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**“That’s what’s moved me to tears!”**

**– The world of academic researchers and their struggles from a  
discursive perspective**

**By**

**Sixian Hah**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Linguistics**

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**Declaration**

I confirm that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Sixian Hah

## Abbreviations

AL	Applied Linguistics
CA	Conversation Analysis
ECR	Early career researcher
HE	Higher Education
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
REF	Research Excellence Framework
SSH	Social Sciences and Humanities
STS	Science and Technology Studies
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Words in italics in excerpts indicate pseudonyms used to replace details that could possibly identify the respondents.

Words in bold in excerpts indicate voiced utterances.

## **Abstract**

In order to be an academic researcher, one needs to be recognised for having expertise in a certain field or discipline. This process of positioning oneself in a field and being recognised for it can be a confounding one that arguably most researchers have to go through. What are the discursive and social practices that researchers engage in so as to be recognised as an academic in a certain field or discipline? The dilemmas or struggles that researchers faced in the process of positioning and establishing themselves as academics are examined from a discursive perspective. The data came from twenty-seven qualitative interviews with academics, ranging from early-career researchers to Professors Emeriti, who work in universities in the UK. As a qualitative case study of researchers in applied linguistics and related fields, it is inspired by ethnographic studies about identity construction in its exploration of how researchers construct identities for themselves or position themselves as applied linguists and their struggles by drawing upon. Informed by Bakhtinian notions of polyphony and positioning theory, it argued that researchers self-position and resisted being positioned through dialogic utterances and voicing. This thesis conceptualised academic struggles as enacted through discursive acts between interview participants (interviewer and respondent) and made sense of by drawing upon tacit, shared or sometimes unshared knowledge about academia. It proposed a model to show how social practices (such as academic struggles) are mediated through language (utterances and discursive acts) and perpetuated in a cyclical and continuous process. The thesis analyzed discursive acts and pragmatic resources such as voicing and humour to demonstrate how struggles are enacted through a negotiation of understanding and positioning. Through the process of understanding and accounting for these struggles in the interview, interlocutors evoked their beliefs, assumptions and ideas about which aspects of academia are more valued or less valued by fellow researchers, institutions and other stakeholders in higher education. These beliefs were often tacit knowledge and hence understood as discourses about academia. The thesis contributed insights into researchers' and institution's valuation beliefs of what constitute 'good' research outcomes, preferred kinds of impact, valued publishing practices and conducive research environments. The thesis argued that the struggles faced by

researchers often emerged from incongruences between what individual researchers aspire toward and what institutions value.

**Keywords**

Discourse analysis, academic struggles, positioning, identity construction, polyphony, voicing, academic researchers, higher education, qualitative research interview

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Impetus for this study

“When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed” (Goffman 1959: 13).

In most social interactions, people need to make sense of one another and to enable others to make sense of oneself in any interaction. We convey who we are and what we are doing every time we speak or interact with others (Gee 2015). In any social setting, introducing oneself is necessary and we do it in various ways that enable other people to make sense of us. We do this with labels to indicate who we are and where we belong. This is especially so in the academic context where academics try to make sense of one another and understand the research we do by relying on disciplinary labels and affiliations. This is something that happens almost unconsciously all the time in first encounters between researchers. Problems arise if labels are wrongly evoked and researchers who are misunderstood would face adverse reactions when trying to communicate one’s research.

The struggle with getting one’s research to be understood with the right academic labels is one of many other struggles experienced by the academic profession. The evolving higher education landscape in the UK has led to new demands (such as REF<sup>1</sup>-related ones) on universities and possibly new struggles for researchers (Archer 2008a ; Billot 2010 ; Clegg 2008). For instance, with no existing panel for applied linguistics at the last Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2014, academics working in this field in the UK struggle to position their work and themselves as researchers. In an independent review of the REF sought by the government, Tess Fitzpatrick, Chair of the British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL), along with several other prominent figures in BAAL, argued that there was

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<sup>1</sup> REF: Research Excellence Framework is the UK’s system for assessing research in higher education institutions.

“insufficient representation of Applied Linguistics in the membership of all [the] sub-panels” to assess impact in this field (Fitzpatrick 2016). This means that researchers working in applied linguistics departments and fields need to submit case studies to sub-panels like Linguistics and Modern languages, Education and others. Understandably, this has repercussions on how academics in applied linguistics departments view and communicate their research. As a case study of researchers in applied linguistics and related fields, this thesis also contributes insights on the discourses shared by these researchers and their decisions on how best to position themselves in a particularly nebulous field such as applied linguistics.

Communicating one’s research is one kind of struggle that prevails beyond the onset of an academic career. Many researchers grapple with it throughout their careers as they find themselves having to communicate their research and themselves as researchers to their colleagues, to institutions, research grant providers, the public and other audiences. While we attempt to define our own identities as researchers with academic labels, our audiences may not necessarily understand us in the way we wish them to. It could be said that it is a preoccupation for almost all researchers to find out how best to position and re-position oneself in order to be recognised as possessing expertise in a certain discipline or field and above all, be recognised as a ‘legitimate’ researcher (Archer 2008b). In other words, researchers construct identities for themselves through talk and this thesis is concerned with exploring what kinds of researchers’ identities are constructed and how they are constructed during an interview? Therefore, this thesis contributes a meta-exploration of how this positioning through turn-by-turn talk in a discursive examination of the ways researchers position themselves in applied linguistics and related fields.

Like many other early career researchers, I struggle with the need to decode academic labels and to position my work accordingly. As early-career researchers form the biggest group of respondents in my pool of interviews, the difficulties they faced in establishing themselves in academia are explored in greater detail than those at other career stages. My exploration of their beliefs or discourses

about what makes a more 'employable' or "legitimate" academic researcher (Archer 2008b) contributes to existing studies about the concerns of early career researchers and also could potentially inform doctoral training centres and universities in their efforts to prepare doctoral candidates for their future academic careers.

## **1.2 Aims of study**

Existing higher education studies have postulated how new policies and changes in the higher education system such as the abovementioned REF can impact on academic identities but few have examined how academic researchers perceive and make sense of their work-related struggles through talk. Therefore a key question that this study seeks to find out is: What academic struggles are enacted by interview participants during an interview?

The term 'academic struggles' needs explicating. I have chosen the term 'struggles' deliberately to encapsulate the tensions between researchers' agency and the limits of their agency in terms of grappling with the difficulties they faced in the academic workplace. The participating researchers in this thesis are perceived as having agency in self-positioning, yet at the same time, they may resist with being positioned in certain ways by others. This seemingly nebulous conceptualisation of the limits on an actor's agency in positioning herself/himself in any interaction is elaborated in Chapter 2 (Positioning theory). In the context of the qualitative interview, both respondent and interviewer constantly struggle with negotiating what they were trying to say and to be understood and positioned in the ways that they desired to be perceived. Thus the notion of struggles is twofold in this thesis:

- (i) researchers' inner dilemmas and reflective moments about the work-related difficulties that they faced and
- (ii) enacting their struggles at positioning themselves in their desired manner and resistance towards being positioned by others in certain ways.

Positioning is also understood as a discursive practice that academic researchers engage in continuously to “negotiate academic subject positions” by applying social categories to others and themselves (Angermuller 2017: 967). In order to make sense of others and enable others to make sense of us as researchers, we employ academic categories and this, in turn, evokes certain ideas and beliefs that people have about which academic categories and practices are valued. To a large extent, positioning sounds very similar to identity construction. In other words, this thesis studies how academic researchers in certain fields (such as applied linguistics) construct their identities in a particular speech event, i.e. in a qualitative interview.

Studies about identity construction often investigate how identities are constructed through discursive practices. Similarly, this thesis asks the same questions about academic struggles: How are academic struggles constructed discursively? How do researchers construct something as a struggle? In the case of identity struggles, scholars seek to examine how interlocutors “orient to shared socio-cultural norms, or [...] dominant discourses” (Van De Mieroop & Schnurr 2017: 451). This resembles the concept of ‘big D’ Discourses (Gee 2015), interpretative repertoires (Wetherell & Potter 1988) or tacit knowledge about academia which researchers draw upon to make sense of their struggles. “Discourses are all about how people 'get their acts together' to get recognised as a given kind of person at a specific time and place” (Gee 2015: 166). In the same vein, academic researchers are recognised as researchers by the ways they think about and value academic practices. During the interview, interlocutors tap into shared (sometimes unshared) tacit knowledge about academia in order to make sense of these struggles. This tacit knowledge is examined as discourses about academia. Usually implicit and unspoken, they may be implied or alluded to and are usually made more explicit during a negotiation of understanding especially when interview participants do not share the same tacit knowledge. Another question invariably follows: What discourses about the academic workplace do researchers draw upon to make sense of and account for their struggles? What kinds of discourses do they draw upon to position themselves as researchers?

Few existing studies about academic identities take a discursive approach in examining how academics enact their identities or position themselves as academics. Although studies about academic identities largely rely on data gleaned from interviews with academics, few have examined these interviews for the shifts in positioning that could be enacted through turn-by-turn talk. Few of these studies have also taken into account the interviewer's presence and role in co-constructing meaning and effecting these positioning shifts that unfold. This thesis fills this gap by providing a discursive perspective on how academic researchers position themselves in a qualitative interview in relation to a more junior or novice researcher and the various ways in which they respond towards being positioned by others. Through the analysis of such an interaction, researchers' valuation discourses about academic practices are evoked.

As a qualitative case study of a group of researchers working in applied linguistics and related fields from mainly three universities in the UK, this thesis attempts to address the aforementioned gaps. Employing qualitative interviews with these researchers as its main source of data, this study applies a close analysis of turn-by-turn talk and discursive acts so as to explore how researchers construct their struggles and the discourses that are used to make sense of these struggles. Such discourses about academia often entail researchers' assessment of which academic practices are more highly valued than others and their beliefs about what institutions value. For instance, publishing in high-impact factor journals is commonly perceived as an academic practice that is highly valued. These discourses could be understood as ways in which researchers estimate and weigh the worth of particular practices in academic life and as such constitute their valuation systems.

This thesis proposes a model that illustrates how academic struggles (understood as social practices) were 'talked into being' through utterances and discursive acts (linguistic practices). The model is able to show how academics engage in certain discursive acts in order to construct the struggles at the academic workplace and how they account and make sense of them by delving into shared knowledge or discourses about academia. These discourses are essentially tacit (or sometimes

unshared) knowledge evoked by interlocutors in trying to make sense of and account for these struggles.

The model illustrates the kinds of discursive acts that indicate how researchers convey their academic struggles and how they wish to be perceived as academics or the ways in which they position themselves. The model is derived from an interactional approach to examine positioning or how academics construct their identities through turn-by-turn talk, with focus on the discursive acts and pragmatic resources such as hedging, mitigation and humour employed. Unlike typical case studies that treat interviews as survey interviews or verbal reports, this thesis takes a more reflexive approach (Cf. Holstein & Gubrium; Tangaard et al in Chapter 3) towards analysing the qualitative interviews.

### **1.3 Research questions**

In order to explore the construction of academic identities and the discourses surrounding academia that are evoked, I asked the following questions:

1. How do academic researchers position themselves as applied linguists? In other words, how do they construct their identities as applied linguists?
2. What academic struggles are enacted by researchers?
  - a. How are they constructed discursively?
  - b. What kinds of linguistic resources and discursive acts are mobilised during the construction of academic struggles?
3. Through researchers' construction of their academic struggles and the enactment of their positioning, what discourses about academia are evoked?

### **1.4 Overview of the thesis**

This thesis begins with setting the ground for a social constructionist understanding of academic practices and how 'academic self or selves' are

constructed and positioned vis-à-vis others. It combines ideas from positioning theory, Bakhtinian notions of polyphony to make a case for how discourses about academia could be studied from a bottom-up approach, that is, by studying the ways that academic researchers talk about their work and position themselves as researchers. Chapter 2 ends by putting forward a model for conceptualising academic struggles as mediated through language. Chapter 3 discusses how the methodology follows a qualitative case study approach and employs as method, qualitative interviews. Its analytical framework is inspired by conversation analysis. It explicates how this study recognises the active and reflexive role of the interviewer in the process of conducting interviews, transcribing and coding the data, while reflecting on the reactions from respondents. It also gives an overview of the respondents' backgrounds. The analysis of academic struggles is organised in three broad categories from Chapters 4 to 6 namely: (i) Struggles with disciplinary positioning, (ii) Struggles with publishing and (iii) Struggles with research environments. Chapter 4 illustrates struggles and discourses that researchers have about positioning themselves in relation to disciplines and justifying their research. Chapter 5 deals with struggles and discourses related with publishing such as beliefs about what are considered as more valued modes of publishing and practices. Chapter 6 discusses the struggles that researchers face in creating impact, seeking interlocutors and other aspects of their research environments. I then discuss the valuation discourses about the academic profession evoked by the enactment of struggles and the ensuing implications in Chapter 8.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Building upon and extending on studies about how academic identities are impacted upon by the evolving higher education landscape through talk, the thesis fills a gap by providing a discursive examination of the kinds of discourses that researchers drawn upon to make sense of their work-related struggles. This is done from a bottom-up approach or from the perspectives of the researchers and how they enact their struggles through talk. At the same time, the thesis also contributes a discursive exploration of how the academic researcher positions herself/himself as a researcher working in applied linguistics or language-related fields. In other words, how do researchers enact an academic identity as working in a particular field or discipline and be recognised as having expertise in that area? It extends Science and Technology studies (STS), which are traditionally done about researchers in the hard sciences, into the fields of social science and humanities (SSH) by examining academic researchers' beliefs and discourses about higher education and how they position themselves in talk.

#### **Overview of Chapter 2**

Chapter 2 begins by giving a brief overview of the development of the field of applied linguistics and how it has been perceived over the years. Next, it takes a step back to discuss changes in the higher education landscape and consequently the impact on academic identities in order to lay the ground for understanding the typical struggles that academics are beset with. Next, drawing upon the social constructionist paradigm, the thesis makes a case for how academic practices are socially constructed and hence could be studied through talk. Bakhtinian notions of polyphony, positioning theory.

The epistemological stance underlying this thesis comes from six main themes:

#### **2.2 The field of applied linguistics**

**2.3 The crisis in the academic profession:** Studies about the evolving UK higher education landscape and how it affects academic identities

- 2.4 A social constructionist understanding of academic practices:** The inquiry into the study of how scientists work in STS, studies about disciplinary communities and their impact on academic practices
- 2.5 Multiple 'selves', identities and positioning:** How the discourses of the self relates with discourses of the others: the Meadian notion of the mind and self, Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor of role-playing and footing, Davies and Harré's positioning theory
- 2.6 The multi-voicedness of utterances and Discourses about academia:** Bakhtinian notions of dialogism and polyphony and how it could be manifested in pragmatic features such as voicing

## 2.2 The field of applied linguistics

Researchers in applied linguistics often have to grapple with establishing a niche for themselves in a highly heterogeneous field whose boundaries are rather vague and ill-defined. For instance, applied linguistics is often seen as the ‘applied’ field in relation to linguistics, which is deemed a more established discipline. Yet, there are also others who argue that applied linguistics have lesser to do with linguistics than with other disciplines these days. Besides claiming a disciplinary position, in what other ways do researchers position themselves as researchers discursively?

The field of applied linguistics (AL henceforth) in the UK began in the 1950s as a field concerned with the teaching of English and was developed by the British Council. The University of Edinburgh was the first to create an applied linguistics programme along with three other universities in the UK (Bangor, Leeds and London, University College) in the early 1960s where the aim of such a programme was to “provide experienced overseas teachers, particularly those who were actively concerned with the control of English-teaching policy and the training of teachers, with an intensive training in the disciplines which were thought to be relevant to language teaching, and in methods of research in this field” (Davies 2007: 116). Similarly, Anna Mauranen, editor of *Applied Linguistics* stated that it was largely the teaching and learning of languages that gave rise to AL although linguistics is “not the only relevant discipline to AL” nor the “principal one” (Mauranen 2015: 489). Most applied linguists would concur that the field started out as one that ‘applied’ findings, descriptions and theoretical models from general linguistics to language learning and teaching almost exclusively. Thus it can be said that teaching of English or what is now known as TESOL<sup>2</sup> formed a core of what applied linguistics was for some time since its inception. While AL’s interdisciplinary research culture is characterised by its teaching orientations, many present-day applied linguists believe that teaching is not what their

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<sup>2</sup> TESOL stands for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

discipline is about, or what they themselves actually do (Hall, Smith, & Wicaksono 2011: 15).

It is inevitable that applied linguistics is often defined in relation to linguistics. AL is commonly described as a field focused on finding solutions to issues to do with language in particular language use (Davies 2007 ; Hellermann 2015) and applied linguists are seen as mediating between theory and practitioners' concerns that involve especially language use and language learning (Ellis 2016 ; Widdowson 2000). However, applied linguistics is often seen as a field, not yet a discipline, unlike its more established 'brother' discipline—linguistics and hence a lesser academic field of inquiry (Tarone 2013).

In contrast to linguistic theorists, who have defined mainstream linguistics, AL is typically oriented towards real social practices, language being firmly embedded in society and culture. Increasingly, it is also described as a disparate one with rather diverse and almost irreconcilable interests (Cook 2015) and still no consensus on its identity (Choi & Richards 2017b). In fact, it was the "lack of specificity" in demarcating the field that motivated the journal *Applied Linguistics* to devote a special issue to invite "self-identified applied linguists" to describe the discipline "as a way to achieve coherence" (Hellermann 2015: 422). This further bears testament to the prevailing struggle among researchers in this field to define their field and what they do.

Therefore applied linguistics is arguably fertile ground for studying how self-identified applied linguists define or demarcate the boundaries of applied linguistics and their respective sub-fields. In claiming to be an applied linguist or linguist, certain valuation discourses are evoked about these disciplinary positions. In addition to the possible difficulties with positioning one's research in applied linguistics or in one of its sub-fields as a struggle brought on by the REF (Chapter 1), there are other struggles that researchers are beset with, such as the ever-increasing pressure to publish. Changes in the UK higher education have brought on new demands and these struggles are arguably not limited to

researchers working in the humanities and social sciences, as discussed in the following section.

## **2.3 The crisis in the academic profession**

### **Academic struggles**

This study on academic struggles draws from a background of studies about a perceived sense of crisis felt by the academic profession in the UK and Europe. While some struggles such as establishing one's disciplinary positioning seemed inherent in the academic profession for a long time, others such as REF-related struggles seemed to have emerged due to an evolving higher education landscape. In this section, I discuss the changes in higher education that have contributed to how my respondents made sense of their struggles.

Studies about higher education largely fall into two groups based on their approaches: top-down or bottom-up. The top-down approach examines how higher education (HE) has evolved over time in various nations and explicates changes in HE in the context of larger societal trends. Studies from the bottom-up approach show the impact of macro changes in the higher education landscape effecting on academic researchers as individuals and members of social groups (i.e. disciplinary communities, institutional colleagues etc). The bottom-up approach examines academics' perspectives and experiences and tends to rely on more ethnographic methods or interviews in qualitative studies. Many of these studies discuss the academic profession in terms of the construction of academic identities and how they are shaped by a combination of disciplinary communities, institutional environments and other factors. However, very few of such studies or perhaps none has considered the interviewer's role in co-constructing meaning with the respondents. Nor have they examined the discursive construction of academic struggles as closely as this thesis. Therefore, I argue that my study plugs this gap by providing a closer look at the discursive processes involved in the construction of academic struggles by researchers.

### **2.3.1 The academic profession**

At about the same time Bourdieu published his seminal study, *Homo Academicus*, on the social reproduction of academic elitism in French academia (Bourdieu 1988), Perkin wrote about the downward slide in terms of status and remuneration for the academic profession in the UK (Perkin 1987). Perkin's seemingly bleak construction of the academic profession was counteracted by Bourdieu's revelation of how power in academia is consolidated and elitism reproduced because "capital breeds capital, and holding positions conferring social influence determines and justifies holding new positions, themselves invested with all the weight of their combined holders" (Bourdieu 1988: 85). Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital accumulates "a reputation for academic worthiness" (Bourdieu 1988: 96) and this has been interpreted in various ways, one of which is the reference to academic capital as "all the necessary roles and status involved in the reproduction of the higher education system" (Lucas 2006: 71). I refer to the notion of academic capital in this thesis as the status, reputation and research output (such as publications) that researchers obtain throughout their careers.

Such a counterbalance of views from Bourdieu and Perkin about the academic profession implied that the discourses surrounding academia are far more complicated than one about the academic profession's downward spiral or the same profession's stronghold over elitism. However, changes have been happening in the higher education landscape and these have given rise to a number of discourses that impact on academic identities.

As universities become increasingly seen as an entity that needs to be accountable to society, a rise in managerial and auditing mechanisms has been observed in universities around the world (Clark 1996 ; Enders 2001 ; Mok 2000). Universities are increasingly held accountable to various stakeholders, including governments, students, the public, in terms of research quality, teaching standards, student satisfaction and other criteria. Focusing on the UK situation, studies have chronicled universities' attempts to move towards more managerial bureaucratic systems and auditing mechanisms (Lucas 2006) or an "audit culture

which routinely survey and monitor [academics'] performance as teachers and researchers" (Keenoy 2005: 304) as seen by the implementation of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Quality Assurance (QAA). The academic profession is described as "losing its academic guild powers" (Enders 2001: 02) as academic autonomy is increasingly encroached upon by managerial power (Henkel 2005).

Kwiek and Antonowicz defined four main milestones in the academic career– the completion of the PhD, attaining the first full or part-time academic job in an institution, being promoted from a junior academic to senior academic position and finally, being able to remain in a senior academic position. Throughout this lengthening academic career ladder, academics are "almost continuously assessed by both peer and administrative bodies" (Kwiek & Antonowicz 2015: 63). Particular attention has been paid to how research is evaluated in the UK, especially in the implementation of REF (Watermeyer 2012;2016) and its effects on academic research, disciplines and academic identities (Henkel 2009). Scholars have argued that as a result of such research evaluation exercises, universities have established more and new forms of monitoring research (Brew & Lucas 2009 ; Lucas 2006) and in turn leading to lessened academic autonomy (Billot 2010 ; Henkel 2005).

Traditional associations of academic employment with prestige, status and generous remuneration have increasingly become associated with precarity and unfairness as perceived by many academics in recent times<sup>3</sup>. Such a phenomenon has also been investigated in academic studies which claimed that tenured positions are decreasing in number and in some European countries, it has

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<sup>3</sup> Precarious academic employment reported in the news include headlines such as "Universities accused of 'importing Sports Direct model' for lecturers' pay" (Guardian News, Wed 16 Nov 2016) and the University and College Union (UCU) strikes in protest of pension cuts which took place at more than 60 UK universities over a period from 22 February – 16 March 2018.

become increasingly the case that the status of academic staff has changed from civil servant to contract status (Enders 2001: 21).

It has also been argued that the link between research funding and employment has grown stronger. For early-career academics, employment has become increasingly dependent on the ability to secure external funding (Kwiek & Antonowicz 2015: 42). These claims are reinforced by growing perceptions of shrinking sources of funding as a result of governmental cutbacks as part of the 'austerity measures', faced by the UK at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. All these factors led to scholars claiming a looming sense of crisis felt by the academic profession especially in Europe (Enders 2001).

### **2.3.2 Academic identities**

"The academy has become a site of struggle between academics and other interest groups for control of matters previously taken for granted as academic prerogative". (Henkel 2005: 163-164)

Studies such as Henkel's (2005) had shown that the evolving higher education landscape have impacted on academic researchers, mostly in less positive ways. As encapsulated in Henkel's quote, many of these studies ruminated about academic autonomy and the agency of academics in the face of tensions arising from increasing managerialism in the evolving higher education landscape (Henkel 2009). In a more bottom-up approach, studies about academic identities largely drew upon interviews with researchers as data. These studies have claimed that academics are constantly stressed by being assessed through publications, teaching and other forms of auditing mechanisms (Archer 2008a ; Billot 2010 ; Clegg 2008 ; Knights & Clarke 2014 ; Lucas 2006). As can be imagined, early-career researchers are even more vulnerable to such pressures as they grapple with changing institutional demands in order to gain legitimacy and acceptance in their respective fields (Archer 2008b ; Laudel & Gläser 2008 ; Sutherland 2017).

Although most studies about academic identities drew from interviews with academics, they mostly focused on *what* was said and not about *how* it was said. Few or none has examined the interviews in terms of turn-by-turn talk and how academics' perspectives unfolded or their identities constructed during the interview. A close study to mine was Fanghanel's study (2007) about how academics positioned themselves in response to an institutional policy document. She examined the beliefs of six academics about the purpose of universities, teaching and learning and students. Through a content analysis of the interviews, she examined how the positioning of six academics shifted between aligning and disjunction with the perceived top-down institutional agenda.

Instead of reporting on what researchers describe as struggles per se, this thesis delves deeper beyond what is said into what is sometimes unsaid or implied and how they describe their problems. By doing so, this thesis provides a discursive perspective on how academic identities are enacted and affected by the aforementioned tensions and developments in HE. The analysis will show how respondents enact their identities as researchers by self-positioning and negotiating how they were positioned by others. Inspired by agonistic and active interview approaches, this study also advocates for greater reflexivity by considering the role that the interviewer plays in the process of how researchers construct their academic struggles. The thesis aims to explore the discourses accounting for this sense of crisis felt by the academic profession through a close examination of their emic perspectives.

## **2.4 A social constructionist understanding of academic struggles**

This thesis is underpinned by a social constructionist epistemological stance by recognising that academic struggles are constructed, accounted for and made sense of in varied ways by individual researchers. It focuses on notions of social constructionism that pertains to discursive practices and identity construction. Thus, the social constructionist stance of this thesis can be narrowed down to the following key ideas:

- Realities are socially constructed through discourse and language and are thus said to be discursively constructed
- How the individual's construction of self or multiple selves is enacted through social interactions with others

### ***2.4.1 Social constructionism***

Closely related with constructivism, social constructionists believe that “what we take to be self-evident kinds (e.g. man, woman, truth, self) are actually the product of complicated discursive practices” (Schwandt 1994: 125).

“For the constructionist, all claims to knowledge, truth, objectivity or insight are founded within communities of meaning making – including the claims of constructionists themselves. Constructionism in this sense is not concerned with truth beyond community, but with what might be called providential intelligibilities” (Gergen 2001: 02).

Gergen's argument that all claims of reality originated within communities of meaning points to the constructionist position that “the collective generation of meaning [is] shaped by conventions of language and other social processes” (Schwandt 1994: 127).

Social constructionists believe that “knowledge and truth are created rather than discovered and that reality is pluralistic” (Richards 2003: 38) because this is

dependent on the “lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt 1994: 118). This calls for an “emic point of view, for understanding meaning, for grasping the actor’s definition of a situation” (Schwandt 1994: 118). In other words, “particular actors, in particular places, at particular times, fashion meaning out of events and phenomena through prolonged, complex processes of social interaction involving history, language, and actions” (Ibid). This prioritization of participants’ lived experiences and how they construct their realities lies at the heart of my study. In addition, my study examines how this construction of realities happens discursively through spoken interaction in the context of a qualitative interview. Therefore, it is worthwhile to consider the implications of constructionism for studying talk.

Drawing upon the Meadian interactionism, Bakhtinian notions of the dialogic imagination and polyphonic utterances, and positioning theory, selves are always conceptualized vis-à-vis others. In fact, it might be argued that one can construct multiple selves and this multiplicity of selves that seemed to emerge during conversations is “deftly assembled from recognizable identities in some place, at some time, for some purpose” (Gubrium & Holstein 2000: 101). Even in the context of an interview, it is recognized that “reality is continually “under construction” and is “assembled using the interpretive resources at hand, in light of the contingencies of the moment” (Holstein & Gubrium 2004: 149).

The following section chronicles a social constructionist approach to the study of academia which begins with examining the production of scientific knowledge as a process that is socially constructed. Furthermore, questions are raised about how disciplinary communities could impact on academic practices and academic identities.

#### ***2.4.2 Scientific knowledge as socially constructed***

The fields of Science Technology Studies (STS) and Sociology of Scientific knowledge (SSK) (Gilbert & Mulkay 1984 ; Knorr-Cetina & Mulkay 1983 ; Latour &

Woolgar 1986) were sociological inquiries in the idea that scientific work could be socially constructed. Two decades later, the field of Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) (Bijker, Hughes, Pinch, & Douglas 2012) emerged. These fields are interested to study how scientific knowledge is constructed and how scientists 'work'. They are guided by the following concerns: (1) a preference for the microscopic study of scientific practice; (2) a focus on how scientists go about talking and doing science than why they act as they do; and (3) a tendency to adopt what can loosely be described as a 'constructionist perspective' (Knorr-Cetina & Mulkay 1983: 07).

At the peak of the STS inquiry, there were macro and micro studies of scientific knowledge production. Latour referred to macro and micro aspects in the endeavour to answer questions behind the 'making' of scientific discoveries, as we know it. Their preoccupation was in opening up the 'black box' of scientific laboratory work in order to explicate the micro-negotiations behind the making of scientific knowledge claims. The notion that knowledge is not discovered but constructed has been investigated by numerous ethnographic studies which showed the arbitrary nature of how laboratory work translate into scientific findings communicated in research papers (Gilbert & Mulkay 1984 ; Latour & Woolgar 1986). These studies tried to prove that in the process of knowledge production, there are many social factors influencing the way scientists work, interpret their findings and communicate them to others.

However, much of the work in STS largely focussed on researchers working in the hard sciences, such as Latour's observations of laboratory work of biologists and physicists (Latour 1987). Little is known about how researchers in social sciences or, what has been termed by Becher and Trowler (2001) as the 'soft sciences' in academia work.

The process of turning a claim into a scientific fact and eventually to tacit knowledge accepted by a discipline was argued to be a discursive process of debate, verification and ratification amongst researchers (Latour 1987). Hence studying how researchers work can reveal if there is a certain *modus operandi*

shared by members of the same discipline. It seems that belonging to a discipline can influence how research is done, evaluated and communicated in the academic community. Therein lies an important link between disciplinarity and the production of scientific knowledge.

### ***2.4.3 Disciplinarity as a socially constructed concept***

Disciplines and fields of knowledge are also a key theme in this thesis and many academic struggles revolved around finding and defining one's disciplinary label, or what is termed as disciplinary positioning in this thesis. Disciplinary positioning is understood as a discursive process that could be examined through how researchers self-position and employ certain disciplinary labels. This section attempts to account for how disciplinarity is socially constructed.

One of the earlier conceptions of disciplinary communities lies in Kuhn's seminal work on the evolution of scientific paradigms and its enduring effects on the development of scientific disciplines. Kuhn's seminal book which attempted to account for the evolution of scientific paradigms (Kuhn 1962), precedes various inquiries in social sciences about disciplinary cultures and practices such as academic biographies and institutions (Bourdieu 1988), the development of higher education, the academic profession (Clark 1987;1989) and academic identities (Clegg 2008 ; Henkel 2000). This thesis focuses on how inquiries in the social sciences view disciplines and the subsequent implications for the study of the academic profession.

Disciplines are seen as a product of institutional organisation and so disciplinary classification is not cast in stone but is mostly socially constituted (Becher & Trowler 2001: 59). Since an academic discipline was defined as a "hiving off in terms of their organisation structures (such as a full-fledged department) by leading academic institutions" and the degree to which a "freestanding international community has emerged, with its own professional associations and specialist journals" (Becher & Trowler 2001: 41), there could be instances when institutions found it difficult to establish certain departments, and thus disciplines, because its intellectual validity was under challenge from established

academic opinion. While disciplines are in part identified by the existence of relevant departments, it does not follow that every department represents a discipline (Becher & Trowler 2001: 41). This was indeed true when I found out that for some respondents, they self-identify with a discipline that may differ from the perceived disciplinary affiliation associated with their institutional department, partly because in their institution, there was no department for their self-identified discipline. Presumably when it was not viable for a university to establish a solely linguistics department, it may cluster several related fields and disciplines together to form hybrid configurations called “School of Languages and Communication” for instance.

### **Disciplines and the academic profession in the UK**

Given that higher education institutions have become more discipline-oriented since the emergence of the modern research university which is structured around separate disciplines (Billig 2013: 14), the notion of a disciplinary community is especially important in how researchers position themselves and communicate their research. In tracing the history and development of the academic profession in the UK, Perkin claimed that the academic profession has a “double allegiance, primarily to the discipline in which they were trained and only secondarily to the institution that employs them” (Perkin 1987: 24). It is because of this disciplinary allegiance that thus made it crucial for academics to publish, so as to reach out to peers beyond their institutions, Perkin justified. Abbott argued that disciplines provide academics with a general conception of intellectual existence, a conception of the proper units of knowledge (2001: 130) and “a core element of the identity of most intellectuals in modern America” (Abbott 2002: 210). Therefore, academic practices, ways of producing research and presenting oneself as a researcher could arguably be strongly influenced by one’s disciplinary affiliation.

Studies investigating disciplines and academic practices believe that disciplinary communities impact on academic identities and researchers’ beliefs about their work practices (Becher & Trowler 2001 ; Hyland 2012 ; Myers 1990). To Becher and Trowler, there is a certain *culture*, or what they defined as “taken-for-granted values, attitudes and ways of behaving” underpinning how particular groups of

academics organize their professional lives, which are related to the intellectual tasks that they engaged in. They argue that these disciplinary cultures are formed through “the ways in which academics engage with their subject matter, and the narratives they develop about it” (Becher & Trowler 2001: 23).

A logical consequence of the formation of disciplinary communities would be the need for novice researchers to try to gain membership and be socialised into a particular disciplinary community. Billig (2013) gave the example of how researchers find themselves having to fit into established practices when publishing, especially if one’s chosen approach is not shared by those who edit the major journals in the field. He explained how certain disciplinary biases are propagated by peer-reviewed journals, where editors tend to be established figures who usually select similar-minded academics to act as their reviewers (Billig 2013: 62). This is supported by Becher and Trowler’s rather provocative claim that “any systematic questioning of the accepted disciplinary ideology will be seen as heresy and may be punished by expulsion; any infiltration of alien values and practices will be appropriately dealt with, either by direct resistance or by tacit incorporation into the prevailing framework of thinking” (2001: 59).

Gerholm argued how doctoral students had to acquire the competence to navigate between the repertoire of scientific discourses (Gerholm 1990: 271) if they aspire to become full-fledged researchers. This repertoire referred to certain expectations of a ‘scientific ethos’ that academic researchers or scientists are thought to abide by or what Mulkey defined as “norms which defined the social expectations to which scientists were generally obliged to conform in the course of their professional activities” (Mulkey 1976: 637). This was attributed to Robert Merton’s seminal study on “putative norms or normative principles” or scientific ethos such as “rationality, emotional neutrality, universalism, individualism, disinterestedness, impartiality, communality, humility and organized scepticism” (Mulkey 1976: 637-638) although an exactly opposite set of counter-norms has also been identified subsequently. Nonetheless, Mulkey argued that scientists (especially leaders of academic science) perpetuated a certain view of science, pertaining to the values of science or beliefs of scientists and what counts as

valuable scientific knowledge, in order to support their collective interests (1976: 654).

The notion of scientific norms is evidence of tacit knowledge shared within scientific disciplines (Gerholm 1990 ; Gilbert & Mulkay 1984). Besides these values or beliefs of how scientists ought to behave or how research should be carried out, there exists too some unspoken knowledge amongst disciplines about the ways in which research is communicated.

That disciplinary communities influence academic practices is supported by research done on how academics write, especially in the social sciences and humanities. These studies shared the view that writing in academia is a cornerstone of gaining recognition and influence as a researcher or even just to engage in the quotidian work of 'doing' research (Angermuller 2013 ; Hyland 2013 ; Hyland & Giuliana 2009 ; Myers 1990) and much has been said about the influence of disciplines on academic publishing. Hyland postulated that academic writing is a "core aspect of the epistemological frameworks of our fields and of our identities as academics" (Hyland 2013: 69). Many scholars in higher education studies have made the link between academic identities and academic publishing (Henkel 2000 ; Knights & Clarke 2014). Academic identities are closely related with reputation in academia and are thus reinforced by the academic peer review system which generates reputations (Henkel 2000: 187). This further defines academic subject positions and how academics are formally and informally evaluated by institutions and fellow academics (Angermuller 2017).

### **Disciplinary labels as discursively constructed**

The need to belong to a discipline or having a disciplinary affiliation helps shape the researcher's identity. It also enables other researchers to make sense of the researcher and see her/his research in light of the larger discipline. This is seen in the versatility in which academics mobilize disciplinary labels to fulfil their communicative goals and it can vary from situation to situation (Pinch 1990). That "science is a form of culture is a familiar theme within today's sociology of

scientific knowledge” (Pinch 1990: 295) echoed Becher and Trowler’s (2001) anthropological metaphors of academic tribes and territories.

In response to the anthropological metaphors, Brew (2008) proposed alternative metaphors such as liquid metaphors (confluent, fluid). They reflect the view of disciplinary affiliation as largely based on relationships as observed from her interviews with experienced researchers. She also questioned if the purported differences in the natures of disciplines (Cf. Becher and Trowler’s comparisons of disciplines) could depend on whether research or teaching is being considered (Brew 2008: 425). Given how “the academic department is frequently equated with the disciplinary community” (Brew 2008: 426), one wonders if the influence of organisational cultures in the institutions or perhaps the existence of a departmental culture could have effects on disciplinary cultures or even be conflated with disciplinary cultures. In the interviews conducted in Brew’s study, she noted that respondents expressed their disciplinary affiliations more as a “negotiation within the context in which they were asked” and not merely “identifying a pre-existing discipline” (Brew 2008: 436). This implies that claiming a disciplinary affiliation is less straightforward than expected.

In Pinch’s view, disciplinary labels are ways of referring to a particular discipline as a way of establishing identities, such as mathematician, chemist, zoologist and others. These are mobilised by scientists to communicate themselves according to the setting, context, and the kinds of audience they want to engage with. He gave the example of the RAE<sup>4</sup> (or REF now). The flexibility in which such labels are used can be seen in the submission of case studies to REF panels for assessment. Researchers sometimes write and submit case studies to panels that differ from their own departmental and disciplinary affiliations. Besides flexibility, these labels are also inadequate to describe the *actual* research that most researchers work on. For instance, scientists working in the same larger discipline may not necessarily share common research interest. Pinch gave the example of two

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<sup>4</sup> RAE stands for Research Assessment Exercise and is the predecessor of the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

computer scientists; one who works on neural nets would have no commonality with the other working on software testing (Pinch 1990: 300).

The preceding sections have established that disciplinary affiliation forms a cornerstone of academic identities. But how are identities constructed and how does disciplinary membership influence this process? The thesis aims to explore how academic researchers construct identities as applied linguists and position themselves in certain fields or disciplines. In the following section, the thesis refers to another major body of literature that develops the idea that identities and positioning are socially mediated and enacted in relation with others.

## **2.5 Multiple ‘selves’ and positioning**

Aligned with the social constructive epistemological stance of this thesis, ‘selves’ are construed to be products of social interaction. The individual mind does not just exist from birth but from a continuous process of reflection and the development of self-consciousness in relation to people we encounter in our lives. Thus the individual’s beliefs and discourses about the realities s/he has to contend with develop not in a vacuum but in relation to others. Hence, in studying how researchers construct their identities as belonging to a certain field of discipline, such as applied linguistics or linguistics for instance, they always do so in relation with other researchers and with other disciplines.

### ***2.5.1 Self and Other***

Mead’s theory on the self and the mind laid the foundation for, in particular, two schools of thought: symbolic interactionist and social psychology. He postulated that the development of self-consciousness is very much a reflexive process when one becomes aware of one’s thoughts and actions in relation to other people, through how they react and respond and judge our words, thoughts and actions, “which enable the individual to take the attitude of the other towards himself” (1934: 134).

“The “I” is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the “me” is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes. The attitudes of the others constitute the organized “me,” and then one reacts toward that as an “I.” (Mead 1934: 175)

The understanding of social realities as what an individual makes of her/his surroundings is essentially constructed through one’s interaction with the society. The conceptualisation of self is heavily dependent on others, as Mead argued, because the “self-conscious human individual [...] takes or assumes the organised social attitudes of the given social group or community [...] to which he belongs, toward the social problems of various kinds which confront that group or community at any given time... ” (Mead 1934: 156).

### **2.5.2 Roles and positioning**

Paralleling Mead’s ideas is Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphor of how people perform roles in everyday life “for the benefit of other people” and his belief in “the impression of reality that he [*sic*] attempts to engender” in his audience. In so doing, the performer is sometimes “fully taken in by his [*sic*] own act” when s/he is “sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he [*sic*] stages is the real reality” (Goffman 1959: 28). This reaffirms the notion of plural realities, which are constructed by different individuals for themselves and their audiences. What their audiences perceive could again differ from the *reality* that the individual hopes to engender in his/her performance.

Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphor of life and people performing roles, be it individually or in teams, relates with the social constructionist paradigm and Meadian understandings of society playing a role in the conceptualisation of self. People perform roles as defined by their understanding of what roles are called for by certain situations and in so doing, define the situations for their audiences to reciprocate and respond accordingly. Goffman also discussed front and back regions and how performances are liable to misrepresentation, miscommunication, social faux pas which led to people being perceived to be behaving out of character (Goffman 1959).

However, scholars from more critical traditions of discourse and social psychology disagreed with the dramaturgical understanding of social life as people playing out roles because it seemed to construe individuals “as actors with lines already written and their roles determined by the particular play they find themselves in” (Davies & Harré 1990: 52). People are construed as merely playing their roles by observing others or following role models. Opponents of the dramaturgical model also questioned its assumption that people would follow rules passively without considering the possibilities for “rule-creation” and how rules are often created in the context of argument, negotiation and interaction (Billig 1996: 53).

Instead of passive role-playing, Davies and Harré proposed that we have agency in co-producing this drama because we are also “the multiple audiences that view any play and bring to it the multiple and often contradictory interpretations based on our own emotions, our own reading of the situation and our own imaginative positioning of ourselves in the situation” (Davies & Harré 1990: 52). They proposed positioning as a different lens to adopt in understanding social interactions, as compared with ‘roles’:

“ ‘Positioning’ and ‘subject position’ [...] permit us to think of ourselves as a choosing subject, locating ourselves in conversations according to those narrative forms with which we are familiar and bringing to those narratives our own subjective lived histories through which we have learnt metaphors, characters and plot.” (Davies & Harré 1990: 52)

This means that people or actors do not just play roles based on ‘scripts’ that they learnt from ‘role models’ but they also respond and react differently based on their differing interpretations of another actor’s positioning. The notion of positioning takes into account the diversity of interpretations that actors bring to the process of understanding and interacting with one another.

### **2.5.3 Positioning theory**

*Positions* in this thesis are likened to “the discursive production of a diversity of selves- the fleeting panorama of Meadian ‘me’s’ conjured up in the course of conversational interactions” (Davies and Harré 1990: 47). Positioning theory construes discursive practices to “constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and yet at the same time is a resource through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions” (Davies & Harré 1990: 62). However, they cautioned that it would be erroneous to assume that positioning is necessarily intentional (Davies & Harré 1990: 37).

Positioning theory comes from a poststructuralist paradigm on discourse where a certain speech event or, what Harré and van Langenhove (1999) termed as, ‘episode’ could afford certain positions for interlocutors to take up but at the same time, limit them in the kinds of positions they can take up or to be understood by. The basis underlying this theory is that interaction is a discursive practice where interlocutors take up positions as they interpret each other’s positions with the unfolding conversation. They identified Goffman’s concept of footing as the closest alternative to positioning in which speakers could gain or lose footing in a conversation and where a change of footing meant “a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and to the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production and reception of an utterance” (Goffman 1981: 128). Footing also complements the other theoretical ideas behind this thesis, i.e. polyphony. More about Goffman’s ideas on footing are discussed in conjunction with voicing and reported speech in Section 2.6.3.

Given that positioning is defined as “the discursive process whereby people are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines” (Davies & Harré 1990: 48), its application in narrative analysis was a logical extension (Bamberg 1997 ; De Fina 2013). In an adaptation of positioning theory, Bamberg (1997) conceptualised three levels of positioning when studying narratives in spoken interaction. He argued for how speakers positioned characters in their stories as agentive or passive on the first level. Speakers position themselves in relation to their audiences in the telling of the

story on the second level. Finally they construct their identities by positioning themselves in relation to the question: “Who am I?” on the third level of positioning.

However, it was unclear what Bamberg’s distinction between what he called the “being positioned orientation” and the “more agentive notion of the subject as ‘positioning itself’” (2004: 366) was. Hence this thesis follows Davies and Harré’s (1990) more nuanced argument about the agency afforded and constrained simultaneously in the positions one can enact in any social interaction.

#### ***2.5.4 Positioning and identity construction***

This study asks several questions about positioning and identity construction: How do academic researchers position themselves as applied linguists? How do researchers construct identities for themselves as working in certain fields such as applied linguistics? How do self-identified applied linguists construct identities for themselves as having expertise in this particular area and not others? Its approach is closer to ethnographically-informed studies that examine identity construction through a discursive lenses.

Readers may note that there are differences between positioning and identities. A possible explanation could be in how Deppermann conceptualises positioning as “what people observably do” and how “positions are tied to the social actions by which they are made relevant” (Deppermann 2013: 370). Therefore being “situated achievements”, positions are ephemeral and constantly shifting as they are taken up or resisted during spoken interaction. While multiple identities seem to be ‘constructed’ over turns in talk or assembled at every turn, positions refer to the subject positions that interactants discursively negotiate together during a conversation. This understanding of positioning complements the stance this thesis takes with regards to interpreting interviews. The active interview and the agonistic interview approaches both deem interlocutors to be active participants in making sense of each other’s positions and reacting accordingly. Still, the thesis

refers to both concepts of positioning and identities and it might be contrived, nor is it fruitful to draw a clear distinction between the two.

In fact positioning is closely related to identity construction. As Bucholtz and Hall (2005) have argued, positioning and identity construction go hand in hand. In their framework for analysing identity, the relationality principle is closest to the stance taken in this thesis as they described identities as “acquiring social meaning in relation to other available identity positions and other social actors” (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 598). Many studies on identity construction hold that identities are not static but are dynamic (Antaki & Widdicombe 1998 ; Benwell & Stokoe 2006). Studies about identity construction often examine how it is co-constructed through turn-by-turn talk in conversations (Bamberg 1997 ; Georgakopoulou 2015 ; Van De Mieroop & Schnurr 2017 ; Wooffitt & Clark 1998), which mirrors the approach that positioning scholars take.

Inspired by another body of literature from higher education studies about academic identities (Billot 2010 ; Clegg 2008 ; Henkel 2009), this thesis is also interested to explore the impact of the evolving higher education landscape on academic identities. In particular, this thesis seeks to find out: What discourses are evoked through the ways academics construct the struggles they faced at the academic workplace? However, higher education studies often do not address the role of the interviewer in the discursive construction of academic identities nor do they delve deeper into the talk of academics and examine their shifts in positioning. The thesis tries to address this gap and this will be elaborated on in Chapter 7.

## **2.6 The multi-voicedness of utterances and Discourses about academia**

Mead’s conception of the self and others leads naturally to the understanding that in an individual’s reflection, we address and formulate our stances from several points of view and voices. The rhetorical mind is capable of and often deals with anticipated opposing voices and these voices are sometimes

articulated or embedded in our utterances. Social psychologists increasingly accept that the rhetorical mind is a cognitive ability because “language, as well as thinking, possesses a dialogical nature” (Billig 1996: 18). They also believe that “utterances are not to be treated as outward representations of inner, pre-formed thoughts. Instead, they are responses in a continuing dialogue” (Billig 1996: 18). This relates with Bakhtinian notions of polyphony and this thesis identifies voicing and reported speech as linguistic markers of polyphonic utterances.

### ***2.6.1. Bakhtinian notions of dialogic imagination and polyphony***

“When constructing my utterance, I try actively to determine this response. Moreover, I try to act in accordance with the response I anticipate, so this anticipated response, in turn, exerts an active influence on my utterance [...] When speaking, I always take into account the **apperceptive<sup>5</sup> background** of the addressee’s perception of my speech: the extent to which he [*sic*] is familiar with the situation, whether he [*sic*] has special knowledge of the given cultural area of communication, his [*sic*] views and convictions, his [*sic*] prejudices (from my viewpoint), his [*sic*] sympathies and antipathies—because all this will determine his [*sic*] active responsive understanding of my utterance. These considerations also determine my choice of a genre for my utterance.”

(Bakhtin 1986: 95-96)

Readers may detect similarities between Bakhtin’s quote with conversation analysts’ belief in studying talk through a turn-by-turn sequence to unveil what is believed to be interlocutors’ intentions, anticipation and reactions towards one

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<sup>5</sup> From apperception: (a dated term used in Psychology) The mental process by which a person makes sense of an idea by assimilating it to the body of ideas s/he already possesses. (Oxforddictionaries.com)

another's utterances. Bakhtin's notion of the 'apperceptive listener' influences my interpretation of the interviews.

One speaks to others all the time, even in our own heads and in our monologues. Bakhtin's seminal work on the dialogic imagination (Bakhtin 1981), a treatise about literary works from Rabelais and Dostoevsky, introduced the notion of dialogic utterances and polyphony. Bakhtinian and post-structuralist notions of polyphony raise issues of the constraints of speech genres (Bakhtin 1986) and social factors that place limitations on how our utterances are interpreted by the listener and hence the position(s) that we are seen as occupying.

Bakhtin (1981) pointed out that linguists often analyse an utterance by examining its composition and linguistic significance, and presupposes the listener to be a blank slate of mind. However, he found this presumption to be invalid because listeners do possess some preconceived knowledge or schemata, which they bring to the conversation. He argued that the actual meaning of an utterance needs to be "understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgements" that are present in the consciousness of the listener. Thus, "every utterance is oriented toward the listener's apperceptive background" (Bakhtin 1981: 281).

In whatever speech event interlocutors find themselves in, they produce utterances and make sense of their interlocutors' utterances within a speech genre (Bakhtin 1986). Hence we are restricted in the way we say something such that our interlocutors can understand the meaning we want to convey. At the same time, we are also restricted by how our interlocutors understand it. It may be the case that our utterances may be misunderstood or understood differently from what we intended. This often happens when we 'speak out of context' or rather, when we evoked something that has fallen outside the speech genre. Readers may notice that this sounds similar to Goffman's postulation of people 'behaving out of character' in his dramaturgical metaphor of people playing social roles in life.

The Bakhtinian understanding of polyphony on utterances as responses to preceding ones in a continuous dialogue (Bakhtin 1986) echo that of Foucault's notion of discontinuous discourses: "when we speak, we enter into an existing discourse that continues" (Foucault 1971: 08). Foucault's subjectivated individual seemed to have little agency in defying the discourses established by institutions and society, where prohibiting mechanisms instilled over time have silenced some voices and prized others. On the contrary, this thesis takes a more moderate stance in considering the degree of agency vested in the individual. It follows the positioning theory's conceptualisation of both the constitutive force of discourse and discursive practices where at the same time, "people are capable of exercising choice in relation to those practices" (Davies & Harré 1990: 46).

### ***2.6.2 Voicing and reported speech***

It is expected that the rhetorical mind addresses different voices by anticipating opposing views or taking up other subject positions. This is seen when my respondents speak as a different person or bring in other voices besides their own. But the question is: How is this manifested in the interviews?

Voicing or speaking in a different voice as indicated by prosodic markers (Couper-Kuhlen 1999 ; Günthner 1999) has interesting implications in terms of the speakers' communicative goals. Even when speakers do not alter their voice quality, they may preface certain utterances with quotatives or words such as "I was like..." to indicate that they are reporting on other people's imaginary thoughts or utterances or articulating their own thoughts (Barnes & Moss 2007). A contemporary of Bakhtin, Vološinov conceived reported speech as "speech *within* speech, utterance *within* utterance and, at the same time, as speech *about* speech and utterance *about* utterance" (Vološinov 1973: 04-05). This conceptualisation of reported speech has persisted till today where contemporary studies of reported speech claimed that reported speech can be used to re-enact an interaction and also to "enable the speaker to simultaneously convey his or her attitude towards the reported utterance" (Holt & Clift 2006: 07).

Vološinov's concept of reported speech has been linked to Goffman's notion of footing where the latter focuses on "the dialogic interplay of separate voices within reported speech" (Goodwin 2006: 18). Goffman's concept of footing enables a systematic analysis of the complex theatre of different kinds of entities that can co-exist within a single strip of reported speech. It "sheds important light on the cognitive complexity of speakers in conversation, who are creating a richly inhabited and textured world through their talk" (Goodwin 2006: 20). According to Goffman, a speaker fulfils three speaking roles: (i) 'animator', he or she who speaks (ii) 'author', he or she who is responsible for the text and (iii) 'principal', he or she 'whose position (i.e. where the speaker stands) is established by the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who is committed to what the words say (1981: 144). This is the basis of the production format of the utterance. On many occasions, animator, author and principal are one and the same person. However reported speech occurs when the animator is a different person from the author.

The subsequent analysis in this thesis will demonstrate how voicing served as pragmatic recourse for speakers to fulfil their communicative goals such as indirect evaluation or rapport-building with interlocutors. Essentially it evokes other voices besides the respondent's own voice and enables respondents in the context of an interview to speak from multiple standpoints or to "voice subjectivities never contemplated before" (Gubrium & Holstein 2001: 22). The evocation of other voices or other subject positions, besides the speaker's, implies that there could be various discourses brought into the interactional event. Therefore voicing is a salient indicator of the tacit knowledge and beliefs that interlocutors bring to a conversation as elaborated in the following section.

### ***2.6.3 Voicing, interpretative repertoires and discourse***

As established in earlier sections, Bakhtin stated that people speak only in "definite speech genres" because "all our utterances have definite and relatively stable typical *forms of construction of the whole*" (Bakhtin 1986: 78). The same

applies to our listeners and interlocutors. While “we learn to cast our speech in generic forms and, when hearing others’ speech, we guess its genre from the very first words” (Bakhtin 1986: 79). In other words, speech genres enable interlocutors to make sense of one another hence we cast our utterances in these ‘expected’ ways that our interlocutors could understand us by. Thus, voicing (such as reported speech as discussed in the previous section) is evidence that no speech is original and that we always construct and pull together utterances from history and from other subject positions. We do not speak individual words and individual sentences, but construct utterances as guided by speech genres (Bakhtin 1986).

In fact, voicing or the evoking of the voices of others is commonly observed across the interviews conducted for this study. These evocation of voices often point to certain ideas or personal evaluation that speakers are trying to convey indirectly. In his interviews with various groups of people, Edley observed that a “discursive terrain that makes up a particular topic or issue” is discovered when people seemed to be making similar arguments and evoking the same “images, metaphors or figures of speech” (Edley 2001b: 199). Atkinson and Sampson made similar observations by referring to narrative stability in their study of interviews with the same group of scientists over a period of time. The first round of interviews was conducted immediately after the scientists had published a discovery of a particular gene and the second round of interviews was conducted fifteen years later. They found some kind of “narrative formulae” (Atkinson & Sampson 2018: 9) in the repeated versions of events by these scientists and proposed that certain episodes were “sedimented among respondents’ stock of stories” (Atkinson & Sampson 2018: 3). Aligned with what is termed the postmodern interview (Atkinson & Sampson 2018) or active interviewer approach interview (Gubrium & Holstein 2001 ; Holstein & Gubrium 1995), the qualitative interview is understood as a speech event where interviewer and respondent make sense of what is said by drawing on the “collective tropes that are shared among [their] speech community” (Atkinson & Sampson 2018: 10). Thus, it is understandable that academic researchers refer to collective tropes from the academic community or what I would argue are discourses about academia in the UK higher education in my interviews.

### **Tropes, interpretative repertoires and big 'D' Discourses**

The notion of tropes echoed that of interpretative repertoires which is defined as “recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena, which often comprise specific metaphors and figures of speech (tropes)” (Potter & Wetherell 1987: 149). An earlier conceptualisation of interpretative repertoires came from Gilbert and Mulkey’s study of biochemists’ repertoires to account for differences in their constructions of how scientific research proceeded by comparing their formal reports (published papers) and informal reports (interviews) (Edley 2001b ; Gilbert & Mulkey 1984 ; Potter & Wetherell 1987). These repertoires were used to understand scientists’ accounts of theory choice, their versions of the applications of scientific knowledge and other similar inquiries about the discursive deconstruction of scientific knowledge production (Potter & Wetherell 1987: 155). An application of interpretative repertoires to a study of white European New Zealanders’ attitudes towards indigenous Maori and racial policies. Wetherell and Potter explained how interpretative repertoires were detected in respondents’ innocuously racist opinions and this contributed an understanding to how racist explanations are constructed and warranted (Wetherell & Potter 1988: 183).

In another study investigating the interpretative repertoires of masculinity with a group of young men (Edley 2001b ; Edley & Wetherell 1997 ; Wetherell 1998), Edley and Wetherell found several different interpretative repertoires of sex and sexuality running through the oscillating—at times-- subject positions taken up by the young men. Interpretative repertoires were defined as “culturally familiar and habitual lines of argument comprised of recognizable themes, common places and tropes” (Wetherell 1998: 400). They are people’s “methods for making sense in [a] context—they are the common sense which organizes accountability and serves as a back-cloth for the realization of locally managed positions in actual interaction” (Wetherell 1998: 400- 401). This back-cloth or “argumentative social fabric” is understood as the “broader, cultural and historical context that, according [*sic*] poststructuralism, constitutes knowledge and systems of meaning; produces ‘subject positions’, and instantiates power relations” (Weatherall 2015:

21). Wetherell's analysis examined preferred and dispreferred responses (findings within CA's domain) to identify how the young men's discursive acts were used to affirm or resist "multiple and potentially inconsistent subject positions" (Wetherell 1998: 400). These constant and sometimes contradicting shifts in positions are accounted for in relation to the contexts of that talk, i.e. the events which led to this conversation, the relationships shared by these men and their tacit and shared (or not shared) perceptions of casual sexual encounters, responsibility and masculine sexual prowess. Through further questioning of such interpretative repertoires, certain ideological beliefs existing in the society can be accounted for.

In the same vein of what was termed as critical discursive psychology, Edley examined his interviews with a group of men for competing interpretative repertoires of talking about feminists (Edley & Wetherell 2001). One was of the liberal feminist repertoire of feminism as just demanding gender equality (or the Jekyll version) and the other repertoire that constructs a more extremist and unreasonable feminist who hates all men (Hyde version). Edley argued that these two repertoires were deployed by speakers to "present themselves as liberal or fair-minded" yet at the same time, "dismiss feminism as extreme" (Edley 2001b: 217).

Readers may note that interpretative repertoires and discourses are extremely similar ideas in the sense that people interact by drawing on "repositories of meaning" and "distinctive ways of talking about objects and events in the world" (Edley 2001b: 202). In fact, Edley claimed that the main differences between the two concepts are to do with "disciplinary 'ring-fencing'" or to signal "different methodological positions within discourse analytical work" (Ibid). He perceived discourse as more often used in Foucaultian research where there is a stronger view of people as subjectified. In contrast, interpretative repertoires are used by those who "want to place more emphasis upon human agency" and offering speakers a range of "rhetorical opportunities" (Ibid). In recognition of the more nuanced limitations on a speaker's agency, this thesis would be more inclined to use the term 'discourse'.

Following Foucault's notion that discourses are discontinuous and are thus products of history (Foucault 1971), Gee proposed that every time people speak and act, they give "a voice and body to a Discourse" and ultimately "changes it, through time" (Gee 2015: 180). Gee made a distinction between small 'd' discourses and big 'D' Discourses. He defined small 'd' discourse as any stretch of text or talk while big 'D' Discourse is a "socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and 'artefacts', of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role', or to signal that one is filling a social niche in a distinctively recognisable fashion" (Gee 2015: 178). It is this big 'D' Discourse that closely resembles the concept of interpretative repertoires. I would refer to Gee's concept of both 'd' and 'D' discourses in proposing a model to analyse academic struggles as social practices in the subsequent Section 2.7.

Gee further categorised big D Discourses into primary and secondary Discourses in terms of how they were acquired (primary discourses are our initial, taken-for-granted understandings of who we are while secondary discourses are a result of being socialised within institutions beyond the home and peers (Gee 2015: 187-188). As could be imagined, it is hard to demarcate primary from secondary Discourses and so, it is not productive to make this distinction in this thesis. The thesis is focused on exploring discourses about academia or higher education. Just like interpretative repertoires or collective tropes, these discourses governed how academics speak, think, behave, interact and understand their academic worlds and work struggles.

Some readers may note that interpretative repertoires sound very similar to Bamberg's conceptualisation of master and counter narratives. In his study of at-risk pregnant mothers and how they countered "pre-existing master discourses" or what was termed as master narratives on the topic of pregnancy and moral identity, Bamberg asked questions such as: "Where did these discourses come from and how did they achieve their coherence and persuasive powers?"

(Bamberg 2004: 341). Bamberg's question resonated with this study's aims to find out how discourses about academia are produced and reproduced through researchers' positioning practices. However, Bamberg was unclear as to how master narratives 'normalize' and 'naturalize' routines to an extent that they constrain our agency as subjects and reduce the range of our actions (Bamberg & Andrews 2004: 360). It was also unclear as to how master narratives are differentiated from counter narratives and this differentiation seemed to weigh heavily on the analyst's subjective interpretation of the participants and their narratives (Further discussion in David's case in Section 4.3.2).

### **Discourses underlying academic struggles**

Underpinning both concepts of interpretative repertoires and Gee's Discourses is the idea that the individual's utterances evoke the discourses in which their lives, talk, experiences are embedded. In other words, the interpretative repertoires in my respondents' talk are made up of beliefs, expectations and assumptions about UK higher education and academia that they draw upon to make sense of their struggles. As such, I describe these as discourses deriving from respondents' beliefs and tacit knowledge about academia that could be analysed from their utterances and positioning practices in the interviews. Exploring the discourses that are evoked through how my respondents construct and account for their struggles answers the research question: What are the discourses that academics drew upon to speak about themselves as researchers and to understand the academic world? Which of these voices and subject positions in this argumentative fabric are academics cast to speak from and at the same time, choose to accept or resist?

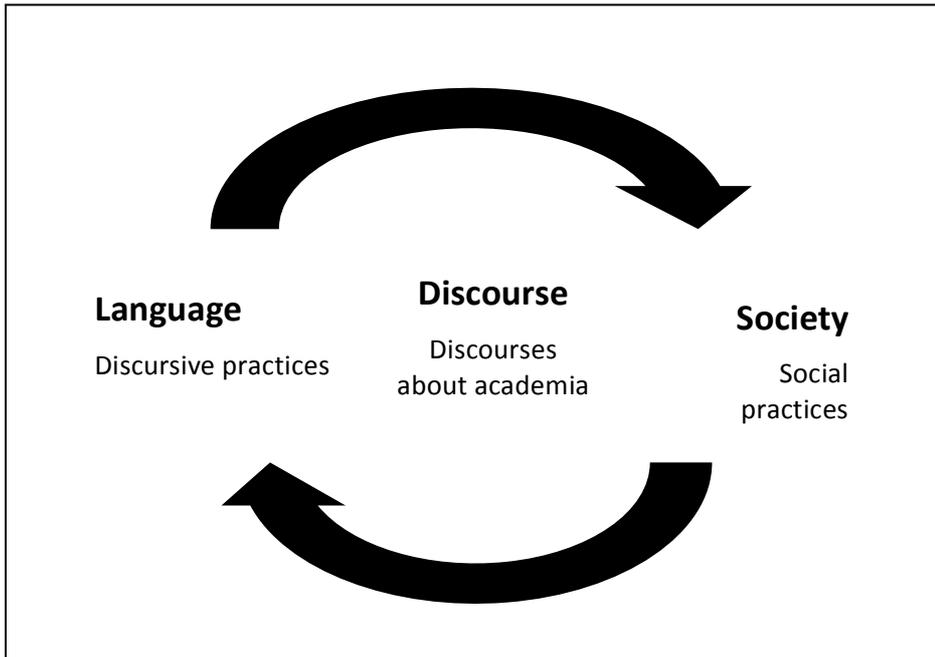
## **2.7 Towards a discursive perspective of academic struggles**

This thesis set out to study the academic experiences of researchers working in applied linguistics and linguistics-related fields in UK universities. It became apparent that in almost all the interviews, researchers display some resistance or report on some form of struggle in terms of negotiating meaning with the interviewer or resisting some larger discourses about what constitutes them as researchers. These larger discourses are evident from how they evoke the voices of others in their utterances when they refer to what seemed to be mainstream ideas on certain academic practices. Aligned with the social constructionist paradigm, this thesis adopts a discursive perspective to examine how researchers construct their academic struggles and consequently the academic world through talk. Interview accounts are understood as not just respondents' reports of their experiences in their academic work life but also "rhetorical enactments that construct the events that they report" (Atkinson & Sampson 2018: 10). Interview participants make sense of these experiences and events by drawing on the "collective tropes that are shared among a given speech community" (Atkinson & Sampson 2018: 10). In the previous section, I argued for how these collective tropes could be understood as interpretative repertoires and hence discourses about academia. These discourses refer to the knowledge that people draw upon to make sense of their social realities. When more and more people draw upon certain discourses to make sense of their social worlds, they become "distinctive ways" of thinking, understanding, interacting and valuing so as to "enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities" (Gee 2015: 171). In the same vein, academic researchers are recognised as researchers by the discourses they engaged in, in terms of valuing and thinking about academic practices. Disciplinary positioning is one dimension of how they convey themselves as researchers.

Gee's distinguishing between Discourses and discourses influenced my conceptualisation of my model (Fig. 1), i.e. how struggles at the academic workplace are social practices enacted through the discourse (or linguistic practices) of a qualitative interview. A salient indicator that there are Discourses

evoked in this 'interview talk' is voicing or when respondents seem to address other voices for instance in reported speech. Voicing is understood as a pragmatic device employed by the speaker to self-position as a reflexive interlocutor who is aware of alternative viewpoints, and to persuade the listener (rhetorical aims) (Cf. Bakhtin, Billig).

Most social scientists will acknowledge that language impacts on society and vice versa. Recognising that all utterances are action-oriented and fulfil interlocutors' communicative goals, discursive practices and social practices are intricately linked. Certain discursive practices effect certain social practices and this produces certain discourses. The same social practices reinforce the same discourses and lead to the reproduction of certain discursive practices. Such is the cyclical and recurrent nature of the perpetuation of discourses. This echoes the notion that utterances are responses to preceding ones in a continuing dialogue (Bakhtin 1986 ; Foucault 1971). I draw upon the notion that social realities are mediated through language and how one cannot be spoken of without relating to the other by proposing the following discursive model (Figure 1). I conceptualise academic struggles as constructed through the discursive practices by the respondent and interviewer during the qualitative interview. In this process of co-constructing and making sense of the academic struggles, interview participants drew upon their knowledge of academia (Cf. 'interpretative repertoires'), thereby evoking and reproducing discourses about academia.



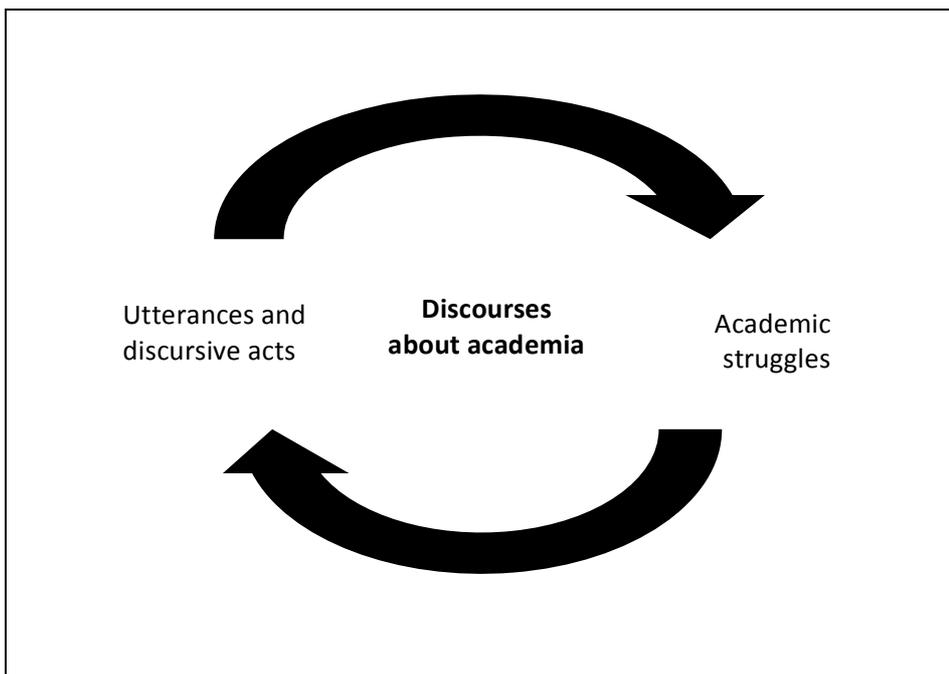
**Figure 1 Discursive model (I)**

**Constructing academic struggles through discursive practices**

This thesis aimed to find out: How do academic researchers position themselves as working in certain fields and disciplines? How do they construct identities for themselves as applied linguists? How do they enact their academic struggles through discursive practices in the interview? As aforementioned, qualitative interviews are the site for co-construction of meaning and so, the interviewer’s role in co-constructing the struggles needs to be taken into account. This co-construction takes place through a process of interpreting and negotiating to produce understanding, to resist or accept being positioned, and to take up stances. How respondents self-position or resist being positioned in certain ways are accounted for through an analysis of discursive acts. The co-construction of academic struggles emerges through this negotiation of meaning and positions between interview participants. Interview participants account for and make sense of their struggles by referring to interpretative repertoires or discourses outside the interview. The analysis of these discourses is informed by Bakhtinian notions of polyphonic utterances and linguistic markers of polyphony (such as voicing). Discourses about academia are construed as shaping how academic

struggles are understood and at the same time perpetuated by their construction through talk. Thus, in a continuous and never ending cycle, discourses are produced and reproduced through discursive and social practices.

Figure 1 encapsulated the precept that discourses are produced and reproduced in an iterative process through language and social practices. The following Figure 2 develops this concept further into the study of discourses about academia. The analysis in Chapters 4-6 is organised around this model. I demonstrate with excerpts from the interviews how interview participants construct their struggles at the academic workplace through discursive practices, thereby evoking discourses about academia and higher education. At the same time, it is these discourses that are drawn upon by participants to make sense of their struggles.



**Figure 2 Discursive model (II)**

### **A discursive model for analysing academic struggles**

Figure 2 builds upon Figure 1 in more detail and proposes a way of conceptualising how academic struggles are enacted and talked into 'being' through **utterances and discursive acts** while at the same time, discourses about

academia are produced to account for these struggles. The interviewer and respondent position each other as they negotiate understanding and make sense of each other's stances through turn-by-turn talk. Respondents position themselves vis-à-vis others or vice versa, including sometimes the interviewer through a series of **discursive acts** such as formulation, reformulation, clarification and repairs. These are communicative acts fulfilled through linguistic and pragmatic resources including hedging, voicing and humour. In accepting my invitation to a qualitative research interview, my respondents recognised that their opinions about their professional lives are valued and sought after. They were being interviewed in their professional capacities or roles, as lecturers or professors and the interviews were recorded for the purpose of research. Thus it was likely that they felt a need to portray, to the best of their knowledge and experiences, how academia is like and how they want to be seen as researchers. They also would not want their views to be distorted or misrepresented. Hence they tend to clarify and reformulate in an attempt to position themselves in their preferred ways and to get the interviewer to see that *this* is the way they wanted to be perceived. It is understood that it is an universal desire for one not to be misunderstood and misrepresented (Goffman 1959) especially in the context of an academic research interview where the data is analysed for research purposes.

As discussed in Chapter 1, academic struggles are examined on two levels in this thesis. On the first level, these struggles are troubles from the academic workplace that respondents reported as experiencing. These are often recognised as commonly shared ordeals of the academic profession and can often be located in larger discourses about academia and higher education in the UK and have very real implications for the researchers themselves in the form of institutional requirements, employability and such. The struggles are often embedded in valuation practices of what is considered as worthwhile research, desirable research output, and preferred academic practices. On the second level, researchers struggle during the interview with positioning themselves in their desired manner and could be observed to resist being positioned in certain ways by others. This is seen in their evoking of voices outside of the interview through reported speech and voicing of what others have said. It is also seen in how respondents compare and ruminate their beliefs and opinions about academia

vis-à-vis others. In trying to account for and understand their struggles, both interviewer and respondent reinforce certain discourses or recurring ways of valuating academic practices.

### **The interviewer's presence in excerpts**

In order to show the discursive construction of struggles by interview participants, excerpts in this thesis are invariably lengthier than in other studies that draw upon interview data. The omitted interviewer's presence in the representation of interview data has been criticised as neglecting the interviewer's role in meaning-making and relationship management (Mann 2011). Therefore, the excerpts analysed in the following chapters try to include the interviewer's questions and utterances as much as possible in order to enhance credibility and validity of this study (Section 3.6.5. Validity and reliability). The analysis illustrates the most prominent struggles that were observed in the pool of data. Due to space constraints, it is not possible to show excerpts from all the respondents who experience the same struggle. Instead only the most salient excerpts are selected to represent any particular struggle.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

Following a social constructionist paradigm, this study adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine how academic identities and struggles can be constructed through talk produced in an interview. This chapter discusses the steps taken to obtain interviews with academic researchers and how the data was processed and analysed. Interviews were employed and analysed with the aim of examining how respondents, along with the interviewer, construct their academic struggles and what discourses about academia are evoked.

### 3.1 Qualitative case study

The methodological approach taken in this thesis follows what Denzin and Lincoln described as a bricolage where the qualitative researcher-as-bricoleur employs whatever tools and methods needed to investigate her/his object in question and where the selection of research methods or tools to use is not always decided in advance (Denzin & Lincoln 1998). A qualitative case study approach works well in the case of asking 'How' and 'Why' questions about a social phenomenon (Yin 2009) or in this case, the academic experiences of a group of researchers in applied linguistics and related fields. As an in-depth study of academic struggles, as a social phenomenon, I asked the following research questions:

- How do academic researchers position themselves as applied linguists? In other words, how do they construct their identities as applied linguists?
- What academic struggles are enacted by researchers? How are they constructed discursively?
- What kinds of linguistic resources and discursive acts are mobilised during the construction of academic struggles?
- Through researchers' construction of their academic struggles and the enactment of their positioning, what discourses about academia are evoked?

This study could be termed a "collective case study" (Stake 1998) where individual academic researchers constitute cases in a collection under study. The

researchers selected for this case study are those that work in applied linguistics and related fields and in UK universities. More importantly, they are chosen “because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases” (Gerring 2004 ; Stake 1998: 89). In other words, understanding how this group of researchers in these particular fields position themselves as researchers could bring new insights about how other researchers in other disciplines and institutions perceive academic research, practices and higher education in the UK. Furthermore, this is an in-depth study of the struggles of academic researchers and the discourses that are evoked to make sense of these struggles. Hence, a collective case study on researchers in these academic fields could draw insights on academic struggles that may be particularly common in these quarters but also possibly shared by others beyond applied linguistics and related fields and the UK.

Yin (2009) proposed delimiting a case study with the notion of a unit of study. In this study, the case in question here refers to a group of researchers in applied linguistics and related fields in different institutions. While I have initially identified applied linguistics as parameters of my case study, I found that not all universities have a department for applied linguistics. Researchers working in applied linguistics could also be found in a range of departments. For instance, in my sample group of three institutions, only Eastern University has a department that contains applied linguistics in its name but there were also other researchers from the Education department who self-identify as working in the subfields of applied linguistics. The closest department that Southbank has to applied linguistics was one that comprises researchers with interests ranging from applied linguistics to literature. Southbank has no education department. Northland has only a linguistics department but there exists an applied linguistics research group whose members mainly come from the education department. Clearly, identifying and locating applied linguists was not a straightforward task. Furthermore, I would also face challenges in seeking respondents to agree to an interview (Section 3.4.1). Thus the sample pool of respondents obtained came from snowball sampling and referral chains. It is also worthwhile to interview not just applied linguists since they are found in a myriad of departments. The interviews with researchers in neighbouring fields such as linguistics and language-related

fields were valuable as they provided possibilities for comparison and how disciplinary positioning could be enacted in relation to other disciplines.

### **Issues with the qualitative case study approach**

Case study research has been criticised for its ambiguity in terms of definition and research design. A common criticism levelled at it is that a single case study is insufficient to make any generalizable claims or to formulate any theory. However it is also true that single particular cases have the power to limit generalisability of certain propositions. For instance, a single black swan could falsify the proposition that 'All swans are white' (Flyvbjerg 2006).

Proponents of qualitative research argue strongly for the need to determine rigour and credibility of qualitative research with a different set of criteria than those that have been traditionally upheld in quantitative research. While research questions in quantitative studies "seek out a relationship between a small number of variables" (Stake 1995: 41), the research questions in qualitative research may study social phenomena that were not anticipated from the start because the "pursuit of complex meanings cannot be just designed in or caught retrospectively" (Denzin & Lincoln 1994 in Stake 1995: 43). Hence, there is a greater likelihood in qualitative research than in quantitative research to have research questions and hypotheses change as the project progresses. While I had set out to study academic experiences, the research focus and questions about the enactment of academic struggles evolved as observations of resistance and struggle emerged through the interviews (Section 2.7).

Furthermore, the notion of generalisability may work well in assessing quantitative research but not so in qualitative studies. In qualitative case studies, how the researcher interprets the case is presumed to be unique and hence it might not be possible to replicate the same findings for other cases and researchers (Stake 1995: 135). Thus, the quality and utility of case study research is assessed by the value of its meanings generated by the researchers and the reader and should *not* be "based on its reproducibility" (Stake 1995: 135).

Given that qualitative research is born out of a constructivist or interpretivist paradigm, it is no wonder that the role of the researcher in a qualitative case study is a prominent and “ongoing interpretive” one (Stake 1995: 43). Since qualitative research relies highly on the researcher’s interpretation, the validity and credibility of such a study should interrogate the researcher’s representations and reflexivity in coming up with those interpretations. Houghton et al (2013) referred to Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria for rigour in qualitative case study research. They delineated four criterion: credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Together, the four criterion relate with value, reliability, accuracy of the findings and whether they could be transferable to other similar contexts (Houghton et al. 2013: 13). Through studying various case study examples in nursing research, they discussed ways in which the four criterion could be met to ensure rigour in a qualitative case study. Among other strategies, several such as peer debriefing, audit trail, reflexivity and thick descriptions are employed in this study and I discuss this in Section 3.6.5 Validity and reliability.

### **3.2 Crossing swords in qualitative interviews**

The qualitative interview plays a central role in this thesis as the primary method of data collection. The qualitative interview is distinctive from other types of interviews because it “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences [and] to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: 03). It came into general use in the social sciences in the 1980s as a “progressive dialogical form of research” as opposed to the “positivist quantification of questionnaires” because qualitative interviews allow for more dialogue, egalitarianism and nondirective approaches (Kvale 2006: 481).

The qualitative interview is perceived as a site where meaning is co-constructed between interviewer and interviewee and not merely a research instrument to capture a sole performance by the interviewee (Mann 2016 ; Roulston 2014 ; Tanggaard 2007). The research interview cannot be seen as “a direct access to the ‘true’ feelings, attitudes, beliefs of respondents” (Mann 2016: 139). Instead,

meaning constructed from the research interview should be seen as the product of situated interaction.

In the following pages, I synthesize the main defining characteristics of qualitative research interview and the implications for this study:

1. **Co-construction of meaning in a qualitative research interview** where both interview participants influence the interview outcomes by how they construe and manage their respective roles. The qualitative interview is construed as a complex process of meaning making and not a mere data-collection instrument.
2. **Multiple voices and positions** that interview participants can speak from in an interview imply that reflexivity is necessary in a qualitative research interview. The interviewer is recognised as collaborating with the respondent in making sense of the interview through the respondent's contextual shifts and reflexivity.
3. **The need to be aware of power asymmetries in the qualitative research interview**

Reflexivity also includes the need for interviewers to be aware that they have more power than the respondent in influencing how the interview unfolds.

### ***3.2.1 Co-construction of meaning***

Traditional perceptions of the interview deem it necessary for the interviewer's role to be minimized and kept as unobtrusive as possible so as not to 'contaminate' the data (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015), i.e. the respondent's opinions. However, social scientists have increasingly recognised that 'data' gleaned from interviews are not limited to what the respondents say but need to be considered in relation to the interviewer's elicitations and the entire process of meaning-making as it unfolds in the interview. Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) gave a comprehensive overview of the different types of interviewer positions that could be taken up (Discussed in Section 3.3) according to the ways in which interviewers treat their respondents' answers. My respondents' accounts of their struggles are

understood to be not just *mere recounts* but are multi-layered constructions of the realities that they produced as conveyed with some communicative intent.

### **The active interview approach**

Holstein and Gubrium introduced the active interview where the interview is “*not* merely a neutral conduit or source of distortion but rather the productive site of reportable knowledge itself” (Holstein & Gubrium 1995: 03). It views respondents as a narrator of her/his lived experiences and who possess a fund or stock of knowledge that is “reflexive and emergent” (1995: 30). The interviewer has a stock of knowledge as well, which sometimes influences the ways in which s/he poses the questions and interprets the respondents’ answers. Therefore, knowledge produced during the interview is regarded not just a straightforward ‘spilling out’ but rather the interplay of these stocks of knowledge through reflection and negotiation. How the stocks of knowledge emerge during the interview depends on how interlocutors “construe and manage their respective roles in relation to what is being asked about and the answers being conveyed” (Holstein & Gubrium 1995: 30). I interpret these stocks of knowledge as assumptions or prior knowledge that both interviewer and respondent possess that influence how they make sense of each other during the interview. Readers may notice that this bears resonance with Bakhtin’s concept of the ‘*apperceptive listener*’ (Section 2.6.1).

### **3.2.2 Reflexivity and multiple voices**

The active interviewer is thus someone who “encourage[s] the respondent to shift positions in the interview so as to explore alternate perspectives and stocks of knowledge” (Holstein & Gubrium 1995: 37). These moments of reflexivity are evident in instances when respondents describe having “to think things over from their various perspectives” or that “they need to take certain matters into account in deciding how they feel and what to say”, all of which are indications that there are diverse contexts for interpretation in life (Holstein & Gubrium 1995: 55-56).

Reflexive moments are also recognised when respondents seem to speak from multiple subject positions or voices. Holstein and Gubrium explained that “topics raised in the interview may incite respondents to voice subjectivities never contemplated before” (Gubrium & Holstein 2001: 22). This could be observed in how interview participants (including the interviewer) shift between personas or voices (Gubrium & Holstein 2000;2001) which is sometimes indicated by “verbal prefaces” such as: “to put myself in someone else’s shoes” or “to put on a different hat”. Alternatively, they explicitly indicate that they are “giving voice to alternative points of view” with phrases like: “Well from the point of view of a...” (Gubrium & Holstein 2001: 22). It is also sometimes indicated by changes in voice quality, which was elaborated on in Section 2.6.3.

The active interviewer as exhorted by Holstein and Gubrium is but one model in which interviewers can show more awareness and reflexivity towards conducting and managing the interview. Scholars studying the use of interviews in qualitative research have examined how the management of the interview could affect respondents’ reactions and eventually the knowledge co-constructed and shared in the interview. Much of this weighs on the interviewer’s attention to rapport-building (Mann 2016) such as the use of minimal responses (Richards 2010). There have also been studies about external factors outside the interview such as prior relationships between interview participants that could also influence rapport and meaning-making during the interview (Garton & Copland 2010). This is further elaborated on in Chapter 3.

In recognition of this contextual reflexivity in the research interview, this thesis makes use of positioning theory to understand the multiple voices and shifting positions that interview participants take up and negotiate throughout the interview. Other studies have taken other theoretical frameworks to make sense of such junctures of reflexivity. Garton and Copland applied Goffman’s notions of framing and footing to explain the “metacommentary” employed by interview participants who were also friends, colleagues or peers. These were comments made by interview participants to “readjust their actions to fit what they believe is ‘going on’ in the interview” (Garton & Copland 2010: 537).

### **3.2.3 Power asymmetries**

Reflexivity also requires interviewers to question the extent of influence that they have over respondents' answers (Holstein & Gubrium 1995 ; Kvale & Brinkmann 2015). Holstein and Gubrium gave an example of how an interviewer repeatedly offered the language of milestones, turning points, and crises as a resource for characterizing the respondent's life. By doing so, he was "making a specific vocabulary salient and repeatedly asserting its descriptive utility" so that "the interviewer had virtually trained the respondent to think and speak of his life in the terms relevant to the research at hand" (1995: 49). It might be true that interviewers often pose questions with some expectations of what kinds of answers they 'prefer' (such as those that fit the research questions etc). However, there remains the possibility of unpredictable responses and even resistance from respondents, who may be unaware or if aware, choose to resist the interviewer's assumptions. Examples of such resistance are discussed subsequently (Section 3.4.4. Reactions during interviews).

Scholars who are wary of the asymmetrical power relations between interviewer and respondent proposed alternatives to conceptualising the qualitative research interview. They argue that power comes into play during the conducting of the interview (especially when the researcher is also acting as interviewer) and the subsequent analysis and representation of the interview in research findings.

When it first came into use in the social sciences, the qualitative research interview has been conventionally described as "empathetic interviews" where rapport-building and agreement with the respondents are prioritized (Kvale 2006). However, the 'caring' approach has been criticised as ignoring "aspects of power relations and dominance in the interview which may make [analysts] blind to the many ethical dilemmas in qualitative research such as the influence of the theoretical background and academic position of the researcher" (Tinggaard 2007: 173). Tinggaard believed that what is needed is a "greater transparency of the power relations and the possible instrumentalization of human emotions and friendship" in the interview (Ibid).

Kvale went as far to argue that “it is a one-way dialogue, an instrumental and indirect conversation, where the interviewer upholds a monopoly of interpretation” (Kvale 2006: 484). The interviewer makes decisions with regards to the interview setting, the topics and questions to ask and for how long to ask it without making explicit her/his agenda to the respondent. It is a one-way dialogue in the sense that the respondent is discouraged from questioning the interviewer. To these claims, I would maintain that there remained some room for unpredictability and negotiation of meaning from the respondents. As the interviewer, I did not think I had full control over the dialogue nor could I fully anticipate how my respondents would react and how the interview would pan out.

Alternatives to the conventional ‘caring’ interview included “platonic interviews, actively confronting interviews, agonistic interviews, dissensus interviews, advocatory interviews, psychoanalytic interview” (Kvale 2006: 485) and even ‘antagonistic interviews’ (Tinggaard 2007). All these alternative interview approaches imbued a certain element of openness and recognition of the importance for respondents to disagree and challenge the questions, or the interviewer. The agonistic and antagonistic approaches are by far the more radical models. Such approaches regard the interview as a “battlefield” (Kvale 2006: 487) where new knowledge produced or new meaning negotiated is seen to happen especially during disagreements or conflicts between interviewer and respondent (Tinggaard 2007). Encountering resistant participants in her ethnographic study of ethnic minority children in the Danish social system, Katherine Vitus argued that the agonistic approach provided the researcher with a framework to understand and develop a sensitivity towards resistance within fieldwork (Vitus 2008: 467). As can be seen, the agonistic and antagonistic approaches to qualitative interviews have a concerted interest in disagreement instead of agreement or confirmation, which is the preferred response in conventional interviews.

It is true that instances of resistance from respondents in my data are especially rich in terms of reaping deeper insights into their interpretative repertoires and

beliefs. There is a richness of alternative viewpoints and meanings to be explored when misunderstandings and disagreements occur because the discourses or stocks of knowledge in the interviewer and respondent differ. In other words it is a hotbed where discourses “may cross, touch, delimit and coproduce each other” (Tanggaard 2007: 161).

The key points raised by both the active and the agonistic perspectives of research interview go into consolidating the epistemological stance of this thesis. The qualitative research interview is understood to be one where the co-construction of meaning happens through turn-by-turn talk during the interview and is constantly negotiated between the interview participants. It is also where the respondent is allowed to question and challenge, and this is to be interpreted and analysed in the context of the research and represented as fully as possible in the research findings or report.

### **3.3 Analytical framework**

This thesis is interested to study the tacit knowledge or discourses about academia that researchers' struggles are embedded in and in particular, how this could be studied in conversations. If much of the academic world (such as disciplinary demarcations and research practices) is socially constructed, then discourses about academia form the backdrop in understanding how researchers construct their academic struggles. The thesis is also focused on studying how academic identities are enacted through talk. In order to address these aims, it adopts an analytical approach that is informed by ethnographic studies about identity construction through interactions and draws upon findings from conversational analysis (henceforth CA) and interactional linguistics to identify the discursive acts that interlocutors engage in through talk. Essentially, the thesis views talk as action-oriented and utterances as constituting discursive acts. Thus, it argues that speakers construct identities for themselves or negotiate their positioning through turn by turn talk. At the same time, the interaction between the speaker and her/his interlocutor also reveals the kinds of knowledge that are tacit and shared. With the knowledge that are not shared, interlocutors go through negotiation and co-construction of understanding. The outcomes of this negotiation and co-construction of knowledge are argued to be discourses about academia that help us gain insights into how researchers perceive their academic worlds and the struggles that they faced.

#### ***3.3.1 Moral order in social interactions and tacit knowledge in conversations***

The thesis asks firstly: What kinds of tacit knowledge are shared by academic researchers? Secondly, how could these kinds of knowledge be examined through talk? In order to examine how tacit knowledge about academia is evoked through the interviews, I draw upon Garfinkel's notion of ethnomethodology and Goffman's theory of social interaction order.

Garfinkel's pioneering work in ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1964) questioned what is deemed as 'common-sense' by interlocutors through examining the

details in talk. Garfinkel's ethnomethodology is understood as the study of methods which people use for understanding and producing the social order in which they live. Much of Garfinkel's work on ethnomethodology focused on how there are shared methods of reasoning in the production and recognition of utterances in an interaction. Garfinkel's breaching experiments showed that when interlocutors speak, they expect their listeners to share some common knowledge with them to some extent and when this expectation is 'breached', this could lead to some adverse reactions (Garfinkel 1964). Interlocutors are constantly adjusting their responses and reactions based on their understanding of one another and the shifting context so that any "changes in an understanding of an event's context will evoke some shift or elaboration of a person's grasp of the focal event and vice versa" (Heritage 2001: 49). This meant that any interaction would require a certain kind of reflexivity between interlocutors. To a large extent, Garfinkel's observations about people's reflexivity especially in a conversation resonate with positioning theory as well because interlocutors take up shifting positions in a conversation.

Goffman's postulation that there was some kind of an order to social interaction (Goffman 1983) defied traditional thought that interactions are random and messy. Goffman argued that there are certain implicit, unspoken rules or norms, which produce some kind of moral order in interactions (Goffman 1983). The interaction order is understood as "a complex set of interactional rights and obligations" which entailed 'face', more enduring features of personal identity; and large-scale macro social institutions" (Heritage 2001: 48). 'Face' is defined as "an image of self-delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (Goffman 1967: 05). Therein lies another crux of Goffman's argument about the interaction order, i.e. social norms or specifically the norms of interaction in any particular setting. The study of interactions in a situation could reveal the norms particular to that situation and setting and this implies that there exist norms that stipulate interactions in a particular institution. This is because people are "continuously creating, maintaining, or altering the social circumstances in which they are placed – regardless of how massively, even oppressively, "predefined" those situations appear to be – and they do so in and through the actions they perform" (Heritage & Clayman 2010: 21). This supports the idea that institutions are talked

into being and social structures reproduced through discourse. By defining the interaction order as an autonomous site of authentic social processes that inform social action and interaction, Goffman laid the groundwork for turning the study of interaction into a social institution worthy and capable of being studied through a systematic analysis (Heritage & Clayman 2010: 8-9), which later inspired the school of conversation analysis. In later CA studies examining institutional talk such as those that happen in the courtrooms, conversation analysts have shown particular features of such kinds of talk that are peculiar to the institutional setting (Drew 1985). Since talk could be systematically studied, it supports the idea that the interviews could be examined closely to see how interlocutors express and negotiate their understanding and the kinds of knowledge that are shared or otherwise.

### ***3.3.2 Utterances constitute discursive acts***

This thesis follows the idea that conversation is co-constructed just as Bakhtin had asserted that each utterance is constructed with the conversational other in mind because it serves as a response to a preceding one.

“To some extent, primacy belongs to the response, as the activating principle: it creates the ground for understanding, it prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding. Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other.” (Bakhtin 1981: 282)

Bakhtin’s emphasis here on the “response” as creating “the ground for understanding” has helped to shift scholars’ attention from speaker to listener where the listener’s understanding is “dialectically merged” in his/her response. It also follows the idea that all talk constitutes actions and is thus, meaningful. It understands the conversation as jointly constructed so every utterance is construed by both parties to perform an act (Ten Have 2007). Participants in a conversation must act as both hearer and speaker. In understanding each utterance by the conversational other, one responds and shapes one’s own utterance accordingly. These utterances take the form of discursive acts such as explaining, accounting, formulating, reformulating, justifying and many more.

These discursive acts are largely motivated by some notion of moral order or norms (Antaki 1988 ; Garfinkel 1964 ; Goffman 1983 ; Shotter 1989) which interlocutors draw upon to make sense of one another's utterances and what is happening in the interaction. For instance, there have been studies about how explanations and accounts are employed because interlocutors feel or are made to feel a socially normative need to account for dispreferred acts and decisions (Antaki 1988 ; Heritage 1988). Thus, analyzing utterances and the discursive acts they encapsulate could reveal the discourses or the tacit knowledge that interlocutors hold about what makes up the moral order or social norms in a particular interaction.

The fact that conversation adhered strongly to a pattern served useful in making sense of the shifts in positioning during the interview and how questions and new information were received. Studies in conversation analysis have produced fruitful findings about adjacency pairs, preferred and dispreferred responses (Pomerantz 1984a) and how speakers indicate the basis of their knowledge. Building on the assumption that turns of talk are sequentially organised, Heritage had done extensive work on turn-initial particles 'Oh' and 'Well' as linguistic markers for changes of epistemic state in the listener or to signal the receiving of new information (Heritage 2018). Such findings are evidently helpful in indicating what is going on in the interview, the co-construction of understanding and the shifts in positioning enacted by respondents.

While this thesis draws upon CA findings, it is *not* a CA study. While CA recognises that interlocutors interact with some implicit knowledge of socially normative ways of speaking such as what constitutes preferred and dispreferred responses, there is less recognition for the idea that speakers are limited in ways of expressing themselves and how they are understood by their interlocutors due to the discursive power of discourses or speech genres (Bakhtin 1986 ; Davies & Harré 1990 ; Edley 2001b ; Wetherell 2007). Bakhtin argued that although speech genres are "changeable [and] flexible", "they have a normative significance" for the speaker in that "they are not created by him but are given to him" (Bakhtin 1986: 80-81). In the same vein, positioning theory echoes the notion of the

speaker's limited agency in expressing herself/himself in ways that her/his listeners could understand her/him in a particular speech event and social milieu. This is because "discursive practices constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and yet at the same time is a resource through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions" (Davies & Harré 1990: 62). Like many ethnographically informed identity construction studies, this thesis examines talk sequences closely to see how speakers construct their identities and shift between positions but it does not delve into the mechanics of turn-taking and the production of talk.

### ***3.3.3 Identities constructed through talk***

Another aim in this thesis is to examine how academic identities are constructed through spoken interaction, especially of researchers working in applied linguistics. Given that my study is focused on exploring how academic struggles are discursively constructed through social interactions, it is informed by studies about how academic identities are constructed discursively through social interactions; and interactional linguistics research done on the linguistics and pragmatics strategies employed by interlocutors. As established earlier in Section 2.5.4, positioning and identity construction are very similar concepts (Bucholtz & Hall 2005). Many of the studies examining identity construction through interactions are grounded in the belief that talk is action-oriented, i.e. people do things through talk (Antaki & Widdicombe 1998 ; Van De Mieroop & Schnurr 2017 ; Widdicombe & Wooffitt 1990). This does not only refer to giving instructions or performing requests but also to the idea that speakers construct their identities and portray themselves in certain ways in any social interactional encounter. This relates with the earlier assertion about how the self is always constructed in relation to others (Cf. Mead). It is also supported by ideas in critical discursive psychology where identities are understood as "discursive accomplishments" (Edley 2001: 196) and how when we speak, we speak from certain interpretative repertoires and lexicon made available by history. At the same time it is these same interpretative repertoires, history and culture that our interlocutors draw upon to understand our utterances (Cf. Edley, Wetherell, Gee). In other words, we

are positioned by others just as we try to position ourselves and others whenever we speak (Cf. Positioning theory).

Studies about the discursive construction of identities often draw upon conversation analysis findings and methods to study how people construct their identities discursively through turn-by-turn talk. For instance, the social constructionist notion that identities are constructed in social interactions with others has given rise to studies about how people construct and shift between multiple identities in interviews, conversations and workplace discourse (Antaki & Widdicombe 1998 ; Benwell & Stokoe 2006 ; Van De Mieroop & Schnurr 2017). One such application is in Widdicombe and Wooffitt's study of interviews with punks, gothics and hippies and how they make comparisons with other subcultures in ways to assert their authenticity in relation to others (Widdicombe & Wooffitt 1990). They found that older and newer members within the same subculture draw comparisons between 'being' (deemed as mere appearance and shallowness) and 'doing' punk (perceived as a moral personal commitment) in order to establish their own authenticity. Comparing oneself with others is one example of discursive acts employed in the construction of identities. In the context of academic researchers, Choi and Richards explored how scientists from different disciplinary backgrounds struggle to assert epistemic rights with their disciplinary membership, thereby enacting their disciplinary identities through a close analysis of their interactional talk at interdisciplinary meetings (Choi & Richards 2017a).

In this section, I have discussed three main ideas that underpin the analytical framework in this thesis. Firstly, interlocutors interact with expectations of a certain moral order in social interactions and they react and respond accordingly to the tacit knowledge shared between interlocutors in conversations. Secondly, talk is understood as action-oriented and utterances constitute discursive acts which can tell us what academic researchers are 'doing' with what they are saying such as accounting, justifying or resisting being positioned by others. Lastly, identities are understood as enacted through interaction and so a close analysis of the interview talk can tell us what kinds of identities researchers are constructing

for themselves. These three underpinning ideas enable the thesis' enterprise of deconstructing, in this case, social life in academia by scrutinizing what individuals believe are acceptable ways of interacting in academic institutions. They enable these to be studied as discursive practices 'done' or enacted by specific participants in specific situations. The thesis is interested to find out what academics believe are acceptable ways of talking and positioning themselves as an academic in a certain field; and what practices they believe are more valued in higher education institutions today.

### 3.4 Data collection

The data used in this thesis came from interviews that I conducted over the course of one year from January 2016 to January 2017 with thirty<sup>6</sup> academic researchers from mainly four different universities and a few others in the UK. I approached respondents from various institutions in several phases over time. There were four phases in my data collection as shown in the table below:

Phases / Time periods	Institutions approached	How participants were approached	Interview questions
Phase 1 First quarter of 2016	Westlake University Interviews with individuals from various institutions	Standardized email from DISCONEX and Personal email (for respondents whom I know personally)	Standardized four main questions from DISCONEX
Phase 2 Second quarter of 2016	Eastern University Southbank University Westlake University	Standardized email from DISCONEX Personal email (for respondents whom I know personally)	Standardized four main questions from DISCONEX
Phase 3 Last quarter of 2016	Eastern University Southbank University Northland University	An introductory email from Lawrence <sup>7</sup> (a staff member from my department) followed by a personal email	Additional questions
Phase 4 First quarter of 2017	Northland University	Personal email	Additional questions

**Table 1 Phases of data collection**

As my study was funded by the DISCONEX (Discursive Construction of Academic Excellence) project, the team shared a common consent form and information

<sup>6</sup> The excerpts selected eventually for this thesis came from twenty-seven interviews.

<sup>7</sup> Pseudonym used here for a staff member who knows me

sheet, which was attached with every email request to researchers to participate in my study (Appendix 1 DISCONEX Consent form and information sheet). Aligned with the DISCONEX project's aims, my study examines research practices of researchers through interview data. With my team members, we discussed ways to approach participants. In the first round of seeking participants, the team decided that sending standardized project-based paper letters and emails of invitation to target participants will enhance credibility and reap higher response rates. Paper letters were mailed first and then followed up by email invitations. This standardized email invitation (Figure 3 ) was sent with an attached electronic letter from the Principal Investigator from a generic mailbox (DISCONEX.uk.ling@live.warwick.ac.uk) and not from my personal mail address, again with the idea that this would seem more official.

Another outcome from the team discussions that influenced my study was to approach whole departments in universities instead of seeking individuals in a scattered fashion all over Britain. At that time, I had a vague hypothesis that there could be a link between research environments and common academic beliefs among researchers from the same institution. It turned out that I did not obtain enough data to test this hypothesis out as my average response rates from each department I approached was only around 30%. However, the approach brought a practical advantage— Respondents sometimes introduce me to their colleagues and this helped me to gain a few more interviews and this generated to some degree, snowball sampling (Robinson 2014).

For practical issues of distance, I selected Southbank, Eastern, Westlake and Northland universities to focus on. I also decided to choose universities that vary in terms of research intensity based on league tables such as THE (Times Higher Education). The rationale for this decision came from literature from higher education studies. It has been found that institutional expectations and beliefs vary according to the institution's history and development. Burton Clark (1989) observed that crucial differences exist between colleges that were developed to be more teaching-oriented than research-intensive ones such as in North America and these will affect researchers' perspectives. However, Clark's claims came

from a much bigger study of researchers from many more colleges in the USA than my qualitative study. Still, there were some observations that could be made from comparing my respondents' discussions of the institutional pressures they face in Chapter 8.

**From:** DISCONEX.uk.ling@live.warwick.ac.uk  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 16, 2016 4:13 PM  
**To:** \_\_\_\_  
**Subject:** Invitation to DISCONEX research interview

Dear Dr \_\_\_\_

My name is Hah Sixian and I am a PhD student at the University of Warwick, in an ERC research project, DISCONEX, led by Prof. Johannes Angermuller. <http://www.disconex.discourseanalysis.net/>

You might have received a paper letter earlier about the DISCONEX project. We are interested to study how researchers in Social Sciences & Humanities 'do' research. In particular for my project, I am interested to study how researchers present themselves and their research in terms of communicating, citing and publishing. Hence, I am writing to ask if I could interview you with regards to your research in [Specialised field as indicated on respondent's webprofile] and your experiences as Lecturer in Eastern University and other prior roles you have undertaken in academia. For this interview, I would need to request for your current CV and for you to indicate up to 5 of your publications that you think are most relevant to your current research. Of course, your CV and the contents of our interview would be kept confidential in line with ethical guidelines.

Would you agree to being interviewed?

Please feel free to let me know if you have any queries. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,  
Hah Sixian  
PhD student, ERC DISCONEX  
Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick  
Mobile phone: +44 7990316224  
e-profile: <http://warwick.ac.uk/hahsixian>

Figure 3 Sample of standardized email invitation (First phase)

### ***3.4.1. Seeking participants***

Given that this is a qualitative case study of researchers working in applied linguistics and related fields, participants for this study were sought after for their work in these fields. As my background lies in applied linguistics, this had some ramifications in terms of how respondents viewed me. While I might appear as an insider to some (Excerpt 11), others might see me as quite the outsider especially those who are not working in applied linguistics. In terms of sampling, it is purposive insofar as I focused on academic staff, who engage in research to some extent and who work in applied linguistics, linguistics and related fields in UK universities. This excludes university administrative staff or researchers from beyond languages-related disciplines. However, given the difficulties in getting respondents, some degree of snowball sampling was involved when some interviews were obtained with participants that were introduced to me by my department colleague and other respondents, in what became a “referral chain” (Robinson 2014: 37).

I located respondents by identifying departments most likely to contain linguists, language specialists and researchers with academic qualifications in linguistics in UK institutions. These are usually linguistics, applied linguistics, languages, education or even communication departments. I use the word ‘department’ in general here but depending on universities, it could be faculties, centres, colleges or schools. I scanned through institutional webpages on the ways departments were organised and the profiles of researchers categorised in that department to ascertain if they could fall into the category of linguists. Some researchers make their CVs public and available online. All the respondents in my sample come from departments named with the following disciplinary labels: linguistics, applied linguistics, languages and education.

I had categorised my data collection period into four phases. The first phase was marked with uncertainty and the aims of my project were still far from refined. I was still struggling with framing my project and at least one participant asked about what I was looking for.

In my email correspondence with Ben, he had asked about my expectations concerning the responses I could get from the interview and how I viewed my role as an interviewer. His email made me realise that the framing of my project needed to be refined and in retrospect, his questions were attempts to make sense of me as a researcher. He seemed to be curious about my epistemological stance, which at that time, was still a fuzzy concept even to myself.

In the first phase, I worked with another colleague in the DISCONEX team to seek respondents in three universities: Hamlet University, Eastern University and Southbank University. We would divide up the list of staff in the target departments and approached them individually. The first university that my colleague and I approached was Hamlet University. It had a small linguistics department. None of the researchers I approached responded despite a second email. Thus, we shifted our attention to Eastern University. This time, we mailed paper invitations to all the staff members in the department before sending an email. Again, the responses were low. Less than half of the invitations I sent received a response and this is despite sending them for a second or third round. We received a few declinations but the invitations were mostly ignored.

The second phase of data collection was marked by a drought of interviews. I received very few positive responses. During the drought, I tried to seek interviews with people I know and I expanded my study to include PhD students. These interviews were easier to secure because I have a ready pool of peers whom I could approach. Some were from my department while others were from other UK universities. It was at this time when I decided to include in my project a possible comparison of experiences of individuals at various stages in their academic career.

It soon became apparent to me that getting respondents to agree to an interview was an arduous task especially if they did not know me. I sought the help of a staff member in my department whom I shall call Lawrence here. He knew me from my Masters course and asked for a brief description of my project. This forced me to

refine my framing of my project. I began to explain to respondents that I am interested to study their perceptions on disciplinary environments and how they communicate their research after I noticed that research environments and disciplines came up frequently in the interviews I had done. As I delved deeper into the literature, I realised that researchers could be enacting disciplinary identities during the interviews. This reframing of my email invitations subsequently led to a refining of my project aims. Lawrence introduced me to researchers he knew who were working in other universities via email. He introduced me and my quest to seek respondents for my study which was briefly described as: “Her study focuses on how researchers communicate their research in spoken and written discourse. Her specific target is researchers in linguistics/ applied linguistics and humanities fields.” (From Lawrence’s email)

Following Lawrence’s email, some of these researchers contacted me to arrange for possible timeslots. With the rest who did not respond, I would follow up with them with a personal email. Eventually, half of these researchers recommended by Lawrence agreed to an interview. This marked a turning point in my data collection period and the beginning of Phase 3.

It was certainly true that respondents began making sense of me even before the interview. This can be seen from their reactions to my email invitations. For instance, in Hugh’s email response to me, he stated his disagreement with how “written outputs” (his words) are the best way of communicating research today. He elaborated on this response during the interview when we discussed his beliefs about ways to communicate research and the limitations of academic journals (Excerpt 90).

Encouraged by the peak in Phase 3, I started seeking a new institution, Northland University on my own. By this time, I had become more confident and clearer in framing my project in the email invitation to participants. These email invitations also became progressively brief and less ‘demanding’ of the participants by the time I got to Phase 4 as can be seen in Figure 4 . Instead of asking for up to five publications, I now request for one to two short publications. I also started

sending email from my personal email address instead of the generic DISCONEX address.

**From:** Hah, Sixian [S.Hah@warwick.ac.uk]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 30, 2016 4:27 PM  
**To:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Subject:** Invitation to research interview

Dear Dr \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Sixian and I'm a second-year PhD student in Warwick University. I am writing to ask if you would like to accept a research interview for my PhD project. I study how researchers (especially in linguistics and applied linguistics) communicate their work and how they perceive their disciplinary environments. I am funded by a larger research project, DISCONEX, which studies the discursive practices of researchers in social sciences and humanities.

An interview would usually take around an hour but even 30 minutes would be fine. I would be happy to meet you at your university (perhaps, in the week starting from 12th Dec), or we could do it via Skype, whichever you prefer. During the interview, I would ask questions about your background, research, academic activities and publications. If possible and if you have time before the interview, I would request for one or two of your written texts and a recent CV.

Would you be agreeable to an interview?

Please feel free to get back to me if you have any questions.

Best wishes,  
Sixian

---

**Sixian Hah** | [E-profile](#)  
Postgrad Research Student | Applied Linguistics  
University of Warwick, UK  
[DISCONEX](#) Project Member  
Email: [s.hah@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:s.hah@warwick.ac.uk)

**Figure 4 Sample of email invitation (Phase 4)**

Phase 4 of the data collection period was a peak in terms of interviews because I achieved the highest rate of success of at Northland University, i.e. 8 interviews were conducted successfully out of 25 respondents approached. Out of these eight interviews, there was a good mix of Professors and post-doctoral fellows that aided my exploration of possible correlations between struggles and academic career stages.

### **Reactions from participants could inform what I could be looking out for in the interview**

With experience, I became more attuned to possible issues that I could probe with respondents. Besides the absolute yes to an interview, I sometimes received what I call the tentative 'Yes' to my invitations. This was when respondents expressed apprehension if they were suitable candidates for my project. For instance, Teresa had introduced herself as a psychologist by training and was at that time working on psycholinguistics projects in a linguistics department. She added a metacomment: "I know this sounds strange" following this introduction. She then clarified that she was involved in laboratory experiments and was unsure if this was within the scope of my research. Teresa's hesitation might stem from her feeling that she was not a linguist and therefore less eligible for my study, which purportedly was seeking researchers in linguistics and applied linguistics. Still, Teresa's foregrounding of this 'strangeness' of working in a linguistics department despite her training signalled to me precisely the kind of disciplinary positioning awkwardness that I was interested to study. Thus I took note to probe her about this during our interview.

### **3.4.2 Ethics**

As aforementioned my study was funded by the DISCONEX project and ethical approval for data collection has been sought as a team. I also made explicit in my email invitations to respondents that I conduct the interviews and collect their CVs and publications for the DISCONEX project and so this information would be shared with the team. All respondents were assured before the interview that all the documents that they sent me and the interview recordings would be kept safe and confidential.

In general, most respondents were forthcoming in sending me their CVs and publications prior to the interview except for two. Sometimes respondents sent their publications in electronic format and if these were not available online then of course, discretion was taken to ensure that these materials remained only

within the perusal of the researcher. Pseudonyms are used in the interview transcripts for names, institutional affiliations and other details that may give away the respondent's identity. When excerpts from the interviews are used for publications, respondents were contacted to check if they are comfortable with how the excerpts were transcribed and the level of anonymity.

In this thesis, pseudonyms have been used for all respondents, their institutions and most parts of the interviews where places, colleagues, research fields mentioned could potentially identify the speakers. It might be observed that the pseudonyms I have used for the respondents seem to be mostly European or Anglo-Saxon names. This does *not* imply that all my respondents came from these cultural backgrounds. In fact my sample include both British and non-British participants.

### ***3.4.3. Conducting the interviews***

#### **Setting up the interview**

Most interviews were held at the respondents' offices in their respective universities if they were not done through online video conferencing (such as Skype). There were a few instances when respondents requested to meet at departmental meeting rooms, cafés or college lounges around campus when they do not have an office available. There were two interviews when we had to change the venue halfway through the interview because someone else had booked the meeting room without the respondent's knowledge. In such cases, I stopped the recorder and resumed recording after we had settled down in the second venue. The two audio files would subsequently be merged to facilitate transcription.

#### **Recording and equipment**

I brought two recording devices to the interviews. I would seek consent before activating the recorders. The obtrusiveness of recording devices in such qualitative interviews has been debated with some scholars suggesting that they be switched on even before the interview began. However, as the interviews are often held at the respondents' offices, there was less chance that I could set up

my equipment before their arrival. Thus, I took their signing of the consent form as indication to switch on the audio recorder. With interviews done online, I used another recording device in addition to the computer's internal recording application. I also ensured that respondents' verbal consent was recorded.

### **Interview questions**

The interview was designed to be semi-structured and it posed broad questions that could allow respondents to expand on their answers and also room for both interviewer and respondent to steer the interview in the directions they wanted. The main questions that DISCONEX was interested in were to do with the biographical and professional backgrounds, academic activities and citation practices of respondents:

1. How did you become who you are today? Please start with your family.
2. What do you think your research is about? How do you think others perceive your research?
3. What is your academic activity (teaching, research, administrative duties in the university)?
4. Who did you cite in this publication? Who are these people that you cite? Did you know them?

The first question was often posed at the beginning of the interview but questions 2 and 3 may not always be asked in the same order. Sometimes respondents may start talking about their academic activities even without prompting and so the interview is very much semi-structured where the flow of the interview is flexible and open to the interaction between interview participants.

To some extent, the anchoring questions decided by DISCONEX provided a framework in which I designed my study and also in how respondents could potentially interpret my study from. However, the reasons behind these questions were not always apparent to participants and not all questions were relevant to my study. For instance, responses to the last question about citations were less cited in this thesis.

After several interviews and listening to the data, I gained a sense of the kinds of responses that certain questions elicited. The questions pertaining to their research and how they think others perceived it drew especially interesting insights. They also provided the space for researchers to position themselves and refer to others. Respondents also interpreted the 'others' in the question 'How do you think others perceive your research?' differently. To some respondents, they immediately thought about their colleagues or fellow peers in the same fields and outside the field. Others thought about their family and friends and non-academic peers. These questions prompted respondents to explain their research in relation to other fields or to the larger discipline, thereby drawing boundaries between fields and disciplines. They often justified and accounted for whether they see their research as falling within (or outside) of certain disciplinary boundaries.

Questions about their academic activities and career trajectory as observed from their CVs provided information about their professional work and mobility in the academic world and also provided space to discuss their beliefs about institutional requirements and career progression.

In the last question, I discussed a publication, which I have read beforehand, with the respondent. This is done with the aim of eliciting their perceptions of other researchers or the people whom they have cited, and if they knew these people personally. However, most of the excerpts shown in this thesis come from responses to the first three questions. This is because these questions elicited sufficiently rich data on researchers' discursive practices to construct their academic struggles.

In addition to the pre-planned questions listed above, I often probed respondents on their use of terms which I did not share their understanding of such as 'interlocutors' (William) or 'acceptance' (Gabriel). I find that these small clarifying questions tend to glean the most interesting responses in the sense that they sometimes reveal respondents' beliefs and deeper issues.

As I had a clearer sense of examining disciplinary positioning in my project, I thought about the kinds of questions that could elicit this in respondents. For instance, I sought respondents' opinions about their disciplinary environments but without asking them too explicitly which disciplinary field they perceive themselves to be in. I learnt that asking about which journal titles they aspire to publish in and their bionotes could possibly invite respondents to talk about which field they ground their work in. Thus I added the following two questions in Phases 3 and 4.

5. Do you have a preference for publishing in books (meaning monographs, book chapters) or in journals (meaning articles or journal papers)? Do you have any journals in mind that you would like to publish in?

6. Where would you use this set of bionotes? What do you have in mind when you were writing this?

While this does not always work, it did reap a surprising revelation of a shift in disciplinary positioning from Matthew in Excerpt 1.

**Excerpt 1 Matthew\_20170112\_#00:21:10-4#**

- 1 I: Are there any journals that you have in mind that you want to publish in? In the future?
- Matthew: Good question. That's an interesting question because it's- because by looking at [research topic] (.) I'm kinda moving away
- 5 slightly from very kind of erm (.) er second language acquisition applied linguistics journals like (.) [title] or (x) [...] into things like language and education.

Questions such as the one I posed in Excerpt 1 gave me more impetus to frame my interview as one that is interested to study how researchers communicate their research. The additional interview questions led to a clearer definition of my project. Interestingly, framing my project as a study of how researchers communicate their research led to my development towards this "agenda" as expressed in my research log (Figure 5).

I realised that since I framed my email as interested to study “how researchers communicate their research and their perceptions on disciplinary environments”, I have kind of grown into that ‘agenda’ as well in terms of shaping my research focus and project (thinking about communication of research and how academic labels or categories play a crucial role in how researchers communicate their work!). It also meant that I am a little bit clearer about what I’m ‘looking for’ in the interview [...] I can ‘steer the interview in those directions’ to ask how researchers ‘see themselves’ (as an applied linguist/ linguist/ psychologist...etc). I also ask them to compare teaching/research environments in various universities/ countries especially if they have worked in or are working in different countries (eg. Luke, Eric) and both have reaped interesting insights.

**Figure 5 Change in framing of my study**

It was almost in a cyclical relationship that my projection redefinition exerted its influence on my interview design and vice versa. I became clearer about which directions to steer the interview towards and I started probing about disciplinary identities through asking them to compare research or teaching environments if they had experience working in different institutions. This sometimes provided opportunities for respondents to make comparisons and reveal their implicit evaluations of what matters more to them in an academic work environment.

A particularly difficult interview inspired me to add one last question during Phase 4 of conducting the interviews.

It was an interview where I faced a lot of resistance from a respondent who gave very brief answers or who declined to answer my questions. A turning point came after I had finished asking all the questions and had switched off the recorder. As I prepared to leave her office, she revealed that she had expected me to ask other kinds of questions. We discussed this further and with her consent, I switched on the recorder again and recorded this sequel to the interview when she shared her opinions on the inequalities in academia that posed obstacles to how researchers could communicate their research. The following Excerpt 2 was my probing on what she saw as an inherent assumption in DISCONEX’s interview questions, i.e. all researchers do research and the interview was aimed at excavating their practices of doing research. She did not think this was true and she wanted to

draw my attention to the inequalities in academia where certain research was communicated and others were not.

**Excerpt 2 Sofia\_ 20161206\_#00:25:37-1#**

- 1 I: [...] That you mentioned that there is an inherent assumption in our project that all researchers do research er which is true but then there are obstacles. So would you like to tell me more about these obstacles?
- 5 Sofia: Obstacles have to do with the nature of the job.  
I: Mhm ok  
Sofia: It depends on the kind of job you do. [...] so for example in [University name] I was a teaching fellow and I didn't have any recognised time for research.
- 10 I: Mhm  
Sofia: In my contract. Which meant that I was not allowed to do research. Even if I had a PhD. So that was the nature of the job. So yes you're right that there is an inherent assumption in there that researchers or people who have a PhD do research but that's not necessarily true. [...]
- 15

Following my experience with Sofia, I decided to include the following question in my interview:

7. Are there any obstacles or what do you see as obstacles in how researchers communicate their research?

It fitted in well with the existing questions I was asking about journal publishing and so I clustered them together:

8. The following questions relate to how you communicate your research.
- Do you have a preference for publishing in books (meaning monographs, book chapters) or in journals (meaning articles or journal papers)?
  - Which journals have you published in?
  - Do you have any journals in mind that you would like to publish in?
  - Are there any obstacles or what do you see as obstacles in how researchers communicate their research?

The 'obstacles' question drew interesting opinions and attitudes about publishing and the REF. Many respondents cited publishing as a struggle and the gate-keeping roles played by peer reviews and journals as a major obstacle to the communication of research.

### **Fieldnotes**

Right after the interviews, I would write up a set of fieldnotes recording the gist of what has been discussed during the interview, any interruptions during the interview and my immediate feelings. These were usually around two pages long. I would record topics that frequently came up during the interview or what I termed as the 'preoccupations' of the respondent. These could range from disciplinary resistance to problems faced in publishing for instance. My fieldnotes indicated which parts of the interview to transcribe in greater detail and to begin my preliminary analysis from. They were also helpful in the process of finding commonalities or common categories in my data.

### **3.4.4. Reactions during interviews**

In line with the qualitative view of doing interviews, interviewees are “not passive pawns that simply perform preassigned roles” and may sometimes behave unexpectedly by objecting to questions or asking questions which seem to break with the “conventional choreography of research interviewing” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: 114). However, such ‘transgressive’ reactions are few and far between because respondents often try to “act as “good interviewees”, according to what they guess is an appropriate way of “doing interviews” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: 114). This is seen in how respondents employ adequacy checks to check whether what they have said is sufficient and relevant (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury 2013) as illustrated by Excerpt 3.

#### **Excerpt 3 Felix\_20170720\_#00:01:59-9#**

- 1 Felix: Is that- Do you want me to carry on? What is it that you're looking at? The way I just said this or are you interested in the: content more than the way I structure my?

#### **Resistance from respondents**

The qualitative interview is also a site where in most cases, the interviewer and respondent are meeting for the first time and would need to establish some kind of interpersonal relationship and rapport as they “act in relation to each other and reciprocally influence each other” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: 35). While it is often a cordial situation, the interaction may also be “anxiety provoking and evoke defence mechanisms in the interviewee as well as in the interviewer” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: 35).

These defence mechanisms are observed in some interviews when respondents show resistance towards some questions by changing them or declining to answer them. The following excerpts listed some instances when respondents declined to answer some questions indirectly or changed the interviewer’s question slightly to suit their preferences.

**Excerpt 4 Eric\_20170118\_#00:00:53-3#**

- 1 I: How did you become who you are today?  
Eric: How did I become- ((laughs)) How far back do you want to go?  
I: You can start with your family.  
Eric: My family?  
5 I: It's a very broad question.  
Eric: Ok. What do you mean my family? ((laughs))  
I: Erm or at any point that you're comfortable to start with.  
Eric: So professionally how did I become who I am? -  
I: -Your academic (x)? Yes you can.  
10 Eric: My academic yah. Well you want to get my life story? ((laughs))  
(xx)  
I: Something like that. Yah yah like a life story.  
Eric: We'll start from the academic life. Erm

**Excerpt 5 Jane\_20161110\_#00:01:28-3#**

- 1 I: How did you become who you are today?  
(1.0)  
I: Please start with your family.  
Jane: Sorry?  
5 I: You can start with your family.  
Jane: [...] I'd rather talk about work I think.

As seen in Excerpt 4 and Excerpt 5, both Eric and Jane were uncomfortable with discussing their family in response to the first question, which was meant to elicit their life stories. They might have perceived this question about their family and biographical background as “potential ethical transgressions of the subject’s personal boundaries” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: 35). Thus, they decided to respond by focusing only on their professional background.

In retrospect, uncertainty about the motives behind some of the questions was a key reason why some of my respondents reacted in the ways they did. For instance, Jane was puzzled about why I had to ask the question about whether she knew any of the citations personally. She asked me about it after the end of the interview and after listening to the recording, I realised I had not given her a satisfactory answer. The question about whether respondents knew citations personally was a question I asked as part of the larger DISCONEX project. It is not immediately relevant to my own PhD study. Thus this resulted in some resistance from some respondents. Hugh declined to answer this question and felt that it was irrelevant to my study. He made it clear during the interview that he would only answer questions that were pertinent to my PhD study because he only had

thirty minutes to spare. Thus he requested to skip the question about citations entirely.

A more explicit way of declining to answer a question could be seen in Sofia's reaction (Excerpt 6).

**Excerpt 6 Sofia\_ 20161206\_#00:11:07-2#**

- 1 I: How do you think others perceive your research?  
Sofia: How do I?  
I: How do you think (.) others perceive your research?  
Sofia: How do you think (at)?
- 5 I: Other people? Others?  
Sofia: Others. Oh. I don't know. I have no idea.  
I: Ok.  
Sofia: I really don't know. I wouldn't be able to tell (through) this question. I think you have to ask them. Not me.

It turned out eventually that this could be because the questions I posed were not what she was expecting and we discussed this in a sequel to the interview. I tried to find out what kinds of questions she was expecting although I expressed my wariness of leading the participant. Sofia disagreed and believed that my questions should be more guiding in Excerpt 7

**Excerpt 7 Sofia\_ 20161206\_#00:36:24-8#**

- 1 Sofia: Much more (.) guiding I would think. Because you would immediately get answers and: (.) because we we tend to have the ability to expand. But you need to locate the particular point, so if
- 5 you ask me the question about the kind of obstacles in terms of discursive practice in er (.) attempting to publish and perhaps link this with Do you feel that there is particular politics going around? Obviously that would spark my own thinking and then you would probably get a better response. [...]
- 10 I: Well ther- (.) I don't really have a specific area that I want to cover. But I guess the challenge with any interview is always not to lead the respondents too much. [(xx)
- Sofia: [ I don't think it's leading!
- I: Uhuh
- 15 Sofia: No no no erm I I didn't. I wouldn't feel I'm being led. You're just exploring different areas of a topic and I don't think (.) that you telling (me how do you feel) if there is any politics that's (.) leading me. Cuz I'm not (.) I'm not going to tell you No there isn't.

My discussion with Sofia again related with my beliefs about the role I perceive myself, as the interviewer should play. In the earlier stages of my project, I tended to see my role more as a facilitator as described by Gubrium and Holstein, where

the traditional view of interviewers as passive “facilitators” are generally “expected to keep their ‘selves’ out of the interview process”. Interviewers are expected to keep neutral and to use their interpersonal skills “merely to encourage the expression of, but not to help construct the attitudes, sentiments and information in question” (Gubrium & Holstein 2001: 13). However, given that both interviewer and interviewee are actively making and constructing meaning during the qualitative interview, it is hardly possible for the interviewer to stay as a passive facilitator and “neutrality is not figured to be necessary or achievable” (Gubrium & Holstein 2001: 15). I began to turn around to the idea that the qualitative interview is very much an unfolding situation as “created, maintained or altered” through the participants’ actions (Heritage & Clayman 2010: 22). I recognized that as the interviewer, I have a role to play in this creation and enacting of the contexts that are evoked in the interview. This became more apparent to me especially when I reflected on some misunderstandings that cropped up during the interviews.

Interviewers are fallible beings and mishearing and misunderstanding are part and parcel of the qualitative interview. Upon listening to the recording of the interview with Jane, which was conducted via video conference (Excerpt 8), I realised I had misheard one of her responses and probed her on a comment that she did not make. I did not realise my mistake during the interview but this caused some ensuing confusion and uncomfortable silences. Listening is deeply necessary on the part of the interviewer (Mann 2016) but at the same time poses a challenge especially when the interviewer has other things to consider such as deciding what questions to pose next, making sense of the responses and ascertaining the respondent’s facial expressions and body language all at the same time.

**Excerpt 8 Jane\_20161110\_#00:03:51-3#**

- 1 I: Er I noticed that you did your PhD in [topic] and you also have an MPhil in [X]<sup>8</sup> and then [Y] and [Z] and your BA was in [A] and [B]. So there's been some slight movements in fields of research I suppose?
- 5 Jane: Yah that's mainly I did [A] when I was twenty [...] And I suppose I moved away (.) gradually from the teaching side of that↑ more to (.) the academic side of it erm (.) which explains the movement from (.) Z to (.) X.
- 10 I: Why is it strange?  
(2.0)
- Jane: Why was what strange?
- I: Why is it strange to you? That [ you've moved from-
- Jane: [ I can't remember what I've said  
((laughter in voice)) What did I say that was strange?
- 15 I: ((laughs)) Erm you've said you've moved from [...]

**More positive reactions**

While I have spent more space discussing the tentative and cautious reactions from some respondents, there were also some unexpected reactions, which were encouraging and enlightening. I was very fortunate to have the chance to interview Luke who not only agreed to an interview but also invited me to lunch after the interview. At the lunch venue on campus, he introduced some of his colleagues to me and it was as close to an 'ethnographic study' as I could get. It was a chance to observe my respondent's amicable interactions with his colleagues from various departments. It was indeed a conducive environment for the "organic fostering" of interdisciplinary collaboration in his own words.

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<sup>8</sup> [alphabet letters] to represent research areas and fields in Jane's educational background

## 3.5 Data analysis

In this section, I discuss the steps I took in preparing the data for analysis namely: transcribing the audio recordings, going through iterative rounds of listening and analysing and coding the data.

### 3.5.1. *Transcription*

In the process of getting to know my data, I listened to my audio recordings for several times after the interview to recap the gist and main themes that my respondents were preoccupied with and also to identify particular junctures, which I would transcribe in detail.

#### **Transcribing data**

The level of detail to include in transcription was an issue that I considered early on in the project. I knew I was working on spoken data and wanted to adopt an approach that could excavate details in talk to infer some deductions on how the academic world is enacted by its actors and conversation analysis (CA) seemed to afford the most useful tools. This study strove for a close analysis of talk by transcribing with an adaptation of Jefferson's transcription conventions (Appendix 2 for a sample of transcript and Appendix 3 for transcription key). However this was *not* intended to be a CA study and did not follow the same kind of focus on deconstructing talk sequences and even how words are sounded in syllables as seen in more traditional CA studies. As mentioned in Chapter 1, it was also not my intention to focus my analysis only on turn-taking and limited to, what more traditional schools of CA would consider as, context endogenous in talk (cf. Heritage 1984).

I needed to transcribe recorded material in just as much detail as required to answer the research question and also to ensure that my claims could be warranted (Holmes 2014: 190). Warranting my claims about how researchers 'do' positioning or engage in positioning practices require that I capture as many clues as I can from the audio recording. I took these clues to be micropauses, lengthier

pauses (unusual and thus interesting), prosodic emphasis, volume, pace, voice quality (speaking in a different voice), overlapping, shortened sounds (due to interruption of thought or self-repair or interruption by interlocutor etc) and other paralinguistic features (coughing, laughter, movement). As humour turned out later to be an interesting and prevalent interactional feature, I also paid attention to how utterances said with laughter in voice could be indicated on the transcripts.

Not all interviews were transcribed in full. The fieldnotes helped my selection of which parts of the interview to transcribe in greater detail. With the other parts, a summary of what was said was included instead.

### ***3.5.2. Fieldnotes and iterative rounds of data collection***

As aforementioned, I kept a research log to record the development of my thoughts about my project with the progress I made in terms of data collection and reading. I also wrote up fieldnotes right after the interview. This provided a first gist of the chief concerns of my respondents during the interview and helped me to select the parts of the interview that I would transcribe first or in greater detail. This is followed by listening to other interviews with the aim of making comparisons and seeing similarities amongst the ways respondents answered certain questions or if they share similar concerns about certain academic practices. For instance, with the accumulation of more interviews, I found similar concerns among early career researchers. They often talked about their struggles with getting their manuscripts publishing or refer to the institutional pressure to ‘publish or perish’ in order to enhance their employability or to keep their jobs.

Besides taking notes of observed similarities in my research log and exploring preliminary hypotheses, I also made attempts in organising my data in an Excel spreadsheet to find patterns in the topics they discussed or the disciplinary labels they used (Appendix 4 Categories evoked by respondents). Understandably the categories and labels evoked are wide-ranging. Some of the first labels that emerged were the teacher versus the researcher differentiation which

respondents like Isla, Hilda and Eric made explicitly in their interviews. A small group of 'disciplinary resistant' respondents was also striking in how they resisted against being positioned in a singular discipline or how they evoked labels like "maverick" and "rebel" in maintaining their autonomy and creativity.

I also tried recording their first responses to each question in another spreadsheet to detect any similarities in the ways they respond (Appendix 5 First responses). This reaped some insights into how respondents define the 'others' in the question 'How do you think others perceived your work?' differently. Some respondents immediately thought of their colleagues and peers while others thought of their families, friends and non-academic audiences. But still their responses are quite varied.

The iterative process of listening, transcribing and making general observations of my data have led to the formulation of several hypotheses. I stayed close to the data-inductive approach and found salient excerpts from my transcripts to support my observations.

### ***3.5.3 Using qualitative discourse analysis (QDA) software for coding***

In trying to organise and make sense of my growing number of transcripts, I used MaxQDA software to code my interview transcripts. MaxQDA was relatively easy to use and was compatible with my Macbook's operating system. Coding helped me to make sense of the data and forced me to think of categories or labels for what is happening in the data and this facilitated the finding of patterns in the data. Essentially, coding is a process of "actively naming data– even when we believe our codes form a perfect fit with actions and events in the studied world" as codes are constructed by the analyst (Charmaz 2014: 115). The analyst "define[s] what is happening in the data and begin[s] to grapple with what it means" through coding (Charmaz 2014: 113). While coding provided me with a way to see patterns in my data, this is *not* a study based on grounded theory.

## **Two formal phases of coding**

My data underwent two phases of coding. Within each phase of coding there were several, iterative rounds of coding when I move backwards and forwards between transcripts as new codes were born and others were deleted or renamed. My 'code trees' grew quickly with more sub-codes. After the first few rounds of coding, I grew to pay closer attention to coding in greater detail where a particular utterance may be broken down into more coded segments or contain a few overlapping codes for the same phrase. This process was ongoing and generated new ideas of making sense and categorising the data.

### **First phase of coding**

In this first phase of coding, I was making sense of my data and coming up with codes that categorised what respondents were talking about such as their description of their research, disciplines and academic activities for instance. The first round of coding led to the birth of three broad categories for analysis: (i) About themselves as researchers (ii) About academic work (iii) About people around them. The first category comprised of codes to do with their beliefs on what kind of researcher they want to be (aspirations, beliefs), shifts or changes in their trajectory, researcher versus practitioner identity, personality etc. The second category about academic work entailed a longer list about respondents' comments about teaching, publications, impact, REF and included gripes about their workplaces.

I came upon the idea of struggles as I kept observing instances of resistance coded. These could be resistance against disciplinary labels, certain institutions' practices or even the interviewer's questions or assumptions. Resistance takes the form of disagreement or implicit complaints or criticism about expectations, practices, and academic environments and so on. Convinced that this was a uniting theme, I established struggles as a code and the object of my study.

The coding software was able to tell me the frequency of particular codes in relation to others and this helped me to identify certain phenomena that keep occurring. An instance is voicing—a linguistic resource which I coded when I observed respondents speaking in another voice or using reported speech to voice another’s utterances. This seemed to occur in almost every interview.

I was interested in how respondents position themselves and discuss their disciplinary environments. Hence I established a code tree ‘Disciplinarity’ which comprise sub-codes such as how researchers perceive themselves as researchers (e.g. disciplinary positioning, comparison of disciplines) in Figure 6.

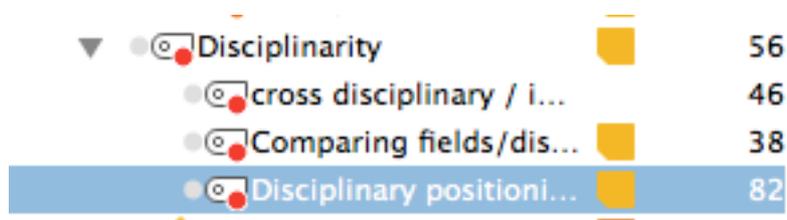


Figure 6 Screenshot of the coded tree 'Disciplinarity' from MaxQDA project

The code ‘Disciplinarity’ and its subsequent sub-codes were also defined in memos that are added in my MaxQDA project. These memos are recorded in a codebook which could be generated from the project whenever needed (Figure 7) and sample of the coded segments are in Appendix 6.

<p><b>1 Disciplinarity</b></p> <p>Umbrella for any reference to disciplines/fields</p> <p><b>1.1 Comparing fields/disciplines</b></p> <p>Felix compares perceptions within/of different fields/disciplines or makes comments about paradigm wars within fields/disciplines</p> <p><b>1.2 Disciplinary positioning</b></p> <p>Felix asserts/resists/negotiates her/his disciplinary identities</p>
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Figure 7 Extract from codebook with memos for the abovementioned codes

A lexical search tool in MaxQDA could help to locate all instances in my transcripts where the words 'discipline', 'cross-disciplinary', 'multidisciplinary' and 'interdisciplinary' were mentioned. However, as with most lexical tools, it is still necessary for the human analyst to examine each coded segment to see how the word was used in order to determine the context it was used. A respondent might be using the word 'interdisciplinary' in the negative sense to say that her work is *not* interdisciplinary (e.g. Jane in Appendix 7) and this has different implications from the group of respondents who were claiming that their work is multidisciplinary (Appendix 7 Sample of lexical query on the word 'interdisciplinary').

### **Second phase of coding**

After writing up the bulk of analysis, I embarked on the second phase of coding with some hypotheses in mind. Under the precepts of focusing on academic struggles, the second round was to revisit the data and see if I could spot new things that I might have missed before.

This was a more focused phase of coding where codes were more stable and required less changes. By now, my attention had shifted to how respondents sometimes interacted with the interviewer such as seeking clarification or asking me questions about my background (Emma in Excerpt 9) and appealing to our shared knowledge of academics (Eric in Excerpt 11). This led to the birth of a meta-category or meta-code for describing what was happening in the management of the interview or what the respondent was 'doing' to the interviewer. These codes were: "seeking clarification", "questioning the interviewer", "engaging with the interviewer" and "appeal to shared knowledge".

I also became more critical about how I define a code, which I indicated on virtual memos attached to the code. I found my definitions further refined during this second phase of coding. It also forced me to rethink how I defined certain codes such as the code: 'Early-career researcher (ECR) concern'. Did I code a segment

based on what respondents explicitly described as an issue that arises because they were early career (e.g. Jodie explicitly discussed her lack of confidence because she was so “early-career” in Excerpt 79 Chapter 6). Or was it a concern that seemed to be described by several ECRs at the same time (such as justifying one’s research)?

It is often the case that coding enables just a glimpse of the tip of the iceberg and the analyst needs to examine the actual talk segments in detail to ascertain the strength of the claim. Therefore, the bulk of my analysis was still done by applying findings from conversation analysis.

### **3.6 The role of the interviewer**

Aligned with my epistemological paradigm, the conceptualization of qualitative interviews as deriving from “ethnomethodologically informed, social constructionist sensibilities” (Holstein & Gubrium 2004: 142) placed emphasis on not just the data (or the outcomes from the interview) but the processes in which data was obtained. As established in Chapter 2, the qualitative research interview is a site for the co-construction of meaning, where the role of the interviewer needs to be taken into account. In this case, the researcher played a dual role of being both researcher and interviewer and this can imply certain biases, assumptions and power imbalances that are brought into the interview (Gubrium & Holstein 2001 ; Kvale & Brinkmann 2015 ; Tanggaard 2007).

#### ***3.6.1 The interviewer’s reflections***

As such, the interviewer’s role in the interpretation and production of meaning during the interview is given due attention in this thesis. I kept a research logbook detailing the progress of my study and included reflections on the process of data collection. During the data collection period, I constantly reflected on my interactions with my respondents and my questioning skills. I also noticed changes in my manner in conducting the interview as evident from the following notes in my research log:

A big reflection [sic] that I see myself doing over the phases of interviews is to resist giving too many minimal responses (mmhm ,mm..etc) because it's a pain to transcribe so I would nod or smile instead. I remember Richard's article about how minimal responses from the interviewer can prematurely evaluate (or even affect) the flow of the interview & the respondent's responses! I see that kind of 'play-back' effect when sometimes I 'react' and my respondent responds to my minimal responses when I didn't mean to! For instance when Hugh talked about how his current research project works with [...] volunteer groups working with migrants and I nodded and he thought I was familiar with those groups because he commented, "you might be familiar with them" softly (when I don't!).

[...]

It certainly is indicative that my respondents are (perhaps constantly) trying to position me or find out [...] what I know so as to find the best way to communicate their ideas with me.

[...]

I think this is what preoccupies all interlocutors in conversations!

**Figure 8 Reflecting on interviewer's manner (From Research log, 12 Dec 2016)**

In this particular log entry, I ruminated on an instance when I felt that my minimal responses could influence the respondents' interpretation of my understanding and positioning; and in turn affect meaning-making of the interview (Gubrium & Holstein 2001 ; Richards 2010). While in this instance, I felt that it might not have affected the flow of the interview drastically; I perceived a constant desire of my respondents to make sense of me and ascertain what I knew about them prior to our meeting. This can be seen in Emma's excerpt below:

**Excerpt 9 Emma\_20170105\_#00:01:52-7#**

1 I: And I'm particularly interested in linguistics and applied linguistics.  
 Emma: Ok  
 I: So that's why (.) I'm I'm looking at people working here-  
 Emma: -Are you a linguist? No you're not a linguist (xxx)  
 5 I: Erm I'm in applied linguistics department in [ Warwick.  
 Emma: [ Oh ok! Yah  
 I: So I wouldn't say I'm a theoretical linguist  
 Emma: No  
 I: [ I'm not (.) Chomskian ((laughs))  
 10 Emma: [ No °but applied linguistics°  
 I: But more applied linguistics.  
 Emma: Yes yah yup.

I had begun the interview by explaining my project and why I had approached her and in response Emma asked about my background, as it seemed, to ascertain if I were a linguist (Excerpt 9). I realised over time that the importance of enabling

my respondents to 'make sense' of me usually before or at the beginning of the interview could not be discounted. It was true indeed that respondents "will want to have a grasp of the interviewer before they allow themselves to talk freely and expose their experiences and feelings to a stranger" (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: 154) in the "decisive" first few minutes of the interview.

In fact, my self-positioning as a PhD student from an Applied Linguistics department in Warwick influenced how respondents position themselves towards me. This is discussed further in Section 4.2. This influence could reach as far back to their decision to accept or to decline my email invitation for an interview. For instance, in seeking respondents at Northland, fewer experienced researchers from the linguistics department agreed to an interview as compared to those from the applied linguistics research group. Unlike Eastern and Southbank, Northland is the only university in my data pool to have both a linguistics department and an applied linguistics research group. The applied linguistics research group comprises a group of researchers mostly from the education department who meet regularly and identify themselves as doing applied linguistics research. Thus this comparison was only possible in Northland. Section 3.6.6 will give more details about which departments my respondents come from in these three universities.

### ***3.6.2 Issues with framing questions***

I noticed that my interview design followed a more iterative fashion as advocated by Rubin and Rubin (2012) where research design continued to evolve throughout the study in responsive interviewing. Rubin and Rubin advocated the strength of responsive interviewing to lie in the "researcher's ability to hear what is said and change direction to catch a wisp of insight, track down a new theme, or refocus the broader questions" (Rubin & Rubin 2012: 39). In a way, the researcher is "continually adapting to new circumstances in the field, changing selection of subjects and questions on the way" (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: 129). This form of "responsive interview design" keeps the research questions generally open and hypotheses stated at the beginning may change (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: 129). I began with very broad questions and as my project definition progressed, I added

more specific questions and also developed a better 'sense' of probing respondents at certain junctures. I would discuss this process of adjusting my interview design in the following pages.

My interview design was flexible and responsive to the reactions from my participants and the way I thought about my project changed. I started with a very broad idea of interviewing participants to collect their perceptions of academic life and how they position themselves through what they say. 'Positioning' was not a term that I could easily include in my email invitation to seek respondents. The conundrum was that telling respondents that I wanted to study how they position themselves as researchers could put them on guard or even create unease. It was similar to the conundrum faced by anthropologist Jean Lave who spent months familiarising herself with a foreign culture before finding a way to ask about moiety systems amongst Indians in Brazil (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: : 135). As a PhD student still new to the academic world, I needed to familiarise myself with this world through listening to the lived experiences of my respondents before I could 'find a way in' so to speak. When I found out that they frequently talked about disciplines and fields, this gave me the idea of framing my interview as interested in their perceptions of disciplinary environments. It also led to the addition of questions about which journals they aspire to publish in and these could give a clearer idea of which fields they perceive their research to be located in or where they *want* to be seen as working in. I also started requesting for bionotes in Phase 3 of my data collection period. The rationale for this was that bionotes captured, to some degree, a self-presentation of the researchers where they claim research interests and locate themselves in certain fields. I asked questions like:

Where would you use this set of bionotes? What do you have in mind when you were writing this?

However, not all respondents provided their bionotes and the discussion about their bionotes did not reap any interesting insights. There were also a few respondents who seemed to pay little attention to their bionotes as seen in their reactions to my request:

**From:** James  
**Sent:** 22 November 2016 11:41  
**To:** Hah, Sixian  
**Subject:** RE: possible interview, 5 Dec, 2pm

Here you go, Sixian. No bionotes though. I'm not sure I've ever done a paper bionote. I was at [Another academic's name] talk when he was talking about these and couldn't think of one. Anyway, my website has one and so does the CUP<sup>9</sup> page for my book that you can look at. Talk soon, James

**Figure 9 Reaction towards request for bionote (email)**

Subsequently, I also developed a more ideal way of presenting my project as one that studies how researchers communicate their research. After speaking with a respondent who questioned the presupposition behind the interview (Sofia in excerpt 6), I became inspired to add questions regarding obstacles to research.

In the initial phases of conducting the interviews, I observed that some respondents were puzzled by why I wanted to know if they know the people they cited personally or not and so I developed an explanation to accompany this question.

I've learnt to frame my interview better so as to 'prepare' my respondents for the first big & broad question that sometimes stun people. So I explain that this is a semi-structured interview and would be more like a conversation. I would ask some big & broad questions and smaller ones just to clarify.

When it comes to the citations question, I explain that this is for me to understand the audiences whom they are writing the paper for and so I would like to know who are the people they cited there.

**Figure 10 Framing questions in the interview (From reflection log, 12 Dec 2016)**

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<sup>9</sup> CUP refers to a publisher.

### ***3.6.3 Interviewer's positioning***

The question of positioning is a running thread throughout my project. While I studied how my respondents position themselves, I needed to reflect on my own positioning as an interviewer. With different respondents, I noticed that I do “switch between different subject positions” in the ways I “ask questions, engage in active listening, and provide interpretations of interviewee talk” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: 109). Kvale and Brinkmann introduced three types of interviewer positions: the pollster, prober and participant. The pollster treated the opinions of interviewees as facts without challenging them. Like a “miner” of data, the pollster aims to “unearth the data in an uncontaminated form”. The prober enquires into “deeper layers of the subjects’ experiential world” and presents herself as “akin to a friend”. Finally, the participant “does not think of herself as a passive spectator to the life of the interviewee but is actively participating in creating a conversation” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: 109).

Generally, the positioning I took up depended on the rapport that I thought I have with the respondent and this also shifted throughout the interview. I am inclined to act as the pollster without challenging my respondents’ accounts because I wanted to allow them space to elaborate and expand in the directions they like. However, I would probe especially when they use terms that I may not share their understanding of, for instance “idiosyncratic” research (Luke) or “acceptance” (Gabriel). At times, I participate in questioning or even ‘challenging’ my respondents’ use of certain terms. Other times, I revealed a bit more of my background when I observed that respondents required that to make sense of me and perhaps to increase our rapport during the interview. Alf was an early career researcher (ECR) and before we began the interview, we found out that we both knew a colleague who was working in my department. It set the stage for a friendly chat instead of an interview and I was emboldened enough to crack a joke at his gripe about red tape at the university (Excerpt 10).

**Excerpt 10 Alf\_20161201\_#00:31:37-1#**

- 1 Alf: I think actually people from the: er business people should like look at the structures that exist at these universities and look at because they are really inefficient. So slow moving! It took me like two months to get those whiteboards.  
((Pointed to whiteboards hanging on the walls of his office))
- 5 I: **You didn't just go to Ikea and buy them?**  
Alf: No I mean like >I'm buying them for the university but I don't want to pay them myself.<  
I: ((laughs))

### **3.6.4 Interviewer as insider**

As aforementioned, it took me some time to familiarise myself with the academic world and to learn what kinds of questions I could ask in order to draw certain reactions from my respondents. While I am working in a similar field as many of my respondents (applied linguistics), the question of how my respondents viewed me arises. To what degree do my respondents consider me an insider? Do they view me as an apprentice or a novice member in the same field or discipline?

As a PhD student learning the ways of academia and immersed in the same UK higher education landscape as my respondents, I could be viewed as an insider by some respondents. Brannick and Coghlan argued for how researchers working from an ethnographic perspective could produce rich insights as insiders in the organisations they study (Brannick & Coghlan 2007). They discussed the concept of 'preunderstanding' which refers to the knowledge, insights and experience that insider researchers apply not only to theoretical understanding of organisational dynamics but also to the lived experience of the researchers' own organisation (Brannick & Coghlan 2007: 69). There were instances when respondents refer to this preunderstanding or tacit knowledge of academia that they assumed I share with them. This was sometimes indicated explicitly by phrases like "you know", "as an academic..." and the inclusive 'we' as shown in Excerpt 11.

**Excerpt 11 Eric\_20170118\_#00:24:12-2#**

- 1 I: What other academic activities er do you have now?  
Eric: Erm (.) **well you know as an academic we attend conferences**  
I: Ok  
Eric: And so there are a few conferences that I go to every year like
- 5 triple A L which is er (.) an American association of applied linguistics.

Another dimension of this shared knowledge between interviewer and respondent occurred when I share prior relationships with some of my respondents. I decided to approach some peers during a drought of interviews in Phase 2 of my data collection. They have since completed or are completing their PhD and hold full-time or part-time academic positions. As observed by Garton and Copland (2010), our prior relationships were sometimes evoked and made relevant during the interview. The interview interaction imposed asymmetrical roles on the interviewer and respondent, which would be at odds with the more egalitarian roles in their prior friendships. In this process of orientating to this asymmetrical relationship enforced by the interview encounter, participants with prior relationships “negotiated the on-going asymmetries and concomitant face work” (Garton & Copland 2010: : 538) by creating solidarity. They do this by “explicitly drawing attention to their roles and particularly to their strangeness within the context of other current and previous relationships” and this could be seen from their making metacomments about the interview. In Excerpt 12, Clara made a metacomment about my first question (“Mm:: I really need this type of conversation”). To outsiders, Clara’s remark did not make sense; nor would they understand why she thought her remark could be funny to me. But as friends who knew about what each other had been going through at that time in our lives, we could both appreciate the humour in this exchange.

**Excerpt 12 Clara\_20161011\_#00:01:05-5#**

- 1 I: So how come you have become who you are today? You can start with your family.  
Clara: Mm:: I really need this type of conversation. ((laughs)) Yah I have the type of family who [...]

### **3.6.5. Validity and reliability**

Validity in qualitative inquiry revolves around credibility and representation of the researchers’ interpretations (Creswell & Miller 2000 ; Peräkylä 2011). Since this study is preoccupied with how social realities are constructed, validity depends on the extent in which participants’ realities are portrayed accurately. This section discusses (i) how validity procedures are set in place to ensure that the researcher’s inferences of the interviews are sufficiently supported by data; (ii) that adequate consideration has been given to alternative, possible inferences

and finally, (iii) the degree of transparency in representing less overt assumptions or biases of the researcher and the participants.

Validity procedures relate with the paradigm assumptions of the researchers and there exists three main paradigms labelled by Guba and Lincoln (Guba & Lincoln 1994) as post positivist, constructionist and critical. This thesis follows the constructionist position and believes in “pluralistic, interpretative, open-ended and contextualised perspectives toward reality” (Creswell & Miller 2000: 125). It is also aligned with the critical perspective where researchers need to be reflexive and challenge implicit assumptions about how interpretations are constructed. Validity procedures associated with the constructionist position consist of trustworthiness, authenticity and validity. These are largely determined by how accurately participants’ realities of the social phenomena are represented (Creswell & Miller 2000). The strategies taken to ensure that participants’ realities are represented as accurately as possible align with those that ensure the rigour of qualitative case study research (Chapter 3.1). Of particular relevance are four of these strategies-- peer debriefing, audit trail, reflexivity and thick descriptions. Therefore, this study places emphasis on several validity procedures that relate with the constructionist and critical paradigms, such as **disconfirming evidence, researcher reflexivity, peer debriefing and using thick, rich description** (Creswell & Miller 2000) in the following ways:

(i) **Finding disconfirming evidence** that is “consistent with or disconfirms” preliminary themes or categories found can help to support the credibility of the analysis (Creswell & Miller 2000: 127). In other words, this ensures that the researcher’s inferences of the interviews are sufficiently supported by data. This is akin to the practice of examining deviant case studies in CA studies where after establishing regular patterns of interaction in a piece of conversational data, the analyst searches for cases that “do not fit the inductively constructed pattern” or deviant cases (Peräkylä 2011: 369). Such deviant cases are scrutinized instead of being treated as outliers. For instance, I found a few respondents who resisted being ascribed any or a single disciplinary label, whom I described as ‘disciplinary-resistant’. They seemed to be deviant cases when compared with most other

respondents who described their work and themselves without questioning the need to belong to a discipline or challenging the use of disciplinary labels. However, scrutinizing these deviant cases or disconfirming evidence further strengthens my hypothesis about researchers' need to mark disciplinary affiliations with labels because I realised that some of these 'disciplinary-resistant' reactions were in response to institutionally-imposed disciplinary positioning (Alf in Section 4.3).

As my methodology draws on CA principles and findings, Peräkylä stated that validation through 'next turn' is a key issue in CA studies because any utterance produced in talk-in-interaction is locally interpreted by interlocutors in a particular interaction and "the next turn will show whether the interactants themselves treat the utterance in ways that are in accordance with the analyst's interpretation" (Peräkylä 2011: : 368). For instance, academic struggles are often co-constructed by respondents and the interviewer through a process of clarification, agreements and disagreements in order to formulate and account for the problems that they faced.

(ii) Both researcher reflexivity and peer debriefing are procedures that ensure that alternative interpretations of the data are adequately considered. **Researcher reflexivity** is evident from the researcher's self-examination of her assumptions, beliefs and biases that could shape the inquiry. In drawing ideas from agonistic interview scholars (Cf. Tanggaard 2007; Vitus 2008) and active interview approaches (Cf. Holstein & Gubrium 1995), the role of the interviewer is kept in mind in interpreting what goes on in the interviews. An attempt to create an audit trail took the form of a research logbook and fieldnotes that detailed what happened at every interview. It played a role in fostering research reflexivity and enabled the development of the project, from the formulating of research aims to the steps taken at data collection and brief reflections during the whole process as evident from the excerpts from the researcher's reflections (Section 3.4).

**Peer debriefing** is the review of the data and research process by people who are familiar with the research or the topic under study (Creswell & Miller 2000). I have discussed some of my data and analysis with some departmental colleagues in the Professional and Academic Discourse (PAD) research group and the DISCONEX team members in 'data-sharing sessions'. They served as a "sounding board for ideas" and helped add credibility to my analysis (Creswell & Miller 2000: 129) by providing alternative ways of viewing my data. I discussed an excerpt of a tense moment in an interview at one data-sharing session. Through a collaborative deconstruction of the excerpt with my colleagues, I received new insights on how to make sense of it as an unfolding misunderstanding between myself and the respondent.

(iii) Validity in qualitative studies is also concerned with the issues of representation of data and the warranting of analyst's claims (See 3.5.1.

Transcription). It is crucial that in representing my data (transcripts and selection of excerpts), issues of transparency are sufficiently addressed and provisions are made for my readers to refer back to transcripts of the recorded interviews to check if my inferences were reasonable. While most of the analysis is done on the spoken data, I tried to support my findings with reference to other materials such as my field notes, the CVs from my respondents and their online research profiles either hosted on institutional webpages or on personal websites. This serves a triangulating purpose in terms of referring to other forms of data in aiding my interpretation (Holmes 2014: 191). In selecting and presenting the excerpts from interview transcripts in my analysis, I tried to provide thick and rich description. The purpose of **using thick, rich description** is to "create verisimilitude" and enable readers to understand the academic worlds constructed by interview participants through the interviews (Creswell & Miller 2000: 129). This comes in the form of contextual blurbs about each individual respondent in terms of details about their departments, career stage and other information derived from their institutional profiles.

### ***3.6.6 About respondents and institutions***

The bulk of my respondents come from three institutions: Eastern, Northland and Southbank universities. Most respondents come from linguistics and applied linguistics departments and a few from languages-related departments.

#### **Eastern University**

Eastern is a Russell Group university. Russell Group universities are a group of 24 self-selected public research universities in UK, which aspire to orientate themselves towards research. Respondents from Eastern University come from the applied linguistics and education departments.

#### **Northland University**

Another Russell Group university, Northland University does well on ranking lists. It is also highly research-oriented. Respondents in this university come from linguistics and education departments.

#### **Southbank University**

Southbank is not in the Russell group. It started out as a technical college and became a full university after several decades. Respondents in this university come from the applied linguistics and translation departments.

#### **Other universities**

A small number of respondents came from several other universities and have agreed to participate due to various reasons. I had come into contact with them through friends or staff members at my department and they have kindly accepted to be interviewed for my project. They mostly come from applied linguistics and education departments.

### **3.6.7 Definition of stages in an academic career**

It is found that some struggles are especially prominent amongst respondents at the early stages of the academic career while others are shared across stages. For instance, disciplinary positioning is one such struggle that seems to persist throughout the academic career for many people. It is also possible that while it may seem that researchers at a particular stage of their career no longer report having a certain struggle, they might have underwent at earlier junctures of their academic lives. In the interest of anonymising details about my respondents' institutional titles and to make career stage-related comparisons, I have categorised my respondents into the following groups:

<b>Terms I used in this thesis</b>	<b>Institutional titles of my respondents</b>
Novice researcher	PhD student
Early career researcher	Post-doctoral researcher
Early career researcher	Teaching fellow
Early career researcher	Lecturer (in the first two years at first academic position)
Academic	Lecturer (more than two years in first academic position or have moved between institutions)
Senior academic	Senior lecturer
	Reader
	Associate Professor
Professor	Professor
Professor Emeritus	Professor Emeritus

**Table 2 Terminology in defining academic career stages**

Not all academic staff and researchers go through all rungs of this prototypical 'academic ladder'. Some attained their first lectureship as Lecturer at their first institution right after graduating with the PhD and thus do not go through the post-doctoral stage. There are also some early-career researchers who become a

teaching fellow right after obtaining the PhD although there are also instances when teaching fellows are no longer at the early stages of their careers anymore. However, the teaching fellows in my pool of respondents are also ECRs. There is less expectation of teaching fellows to do research, unlike lecturers who are evaluated typically based on three dimensions demanded of academic positions: research, teaching and administrative work.

### ***3.6.8 An overview of the findings— 3 aspects of academic struggles***

Most of the struggles that researchers have seemed to revolve around these three aspects of academia namely: disciplinary positioning, academic publishing and research environments. The following chapters 4 to 6 are organised according to these three categories. Each chapter also attempts to bring to the fore the discourses that researchers draw upon to account for their struggles. For instance, they hold certain beliefs about which research topics are better to pursue and which publication outlets are preferred by institutions and such. These are often tacit knowledge that contributes to the reinforcement and reproduction of discourses about academia (Discussed in Chapter 8).

Chapter 4 examines struggles and discourses to do with how researchers position themselves and how they are being positioned in relation to disciplines. This also relates with how they justify their research topics and for some of them, enacting a practitioner-researcher identity.

As can be expected from today's higher education climate, publishing was a prevalent issue that was raised. Chapter 5 looks at struggles with publishing that academics face in terms of institutional preferences, pressures and also the equating of publications with impact creating. Publishing would involve communication of research and here in this chapter, researchers' attitudes towards valued and preferred modes of communicating research are also explored.

Finally, Chapter 6 is concerned with struggles relating to research environments. These struggles ranged from facing a lack of interlocutors to dealing with institutional bureaucracy; and perceived conflicts between the beliefs of institutions and individual researchers about the purpose of universities.

Please refer to Appendix 8 for an overview of respondents' institutional backgrounds and the main aspects of discourses about academia illustrated by their excerpts.

### **Conclusion**

This section focused on the methodological considerations in using the qualitative research interview as a means of collecting data. In the subsequent chapters, the interviews are analysed to illuminate how respondents construct their academic struggles through talk.

## Chapter 4 Struggles with disciplinary positioning

### Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on how researchers position themselves as working in certain fields or disciplines and how this is often done through a negotiation with what others perceived of them. This largely revolves around how they position themselves or their research topics in relation to discipline(s) or field(s) or, what is termed in this thesis as, disciplinary positioning. For some researchers, they face a struggle with finding a disciplinary label to describe their work. Others struggle with being positioned by others in a field or discipline that they do not want to be associated with or they do not want to be pigeon-holed in one single field. I examine how these struggles are constructed through a negotiation of tacit knowledge with the interviewer about what they value in terms of disciplinary positioning and constructing identities for themselves as applied linguists, linguists or something else.

While it is understandable that struggles with finding one's epistemic niche are usually associated with ECRs rather than with more experienced researchers, my research interviews show that this seemed to be a struggle that persists throughout the span of most researchers' careers before they obtain professorship. It is not uncommon for veteran researchers to keep shifting their research interests into new fields at later stages of their career because as one Professor observed, "How much can one say about the same topic after years of research?" (Private communication). He believes that the struggle to justify one's research topic arises every time he makes a foray into a new field of research.

### Overview of Chapter 4

This chapter illustrates academic struggles to do with disciplinary positioning and examined how they are constructed by interview participants. Section 4.1 introduces the struggles to justify one's research. Such struggles are evoked and also embedded in discourses about the various kinds of research valued by

researchers (4.1.1); their beliefs about the researcher's volition behind pursuing a research topic (4.1.2); and beliefs among ECRs about developing an independent research agenda (4.1.3).

Beyond the ECR stage, the struggle to define one's disciplinary label remains and Section 4.2 examines how respondents position themselves vis-à-vis disciplines and other researchers, notably with regards to the interviewer's positioning as a PhD student in applied linguistics. Many of the positioning and academic struggles in this section revolve around the question: "What kind of linguist am I?" The discourses that emerged from this set of struggles relate with respondents' beliefs about enhancing one's employability (4.2.1); institutionally-imposed disciplinary positioning (4.2.2); and how researchers demarcate disciplines (4.2.3).

Section 4.3 discusses researchers who struggle with claiming a singular disciplinary label. With researchers who resist a singular disciplinary label, their struggles are associated with discourses about researchers' resistance against being pigeon-holed (4.3.1) and challenging the need for disciplinary labels (4.3.2). For researchers who claim an interdisciplinary label, their struggles lie in communicating to audiences from various disciplinary backgrounds. This evokes certain discourses about institutional obstacles to interdisciplinary research (4.3.3).

Finally, section 4.4 discusses how some researchers struggle to deal with a shift in their desired self-positioning as practitioner first and researcher second. It also explores what it means to this group of researchers to enact a practitioner- first, researcher-second positioning.

## 4.1 Struggles with justifying research topics

When responding to questions about what their research is about and how it is perceived by others, researchers often self-position their work in relation to fields and disciplines and unsurprisingly, evoked the voices (or opinions) of others. This is also when struggles arise when they have to explain their research to the interviewer who does not share their background and also to justify their research topics. Voicing and discursive acts such as justifying, accounting and reformulating are frequently employed. More deeply embedded in their answers lay discourses about the kinds of research that they think are valued by institutions and the masses.

I begin with a close analysis of a series of excerpts from Peter, an early career researcher, to show how his struggle with justifying his research was co-constructed with the interviewer. Various linguistic resources such as laughter, hedging and discursive acts such as reformulation were employed during the positioning struggles when Peter tried to get the interviewer to recognize how he wanted to position his research and himself as a researcher. This is followed by excerpts from other researchers who share Peter's struggle and the common discourses in Sections 4.1.1-4.1.3, which they drew upon to justify their research.

Two months into his first full-time academic position as Lecturer, Peter was at the cusp of developing his PhD topic further. He still had plans to write a few more publications based on his PhD thesis and had aspirations for a future research agenda. Instead of answering the question directly, Peter expressed an aspiration to "always make [his research] applied" ( Excerpt 13: 2-3).

**Peter, ECR, Lecturer, Applied Linguistics, Eastern University**

**Excerpt 13 Peter\_ 20160226\_#00:03:54-8#**

- 1 I: Ok. What do you think your research is about?  
Peter: So I er- (.) I try to (.) keep it er to always make it applied but at present it's very much about erm: the organisation of the mental lexicon [...] for first language speakers and for (.) bilingual  
5 speakers (.) My aim is to use experimental techniques to try and: enrich this model of how [...] and then use that to try an-and improve our understanding about language impairment and what happens when those things break down really (.) So very broadly it's about *fixed clusters of language*<sup>10</sup>↑ and: and with >sort of  
10 very specific interests< erm (.) psycholinguistics and the processing of those things ° I think °

Peter seemed to have clear aspirations for future research outcomes that are formulated as empirical and contributing to our understanding of real world problems like language impairment. (“My aim...” lines 5-7). In a closing upshot, he located his research in psycholinguistics, which was a disciplinary label he evoked (10-11). Disciplinary labels are understood here as labels that refer to specialised fields of knowledge or disciplines. I had assumed that this was the disciplinary positioning that he wanted to enact as he held the position as lecturer in psycholinguistics. However I was proven wrong in our ensuing exchange.

My so-prefaced upshot (Raymond 2004) of Peter’s disciplinary positioning (Excerpt 14 : 12-13 ) was resisted by his hedged “I think so” in a partial agreement (Pomerantz 1984b). His disagreement was revealed subsequently: “I try to keep it quite applied linguistics generally though”. To make his point, Peter employed labels commonly associated with the language teaching subfields of applied linguistics such as “bilingualism” and “language learning” and described his research subjects as “second language speakers” (14-18).

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<sup>10</sup> Pseudonym for his topic

Excerpt 14 Peter\_ 20160226\_#00:04:51-6#

- I: Mm. So you would say that your research falls into the realm of psycholinguistics?
- 15 Peter: I think so. I try to keep it quite (.) applied linguistics generally though because they're applied to bilingualism and language learning, and most of the studies I've done are with second language speakers so how they (.) use *fixed clusters of language* in English erm so the applied side of it is ver-very very big, an-an-  
20 and how we can then er:m apply that to language learning and to teaching and how we introduce these things. Er:m but yah I guess it's grounded in psycholinguistics more than anything i-in the sense that I'm interested in experimental data that tells us what (.) people are actually doing, and then using that, er in an applied way.

Despite Peter's initial disagreement (albeit hedged) with my positioning of him, he conceded why I had done so ("Erm but yah I guess it's grounded in psycholinguistics..." lines 20-24) but limited the veracity of the claim with the phrase "in the sense that". By doing so, he presented experimental data as the only feature of his work that is similar to psycholinguistics. Still he maintained that it was still about using the experimental data "in an applied way" and repeated the lexeme *apply* throughout his response.

The reasons behind Peter's desire to position his research as 'applied' began to unfold as we continued to discuss how his research was perceived. His struggles to justify his research slowly began to take shape. Peter's loud sigh in response to my question was one that evoked laughter (Excerpt 15: 27-28). His subsequent ambiguous one-worded answer "Interesting" seemed to be a sign of 'troubled humour' or what I described as humour employed in the telling of struggles.

Excerpt 15 Peter\_ 20160226\_#00:05:33-6#

- 25 I: °Mmhm mmhm I see° (.) Er:m how do you think others perceive your research?  
Peter: ERM HMM:: ((breathes out))  
I: ((laugh))  
Peter: ((laughter in voice)) Interesting. I think it's quite niche. Er:m so  
30 what I look at (.) is not immediately obvious why (.) it would be important. So I-I-I feel like I have to (.) justify it <quite er:m a lot>. Not necessarily to other academics but (.) when friends and family ask me what I do for example (.) it-it-it takes quite a lot of justification to make them understand (*his topic*) or why (.) why  
35 (*his topic*) [...] is actually important. SO ((intake of breath)) (.) I think (.) for people who done other research in *language processing*↑ It-it's sort of (.) it it-it raises (.) some interesting and quite original questions. For people who haven't, it's not as easy to see (.) why it's (.) worth doing ((laugh)) in a way. Erm (.) so: (.)  
40 very mixed I would say.  
I: Very [ mixed I see  
Peter: [ yah but most people could see that it's quite interesting and quite original. Because people kind of like *fixed clusters of Language* (.) most people who have learnt (.) another language  
45 have an experience [...] so it's quite an immediate sort of thing er:m (.) to explain to people but the deeper importance of it (.) is maybe not quite as immediately obvious.

Peter proceeded to explain what turned out to be his struggle with justifying a “niche” research topic ( Excerpt 15 : 30-31). Ruminating the reactions of various audiences from non-academics like his family and friends (30-34) to specialised audiences (36-37), it seemed that Peter found it generally hard to justify to them why his research was “worth doing” (38-40). His accompanying laughter at this point seemed to indicate this as a ‘troubling thing’ and he finally ended his turn with “very mixed” to describe reactions towards his research.

Although I repeated Peter’s words in my upshot: “Very mixed I see” (41), he did not intend to end on this note. In another partial agreement (“Yah but...”), Peter proceeded to reformulate with a gloss that “most people could see” his research was “quite interesting and quite original” (42-43). As long as most people had exposure to different languages, they were able to understand his research albeit not its “deeper importance” (45-47). His positioning had clearly shifted from his earlier turn.

Oftentimes, respondents attempt to account for why they face certain struggles. Harré argued that the speaker, in any act of accounting, is concerned with not just

the presentation of reasons but also of oneself; and also “the representation of relative status, power and solidarity vis-à-vis one’s audience of that moment” (Harré 1988: 167). Thus, what followed naturally from Peter’s enactment of a struggle with justifying his research was to account for it. In Excerpt 16, Peter accounted for his problems by drawing upon what he referred to as shared knowledge (with the interviewer) and common discourses about the REF as indicated by his turn-final ‘you know’ (60).

**Excerpt 16 Peter\_ 20160226\_#00:07:06-4#**

55 Peter: [...] To me it’s quite obvious why: these questions matter but (.)  
my experience is that in some cases people just sort of have a bit  
of So what? attitude to it and ((intake of breath)) I wonder if tha- er  
(.) it migh- (.) increasingly my experience with that seems to be  
the case anyway (.) People (.) have to justify their research as  
60 having impact and all the other things (xx) things like the REF  
framework you know. [...]

Peter began his account by describing more critical reactions towards his research (“in some cases people just sort of have a bit of So what? attitude to it” –56). He accounted for this by referring to the increasing need for researchers “to justify their research as having impact” and constructed this as a prevalent expectation resulting from the REF (“increasingly my experience with that seems to be the case anyway” 57-58). Given that accounting is intricately related with self-positioning, what Peter was doing here was to account for his struggles as something that did not just affect him but many other researchers as well because of sweeping changes in the landscape of higher education (i.e. the introduction of impact as a criterion for assessment in the REF).

**4.1.1 Discourses about the valuation of a research topic**

The onerous exchange with Peter was essentially a negotiation of understanding about how he wanted to position his research and perceived. This is embedded in his beliefs about what kinds of research are more valued than others as can be seen in the following excerpt.

Peter's attempts at positioning his research had finally paid off when my second upshot of his disciplinary label (Excerpt 17 : 95-96) received his quick affirmation: "very much so" which overlaps part of my question. Peter's account for positioning his research as being grounded in applied linguistics revealed a comparison of two different kinds of research: "Because otherwise it is just research for the sake of research" (100). The reductive *just* was a precursor of what was to follow—his valuation of research in general.

**Excerpt 17 Peter\_ 20160226\_ #00:10:09-3#**

- 95 I: Mm (.) I see (.) So this is what you meant by trying to er::m (.) trying to ground your research in er applied linguistics?
- Peter: [ Very much so
- I: [ Trying to draw links to applied linguistics
- 100 Peter: I think so. Because otherwise it is just research for the sake of research. Erm and I (1.0) I've always had in mind that the reason I want to do this is firstly I-I enjoy it you know I enjoy the freedom that comes with being able to research interesting questions.
- I: Mm
- 105 Peter: But also it should make (.) a difference. It should (.) try and answer some questions now as I say to me (.) ultimately and this is sort of a long term over the course of my career (.) goal. Erm you know I would like to run studies (.) that helps us understand [...] Erm so if my research, could ultimately build up into a better
- 110 understanding of what has gone wrong, and therefore how we address that, how we create (.) therapy or rehabilitation to address those problems
- I: Mm
- Peter: I can look back at the end of it and sorta say brilliant tha-tha- (.)
- 115 that was (.) my contribution if you like, whereas if all I've done is written (.) interesting papers that are kind of (.) theoretically (.) quite interesting but actually have no practical benefit (.) at all↑ That's great↑ (.) And academia has been built on that >you know that's an important part of it but< to me it sort of needs: Sooner or
- 120 later it needs something practical something to (.) to (.) make it (.) useful.

The first kind of research was defined by Peter as "being able to research interesting questions" which is akin to "blue-skies research" (102-103) (Luke's terms in Excerpt 21). However, Peter raised a second kind of research which he aspired towards that could "make a difference" (105) in terms of real world applications ("therapy or rehabilitation"). He contrasted these applied research outcomes with publishing theoretical papers, which he deemed as not serving any practical benefits (115-117). Making a quick shift in his positioning, he mitigated his claim by showing his awareness of the increasing pressure on academics in UK institutions to publish in high-quality journals (Archer 2008b). He did this by first

acknowledging the importance of publishing: “That’s great↑ ... academia has been built on [theoretical papers]...” (118-119) and then resisting this mainstream view by reiterating his stance that research “needs something practical” “to make it useful” (120-121). Throughout his answer, Peter took pains to present a nuanced stance through the use of linguistic hedges: “sorta... kind of ... sort of ...sooner or later...” (114-121).

### **Struggles in justifying research topics often revealed discourses of evaluating what makes a ‘good’ research topic**

Peter’s struggle exemplified what several other ECRs constructed as struggles in the interviews. Through accounting for their struggles and justifying their research, their discourses about what makes a ‘good’ research topic emerged. These discourses often emerged through respondents’ self-positioning vis-à-vis other groups of people. In Peter’s case, his reference to others, including myself (when he resisted my positioning of him) was done with much hedging and mitigation. In Vivian’s case, she re-enacted imaginary thoughts and other voices or reported speech to bring in the ‘voices’ of others into her utterances.

#### ***Vivian, ECR, post-doctoral research fellow, Linguistics, Northland University***

##### **Excerpt 18 Vivian\_20170118\_#00:16:53-9#**

- 15 Vivian: And:: (.) And then I suppose they probably think (.) **Well (.) that it- it’s quite specialised and er (.)** ((laughter in voice)) **I’m looking at really this one tiny thing.** But I think that’s true of all research. Really. If you if you talk- as a layperson you talk to someone who does research and they tell you what they are interested in and
- 20 you think (.) **Gosh! That’s (.) really really specialised and complicated.**

When interviewed, Vivian was in the first year of her funded fellowship to study a minority language, *Moviton*<sup>11</sup>. In Excerpt 18 Vivian shifted between three ‘voices’ or subject positions (Gubrium & Holstein 2001) – an imaginary layperson thinking, herself speaking and her thinking aloud. First, Vivian voiced how she imagined lay audiences would perceive her research in a dismissive way as “really this one tiny

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<sup>11</sup> *Moviton* is a pseudonym for the minority European language that Vivian is studying.

thing” (15-17). Marking these utterances (in bold) with a change in her voice quality to indicate them as reported speech, this is commonly employed when the speaker is reporting self-criticism (Holt 2017, July). Next, Vivian shifted back to speaking as herself: “But I think that’s true of all research” to make the claim that “all research” would suffer from this form of criticism. Finally, to make her point, Vivian proposed a hypothetical scenario by imagining herself to be a non-researcher and her reaction as a lay person (18-21).

Voicing is one of the pragmatic resources employed by my respondents as they shift between various footing (Goffman 1981) and reflects “the dialogic interplay of separate voices within reported speech” (Goodwin 2006: 18). It testifies to how researchers bring in the voices of others in their positioning of themselves. In Vivian’s case, she employed voicing quite frequently as she positioned herself vis-à-vis others in trying to justify her research.

**Excerpt 19 Vivian\_20170118\_#00:18:55-2#**

- I: Yes yes. You mentioned people in the community?  
45 Vivian: Mmhm.  
I: What-What about their perceptions of this research?  
Vivian: I suppose sometimes people (.) say (.) °kind of° (.) they rarely say as boldly as this but they usual- they’re normally asking **what use is it? Like wha-what are the applications of this research?** And I find that quite a difficult question to answer.

Similar to Peter’s struggles, Vivian struggled with the “so what?” question of proving the worth of her research. In an instance of reported speech, Vivian voiced the questions that people raised about the uses of her research and indirectly evaluated those whom she was citing. She seemed to position these people’s questions as inapposite or rather audacious when she prefaced their questions with: “they rarely say as boldly as this but ...” Vivian’s hedging with a softly-articulated “kind of” projected uncertainty which could be done to comply with social norms in showing reluctance to talk about matters that reflect weaknesses or faults (Pomerantz 1984b: 617). This supports Peter’s observation that researchers are increasingly required to account for the applications of their research. While Vivian concede that this was a difficult question for her, her implicit evaluation of those who question the appliedness of a researcher’s work

implied a resistance against having to account for research to reap applied outcomes.

**Excerpt 20 Vivian\_20170118\_#00:18:55-2# (continued)**

50 Vivian: Because (1.0) in a way I'm doing this because I find it fascinating. Erm and because (.) specially I'm doing (1.0) I'm doing it now because it's an endangered language. And it might not be around certainly in the form it currently is for very long so I think it's important to get the record now. (1.0) Erm but yah people often  
55 wonder kind of what the point of it is? (xxx) my research is? Erm ((laughs)) Other than expanding human knowledge is (.) in some way. But er (.) I suppose it has some implications for (.) language teaching language policy and how do we how do we view ourselves? [...]

Following her struggle in the last excerpt, Vivian accounted for her research as a timely (with prosodic emphasis on “now”) service to humanity by recording an “endangered language” and a contribution to expand human knowledge (Excerpt 20: 52-56). Downscaling from what might sound like lofty aims, she formulated possible educational applications for her research (57-59).

**That appliedness is a valuable aspect of what makes a research topic worthwhile is reiterated in other researchers' accounts**

In both Peter and Vivian's construction of struggles, they both cited applications of their research as reasons for its worthiness. More interestingly, they seemed to imply that there are two kinds of research – one that was embodied as “the interesting questions” (Peter) or “fascinating” topic (Vivian) that can be explored in academia versus the other kind of research that frequently emerged in their accounts as applied outcomes that could benefit the world.

**Blue skies research**

This first kind of research was given a name– blue skies– by Luke's opposition towards the discourse that research needs to be applied in order to be justified. Luke argued for the university to be a place for “blue sky research big picture question” (Excerpt 21 ). This implies a link between researchers' beliefs and valuation of research outcomes and their research environments.

**Luke, Professor, Linguistics, Northland University**

**Excerpt 21 Luke\_20170112\_##00:45:52-4#**

15 Luke: Erm (5.0) So (2.0) So I'm a big believer that the university should be where like (.) big sky research blue sky research big picture question happens and the:: you know if corporations want to work on applied research then fine but increasingly I'm finding that (2.0) the corporate model is taking over the university as well.

This notion that research could be broadly classified into two kinds, i.e. blue-skies and applied research is a running discourse in several other interviews. The discourses surrounding what constitutes 'good' research, research outcomes and conducive research environments are further discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.

**Discourses about what makes a 'good' research topic**

Besides the applied versus blue-skies categorization of research, one wonders if there are possibly other discourses that could be drawn upon to justify research. Moreover, justifying one's research has been constructed as struggles from the accounts of Peter and Vivian. But could there be researchers who do *not* struggle or struggle less with justifying their research?

In contrast to Peter and Vivian, Eric and Matthew positioned their topics as easy to communicate to audiences and their accounts continued to evoke discourses of what makes a 'good' academic research topic. In Matthew's account, the notion of a researcher's volition was implied.

A "good" research topic was equated with something that was "easy for people to understand" and easy to communicate to people in Eric's opinion ( Excerpt 22 ). Coming from a background as a language teacher, Eric had experience working in various institutions before coming to Northland and his research was about *International uses of English*<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Pseudonym used for Eric's research topic.

**Excerpt 22 Eric\_20170118\_#00:18:27-7#**

- 1 Eric: Er I think within the fields (.) it's quite a good topic. That's why I've been drawn to it. Is that it's easy for people to understand like anyone who speaks English or learns English some (.) you know would have an opinion on this topic. [...]
- 5 Er this kind of general topics even somebody not in applied linguistics will have an opinion on. Erm and so I think it's easy to communicate with people about the topic. [...]

In Excerpt 22 , Eric's formulation of research as something "easy" for various audiences to understand and engage with ("have an opinion") made it a good topic. He formulated his research as speaking to almost all encompassing audiences which include non-academics and academics from a different field ("anyone who speaks or learns English"; "even someone not in applied linguistics"). Consequently, he located his research firmly within the field of applied linguistics.

The notion of a good research topic as something that can be easily understood by various audiences is echoed in Matthew's explication of "accessible" research in Excerpt 23. In addition to this discourse about "good" and "accessible" research topics, Matthew seemed to evoke the belief that a researcher is able to choose and frame his research in certain ways to make it an accessible one. Thus this relates to a second strand of discourses in 5.1.2.

***4.1.2 Discourses about the researcher's volition in framing one's topic***

Excerpt 23 and Excerpt 24 are consecutive extracts from Matthew's interview. They showed a negotiation of understanding between the interviewer and Matthew to ascertain how Matthew constructed his research topic as "accessible" and hence worthwhile.

**Matthew, Professor, Education, Northland University**

**Excerpt 23 Matthew\_20170112\_#00:07:56-4#**

- 1 I: Mmhm I see. How do you think others perceive your research?  
Matthew: How do °I think others (xx) research?° Er::m (2.0) Do you mean academics or anybody?
- I: It's quite broad. It's up to you.
- 5 Matthew: ((laughs)) Ok. (.) ERM I HOPE that they >**I don't know if they do?**< I think- I think er most people I've spoken to about my research thinks it's accessible. (.) That it is accessible. Er: and so erm (.) I try to make it practical as well as theoretical. Erm so I think that is what they do. I think they perceive it as important. I
- 10 think they perceive that it is (.) the themes I'm pursuing are very important things. So mine at the moment is hugely important. But also interaction in those classrooms is very very important. ER:m I think it is seen as important and accessible. At least I I I hope it is. And that's the way I er I push >I mean< that's-you know the
- 15 direction I try to go in. Erm (.) any other ideas you want to-

At the beginning, Matthew expressed uncertainty in an act of thinking aloud (“I don't know if they do?”) but became more assertive subsequently (6-7). He based his claim on his experience of speaking to people and this adds credibility to his account (Pomerantz 1984b). He gave several reformulations of what ‘accessible’ meant: “practical as well as theoretical”, “important” and with a booster “hugely important” (7-11). In fact, the words ‘accessible’ and ‘important’ were repeated many times throughout his response. Like the ECRs discussed in earlier pages, arguing for the appliedness of one’s research is a mainstay of justifying it. Matthew took pains to differentiate between what others think of his research (“I think they perceive it as ... I think it is seen as...”) and how he wants it to be perceived through his use of personal pronouns and hedges (“I try to make it ...” “At least I I I hope it is”) (8-13). He made it clear that his source for ‘knowing’ how others perceive his research comes from the horse’s mouth (6-7) and is thus reliable. Matthew’s distinguishing between how he wants his research to be perceived and what others say about it indicates a belief that the researcher has agency in framing and moulding his research such as when he indicated that this is the “direction” that he wanted to pursue (14-15).

**Excerpt 24 Matthew\_20170112\_#00:07:56-4# (continued)**

- I: -Accessible in what way? What do you mean when you say accessible?
- Matthew: ERM that erm that is not SO abstract that nobody can't understand that nobody can understand it you know. It is theoretical, it is based on empirical research but it it's (.) I kind of transformed it into something understandable, use-able, has an impact and it is ACCES-accessible in that sense.
- 20

Credibility in interview studies is boosted when interviewers “question and challenge the respondents’ answers, thereby countering the credulous attitude of many interview studies” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015: 333). Hence I probed Matthew’s beliefs of what defines accessible research. According to Matthew, it is research that is “not so abstract”, based on “empirical research”, still theoretical but “transformed” into something that could be understood by lay audiences and also “use-able”. A strong sense of the researcher’s volition and agency is present in how he described it as: “I kind of transformed it into something understandable, use-able, has an impact and it is accessible in that sense” (21-23). Thus, there seemed to be a belief amongst some researchers that the onus lies on them to ‘transform’ or shift their topics, if they were perceived as esoteric, into more ‘accessible’ ones. This same inclination could be seen in Peter’s aspiration for his research to reap applied outcomes and Zoe’s question to herself ( Excerpt 25 Later in 5.1.3) as she pondered her future research agenda after the PhD. They seem to follow the belief that they can turn their topics into more ‘accessible’ ones and to position their research as reaping applied outcomes that could benefit the world.

### ***4.1.3 Early career concerns about developing one’s research agenda***

An immediate challenge that ECRs are faced with after obtaining their PhDs is to develop a research agenda independently. The discourses about what constitutes worthwhile research and the agency that researchers have in selecting and transforming their research topics into something that could be easily justifiable influence how ECRs think about their research agendas.

For ECRs, justifying one's research topic is often intertwined with decisions to extend or change one's research direction as seen in Zoe's case. ECRs continually have to be able to justify their research in making the transition from "mentored research" during the PhD to forging an independent research agenda (Laudel & Gläser 2008). This transition requires a shift in mindset as seen in Zoe's 'thinking aloud' ("How can my research be beneficial to people?") in Excerpt 25.

**Zoe, ECR, Lecturer, Applied Linguistics, Eastern University**

**Excerpt 25 Zoe\_20160308\_#00:14:30-3#**

1 Zoe: [...] Because I think that (.) erm I think that quite often with PhDs  
you start quite niche, (.) erm but once the theoretical framework is  
in place erm that you utilize for your research it enables you to  
expand in different directions and so the question that I ask (.)  
5 myself was (.) **how can my research be useful to (.) to people?**  
I think it's all very well finding out er-erm (.) I mean one of the-the-  
(.) I think one of the criteria for getting a PhD is (.) Is that original  
contribution to knowledge >Of course that's important< (.) But I  
think I began to ask my myself **how can my research be**  
10 **beneficial to people?**

Zoe had been teaching for 18 months at the time of this interview. In Excerpt 25 she made a comparison between the expectations of a PhD, which needed only to be justified as an "original contribution to knowledge", and what seemed to be post-PhD expectations of research. Conceding that it remains important that academic research contributes to knowledge (8), Zoe believed that it was more important to her and perhaps to researchers at the ECR stage to begin considering how their research could be "beneficial to people".

As referred to in Zoe's account (Excerpt 25 : 1-4), the 'success' of an apprenticeship in entering the academic career would mean a PhD topic that enables "the emergence of new projects from the solutions found in the PhD" (Laudel & Gläser 2008: 397). ECRs often try to extend on their PhD topics but this depends on various factors; not all research topics can 'grow' this way and not all work environments (in which the ECR is in) can tolerate all topics (Laudel & Gläser 2008: 397). This challenge of developing a research agenda from one's PhD research can constitute an academic struggle especially for ECRs and Jodie's case illustrated this perfectly.

Jodie has been lecturing for around a year at the time of interview and her PhD focused on language learning environments. She maintained an epistemological stance between two specialized fields, A and B (Excerpt 26). In accounting for her difficulties, she constructed Field A's theoretical perspectives as clashing with her background in Field B which aligned with a different kind of paradigm and methods. She labeled herself as a "kind of a situated cognitivist" (10) but faced hostility from peer reviewers towards her "bastardisation" of the perspectives from these two fields. This meant that she found it extremely difficult to get her work published. The gate-keeping power of journals and peer reviewers is clearly a discourse that many researchers draw upon to account for their difficulties in getting published and this is elaborated in Chapter 6.

***Jodie, ECR, Lecturer, Education, Northland University***

**Excerpt 26 Jodie\_20170110\_#00:27:41-5#**

1 Jodie: Erm particularly for my research it's really difficult getting  
published when I'm focusing on informal (.) erm out-of-classroom  
contexts. Because *Field A*<sup>13</sup> seem to think that anything out of the  
classroom (.) is their domain and should only be approached from  
5 *their*<sup>14</sup> theoretical perspectives whereas I come from a very strong  
[field B] background. *Field B* which is (.) you know more aligned  
with *Paradigm P* and (.) ER you know *X kind of* methods and you  
know *Z kind of* experimental design! And my personal position  
10 is somewhere in the middle I'm kind of a situated cognitivist. But  
er (.) what I found is that (.) peer reviewer of my work generally  
don't like (.) me trying to combine or saying that I align myself  
with both perspectives↑ because they are usually one or the  
other↑ (.) So they find that my perspective is a bastardisation of  
15 their perspectives.

Her difficulties at getting published had become formulated as a deeper struggle of not being able to communicate her work and hence leaving Jodie with little choice to continue in her original field of research (her PhD topic). As a result, Jodie was considering moving into a new field (ITP) in Excerpt 27. This supports Laudel and Gläser's claim that not all work environments can allow PhD topics to

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<sup>13</sup> Pseudonyms for the fields that Jodie is referring to.

<sup>14</sup> To replace the field that was referred to.

grow. Jodie formulated her move as a last resort because she had “a career to think of”. In order to continue in academia, she felt that she had to turn to a field that is “less theoretically guarded” (10-12) in order for her kind of research to develop.

**Excerpt 27 Jodie\_20170110\_#00:28:43-8#**

- 1 Jodie: Yah peer reviewers don't like that. So that's been an issue in communicating my work ((laughs)) Sometimes it's hard to get stuff like that past (.) peer reviewers. And it's sad to say actually I think one of the reasons why I'm moving (.) in the direction of doing more research in the *ITP*<sup>15</sup> is because it would be a lot easier to get it published and that's sad. But (.) you know (.) I've got a career to think of.
- 5
- I: Wh-Why is it easier? If you move into *ITP*? Why is it easier?
- Jodie: Why? (.) Because the:: ((intake of breath)) (2.0) it's a less (3.0) Maybe this is all in my head but I feel like it's a less theoretically guarded erm topic than language learning outside of the classroom.
- 10

Jodie's experience illustrated how ECRs often have to grow awareness of and navigate between such paradigm wars and implicit boundaries between specialized fields in order to find their niche. The accounts of ECRs in this section enact their dilemmas and struggles with findings ways to develop their PhD research and finding a suitable field and discipline to position their research. Through their enactment, one gets a glimpse of ECR beliefs about what the PhD constitutes and how best to forge an independent research agenda after it.

Academics have to be able to situate their work in a field of knowledge and claim some kind of disciplinary affiliation in order to be recognised as a researcher (Angermuller 2013). This search for a disciplinary niche or a disciplinary positioning goes beyond the early career stage and Section 4.2 discusses struggles associated with researchers trying to define their disciplinary positioning in order to gain acceptance into a disciplinary community and also employment.

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<sup>15</sup> Pseudonym for a field of language learning

## **4.2 Struggles to define one's disciplinary positioning**

### **What kind of linguist am I?**

The struggles in this section revolved around the disciplinary affiliation or disciplinary label that interview participants claimed for themselves according to their “differing degrees of certainty attached to the knowledge produced by a discipline” (Pinch 1990: 300). As I have targeted mostly linguists, applied linguists and researchers working in related fields, many of the academic struggles and positioning practices shown here revolved around what ‘kind’ of linguist they positioned themselves as, in relation to others and to me. Some respondents position themselves as firmly located in the core of a field of linguistics while others position themselves in the periphery or at the intersections between several fields and disciplines. Disciplinary positioning is recognised as a fluid process where researchers employ disciplinary labels according to their communicative goals and discursive aims (Brew 2008 ; Pinch 1990). The co-construction of these struggles often entailed a negotiation of what it means to be a linguist. This section also discusses various discourses about the boundaries between certain disciplines and fields, institutionally-imposed disciplinary labels and researchers’ beliefs about employability.

### **Positioning in relation to the interviewer**

My positioning as a PhD student in applied linguistics had implications for how respondents react towards me from deciding whether to accept or decline my invitation for an interview to enacting their disciplinary positioning in relation to me during the interview. In the process of seeking participants to do an interview with, I received higher rates of acceptance from researchers who self-identified as working in the applied linguistics field than those who work in theoretical linguistics. Teresa’s hesitation (Chapter 3) provided a clue to a possible reason for this lukewarm reception: theoretical linguists might not see themselves as relevant to my study. My exchange with Emma about whether I considered myself a linguist was possibly another attempt to ascertain my disciplinary positioning (Excerpt 9).

Recapitulating my self-positioning in Excerpt 1, I have demarcated theoretical linguistics and applied linguistics clearly by evoking Chomsky and the ‘kind’ of linguistics that he pioneered. I had set myself as a non-Chomskian and so a non-linguist, as far as structural linguistics was concerned. Rather I had positioned myself as an applied linguist which Emma accepted.

[Recapitulated excerpt from Chapter 3]

**Emma, ECR, Post-doctoral fellow, Linguistics, Northland University**

- 5 Emma: -Are you a linguist? No you're not a linguist (xxx)  
I: Erm I'm in applied linguistics department in [ Warwick.  
Emma: [ Oh ok! Yah  
I: So I wouldn't say I'm a theoretical linguist  
Emma: No  
I: [ I'm not (.) Chomskian ((laughs))  
10 Emma: [ No ° but applied linguistics°  
I: But more applied linguistics.

**Varying degrees of certainty to draw affiliation to a discipline**

Ruminating on my unwillingness to be seen as a linguist, I had drawn upon my understanding of what theoretical or pure linguistics constituted (knowledge of structural linguistics and perhaps a follower of Chomsky's ideas). I did not feel I had sufficient training and knowledge of theoretical linguistics in order to claim this as my disciplinary label. This process of self-assessing one's proximity to one or more disciplines (Pinch 1990) lies at the root of many disciplinary positioning struggles such as mine. The question is what constitutes the criteria for this self-assessment? On what grounds can one ascertain one's proximity to a discipline besides knowledge (in my case)?

**Patchy academic background**

John is Professor in a specialised branch of linguistics that shall be termed *Investigative practitioner linguistics (IPL)* and also serves as consultant to practitioners. John had previously worked in various departments at different institutions where he tapped into his knowledge of psychology, linguistics and philosophy. He felt that he was more comfortable in an interdisciplinary research environment such as a communication department than one of a single discipline such as psychology: "As an academic I was happier in the *department of*

*communication*<sup>16</sup> because it was kinda vague what my background was. ((laughter in voice)) But I was definitely not an absolute psychologist.“ (#00:06:47-6#)

The notion that one could be an *absolute* linguist seemed to imply that to claim expertise in a single discipline, one needs to fulfil certain requirements. In Excerpt 28, John reported that his colleagues “teased” him for using two disciplinary labels (i.e. linguist or psychologist) when addressing different groups of audiences and formulated this as a “defense mechanism”. It could be that by not claiming to be a linguist in the company of linguists, he is freed from the expectation to abide by certain disciplinary norms. The idea that disciplinary communities enact certain expectations about what constitute valued topics or paradigms or methods has been discussed in Chapter 2 and some researchers perceived this as an imposition on the researcher’s freedom and creativity (further discussed in Section 4.3). Another interpretation could also be that his employment of humour was a modest way of positioning himself as possessing the knowledge (and backgrounds) to draw on when enacting these two disciplinary positions.

**John, Professor, Linguistics, Southbank University**

**Excerpt 28 John\_20161109\_#00:32:33-4#**

1 I: How do you think others perceive your research?  
John: I don't know! ((laughs)) I get teased by my colleagues that (.) whenever I'm in a room full of er:: (.) linguists, I talked a lot about my background in psychology and I pretend that I'm not  
5 really a linguist. And when I'm in a room with psychologists or *investigative practitioners*<sup>17</sup> I'm happy to say that I'm a linguist.  
I: Oh  
John: AND SO **my colleagues** teased me ((laughs)) and **say that this is sort of a:: (.) defence mechanism** er::m (.) but (.) er::m (3.0) I  
10 don't know how (.) You have to ask them, interesting question. I think (2.0) I think I've got a (.) (to an extent which) a:: reputation in *plagiarism analysis*.

John attributed this to his “patchy academic background moving around different departments and different disciplines” in Excerpt 29.

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<sup>16</sup> Pseudonym used for the name of the department that John used to work in.

<sup>17</sup> Pseudonym for practitioners that benefit from John’s research.

**Excerpt 29 John\_20161109\_#00:07:26-2#**

- 1 John: So I ((laughter in voice)) had a sort of a patchy academic background moving around different departments and different disciplines.  
I: ((laughs))  
5 John: WHICH suits I think *Investigative Practitioner Linguistics*. I don't think it is a very pure discipline it requires drawing all sorts of influences and different approaches.

John seemed to poke fun at his “patchy academic background” by the tinge of laughter in his voice (Excerpt 29: 1-2). Construing this as a display of self-deprecating humour, I laughed in response. I might be wrong because he quickly positioned his varied academic background as strength in making him suitable for his current role as Professor in *IPL*. This was emphasized in his elaboration prefaced by a louder “WHICH” because IPL was not a “very pure discipline” in the sense that it was interdisciplinary (5-7).

John's academic struggle emerged more fully in Excerpt 30. Taking BAAL as an academic group representative of the field of applied linguistics, he felt that he could not find many interlocutors there (4-5) because he did not go through what he perceived as the mainstream or typical training of a linguist (“I'm not come out through linguistics in quite that way”). In this sense, John seemed to perceive his background in linguistics as “patchy” or inadequate. Besides formal training or background in linguistics, John's feeling of inadequacy seemed to also come from not being fully affiliated with linguists (“don't know that crowd”... “a bit of an outsider”) because this implied not being able to keep abreast with knowledge in that field (6-9).

**Excerpt 30 John\_20161109\_#00:47:19-3#**

- 1 John: So yah. I do feel that because of < my academic background (.) that (.) er::m (3.0) > (like I said) I don't (.) You know I've been to the BAAL<sup>18</sup> conference a couple of times. And I really don't know that crowd. There are not sort of- I-I-I don't meet lots of friends all  
5 the time and I'm a bit of an outsider cuz I'm not I'm not come out

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<sup>18</sup> British Association for Applied Linguistics

through linguistics in quite that way. And sometimes I worry that therefore I'm not aware of bodies of research that I should be reading or particular authors I should be reading to help me write and er:: help me understand the field well enough. [...]

From John's excerpts, it seemed that researchers consider the following criteria in their self-assessment before claiming a disciplinary label : (i) knowledge of the field; (ii) academic background or training in that field; and (iii) whether they can find interlocutors or "know [the] crowd" in that field. This supports Angermuller's claim that researchers participate in many "categorization processes where their tacit social know-how about how things are done in research is mobilised" (Angermuller 2017: : 971). These "ongoing categorization and valuating members inside and outside institutions" (Ibid) is seen here in John's struggle with claiming the 'linguist' label solely to describe himself as a researcher. Angermuller postulated the notion of 'soft' and 'hard' categories that "define academic researchers and constitute their academic subject positions" (2017: 968). 'Hard' categories are required for an academic career and need to be built over time, such as institutionalized categories like 'Professor' while 'soft' categories are "reputational, informal and subjective" (Angermuller 2017: 969). Seen in John's context, hard categories seemed to refer to the formal training and educational trajectory of a linguist and soft categories related with 'knowing the crowd' and 'having friends' in that field. Though John's reputation lies in a specialised branch of linguistics, he hesitated at claiming to be wholly a linguist because of this ongoing categorisation.

Depending on this process of categorisation and self-assessing, researchers decide to claim certain disciplinary labels and not others. However, it would be wrong to think of this process as solely dependent on one's self-assessment. Positioning needs to be ratified by others for it to be successful. A researcher's self-positioning in a certain discipline may not always get ratified by others, in particular by institutions (Alf's excerpt later in Section 5.2.1).

### **Becoming a linguist**

I have discussed researchers (including myself) who claim more proximity with applied linguistics. But one wonders how linguists, or those whom I categorize as

the theoretical linguists (in my exchange with Emma), would self-position themselves?

Emma did her PhD in philology. She worked originally as a librarian in her home country and after relocating to the UK, found a new job as a librarian specialising in linguistics at Northland University. Preceding Excerpt 31 was her recount about how she came to be appointed as a postdoctoral fellow to work on an ancient manuscript with *Professor P* at the linguistics department. She formulated her disciplinary shift (from philology to linguistics) as becoming a linguist “slowly but surely” and accounted for this shift in various ways.

**Excerpt 31 Emma\_20170105\_#00:10:11-0#**

- 1 Emma: [...] So (.) they appointed me. And I'm happy there and I met lots of linguists and went to (.) lectures in:: linguistics↑  
I: Uh huh  
Emma: So there's a general linguistics seminar that always runs (.) Er  
5 and I'm allowed to follow that (.) to go to these lectures which is great↑ [...] So I go to these lectures that also shows my interest probably in linguistics and you learn a lot from listening to many lectures. Erm (.) And together with this research position that I do with *Professor P*  
10 I: Mm  
Emma: Erm (.) °yah° ((change in voice quality)) I have (.) become a linguist.  
I: ((laughs))  
Emma: ((laughter in voice)) Slowly but surely! So I don't know how it  
15 happened ((laughs)) (.) So now I am (.) a linguist.  
I: Uh huh

In Excerpt 31, Emma's declarations: “I have become a linguist” and “So now I am a linguist.” (11-12; 15) marked this disciplinary positioning as new and almost transformation-like. Emma accounted for her transformation by referring to her state of satisfaction of being in a linguistics department, meeting other linguists, having access to lectures and showing her interest in linguistics by learning from the lectures (5-9). Her formulation of being “allowed to follow... go to these lectures” (5) seemed to imply access to something made exclusive to a group (i.e. academics and students in the linguistics department only) linguistics knowledge. As such, Emma seemed to be positioning herself as the “out-group member” (Holmes & Marra 2017) who have successfully gained membership into the social

group of linguists by proving she had sufficient interest in the subject and gaining the necessary knowledge.

In her current role at Northland, Emma was studying a *Phelasian*<sup>19</sup> manuscript with *Professor P* and they had co-written papers about the linguistic structures of *Phelasian*. Her decision to adopt a different disciplinary positioning as a linguist was also driven by practical considerations of moving into a field with a wider audience in Excerpt 32.

**Excerpt 32 Emma\_20170105\_#01:06:02-4#**

- 1 Emma: [...] And since I'm being- (.) I'm working on projects within linguistics now I can't do (.) too much philology because my time has to go to linguistics. ((laughs))
- I: I see I see.
- 5 Emma: And also you can't do (.) er I've done this alongside for a bit but it doesn't work so well↑ because one one subject (xx) will need your full attention. And my attention is already broken up already because I'm only half time so (.) in a week and I can't the little time I have, I can't break that up between different subjects.
- 10 I: That's why you position yourself more as a linguist these days.  
Emma: Yah so now I'm more of a linguist. Because I can't keep doing this, if I wanted to know more about *Neoman* (xx) then I'll have to do that all the time.
- I: Mm mm
- 15 Emma: And yes it has my interest but I can't do it all at the same time I just can't.
- I: Mm Ok I see I see.  
Emma: So yah I can go back to this. But there's more future for me and:: (.) with *Phelasian* linguistics and also there's also a bit of a wider audience >The *Neoman* audience is very small and I know all of them<
- 20

Preceding Excerpt 32 was Emma's discussion about a paper that she had written previously about an old *Neoman*<sup>20</sup> manuscript. Formulating a practical struggle, presumably one that many researchers face, in terms of splitting her time and attention across research projects and interests, Emma accounted for positioning herself as a linguist as something that she had to do because of the demands of her institutional role (as postdoctoral researcher in a linguistics department). In her affirmation of the interviewer's upshot: "Yah so now I'm more of a linguist"

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<sup>19</sup> Pseudonym for a medieval language

<sup>20</sup> Pseudonym for a minority European language

(11), she constructed this shift in her disciplinary positioning as a natural consequence arising from the demands of her current situation. This was followed by other reasons in her disciplinary shift which indicated more researcher's volition when she cited better research prospects and a "wider audience" in Phelasian linguistics (18-21).

Emma's excerpts reflected discourses about claiming a disciplinary label such as the label of 'linguist'. Similar to John, Emma drew upon categories that validated her transformation into a linguist. She referred to soft categories such as her access to knowledge of the field and in-group activities like lectures, meeting linguists (interlocutors) and showing that she had sufficient interest in the field. This is coupled with her official appointment in a linguistics department (hard category).

In the following section, I examine more of such discourses that researchers draw upon to claim a disciplinary label and how there could be instances when researchers are positioned by institutions in ways that differ from their self-positioning.

#### ***4.2.1 Disciplinary positioning imposed by institutions***

The criteria of claiming the 'linguist' label are part of the discourses that researchers have about claiming a disciplinary affiliation. However, this is not only a matter of self-positioning but also about how one is positioned by institutions. Researchers find themselves having to deal with the kinds of disciplinary positioning attributed to them by others (particularly potential employers and institutions) at times. Being positioned by others, especially institutions, in ways that conflict with one's self-positioning could lead to a lost job opportunity such as in Alf's case.

### **Not enough of a linguist**

Alf had applied for a position at what he described as an “old school linguistics department” and they had perceived him as not enough of a linguist. To some extent, his less than well-defined disciplinary label had “backfired” with this application at Rizona<sup>21</sup>. Alf constructed his account like a story with a verbal preface (Stokoe & Edwards 2006): “There was this time...” ( Excerpt 33 : 01) and began by setting the scene with details about the “kind of old school linguistics department” as compared to his current department which he described as “more open minded”. This juxtaposition implicitly positioned Rizona as being less open-minded. Alf described Rizona’s department as “very like ((tongue click)) traditional linguistics” which evoked a disciplinary demarcation between what constitutes traditional linguistics and non-traditional linguistics.

### ***Alf, ECR, Lecturer, Applied linguistics, Eastern University***

#### **Excerpt 33 Alf\_20161201\_#00:15:51-6#**

- 1 Alf: There was this time:: when I was at: I applied for linguistics department at the *University of Rizona*↑ Er:m an::d it’s a very kind of old school linguistics department↑ erm this one is a little bit more open minded↑ And they were very like (.) ((tongue click))
- 5 traditional linguistics. Er:m an::d I:: I got erm shortlisted for the job, erm An::d the::n there was a little bit of concern >well it was the feeling I got from talking to people there and actually that’s the feedback I got from them<, that I had a degree in er cognitive science, that I was not enough of a linguist↑

In a series of self-initiated repairs, Alf formulated the reason for being rejected. His formulation increased in precision from a vague “there was a little bit of concern” to personally hearing from staff in that department (“feeling I got from talking to people there”) and finally to the receipt of feedback (“actually that’s the feedback ...”) (6-9). By drawing upon various sources as bases (from his gut instinct to receiving feedback) for his claim, Alf portrayed his point of view as a reliable one (Pomerantz 1984b).

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<sup>21</sup> Pseudonym for institution that Alf applied to.

Alf was not merely recounting an experience but in fact, evaluating and demarcating disciplines. In his formulation, traditional linguistics connoted 'less open-minded' linguistics, which turned out to mean a lower tolerance for interdisciplinary research.

What followed immediately after was a negotiation of understanding between Alf and the interviewer. In seeking to understand why Alf could be seen as not enough of a linguist, I probed his educational background. This related with the self-assessing discourses about what makes a linguist discussed earlier in John's case (Section 4.2). Embedded in my question was the assumption that one's disciplinary label needed to be supported by one's educational credentials (Excerpt 34 : 10). Although Alf was quick to justify his credentials, he did not challenge this assumption and in fact, reinforced it.

**Excerpt 34 Alf\_20161201\_#00:15:51-6# (continued)**

- 10 I: Your PhD was in cognitive science?  
Alf: My PhD was in cognitive science-  
I: - Oh [ right.  
Alf: [ Yah right. But my Ma-Masters was [ in linguistics  
I: [ yah right  
15 Alf: and my undergrad was essentially in linguistics.  
I: yah right

My Oh-prefaced response (12) marked Alf's admission that his PhD was in cognitive science as new information. Overlapping my turn, Alf quickly justified that his Masters degree was in linguistics (13) and a similar, albeit hedged, claim about his undergraduate degree (15). This exchange seemed to mirror Alf's struggle to prove he was 'linguist enough' for Rizona. On hindsight, given how diverse researchers' beliefs are about what constitutes linguistics and especially how heterogeneous the field of applied linguistics is (Cook 2015 ; Hellermann 2015 ; Shuy 2015), demarcating disciplinary boundaries continue to be complicated. This is made even more complex by how funding agencies are becoming more encouraging of interdisciplinary research (Choi & Richards 2017a) which provides impetus for some institutions and departments to move in this direction. The trend towards interdisciplinarity implies more varied disciplinary categories that researchers could mobilise and thus makes it more difficult to

judge a researcher's disciplinary positioning based solely on her/his academic qualifications.

In further efforts to claim his expertise as a linguist, Alf made a "so"-prefaced declaration: "So erm I have published in linguistics journals and so on" in Excerpt 35. This evokes another soft category in evaluating a researcher's disciplinary positioning by where s/he had published. Getting published in peer-reviewed journals could logically equate to ratification by the disciplinary community and hence membership into the discipline, since journals are often seen as gatekeepers of a discipline. Unfortunately, Rizona did not share Alf's assessment as he voiced their doubts of him (3-4).

**Excerpt 35 Alf\_20161201\_#00:16:47-3#**

- 1 Alf: So erm I have published in linguistics journals and so on. Erm  
I: uh huh  
Alf: But then, (.) they: were like kind of like (.) **Yah er:m but (.) Er:: Is he really a linguist enough?** And I really felt that my: (.) the fact  
5 that I did so many different things↑ and I didn't really have a well defined research programme. I mean the-er >as I mentioned to you< I'm kind of all over the place. That fact really backfired with that particular position, because they really didn't, they wanted somebody who's like more specialised↑ and focuses really only  
10 on language. But at the end I was kind of happy that I didn't get the job, because if they don't like that, then I don't wanna be there. I wanna be at a place where it's ok with me to be doing (.) the occasional (.) non linguistics thing or something different so (.) erm-

In accounting for this rejection Alf again positioned Rizona as a department which seemed rigid in the sense that they wanted someone focusing "really only on language" and less accepting of a diverse or less than "well defined research programme". An unclearly defined research programme translated to an unclear disciplinary positioning. Alf ended his story with a 'happy' ending insofar that he was "kind of happy" that he did not end up at Rizona. The prosodic emphasis in his assertion conveyed that the rejection was mutual on some level: "...if they don't like that, then I don't wanna be there" (11). If Rizona did not like his diverse research portfolio, he did not want to join them either. He also made it clear that he preferred to be in a more open-minded environment which allowed for more

freedom in pursuing his research interests, including non-linguistics ones ( Excerpt 35 : 10-14).

As seen in Alf's case, the struggles to define one's disciplinary label are to do with how one is positioned by institutions. To a large extent, researchers will have to negotiate such institutionally-imposed positioning whenever they seek employment or to gain new positions. Defining one's disciplinary label will hence depend on researchers' beliefs about the ways to enhance one's employability as discussed in the next section.

### 4.2.2 Discourses about enhancing one's employability

Alf's rumination about a missed job opportunity because of his unclearly defined disciplinary positioning is evidently a belief that is shared by other ECRs. Clara who was seeking employment at the time of the interview discussed this need to "fit nicely" into a field as well. Often, the demands of employability accentuated the need for post-doctoral researchers to feel like they need to have a clearly identifiable disciplinary label, at least when they apply for jobs.

#### The need for a clearly identifiable disciplinary label

At the time of the interview, Clara had just graduated with a PhD in applied linguistics and was a part-time Teaching Fellow on a short-term contract. She discussed her uncertainties in finding a label to describe her research and herself as a researcher in Excerpt 36.

#### Clara, ECR, Teaching Fellow, Crossland University

##### Excerpt 36 Clara\_20161011\_#00:28:08-8#

- 1 Clara: It's sorta of like I'm in the middle of nowhere. I mean it's a bit of *children's psychology*, it's a little bit of social psychology, it's also ELT<sup>22</sup>, it's also applied-
- I: -You mean your research?
- 5 Clara: Yah it's applied linguistics. So it has all these elements. It's *cross-cultural communication*. At the same time it's *social psychology* and *adaptation*. It has bits of everything. But it doesn't fit nicely into anything. So still I struggle to identify myself. **Am I an applied linguist? Am I a: sociolinguist? Am I an ELT researcher?**

Clara's struggle to identify herself with a single disciplinary label stemmed from the fact that her research drew from several fields and topics (1-8). Her thinking aloud: "Am I an applied linguist? Am I a: sociolinguist? Am I an ELT researcher?" (8-9) articulates a typical dilemma that ECRs often face when they seek to apply for jobs.

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<sup>22</sup> ELT: English Language Teaching

However, Clara's struggle was not just about deciding on a single disciplinary label but also about her varying degrees of certainty towards each of the fields that her research traverses in Excerpt 37.

**Excerpt 37 Clara\_20161011\_#00:28:08-8# (continued)**

- 10 Clara: So I'm a bit erm (.) erm a bit indecisive about (.) where I belong. Erm at the same time, it is a bit (.) er ((voice creaks)) >it is very nice, this is something very positive, you know about different things< and you link them nicely together↑ But on the other hand I feel like sometimes (1.0) I don't k-know:: for example in much
- 15 depth about::t *children's psychology*. But I still (.) erm link to it somehow. Similar to *cross cultural communication*. I (.) do a lot about it I argue a lot about it but I'm not like (.) erm so much thoroughly d- in erm aware of that area because that's not my own focus.

Despite her dilemma, she claimed that knowing different things is a strength (11-13) but at the same time, she was not confident enough to claim expertise in all the knowledge areas that her research traverses (13-19). Again, this harks back to the set of criteria that researchers have in self-assessing their proximity and hence confidence in ascribing a disciplinary label to oneself (Section 5.2).

I seemed to have misinterpreted Clara's wavering disciplinary positioning to mean an indecisiveness at that time and thus, probed on why she felt a need to claim a single label in Excerpt 38. My question was also a result of having talked to other researchers who have clearly resisted against belonging to just one field. It was with this stock of knowledge (Holstein & Gubrium 1995) that I phrased my question with a trailing *or::* to sound as though there was a dichotomy: "Why did you feel a need to like you say specialise in just one area *or::*?" The reductionist implications of the word 'just' seemed to indicate to the hearer that my stance was for the 'other' albeit unspoken option, i.e. one should not feel a need to specialise in *just* one area. Furthermore, due to our friendship, Clara might also be more inclined to agree with my stance (Cf. Section 3.3.4).

Excerpt 38 Clara\_20161011\_#00:30:06-2#

- I: Ok. Why did you feel a need to: like you say (.) specialise in just one area or::?
- 30 Clara: Yah you don't need to really. It's more of like er::m (.) having a focus. You know there's no need to do it. And you notice this more often (.) I mean I notice this more often er when I started to apply for jobs. And then I could see job applications and they were like **Yah we need a sociolinguist. And I'm like °Hmm (.) I'm not sure I am one.**° You know but at the same time they were like er
- 35 (.) When they say >for example< when they say we want someone specialising in *Teaching young learners English* I can just very nicely fit myself in. And I'm like **Yah I'm that one.** But about the other aspects (.) I'm like a bit hesitant. To see like (.) **°Erm am I a suitable person? Maybe maybe they want**
- 40 **someone with more° (.) broader and more like comprehensive awareness research focus on that.** I don't think you necessarily need to have one focus I don't- I think it is- It is actually very good not to have. But I think there should be something way more:: so you will be like **Yup.**

In aligning her stance with mine, Clara agreed quickly that “there’s no need to” ( Excerpt 38 : 30-31) to have just *one* specialisation. She reformulated it as “more of like having a focus” (29) and carefully qualified that it was not based on a “need” (30) as worded in my question. She justified that having a focus is helpful when applying for jobs: “And you notice this more often I mean I notice this more often when I started to apply for jobs”. In quick succession, Clara shifted from using the impersonal ‘you’ to the first-person pronoun ‘I’ in a self-initiated repair to downgrade a general observation to one based on experience. This is often observed in speakers who recast their claims to be grounded in their personal experience when they felt that their assertions could be doubted (Pomerantz 1984b).

Enacting her inner dilemma by her shifts in positioning, Clara positioned herself as voicing the thoughts of (i) potential employers (“Yah we need a sociolinguist”) and (ii) her own thoughts (“Hmm I’m not sure I am one”) (33-34). This shift in positioning is indicated by her lowered volume when voicing her own thoughts and this is complemented by her preceding quotative pre-framing (Barnes & Moss 2007: 127): “they were like... And I’m like... To see like... you will be like” (33, 37, 38, 44). This interplay of her imagined thoughts of employers and her thoughts illustrated perfectly the struggles an ECR undergoes to claim certain disciplinary labels in order to present oneself as a suitable candidate to a potential employer.

Thus, for many ECRs, the labels they claim for themselves are greatly shaped by the demands of the job market at that time.

### **Employment and hence institutional demands imbibe a need for researchers to enact a clearly defined disciplinary positioning**

The discourse about finding a clear disciplinary label that one is confident to ascribe to oneself and yet also having to match one's label with what the job market requires is reinforced by Vivian's account. In a slightly more secure position than Clara, Vivian is a post-doctoral research fellow who had successfully obtained a three-year funding grant for her research. Vivian evoked the analogy between employability and fitting neatly into a box in the following excerpt.

#### **Excerpt 39 Vivian\_20170118\_#00:26:59-8#**

- 1 Vivian: I have a paper with somebody else that's under review at  
*Language Changes* which is a journal that looks at language  
change and historical linguistics. [...] So fingers crossed they  
accept it this time **but (.) you never know?** ((voice quality  
changes)) ((laughs))
- 5 I: ((laughs)) Ok. So you see yourself as a historical linguist? Or?:  
Vivian: ERM No not really. Erm (.) it's very difficult because I (.) I'm not  
sure I fit very neatly into a box↑ Erm you know what kind of  
linguist I am? Which is a problem for (x) like applying for jobs  
and things. They want- they want like a phonologist or a  
10 syntactician or a historical linguist.

Although Vivian was in the process of publishing a paper in a journal about historical linguistics, she did not perceive that as her disciplinary positioning when she resisted my upshot ( Excerpt 39 : 6). Her perception that not being able to define the kind of linguist she was posed a problem for seeking employment and this belied a similar discourse as Clara's. Claiming a clearly defined disciplinary label or category is seen as necessary for seeking employment. Positioning potential employers as "they", Vivian listed examples of what they want (phonologist, syntactician, historical linguist) as labels that refer to monolithic, singular and established fields of knowledge (10-11). Such beliefs about attributing a clearly defined disciplinary label to one's research are at odds with Brew's (2008) observation that researchers claim disciplinary affiliations in a less straightforward manner. This discrepancy between institutional expectations (to fit neatly into a box) and grappling with the reality of being a jack-of-all-trades but master of none lies at the root of Clara and Vivian's struggles.

What Clara and Vivian described were struggles seeking employment during the early career stage. They refer to discourses about fitting into clear disciplinary 'boxes' to meet what they perceive as the demands of the job market and potential employers and this is further supported by Felix's experiences. His account illustrated how such employment-motivated decisions to enact a certain disciplinary positioning at an earlier part of his career had impacted on his career trajectory and disciplinary positioning.

### **Disciplinary positioning and the job market**

Felix is a senior researcher who self-positioned as a historian. At the time of interview, Felix has been head of an interdisciplinary department working on language studies and translation for about a year. When he detected my puzzlement that his self-identified disciplinary affiliation was not aligned with his institutional role, he reiterated his positioning as such: "In disciplinary terms I see myself as a historian rather than somebody in a: languages department" (00:04:12-8#).

Preceding **Excerpt 40** , Felix was discussing the interdisciplinary department that he was heading. I was keen to find out how he felt working in such an environment instead of a typical history department. His ambivalent response and the ensuing laughter seemed to hint at a deeper struggle (5) and this was confirmed in Felix's subsequent admission that it was not by choice that he had ended up in this department (6-8).

### ***Felix, Senior Academic, Translation studies, Southbank University***

#### **Excerpt 40 Felix\_20170720\_#00:07:49-0#**

- 1 I: [...] Would you like to say more about this kind of interdisciplinary environment? Er: so you found it interesting, perhaps would you like to elaborate in what ways do you find this er:: or would you prefer being in a purely his:: history (.) kind of a department?
- 5 Felix: Er:: Sometimes I would, sometimes I wouldn't. ((laughs)) So er (.) the question is how much choice you would have. In the end it's about the job market and you apply where there's a: (.) where there's a vacancy.

It seemed that like many other ECRs, Felix's struggle at an earlier part of his career was about defining his disciplinary label so as to meet the demands of the job market at that time. His belief then was that he could create opportunities for himself by positioning himself as a language teacher ( Excerpt 41 : 10 ).

**Excerpt 41 Felix\_20170720\_#00:07:49-0# (continued)**

Felix: Erm I've (.) I've (.) When I did my PhD it was quite clear to me that  
10 the job market is quite competitive and er:: the-the more I can  
bran::ch (.) out (.) er into other disciplines, the more opportunities I  
(.) create for myself (of) the job market, the better. And so for my  
PhD, I started teaching *Language R*<sup>23</sup>, I lived in Britain and started  
15 teaching *Language R* a little bit get er (.) get some teaching  
practice there teaching experience er and this worked out nicely  
in getting that postgraduate job working as a visiting lecturer for  
(*Name of a university programme*) and then getting into an  
academic position in Britain. Er so it was a:: erm (3.0) er (.)  
20 ((change in quality of voice)) choice only to some extent. In the  
end it's about the practicalities of (.) of positioning yourself in  
the job market.

While Felix's research interests lie within history, it was through teaching Language R that he managed to find an academic position. After leaving his home country to continue his PhD in the UK, he perceived teaching Language R as a necessary means to enhance his employability in a competitive job market ( Excerpt 41 : 11-20). Thus, he concluded that it was not entirely by choice that he ended up in his current position in a languages department but rather accepting the "practicalities of positioning [oneself] in the job market" (19-20). In his case, his earlier decision to position himself as a language teacher has shaped his career trajectory and his current positioning as historian in an interdisciplinary languages department.

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<sup>23</sup> Pseudonym for an European language

### **4.2.3 Disciplinary demarcation**

When situating their research and themselves with relation to disciplines, researchers have certain discourses about how disciplines and fields are demarcated. The fact that they can be demarcated differently according to individual researchers illustrated that “disciplinary cultures are best treated [...] as flexible resources which can be used for a variety of argumentative purposes” by researchers (Pinch 1990: 302).

#### **Inward and outward orientations in demarcating disciplines**

Spatial metaphors are observed to be commonly used by my respondents to describe their disciplinary position. For instance, they describe their work to lie within the core or peripheral of a field or at the intersections of several disciplines. Extending on this, I argue in this section that some researchers display inward and outward orientations in their demarcation of disciplinary boundaries and positioning their research. These orientations are also manifested in their self-positioning as researchers who seek inwards or outwards (metaphorically) for interlocutors. I would demonstrate how these orientations are enacted discursively through Eric and Luke’s attempts at defining their respective disciplinary positioning with the interviewer.

#### **Inward orientation**

Eric had experience working at a linguistics department before his current appointment at an education department at Northland. He positioned himself clearly as an applied linguist that is more aligned with education and pedagogy in Excerpt 42.

**Excerpt 42 Eric\_20170118\_#00:13:04-5#**

- 1 Eric: Maybe the other difference was that I was in a linguistics department, and here I am in an education department. So for me personally (.) er that I saw a difference there. Than a-
- I: What's the?
- 5 Eric: Well just as an applied linguist.
- I: Mmhm
- Eric: Sometimes we are in education sometimes we are in linguistics.
- I: Mmhm
- Eric: Erm we can kind of do both.
- 10 I: Mmhm
- Eric: For me personally because of my topic is concerned with pedagogy I'm much happier in an education department.
- I: I see I see
- Eric: I feel I have more in common with my colleagues here. Whereas
- 15 in the linguistics department in *Brina* there are people doing speech therapy and phonetics and other topics that don't overlap with mine.

By identifying a difference between linguistics and education departments “just as an applied linguist”, Eric distinguished between at least two kinds of applied linguists– those who are more aligned with education and others with linguistics. While he acknowledged that applied linguistics research sometimes traverses both education and linguistics disciplines (9), his reservations are evident from the hedge “kind of” because he perceived his kind of research as less reconcilable with speech therapy and phonetics, which he regarded as falling within the realm of linguistics (14-17). Eric’s enactment of positioning was not only done in relation to other fields of research and disciplinary labels. He also positioned himself in relation to colleagues he had in both his previous and current departments. He perceived more commonality in terms of topic and also interlocutors with his current department (11-17). He sought interlocutors within his own discipline and his department instead of beyond these disciplinary and institutional boundaries.

Agreeing that we both understand applied linguistics to be a wide and heterogeneous field, I requested Eric to describe his specialisation in Excerpt 43. His demarcation of his specialisation included other related fields (10-11) and in his perception, these fields are very much related with applied linguistics as seen in his subsequent declaration of being a “very applied linguist” in Excerpt 44.

**Excerpt 43 Eric\_20170118\_#00:35:40-3#**

- 1 I: Mm mm mm. So you see yourself as an applied linguist?  
Eric: Mmhm  
I: And er:: applied linguistics is a very wide heterogenous and diverse field.
- 5 Eric: Mmhm  
I: Do you see yourself as a specialist in any (.) specific fields?  
Eric: Well I think if I were to going to say what I am an expert in it will be in *International uses of English*<sup>24</sup>.  
I: Ok.
- 10 Eric: Erm which covers areas like *Global Englishes*<sup>25</sup> and *Social phenomena of English use*<sup>26</sup>.

**A very applied linguist**

In Excerpt 44 Eric marked his self-created disciplinary label with laughter and the booster ('very') could be interpreted in two ways. It could mean that he perceived his research to focus on the 'applied' side of linguistics or it could also mean that he perceived his research to fall squarely within the parameters of applied linguistics. It seemed that the latter was true as Eric clarified that his research did not include a lot of linguistics, taken here to mean theoretical linguistics (16).

**Excerpt 44 Eric\_20170118\_#00:35:40-3# (continued)**

- Eric: Erm I often describe myself as a very applied linguist. ((laughs))  
I: A what?  
Eric: ((laughter in voice)) A very applied linguist.
- 15 I: Very! Ok.  
Eric: Because I don't do a lot of linguistics in my work.  
I: Ok.  
Eric: Erm so it's always applied to education. Erm (0.5) so I would never actually describe myself as a linguist whereas some people↑ in applied linguistics would think of themselves as linguists that do applied work. Whereas I think of myself as an educationist that applies some notions from linguistics yah
- 20 I: I see I see. And by appliedness you you think of education,  
Eric: Education
- 25 I: Pedagogy?  
Eric: Yes.

---

<sup>24</sup> Pseudonym used here for Eric's topic of specialisation

<sup>25</sup> Pseudonym used here

<sup>26</sup> Pseudonym used here

Continuing with boosters, he demarcated his disciplinary position by formulating what he “always” does and “never” do (18-19). He constructed his positioning vis-à-vis other applied linguists who “think of themselves as linguists who do applied work” while he saw himself as an “educationist that applies some notions from linguistics” (19-22). Essentially, he has foregrounded the label “educationist” above “linguist” in his definition of himself as a “very applied linguist”. Eric made a clear differentiation between the language-teaching branches of applied linguistics study from theoretical linguistics. The inward orientation seen in Eric’s locating of his research is reflected in how he drew the boundaries of his research topic inwards into a very niche area within applied linguistics and excluded what lies outside of it.

### Outward orientation

In contrast to Eric’s positioning of his research, Luke seemed to demarcate his research in an outward or expansive manner as straddling both linguistics and other disciplines. He described his research as “idiosyncratic” and how he “look[s] at bridging computer science and linguistics and also philosophy and linguistics ...” (#00:05:11). In our further discussion of his idiosyncratic research, Luke explained how others often perceive it as something that could *not* be categorized easily (Excerpt 45 ).

#### Excerpt 45 Luke\_20170112\_#00:29:34-1#

- 1 I: I see. You talked about idiosyncratic research. What do you define as idiosyncratic research?
- Luke: Well I mean every field has its erm (3.0) mainstream and its sort of less (.) er:: (4.0) less mainstream parts I guess. Erm so for
- 5 example there could be in your field a particular theory or a handful of theories that are the most commonly pursued theories and if you’re working (.) on a theory that’s not one of the most commonly pursued ones then you’re doing something that is a bit more idiosyncratic right?
- 10 I: °mm°
- Luke: Erm (2.0) SO every-every field has its sorta core research that everybody agrees is (.) counts as X. And its more sort of interdisciplinary fringes that (.) people are like **WELL I’m not sure if that’s X or if it’s Y it’s something in between.** (.) Erm and
- 15 THAT’S more the kind of research I do. Erm
- I: The one (.) that’s interdisciplinary?
- Luke: Yah.

In **Excerpt 45** Luke reproduced a common discourse about the spatial metaphor of disciplines as possessing a core and “mainstream parts” and a peripheral or “interdisciplinary fringes” (3-4; 11-15). Evoking shared knowledge with me, Luke guided me with a hypothetical example: “If you are working on a theory that is not one of the most commonly pursued ones then...” (5-9). Luke positioned his research as *not* one that could fit neatly into a linguistics sub-field or something that could be clearly defined. This is seen in how he voiced the imaginary uncertainties of how other people perceive his research: “Well I’m not sure if that’s X or if it’s Y it’s something in between” (13-14).

Luke had a background in cognitive science and worked as a linguist and a cognitive scientist in two universities. It was intriguing to see how he positioned himself and demarcated these disciplines and so I posed the following questions (Excerpt 46 : 1-3; 5).

**Excerpt 46 Luke\_20170112\_#00:50:42-6#**

- 1 I: It’s interesting because you hold (.) two positions one as professor of linguistics and one as professor of cognitive science. Do you see yourself as a: What do you see yourself as then?
- Luke: ((intake of breath))
- 5 I: Do you see them as together or separate?
- Luke: Erm Well I see myself as a linguist who’s definitely informed by cognitive science. I mean my first two degrees my undergrad and my masters are in cognitive science [ not in linguistics.
- I: [ Right ok
- 10 Luke: And that’s part of what gives my my work in linguistics this kind of (.) slightly (.) different (.) profile. Erm (.) I think it’s a different kind of work than the typical person who’s done an undergraduate in linguistics and masters in linguistics and a PhD in linguistics.
- I: uh huh
- 15 Luke: At like (.) one of the:: (.) sort of big schools you know.

In Excerpt 46 Luke’s ‘well’-prefaced response indicated that this was not a simple either-or question. He decided to describe himself as “a linguist who is definitely informed by cognitive science”. His use of a booster (“definitely”) shows a strong desire to include cognitive science in his researcher identity, followed by an ‘I mean’-prefaced elaboration of why cognitive science was so crucial to how he perceived himself (6-8). Luke identified his interdisciplinary background as what makes him different from a typical linguist (10-15).

However despite his background in cognitive science, Luke qualified that he still considered himself as a linguist “as opposed to a cognitive scientist” ( Excerpt 47 ).

**Excerpt 47 Luke\_20170112\_#00:50:42-6# (continued)**

Luke: Erm (3.0) But I definitely consider myself a linguist as opposed to a cognitive scientist. (.) >I mean I< consider linguistics as part of cognitive science bu::t I don't think (.) <cognitive science is (.) yet a coherent enough field> that it makes sense for someone to present himself as a cognitive scientist as opposed to: (.) as a person who does one of the things that comprises cognitive science. If you see what I mean.  
20  
I: So cognitive science as part of linguistics?  
Luke: Er I would put it the other way round  
25 I: [ Oh the other way around  
Luke: [ Linguistics as part of cognitive science right?  
I: Oh  
Luke: So there's definitely things that happen in linguistics that linguists are interested in that have (.) are not relevant (.) or not very relevant to cognitive science. Er (2.0) but there's part of linguistics that is a core part of cognitive science. Along with parts of philosophy, parts of psychology and parts of computer science and parts of neuro science. (.) Erm (2.0) but I don't think er: ((intake of breath)) (3.0) Yah so if people ask me **what do you do?** I say linguistics I don't say cognitive science in the first instance.  
30  
35

While Luke regarded his background in cognitive science as providing him with an advantageous edge over typical linguistics research, he maintained that he regarded himself as a linguist because cognitive science was “not yet a coherent enough field” (Excerpt 47). My clarification in lines 23-25 showed a misunderstanding of Luke’s demarcation. I had understood “part of” to mean a part-whole relationship where linguistics plays a subordinate role to cognitive science. Instead of seeing them as distinctively different disciplines, Luke perceived cognitive science as multidisciplinary and comprised parts from linguistics, “philosophy, parts of psychology and parts of computer science and parts of neuro science” (30-35).

In comparison to Eric’s earlier inward demarcation of his research as ‘very applied linguistics’, Luke preferred to see, what seemed to me, disparate disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, philosophy and cognitive science as connected in some ways. As a result, he saw his research as lying in between fields or comprising various parts of different disciplines meshed together. In this way, he positioned

his research as interdisciplinary and not clearly compartmentalised into a particular field. Luke drew outwards in demarcating his research area to comprise several disciplines but foregrounded the linguistics dimension of his research possibly to match his current appointment as professor in a linguistics department. As will be seen later in Chapter 6, Luke was also outward looking in seeking interlocutors beyond his department and disciplinary community. He valued opportunities to form networks and collaborations with researchers from other disciplines and disliked “disciplinary silos”.

Conversely, Eric drew inwards in demarcating what his research was not (not linguistics, within applied linguistics and education) and sought interlocutors within his department and disciplinary community. He showed a preference to work in a department, which better matched the kind of applied linguistics research that he does instead of a department that had a mix of linguists and applied linguists.

Eric and Luke’s cases illustrate what I describe as inward and outward orientations in demarcating disciplines in order to position their research. Admittedly, there are limitations with this hypothesis of inward and outward orientations as these directional demarcations of disciplines are interpreted by me, the interviewer, and are dependent on my understanding of what they were describing. The comparisons made between Eric and Luke may be unfair as they hold different institutional status and hence academic capital— Luke is a Professor while Eric is not. The differences in their orientations may be due to their disciplinary backgrounds and the demands of their current institutional needs. For instance, Luke has often positioned his background in cognitive sciences as an interdisciplinary one. Perhaps this has led to him seeking outwards for interlocutors more readily. It is also possible that the inward and outward disciplinary orientations are only displayed in the context of these interviews. Given that positioning is an ephemeral practice, researchers may not display the same orientation in all interaction encounters or throughout their academic careers.

### 4.3 Struggles with having to claim a singular disciplinary positioning

In this section, I discuss respondents' struggles with having to position themselves within solely one discipline or field. There is a differentiation here— (i) respondents who struggle with having to position themselves in solely one field or discipline as opposed to (ii) respondents who claim an interdisciplinary label. As seen in the case of Alf who missed a job opportunity because of his diverse research programme (Section 4.2), it was invariably the case that he struggled with claiming *just* one disciplinary positioning.

#### (i) Torn between disciplinary labels

In an earlier part of the interview, Alf resisted positioning himself solely as a linguist and preferred to position himself as someone with a broader interest: “Erm I don't really think of myself as a linguist. Erm I'm somebody who studies language, (.) and I take whatever aspects of language (.) is most interesting [...]” (#00:08:24-7#).

I had sensed a possible tension between how Alf perceived himself as a researcher (his disciplinary positioning) and his institutional positioning (his institutional title and appointment in a linguistics department). Alf's struggle between calling himself a cognitive scientist or a linguist was revealed after some probing in **Excerpt 48**.

#### Excerpt 48 Alf\_20161201\_#00:09:56-3#

- 1 I: I see I see so you don't see yourself really as (.) a linguistics person.  
Alf: Mm::  
I: So:: what would you see yourself as?  
5 Alf: >That's a good question< (.) I would say like (.) er:: if I have to pick one er::m (.) mm:: so I'm torn between calling myself a cognitive scientist↑  
I: Uh huh  
Alf: and a linguist.

Alf's reason for positioning himself in two disciplines was revealed in Excerpt 49. He disliked the institution's positioning of the linguistics department along with more literary departments.

**Excerpt 49 Alf\_20161201\_#00:09:56-3# (continued)**

- 10 Alf: Er::m I thi::nk there's times when I don't really want to be a linguist↑ er::m when I'm like (.) ((in another voice)) **No I'm doing natural sciences! This is all (.) stats and numbers!** And this is hardcore because like (.) especially sometimes here >cuz I'm in the school of er::m er:: what is it? Er::m what's my school? English
- 15 er:: (.) *Foreign Studies* and *Theatre Studies*<sup>27</sup> or something like this whatever it is the arts?<
- I: Oh yah. [ bigger school
- Alf: [ Yah and then within the *Faculty of Arts* erm (xx) I guess >see I don't even know my school< ((laughs))
- 20 Erm and sometimes when I see like erm >for example< there's a lot of literature going on >and stuff like that< er::m I don't want to be put (.) in the same (.) er::m (.) pot with that.

Alf's indignation was clear in his voiced resistance towards what he perceived as an institutional conflation of linguistics and literature (12-13). He demarcated the difference between the disciplines of literature and linguistics, of which the latter was formulated as a "natural science" and all about statistics and figures (11-12). He spent some time trying to recall the name of his school, which was placed within the larger faculty of arts (13-15). He joked about his inability to remember his school name: "see I don't even know my school" (18) which could imply a general disregard for paying attention to such institutional detail or titles; or a resistance towards being categorized in such a way. He clearly distanced himself away from more literary departments in his school as he did not want to be placed in the "same pot with that" (19-21).

**(ii) Claiming the interdisciplinary label**

To further understand Alf's struggle, it is worthwhile to consider respondents who claim an interdisciplinary disciplinary positioning but do not seem to struggle with their disciplinary positioning (although they may struggle in other ways). For instance, Hannah who claimed research interests in several fields but stated

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<sup>27</sup> Words in italics indicate pseudonyms used

affiliation to a single discipline (Translation studies) in Excerpt 50. In her following enactment of her disciplinary positioning, an interdisciplinary label seemed to be a result of having to match her research interests with her institutional disciplinary affiliation.

**Hannah, Academic, Translation studies, Southbank University**

**Excerpt 50 Hannah\_20161006\_#00:03:27#**

- 1 Hannah: My discipline is translation studies (.) my research is about feminism and gender studies (.) that's what (.) interests me the most (.) and of course I have to frame it within because I'm not a sociologist so I have to frame it within my discipline (.)

Hannah perceived her research as a combination of gender studies and minority cultures studies which she “frame(d) within” her discipline, i.e. translation studies. She drew a clear distinction between her research interests and her discipline ( Excerpt 50 : 1-4). By doing so, she validates or accepts the institution’s construction of translation studies as a discipline (at least as an institutionally recognized label) and it holds sway over her research interests (feminism and gender studies). Besides her background (her PhD was done in translation studies), her appointment as head of translation (a subgroup in the department) understandably demands that she constructs her disciplinary positioning in a certain way. Hannah seemed to place her research interests and discipline in a hierarchical order. This seems to testify to the power of institutions to organize disciplinary departments and enact “disciplinary classification” (Becher & Trowler 2001: 59).

Hannah’s need to define her disciplinary positioning according to the institution was implied in her statement: “because I’m not a sociologist so I have to frame it within my discipline” (3-4). She seemed to imply that her two areas of research interest will fit better into sociology but because she is *not* a sociologist, she has to frame it “within” her discipline. I tried to verify this in Excerpt 51.

**Excerpt 51 Hannah\_20161006\_#00:08:42#**

- 1 I: So you saw your research as something that's closer (.) er to sociology (.) instead of translation and erm  
Hannah: Well you see yes and no (.) yes erm but at the same time translation is interdisciplinary I mean translation itself what is that?  
5 (.) Translation is always in relation to other things what do you translate, what type of texts (.) um so translation and technology,

translation and social theory, translation and politics, translation and um legal texts, translation and linguistics (.) erm so it's-it's hmm it's not that my research (.) is not linked to translation it's trans-it's linked to translation and sociology (.) Or sociological approaches er::m (.) of or about translation

My probing question attempted to place her within closer proximity to sociology than translation studies, which Hannah resisted with an ambivalent answer (Excerpt 51 : 03). Hannah accounted for her interdisciplinary positioning as arising from the nature of the translation studies discipline (4-6). She believed that it had to be studied in relation to other fields or disciplines and eventually ascribed the following labels to her research: “translation and sociology ... sociological approaches of or about translation” (10-11). Hannah’s excerpts illustrate an enactment of disciplinary positioning based on her demarcation of gender studies, translation studies and sociology and putting them in a hierarchical order as demanded by her needs.

As can be seen, both Alf and Hannah staked claims on more than one disciplinary label but for different reasons. Alf staked claims on both linguist and cognitive scientist labels because he resisted his institution’s positioning of linguistics with literary fields. But Hannah claimed an interdisciplinary positioning because her discipline (translation studies) was interdisciplinary to begin with. In her perspective, she claimed only one discipline (translation) and strove to fit her research interests within this discipline as demanded by her institutionally-imposed disciplinary affiliation.

In the following sections 4.3.1 - 4.3.3, I explore the discourses underpinning these struggles with having to claim a singular disciplinary label.

#### ***4.3.1 Not wanting to be pigeon-holed***

Oftentimes, the resistance towards being typecast in a singular discipline stems from a researcher’s desire for versatility in his/her research trajectory. David challenged the need to be positioned in a singular field. Although his PhD was in

*European Language Studies*, his research trajectory has shifted from literary to linguistics over the years and his recent research lies in discourse analysis. David's aversion towards the word 'discipline' encapsulates a discourse among researchers who crave for academic autonomy. Early on in the interview, he also self-positioned himself as an 'intellectual' which he distinguished from an academic: "...perhaps in the french sense (.) of an intellectual (.) and not as an academic (.) committed to a particular discipline (.) with particular goals" (#00:06:56-4#) and defined as "somebody who is a thinker, in-on anything (.) with a philosophical (.) tendency" (#00:07:18-4#).

**David, Professor Emeritus, Applied Linguistics, Leaveland University**

**Excerpt 52 David\_20160204\_#00:04:27-7#**

1 I: How come you have become who you are?  
 David: Right but er it's various (.) various factors some of which are  
 5 accidental. I've always felt I had several persona: in the research  
 (.) context. And I don't commit to any particula-I don't feel like I  
 only have one research identity (.) so: er::m I don't know how part  
 of the difficulty of answering this question because I don't know  
 how I'm seen by (.) other groups I'd rather suspect that (.) different  
 things that I've published (.) speak to different people. They have  
 different sets of readers (.) and that is because I've changed  
 10 directions many times (.) and been interested in many different  
 things. An::d I've never felt totally (.) inside one particular  
 discipline. In fact I don't very much (.) like (.) the word (.) discipline  
 (.) cuz I do not like to be disciplined by anybody

In Excerpt 52 , David discussed his multiple research personas because he has changed research directions many times throughout his career. The fact that he chose to use the term *persona* is also interesting because he saw himself as having various identities as a researcher, in such a way that he constructed a new identity for himself every time he ventured into a new academic field.

David seemed to resist the expectations of having his research pigeonholed in one field, as could be seen in the various instances of negation here. Negation is held as a clear marker of polyphony because "a dialog is condensed as it were in one and the same utterance by means of negation" (Angermüller 2011: 2996). In order to illustrate how David's utterances are polyphonic, I refer to the ScaPoLine theory (Théorie SCAndinave de la POLyphonie LINGuistiquE) which helps to unveil

the presence of both self and others, even though they are not explicitly introduced in the utterances (Fløttum 2005: : 31). While ScaPoLine may consider other linguistics expressions such as irony and sarcasm as polyphonic, I am applying it in this case to focus on syntactic negation, mainly because negation in David’s utterances is made salient by its repetition. This kind of syntactic repetition to resist being typecast was also seen in Alf’s utterances but due to space constraints, I have chosen to present only David’s utterances here.

The precept underlying ScaPoLine analysis is that an opposite point of view is always assumed in a negated utterance. So in a classic example from Oswald Ducrot:

This wall is not white

At least two points of view (pov) could be derived (Nølke 2006: 139):

pov<sub>1</sub>: This wall is white

pov<sub>2</sub>: NO pov<sub>1</sub>

In making sense of this utterance, a reader may infer that the producer of this utterance is assuming that someone else might have thought that the opposite was the case. It relates back to notions of Bakhtinian polyphony and also rhetoric, where utterances are recognized as responses in a continuing dialogue (Billig 1996: 18), be it an imaginary one or one that the locutor had with other interlocutors previously.

I refer to the following abbreviated symbols in Table 3 to indicate the two points of view embedded in negated utterances.

Abbreviated symbol	What it stands for	Remarks
pov	Point of view	The points of view related to a source (Fløttum 2005)
l <sub>0</sub>	Locutor	the speaker producing the utterance
a <sub>1</sub>	Allocutor	the ‘other’ voice that opposes the Locutor

**Table 3 Abbreviated symbols for polyphonic analysis (adapted from Fløttum 2005 and Angermuller 2014)**

By applying analytical perspectives inspired by ScaPoLine and Angermuller (2014), I attempt to split David’s (who is the locutor) utterances into two points of view to show the ‘other voices’ that he seemed to be addressing in his utterance.

Lines 4-5: And I don't commit to any particula-I don't feel like I only have one research identity

pov<sub>1</sub>: [a<sub>1</sub>] I feel like I only have one research identity  
pov<sub>2</sub>: [l<sub>0</sub>] NO pov<sub>1</sub>

In lines 4-5, David felt a need to proclaim that he does not want to commit to or feel that he has only one research identity. He opposes the allocutor or the 'other voice' [a<sub>1</sub>] that states that he has only one research identity in pov<sub>1</sub>. It seems to be a negation of perhaps a tacit expectation that all academic researchers usually commit to only one research identity in one research field throughout their careers.

Line 11: I've never felt totally (.) inside one particular discipline.

pov<sub>1</sub>: [a<sub>1</sub>] I have felt totally inside one particular discipline  
pov<sub>2</sub>: [l<sub>0</sub>] NO pov<sub>1</sub>

In a second instance of negation in line 11, David again resisted the notion of how researchers need to position their work in one particular discipline. Here, the prosodic emphasis on *inside* seemed to imply metaphorical allusions to positioning and what it means to be inside or outside a discipline. The embedded pov<sub>1</sub> in David's utterance seemed to represent the tacit expectation that many people have about academic researchers, that is, a researcher is usually known to specialise in only one discipline throughout his career. This seemed to be an expectation that is reinforced in institutional titles (e.g. Professor in linguistics).

Lines 12-13: I don't very much (.) like (.) the word (.) discipline (.) cuz I do not like to be disciplined by anybody

pov<sub>1</sub>: [a<sub>1</sub>] I like the word discipline cuz I do like to be disciplined by somebody  
pov<sub>2</sub>: [l<sub>0</sub>] NO pov<sub>1</sub>

Finally, David declared his aversion towards being typecast in a discipline albeit with a slight humorous pun on the word 'discipline'. Here he was referring to the common belief about the insidious 'disciplining' or socialisation of academics into a discipline, in terms of imposing its unspoken rules on new members (Section 2.4.3).

### 4.3.2 Challenging disciplinary labels

Admittedly, the interviewer brings the ‘disciplinarity’ frame into the interview when I asked respondents about what disciplines they see themselves as belonging to (Alf) and if they feel a need to locate themselves within a single field (Clara, Vivian). Most respondents were cooperative and do not question the disciplinarity frame explicitly. In this section, I examine how researchers could explicitly challenge the very idea of disciplinary categorisation and their beliefs about disciplines and labels.

Excerpt 53 follows Alf’s earlier declaration of feeling torn between two disciplinary positions (linguist or cognitive scientist). After further resisting the institutionally-imposed clumping of his department with literary ones, Alf jokingly associated his wavering disciplinary positioning as fickle-mindedness (2-3).

#### Excerpt 53 Alf\_20161201\_#00:11:43-4#

- 1 Alf: Er::m but sometimes when I’m hanging out with my linguist friends then I feel like a linguist. So I’m actually like (.) it’s really more like on a day to day basis I feel ((laughs)) very different. When I’m here, I mostly feel like a linguist yah. ((laughs))
- 5 I: Because this is the *linguistics* departm-  
Alf: ((laughter in voice)) Yah because this is the *linguistics* I’m supposed to feel like that I guess yah.
- I: Alright! I see I see  
Alf: But it depends. Er::m yah (.) I really don’t actually want to (.)
- 10 actually label these. >I don’t know< I think these labels are actually bad. Er::m
- I: Mmhm  
Alf: I mean I think like mostly disciplines are administrative divisions that the university comes up with? Er::m

In Excerpt 53 , Alf and I co-constructed his tendency to shift his disciplinary positioning according to the company he keeps. On the one hand, Alf alluded to the notion of belonging to a disciplinary community which he drew affiliation with when “hanging out with [his] linguist friends” and when he was in the department or university (4). On the other hand, he seemed to make light of disciplinary labels by likening his disciplinary affiliation to a mood that changes “on a day to day basis”. When I hazarded a guess that it was the institutional affiliation which made him feel like a linguist (5), Alf seemed to confirm with a quick “Yah” but with some ironic humour added, “I’m supposed to feel like that I guess” (6-7). This

seemed to indicate some resistance against an institutional positioning of being labelled in a certain way. The interpretation of ironic humour in Alf's previous utterance was confirmed by his subsequent utterance (9-11). Shifting the topic to discuss his aversion towards disciplinary labels, Alf described them as "administrative divisions that the university comes up with". Making light of and joking about disciplinary labels were Alf's discursive ways of reducing disciplinary labels to mere nomenclature that the university employed for administrative and organisation purposes.

Besides challenging disciplinary labels, there are researchers who also questioned the notion of how disciplines or disciplinary communities exert norms on academic practices and the researcher's academic autonomy. Following his earlier self-positioning as an 'intellectual' and not an academic committed to a particular discipline, David evoked more personality-related characterisations of himself as a 'rebel' and 'maverick' in Excerpt 54 and their ensuing master or counter narratives (Bamberg 2004) which those terms could be embedded in.

**Excerpt 54 David\_20160204\_#00:26:04-1#**

- 1 I: And why didn't you like the (.) the term discipline?  
 David: ER oh I think that goes (.) much deeper probably I'm a bit of a rebel.  
 I: Ok ((laughs))  
 5 David: You know I don't like I don't like the idea (.) of being (.) in a group of people where there's a (.) consensus that you have to er- even today's talk=  
 I: =yes!  
 David: makes me a bit uneasy.  
 10 I: ((laughs))  
 David: I didn't ask any I resisted asking questions > it makes me a bit uneasy < I should- er to think that I'm expected to conform (.) to a certain identity, (.) you know for a certain (.) discipline↑  
 I: Uh huh  
 15 David: with its own rules↑ >they're probably not spoken rules they're probably er:m< (1.0) unconsciously imposed ones (.) by the group as often the case in social groups.

In Excerpt 54 David positioned himself as "a bit of a rebel" (2-3) because he resisted the idea of conforming to a discipline's imposed rules. Recalling a talk about disciplinary norms in academic writing, which we had attended prior to this interview (6-7), David positioned himself as the rebel academic. In order to

understand the context of his resistance, it must be recognised that as one of the more senior academics attending this talk given by a visiting scholar at the university, David could have felt that he was expected to comment on the talk. In resisting against asking questions or commenting, David was embodying the rebel who would not do as expected. The ‘rebellious researcher’ persona expressed indignation with a seemingly deliberate choice of a less common syntactic structure: “...to think that I’m expected to conform to a certain identity” (12-13). David’s aversion towards having to conform to a certain discipline is consistent with his advocating for an academic environment that allows for “open free original and creative thought” (#00:26:24-9#) (also seen in his subsequent criticism of the REF for constraining autonomy in Excerpt 60 ).

David’s reference to some kind of top-down imposition by a nameless group of ‘others’ (15-17) seemed to allude to the notion that researchers have to be ‘disciplined’ in order to claim allegiance to an academic community, in light of studies about how novice researchers and PhD students undergo some degree of acculturation or socialization into their aspired academic disciplines (Abbott 2001 ; Becher & Trowler 2001 ; Billig 2013 ; Gerholm 1990). These studies have concluded that most, if not all, researchers would have to adhere to certain norms and practices of a particular disciplinary community if they want to gain membership in it.

Continuing with his resistance to being part of a group and his desire to be different from the rest, David aligned himself with thinkers whom he described as “the awkward and the different” by evoking another characterisation of the “maverick” in Excerpt 55

**Excerpt 55 David\_20160204\_#00:27:57-5#**

- 1 David: [...] there’s a- (.) You NEED to preserve originality and creativity  
and (.) you know th- the awkward (.) and the different  
I: Mm  
David: (1.0) are the people who are th-slightly >you know this word  
5 maverick?< (xxx) in Jewish [...] I think I’m prob-I see myself as a  
bit of a maverick.

Scholars in the tradition of narrative analysis like Bamberg have proposed ways to study identity construction by examining narratives embedded in talk. Bamberg proposed the notion of master narrative as “grand récits and metanarratives” that speakers are principally subjected to (Bamberg 2004: 359). He described master narratives as “setting up sequences of actions and events as routines” which then ‘normalize’ and ‘naturalize’ so that “the more we as subjects become engaged in these routines, the more we become subjected to them” (Bamberg 2004: 360). I understand this to be similar to interpretative repertoires (Wetherell; Section 2.6.3). Therefore, David’s construction of himself as rebel and maverick resisting greater forces in academia seemed to counter the master narrative or the mainstream discourses in academia about researchers having to belong to a discipline.

At the same time, David’s positioning as a researcher rebelling against conventions could be reminiscent of another master narrative of the underdog going against the system. Hence, what counts as a master narrative or a counter narrative is difficult to ascertain here. It seemed that the interpretation of what constitutes a master or counter narrative can be quite subjective and largely analyst-driven. Therefore, this thesis is more inclined towards analysing interpretative repertoires or discourses embedded within academic struggles through discursive acts and polyphonic utterances instead.

Another strand of discourse that are embedded in researchers’ struggles with claiming a singular disciplinary label are their beliefs about the obstacles (often institution-related) that stand in the way of doing interdisciplinary research.

### ***4.3.3 Obstacles to doing interdisciplinary research***

Researchers who claimed to do interdisciplinary research discussed some issues that they faced. The obstacles to interdisciplinary research had to do with difficulties in communicating one’s research to audiences from different

disciplinary backgrounds; difficulties in getting cited and finding interlocutors; and finally, REF-related obstacles to publishing and evaluation.

### **Difficulties in communicating interdisciplinary research**

As discussed in 4.3, Hannah claimed interdisciplinarity because her discipline (translation studies) was interdisciplinary to begin with. However, communicating her research to various audiences had not been easy and in Excerpt 56 she constructed the forms of resistance she faced from audiences towards her research. Hannah made concerted efforts to engage with audiences from various fields and disciplines by deliberately bringing in topics which audiences are less familiar with at conferences. For instance she would speak about feminism at a translation studies conference and vice versa. But people did not appreciate her “mixing [translation studies] with feminism” (4-5). It also seemed that her audiences deemed feminism a less established discipline and thus questioned her approach (9-14).

#### **Excerpt 56 Hannah\_20161006\_#00:15:13#**

- 1 Hannah: With feminism (.) it's like (.) anybody (.) can give – it's like it's it's  
it's a matter of opinion, it's not (2.0) a discipline in itself so  
that's the way people perceived sometimes my work like (.)  
5 translation studies yes but why mixing it with feminism that's what  
you think that's not a discipline itself. So in a way I was (.) I was  
frustrated sometimes because I couldn't (.) I couldn't go as quickly  
as I would like to. [...] If it's a translation erm studies conference  
or [...] then I have to explain everything from the beginning (.)  
10 otherwise (.) my approach my gender approach is going to be  
questioned.  
I: I see so they're asking questions not just because they are  
unfamiliar with it because they're not gender (.) specialists but  
also because er they don't think feminism is a proper discipline?  
Hannah: I think so that's my impression.

### **Difficulties in getting cited and finding interlocutors**

Another respondent who worked in two fields, translation and a certain European language studies, was William. He attributed his struggles with getting cited to his esoteric field and for not working in a more “central area” of his discipline (Excerpt 57).

***William, Academic, Translation Studies, Southbank University***

**Excerpt 57 William\_20160614\_#00:14:10-2#**

- 1 William: Er I don't think I'm often cited. In fact I'm probably never cited. Erm or I say never cited maybe one or two people cite me but I guess that's maybe because not many people (.) ((laughter in voice)) work in my field. [...] Er::m it'll be nice to be cited more  
5 but er::m you know I-I er::m (.) If-if I were to move into s-some area that was more central, (.) Er::m then I guess I would (.) expect ((laughter in voice)) to be cited more.

William evoked the spatial metaphor used to describe disciplines as having a “central” or core. With laughter in his voice, William discussed his struggles with getting cited through a series of reformulations. The gravity of his struggle grew from not being cited to “never cited” but he backtracked in a self-repair to clarify that maybe “one or two people cite” him (1-3).

In fact, William believed that his disciplinary positioning in the periphery and intersections of disciplines had also led to his struggle to find interlocutors ( Excerpt 58 ). Yet, he did not want to change his research topic to what he perceived as a more ‘popular’ one where interlocutors would come by easily (4). The researcher’s volition is alluded to here but in one’s resoluteness about sticking to a chosen research topic. The need for researchers to find interlocutors in their research environment closely ties in with their professional satisfaction and this is delved into deeper in a subsequent chapter (Section 6.2).

**Excerpt 58 William\_20160614\_#00:16:47-1#**

- 1 William: Erm I struggle to find interlocutors. And:: er::m (.) that doesn't (.) you know that doesn't make me want to go and change my subject you know and go on and work on (Philosopher's Name) where I can meet twenty interlocutors. Er- but it just means that  
5 I have to- I have to work quite hard:: I guess (.) at that.

**Research evaluation as an obstacle to interdisciplinary research**

Having had more experience with the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and subsequently the REF, more experienced researchers observed that the REF had made it more difficult for research to be interdisciplinary.

At an earlier part of his academic career, David was teaching literary studies in *European Language B* but was doing research about linguistics at the same time “because the atmosphere was ... relaxed from a disciplinary point of view”(Excerpt 59 : 1-4). However, he was asked to stop pursuing linguistics research when the disciplines were demarcated in a more rigid fashion (“disciplines became much tighter”) and his linguistics research would not count in the RAE since he was based in a literary department (10-19).

**Excerpt 59 David\_20160204\_#00:08:30-8#**

- 1 David: I was already interested in linguistics when I came here (.) and: because the atmosphere was so relaxed erm from a disciplinary point of view. I just continued doing linguistics and concentrating on it more and more. No problems. However when it came to the
- 5 the 1980s and it came to what was known as the RAE, the research assessment exercise.
- I: Yes
- David: or what is now known as the REF
- I: yes that's right
- 10 David: the disciplines became much tighter
- I: Ok
- David: And so: linguistics (.) was not considered under the RAE or REF panels.
- I: Ok
- 15 David: So I was told that actually by my erm erm my later head of department that I should not really continue erm researching in (.) in er: (.) linguistics. Really I should be doing work in *European Language B* literature which I lost interest in I basically lose interest in it and wasn't researching.

David's personal experience at being stopped from pursuing linguistics research because of the RAE contributed to his belief that the REF would also constrain academic autonomy and creativity. In the following Excerpt 60, it was interesting when David stopped our discussion to include a sidenote (“en parentheses”) about the REF. This seemed like a slight shift in his footing as he departed from his role as respondent to answer the questions posed by the interviewer, to an explicit request to express a personal opinion about the REF on record (1-2). David launched into a strongly worded criticism about the REF's constraining effect on interdisciplinary thinking and academic creativity especially in the arts and social sciences (5-16).

**Excerpt 60 David\_20160204\_#00:31:44-6#**

- 1 David: But the REF is I quite like to just say something about the REF en parentheses, that will be in brackets.  
 I: sure  
 David: Before I get back to your question about what I'm doing right now.  
 5 I do feel the REF is one of these disastrous British institutions, and imposition of the seven- I think the neoliberal (.) environment of the seventies and onwards. (.) which constrains interdisciplinary thinking in particular and I do think you need cross-fertilisation  
 I: Ok  
 10 David: Between minds and different disciplines. Erm and: it is quite difficult to achieve it now still with the way the panels are constructed. So: as we were talking about disciplinarity↑ earlier, (.) and research and originality I think REF has not been helpful (.) to that  
 15 I: Mm  
 David: Especially in arts & social sciences °arts & social sciences°.

David was not alone in his criticism and to give a tangible illustration of how the REF could indeed constrain “cross-fertilisation between minds and different disciplines” (Excerpt 60 : 8-10), John related his struggle with publishing in journals outside the disciplinary affiliation of his department.

In Excerpt 61, John discussed the institutional expectations of him to publish only in linguistics journals and not other disciplines (5-10). The presence of bureaucracy is clearly present in his passive formulation here: “I’m certainly encouraged to publish in more mainstream linguistics journals...” He formulated his experience as a commonly-shared one (11) and concluded that it is “quite hard to be truly interdisciplinary within the REF structure” (11-12) although he tried to make concessions immediately after (13-14). Despite so, the institutional imposition was clearly felt: “I think the institutions want you to be safely within the middle of the REF submission...” (16-19).

**Excerpt 61 John\_20161109\_#00:49:43-0#**

- 1 John: We:: er::m (.) The REF submission which is important rather than department. Is to:: modern languages and linguistics.  
 I: mmhm  
 John: Erm so erm (4.0) Er If I wrote a paper and submit it to a  
 5 psychology journal, if it contained enough linguistics it could be evaluated under that REF panel↓ But the worry would be that it would be evaluated less positively. So the when I have my annual appraisals I'm certainly encouraged to publish in more mainstream linguistics journals than in other areas.  
 10 I: Mm  
 John: And I think that's quite common. I think it's quite hard to be truly interdisciplinary within the REF structure. Although it's not er::m ((tongue click )) (4.0) There are there are mechanisms within REF which are meant to allow you to be interdisciplinary. But I don't

15 think that in practice that they work. I think the institutions want you to be:: safely within the middle of the REF the REF submission you know. That's DEFINITELY linguistics rather than (.) maybe linguistics and maybe psychology. And so you end up writing to that to some degree.

Reiterating John's point, Luke discussed how the REF encourages short-termism by giving examples of how researchers select research topics to reap the required number of publications for evaluation (further discussed in Section 5.2.2).

#### **4.4 Struggles with practitioner-researcher positioning**

Some academics foreground their positioning as a practitioner or a teacher before their positioning as a researcher. This is observed especially in academics who work in more applied fields where research is seen to inform practice. A salient example would be in the field of language teaching. In my pool of data, researchers who hail from a teaching background often foreground their identities as teachers or teacher trainers and their teaching experiences. It is worth noting that the 'practitioner' aspect in research could also refer to other kinds of professional practitioners. In John's case, his research in *Investigative Practitioners Linguistics* aids certain professions.

Among such practitioner-researchers, a struggle that they faced arose when their desired self-positioning as a practitioner first, researcher second had to be subverted due to changes in institutional roles. For instance, respondents who come from a teaching background (such as TESOL) and who are currently academic researchers often have to deal with an emerging rift in their identities between that of a teacher and a researcher.

Such a struggle is constructed by Eric in

Excerpt 62 who found it disappointing to have become one of "those academics", whom he perceived as having lost touch with the teaching practice. Eric had started out as a schoolteacher and had "never thought of becoming an academic" (his words) before the PhD. His career aspiration before doing his PhD was to be a

school principal. Even after obtaining his PhD and working as a lecturer at an Asian university, Eric perceived himself as a teacher-researcher. (“I always saw myself as a teacher (.) first. And a researcher second.” #00:07:02-9#). It was after moving to his second academic job at Brina<sup>28</sup> University in Europe when he saw a shift in his roles to focus on research more than teaching.

**Excerpt 62 Eric\_20170118\_#00:37:29-6#**

- 1 Eric: But in terms of teaching language I don't think that's part of my identity now.  
I: °I see I see.°  
Eric: Yah.
- 5 I: Ok  
Eric: Which is disappointing. ((laughs))  
I: ((laughter in voice)) Why? Why is it disappointing?  
Eric: Well like I always said, I always thought (.) er if I went into academia, I would never want to leave teaching entirely. Because
- 10 I hate academics that (.) erm:: (.) have lost touch with what happens in the classroom. So you know if my research is about the classroom I feel like I should maintain some kind of practice in the classroom. But now I've become one of those academics that is losing touch ((laughs))

In

Excerpt 62, through his use of words like “always”, “never” and “hate” (8-10), Eric constructed a strong stance against academics that have lost touch with teaching. In a clear positioning of me versus them, he conveyed the irony of having become one of those academics, whom he used to hate (13-14). His self-deprecating humour here evoked clearly a discourse about how practitioner-researchers should be like as opposed to academic researchers in the field of language teaching.

The boundary between practitioners (teachers) and academics (researchers) is clearly drawn by Eric and this is perhaps something that researchers in the fields of TESOL or teacher training are acutely aware of, especially if they have been language teachers before. The labels ‘practitioner’ versus ‘academics’ or ‘teachers’ and ‘researchers’ demarcate the groups and are laden with the kinds of knowledge and expertise that practitioners and teachers are assumed to possess. The use of such labels implies the speakers’ ascribed value for the practitioner.

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<sup>28</sup> Pseudonym for an university that Eric worked at previously.

The underlying assumption is that it is crucial and preferable for researchers in this particular field to “maintain some kind of practice in the classroom” (12-13). Hence, this is one enactment of positioning oneself as a teacher-academic or practitioner-academic.

The labels or categories ‘practitioner’ and ‘teacher’ seemed to resonate with and “generate category-bound features” (Stokoe 2012) especially in this context of teacher-researchers in the field of language teaching. Such category-bound features seemed to manifest in the form of lexemes associated with teaching like “classroom”, “practice” and “students” and more broadly-speaking, Eric’s reactions at academics who have “lost touch” and his notions about what it means to be a practitioner-researcher. These notions or discourses are further discussed in Hilda and Isla’s excerpts in the next section.

#### ***4.4.1 Positioning oneself as a teacher or practitioner before researcher***

Despite being at different academic career stages, all three respondents (Hilda, Eric, Isla) asserted a strong teacher identity before entering academia. The degree to which they embraced their academic identities differs slightly and this seems to depend on their current appointments. The following excerpts would show what it means to position oneself as a teacher first before a researcher and how this was enacted through the interview. The acts of positioning oneself as a practitioner-researcher are observed to be as follows:

- (i) The role and passion for teaching or mentoring is foregrounded in their talk. There is innately a comparison between the roles of teacher and researcher and a preference for the former.
- (ii) There exists a notion of losing touch with one’s practice if one does not teach or train in the classroom anymore. They draw alignment with academics that were former teachers themselves as compared to academics who have never taught before.

- (iii) Practitioner-researchers tend to aspire for their research to benefit practice in terms of practical research outcomes instead of merely theoretical academic publications.

Hilda was doing her PhD concurrently with her full-time position as Senior Teaching Fellow. She was training aspiring English language teachers. In Excerpt 63 we were discussing her citations in her publication (a book chapter). Hilda described practitioner-academics as having their “feet still in some kind of application of what [they] talk and write about” (2-3) such as *Adam Bold*<sup>29</sup> whom she “would aspire to” (6-10). With emphatic hand gestures to draw two groups of academics that she was referring to, she regarded practitioner-academics to be “one of [her] people” (4) as opposed to people who are academics “with almost a capital A” (11-12). Hilda described the latter group as academics that are “taken more seriously” in terms of “published material” (13-15) while *Adam Bold* and other practitioner-academics, though also respected, tend to be read by practitioners in journals like “ELTJ<sup>30</sup> [...] rather than Applied Linguistics” (15-21).

***Hilda, ECR, Teaching Fellow, Applied Linguistics, Westlake University***

**Excerpt 63 Hilda\_20161013\_#00:33:09-8#**

- 1 Hilda: But to me: (.) But to me because he because he’s a practitioner because he (.) has his feet still in some kind of (.) erm application I suppose of what he talks and writes about. Then (.) I see you know for me: (.) I feel like he’s one of my people. Erm
- 5 I: Mmhm  
Hilda: You know people like *Adam Bold* would fall in the same category. [...] you know there’s a number of people like that who (.) have remained (.) I feel I suppose that (.) those are people that I would aspire to. °(won’t get like them)° But that’s the direction I
- 10 would aspire to move into. Rather than the: you know (*Carl David*<sup>31</sup>) and [...] Those people you know to me are academics. [gestures with hands on table] (.) With almost a capital A. Erm (.) And of course they are taken more seriously. You know in the world of published material and er this sort of work. They are
- 15 definitely taken more seriously. [...] I would think that (*Evan*<sup>32</sup> xx) and *Adam Bold* >whom I think are held in high respect [...] You

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<sup>29</sup> Pseudonym for an academic who continued to be active as a teacher-trainer.

<sup>30</sup> ELTJ is an acronym for English Language Teaching Journal.

<sup>31</sup> Pseudonym for an academic who was not a practitioner.

<sup>32</sup> Pseudonym for an academic who was like Adam Bold.

know it's not like they are not publishing stuff but (.) but they are perhaps publishing more in: (.) erm outlets that are more (.) likely to be read by practitioners so ELTJ you know *Modern Language Teachers*<sup>33</sup> (xx) or things that are free, rather than (.) Applied Linguistics or something.

What Hilda was doing in Excerpt 63 was marking out which group she would like to gain membership into or “one of [her] people (4), i.e. the practitioner-researchers instead of academics without experience or who are no longer active in classroom teaching or teacher training. The us-they boundary (Holmes & Marra 2017) is evoked here by Hilda’s description of her people and those who are not, with added emphasis by her accompanying hand gestures (12). She formulated academics with “a capital A” as those who were “taken more seriously” because they published in journals that were more recognised in academia. However she drew affinity with the other category, i.e. practitioner-researchers, whose publications were more likely to be read by practitioners. This reinforces the idea that practitioner-researchers tend to foreground and prefer practical research outcomes such as pedagogical output to theoretical publications.

Another teacher turned academic, Isla, strongly positioned herself as a teacher through various ways. At the time of interview, Isla was slated to become Head of Department a few months after. Yet she remained heavily involved in teaching at all levels from undergraduate to PhD supervision despite her growing administrative workload. Early on in the interview, Isla attributed teaching as the motivating reason for why she had ended up in academia: “I became who I am: by: er:: (.) I think the first experiences were just wanting to be a teacher that was my original aim” (#00:01:46-9#)

In Excerpt 64, Isla reiterated how teaching is her first love and positioned herself as an active practitioner who persisted to be deeply involved in teaching undergraduates and postgraduates despite her growing administrative workload (1-6). By highlighting the fact that she was “just” supervising a student before the

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<sup>33</sup> Pseudonym for an academic journal read by teachers

interview, Isla positioned herself as still actively involved in teaching (5-6), which she made her “main academic activity” (8-11).

***Isla, Senior Academic, Applied Linguistics, Eastern University***

**Excerpt 64 Isla\_20160323\_#00:11:06-2#**

1 Isla So teaching, which is my first love, which is why I came into  
academia, I do a lot of that er I enjoy that (.) that is why I am  
here. and you know I really like what I do. I teach different levels I  
5 teach undergraduates first year, second year, third year, I teach  
masters students and I have PhDs. I was just supervising a  
student before you came in. So I do the whole (.) range of (.)  
levels [...] they are all er:m (.) they are all different. They are  
challenging in different ways but they are all extremely enjoyable  
er:m you know the interaction between (.) teaching and between  
10 me (.) learning about teaching and about those subjects (.) is what  
really (.) my main academic activity.

Isla clearly prioritized teaching outcomes above journal publications in her declaration that she perceived “practical pedagogic outcome” as valuable research output instead of publishing in a high impact journal (Excerpt 65 : 1-3). Her stance was firm as indicated by her change in the volume of voice and prosodic emphasis. There was a slight change in her voice as she pronounced the words “high impact journal” with prosodic emphasis and a slower pace in uttering “doesn’t really make” to emphasize her point. Her comparison (as indicated by “than”) between publishing and the satisfaction she gained from teaching was made more vividly by her voicing her students’ reaction: “That was really useful”. Through this vivid juxtaposition, Isla evaluated a well-delivered lesson as better research output than publications.

**Excerpt 65 Isla\_20160323\_#00:37:40-2#**

1 Isla: >FOR ME THE OUTCOME< (.) was (.) I’ll say (x)-(.) the outcome  
(.) IF THE OUTCOM- OUTCOMES of my research have a  
practical (1.0) pedagogic outcome (1.0) that makes me the most  
5 satisfied. So getting it in a **high impact journal** (.) <doesn’t really  
make> (.) a huge difference to me. Than having a group of  
twenty-five people turn around and say **that was really useful**.  
So erm for me my focus has always been on output (.) which I  
interpret as NOT (.) er: er: publications but it could be materials it  
could be teaching a class based on my experience of my research  
10 on academic discourse.

Isla's prioritizing of research outcomes differed from most other academics' priorities on publishing. Her mentioning of publishing in high impact journals seemed to the interviewer to allude to the REF and this prompted the following question about her thoughts on the REF in the following excerpt (Excerpt 66: 32-34). Isla's lengthy response about REF's value as a measurement tool was not what the interviewer intended to probe about, as evident from her interruption (39-40).

**Excerpt 66 Isla\_20160323\_#00:38:45-4#**

- 25 Isla: SO I look at the outcomes of my research as being >you know< of value. To °to people who are learning°  
 I: Mmhm mmhm. And (.) the outcomes of your research er: could take the form of teaching materials?  
 [ (which you drew) satisfaction ]  
 30 Isla: [ THEY OFTEN have. ]  
 They often have.  
 I: Mmhm mmhm. that's very interesting. Because I'm just wondering about the REF and er::m (.) well. ((laughs)) How do you feel about it?  
 35 Isla: Er: it-I think it's good. I think it's valuable. I think research ought to be (.) >you know< all the things that are described in the REF [...] If you're a teacher in a school, you're measured by >y'know< SO:  
 [ every-  
 I: [ because I'm wondering your teaching materials wouldn't count in  
 40 the REF, [ would it?  
 Isla: [ they wouldn't yah.

The interviewer's questions (39-40; 44-45) were posed with the assumption that there was an incongruity between institutional expectations and Isla's individual stance on publishing. From the interviewer's perspective, this was a potentially troubling situation for an academic whose teaching materials would not be considered in the REF. However, Isla did not seem to share the interviewer's view and her puzzlement was seen in how she repeated the question to herself (46). After the interviewer's further explanation (47; 49), Isla reiterated her disregard for the implicit REF-induced pressure on academics to publish (50-58).

**Excerpt 67 Isla\_20160323\_#00:38:45-4# (continued)**

- I: They only look at your publications  
Isla: [ Yah  
I: [ So: (.) I don't know. Would you have: (.) how would you deal  
45 with this?  
Isla: I:: how would I deal with it?  
I: As in how would you feel about this? You have er::  
Isla: it [ wouldn't mat-  
I: [ you have very practical (.) outcomes  
50 Isla: It wouldn't matter to me. Because my students are >y'know<  
I DERIVE satisfaction out of it.  
I: I see I see.  
Isla: You know So I'm not motivated by the fact that it needs to be a  
55 REF publication and that's it. Er you know. If it IS a REF  
publication great↑ but >you know< what is more important to me  
is that it is er:: >you know it's< it's er:: (.) i-it's something of  
practical value.

In juxtaposing the practical outcomes of her research (teaching materials) with what she constructed as the 'other' outcome that researchers are expected to produce (high-impact journal publications), Isla had staunchly positioned herself as a researcher who prioritizes being a teacher. If we understand this to be 'doing' some kind of membership, she claims membership to the group of researchers who value teaching and practical outcomes of research more highly than research for the sake of publishing in high-impact journals. There is an implicit reference to the 'other' view, which valued research outcomes as publishing in high-impact journals.

She made it clear that she was "not motivated by the fact that it needs to be a REF publication and that's it" (54-55), where "that's it" was the emphatic period to end the argument. In a slightly hedged concession that most academic researchers would be expected to publish in avenues recognized by the REF: "if it's a REF publication great↑", she continued to stand her ground: "what is more important to me ... is something of practical value" (55-58).

When the interviewer introduced the REF into the conversation, Isla showed her agreement with REF's definition of how research ought to be: "Er: it-I think it's good..." (32-36). On the one hand, she agreed with the normative criteria that REF imposes on evaluating research; yet on the other, she countered it with her

reformulation of research outcomes, which she interpreted as teaching materials and not necessarily a high impact journal publication.

### What makes a teacher-researcher?

As seen in this section, teacher-researchers value practice in the classroom and sometimes, practical outcomes (such as teaching materials and interaction with students) more than publications in high impact journals which has been constructed as the expectation that almost all academics are required to fulfill. Teacher-academics prefer to see themselves as researchers informed by practice instead of those who have lost touch with the classroom or their 'practice'. Positioning oneself as a teacher first followed by researcher is enacted through an implicit valuing of practice over theory, and of good pedagogical outcomes over publishing.

### Other Practitioners

The 'practitioner' label applies to more than just the field of education as seen in John's case who described himself as a 'practitioner academic' in his CV:

"I am also a **practitioner academic**; my casework has helped resolve numerous cases nationally and internationally." [From John's CV]

In John's view, being a practitioner is to be involved in the practice of finding methods to address problems in his field of specialized linguistics. Similar to the teachers-turned-academics, the notion of practitioner is strongly tied with the actual applied practice and outcomes of their research. For John, he sees his research as feeding into the practice and vice versa ( Excerpt 68 : 6-7).

#### Excerpt 68 John\_20161109\_#00:17:37-9#

1 John: Erm AN::D so:: (.) < I think that to be a:: (2.0) practitioner, > you  
have to also probably be at this stage in the development of  
*Investigative Practitioner Linguistics (IPL)* to be a researcher. It's  
5 about finding methods and developing methods to address  
common problems in *IPL* analysis. So I think (.) the:: research is  
into methods for addressing *IPL* problems. An::d then the practice  
feeds into the research and the research feeds into the practice.  
[...] So:: So:: yes I'm an academic practitioner or practitioner  
10 academic the case work getting involved in the real world cases  
is-is very much- IT IS NOT just being an academic into  
consultancy. The case work is part of th-the- (.) research and  
>then of course feeds into the teaching of the students< and so on  
as well. SO SO it's very much integrated into what I see as as the  
role.

In Excerpt 68 John was also quick to distance himself away from academics-turned consultants whom he described as academics who are not directly involved in the practice (10-11) whereas he saw himself as very much involved in “real world cases” (9).

### ***Conclusion to Chapter 4***

I conclude this chapter by referring to the three dimensions of my inquiry: academic struggles, positioning practices and discourses about academia that are evoked. An overview of the discourses evoked through the struggles with disciplines is provided in Figure 11.

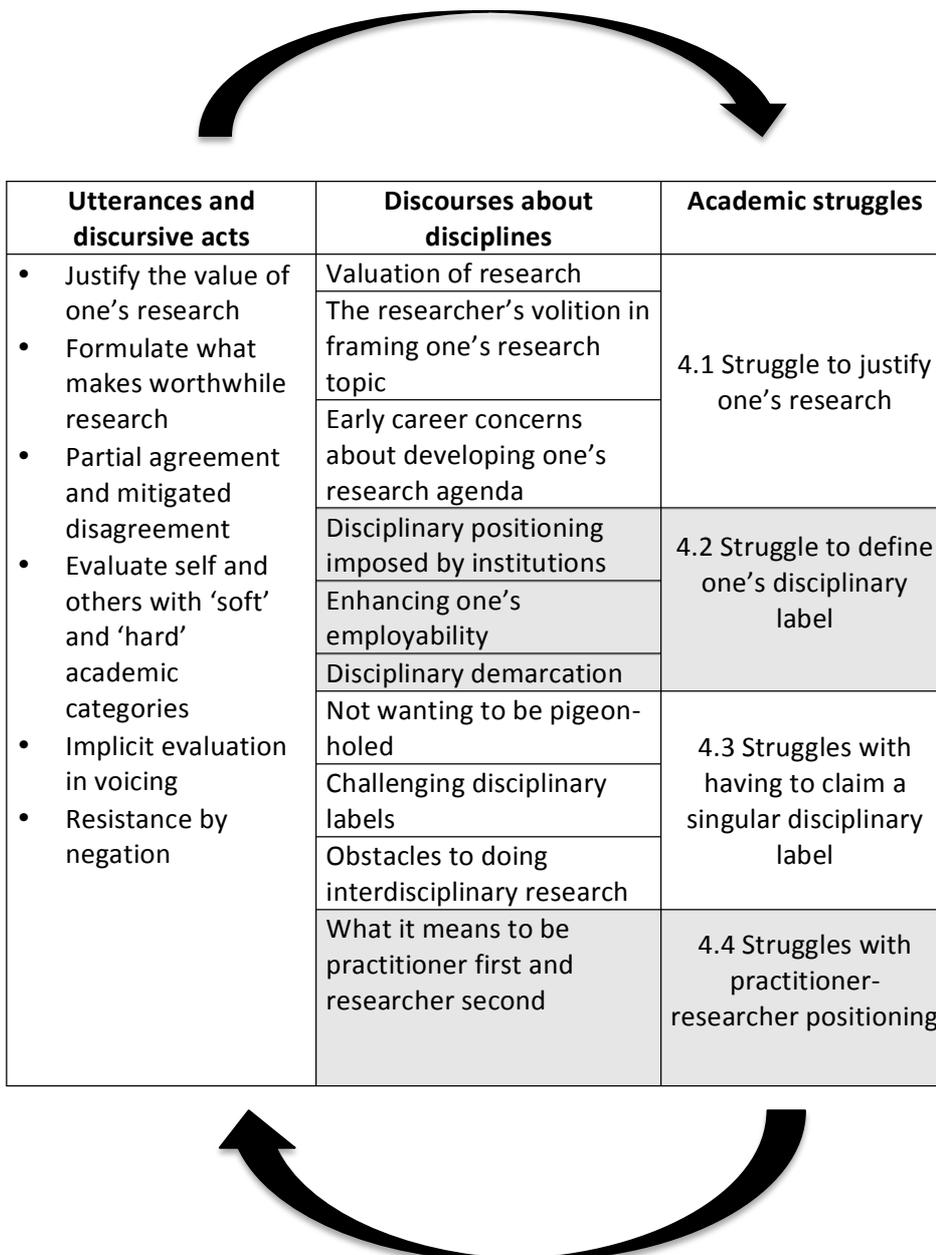


Figure 11 Discursive model (Disciplines)

As can be seen, the struggles were enacted through discursive acts such as justifying the value of one's research (Peter, Vivian), formulating what makes worthwhile research (Peter, Vivian, Eric, Matthew), positioning oneself vis-à-vis others (Vivian, Clara), demarcating disciplines in certain ways and defining which discipline they want to be perceived as working in (Alf, Luke, Eric). Respondents also self-assess and categorise others by referring to 'soft' and 'hard' categories of claiming a particular disciplinary label (Clara, John). Some researchers challenged being ascribed a singular disciplinary label or the need for labels at all (David, Alf).

The academic struggles with disciplinary positioning are to do with finding and claiming disciplinary labels that could be ratified by other researchers and more importantly by institutions. In many cases, gaining employment or being employed in a certain disciplinary department results in a need to negotiate one's self-positioning according to what is required or imposed by institutions. There arise times when the interdisciplinary label is evoked to fit one's interests with how one is positioned by the institution. Besides disciplinary positioning, I also examined the self-positioning practices of practitioner-researchers who foreground their practitioner or teacher identities before their researcher identities.

Some general observations could be made about the types of disciplinary positioning struggles associated with career stages in academia. At the earlier stages of an academic career, researchers tend to struggle with finding an apt label to describe their work and themselves as researchers. Some struggle with justifying their research topics (Peter, Vivian). At the juncture of seeking employment, researchers may feel a need to claim a clearer disciplinary positioning especially to find a match between their research profile and potential employers or the job market (Clara, Vivian). Sometimes the decisions made at gaining employment affect one's trajectory and disciplinary positioning even at later stages of one's career. After gaining employment, some researchers struggle with how they are being positioned by their institutional titles, which can sometimes be at odds with how they want to position themselves as researchers (Alf, Felix).

In constructing these struggles, researchers self-position by mobilizing disciplinary labels or 'soft' and 'hard' academic categories and demarcating disciplines. For instance, researchers mobilized certain labels in order to position themselves to align themselves with some disciplines and resist others. They also position themselves vis-à-vis various groups of people such as audiences for their research (academic peers, non-academic audiences, government etc) when justifying the worth of their research and formulating what makes worthwhile research. Besides self-positioning, my respondents sometimes negotiate with and resist being positioned in certain ways by the interviewer and institutions.

The discourses embedding and evoked by these struggles mainly revolve around the valuation of the kinds of research that are preferred by researchers and institutions. Researchers also hold certain beliefs about how best to justify their topics and how they have volition and agency in framing their research topics. ECRs, in particular, discuss their beliefs about developing an independent research programme after the PhD. In defining their disciplinary label, it can be seen that researchers hold certain discourses about what qualifies them to claim a certain disciplinary label (for instance, what makes one a linguist). Researchers also react towards what seemed to be mainstream expectations of having to claim affiliation to a single discipline. There are also beliefs that there are often institutionally imposed obstacles to doing interdisciplinary research. Finally, discourses about what makes a practitioner-researcher are evoked when respondents position themselves first as a teacher or practitioner before a researcher.

Sometimes disciplinary positioning is intertwined with the fields and disciplines that a researcher publishes in. In the next chapter, I explore another set of academic struggles to do with publishing.

## Chapter 5 Struggles with publishing

### Introduction

The institutional pressure to publish in order to remain in academic employment is an age-old one but has grown more pressing than ever with the REF. In this chapter, I demonstrate how researchers enact various kinds of publishing-related struggles by referring to tacit and non-tacit knowledge about the need to publish, the kinds of publishing outputs that are more valued by institutions and other beliefs about the difficulties in getting published. Getting published has been reformulated as a way of gaining acceptance especially among ECRs (5.1). The struggles to get published are grounded in discourses about journals as disciplinary gate-keepers (5.1.1) and institutional expectations to publish (5.1.2). The 'publish or perish' pressure continues throughout the academic career for most academics until they attain tenure. Another constant preoccupation is to be cited, in order to have academic impact (5.2). This relates with discourses about the kinds of impact that researchers aspire towards and define for themselves (5.2.1) and the limitations of academic journals as means to communicate research (5.2.2).

## 5.1 Struggles with getting published

In this chapter, I examined how the struggles with getting published are co-constructed and accounted for by researchers. ECRs, who are often in the probation phases of their careers or who are on short-term contracts, feel the institutional pressure to publish even more keenly due to the REF. Hence, I begin by examining how Gabriel, an ECR, constructed and accounted for his struggles with publishing.

### *Gabriel, ECR, Lecturer, Applied linguistics, Southbank University*

#### Excerpt 69 Gabriel\_20161130\_#00:19:23-3#

- 1 Gabriel: But I'm at that stage now where I need to step it up. Get more  
publications. To feel as if kind of (.) you know more acceptance of  
what I do. Maybe. But I don't dwell on these things. I just think that  
these are the things that I need to do to kind of maintain the (.)  
5 (momentum) of my career. Because we have these pressures  
now obviously REF and (you wouldn't want) to create a standstill.  
So you have to keep publishing anyway. Erm but the challenge is  
juggling that with the teaching. And the admin roles connected to  
being a lecturer as well.

Gabriel, who has been teaching applied linguistics for around a year at the time of the interview, described this pressure (“I need to step it up”) of having to juggle publishing with teaching and administrative work in Excerpt 69. As an early career researcher, he felt keenly the need to gain “acceptance” for what he does (2-3) but his notion of ‘acceptance’ was something, which I thought was worth probing subsequently in the interview. He began accounting for this by referring to “pressures” associated immediately with REF and he stated this as apparent knowledge (“obviously REF”) without elaborating on what these pressures refer to. It also seemed that this pressure came from a need to juggle teaching and administrative tasks in addition to publishing. A common belief and discourse on the ever-increasing demands on academics is alluded to here and one that Gabriel took to be shared knowledge with me.

In Excerpt 70, my probing Gabriel about his notion of acceptance led to further unravelling of the discourses surrounding academic publishing. Gabriel formulated publishing as one of the “kinds of institutional ways now... to talk

about acceptance” (4-5). Besides just getting published, acceptance was also formulated as having publications that “can be put forward to the REF”. For Gabriel, it was unfortunate that his existing publication did not achieve a three star rating for publications that could make it to the REF. This was an internal rating scale which the heads of department used to select the publications for submission to the REF. Taking the link between impact and REF as tacit knowledge, Gabriel alluded to the institutional preference for applied research (or research that could demonstrate impact) to blue-skies research (10-14). His observations about not “being able to research a topic... for purely academic interest” (11-12) or blue-skies research were also shared by several other respondents and discussed in section 5.1.1.

**Excerpt 70 Gabriel\_20161130\_#00:20:02-4#**

1 I: You mentioned something about acceptance? [ (xx) research  
Gabriel: [ Yah  
I: Would you like to elaborate what kinds of acceptance (x)?  
Gabriel: Just erm (.) I think there’s all kinds of institutional ways now (.) you  
5 have to talk about acceptance. Because you know publications  
get star ratings so my one publication (.) hasn’t been considered  
three stars, which is unfortunate, because that means that (.) I  
haven’t got anything in the bag ready to put forward to the next  
REF. Whereas if it had been considered three star I would. So  
10 er::m (.) you know the whole dynamics of needing to achieve  
impact. And no longer being able to just kind of (.) research a  
topic which (.) just for purely academic interest I think perhaps the  
(.) landscape’s shifted and you need to demonstrate impact.  
That’s harder. SO:: (.) Yah talking about acceptance (.) it’s the  
15 idea that you have something on your CV (.) which is REF-able in  
the er (.) Research excellence framework. And er:: that’s  
something I need to work on.  
I: Mhm I see.  
Gabriel: Mm. Yah.  
20 I: So acceptance in terms of the REF?  
Gabriel: Yah

To some extent, Gabriel’s excerpts illustrated how the REF and institutional expectations of publishing practices had been internalized (whether willingly or not) by researchers, especially ECRs, who seemed to reformulate these institutional requirements as a personal need for acceptance to be recognised as a researcher. For many ECRs, publishing has become key to gaining legitimacy as a researcher.

### **ECRs reformulate publishing as gaining acceptance by the academic community**

Studies about early career researchers have widely noted their need to gain legitimacy, acceptance and other means of establishing oneself as an academic researcher in their respective fields (Laudel & Gläser 2008 ; Sutherland 2017). Louise Archer noted that “younger, ‘new’ academics who had not yet managed to build a publications portfolio experienced considerable stress and pressure” because they occupy “marginal positions within the dominant economy” and are hence “most at risk of being rendered illegitimate” (Archer 2008b: 390). Thus Gabriel’s struggle to publish in Excerpt 69 and Excerpt 70 can be understood as embedded in the broader context of a process to gain acceptance as an ECR.

Beyond the early career stage, the “looming” pressure to publish due to the REF is felt by all researchers, especially those who are no longer seen as early career researchers, such as Natahsa. She has been lecturing for around five years by the time of the interview and was not entered into the last REF. In Excerpt 71 Natasha perceived the pressures on her to publish were greater now that she was no longer considered an ECR. She also raised an additional requirement for academics not just to publish, but also in “well known rigorous places” (5-9).

#### ***Natasha, Academic, Applied linguistics, Southbank University***

##### **Excerpt 71 Natasha\_20161206\_#00:23:29-5#**

- 1 Natasha: So it's like (.) (looming) over us. Not just me but my colleagues as well. But I think there is an additional erm (.) pressure on me and colleagues who might be in my position. Where (.) until very recently I was an early career researcher. So I didn't (.) I wasn't (.)
- 5 entered into REF last time so that's why not a problem and I was lucky it seemed like that. But now I have no option because I'm not seen as early career researcher anymore. So (1.0) it's important to publish. And it's important to publish in well known (.) rigorous places.

Having to prove oneself was a theme that Natasha returned to throughout the interview. Having moved to the UK from her home country, she described various efforts to prove herself as being sufficiently qualified to be a TESOL teacher then a teacher trainer before embarking on her PhD and now as an academic at

Southbank, she continued to see a need to prove herself as a researcher ( Excerpt 72 ).

**Excerpt 72 Natasha\_20161206\_#00:38:36-9#**

1 I: I see. How do you think others perceive your research?  
Natasha: (1.0) Er::m I don't think they take it seriously.  
I: Oh! No?  
5 Natasha: No. (1.0) No because the thing is TESOL because my work is in  
the area of TESOL and although I see it as applied linguistics  
research because of the kind of erm (1.0) kind of analysis that I  
am doing. I don't think (.) it has the same (.) kudos (1.0) as work  
that others do. However (.) the fact that I have published my book  
has changed (.) possibly people's perceptions. If the book haven't  
10 come out, (.) it was going to be definitely (.) they don't take it  
seriously. But because the book has come out, (.) >obviously for a  
book to come out it says that you know it is of publishable quality<

Natasha's account for why felt that her research was not taken seriously in Excerpt 72 evoked the demarcation and also valuation of disciplinary fields. Not all fields are made equal and in her account, she perceived her work in TESOL as not receiving the "same kudos" compared to other fields of research in applied linguistics. In addition to Archer's (2008) observation of ECRs being placed at a marginal position, researchers who perceive themselves as working at the fringes of a discipline may sometimes feel the same kind of marginalization, such as Natasha's ruminations about her disciplinary positioning here (4-7). In Natasha's view, publishing was a way to prove the worth of her research and being able to publish a monograph connotes research quality (10-12). Such valuation beliefs can also extend to what kinds of research are deemed more 'publishable' (or being published more easily) which Natasha shared in a later section (5.1.2).

### 5.1.1 Academic journals as ‘disciplinary gate-keepers’

As seen in the earlier section, struggles about getting published are accounted for mainly by institutional and REF-related requirements. Discourses that respondents used to account for their publishing struggles revolve around academic journals as gate-keepers and the misalignment of disciplinary paradigms between writers and peer-reviewers.

#### Excerpt 73 Jodie\_20170110\_#00:27:14-5#

- 1 Jodie Erm (1.0) Publishing for me (.) ((exhales)) It's been a mixed bag.  
(1.0) Erm some things have been published like (.) really easily  
just with like (.) minor corrections and then they accept it. And  
5 then others I've had just the most cutting comments on. On  
manuscripts that you could possibly imagine. And tha-that's  
what's moved me to tears! ((laugh))  
I: ((laughs))  
Jodie: ((laughter in voice)) These peer reviewers' comments sometimes.

Having one's manuscript accepted seemed to be constructed as something fortuitous here and out of the writer's control as seen in Jodie's analogy of publishing as being a "mixed bag" (Excerpt 73 : 1-5). Her account of suffering the brunt of scathing comments from peer reviewers would resonate with many researchers (Excerpt 73: 4-8). Readers will notice that the title of this thesis came from Jodie's exclamation here about being reduced to tears by the "cutting comments" from peer reviews. Jodie's comment here was a humorous reference back to an earlier point in the interview. She had recounted how her friend was moved to tears by a plenary speech at a conference. In a humorous subversion of her friend's experience, she described herself as being "moved to tears" by nasty peer reviews. This is an example of what I would describe as 'troubled humour' or humour employed during the telling of one's struggles.

Accounting for scathing peer reviews as waging "theoretical battles on empirical research" in Excerpt 74, James positioned peer reviewers as 'they' who are "anonymous" and "who don't always have sort of honest intentions" (3-4) against 'us', the writers. In James' opinion, blind peer reviews were the reason behind nasty reviews and long delays in the publishing process. When positioned on the other side of the fence as a peer reviewer, James mooted for de-anonymizing

himself so that he would write more “respectful, thoughtful, careful, useful reviews” (James\_20161208\_#00:31:59#).

**James, Senior Academic, Applied linguistics, Southbank University**

**Excerpt 74 James\_20161208\_#00:29:51#**

1 James: [...] Just peer review in general is a massive obstacle, right  
because you're constantly fighting the peer reviewers who are  
anonymous to you and who don't always have sort of honest  
intentions and (.) are often fighting theoretical battles er:: on you  
5 know empirical research.

Besides scathing reviews, most respondents believe that rejection occurs when journals decide that their manuscripts fall outside the scope of the journal or if peer reviewers do not share the writers' ways of thinking. What constitutes the scope drawn up by journals is not immediately apparent, especially to new members in the academic community. Therefore, it is unsurprising that ECRs struggle with making sense of the requirements of various journals and their respective disciplinary audiences.

Theo, who was a post-doctoral fellow working on a speech recognition project, made sense of the arbitrariness of peer reviews by referring to individual preferences and certain “kind(s) of mindset” ( **Excerpt 75** : 1-5). Enacting an example of reviewer's criticism in reported speech (6-8), he juxtaposed two 'schools' of reviewers– those who prioritized analysis and others who prioritized methodology.

**Theo, ECR, Post-doctoral research fellow, Linguistics, Northland University**

**Excerpt 75 Theo\_20161208\_00:32:22-2#**

1 Theo: [...] sometimes reviewers have er different er (.) different (.) er:m  
(.) preferences. For example erm (1.0) ((voice creak)) (.) if you if  
you (.) er present your work to someone, he might be looking for  
something OR HE has some kind of mindset he might not be able  
5 to appreciate that work [...] If he's an expert-he-he's too much into  
experiments and analysis he'll say that **Oh this analysis is not  
complete, you you have shown it only for (.) limited cases but  
you expanded for more number of cases or more situations.**  
And then (.) But on the other hand like some people who are more  
10 into methodology [...] they: might appreciate it very well. ((laughs))  
>So means it< also depends on the: person whom you're  
presenting your work to. How he er:: receives it.

More experienced researchers are beset with similar issues. Jane is a senior lecturer in applied linguistics at City University and does research on social media discourse, which she felt was a topic that could lend itself to fields such as computer-mediated communication. However, the paper was rejected because she perceived that the reviewer did not share the writers' view of social reality as "constituted through language" ( Excerpt 76 : 4-6), which is a paradigm largely shared by applied linguists.

***Jane, Senior Academic, Linguistics, Cityland***

**Excerpt 76 Jane\_20161110\_#00:45:27-1#**

1 Jane: Er:: I did try we tried once to get published in computer mediated  
communication and it seems from that (1.0) that it was not the  
right place for (2.0) possibly applied linguistics research erm- [...] Erm  
but that particular kind of view (.) that (1.0) >you know that<  
5 to some extent (.) social reality is constituted through  
language. They-That reviewer anyway did not seem to share. Erm  
It was interesting because it made me think about the (.) erm  
(1.0) the limits to where we can publish.

In Jane's accounting of the rejection of her manuscript, the legitimacy of a paper's knowledge claims lie on certain paradigms unique to the writer's disciplinary backgrounds. When the journal editors or reviewers do not share these paradigms, the paper would most likely not be accepted. She felt that these publishing obstacles stemmed from disciplinary differences: "I think it is easier to publish your work in a journal < if you're (.) if you and it ((laughs)) are coming from the same (1.0) discipline." (Jane\_20161110\_#00:50:45-6#)

Although her research in social media discourse made use of concepts from non-linguistics fields like media studies or computer-mediated communication, she observed that the latter fields do not share similar paradigms ( Excerpt 77 : 4-6). In another 'us versus they' positioning, Jane used 'we' to refer to the discipline which she considered her co-author and herself to be working in, i.e. applied linguistics versus media studies. In declaring that "we are influenced by media studies but I don't think we influence media studies", Jane demarcated the two disciplinary fields based on the fact that they do not share the same paradigm.

**Excerpt 77 Jane\_20161110\_#00:51:03-6#**

- 1 Jane: [...] so a lot of concepts we use are from say media studies. So  
erm er something like erm (.) er Journal New Media, New Media  
and Society, or the journal of computer-mediated communication  
5 seemed very relevant to us. We are using a lot of the concepts  
from those journals. But I don't think (.) it's ((laughter in voice)) not  
mutual. So (.) we are influenced by media studies but I don't think  
we influence media studies↑  
I: We as in (.) applied linguistics?  
Jane: Yah yah

What Jane described in Excerpt 76 and Excerpt 77 alludes to the scope that journals draw up in deciding which manuscripts make it into publication. It strongly corresponds with researchers' beliefs about the boundaries between disciplines as seen in Jane's observation that certain paradigms commonly accepted in applied linguistics are not shared by other disciplines.

Besides disciplinary paradigms, submitting to journals from different disciplines seemed to also require a shift in how researchers write, as John testified in his experience of "genre difficulty" when writing to psychology and linguistics journals (Excerpt 78 : 1-4). So in addition to the belief that journals have certain expectations and scope regarding a manuscript's content and paradigms, it is believed that they also have expectations about the way a manuscript is written (genre). The power of journals to 'police' the boundaries of a discipline is attested by John's experience of being rejected by journals for "being in the wrong discipline" (11-12).

**Excerpt 78 John\_20161109\_#00:47:22-0#**

- 1 John: Early in my career, I was writing (.) for the two sorta disciplines. I  
write for psychology journals and for linguistics journals. AN::D  
er::m I I I sometimes experience a bit of a genre difficulty. That I  
5 write a paper and submit it er to a linguistics journal and it would  
get rejected. And then I get it back and I'll read it and I realise that  
I had written it for the genre of a psychology article rather than a  
linguistics article. And sometimes the other way round. So:: (.)  
Erm erm Because of sort of institutional pressures er (.) REF and  
10 other things I now much more write just for linguistics journals. So  
I I feel like I've-I've learnt that genre now ((laughter in voice))  
and I'm less likely to be rejected by er by just for er being in the  
wrong discipline.

In Excerpt 78 , John also discussed the “institutional pressures er REF and other things” (8-9) which led him to write only for linguistics journals now. It reinforces the idea that the institution plays a big role in influencing which disciplines researchers feel that they have to write for at least in terms of academic journals. This leads to the following discussion on discourses that researchers have about institutional expectations and valuation of publishing avenues.

### **5.1.2 The ‘publish or perish’ discourse**

The gatekeeping power of journals affects what kinds of research get disseminated to the academic community and this has significant effects especially in ECRs’ cases as seen in Jodie’s account (section 5.1.3). Not being able to publish in her original field of interest meant that Jodie had to shift her research topic and redefine her disciplinary positioning.

#### **Excerpt 79 Jodie\_20170110\_#00:37:13-7#**

1 Jodie: [...] I’m not confident enough to kind of fight that in a public space  
because I’m so early career. [...] It’s sad that (1.0) because I’m  
so early career because I don’t have the confidence in my  
convictions yet because I don’t have enough experience (1.0) I’m  
5 not (.) confident enough to fight it out (there was) once I fought it  
out with a peer reviewer but (.) (xxx) it was a methodological  
matter >On a theoretical matter I wouldn’t< because I’m too early  
career. But what that means is that if I can’t publish (.) in the area  
that I really want to publish in, that really reflects my kind of (.)  
10 epistemological viewpoint then:: I’m going to have to abandon that  
viewpoint because you have to (.) publish or perish right?

In Jodie’s case she found herself having to “abandon” her original field of interest largely because of the ‘publish or perish’ discourse. In Excerpt 79, Jodie described her lack of confidence to challenge a journal article’s view “in a public space” because she was “so early career” (1-2). In fact, Jodie attributed her lack of confidence with being “so early career” which she made salient by repeating thrice in this excerpt. Not being able to triumph against peer reviewers would mean that she “can’t publish in the area that [she] really want[s] to publish in” which “reflects [her] kind of epistemological viewpoint”. In a rhetorical question

“you have to publish or perish right?” (11), Jodie concluded her disappointment in having “to abandon” her original field of interest.

Other researchers such as Luke referred to the ‘publish or perish’ discourse as a phase in the academic career ( Excerpt 80 ) and this again exemplifies how publishing is a common struggle shared by most researchers at least until they receive tenure.

**Excerpt 80 Luke\_20170112\_#00:48:06-9#**

1 I: Do you have any ideal journals that you want to publish in in  
future?  
Luke: So I'm at a stage of my career where I can (.) you know I have  
tenure and stuff so I don't need to:: er::m (.) I'm not in the publish  
5 or perish phase of my career anymore

Luke's excerpt about how tenure affords him immunity from the ‘publish or perish’ anxiety bears testament to how academic employment and stability are intricately tied with publishing. As can be imagined, in order to satisfy institutional requirements, researchers develop some common discourses about what publishing modes and practices that are more valued by institutions.

**Other kinds of institution-related valuation systems on publishing practices**

As Gabriel had established in 5.1 Struggles with getting published, the institution has certain expectations of the kinds of publications that researchers ought to produce for them to be REF-able. There exists inherent valuation systems from institutions and academic communities that percolated down to individual researchers when they express beliefs about what kinds of publications and research are more valued. Similarly, Natasha who made the connection between research quality and monograph-publishing, discussed her beliefs about the kinds of research that are deemed more ‘publish-able’ for her second monograph ( Excerpt 81 ).

**Excerpt 81 Natasha\_20161206\_#00:43:51-2#**

- 1 Natasha: And I would like to use (.) in some part of the book corpus  
methods. Because I'm interested in corpus linguistics. Erm I think  
that's going to give more credibility (.) and rigour to th- I think this  
5 day and age (.) mixed methods is what people are looking for. To  
prove yourself. We're coming back to this proving yourself. So this  
time I'm not proving myself as an educator, (.) or a practitioner.  
I'm proving TRYING to prove myself as a researcher.  
I: I see I see.  
Natasha: Yes  
10 I: Why did you think mixed methods is the way to gain credibility?  
Natasha: (2.0) < Because people like (.) quantitative data. >  
I: People as in the?  
Natasha: [ General  
I: [ Masses? Or the-  
15 Natasha: Yah people who read journal articles [...]

Discussing her plans to use corpus linguistics and mixed methods analysis in her second book, Natasha reasoned that it will “give more credibility (.) and rigour” and also because “mixed methods is what people are looking for”. Her opinion could perhaps stem from institution-related discourses about the perceived superiority of quantitative research methods over qualitative ( Excerpt 81 : 2-5) and also more generally, the historical emphasis on quantification in scientific research (Guba & Lincoln 1994). I was keen to find out where Natasha had developed her beliefs from (10, 12). From Natasha’s responses, proving oneself as a researcher has been formulated as being read and accepted by “people who read journal articles” and who are likely to be fellow researchers in the same discipline (11-15). Natasha had constructed mixed methods research as an academic practice that is valued by her institution and disciplinary community. Hence what is considered to be ‘good’ research is equated to mixed methods research and to be able to demonstrate competence in it is equated with being ratified by one’s community.

As discussed in 5.1.1 and 5.1.2, the discourses that are evoked with researchers’ struggles with getting published come from beliefs about journals acting as gatekeepers of disciplines and institution-related pressures of having research outcomes that are ‘REF-able’, i.e. academic journal publications in well-known journals. Further institution-related valuation systems of the modes of publication modes are discussed subsequently in section 5.2.1.

## 5.2 Struggles with being cited

Besides getting published, academics are also concerned about their publications being read and cited in order to demonstrate the impact of their research.

William has been working as a Lecturer in *European Language A* studies for five years at the time of the interview and his research lies at the crossroads of language studies and translation. He perceived “a kind of secular hostility to what [he does]” (#00:11:20-2#) from his colleagues and his struggle with not being cited was closely linked with not being able to find interlocutors (discussed in chapter 6).

William was responding to the question about how his research was perceived by others preceding Excerpt 82 when he discussed his problems with not being cited. For respondents like William and Isla ( Excerpt 86 ), the question about how one’s research is perceived by others has become associated with one’s published output.

### ***William, Academic, Translation studies, Southbank University***

#### **Excerpt 82 William\_20160614\_#00:14:29-9#**

35 William: I (guess) it’s hard to get citations >but erm< you know I-I’m kind of  
(.) I’m not I’m not so much driven by (.) that. ER::M (2.0) Cuz I  
think (.) you know sometimes we have too much of a matric er::  
perspective. You know sometimes ideas take a while to develop  
and mature (.) sometimes er::m (.) people go into discussions  
40 maybe prematurely and er::m

Excerpt 82 continued from William’s earlier rumination about not being cited as much as he wanted (from Excerpt 57). He accounted for his struggle by referring to the “matric perspective” and the implied short-termism (similar to Luke in Excerpt 92) behind more utilitarian attitudes towards doing research driven for the sake of reaping publications (37-40). He also asserted that he was “not much driven by” the need to get cited and positioned himself as someone who valued research that need time to “develop and mature”.

**Excerpt 83 William\_20160614\_#00:14:54-9#**

40 William: So erm I'm not so bothered (.) I'm not so bothered by how much  
I'm cited I guess it's what I'm saying. Er::m it'll be nice to be cited  
more but er::m you know I-I er:: er::m (.) If-if I were to move into s-  
some area that was more central, (.) Er::m then I guess I would (.)  
((laughter in voice)) expect to be cited more. Er::m ((tongue click))  
45 (1.0) Yah there you go. > I guess I you know I'm also er My  
character is also maybe a bit diffident as well you know I don't like  
to sing my praises. I-I mean I think (.) I think my book was really  
good↑ (.) Er: I think I've written (.) one or two:: (.) important  
chapters. ER::m the rest of the stuff is:: (1.0) >you know to some  
extent< it's me trying to learn my trade! [...]

Besides accounting for his struggle in Excerpt 83 as not working in a more “central” area of his discipline (42), William also attributed it to his “diffident character” (45) and how he was not so bothered by how much [he was] cited (39-40). In connecting his struggle with a personality trait, he seemed to imply that getting cited had to do with a need to publicize one’s publications. Consequently, his dislike for indulging in self-publicity was attributed as another reason for his struggle. The implication seemed to be that getting cited might have to do with self-publicity instead of perhaps solely dependent on the quality of one’s research, as seen in William’s assertion that the quality of his publication and hence research was “really good” (46-48).

These two excerpts illustrated an intriguing series of shifts in William’s self-positioning. In enacting his struggle with getting cited, he accounted for his difficulties in various ways and disproving the link between getting cited and one’s research quality. The underlying assumption and discourse here is that being cited is equated with the ratification of one’s research and ultimately, making academic impact in one’s disciplinary community.

This deeply entrenched belief about how scholarly influence is linked with academic publishing resonated in Alf’s recount of his disappointment at his little-cited paper. Alf’s recount in Excerpt 84 began with his setting up his paper as one of promising potential (1-3). He accounted for its low citations because of its disciplinary misalignment (5-7). While he aimed for it to make “connections between life science and linguistics”, it seemed that the intended audiences (biologists and linguists) were not able to “appreciate” it (12). Voicing his inner

thoughts (Sams 2010): “I (go) like why is this not more influential” and in a self-conscious reflection: “I guess we’re always hoping to be influential” (13-15), Alf revealed his discourses about getting cited and being influential.

**Excerpt 84 Alf\_20161201\_#00:18:06-2#**

1 Alf: Er:m So:: I had I had this one on on *[Topic]* and I actually  
submitted to a *life science* journal↑ erm and it got in. And so a  
really high impact *life science* journal. So I was really quite proud  
5 of this. Erm but that paper (.) erm is surprisingly little cited even  
though it came out two years ago. There’re very few people who  
had cited it and I think it’s partly because (.) it is so:: in between  
different fields. Erm it’s kind of like making connections between  
*life science* and *linguistics* and with respect to *[Topic]*. It’s so in  
10 between stuff that erm I think the biologists don’t know what to do  
with it↑ and the linguists haven’t seen that paper yet. [...] I think  
it’s too different erm (.) to actually be appreciated by them. Er::m  
So it’s kind of falls between the cracks erm I think that some of my  
stuff is like:: >I’m sometimes like< (.) some of it I’m disappointed  
or some times I (go) like **why is this not more influential** I guess  
15 (.) we’re always (.) hoping to be influential erm ((laughs)) yah.

**Academic influence**

Alf’s remark about hoping to be more influential sounded to me that getting cited is linked to academic influence in Excerpt 85 and so I asked: “Most cited, frequently cited or?” Partially agreeing, Alf reformulated being influential as “changing minds”. Seeing that this was new information to me (19), Alf shifted into ‘scientist mode’ with a verbal preface “As scientists” and explained his belief that the scientist’s duty is to change the world (20-22). Similar to a shift in footing, Alf seemed to have taken up an “alternative voicing” or “varied subject position” here (Gubrium & Holstein 2001: 22). Using the inclusive ‘we’ personal pronoun, he stated his opinion as if it were a truism in academia and tacit knowledge with his tag question (“As scientists, we are supposed to change the world isn’t it?”).

**Excerpt 85 Alf\_20161201\_#00:19:16-3#**

- I: Influential as in? Mostly cited frequently cited or: ?  
Alf: YAH I guess or: (.) changing (.) minds I mean I mean  
I: Ah  
20 Alf: As scientists (.) we-we-we're supposed to change the world isn't it? And so: I think that-that's our job. I mean (.) we have to change the world.  
I: Ok. ((laughter in voice))  
Alf: If we fail our job, then we fail as scientists.  
25 I: Oh wow!  
Alf: Yah No I don't really think that. ((laughter in voice))  
I: ((laughs))  
Alf: No that's like the:: >most important thing we have to change the world.< Some way or another. We either change the bi-I mean if  
30 we teach people that's actually changing the world because we're influencing the future minds and educating them in science and so on.  
I: Mmhm  
Alf: But also we want to have ideas↑ (.) that change the way that  
35 people do science. And I think that's erm (.) that's my ultimate motivation. If it doesn't- If nobody cites it, then-then (.) I haven't really done it. >Then it's not like< (.) I mean science is about being (.) I think it-it-it is >with respect to community< it needs to it needs to (.) (fly) within the community (.) to actually develop.

I had construed Alf's seemingly exaggerated sense of duty as scientists (Excerpt 85: 20-22) as an utterance to be taken less seriously (23; 25). While Alf seemed to concede with laughter in his voice at first (26), he turned serious subsequently to reassert his view (28-32). Our discussion about citations and academic influence had revealed Alf's aspirations as a scientist ("we want to have ideas that change the way that people do science...that's my ultimate motivation" 34-36) and confirmed that his goal is fulfilled by being cited: "If nobody cites it, then-then I haven't really done it" (36). To Alf, doing science was equated with being cited by one's academic communities in order for research to take flight (37-39).

### ***5.2.1 Institutional valuation of publishing practices***

Scholars have argued that it is because publishing scholarly work has always been central to being an academic that few academics have resisted against the pressure to publish even though it has been transformed into a tool for assessing and auditing in today's higher education (Keenoy 2005 ; Knights & Clarke 2014). Knights and Clarke went as far as to argue that in fact, academics discursively imposed these performative measures not only on themselves but on each other

and on their own discipline (2014: 347). The value of academic publications, especially in peer-reviewed journals, has increased in modern academia, as the need to publish grows greater than ever with the rising institutional emphasis on 'REF-able' research output such as journals with high impact factors. Alf's description of journal papers as the "currency of science" ( Excerpt 87 ) succinctly sums up the significance of academic publishing to the processes of employment, promotion and attaining tenure in academia. Academics perceived clear valuation systems attached to modes of publications and what counts as valuable publishing practices.

### **Journal publications valued over other research outcomes**

There seemed to be a strong institutional expectation for researchers to publish in high-ranking journals instead of producing other research outcomes. Respondents also often perceived this to be closely linked with the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

#### **Excerpt 86 Isla\_20160323\_#00:15:52-9#**

- 1 I: Mm mmhm I see. Erm how do you think others perceive your research?
- Isla: WELL because I haven't published as much as I'd like to. I think They probably look at it as erm I could do more and publish in (.)
- 5 JOURNALS probably more because >you know< I tend to have a lot- (of invited) chapter contributions.

In Excerpt 86 , Isla's emphatic 'well' prefaced a turn which "privileged the perspective of the respondent over the questioner" (Heritage 2015: 101). Isla has given a transformative answer that addresses the question that is put to her but does not do so in the terms that the question was framed (Heritage 2015: 93) by reporting on perceived criticism about herself as a researcher: "they probably look at at as erm I could do more and publish in journals probably more..." (4-5). Following this claim of inadequacy, she explained that it was because she had more book chapter contributions than journal publications, which implied that journals are preferred over other modes of publishing by fellow researchers and institutions.

Several other respondents also echoed the perception that journal publications are more valuable than book chapters or monographs. Preceding Excerpt 87 was my comment on Alf's prolific list of publications, mostly journal papers. Alf made his preference for journal papers clearly by first constructing, almost jokingly, the obsolescence of books and its replacement by papers (1-4).

**Excerpt 87 Alf\_20161201\_#00:54:57-4#**

- 1 Alf: Like books are a thing of the past. Erm (.) like nobody has the  
time to read books. Erm ((laughter in voice)) and er: I think the  
paper form is a very modern form that allows us to have more (.)  
er focused distinct deas on specific sub topics. Erm I: kind of I: (.)  
5 because the REF >you've heard about the REF have you?< the  
REF frame- the research excellence framework?  
I: Mmhm  
Alf: So that-because of that, erm there is a kind of- Here there's  
there's a recommendation for me to like (.) write a book↑ And so I  
10 like the idea that this is kind of compelling me to erm think a little  
deeper, longer (.) more theoretically involved on one particular  
topic, (.) but my preferred thing to do is journals. Because (.) I  
think that's (.) really where it's at-I mean that's the currency of (.)  
of science. Those journal papers. I think they're more important.  
15 Cuz books are really difficult to access. Erm (.) they're gonna be  
stuck in some library and somebody has to take them or buy  
them. But journals are electronic the access can be widely  
distributed. Erm and er er they're out much quicker, and books  
take ages.  
20 I: Mm  
Alf: So it's actually like (.) when we want to speed up things, actually  
journals are better.

However, Alf's personal preference for journal articles had come at odds with a recommendation from his institution for him to write a book (Excerpt 87: 8-10). Drawing my attention to the REF and emphasizing on 'here' (8), Alf formulated the recommendation as a REF-related but institution-specific expectation (4-9) and hence, not a broadly valued academic practice. Despite conceding the merits of writing a book: "And so I like the idea that..." (10-12), he made his preference clear for journals as "the currency of science" (13-14) and a speedier avenue to communicate research as opposed to books (15-22).

ECRs like Louise (Excerpt 88) pointed out that institutions value journal papers more than monographs and it is hence more strategic for job seekers to publish in journals. Louise related her experience of applying for an academic position and

how the strength of her application was measured solely by the number of publications (“what they basically look at...”). In addition, her comparison of the worth of journals and monographs in terms of their appeal to employers again echoed the idea of academic capital.

***Louise, ECR, Post-doctoral fellow, Applied linguistics, Eastern University***

**Excerpt 88 Louise\_20161206\_#00:36:48-0#**

- 1 Louise: [...] I think er:: (.) in my profile could make more impact to publish  
research papers on several er (.) good journals than a single  
monograph. Erm (2.0) ((tongue click)) so I applied for a position  
5 in [Country] in academia (.) What they basically look at is  
publications. And er it is more worth (.) four five publications on  
four five journals than a single monograph.

This is not to say that all researchers think that journals are the best and only research outcome that they aspire towards. Somewhat going beyond the struggles constructed by some researchers about getting published and getting cited, there are researchers, usually more veteran ones, who speak out against academic journals as the only avenue for communicating research. Their reactions seemed embedded in another kind of discourse about the limitations of academic publishing as discussed in the next section.

### **5.2.2. Academic journals as parochial**

More experienced members of academia– Professors and Professor Emeriti – have pointed out the parochial nature of academic journals and the increasingly competitive nature of academia. For instance, Hugh ( Excerpt 89 ) did not think that academic journals are a good avenue to communicate research and deemed them the least read mode of publication.

#### **Hugh, Professor, Education, Eastern University**

##### **Excerpt 89 Hugh\_20161201\_#00:31:08-6#**

- 1 Hugh: [...] journals tend to be read by academics. Not by anybody else. Really not by anybody else. If you include students as academics. And so what's the point of them?

In fact Hugh argued strongly for alternative modes of communicating research such as reaching out to the public through films and non-academic avenues instead of publishing in academic journals. He positioned scholars as subjected to institutional pressures to “hit certain targets” in terms of publishing in journals in Excerpt 90 and constructed the academic world as parochial, competitive and neoliberal to the extent that journal publications are seen as commodities to appease institutional demands instead of genuine contributions to scholarly debate. Hugh’s earlier response to my email invitation (Section 3.4.1. Seeking participants) now made sense in light of his comments in this excerpt.

##### **Excerpt 90 Hugh\_20161201\_#00:31:58-4#**

- 1 Hugh: [...] we think it's very important that we find ways of communicating our research to people beyond (.) academic journals. The academic world is is is (.) firstly very narrow (.) in its (.) vision. And secondly (.) relies on er::m (.) competition (.)  
5 and neoliberal orientation (.) to the extent that (3.0) there's a danger right now, (.) that people (.) that scholars (1.0) write in order (.) to be published in certain journals in order to hi-to hit certain targets which are set by their (.) institution.

Ben shared the view that competition in academia has led to an increasingly parochial communication of knowledge through academic journals. In Excerpt 91, Ben discussed how citations have become a tool for academics to ‘scratch one another’s backs’ and how bibliometric tools such as the Social Sciences Citations index have brought about this utilitarian aspect to academic citations (7-15).

**Ben, Professor Emeritus, Applied linguistics, Eastern University**

**Excerpt 91 Ben\_ 20160209\_#00:21:24#**

- 1 Ben: Well, that is- it's something that started I think, er:: in the United States and it has to do with ranking. Because I mean, er what determines, (.) er your own rank is (.) according to what people say these days. Er er well, (.) er how many citations of that- of
- 5 who you work and all the- social science [ citation index.
- I: [ O:::h, citation index.
- Ben: And so you have to write (.) a lot of (.) small small articles citing a lot of your friends so that they feel (.) obliged to write also lots of articles where they cite you. So, that we have-for instance, if you
- 10 look at *spatial linguistics*<sup>34</sup> where a lot of different schools are doing *spatial* linguistics in the States, and they never refer to each other. It will read each other and they would never quote someone who doesn't belong to the same camp. Because every citation would give them-Well, er er er (.) some, some advantage on the
- 15 social science citation index.

In Excerpt 91 Ben gave two examples to describe this utilitarian phenomenon of researchers citing 'friends' but never 'foes' in various ways. He began with a hypothetical example in which the impersonal 'you' (Lampropoulou & Myers 2012) is evoked (7-9). Lampropoulou and Myers (2012) have cited Sacks' lectures in arguing that the impersonal you can refer to "everybody" and incidentally of "me" as well, thereby offering a claim as "proverbially correct" (Lampropoulou & Myers 2012: 1208). Thus hearers understand Ben to be referring to researchers in general and how the social science citation index has motivated them to "write a lot of small articles citing a lot of [your] friends" so that they feel obliged to do the same.

In his second example about academic rivalry in spatial linguistics (9-15), Ben positioned researchers working in rivalling schools as behaving in singular entities in "camps" with the singular personal pronoun "it" ("it will read each other") and shifted to the plural "they" when he referred to researchers as in "they never refer to each other". This positioning constructed the notion of citing as a tribal-like exercise in which researchers do not cite for the sake of academic argumentation; instead citing seemed like 'academic warfare' where one was restricted in citing from other camps except one's own. Through both examples, Ben seemed to construct the perception of citations as largely motivated by the

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<sup>34</sup> Pseudonym for a field of linguistics

impetus to gain academic capital (i.e. to gain citations and thus be evaluated positively in bibliometric exercises) and meaningless academic rivalry.

Besides the competitiveness and parochial nature of academic journal publishing, the REF had also contributed to a short-termism in research in the sense that researchers were only incentivized to pursue research that could reap publications within the four-year time period between each REF exercise. Luke alluded to this distorting effect of REF on research (1-3) in Excerpt 92 and its long-term effect on the kinds of research that would be pursued and produced. Luke formulated the pressure that the REF exerted on “everybody” (4-5) as a sweeping phenomenon. In addition, by employing the impersonal ‘you’ in his hypothetical example of the difficulties for researchers to pursue a “big picture project” (5-10), he formulated it as a statement that draws on ‘common-sense’ and which hearers typically recognise as a statement of general rule, thereby not questioning it (Lampropoulou & Myers 2012: 1209).

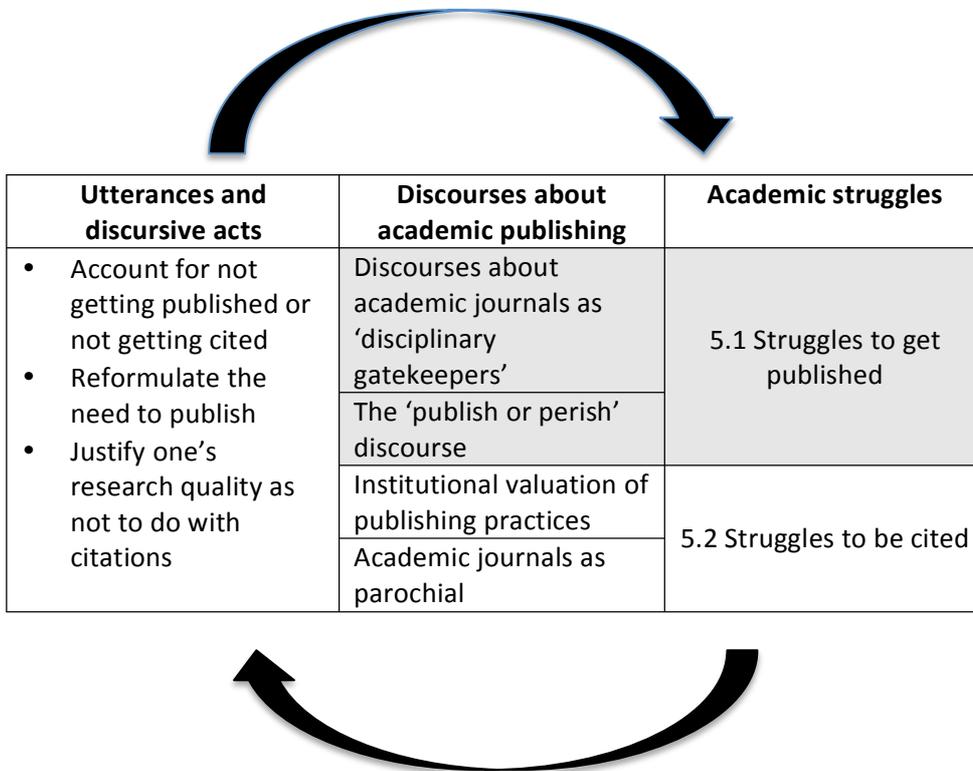
**Excerpt 92 Luke\_20170112\_#00:42:25-2#**

1 Luke: I do think that the REF also potentially distorts research. (1.0)  
because it (3.0) WELL it promotes short term and mid term  
research over research that might have a long pay off. (2.0) So  
5 everybody needs to get their four publications or whatever for the  
next REF. (.) Er whereas >you know or< maybe you’re working on  
a-on a research (.) piece of research that would benefit from (.)  
not a (1.0) five year ((outtake of breath)) time frame but a ten or  
fifteen year time frame. It’s much harder to work on those sorta  
(2.0) maybe more big picture projects now I think (1.0) in the UK  
10 at least.

Luke’s opinion reflected the criticism that some higher education studies have levelled at the REF, being the subsequent incarnation of the RAE (Research Assessment Exercise). The REF has long been criticised for this “short-termism” where it had arguably caused divisions within university departments and “a homogenizing of research areas towards the mainstream, short-termism and lack of innovation” (Lucas 2006: 168).

## Conclusion to Chapter 5

Figure 11 provides an overview of the discursive acts involved in the construction of publishing struggles and the discourses that were evoked.



**Figure 12 Discursive model (Academic publishing)**

Knights and Clarke explained how publishing scholarly work has always been central to being an academic but has now become an instrument of evaluation in “the audit, accountability and performative culture” in academia (2014: 347). Thus it is imaginable that publishing-related struggles are mostly constructed as emerging from institutional pressures to publish a certain quantity and in institutionally preferred avenues (i.e. in journals with high impact factors). This generates a great supply of manuscripts all vying for a spot in a small number of highly-ranked journals. Journal editors and peer reviewers arguably become very powerful gate-keepers in delimiting the disciplinary boundaries of the papers that are allowed to enter into print, as many respondents seemed to believe.

The discursive acts that emerged often involve positioning peer reviewers and journals as 'they' versus 'us' the writers or researchers. ECRs tend to perceive some degree of fortuitousness with getting one's manuscript accepted by a journal where the demands of reviewers and journals are unpredictable. More experienced respondents accounted for their rejected manuscripts as arising from differences in disciplinary paradigms or genres with the journals they were submitting to. This relates with the observation that certain disciplinary biases are propagated by journal editors and reviewers because researchers have to fit into established practices when publishing, especially if their chosen approach is not shared by those who edit the major journals in the field (Billig 2013: 62).

Other discursive acts that emerged from the enactment of such publishing struggles take the form of accounting for why one is not cited as much as one wanted and more importantly, how not getting cited is not a reflection of the quality of one's research. Instead, respondents accounted for lesser-cited published output as a result of disciplinary misalignment (with the journal audiences) or personality attributes (William's "diffidence").

The struggles reported by researchers in this chapter are also embedded in the discourses of institutional and individual researcher's valuations of preferred publishing practices and modes of publications (journal articles as the most preferred over monographs or book chapters). Finally, there are also dissenting discourses from the mainstream ones about the limitations and competitiveness of academic publishing.

## Chapter 6 Struggles with research environments

Like any other professional occupation, academics also face struggles with the people they work with, the communities they are in and their research environments in general. Their struggles stem largely from incongruences between what they believe a good research environment should be like and what their institutional environments were actually like. Sometimes these struggles are constructed and understood as a misalignment in valuation discourses about the role of a university, the kinds of research that should be recognised and the kinds of provisions that should be accorded to academic researchers. In this chapter, I begin by examining how respondents construct their struggles with creating impact and their beliefs underlying the kinds of impact they want to create (6.1.1). 6.2 looks at researchers also struggle with not being to find interlocutors in their research environment, which relates with the discourse that researchers *need* to have interlocutors in order to produce good research (6.2.1). Finally, academics also struggle with bureaucracy (6.3) and this evokes discourses about administrative work as nuisance (6.3.1) and their beliefs about the purpose of universities (6.3.2).

### 6.1 Struggles with creating impact

#### Academic impact and disciplines

The struggles with creating impact come about from individual researchers' definitions of the kinds of impact that they aspire towards and this is often influenced by the disciplines they work in. Their beliefs about what counts as impact are connected with the discourses on what constitutes valuable research outcomes and the ways in which their research is worthwhile. In fact, this valuation could even extend to disciplines and how certain disciplines produce research that are deemed more impactful or important by the public or governments. Such a valuation could be seen in Emma's Excerpt 93.

**Excerpt 93 Emma\_20170105\_#00:31:22-9#**

- 1 I: How do you think others perceive your research?  
Emma: How it's being perceived? By other people?  
I: yah  
Emma: ((laughter in voice)) Yah yah This is- this is (.) ((change of tone))  
5 >**WHY DID you become a linguist! Nobody reads your work!**<  
((laughs))  
I: ((laughter in voice)) Oh really?

When asked about other people's perceptions of her work, Emma equated this question to one about why she became a linguist to the interviewer's surprise ( Excerpt 93 : 07). Taking on an admonishing tone of voice, she equated the interviewer's question to the self-denigrating perception of linguistics research: "This is 'Why did you become a linguist! Nobody reads your work!'" (4-5). This was akin to what Barnes and Moss termed as 'reported private thoughts' when speakers articulate either imaginary thoughts of others or their thoughts at a certain point in time, and use them as a "resource for handling everyday rational accountability in reporting and explaining actions and events" (Barnes & Moss 2007: 123). Emma's voicing was done partly in jest but also in accounting for the fact that her research was rather esoteric as she subsequently went on to explain what she described as "very niche" and "not world-changing" research on a medieval language (#00:32:19-9#).

**Impact as defined by institutions and the REF**

Beyond impact as defined by Emma as research that is read by people, Jodie's account in Excerpt 94 related with how institutions such as funding agencies and the REF defined as impact<sup>35</sup>. Her detailed listing of the many questions in the grant form (4-7) testified to the fact that there is growing institutional (i.e. universities, funding agencies and other organisations) importance ascribed to research impact and researchers increasingly need to be able to account for the

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<sup>35</sup> The Research Excellence Framework was the first exercise to assess the impact of research outside of academia. Impact was defined as 'an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia'. [Taken from HEFCE website: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/REFimpact/> ]

impact of their research. Her lament that had she known about this earlier, she might have chosen a different PhD topic (7-10) was similar to Felix's ruminations about selecting a topic that lends itself to public engagement (Excerpt 97 ).

**Excerpt 94 Jodie\_20170110\_#00:30:51-0#**

1 Jodie: And yah I do think about that that (fourth) criteria impact. And  
how:: (1.0) my research will show that beyond citations (count).  
Erm I do think about that. I applied for some funding I didn't get it.  
[...] And erm it was (xx) an ESRC<sup>36</sup> grant. And so obviously the  
5 ESRC go into real detail about the proposed impact, and how (.)  
the pathways to impact how you are going to make sure that the  
impact that you wanted to have happens for the right people. Erm  
(2.0) I kind of wished I had known about that before my PhD like  
the importance about impact because I might then have done  
10 something a bit different↑

Jodie's struggle highlighted a pervasive view of what funding agencies value, that is, the need to show that one's research is useful and this is supported by Luke's observations (Excerpt 95 : 12-13; 17-18).

**Excerpt 95 Luke\_20170112\_#00:43:57-7#**

10 Luke: Erm (.) there's also this perception that research has to be useful  
that I think that is taking over in the: especially in the UK and er (.)  
North America. So:: we're constantly being asked to: make  
arguments about impact and knowledge transfer and so on. (.)  
Erm (.) I think it's also harmful to the research environment  
15 because I think that (2.0) the university should be a place where  
people are entitled to pursue (3.0) knowledge for the sake of  
knowledge (.) not knowledge for the sake of: (.) building a gadget  
or informing some policy or something. >There's definitely room  
for that kind of (.) work too. But it's not clear to me that< erm (.) it  
20 should be (.) a yardstick to measure all university research by.  
And it's increasingly becoming like that I think.

Opining that the purpose of universities is to be "a place where people are entitled to pursue knowledge for the sake of knowledge not knowledge for the sake of building a gadget or informing some policy or something", Luke distinguished between blue-skies research versus applied research ( Excerpt 95 : 15-19). He was against what he perceived as the increasingly predominant view

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<sup>36</sup> ESRC stands for Economic and Social Research Council. It is one of several funding councils in the UK.

that all research needs to have applied outcomes or to be ‘useful’ in order to be worth doing (19-21). Luke’s view about the perceived deterrence on researchers from persisting with topics that do not reap immediate applicable outcomes was indeed true in Jodie’s case.

### ***6.1.1 Valuation of research impact***

Following the discourses evoked about researchers’ differing valuations of research outcomes (Section 5.1.1), one could imagine that this closely relates with their aspirations for the kinds of impact they want to create. Besides academic publications, this section examined discourses from several researchers who defined impact as engaging with the public and informing policymakers.

#### **Impact defined as engaging the public**

While the REF had led to the rising pressure to publish in journals with high impact factors, its definition of impact as reaching beyond academia also has ramifications in terms of how funding agencies select projects to sponsor. Certain funding grants may be awarded with the explicit requirement for research projects to communicate their results to the public, as testified by Felix when he described his current project to be “about communicating your research to a wider audience. To-to kind of a non-academic audience.” #00:12:29-8#).

In Excerpt 96, Felix explained how he had grown to accept the agenda from funding agencies where impact is defined as public engagement (1-4) and in fact, seemed to have internalized this rhetoric as seen in how he described its importance and his gravitation towards it (8-9).

**Excerpt 96 Felix\_20170720\_#00:20:29-1#**

1 Felix: [...] Erm to a wider audience. Er I've moved the last few years  
er:m (.) to public engagement I find this quite er: important↑ Er:m  
and it's something we're pushed into a little bit by the funding  
5 councils. How do you communicate to a wider audience. At first it  
was a learning curve for me. I had a XORC<sup>37</sup> funding er kind of  
fellowship f-f-four years ago where I had to write a short  
paragraph on public engagement how do you (.) engage the wider  
public and I found it quite difficult to write this but now er: I found  
I've grown into (.) the agenda quite naturally.

In fact, Felix does not only agree with the agenda but he seemed to be sufficiently convinced to promulgate it in Excerpt 97. Felix reformulated funding agencies' 'agenda' into a 'responsibility' that falls on all researchers to communicate their research to the public ("As researchers..." lines 25-26). He extended this responsibility beyond communicating research findings to the selection of research topics and his personal experience in deliberately choosing "a topic which lends itself to public communication" (30-35).

**Excerpt 97 Felix\_20170720\_#00:21:34-2#**

I: So you mentioned that you grow into the agenda very naturally, in  
what ways do you see yourself going into this er::?  
25 Felix: Er:m I think (.) As researchers we've got the responsibility to  
communicate what we do. Erm yes it is important that we meet as  
specialists to discuss (.) certain issues erm at very complex levels  
which sometimes might be difficult for others to understand [...]  
30 That is important but I think it is equally important for us to  
express ourselves in ways that are generally understood. Er and  
(1.0) when you pick a topic, erm you've got a choice. I mean I- I've  
got ten different ideas of things I'd like to do and things I'd like to  
have followed up but erm (.) I might have picked a topic (3.0) to  
some extent unconsciously but many more consciously a topic  
35 which lends itself to public communication. Er:: and in the end I  
just enjoy very much working with the general public. People are  
not who are not (.) er::m (.) I wouldn't say overly critical but people  
are just appreciative of (.) what you do (.) and to see a real (.) life  
(.) connection with what you do and for me that's quite satisfying  
40 as well when you write when you write something

In Excerpt 97 Felix continued to bolster his conviction by formulating it as a personal choice: "I just enjoy very working with the general public..." (36) and

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<sup>37</sup> Pseudonym for research council that is funding Felix's project.

personal motivation (“that’s quite satisfying...”) (35-40). Felix’s response is one way in which researchers reformulate institutional requirements into personal aims (Another example of reformulation is seen in Gabriel’s case in Chapter 5).

### **Impact defined as informing policy**

Another type of impact which respondents aspired towards was to effect changes in policy-making. This was the aim of Hugh and Matthew, both professors in education departments who perceived a struggle in their field of research to create this kind of impact because policy makers were not perceived as being receptive towards research.

In Excerpt 98 Matthew’s response to a question about obstacles to communicating research revealed his belief about the beleaguered status of researchers in the education field as compared to their counterparts in the medical sciences (25-29). The “problem” that education research had with not being taken seriously was reformulated as “a kind of disdain” and eventually to “not held in high esteem” (25-26). Matthew presented the juxtaposition between how the public reacts towards medical science research and education research by voicing their thoughts: “What’s the latest on cancer?” (29) and how people “turn to” (prosodic emphasis) medical science whereas they do not trust the research findings for questions such as: “What’s the latest research in language education?” (33-34).

Excerpt 98 Matthew\_20170112\_#00:11:09-7#

- 20 I: That relates to another question about communicating of research that I have. I was going to ask you do you see any obstacles or what do you see as obstacles in how researchers communicate their research?
- 25 Matthew: (hur hur) ERM I DO actually yah. Erm (2.0) ((tongue click)) Yah I think that there is a problem. In that (.) ((ahem)) There is a:: kind of a (.) disdain or: er: (.) Researchers aren't always held in high esteem unless you're in a medical profession er:: or some of the really kind of you know those professions where (.) SCIENCE (xx) People TURN TO research and say you know **What's the latest on cancer?** You know or?
- 30 I: Mmhm
- Matthew: But what's the latest on education? Erm (.) people don't-MIGHT say **you know what's the latest research in language education** °or something like that° but they don't (.) then trust it.
- 35 (.) In the same way as you know what's the latest research on cancer or what's the latest research on you know (.) AIDS or something. You know? I think that's erm (2.0) that's an obstacle. That education research (.) is not considered to be:: er authoritative you know for policy makers because (.) everybody thinks they know about education. Everybody thinks they know about education. So er: because everybody's been through it.
- 40

Matthew argued that policy makers do not consider education research as “authoritative” because “everybody thinks they know about education” ( Excerpt 98 : 38-42). This syntactic structure of various groups of people who “*think* they know about education” was repeated in this and the next excerpt. Consequently, the implication is that they do *not* actually know. Through the us-they positioning, Matthew drew a division between ‘we’ the education researchers versus ‘they’ the public and policy makers who disregard education research.

Furthering his point, Matthew’s response in Excerpt 99 enacted the disregard that education researchers have for the government. Employing a repetition of syntactic structure and prosodic emphasis in his comparison of both former and current government ministers’ reforms (“thought he knew what was needed” and “thinks she knows what’s best”), Matthew’s evaluative tone of the government was clear. Just as in the previous excerpt, the same rhetoric was evoked here— of a group of people who *think* they know but actually do not know.

**Excerpt 99 Matthew\_20170112\_#00:15:12-8#**

100 Matthew: The government thinks they know about education  
I: Ah [ ok I see  
Matthew: [ You know so erm: They have all been through education. So  
105 you know if you look at previous ministers in the UK (.) like [Name]  
for instance he was the one before this one. Erm you know he  
thought he knew what was needed you know. ERM yah-our  
current Prime Minister [Name] thinks she knows what's best.

Hugh alluded to the same kind of challenge that Matthew discussed when he described persuading policy makers as: "I think in this country in particular that's always a challenge." (#00:23:01-3#) Hugh was co-leading a large-scale interdisciplinary and cross-national research project that involved many academic researchers across various disciplines and also non-academic stakeholders. He believed that to make an impact with research was to have "the ear of policy makers even government ministers" in order to "make a difference" (#00:20:29-4#). Hugh delineated the ways of creating impact that he deemed as important in Excerpt 100.

**Excerpt 100 Hugh\_20161201\_#00:31:58-4#**

1 Hugh: Er::m so we ne::ed to (.) be making films, communicating our  
research through theatre, through the arts, we ne::ed to be having  
conversations with policy makers, we need to be involved with  
local politicians. We need to work collaboratively erm (.) with erm  
5 (.) people from from whole range of sectors (.) >not just disciplines  
but< sectors. So that we get our research findings out into the  
wor::ld and we don't just communicate with academics. It's almost  
it's not (.) it's not quite (.) pointless >of course academics need to  
need to< er::m (.) share their knowledge with each other for the  
10 greater advancement of knowledge  
I: Mm  
Hugh: That's important. But it only becomes important if that (.)  
enhanced knowledge informs (2.0) the world, informs policy,  
informs er::m practice, and erm and informs people. [...] I think  
15 academic research has to really change the way it presents its  
research outcomes. So that erm >AND I'm not I'm not talking  
about ticking the boxes< on impact ((laughs)) for the REF.  
((laughter in voice)) That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking  
about really:: finding ways to to (.) erm (.) RE-present our  
20 research (.) so that it speaks to people. If it's important, (1.0) we  
ought to be able to do that. If we can't do it, then maybe it wasn't  
too important in the first place.

Hugh's earlier perception of academic journals as very limited avenues of communicating research (Section 6.2.2) was followed by his advocacy for disseminating research findings to wider audiences beyond academia here in

Excerpt 100. “Having conversations with policy makers” and “[involving] local politicians” was top on his list. Hugh was clear about his stance that researchers should not just communicate within the academic community (7; 19-20) but he acknowledged that there is a mainstream expectation of academics to “share their knowledge with each other for the greater advancement of knowledge” (8-10). While he conceded that this was important, he continued by reasserting his stance that research “*only becomes* important if that enhanced knowledge informs the world, informs policy, informs er:m practice, and erm and informs people” (12-15). However, he was quick to show that he was aware that this definition of impact could sound similar to the REF by asserting that his stance was not taken to fulfil REF’s requirements (“ticking the boxes” 17-18). In Hugh’s formulation, research becomes only important if it could inform the masses. His final comment: “If it’s important, we ought to be able to do that. If we can’t do it, then maybe it wasn’t too important in the first place” (20-22) went as far as to equate the importance of research with its ability to be communicated to the masses.

Thus it could be seen that impact as perceived by Felix, Hugh and Matthew seemed to relate to public engagement and making research accessible to the masses and policymakers; and to a large extent, emphasizing the appliedness of research. This is quite different from the conception of impact by other respondents like Luke, who supported blue-skies research (14-15) as seen in Excerpt 101.

**Excerpt 101 Luke\_20170112\_#00:45:52-4#**

1 Luke: Well we should be able to research a question simply because it’s an interesting question.  
 I: Mmhm  
 5 Luke: Even if we have no idea if it’s gonna (3.0) pay off in terms of policy or technology or any other sort of application. Because >you know certainly in the past there have been< (.) advancements in knowledge that have had no obvious application but then (.) you know a decade or two sometimes four decades later (.) it has very important applications. But if the applications were driving the  
 10 research↑ that research would never have been done because when it was done the applications weren’t there. Right?=  
 I: =mmhm

Luke seemed to refer to all researchers, or at least the interviewer, with an inclusive 'we' in stating that "we should be able to research a question simply because it's an interesting question" (1-2). Like his previous argument against REF's incentivising of short-term research ( Excerpt 92), Luke draws upon common sense reasoning in rationalising how scientific advancements in the past would not have materialised since they "had no obvious application" until decades later (4-11). In this excerpt, implicit shared understanding was created with "you know" (Stubbe & Holmes 1995) and his tag question "Right?" to check if I was following his argument, thereby consolidating his point.

## 6.2 Struggles with finding interlocutors

As aforementioned, the idea that researchers need to have their research read and cited by the academic community in order to for ideas to take flight is commonly shared (Alf in Excerpt 85). Researchers often believe that academic impact is demonstrated through how much one's published output gets cited and this often relates with finding interlocutors.

Readers may remember William who lamented his lack of interlocutors because he was not working in a 'popular' or core area in his discipline ( Excerpt 58 ) but remained staunch about not changing his research topic. A key reason William gave for not being cited much ( 5.2 Struggles with being cited ) was his lack of interlocutors. In Excerpt 102, he rationalised this as a common phenomenon that plagues the majority of academics with the preface: "I do think that many academics feel these days..." (45-49). By phrasing his observation to sound like a generalisation, he seemed to evoke a common perception about academics being too overworked to devote time to having academic conversations. He supported this with his personal experience: "I almost never have an academic conversation with my colleagues. I almost never have a discussion of ideas, a debate about different perspectives and so on and so on", which he repeated in both syntactic structure and prosodic emphasis (50-52) to make his point.

### Excerpt 102 William\_20160614\_#00:20:34-9#

William: So er::m that's what I mean by interlocutors and I think to me:: (.)  
to me to me:: that's something I really value because it's  
45 something that's quite rare. [...] But (.) but I do think er:: many  
academics feel these days (.) that they spend an awful lot of time  
er::m doing admin, er:: managing their teaching and students (.)  
And NOT doing much talking to:: other academics about  
50 academic matters. I almost never have (.) an academic  
conversation with my colleagues. I almost never have (.) a  
discussion of ideas, a debate about different perspectives and so  
on and so on.

The notion that interlocutors and disciplinary communities are interlinked is confirmed in Excerpt 103 when William accounted for his struggle by referring to a lack of departments working on theology and philosophy in his institution.

**Excerpt 103 William\_20160614\_#00:23:01-5#**

- William: [...] But certainly in the concrete I would like more interlocutors and it's difficult to find them at times. Or often it's difficult to find.
- 70 I: Er did you find more interlocutors in *Western University*<sup>38</sup>?
- William: ((intake of breath )) ER::M yes (.) Yes I did and that's another kind of dilemma for me because a lot of my work overlaps with:: theology and philosophy. And erm er here in Southbank, ((laughter in voice)) neither (.) neither discipline exists.

By stating that neither disciplines of theology and philosophy “exist” in Southbank (Excerpt 103: 73-74) with a tinge of laughter in his voice, William seemed to be indirectly critical of his institution for not having departments in these respective disciplines but also that these disciplines are *not* regarded as important enough to be relegated institutional recognition. William's struggle seemed to affirm the observation that disciplines are socially constructed and in this case, ‘created’ through institutional organisation (Section 2.3.3).

### **6.2.1 Researchers' beliefs about the need for interlocutors**

As discussed earlier in Excerpt 30 (Section 5.2 Struggles with being cited), not finding interlocutors at BAAL made John less certain about claiming the ‘linguist’ disciplinary label. Having interlocutors seemed to be a criterion or a ‘soft’ category when researchers evaluate themselves or others as falling into a particular discipline. Thus the need for interlocutors seemed almost a quintessential part of being an academic researcher and as a result, the provision of such networks is a necessary criterion of a good research environment.

In Luke's comparison between the two universities which he works at (Northland in the UK and Nuver in North America), he remarked how Northland is a better “home” for his kind of idiosyncratic research than Nuver (Luke: I feel like it has a better home here (.) than at Nuver. So I- (.) re- (.) research wise I'm definitely happier at Northland than I was at Nuver. #00:28:20-6#).

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<sup>38</sup> Pseudonym for the university where William did his PhD.

One of the reasons for this was that interdisciplinarity is fostered more naturally or “organically” at Northland than Nuver (#00:33:17-0#). Luke described North American universities as such: “you tend to be sort of ghettoised in your own department, you don’t have many opportunities typically for meeting people outside your department” (Luke\_20170112\_#00:30:52-8#) although he admitted that this was not the case in his department at Nuver. Continuing with this spatial metaphor of disciplines as ghettos in Excerpt 104, Luke constructed the notion of ‘bridges’ in good research environments that facilitated collaboration and network building.

**Excerpt 104 Luke\_20170112\_#00:35:17-9#**

- 1 Luke: Er:: So I do. So I think there are these sort of (1.0) disciplinary silos in North American universities that you have to: explicitly bridge. Whereas here<sup>39</sup> the bridges are all there and (.) it’s much easier to just explore it on your own.
- 5 I: °I see. Ok° Silos? As in?  
Luke: Oh er. (1.0) Like er each department stands on its own  
I: Alright [ ok  
Luke: [ and is mainly sorta inward looking. And may:be people will have their collaborators through their normal research
- 10 networks at other universities or whatever but within the university there isn’t necessarily a lot of collaboration.

Luke defined “disciplinary silos” in North American universities as synonymous with “inward looking” (8) departments that “stand on [their] own” (6) and a general lack of collaboration within the university (10-11). Using the metaphor “bridges” in contrast with “silos”, Luke depicted Northland as an institution that is more supportive of collaboration and thus a more conducive research environment for researchers (1-4).

The accounts from William and Luke seemed to show that researchers are dependent to some extent on their institutions for provisions of the necessary networks and opportunities to find interlocutors and collaborators. This relates with researchers’ beliefs about the role and purpose of the university in the next section.

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<sup>39</sup> Here refers to Northland University in UK.

## 6.3 Struggles with bureaucracy

It is known fact that full academic positions in most universities would require academics to split their time between teaching, research and administrative work. Administrative work is often perceived by respondents as the least favourite aspect of their work and is often described as something that takes researchers away from their research. For instance William described his typical workload as such: “Er:: I do a lot of administration, er::m I do some teaching and whenever I can I fit it in I do my research.” (#00:05:24-1#)

In enacting his struggle with bureaucracy, John employed self-deprecating and subversive humour in Excerpt 105. He began by ‘confessing’ to be “not a very diligent administrator” and with laughter in his voice, voiced a sarcastic thought that mocked the importance of administrative work (4-5). John’s sarcasm in this case is an example of subversive humour often used in implicit criticism (Schnurr & Rowe 2008).

### Excerpt 105 John\_20161109\_#00:20:20-3#

- 1 John: The administrative stuff ((laughter in voice)) I’m not a very diligent administrator. I do it because I HAVE to and that’s how you get things done in the university. It’s not something that er::m (.) I kind of **OH it’s been an interesting and important bit of what I**
- 5 **do.** I try to shirk that and get away from it as much as possible. ((resumes serious voice)) But:: I-inevitably working in a:: institution, I ha::ve (.) institutional roles er::m (.) er:: (.) whi::ch er::m er:: (I’d been) head of group I’ve been head of department and:: (.) currently I have the role of developing impact case
- 10 studies for the REF (.) which actually suits me very well er I think they-they have done quite well. Er::m (.) er:: in terms of finding er::m (.) er a role for me that suits me
- [...]
- 20 So I do do the administrative stuff. But yes it’s it’s (.) those-those the things that get pushed behind the desk before eventually I have to do it because someone (.) (has) asked for something to be done three times and I can’t escape ((laughs)) things like that.

As professor and head of a research centre at Southbank, the implicitness of John’s subversive humour was necessary because he occupied a managerial and senior position at his institution where “administrative stuff” was forced upon him in his role (prosodic emphasis on ‘have’) ( Excerpt 105 : 1-3). In reality, administrative work was something he tried to shirk from (5; 20-23). However, he

resumed a serious voice almost akin to an institutional voice when he said: “But I inevitably working in a institution I have institutional roles” (6-9) and listed his past and present administrative roles.

John’s struggle emerged through the sense of being positioned as an administrator who had to deal with “administrative stuff” and manage people subordinate to him (20-23) and yet at the same time, was being ‘managed’ by others in an increasingly managerial culture of universities. This was alluded to when John described “they” or the management as having “done quite well” by assigning him with what he felt was a suitable role of developing impact case studies for the REF (10-12).

### ***6.3.1 Administrative work as nuisance***

John’s construction of administrative work as nuisance seemed to be a general belief shared among a number of respondents, including my exchange with Alf about his troubles getting furniture for his office ( Excerpt 10 ). Gabriel also raised the issue of administrative work as one of the pressures on his time as he juggled publishing with teaching and the administrative work that came with being a lecturer ( Excerpt 69 ). Bucking the trend, Isla referred to this shared discourse even as she countered it. Unlike the majority of respondents, Isla was the only respondent who indicated that she took on more administrative work by choice and she challenged what other respondents have constructed as the typical academic’s aversion towards administrative work.

In response to a question about her academic activity, Isla described her teaching and management workload and having to squeeze her research into the remaining amount of time (Excerpt 106 : 1-4). While Isla seemed to confirm the interviewer’s upshot of administrative work as something “inevitable” (5-7) at first, she proceeded to challenge this in a partial disagreement: “Ah I would say the administration is partly inevitable, but partly by choice” (10-11).

**Excerpt 106 Isla\_20160323\_#00:01:46-9#**

- 1 Isla: And of course my own research in writing which I've just finished a paper and sent it off over the weekend er: >you know which< tends to get squeezed into the little pockets of time that I have but it's still an important part of my-of who I am, °I think°
- 5 I: Ok I see. So the main focus is still on teaching, and of course the administrative is inevitable (you have) the management, and then you do your research.
- Isla: [ yup
- I: [ yah
- 10 Isla: AH I would say the administration is:: partly inevitable, but partly by choice.
- I: Mmhm ↑
- Isla: because er:: I don't dislike it.

Isla acknowledged the assumption that there are indeed academics who find administrative work a nuisance (Excerpt 107 : 15-16) but set herself apart from them because she did not dislike administrative work. In fact her stance on administrative work grew more positive in the subsequent turns from not disliking it to actually enjoying and gaining satisfaction from doing it (23-24). Isla reformulated administrative work from nuisance to a “mess” that she could “make...into a success” and a “challenge” that she would take up (25-31). Through this reformulation, she positioned herself as a competent and efficient administrator.

**Excerpt 107 Isla\_20160323\_#00:01:46-9#**

- 15 Isla: Er::m you know er-some (.) academics I know view er:: administrative work as a nuisance.
- I: Mmhm
- Isla: I don't. I view it as an opportunity (.) er::m to make things better. er:: to make systems better to make er: things work better work more efficiently er::m [...] you know I think things can have better systems er: you know it can operate better, and more efficiently. And I think I'm a very organised person so:: >you know I< I bring that (.) to (.) my (.) administrative jobs (.) and enjoy them and get (.) great satisfaction when things go well. Er:m so I'll take on an administrative job (.) usually because the thing is a mess.
- 20
- 25 I: Oh ((laughs))
- Isla: and tidy it up. ((laughs)) ER::m you know and make it a success and then I move on (.) to the next (.) thing. That is >you know< that needs er:: (.) needs some attention. And I view those things as challenges rather than nuisances rather than nuisance thing
- 30 that one has to do.

Given that Isla became head of the linguistics department several months after the interview, Isla's positioning was understandable. The role of administrator was a significant part of her identity as an academic researcher.

### **6.3.2 Discourses about the business of universities**

Besides the struggles researchers have with juggling research on top of the teaching and administrative workload, frustration can also come from tensions arising between individual beliefs and the institution's beliefs about "the business of the university", in William's words. The business of a university referred to the bureaucratic outlook of a university or what it sees as its purpose. Academics at Southbank were exhorted to boost "employability records" in order for the university to rank more highly on "league tables" ("we're all told to pursue that that sort of goal"). But this goes against William's belief in what a university education should be like (Excerpt 108 : 5-6). There is also a sense here that there was a strong institutional imposition on academics there to pursue goals like "professional preparation" and "employability records". William's struggle could be understood to arise from how "an academic's identity is influenced in its construction to achieve governmental and managerial aims, rather than primarily scholarly objectives" (Billot 2010: : 718).

#### **Excerpt 108 William\_20160614\_#00:27:41-8#**

1 William: Southbank sees itself as a university that prepares students for  
professional life and is very proud of its employability record and  
because employability records are very important to league tables  
these days. You know we're all told to pursue that that sort of  
5 goal. I mean that in itself is er::m er (1.0) that kind of runs counter  
to to what I want to do in a university. Because to me er::m (2.0)  
to me of course professional preparation is important. But er::m  
you know er::m (.) I think ideas are important! I think learning how  
to analyse ask questions I think that's really important. [...] I-I-I  
10 would kind (.) I wou-would-would be much happier I guess in a  
faculty where people were (1.0) erm ready for:: (.) intellectual  
pursuits where (.) it might not have any immediate (.) professional  
outcome. Because I think (.) I think that's the business of the  
university.

While William conceded that enhancing students' employability is important, he believed firmly that having ideas, asking questions are important skills too. In

stating his preference for a faculty which values “intellectual pursuits” that may not result in “any immediate professional outcome”, he presented a dichotomy between institutions like Southbank that prioritised employability and other institutions that prioritised intellectual pursuits (10-14).

As William drew the link between employability with a growing utilitarianism in his institutional culture (Excerpt 109 : 16-19), his formulation of his contention with his institution’s beliefs grew stronger as the turns unfolded. While he had previously described institutional beliefs as “run[ning] counter” to “what he wanted to do in a university” (Excerpt 108 : 5-6), the utilitarian culture that he perceived in Southbank made “[his] blood boil” (19) in this excerpt.

**Excerpt 109 William\_20160614\_#00:29:15-0#**

15 William: Er::m but I I sort of feel (1.0) I sort of feel that that er::m (.) I mean  
th-this is in- in that sense the university increasingly reflects (.) the  
culture which only see::s (.) only wants to value:: things that are::  
er::m you know useful (.) and utilitarian. An::d and you know I  
20 (1.0) that makes my blood boil you know. I-I-I took (.) to me (.) to  
me (.) I-I I would (.) er::m what I want to see in my student is is a  
mind that becomes alive! And becomes interested in things. Not  
because they’re useful (.) or that they can exploit them. But  
because they are confronting a wider world!  
[...]  
30 I just don’t think (.) **How much can I earn?** (.) is that important a  
question. I mean of course it’s an important question you know I I I  
got my mortgage to pay, I got my bills to pay. But I-you know I just  
think human beings are made for something more than that.

**William’s argument for nobler aims in tertiary education grew increasingly passionate as seen in his prosodic emphasis on what he would like to see in his students (“a mind that becomes alive!” 20-21) and his voicing of a common bread-and-butter question: “How much can I earn?” His positioning shifted quickly here from conceding the importance of employment with his self-repair: “I mean of course it’s an important question...” to reiterate his stance that “human beings are made for something more...” (30-33). William’s argument for a less utilitarian and more idealistic purpose for tertiary education could be seen to mirror the professional frustration that he faced in**

Excerpt 110.

**Excerpt 110 William\_20160614\_#00:30:18-9#**

35 William: And and so:: er::mm yah there's this kind of frustration I get in my professional life, which is linked to my disciplinary er wandering ((laughter in voice)) Er::m you know and er::m (.) BUT of course you need to make accommodations with (.) the realities in front of you. The FACT is that I haven't got a job in *University A or B or C or D*. Maybe where some of these conversations happen. But I  
40 would like to see. Er:: but rather I'm here at Southbank. You know (.) where:: bureaucracy comes first. And then er:: (.) ((laugh)) practicality comes second. And only intellec- you know intellectual inquiry comes kinda third you know.

**While he had stated that he would be happier in a faculty that valued intellectual pursuits (**

Excerpt 110), he admitted that at the end of the day, one has to “make accommodations with the realities in front of you”. Having to support a young family, William had shared his concerns about leaving his job at Southbank earlier in the interview and it is against this context that his struggles were enacted (36-40). In the interview, William had presented himself to be a family-oriented academic and his family played a role in determining his career trajectory. For instance, William's immediate response to the first question about his biographical background was to name himself a husband and father (Appendix 5 First responses). His struggle needs to be understood against this context where his ability to move to a different institution seemed relatively limited (because of family obligations) and yet he was unhappy working at his current institution.

**Academic autonomy**

Similar to William, Luke had advocated for the university to be a place for blue-skies research earlier in Excerpt 21. Besides blue-skies research, Luke believed that universities should resist corporatisation (“you know if corporations want to work on applied research then fine but increasingly I'm finding that (2.0) the corporate model is taking over the university as well.” Luke\_20170112\_##00:45:52-4#). A natural extension of a university supportive of blue-skies research would be one that provides researchers with the autonomy to pursue whatever kinds of questions they are interested in. Such a research environment would be one that is attractive to researchers as seen in Luke's comparison between Northland and Nuver. Luke perceived Northland to provide

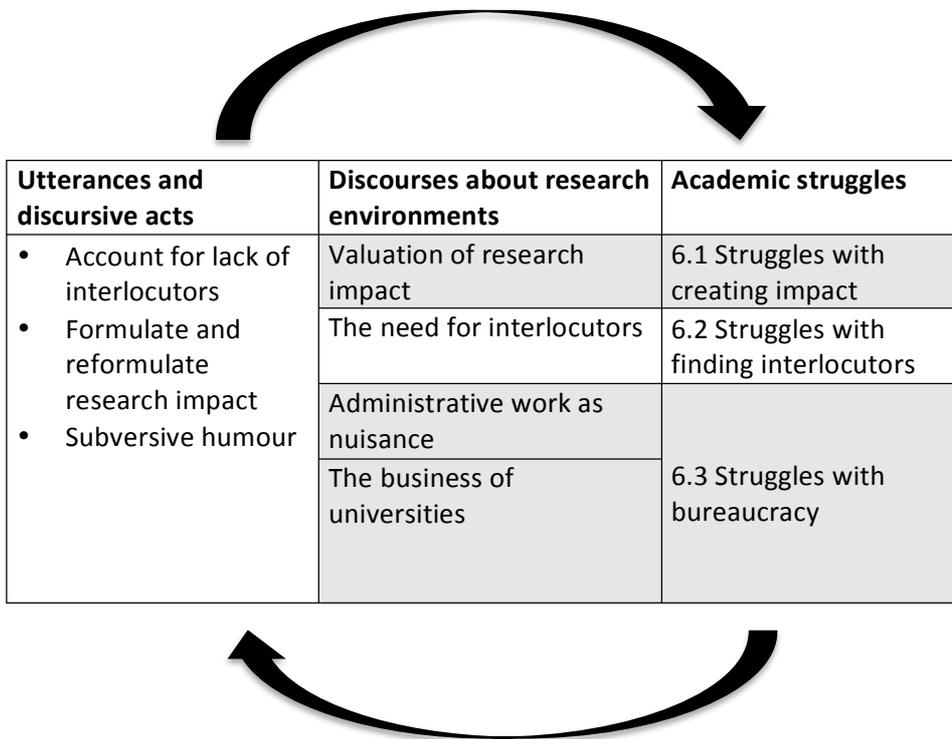
more academic autonomy in terms of a “flatter hierarchy” and allowing researchers to pursue their own interests (Excerpt 111 : 1-4).

**Excerpt 111 Luke\_20170112\_00:25:04-5#**

1 Luke: Whereas here it's got-there's much flatter hierarchy (.) and I think  
people are left to kind of do their own thing much more here. (3.0)  
Erm (4.0) so:: (3.0) I feel like I have more: independence here  
than I do at Nuver. Er:: (2.0) I also feel like erm (5.0) maybe this  
5 sounds like a pejorative way of putting it but idiosyncratic research  
is more valued here (.) erm than it is at Nuver er:: (6.0) I think it's  
a question of institutional confidence↑ I mean Northland is  
obviously a big university whereas Nuver is not. It's a relatively  
young university it's just turning seventy five this year. And: I think  
10 at Northland there's this perception that **Well if you managed to  
get a job at Northland then: (.) who are we to tell you what  
you should be doing?** (.) Whereas at Nuver, we need to do all  
this kind of strategic planning in order to: (1.0) erm (2.0) better  
our reputation and our standing in the university world and so on.

Readers may remember that Luke had positioned his “idiosyncratic” research as located at the interdisciplinary periphery of disciplines (**Excerpt 45**). Besides academic autonomy, it was also the institutional recognition for his research that made him perceive Northland as a better home for his kind of research (3-6). Luke accounted for this recognition by comparing the level of “institutional confidence” between Nuver and Northland. This comparison was made in the context that Northland was a more established and reputable university than Nuver. By voicing the imaginary institutional stance at Northland (10-12), Luke seemed to imply that researchers in Northland were perhaps subjected to less auditing mechanisms because the institution had less to prove in terms of research evaluation.

## Conclusion to Chapter 6



**Figure 13 Discursive model (Research environments)**

The struggles discussed in this chapter arise from issues that researchers faced with various aspects of research environments namely: creating impact with their research, finding interlocutors and managing the demands of bureaucracy in their institutions. These struggles are embedded in discourses about the valuation of different kinds of research impact, the provisions that institutions could make for researchers in terms of collaborative opportunities and interlocutors; and how institutions could foster research environments that allowed for more academic autonomy and less bureaucratic demands.

Other struggles arise from difficulties in creating the kinds of impact that researchers aspire to achieve. These may have to do with public opinion or governmental stances towards research. For instance, education researchers perceive a general disregard for their work and hence they have greater impetus

to inform policy makers with their findings. Their struggles are often constructed through us-they positioning practices where divisions are drawn between those with knowledge and expertise and those without.

Some of these struggles emerged from tensions between expectations that researchers have of their research environments and the realities that they are faced with (eg William). The incongruence between institutional beliefs and the individual researcher's beliefs about the purpose of universities, research and the role of academics could cause much frustration to researchers. Such struggles are sometimes constructed through direct criticism of the institution or indirectly, through the use of subversive humour.

## Chapter 7 Discussion

This study set out to examine the experiences of academic researchers working in linguistics and language-related fields in British universities. It found a red thread running through the researchers' experiences, that is, struggles in the academic profession. It elucidated the enactment of struggles around three key facets of academic life – disciplines, publishing and research environments. This thesis proposed the use of a discursive model to examine how academic struggles are enacted through the interviews. They are enacted by how respondents position themselves vis-à-vis others and through a negotiation of meaning with the interviewer. This process of meaning-making often required tacit knowledge and evoked shared (or sometimes unshared) discourses about academia between interview participants. It is found that these discourses often revolved around different valuation beliefs of what constitute worthwhile research, kinds of research impact, good academic practices and research environments by researchers and institutions.

In this chapter, I discuss three key contributions of this study. Firstly, I discuss the knowledge contribution towards the kinds of discourses surrounding academic valuation, or in other words, the beliefs and ideas that academic researchers have about what they value, what institutions value; and even what other stakeholders in higher education or the public value. Given that this is a qualitative case study on researchers working in applied linguistics, I discuss what they particularly value in terms of positioning themselves as applied linguists. Secondly, I elaborate on the kinds of academic struggles that are often observed among early career researchers. Thirdly, I discuss the contribution made towards the study of how academic identities are constructed discursively. Finally, I will ruminate on some limitations of the study and possible future directions.

## **7.1 Contribution to academic valuation discourses**

### **Valuation discourses lie at the root of academic struggles**

This study has shown that valuation lies at the heart of many kinds of discourses about academia. Academic evaluation takes many forms as can be seen in the myriad of implicit valuation discourses relating to all three facets of academic life. Researchers constantly evaluate which kinds of research outcomes are more worthwhile, the kinds of research impact they aspire towards, the modes of publications that are more valuable and certain attributes of research environments that appeal to them. As discussed in Chapter 2, such valuation discourses are “interpretative repertoires” (Edley 2001a ; Wetherell 1998) which researchers draw upon to make sense of their social realities and to account for their struggles. Hence this study makes a contribution towards a discursive exploration of how academic categories and valuation practices are enacted through talk. Angermuller (2017) provided a discursive perspective on how academic careers are organised by categories which define “who academics are (subjectivation) and what they are worth (valuation)”. This study takes a closer look at how some academic categories such as disciplinary labels and practitioner-researcher labels are employed in talk by academics in linguistics and language-related fields. To some extent, researchers’ valuation systems could be influenced by institutional valuation especially REF-related requirements and the preferences of funding councils. Their struggles emerged when there are incongruences between what they value as individual researchers and what the institution value.

### **Academic categories and disciplinary labels**

Defining their disciplinary labels according to the demands of the job market or the departments that they currently are working at, researchers are constantly negotiating their disciplinary positioning throughout their careers. The fluidity of disciplinary labels can be seen in how they are used to fulfil researchers’ communicative goals and situational needs (Brew 2008 ; Pinch 1990). Claiming a label also depends on their varying degrees of certainty towards a discipline and confidence in asserting her/his disciplinary affiliation (Clara, John). It is found that researchers often engage in this kind of academic evaluation of self and others in terms of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ categories (Cf. Angermuller 2017). So for instance, a

researcher's disciplinary positioning is evaluated based on factors such as educational backgrounds, institutional affiliations, the interlocutors they have and which journals they have published in. Researchers' demarcations of disciplines also vary according to contextual needs and they often used labels to self-position and also position others by categorising what falls within or beyond their disciplines. There are also, what I described as, 'disciplinary-resistant' respondents who explicitly challenged the need to be labelled or positioned in a single discipline or the need for disciplinary labels. These acts of self-positioning are analysed through polyphonic utterances (ScaPoLine in David's case) to reveal the unseen voices or mainstream discourses that they seemed to be resisting. It is observed that even 'disciplinary-resistant' researchers mobilise labels to fulfil their rhetorical goals although they challenge the use of labels (David, Alf). For instance, in accounting for why he was rejected by Rizona, Alf positioned the Rizona linguistics department as a "traditional linguistics" (his words) department and thus less accepting of his kind of research profile.

### ***7.1.1 Comparison of blue skies versus applied research***

#### **What makes research worthwhile**

Justifying the worth of one's research and defining the field in which one's research is located in that seem to preoccupy ECRs more prominently than researchers at other career stages. This strongly relates with researchers' beliefs about what kinds of research are valued and what respondents perceived as institutional expectations and employability. This is seen in their formulations of what makes worthwhile research, be it to benefit industries and professional needs such as therapy and education or to record a dying language for posterity. Their formulations of what makes worthwhile research also reflect two main camps of thought in terms of the valuation of research— applied or 'strategic' research versus blue-skies research. Such discourses about what kinds of research are valued over others could be observed amongst researchers from different fields across different career stages. This could imply that they are drawing upon larger discourses or common interpretative repertoires about what makes research worthwhile. It is likely then that recognising why some research is perceived as more valued than others depends on a shared interpretative

repertoire. To some degree, the interviewer herself is also part of this interpretative process and shares this repertoire.

Despite their disciplinary backgrounds, respondents share certain ideas of research as falling in two broad categories: useful versus blue-skies research. They seemed to draw an imaginary line between applied research and basic research in their positioning of one's research as falling within one or the other category. Peter acknowledged that it was the autonomy to "research interesting questions" (basic research) that drew him to academia even though his inclination was to pursue research that reaped applied research outcomes than theoretical ones. Respondents, particularly those from applied linguistics and education departments, commonly drawn upon the rationale that their research can reap applied outcomes (e.g. therapy, pedagogical findings) or resonate with the masses (e.g. language learning and education) in order to justify it (elaborated in Section 7.1.2). Researchers like Peter and Zoe aspire towards applied outcomes for medical industries and information technology. Some others define impactful research as those that inform policies (Matthew, Hugh) and to engage with the public (Felix, Hugh). They refer to real-life applications of research either implicitly or explicitly as a benchmark to assess their own research as 'accessible' (Matthew) or 'good' (Eric) and valued by their respective academic communities and also draw upon the rhetoric of benefitting humanity to justify their research (Vivian).

Underlying this rationale was also the idea that the researcher has volition in 'transforming' their research (Matthew) or choosing a topic (Felix) that could be communicated more easily to lay audiences. This belief in the researcher's volition is sometimes articulated as a responsibility of researchers (Felix, Zoe, Peter) and has effects on how ECRs develop their research programme after the PhD research topic.

In contrast to the notion that research needs to be useful in order to be justifiable, there exists an argument for researchers to pursue any question as long as it is interesting. For instance, Luke made a distinction between 'useful'

research and blue-skies research. Employing rhetoric appealing to common sense, he argued that many scientific discoveries that were proven useful today were embarked upon without researchers knowing their possibilities for application. In his view, pursuing only applied or useful research would result in a narrowing of knowledge pursuit in academia. Respondents like William and Luke believe that universities should be places where researchers are entitled to pursue knowledge for the sake of knowledge and where students are encouraged to learn knowledge that goes beyond reaping practical results or for finding employment. They tend to defy the growing expectations of universities these days to prepare students for employment or make tangible contributions to society. Unlike respondents from applied linguistics and education departments, William and Luke hailed from humanities and cognitive science backgrounds respectively. Their disciplinary backgrounds could have much to do with their beliefs in support of basic research.

The notions of 'blue skies' and applied research are supported by studies about the "increasingly dominant concept of 'strategic research'" adopted by institutions in the 1980s as opposed to 'pure science' or 'basic' or 'pure' research (Henkel 2005: 160). Readers will also notice that the valuation of what makes a worthwhile research topic has much to do with institutional discourse about the kinds of research that the institution believes in and encourages. The nationwide REF plays a part in institutional and individual appraisal of good research and what research outcomes are more favoured over others. The recent definition of impact in REF 2014 has left an indelible impression that impact of research needs to go beyond academia. Hence, public discourses about the use of academic research and academia have also come into play.

Besides co-constructing these valuation discourses, one may also wonder if the interviewer played a part in influencing the ways in which respondents justify their research with this 'appliedness' rationale. The possibility of this is low as seen from the fact that words like "blue-skies" or the notion of applied research outcomes came from respondents in the interviews. It was Luke who first made the comparison between blue-skies versus useful research. Moreover, the

interview did not set out a priori to elicit what kinds of research are valued from the respondents.

### **7.1.2 What researchers in applied linguistics value**

Researchers who self-identify and position themselves as working in applied linguistics tend to foreground the need for their research to have applied outcomes as compared to researchers in linguistics or other fields. Applied linguistics researchers tend to perceive research as something that needs to be made “accessible” (Matthew) to the public either in terms of research outcomes or teaching materials (Peter, Isla); or something that could be understood easily by lay audiences (Eric). This relates with how many researchers in applied linguistics hold the belief that their research needs to reap applications or findings that could inform professional practice. This is evident from the descriptions of many applied linguistics journals and organisations as concerned with “practical problems of language and communication” and “language-related issues”; and who strove to produce research for “real-world problems” in which language plays an important role (Hellermann 2015). In fact, this is one of two main definitions of applied linguistics that many understand the field by, the other being a field that holds linguistics as its core (Choi & Richards 2017b). It is notable that like some other applied disciplines, some applied linguistics-related journals and conferences cater to practitioners, besides academics, such as the TESOL Quarterly for teachers of English and the Journal of Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice (JALPP) that examined communication-related issues in some professions such as healthcare for example. However, others working in the applied linguistics field have grown further and further apart from the belief that linguistics is not the only relevant discipline, and increasingly “not even the principal one” to applied linguistics (Mauranen 2015: 489). Nor are educational theory or language learning and teaching the key interests that drive most of applied linguistics research (Cook 2015 ; Hall et al. 2011 ; Mauranen 2015).

It is also observed that some respondents foreground their ‘practitioner’ or ‘teacher’ identities as something that they prioritize before their researcher identities (Eric, Isla, Hilda). This relates strongly with the history of applied linguistics as having evolved from a field primarily concerned with English

language teaching and teaching training to a field that has diversified interests beyond language teaching today. This valuation of the practitioner identity over the researcher identity by applied linguists is elaborated on in Section 7.3.

### ***7.1.3 Valuation discourses accounting for struggles with publishing***

Embedded in the struggles of being rejected by journals are discourses about the gate-keeping power of journals. Existing literature has often argued that blind peer reviewers and journal editors could act as gate-keepers of disciplines and thus influence the development of disciplines (Abbott 2001; Becher & Trowler 2001; Hyland 2012). Such discourses are enacted in the researchers' perceptions of peer reviewers who do not share their disciplinary backgrounds and thus reject their manuscripts. In Jodie's case, the gate-keeping power of journals could even dissuade an ECR from continuing in her original field and to try to shift her research into other fields that were less "theoretically-guarded". To some extent, many of the struggles discussed in this thesis stemmed from a need of academic researchers to communicate their research successfully to their intended audiences so that it could be ratified and recognised as important or making a contribution to knowledge.

Besides fulfilling institutional and REF-related requirements, some researchers like Gabriel and Natasha reformulated getting published as a way of gaining acceptance by one's institutional and disciplinary community (Gabriel, Natasha). Respondents accounted for their publishing struggles by evoking discourses about journals as gate-keepers and sometimes even obstacles to communicating research; and the 'publish or perish' anxiety (Knights & Clarke 2014). Writers account for the rejection of their manuscripts as misalignment with what they perceived as the disciplinary paradigms or genres enforced by the journals (Jane, Emma, John). The struggle with not being cited was also accounted for by referring to disciplinary positioning and character traits (William) and not because of publication quality. For some researchers, being cited is closely related with academic impact (Alf) and having interlocutors (William). This gives rise to

discourses about the 'role of scientists' (Alf) and such observations are often constructed as truisms about what researchers ought to be.

### **Academic publications valued over other kinds of research outcomes**

Valuable research outcomes are synonymous with academic influence and impact and to most of my respondents, this equates with publications. Publishing is such a deeply entrenched academic practice that all who wishes to gain entry into academia has to play by the rules of this game. However, there were a few respondents in my data pool who aspired towards alternative research outcomes such as teaching materials (Isla) or real world applications (Peter). A few other respondents argued that academic publishing is a limited and ineffective avenue of communicating research especially to the masses (Ben, Hugh).

A small group of researchers in my pool of data interpreted research outcomes to include producing knowledge that can inform practitioners, policy-makers and the public. For respondents who see themselves as practitioner-researchers, they view 'practical' research outcomes such as teaching materials (Isla) and findings that can inform professionals to be valuable (John). Hugh and Matthew, who both work in education fields, perceive impact as informing policy-makers. As discussed in Chapter 4, researchers who believe in research having to be 'useful' would interpret research outcomes as feeding into innovations or technologies that could aid professionals and industries (Peter, Zoe).

Some publishing struggles are embedded in discourses about the valuation of certain publishing practices. Given that publishing is such an important academic activity, there exist different kinds of valuation beliefs. For instance, Alf discussed how his personal preference for publishing in journals was at odds with his institution's recommendation for him to write a book. His excerpt revealed the valuation of publication modes (journal papers, books) at the levels of the individual researcher, the disciplinary community and the institution. Respondents also refer to institutional preference for publishing in journals with high impact factors because they are considered as 'REF-able' research output (Gabriel, Natasha).

#### ***7.1.4 Valuation discourses about good research environments***

The struggles revolving around creating impact, finding interlocutors and managing bureaucracy in Chapter 6 evoked researchers' expectations and beliefs about what constitutes a conducive research environment that supports their research. Respondents accounted for their struggles by referring to discourses about the perceived rising demands on academics to find time for seeking interlocutors and intellectual debate in addition to their teaching and administrative workloads (William).

Researchers' valuations of what makes a good research environment closely relates with their views of the purpose of research. William found his views at odds with what he perceived as his institution's more utilitarian beliefs of university education and research in general. This resonates with Sutherland's study on individual researchers' beliefs about what constitutes subjective career success, which included freedom and influence over the lives of students (Sutherland 2017) and William's views seemed to embody this. An advocate for universities as places for blue-skies research, Luke explained how Northland was a good home for his kind of interdisciplinary research because it had provided him with opportunities to collaborate more easily with researchers from other disciplines. His inclination to seek interlocutors from beyond his discipline also meant that he appreciated institutions that offered the "organic" (his words) fostering of interdisciplinary links.

In general, researchers desire to work in institutions where they can find interlocutors and feel that their research is valued. They also prefer institutions where the presence of bureaucracy and hierarchy is less prominent. For instance, besides not being able to find interlocutors in his institution, William's professional frustration also came from his perception that his institution did not value his research.

Administrative work is one manifestation of bureaucracy and researchers generally view this aspect of their workload as a nuisance. John's use of

subversive humour in his implicit critical account of his administrative roles testified to the relationship that many researchers share with their administrative workload. The greater the presence of bureaucracy, the lower the amount of academic autonomy for researchers. In the cases of John, William and Alf and other researchers, bureaucracy's palpable effects on academic activities, workloads, and professional life were often described in less than positive terms.

### **Academic autonomy**

Academic autonomy is associated with the amount of freedom researchers have to pursue whatever research questions they are interested in, and is often discussed as something that comes with lessened need for accountability. This autonomy is alluded to when respondents discussed their aspirations for their research trajectories and outcomes. The degree of autonomy desired by respondents is varied. At one end of the scale, some researchers like Luke argue for complete freedom to pursue research without having to account for a need for applied outcomes. Occupying middle ground are researchers like Peter who appreciate having freedom to pursue interesting questions but would prefer to see outcomes that could benefit people in tangible ways (such as therapy). At the other end of the scale, respondents such as Felix argue that researchers are obliged to pursue topics that can be communicated easily to the public.

Notably, ECRs tend to share the idea that worthwhile research needs to be applied and accessible in the interviews. The REF was also something referred to more frequently by ECRs than respondents at other career stages. Most ECRs seemed to accept the discourses about having to show impact and thus 'usefulness' of their research in order to get published, or to obtain funding and employment. This is supported by studies which found that the REF affected researchers' decisions about what research to pursue and within what methodological paradigms to do research in (Smith, Ward, & House 2011). This is clearly illustrated by Natasha's case when she felt that the mixed methods approach would be a more valuable methodological paradigm to pursue in her planned second monograph (Excerpt 81). Some ECRs like Jodie also discussed their apprehension at not knowing what funding agencies wanted. She felt that

she might have embarked on a different PhD topic had she known about the importance of showing impact. This bore testament to Luke's argument that the impact agenda in the REF could narrow knowledge pursuit in the long run. As opposed to ECRs, Professors and Professor Emeriti tend to perceive the REF as something that is detrimental to research in the long run (David, Luke, Hugh).

As discussed in Section 3.6.6, the selection of the three main institutions in this study was done with certain considerations in mind. A preliminary hypothesis was to find out if researchers' beliefs of what makes a good research environment are influenced by how research-oriented their universities were.

On a scale of research intensity and orientedness, Northland ranked the highest amongst my sample of three universities, while Southbank (non-Russell Group) ranked the lowest. This is defined according to the research criterion in Times Higher Education Universities'<sup>40</sup> ranking methodology of universities in terms of research reputation, volume of citations and income. Compared with the other more research-oriented universities, Southbank researchers tend to discuss less positive experiences with teaching workload (Hannah), institutional bureaucracy (William, John), tensions with institutional beliefs (William) and institutional pressures of dealing with the REF (Natasha, Gabriel). In comparison, respondents from Northland referred to a greater institutional focus on research (Eric) and generally a less top-down environment that foster interdisciplinary research collaborations (Luke). Striking middle ground, Eastern researchers commented a little on bureaucratic inefficacy and tend to discuss applied research outcomes including pedagogical ones.

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<sup>40</sup> From Times Higher Education (2017, August 29) World University Rankings 2018 methodology. Retrieved from <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/methodology-world-university-rankings-2018>

## **7.2 Contribution to understanding struggles particularly at the early career stage**

Many of the disciplinary positioning struggles in Chapter 4 were observed in interviews with ECRs. These could be struggles to find a disciplinary label for themselves and their research (Clara) or struggles with justifying their research, especially when it seemed quite esoteric and not easily explicable to non-specialists (Vivian, Emma, Peter). ECRs also discuss their dilemmas about extending on their PhD topics or changing research interests as ECRs shift in their disciplinary positioning. Laudel and Gläser (2008) have noted that the transition from ECR to a colleague or a full member of a community is marked by the transition from dependent to independent research. They defined the PhD phase as dependent research where the novice researcher works closely with a supervisor to produce the thesis. In making the transition from PhD graduate to a colleague upon attaining a full-time academic position, the ECR is expected to make autonomous decisions in “developing their individual research trails” (Laudel & Gläser 2008: 391) and become an independent researcher. Becoming a member of an academic community (such as a department) requires ECRs to continue contributing to the knowledge community as often indicated by publications. Hence, ECRs struggled with explicit expectations from institutions and the REF to publish. The ‘publish or perish’ threat is even more palpable to ECRs as most of them are employed on contractual basis and their very employment depended on getting published (Jodie) and producing publications that could be put forward for the REF (Gabriel). In Gabriel and Natasha’s cases, publishing is key for ECRs to gain acceptance as a legitimate researcher by their institutional and disciplinary communities (Section 6.1). Although the need to get published is heightened in the earlier stages of researchers’ careers, it could be argued that this is likely to persist throughout the academic career. This is because publications are still seen very much as a way to gain academic capital (Lucas 2006) and academic evaluation (for the purposes of employment, promotion and tenure) is still heavily dependent on it (Louise).

In Felix’s case, the decisions he made at the earlier stages of his career had influenced his career trajectory. He made a decision early in his career to position

himself as a language teacher according to the demands of the job market at that time. As a result, he is now head of an interdisciplinary languages department despite being a historian.

More experienced members of academia— Professors and Professor Emeriti—tended to voice more critical comments about academia. They often pointed out less positive changes in academia such as a perceived shrinking of funding sources (Luke), lessened autonomy for interdisciplinary research and creativity due to the REF (David, John), the parochialism of academic publishing and in particular, citation indexes boosting the phenomenon of academics citing for self-serving ends instead of contributing to genuine intellectual debate (Ben, Hugh). These criticisms seemed to be linked to the increasing perceptions of auditing and evaluation mechanisms imposed in universities.

### **7.3 Contributing insights on the construction of academic identities in applied linguistics**

A considerable amount of studies in the field of higher education has focused on the perspectives of academics as gleaned from interviews. In most of these studies, the presence of the interviewer is eradicated and the experiences of academics are often reduced to short quotes to support the article's claims. Such disembodied voices seemed to 'comment' on the issues set out by the article but this approach makes use of "etic (i.e. non participant generated) and not emic categories of analysis" (De Fina & Perrino 2011: 05). Consequently, academic identities seemed to be portrayed as monolithic and stable entities. On the contrary, my study focuses on how their identities are constructed through the constant shifting and ephemeral positions that are negotiated during a spoken interaction. Instead of reporting on researchers' insights per se, this thesis delves deeper beyond what is said into what is sometimes unsaid or implied. It contributes to higher education studies by showing how academic struggles are constructed discursively through talk. Academic struggles are not studied as problems gleaned merely from what academics say. Instead, they are studied as constructed by interview participants and to be made sense of in light of deeper

discourses that academics hold about academia. As a qualitative case study of researchers working in applied linguistics, this thesis also contributes insights on how self-identified applied linguists claim their disciplinary affiliation and construct their identities accordingly.

The thesis is inspired by studies that examined how people construct their identities discursively through social interactions (Section 3.3.3). Seen in this light, applied linguists establish themselves as applied linguists in various ways. One of these ways is by differentiating what they do from linguists. This relates back to academic categories and valuation discourses as discussed in earlier sections (7.1) about the kinds of identities and positions valued by an applied linguist. The process of claiming to be an applied linguist entails comparison with other disciplines, most notably linguistics, as it has traditionally been and is still regarded by many (especially non-specialist audiences) as the closest discipline to applied linguistics (Choi & Richards 2017b). This was illustrated by Eric's self-identifying as "a very applied linguist" (Excerpt 44). In doing so, he had demarcated the disciplinary boundaries between linguistics and applied linguistics. In the same vein, the grapple with claiming a disciplinary label was observed with respondents such as Clara, John and Emma, including myself ("not Chomskian"), and this illustrated the valuation discourses of what it means to be a linguist or an applied linguist.

In fact, another discourse associated with applied linguists is the valuing of the practitioner identity over the researcher identity. This is not to say that *all* applied linguists aspire towards a practitioner identity. However, as English language teaching had traditionally been a mainstay in the history of applied linguistics, many researchers in this field had begun their careers as teachers before entering academia (Eric, Isla, Hilda). These respondents often foregrounded their teacher identities and in Eric's case, seemed to describe a shift in their identities from teacher to researcher as something troubling. As discussed in Section 7.1.2, there is value ascribed to being a teacher or practitioner especially if one works in the language teaching subfields of applied linguistics (Eric, Isla, Hilda). Even with researchers such as John, he foregrounded his identity as a practitioner-

researcher in his CV because of his work in a subfield that directly informs investigative practitioners.

The observations gleaned about how applied linguists position themselves or construct identities for themselves as applied linguists reinforced some of the ideas about applied linguistics in literature. There remain a number of practitioner or teacher turned researchers in applied linguistics who may continue to value the ability to influence practitioners with their research as part of their identity. At the same time, they value less the theoretical researcher in her/his ivory tower or the 'Academics with the capitalized A' (in Hilda's words).

In this thesis, I have referred to both ideas of positioning and identity construction. Compared to theories about identity construction, positioning theory has better articulated the idea that speakers are limited in their agency to position themselves because they are simultaneously being positioned by others and by the discursive practices from which they speak from. However, the empirical basis for positioning theory has been criticised as unclear as it has not been applied to the analysis of "authentic social interaction"; nor has positioning theory been able to identify "linguistic and narrative choices and strategies employed to project and negotiate positions" (Deppermann 2013: 04). In an attempt to fill this gap, this study has demonstrated how positioning could be analysed through sequences of talk and discursive acts. As such, it has applied key theoretical ideas from positioning theory to empirical data. For instance, Davies and Harré postulated that "discursive practices constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and yet at the same time is a resource through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions" (Davies & Harré 1990: 62). This is best illustrated in Alf's case when the interview was a discursive practice which constituted him as a linguist since he was selected for the interview based on the fact that he was working in an applied linguistics department. Moreover the interview was conducted in an institutional setting, i.e. his office in the university. Both interviewer and Alf recognised that he was speaking as a linguist and was positioned as one. Hence, his struggle emerged in his resistance towards being seen as one, especially when his department was clumped together with

literature according to his institution. Therefore he negotiated new positions for himself as being both a linguist and a cognitive scientist.

### ***7.3.1 Discursive acts and pragmatic resources in enacting academic identities and academic struggles***

In demonstrating how academic identities are discursively constructed and how discourses about academia could be studied through discursive practices, the study contributes a model towards understanding how social practices, linguistic practices and discourses could interlink (Section 2.7). The model (Figure 2) conceptualised academic struggles (social practices) as embedded and reinforced by discourses, which were enacted through discursive acts (discursive practice). More developed versions of the model (Figures 11-13) at the ends of Chapters 4-6 illustrated the kinds of discursive acts which respondents employed to construct their struggles and enact their identities as academics working in particular disciplinary fields or to position themselves as certain kinds of academics, for instance, more outward-looking and resisting being pigeon-holed in a single field (David, Alf).

Formulation and reformulation are discursive acts commonly drawn upon by respondents in enacting all three categories of struggles. When justifying their research, respondents formulate what constitutes worthwhile research in various ways and how *their* respective research could be formulated as worthwhile (Peter, Vivian, Matthew in Chapter 4). The institutional expectations and pressures to publish were reformulated as ways to gain acceptance (Gabriel) and to prove oneself (Natasha) to one's disciplinary community (Chapter 5). Administrative work was reformulated from being a nuisance to a welcomed challenge (Isla in Chapter 6). The push for public engagement by funding councils was reformulated from being an agenda to a responsibility of scientists and personal impetus for Felix to aspire towards communicating his research to the public (Chapter 6). Most respondents formulated academic impact as equivalent to academic publishing and getting cited (Chapter 6). In addition to this, researchers formulate other ways of achieving impact such as informing policy

and engaging with the public. In Felix's case, public engagement as following the agenda of funding agencies was reformulated to be a responsibility of researchers.

In order to assert their stances while recognising opposing opinions, respondents hedged and mitigated especially when disagreeing with what seemed to be mainstream beliefs about academic practices. A common mitigation strategy that was observed was to concede and reassert one's stance (Peter, Zoe, Hugh). This is done when respondents concede a mainstream opinion before reasserting one's stance as in opposition to that. For instance, Peter conceded that there is a mainstream perception that theoretical papers are important contributions to academia but he aspired for his research to reap applied outcomes instead of theoretical ones.

### ***7.3.2 Voicing as pragmatic resource***

Contributing to pragmatics studies about voicing, this thesis also examines how speakers employ reported speech and 'speak in different voices' by varying prosody and change of voice in order to signify the shift in subject positions or identities that they are speaking from. Few studies have been done on examining these interactional features in the context of a qualitative interview and my study argues that voicing is a pragmatic resource that researchers employ to enact positioning and in the 'telling of troubles' respectively. This draws upon Bakhtinian notions of polyphony and also understandings of the interview as a reflexive space where interview respondents can choose to speak from multiple standpoints or to "voice subjectivities never contemplated before" (Gubrium & Holstein 2001: 22) (elaborated on in Section 2.6). The Bakhtinian notions of polyphony are unmistakably present in respondents' telling of their professional struggles. Sometimes, this could be a manifestation of the rhetorical mind trying to persuade or to anticipate disagreement from the apperceptive listener (such as statements of negation in David's excerpts). At other times, these instances of voicing are re-enactments of past interactions and serve the speaker's communicative goals in positioning oneself vis-à-vis others in certain ways (Alf).

Then there are also times when respondents voiced inner thoughts to explicate their dilemmas (Vivian, Clara).

In almost every interview, respondents often voiced the utterances or imaginary thoughts of the self and others in examples of reported speech or 'thinking aloud'. Voicing was a linguistic resource that was frequently employed when respondents positioned themselves vis-à-vis others by implicitly evaluating others for casting doubts on the worthwhileness of their research (Vivian) or self-assessing their claim on a disciplinary label (Clara, John). Humour and utterances expressed with laughter in voice are also observed to emerge when researchers seemed to be describing more problematic experiences or their struggles (Peter, John).

Hence, voicing is also construed in this thesis as a manifestation of polyphony. It shows how other voices besides the speaker's are embedded in her/his utterances. The speaker's intentions in voicing the thoughts or reported speech of others also indicate their attending to discourses, which they anticipate the hearer (interviewer) to have. Such discourses relate with commonly shared beliefs, norms and expectations of research and even how researchers ought to be like. Thus, polyphonic utterances, though seemingly abstract, are examined in empirical data through the pragmatic resource of voicing and linguistic detail such as syntactic negation (ScaPoLine) to reveal discourses about academia.

### ***7.3.3 Humour as pragmatic resource***

In describing their struggles, respondents sometimes speak with laughter in their voices or end their utterances with laughter (Emma, William). Further studies will need to be done to ascertain how laughter could be used as a device for self-positioning or relationship management in a conversation. Through her study of speakers sharing their troubles, Gail Jefferson found that laughter did not always accompany humour. Instead, laughter (or its absence) was employed as a relationship management device to show affiliation with the teller of troubles. It was argued that by refraining from laughing along, listeners were showing

affiliation and empathy for the speaker relating her/his 'troubling' experience (Jefferson 2015).

Humour used in a self-deprecating, sarcastic, ironic and subversive manner has also been observed especially when respondents are being implicitly critical of certain institutional practices (John in Section 6.3). Such instances again require further examination to determine the discursive purposes that they served for the speakers. Self-denigrating humour was also seen in how respondents described a potential struggle or 'troubling' state of matters. For instance Emma employed self-denigrating humour when she positioned linguistics research as a less impactful discipline because it commanded lower readership. Another kind of humour, subversive humour, is employed to implicitly criticise bureaucracy or to position administrative work as the least favourite aspect of the academic workload (John).

Humour seemed to be a good communicative tool to establish tacit knowledge and solidarity especially against a more imposing and 'powerful' entity that is perceived to cause the speaker's struggles (Holmes & Marra 2002 ; Schnurr & Rowe 2008). Due to his senior position, John's subversive humour about his clear lack of enthusiasm for administrative work was understandable. In fact, laughter and humour appear so frequently to accompany the 'telling of troubles' in the data that they were almost indicative of a struggle.

## 7.4 Limitations of study

As with many qualitative case studies, the small sample size reduces its claim of generalisability. Could these struggles be generalised to other academics in other disciplines or who work in other institutions? This thesis being a collective case study attempts to show how certain academic struggles are shared among researchers in applied linguistics and related fields and there is a high likelihood that they are shared beyond these disciplines. For instance, the ‘publish or perish’ struggle is so commonly heard and referred to that it is indubitably a struggle that transcends disciplines. Since there are commonalities in the struggles constructed by researchers coming from more than 5 institutions, it is also likely that researchers in other institutions may share the same struggles perhaps just manifested in different ways.

The thesis acknowledged the complexity and diversity in respondents’ ways of defining and demarcating disciplines. For instance, it would be next to impossible to achieve consensus among respondents about whether linguistics constitute a discipline and if applied linguistics comes under it or exists as a separate discipline. The small numbers of respondents representing various linguistics, applied linguistics and language-related fields in this study also makes it difficult to compare and make claims about discipline-specific struggles.

However, to some extent, the experiences of my respondents could arguably represent those of many other researchers in linguistics and applied linguistics fields. The heterogeneity of the field of applied linguistics and the fuzziness of its disciplinary boundaries continue to be debated upon and traces of such discourses emerged in my data. For instance, Peter’s positioning of himself and his research related with conceptions of applied linguistics research as involving “potential applicability with target audiences” (Candlin & Sarangi 2004: 227). At the same time, applied linguistics research has also been described as comprising multidisciplinary approaches (not just linguistics) to tackling language-related concerns (Hellermann 2015). Such notions could play out in my positioning as an applied linguist in relation to respondents who self-position as linguists (e.g. my

exchange with Emma in Excerpt 2) and also in how other respondents demarcate disciplines and define their labels (John, Clara).

I argue that disciplinary positioning is also another prevailing struggle that could be observed in academics from almost all disciplines. Making one's expertise known in order to be recognised as an academic researcher is part and parcel of becoming an academic. This process of finding a label for one's expert knowledge starts from embarking on a PhD and lasts all the way even after tenured professorship is attained. Pursuing the PhD is arguably the first step into the academic world and an induction into academic scholarship. After that, the novice researcher has to continue to deepen or shift her/his expertise in a particular field of knowledge if s/he wants to ascend the rungs of the academic world. It is not just about finding a label for one's research area but also in deciding which specialised fields to venture into and gain deeper expertise in, the ramifications of which could lead to either a long and fruitful academic career or to a premature exit from academia should one be unable to find recognition for one's research output.

The struggles to do with REF could arguably be generalizable across disciplines because all researchers working in UK universities will need to contend with it. Early-career struggles typically revolve around seeking employment and satisfying institutional and REF-related requirements and so could invariably be generalised across disciplines as well. In fact, the struggles to do with defining one's disciplinary position are perennial across institutions and time. As Angermuller (2017) argued, academic evaluation happens all the time, whether informally (e.g. reputation) or formally (e.g. promotions, tenure) where academics make use of 'soft' and 'hard' categories to position others and be positioned by others.

## **7.5 Future directions**

I have shown how valuation discourses about academia could be produced and perpetuated by researchers and institutions through a seemingly micro discursive practice such as talk. But questions remain as to whether these valuation

discourses could be generalized across different national higher education systems and if these discourses have stayed the same or changed over time.

This study was not designed a priori to examine if researchers face certain struggles at a particular career stage. It only emerged during the analysis phase of this project that ECRs seemed to share certain prominent struggles. The difficulty of getting respondents to agree to a research interview also made it hard to ensure a balanced representation from all career stages. In order to better examine the correlation between career stages and academic struggles, future studies would have to adjust aspects of research design and data collection accordingly.

It seemed from this study that ECRs are most susceptible to the evolving changes in the higher education landscape, as they need to be versatile in adapting or positioning themselves according to the demands of the job market. Their positioning is likely to change as they ascend the rungs of the academic ladder. Hence, a study of ECRs' positioning over a period of time and their reactions towards changes in institutional demands could also be interesting.

### **A final note**

I hope to sum up the key ideas in this thesis by returning to the quote in my title – “That’s what’s moved me to tears!” (Jodie in Excerpt 73 ). Firstly, the humour in Jodie’s comment is recognised as a subversion of her preceding utterances and this affirms Bakhtinian notions that all utterances are responses in a continuous dialogue. Secondly, her utterances evoked shared, tacit knowledge between interviewer and respondent about the struggles to publish in academia. Finally, humour is employed in the telling of this struggle and evoked solidarity and empathy between interlocutors. Through this micro discursive exchange, academic struggles and worlds are ‘talked into being’ (Cf. Heritage & Clayman 2010) and perpetuated.

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# **Appendices**

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## CONSENT FORM



**Project Title:** *DISCONEX*  
*(The Discursive Construction of Academic Excellence)*

**Name of Researcher:** (to be completed by participant)

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated

For the above project which I may keep for my records and have had the opportunity to ask any questions I may have.

I agree to take part in the above study and am willing to be interviewed and to have my interview audio-recorded.

I understand that my information will be held and processed for the following purposes: research carried out by the DISCONEX research team (including use in talks, quotations in papers, dissertations and other publications in an anonymous manner).

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

-	-	-
<b>Name of Participant</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>
-	-	-
<b>Name of person taking consent if different from Researcher</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>
-	-	-
<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>

# INFORMATION SHEET



**Project:** *DISCONEX*

**Name of Researcher:**

1. The aforementioned project will be carried out in years 2015 -2018 at the Centre for Applied Linguistics at the University of Warwick (UK) and in the framework of the ERC- funded DISCONEX project. This research project is led by Prof. Johannes Angermuller.
2. The aim of the DISCONEX project is to study the discursive practices of researchers in the social sciences and humanities. It is particularly interested in the practices of positioning, classifying, and evaluating amongst researchers from the disciplines and fields of sociology, linguistics, postcolonial studies, and semiotics in Germany, France, UK, and the US.
3. Participants for this project were chosen based on their disciplinary backgrounds, career trajectories, fields of research, and publications. They would usually be active in the disciplines and fields of sociology, linguistics, postcolonial studies, and semiotics in Germany, France, UK, and the US. They would usually be contacted via email.
4. All participants who are interviewed for the purpose of this study will do so on an entirely voluntary basis. They may withdraw at any time. Withdrawal will not affect future treatment or have any negative consequences.
5. The participant can request access to research findings resulting from the study in which he/she volunteered upon the completion of the project.
6. Participants may benefit from the research carried out by accessing its results (upon request)once the study has been completed.
7. Participants in this study may expect to be interviewed (the length of which should notnormally exceed one hour), which is audio-recorded. Should further clarification be needed, the researcher may contact the participant subsequently.
8. The interview will remain anonymous – the identity of the participant will be known only to the researchers. The content of the interview will always be quoted in an anonymised way, rendering the identification of the participant impossible. The level of anonymity (eg. concealing name, age, institutional affiliation etc.) can be discussed with the researcher and agreed upon before or after interview.

9. The recording of the interview and any other material related to the research, which the participant will provide will be stored on a safe disk to which only the researchers of the DISCONEX team can access.
10. The material resulting from the interview will be used for the purpose of research exclusively.
11. Queries or complaints concerning the study can be addressed to the principal investigator directly: Prof. Johannes Angermuller at [J.Angermuller@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:J.Angermuller@warwick.ac.uk), Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL

## Appendix 2 Sample of transcript

Part of transcript from interview with Gabriel

Gabriel\_20161130\_#00:51:49-6#

- 1 Gabriel: It was like↑ >I can tell you what it was like< You know how  
erm (.) People can set out with a kind of liberal agenda on  
something. Ok they've highlighted something they perceived  
as inequality or unfair. And they set out with that liberal  
agenda so strongly (.) that  
5 they actually become dogmatic themselves. They actually  
become what they hated in the first place. So they might  
stand up and say **Look (.) Standards in English (.) are a  
terrible thing (.) They should be abolished. You know.  
They're only there, they are externally imposed. Nobody  
should be (.) paying attention to  
10 these standards, nobody uses them in (xx)  
communication.** It's too dogmatic because what about the  
people (.) who do care↑ for their personal identity. They want  
(.) they want standard grammar or: they have invested ten  
years of time and money in studying standard grammar >do  
you know what I mean?< This is  
15 the kind of thing that was going on. And I (.) didn't want any  
part in that. I never wanted my: publication or my PhD title to  
have GEP in it because of that. #00:51:59-8#  
I: I see. Ok ok- #00:52:03-6#  
Gabriel: -SO SO GEP is still highly relevant to what I do. And the  
concepts  
20 I'm extremely grateful for them (.) for their work because it's  
very influential but I don't identify- And they have this inner  
circle you know they have their own conferences GEP  
conferences but then they don't come out so much into the  
(.) BAAL and >you know what I mean? It's < #00:52:24-5#  
25 I: Yah right right. #00:52:24-5#  
Gabriel: Er I think a lot of it is posturing and (.) like shield beating like  
you know **This is our (.) group** and (.) I don't want to be  
part of that.  
I: I see. Ok ok ((laughs)) #00:52:37-3#  
Gabriel: So tha-that's why GEP has that role in the publication and  
the  
30 PhD. #00:52:40-2#  
I: So you'd rather be seen as English as international  
language or [diversity? #00:52:43-8#  
Gabriel: [Well ((intake of breath)) yea:: But the problem with that  
that's also contested. #00:52:49-6#  
35 I: Yah ok #00:52:49-6#  
Gabriel: What about someone from Australia and someone from New  
Zealand you know that's international. But it's not really the  
heart of what we are talking about. #00:52:55-5#  
I: How would you define your identity then? #00:52:58-4#  
40 Gabriel: Er I don't (.) I like to I like to step around all those terms.  
#00:53:07-3#  
I: Mmhm  
Gabriel: You know English in a global voluntary context. #00:53:07-  
3#  
I: Mmhm #00:53:07-3#  
45 Gabriel: Ok so there's spoken interaction and its implications for  
language  
pedagogy. There's no (.) there's no identification- MAYBE I

SHOULD. >Maybe I'll be having an easier time if I did. <  
#00:53:15-6#

I: ((laughs)) #00:53:17-3#

### Appendix 3 Transcription Key

Adapted from Jefferson's Transcription Conventions (Jefferson 2004)

(.)	micropause, i.e. shorter than (0.5)
(2.0)	pauses in seconds
[...]	ellipted content
(xxx)	inaudible word
(( ))	double parentheses mark transcriber's descriptions rather than transcriptions
::	lengthening sound
-	a hyphen represents the cut-off of the preceding sound often by a stop
[ ]	overlapping utterances
=	latching between utterances
> <	quicker than surrounding talk
< >	slower than surrounding talk
CAPS	relatively high amplitude
?	rising intonation at the end of a question
.	falling intonation
,	intonation that indicates a continuing utterance (perhaps when listing)
!	intonation indicating an exclamation
↑↓	Vertical arrows precede marked pitch movement, over and above normal rhythms
°words°	speech in significantly lower volume
(words)	single parentheses mark problematic or uncertain hearings
<u>word</u>	Emphasis
<b>words</b>	words in bold in the excerpts stand for a voiced utterance indicates through prosody or other paralinguistic features that they were voicing the utterances from another subject position (such as thinking aloud, imagined or reported thoughts of oneself or others spoken at another time)
((laughter in voice))	indicate that what follows are uttered with laughter in voice and ends at the next full-stop

#### Appendix 4 – Categories evoked by respondents (A sample)

Sample showing some of the categories that respondents used to describe themselves or evoked during the interview

	Academic categories		Non-academic categories	
Name	Disciplinary	Others	Family	Personality
David	maverick, rebel, dislike the term 'discipline', linguistics	French intellectual	wife influenced his research interests	rebel, maverick
Alf	Dislikes labels & being labelled; torn between seeing himself as cognitive scientist and linguist	opportunist in finding opportunities to publish	parents influenced his career choices	hates labels
Luke	Cognitive science, linguistics, idiosyncratic research	departments as "ghettoised"; disciplinary silos	family is reason why he works in 2 countries	
Hilda	practitioner, teacher, teacher educator	No strong need to go into research. Teacher-educator.	husband, son	
Isla	teacher before researcher, teaches many levels (undergrads, postgrads, supervise PhDs)	Teaching outcomes are as good as or better than being published in a REF-recognised journal.	father	teaching as first love
Eric	very applied linguist, International uses of English	Comparisons between working in business, linguistics and education departments	Declined to talk about family in the first question.	

**Appendix 5 -- First responses to interview questions (A sample)**

Name	How did you become who you are today?	What do you think your research is about?	How do you think others perceive your research?	What does your academic activity consist of now?
William	Himself as husband and father, family	religious studies, interdisciplinary	Hardly get cited, few people in the same field.	teaching, complains about institution's practical orientations versus his ideas about what a university should be like
Alf	His parents' freelance careers as reasons for his trajectory (Grew up without work structures)	Hodge podge. Led to reflection on how he does not like to be labelled as being in one research area only and his aversion towards labels.	Well-received but reflected on how his hodge podge research led to a missed job opportunity	Researcher before teacher preference; transition from PhD student to first academic position as lecturer
Jodie	Family and boyfriend as reasons for career trajectory and making the switch to academia	Her PhD research and her struggle being caught in the paradigm wars between 2 fields	Don't know at first, ask about which audience. Explains difficulty in publishing in the field she was originally interested in (her PhD) because of paradigm wars	Lecturer, college tutor, applying for funding

## Appendix 6 Sample of a code tree, memo and coded segments

### Sample of code tree Disciplinaryity (screenshot of MaxQDA project)

▼ ● Disciplinaryity	56
● cross disciplinary / i...	46
● Comparing fields/dis...	38
● Disciplinary positioni...	82

### Sample of memo for the code

How a code is defined

#### 1 Disciplinaryity

Umbrella for any reference to disciplines/fields

##### 1.1 Comparing fields/disciplines

Felix compares perceptions within/of different fields/disciplines or makes comments about paradigm wars within fields/disciplines

##### 1.2 Disciplinary positioning

Felix asserts/resists/negotiates her/his disciplinary identities

### Sample of coded segments for the code: Cross-discipline or interdisciplinary

Felix : [yah] so (.) it's quite interdisciplinary it's quite interesting to-to work within the department not-not in a history departmen-department but within an interdisciplinary erm languages department.

Interviewer : ok yah that's very interesting. Would you like to say more about this kind of interdisciplinary environment? Er: so you found it interesting, perhaps you would like to elaborate in what ways do you find this er:: or would you prefer being in a purely his::-history (.) kind of environment?

Felix : Er:: Sometimes I would, sometimes I wouldn't. ((laughs)) It's er (.) Er: (.) the question is how much choice you would have. In the end it's about the job market and you apply where there's a: (.) where there's a vacancy. (.) Erm er I've (.) I've (.) When I did my phd it's quite clear to me:: that the job market is quite competitive and er:: the-the more I can bran::ch (.) out (.) er into other disciplines, the more opportunities I create for myself or the job market, the better. And so for my phd, I started teaching [European language], I lived in Britain and started teaching

[European language] a little bit get er (.) get some teaching experience and this worked out nicely [...] and then getting an academic position in Britain. So it's a er:: (.) choice only to some extent. In the end it's about the practicalities of (.) of positioning yourself in the job market.

Interviewer : I see

Felix : Er:: but your question was do I enjoy working in this environment? Yes I very much (.) enjoy it.

Interviewer : Mmhm mmhm [ok ]

Felix : [Although] the depth of historical (.) er::m kind of historical intercourse with colleagues who: work more in depth (.) on issues I'm working on (.) er that's something I don't have but then they don't have the interaction (.) with people from other disciplines maybe.

Interviewer : mm

Felix : So-so it's a give and take.

FELIX: 54 - 62 (0)

interdisciplinary

FELIX: 107 - 107 (0)

my discipline is translation studies (.) my research is about feminism and gender studies (.) that's what (.) interests me the most (.) and of course I have to frame it within because I'm not a sociologist so I have to frame it within my discipline (.) but because every-everything can be approached from a feminist perspective that's what I'm doing with my research in translation studies

Hannah: 12 - 12 (0)

interdisciplinary

Hannah: 28 - 28 (0)

Erm because of the nature of my research I sometimes present at conferences (.) in [R studies] (.) and I go there and I tell them about feminism and translation (.) I go to conferences on translation studies and I tell them about [R studies] and-and gender. I go to conferences about gender studies

Hannah: 36 - 36 (0)

interdisciplinary

Hannah: 37 - 37 (0)

interdisciplinary

Hannah: 218 - 218 (0)

## Appendix 7 Sample of lexical query on 'interdisciplinary'

### Sample of coded segments that contain the word 'interdisciplinary' – from lexical query generated on MaxQDA

Document	Search items	Search results
Luke	interdisciplinary	) So the research environment here is erm much more er:m (5.0) I think truly interdisciplinary than it is in: (.) or potentially interdisciplinary than it is in the er (3.0) in [country].
Hugh	interdisciplinary	Er:m (1.0) er:: (3.0) I: s- (.) we we work in an interdisciplinary team.
Hugh	interdisciplinary	) because it- (.) as I say, it's fundamentally interdisciplinary.
Hugh	interdisciplinary	BUT (.) I think erm it's really important to hang on to the fact that really it's an interdisciplinary project and we're interested in (.
Hugh	interdisciplinary	And and erm each section has a different disciplinary orientation. So again it's an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary (.
William	multidisciplinary	William : Er:m yes My work is erm is is quite er multidisciplinary really.
Alf	interdisciplinary	Er:m so:: I like to do things that intersect that have intersections with all the fields actually^ Erm >because I have a degree in cognitive science^ (.) which is highly interdisciplinary<.
Jane	interdisciplinary	And (.) the fact that (1.0) > yah I guess interdisciplinary work is difficult because (.
Jane	interdisciplinary	Jane : Erm (1.0) I think it's just erm (3.0) erm well I er yah (2.0) er (6.0) ((tongue clicking)) Well yah er ((small laugh)) Erm I don't know if I see my work as interdisciplinary.

**Appendix 8 – Table summary of respondents and the aspects of discourses about academia that their excerpts illustrate**

	<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Academic struggles faced</b>	<b>Career stage</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Department<sup>41</sup></b>
<b>1</b>	Alf	Disciplinary positioning	ECR / Lecturer	Eastern	Applied Linguistics
<b>2</b>	Peter	Justifying research	ECR / Lecturer	Eastern	Applied Linguistics
<b>3</b>	Zoe	Justifying research	ECR / Lecturer	Eastern	Applied Linguistics
<b>4</b>	Isla	Practitioner-researcher, publishing	Senior academic	Eastern	Applied Linguistics
<b>5</b>	Ben	Research environments (publishing)	Professor Emeritus	Eastern	Applied Linguistics
<b>6</b>	Louise	Employability, publishing	Post-doctoral fellow	Eastern	Applied Linguistics
<b>7</b>	Sofia	Research environments (bureaucracy)	Academic	Eastern	Education
<b>8</b>	Hugh	Research environments	Professor	Eastern	Education
<b>9</b>	James	Publishing	Senior academic	Southbank	Applied Linguistics
<b>10</b>	John	Disciplinary positioning	Professor	Southbank	Applied Linguistics
<b>11</b>	William	Research environments (Interlocutors, bureaucracy)	Academic	Southbank	Translation
<b>12</b>	Hannah	Disciplinary positioning	Academic	Southbank	Translation
<b>13</b>	Felix	Disciplinary positioning	Senior academic	Southbank	Translation
<b>14</b>	Gabriel	Publishing	ECR / Lecturer	Southbank	Applied Linguistics
<b>15</b>	Natasha	Publishing	Academic	Southbank	Applied Linguistics
<b>16</b>	Emma	Disciplinary positioning	ECR / Postdoctoral fellow	Northland	Linguistics
<b>17</b>	Theo	Publishing	ECR / Postdoctoral	Northland	Linguistics

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<sup>41</sup> In order to anonymise participants' details, actual departmental titles have been replaced by the closest disciplinary labels.

	<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Academic struggles faced</b>	<b>Career stage</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Department<sup>41</sup></b>
			fellow		
<b>18</b>	Vivian	Justifying research, employability	ECR / Postdoctoral fellow	Northland	Linguistics
<b>19</b>	Teresa	Disciplinary positioning	ECR / Postdoctoral fellow	Northland	Linguistics
<b>20</b>	Luke	Research environments	Professor	Northland	Linguistics
<b>21</b>	Jodie	Disciplinary positioning	ECR/ Lecturer	Northland	Education
<b>22</b>	Eric	Practitioner-researcher, disciplinary positioning	Associate Professor	Northland	Education
<b>23</b>	Matthew	Research environments	Professor	Northland	Education
<b>24</b>	Hilda	Practitioner-researcher	ECR/ Teaching Fellow (pursuing PhD at the same time)	Westlake	Applied Linguistics
<b>25</b>	Clara	Disciplinary positioning, employability	ECR / Teaching fellow	Crossland	Education
<b>26</b>	Jane	Publishing	Senior academic	Cityland	Applied Linguistics
<b>27</b>	David	Disciplinary positioning	Professor Emeritus	Leaveland	Applied Linguistics