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Blurred lines of participation: nexus analytical tools for reflecting on the roles of researchers and participants in change-oriented research projects

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Abstract: This article discusses nexus analysis (NA) as a research strategy that provides specific tools for reflecting on the roles of researchers and participants in participatory research. While many research traditions use participatory methods and problematise what it means to participate in research, thus far the potential of nexus analytical concepts as tools to mediate such a reflection has not been discussed explicitly. In order to illustrate how NA promotes such reflections, we draw on four linguistic projects in multilingual settings that deal with (1) preservice teachers' learning to design for language learning in hybrid environments on a university course, (2) plurilingual and collaborative teaching approaches to writing in language classrooms in secondary schools, (3) language socialisation of migrant mothers, and (4) family language policy in single-parent families. With this article, we demonstrate how the nexus analytical conceptual tools of 'zone of identification', 'historical body' and 'interaction order' facilitate reflection upon the researcher's participatory engagement in various stages of the research process. We show that the lines between the roles of researchers and participants are blurry, in particular in research projects that focus on introducing social change. Additionally, we highlight the importance of reflecting on power relations between researchers and participants and how control over project direction and decisions can impact the representation and involvement of community members.

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1 Introduction

Change-oriented research projects have been gaining in popularity in numerous fields of study and alongside them came the use of participatory research methods that question more traditional research practices in the spirit of democratising research (Edwards and Brannelly 2017). In the field of human sciences, there is a long history of using participatory research, allowing for distinguishing between three main traditions (Rahman 2008). Firstly, the Latin American tradition, mainly influenced by Orlando Fals Borda (1987) and Paulo Freire (1970, 1977), aims at promoting the collective consciousness of communities and social change (e.g., Freire 1970, 1977; Shor and Freire 1987). Secondly, the action research tradition, represented by Kurt Lewin in particular, relates to organisational development where the parties involved participate in examining their own situation and bringing about change (Coghlan 2015: 418; Kemmis et al. 2015: 454). The third tradition of critical participatory research relies on the Freirean tradition, but also on the critical theory of the Frankfurt school (Kemmis et al. 2015), and has as its goal broader economic, social and political change (Gustavsen et al. 2008; Kemmis et al. 2015: 453–464; Rahman 2008). What all these traditions have in common is a concern for promoting social change by approaching research participants as active subjects and by recognising the researcher's active role in shaping the research process. Increasingly, studies in applied linguistics are also making a methodological turn toward participatory approaches in order to capture the complexity of multilingual settings (Grasz et al. 2020).

In this context, researchers are required to reflect upon what kind of change they are introducing and, maybe even more importantly, how they are introducing it. It can also be questioned whether or not it is the researcher who introduces the change in the first place. Consequently, it is necessary to consider what it means to participate in research, and we propose nexus analysis (NA) (Scollon and Scollon 2004) as a research strategy that facilitates such reflections. In any research project that is concerned with introducing social change, we argue that it is crucial to reflect on one's own role as a researcher and power relations between the researcher and participants in that endeavour. This article aims to show a range of tools provided by NA to reflect upon participation in research of both the researcher and the participant. Given that NA utilises an ethnographic lens when engaging with research materials, the next section provides a background on key characteristics of participation in participatory research as well as in ethnography. Section 3 describes the contribution of NA and some of its central concepts to examine participation.

Sections 4–6 focus on the issues involved in each stage of NA as a research strategy and illustrate them with the applied linguistic research projects the four authors are involved in. Section 7 concludes this article with some implications for the use of NA in participatory research.

2 Background on participatory research and ethnography

The expansion of participatory research reflects a paradigmatic shift towards different ways of knowing and experiential learning as criteria for good science (Boyd 2014: 499–501; Reason and Bradbury 2008) and is accompanied by a growing concern for the needs of communities and participants affected or involved in a given research project (Schubotz 2020; Vaughn and Jacquez 2020). Historically, participatory research has been influenced by social movements and liberation movements as well as by the need to develop communities and organisations. In Africa and Latin America, participatory research has been linked to democratic development (Banks and Brydon-Miller 2019; Bergold and Thomas 2012; Reason and Bradbury 2008). That legacy is visible in the aim of participatory research to benefit the community in question (Hall 1975) by solving problems and introducing change (Swantz 1975). More recently, Schubotz (2020) even argued “that we are experiencing a *participatory turn* in social research” (2, original emphasis). The research strategy of NA fits into that participatory turn because it provides concrete concepts that incentivise thinking critically about the level of participation of researchers and of participants in the research process that aims at introducing social change.

Participatory research endeavours must be applicable to real-life contexts and make room for hearing the voices of participants who do not speak the “language” of researchers, planners and decision-makers (Cook and Hess 2007: 30). It follows that the level of participation of researchers and participants needs to be negotiated and adapted to the local needs (Vaughn and Jacquez 2020). To facilitate such negotiations, Vaughn and Jacquez (2020) as well as Schubotz (2020) present five levels of participation (see Table 1). While Schubotz (2020) considers participation from the participant’s perspective, Vaughn and Jacquez (2020) consider participation from the researcher’s perspective; the two perspectives are complementary to each other. On level one, the researcher decides on the development of the research project and only informs the participants about its activities. On level two, participants act as consultants and their input is considered feedback or advice. According to Schubotz (2020), level three involves the participants as equals in the research project, an aspect emphasised by Vaughn and Jacquez (2020) at level four. Conversely, they

Table 1: Levels of participation in participatory research from the perspectives of the research participant and the researcher.

According to Schubotz (2020), the participant can ...	According to Vaughn and Jacquez (2020), the researcher can ...
1. Be informed by the researcher	1. Inform the participant
2. Give advice to the researcher	2. Consult the participant
3. Co-design with the researcher	3. Involve the participant
4. Co-produce with the researcher	4. Collaborate with the participant
5. Lead the research	5. Empower the participant

emphasise the researcher’s direct involvement in the given community at level three. On level four, Schubotz (2020) sees more decision power in the participants’ hands even though they did not initiate the project. On level five, according to both papers, the project is initiated by the participants themselves who are empowered to take on the leading role.

Each level of participation may be appropriate at different stages of a project. Both papers emphasise that the researcher’s involvement needs to be adapted to local needs. Vaughn and Jacquez (2020: 2) highlight that “the choice of participation level is closely tied to the impact research will have in real world settings”, and Schubotz (2020, referring to Stoecker 1999) stresses the importance of considering the needs and wants for research and participation of the community under study. Consequently, it is important to be aware that negotiations about local needs are necessary. By recognising that such negotiations are an intrinsic part of the research process, NA becomes a useful strategy for change-oriented, participatory research projects. In particular, the concept of the ‘zone of identification’ (see Section 3) makes explicit the need for researchers to negotiate their role within a research project, to reflect on power relations between them and the participants, and to position themselves in relation to participants.

Given that participatory research takes place directly within a community, such research projects usually necessitate some kind of ethnographic research materials. Nexus analysis shares such ethnographic roots (see Section 3), so a reflection on participation from an ethnographic perspective is also warranted in the current paper. The levels of participation by Schubotz (2020) and Vaughn and Jacquez (2020) go in line with categorisations of the participation level from methodological literature on ethnography. Questioning participation and the involvement of the researcher is an integral part of conducting ethnographic research. Bryman (2016: 434–437) outlines the researcher’s role on a spectrum from ‘covert full member’, through ‘overt full member’, ‘participant observer’, ‘partially participating observer’, ‘minimally participating observer’ to ‘non-participating observer with interaction’.

Researchers who are full members of the community they are studying are considered insiders, while the observer roles are characterised by varying degrees of participation in the community. When establishing the ‘zone of identification’ in NA, i.e., when the researcher defines their degree of participation within their research setting, such distinctions from ethnographic fieldwork are helpful in articulating the researcher’s level of participation.

In contrast to ethnographic research, participatory research approaches usually aim to change the relationship between researchers and the researched from a relationship between subject and object into a relationship between two subjects (Smith 1997), changing the power relations between them. Ideally, in participatory ethnographic research, the informant takes on the role of a colleague. However, this change does not eliminate the role of researchers as project planners and managers (Hämeenaho and Koskinen-Koivisto 2014). As mentioned above, the level of participation of researchers depends on the individual goals of the research project and needs of the community. Power issues are explicitly present in these dynamics, as researchers often retain control over the project’s direction and decisions. The choice of who gets to represent the community is itself a power-laden decision, influenced by the researchers’ perspectives and the selected individuals’ social, economic, and political resources. The following section will provide insights into how NA builds on concepts from participatory and ethnographic research and turns them into concepts that are integral to its research strategy, thereby making reflection upon participation an intrinsic and indispensable part of nexus analytical research projects.

3 Nexus analytical tools

The aim of NA is to gain an in-depth understanding of social action and introduce change in the social issue under study. NA has a transdisciplinary background drawing from the fields of linguistic anthropology, psychology, ethnography, interactional sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis (Scollon 2001; Scollon and Scollon 2004: 78–79; Scollon and Scollon 2007: 615–619) which makes it a flexible research strategy applicable in several fields of study. Moreover, NA can be seen as a form of social activism that aims at promoting change in social practices through research inquiry that is interested in what is said, how it is said, and why (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 10, 149; Scollon and Scollon 2009). Accordingly, NA has been described in varied ways: a meta-methodology (Hult 2010, 2019); a historical ethnographic discourse analysis (Lane 2010, 2014); and the historical, ethnographic and methodological arm of mediated discourse analysis (Scollon and de Saint-Georges 2011).

The core in NA is that it takes social action as the unit of analysis, and not, for example, a certain group of people or a linguistic feature in language. NA defines social action as mediated, real-time action that is carried out via material and symbolic mediational means or cultural tools (Scollon 2001; Scollon and Scollon 2004: 11). A focus on social action means that NA wants to gain understanding of “multiple motives, multiple participants, and across cycles of varying timescales” (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 148) behind the social actions that contribute to the emergence of a nexus of practice within the social issue under study. While social actions happen in real time, a nexus of practice is a set of social actions that have been repeated over time so often that they become a recognisable entity (Lane 2014). In other words, they are the social issue under study.

In NA, social action is seen to take place at an intersection of three cycles of discourse: ‘historical body’ (drawing from Nishida 1958), ‘discourses in place’ (Scollon and Scollon 2003) and ‘interaction order’ (drawing from Goffman 1983). We will engage with these terms in Sections 4–6. Even though they are typically used as analytical concepts, we want to emphasise their use as heuristic tools to examine participation. With the help of these three concepts, NA sheds light on how people participate in social action, who the key participants are and how participation is structured.

As a research strategy, NA advances cyclically through three stages: ‘engaging’ the nexus of practice under study; ‘navigating’ the nexus of practice; and ‘changing’ the nexus of practice. While the three stages of NA are often presented in consecutive order, it is important to note that these stages may and most often do overlap during the research process. In other words, engaging the nexus may already involve navigating and changing as the researcher enters the nexus of practice that they want to study and understand. Nonetheless, it is helpful to distinguish the three phases conceptually as they can be considered tools that help guide and structure the participatory research process. These stages will be elaborated on in the following sections with examples of the authors’ research projects.

Finally, it is important to highlight the need for the researcher to establish their ‘zone of identification’ in a given nexus of practice. “Identification in a nexus analysis means that the researcher himself or herself must be recognized by other participants as a participant in the nexus of practice under analysis” (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 153). This recognition does not mean that the researcher becomes a full member of the nexus of practice; instead, they develop and define their own role within it (Lane 2014). Participation through establishing a ‘zone of identification’, therefore, has to do with questions on legitimacy within a nexus of practice. In order to become a legitimate member of the nexus of practice, the researcher’s participation needs to be accepted by its usual members

to the extent that the “‘research’ activities merge with [...] ‘participation’ activities” (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 156).

At the same time, it is essential to remember that the researcher’s historical body potentially carries institutional power. The power relations necessitate reflection on how a researcher’s participation in a research project and communication about the research afterward may make the line between researcher and participant more visible again. Indeed, Scollon and Scollon (2004: 145) admit that they ended up “speaking for” the Alaska Native people with whom they were researching. They acknowledge that the research gave them more renown which they found problematic as they were not members of the community themselves. As a consequence, they left the university and engaged in promoting academic research arising from within the community (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 146). Keeping this experience in mind for the purposes of this paper, we do not argue for the disappearance of the line between researcher and participants. Rather, we argue for more awareness and reflexivity from researchers to consider how they represent their participants and to what extent the participants had the opportunity to represent themselves. In the current article, we show how the NA framework facilitates such reflection.

The current article builds on four different nexuses of practice with which the authors have been engaged: (1) preservice teachers’ learning to design for language learning in hybrid environments on a university course, (2) multilingual and cross-curricular teaching approaches to writing in language classrooms at secondary school level, (3) language socialisation of migrant mothers, and (4) family language policy in single-parent families (Figure 1). The role of the researcher and the level of participation vary in each project exemplifying the flexibility of the research strategy. In the following sections, we aim to discuss the diverse ways to participate in the nexus of practice under study and what implications that has for the research process. We hope to show that NA provides helpful tools – in particular, zone of identification, historical body and interaction order – to view researchers as active participants since the very beginning of a research project when engaging the nexus of practice, as well as tools to reflect on the often blurred distinction between researchers and participants throughout the research process when navigating and changing the nexus of practice. Discourses in place are tightly connected to historical bodies and interaction orders because they describe the “conceptual and material context” (Hult 2015: 224) of the nexus of practice, the way it is constructed in interaction by social actions and actors. However, for the purposes of this article, we engage more deeply with the other two concepts as they emerged more relevant to describe participation in our four research projects.

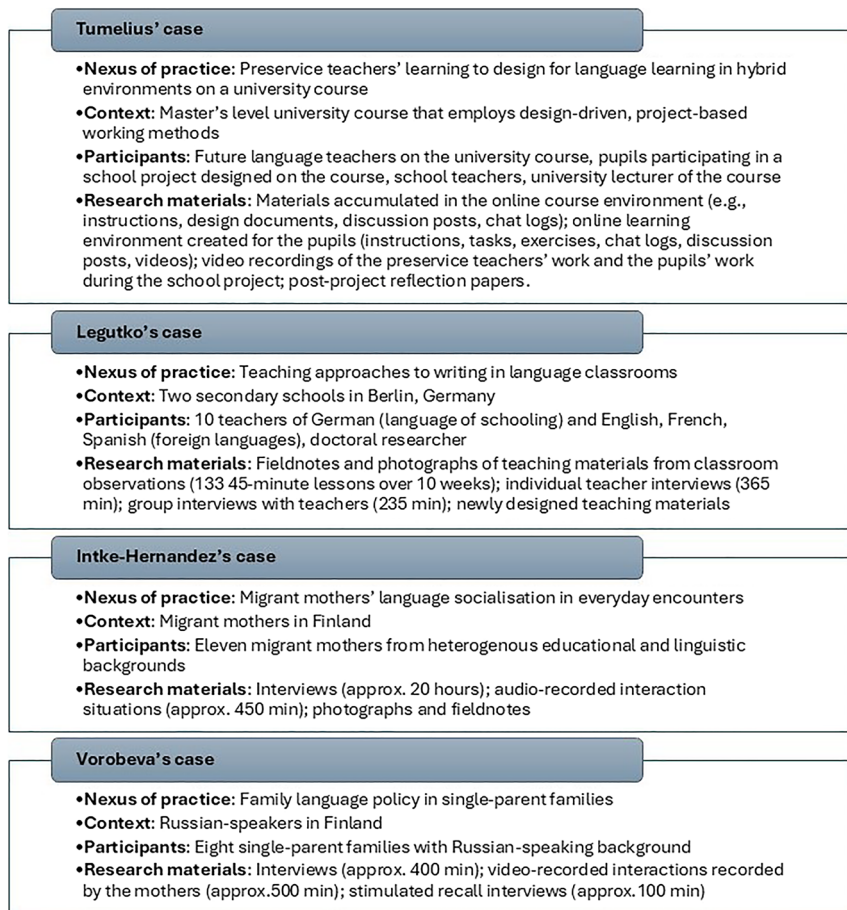


Figure 1: Brief description of the four research projects used as examples in the article.

4 Researchers as participants: engaging the nexus of practice

NA embraces the researcher's participation in the nexus of practice under study and involves three research activities: engaging, navigating and changing the nexus of practice. The research process begins with the activity of engaging where the first task is to define the nexus of practice to be studied. The researcher will begin collecting research materials and documenting observations from the very beginning of engaging the nexus of practice. The engaging process can also be described as

recognising the crucial actors and the most significant cycles of discourse by observing the interaction within the nexus of practice (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 153–155). The crucial social actors are in a key position in producing the nexus of practice, and thus, in a key position to bring about social change.

While taking the steps to engage in the nexus of practice, the researcher establishes their ‘zone of identification’ within the nexus of practice (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 156), meaning that they define their role within a research setting and in relation to participants. While establishing the ‘zone of identification’, the researcher undergoes a process of reflecting upon one’s own ‘historical body’, defined as a “history of personal experience” or “a lifetime of personal habits” (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 13). Originally, Scollon and Scollon encourage the researcher to consider the following guiding question: “How did these participants all come to be placed at this moment and in this way to enable or carry out this action?” The intention behind this question is to explore what experiences shape the actions of a given participant. Conversely, the same question can be used in the researcher’s reflections on their own participation in research: How *did I* come to be placed at this moment and in this way to enable or carry out this action? The intention here is to consider the power that the researcher may or may not hold over the participants as well as to reflect upon the experiences that shape actions the researcher takes in order to engage the participants in the research project. In other words, the historical body accumulates “the lived experience of actors” (Hult 2015: 224). Awareness of one’s historical body can help articulate the impact the researcher has in their own research project. The following three examples shall illustrate how a reflection on the impact of the researcher’s historical body on the research participants might look like.

Firstly, research by Tumelius was set in language teacher education at a Finnish university. She examined a university course aimed for preservice teachers learning to use technologies in a pedagogically informed way (Tumelius 2022). The research materials were generated from two different course implementations (School Project 1 and School Project 2) in which the researcher had different levels of participation. In School Project 1, Tumelius engaged the university course under study as one of the preservice teachers and conducted research for her master’s thesis acting in the border zone of a participant and a researcher. After a few years of time, she re-engaged with School Project 1 materials as a doctoral researcher. The years between had given her experience as a language teacher and a distance in time, which provided a new perspective into the analysis of past activities where she had been a course participant herself. In School Project 2, Tumelius examined the nexus of practice from the perspective of an outsider even though she had a good understanding of the university course design as such. Tumelius had not participated in the realisation of School Project 2 but the university course had the same university

lecturer and pedagogical aims as in School Project 1. The research materials were used to examine the design-driven process and developments in the students' understandings during the course project.

Secondly, Legutko's project examined cross-curricular teaching approaches to writing at secondary schools. She wanted to observe language lessons of teachers of different languages (German, English, French, Spanish) at two secondary schools in Berlin, Germany, and document naturally occurring teaching. Legutko engaged the participating schools because she has first-hand knowledge of that educational setting: she used to be a student at similar schools in the same city, and therefore, she shared the language learning trajectory of the students whose classrooms she observed. That knowledge resided in her historical body, alongside the fact that she was a first stage researcher, running an independent research project for the first time. While establishing her 'zone of identification' and finding her place in the language classrooms in relation to the participating teachers, it was important to ask and reflect upon the consequences such inside knowledge and research experience might have. Examples of aspects that might be affected were getting access to a given classroom (e.g., to what extent does the teacher mind the presence of a first stage researcher?), the teaching activities the teacher organised in the classroom (e.g., does the teacher adapt to perceived expectations of the researcher?) or the kind of topics that the teacher talked to the researcher about (e.g., what kind of information does the teacher take for granted and does not need to explain explicitly to the researcher?). Such reflections led to Legutko's decision to always position the teachers as the experts in the classroom and telling them that she was in the classroom to learn from their experience. The goal was to recognise the institutional power the teachers hold in their classrooms. The hope of such positioning was that the teacher will not feel judged during the classroom observations and did not change their teaching activities for the researcher which allowed for observation of naturally occurring teaching.

Thirdly, Intke-Hernandez' (2020) dissertation focused on what kind of language socialisation migrant mothers encounter in their everyday lives and interrelationships. The research materials were generated ethnographically in Helsinki's metropolitan area in an open day care centre and in the mothers' everyday settings during 2012–2018. The study also started by establishing the zone of identification, i.e., by getting to know the field and its actors and by locating her own position as part of it (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 9, 153–159). Achieving the position of a legitimate participant was challenging because some participants found it difficult to understand why the researcher was there and what the purpose of her work was. However, the fact that the researcher herself was a mother and her child was sometimes involved in activities made it easier to gain legitimate participation. This commonality helped bridge some of the power gaps, as it allowed the researcher to be seen not just as an outsider or authority figure, but as a peer sharing similar experiences.

However, the researcher's position also conferred certain privileges, such as access to resources and knowledge about the research process, which were not equally available to all participants. Intke-Hernandez participated in the group as a researcher, but also as one of the mothers and as a "fellow traveller". Their life situations were similar in the sense that they shared the same type of joys and worries related to raising and caring for children. The shared experience of motherhood in the historical bodies of both the researcher and the participants helped the researcher gain confidence and become a member of the community. Shared motherhood mitigated the subject-researcher confrontation.

While the three examples above illustrate how the researcher's historical body impacted engaging participants in the research project, the next example of Vorobeva's project illustrates how the researcher's historical body might be part of the motivation for engaging in the research in the first place. Reflecting upon the link between one's historical body and the reasons for undertaking a research project is important because the motives for conducting a study serve as a guide that takes us certain paths (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 147). These motives can be multiple, and they may stretch from private and affective (e.g., when significant others experience prejudice or discrimination) to more public-stemming (e.g., noticing flaws in the education policy).

Vorobeva's project on family language policy in single-parent Russian-speaking families in Finland was initiated by personal and society-oriented motives (Vorobeva 2021, 2023). The project was initially inspired by motives that can be described as personal which were grounded in the researcher's historical body, as she identified herself in a similar way (i.e., had a migration experience and was raising a bilingual child as a single parent). This inquiry was further fuelled by the realisation that the field of family multilingualism at that time was centred around nuclear families, and researchers had only started exploring language practices in families that did not conform to this label (see e.g., Fogle 2012; Poveda et al. 2014). This realisation consequently led to another motive which was aimed at a more socially oriented change, specifically at contributing to the emerging discourse on diverse families in family multilingualism research.

Similarly to the project by Intke-Hernandez, when establishing a zone of identification, Vorobeva as the researcher made the experiences sedimented in her historical body accessible to the participants. For example, the participants knew that the researcher was a single mom with an immigrant background and spoke Russian as her L1. The latter aspect, however, was a point for power imbalances, as some participants spoke Russian as one of their languages but not as an L1 and had strong connections to other linguistic identities, which were not as prominent in the study itself (see Vorobeva 2021).

In sum, NA encourages researchers to think about themselves as participants in a given nexus of practice. It provides two helpful concepts that facilitate reflections on one's engagement in a research project: 'zone of identification' and 'historical body'. The zone of identification encourages the researcher to think about one's relationship with the participants and the power relations between them and the participants from the beginning of the research project. The historical body draws attention to the impact the researcher's past lived experiences may have on gaining access to participants and on motivating a given research project. Different lived experiences and motivations might lead to different research projects and outcomes, and encouraging awareness of such potential differences makes NA a participatory research approach.

5 Blurring the lines between researchers and participants: navigating the nexus of practice

In the navigating phase of NA, the researcher investigates the phenomenon under study from various perspectives. The aim is to gain a deep understanding of what is going on in the nexus of practice and explain it by documenting and mapping the trajectories of participants, places and situations. Therefore, this phase entails activities for generating research materials, i.e., documenting the social actions of its key actors as well as identifying motivations behind the actors' behaviour. The kind of research materials generated will depend on the interaction order between the researcher and the participants, i.e., the power relations between them and the rules that guide their interaction. The researcher is developing their level of participation and continues to establish their zone of identification, keeping in mind that the goal is to merge the researcher's and the participants' activities (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 156). In order to describe the interaction order and the levels of participation of researcher(s) and participants within it, the distinctions provided by Schubotz (2020) and Vaughn and Jacquez (2020) as well as Bryman's spectrum of participation (see Section 2) are helpful. Tumelius and Legutko's projects will serve as examples of different interaction orders between the researchers and participants, and the consequences those orders had for collecting research materials.

In her project, Legutko interacted with language teachers and deliberately distanced herself from the teacher role in those interactions in order to document the teaching practices as they occur naturally in the language classroom. Not being a teacher at the participating schools allowed her to foreground the voices of the teachers who did work there by telling them she was there to learn from them, rather than to inform them. In other words, the goal was to mitigate the power to provide input on the teachers' teaching practices that the teachers might assume the researcher to

have. The interaction order involved regular dialogue with teachers in order to understand their teaching approaches and experiences, rather than positioning herself as a teacher and drawing on her own teaching approaches. In Vaughn and Jacquez's (2020) terms, Legutko was on level 2 of participation because she consulted teachers by positioning them as experts in the given nexus of practice. In contrast to participatory research that Vaughn and Jacquez speak of, the focus of the navigating phase is not to change any practices yet, but to describe what is going on in the nexus of practice. It is therefore natural that the researcher takes on an observer role. Bryman's (2016) spectrum that describes various roles the researcher can take during participant observation is helpful in the navigating phase of NA. The description of a 'partially participating observer' reflected most accurately the role Legutko played in the language classroom during her project. Even though she was "a regular in the vicinity", she was not always fully involved "in the principal activities" (Bryman 2016: 435) in the classroom. When students were working in groups, pairs or individually, she was available to answer any student questions, but did not interfere in the decisions teachers took in the class and followed their lead to the best of her ability. By participating as an observer and positioning the teachers as experts, Legutko hoped to introduce an interaction order that allowed to document naturally occurring teaching.

For Tumelius, navigating the nexus of practice involved different levels of participation in the two projects where preservice teachers designed for language learning in hybrid environments. In School Project 1, Tumelius did research for her master's thesis and was one of the preservice teachers participating in the course as well. The setting created a blurred role as a researcher and a participant integrating elements from levels 4 and 5 of participation as described in Schubotz (2020) and Vaughn and Jacquez (2020). As a joint effort, the preservice teachers on the course ideated, created and tested activities, and carried out the school project. The university lecturer responsible for the course took the role of a team member instead of leading the course activities from above. Tumelius belonged to a group of students who took responsibility for research activities on the university course, e.g., planning the collection and documentation research materials, and gaining the informed consent from different stakeholders. The setting placed the course participants on the level 4 and even on 5 in terms of Schubotz (2020) where the participants co-produce the research project and are even empowered to take lead on their individual research projects. One of the main findings of the doctoral research (Tumelius 2022: 70; Tumelius and Kuure 2022) was that a balanced, equal interaction order on the university course emerged during the design-driven university course because the university lecturer acted as one of the team members. Thus, the design-driven approach contested the traditional setting for academic teaching (see also Scollon and Scollon 2004: 39–49) and its power relations. The interaction order enabled the preservice teachers to assume agency and take responsibility for the school project, empowering them to gain ownership of the school project, and later of their

research projects conducted using the collected research materials. Moreover, the participants' view from inside School Project 1 was important in conducting the analysis as it gave Tumelius an insight into the background of the design process that would have otherwise remained hidden.

In the study for School Project 2 (Tumelius et al. 2022), Tumelius' role was more distant because she had not taken part in the course implementation. Now, she acted as an outside observer, aligning with levels 1 and 2 in Vaughn and Jacquez (2020), when conducting analysis with the other researchers. Nevertheless, one of the other researchers had acted as the university lecturer on the course providing an insider's view (Tumelius et al. 2022: 26). The process of analysis involved multiple rounds of both individual work and joint workshops where the analytical observations of the preservice teachers' online discussions and post-project reflective essays were discussed together. The joint discussions showed how the different perspectives (researcher as an outsider or as a participant) provided sometimes conflicting interpretations. The pool of research materials was assessed again to find related discussions and documents to gain a deeper insight into the converging discourses in place. Thus, the multiple rounds of analysis which were prompted by the different levels of participation proved to be valuable in ensuring the validity of findings.

In sum, when describing NA as a participatory research strategy, it is useful to draw attention to the interaction order between the researcher and the participants in the navigating phase, and the potentially blurred lines between the two. The nature of collection and analysis of research materials depends on the nature of the relationship between researcher and participant. The concept of the interaction order helps to reflect on the researcher's level of participation by directing focus to the different rules and power relations that govern the relationship between researcher and participant, and by making it clear that the extent to which the researcher intervenes in the nexus of practice is a conscious decision. In Legutko's case, mere observation was preferable in order to collect the research materials she needed for her research interest of documenting natural teaching practices. In Tumelius' case, her role as both a researcher and a participant on the course provided a variety of observations and interpretations not accessible otherwise.

6 Participants as co-researchers: changing the nexus of practice

Changing is the final phase of NA as well as the goal of doing NA. Changing the nexus of practice may take place at any point in time during the research projects and therefore co-exists with the other two stages (i.e., engaging and navigating the nexus

of practice). According to Scollon and Scollon (2004: 178), actions of the analysis itself are already enough to alter “trajectories for yourself and for the others in the nexus of practice and that in itself is producing social change”. Therefore, activities such as covering a research gap or cooperating in generation and analysis of research materials can be approached as an activity that changes the nexus of practice. NA allows observing change within different time spans. For example, a change can be observed during a research process or may become apparent many years after in a form of social activism. These types of change will be exemplified with Vorobeva’s and Intke-Hernandez’ research projects that focused on (1) family language policy in single-parent families and on (2) language socialisation of migrant mothers.

Vorobeva’s project engaged participants in the generation and collection of research materials by encouraging the mothers to decide themselves on what family interactions to record and when. One of the studies in the project (Vorobeva 2023), followed the three methodological steps of NA (i.e., engaging, navigating and changing the nexus of practice), and drew on the stimulated recall interview (SRI) as a changing the nexus stage. SRIs provide an opportunity for reaching the participants’ intentions, understandings and rationales in taking certain actions at the moment of the recording (see e.g., Dempsey 2010). SRIs were implemented as a step toward changing the nexus of practice to help the researcher understand why certain languages were used in certain situations in the family talk. The researcher prepared individual SRI protocols with time codes for ambiguous extracts of the recordings and pre-planned clarification questions. When meeting with each mother separately, we watched the ambiguous extracts together and discussed them. This activity allowed for a better understanding of what meanings the mothers attached to certain language practices. The decision to implement SRIs was taken after analysing the recordings of family interactions, but the interpretation of certain family language practices remained unclear. In order to change the nexus of practice and to shed more light on why and how certain language practices were playing out in the families, SRIs were recorded according to the stimulated recall protocols that were designed for each interview. This case illustrates how the nexus analytical task of changing is intertwined with the concept of historical body, as SRI facilitates change in the researcher’s historical body and helps to better understand how the participants implemented the social action (i.e., family language use) (see Section 4).

Intke-Hernandez’ project is an example of how social activism can be exercised in the NA framework. It means being, reflecting, discussing and acting together with the intention of raising awareness. This awareness can occur at the individual level, but always has its impact in broader contexts, too. The changing of the nexus of practice started when Intke-Hernandez began interacting with participants and establishing her zone of identification. She started to act as one of the participants in

the migrant mothers' communities and was part of their everyday conversations and reflections on language socialisation. The joint discussions created new insights for both participants and the researcher. They were essential in collecting research materials and during the analysis process since the philosophical approach in the study followed the Freirean tradition underlining the learner's subjectivity and the importance of the dialogic nature of constructing knowledge (Freire 1970, 1977; Shor and Freire 1987). That approach produced an important challenge of finding a common way to speak and understand each other between the participants from heterogeneous backgrounds and the academic researcher and how to avoid speaking in the "language" of researchers (Cook and Hess 2007: 30).

The process of finding a shared language between researcher and participant is part of the changing phase of NA, and the concept of historical body facilitates articulating what kind of change occurs. This process also inherently involves power dynamics, striving towards a more equal division of power and a more equitable interaction order. In Intke-Hernandez' project, some participants' historical bodies already included a clear view of their own language learning process at the start of the project: some already oriented towards observing, finding and utilising language learning opportunities in their daily life, and they strove to actively participate in different speech communities. However, there were also participants who assumed that the space for language learning was limited in traditional courses and schools. They were waiting to have an opportunity to participate in language courses so that their language learning could begin. After discussing the findings together, some participants realised through the discussions that in their everyday life there are opportunities to socialise in the speech community and become a part of it, and thus support their language learning. The experience of an exchange with other migrant mothers and the researcher became part of the participants' historical body, and further observations and conversations would be interesting in order to reveal any possible changes in the participants' social actions.

In sum, changing the nexus of practice is one way of exercising social activism, which can be defined as working together and collaborating to produce a change in a community. Moreover, research aiming at social change requires awareness of power relations in the given setting (see Scollon and Scollon 2004: 178). The participatory approach of NA facilitates promoting such change and may encourage considering research participants as co-researchers because their voices and reflections are heard in collaboration with the researcher. As shown in our examples, both participants' and researcher's awareness of the social issue under examination increase, and learning occurs for both parties. In nexus analytical terms, the 'historical bodies' of both parties converge and include that common experience, possibly altering future trajectories of their social actions.

7 Discussion and conclusion

This article illustrates how participation is ingrained in NA as an intrinsic part of the research process. Participation can be approached from a perspective of a researcher and that of a participant. While it is tempting to think of these two polarised positions as the only possible alternatives of participation, we suggest a continuum where the parties involved in the joint project are in continuous (re)negotiations of their participatory roles (see also Bryman 2016). Depending on the goals of the study, different participatory roles may be appropriate. When engaging the nexus of practice, participation as a researcher might include past experiences as a participant in the given nexus of practice (see Section 4 on Tumelius' case). When navigating a nexus of practice, the researcher may want to 'blend in' as a participant (see Section 5 on Legutko's case). Or when changing the nexus of practice, the participants may be encouraged to reflect upon their experience or the researcher's observations through more of a researcher lens (see Section 6 on Intke-Hernandez' and Vorobeva's cases).

Conceptual tools, such as 'zone of identification', 'interaction order', and 'historical body', are helpful to reflect upon the meaning of participation and power relations in a research project. They explicitly invite the researcher to reflect on their positionality and observe the interactional dynamics during the project, which may facilitate or hinder possibilities for research activities such as collection of research materials and collaboration with participants (see also Kuure et al. 2020 on zones of identification in connection to interdisciplinary research collaboration). The 'zone of identification' invites the researcher to implement the analysis in proximity with the social action under study and be recognised as a legitimate participant in the action. The 'historical body' highlights the importance of partially shared experiences which may facilitate or hinder engaging the nexus and building rapport. Moreover, a reflection on one's historical body helps to become aware of influential experiences that we, as researchers, bring to the research project, and consequently, brings to light what we find relevant.

When establishing one's zone of identification and becoming aware of one's historical body, it is important to reflect on the nature of the relationship and rules of interaction between the researcher and participants. The concept of 'interaction order' becomes relevant, as was demonstrated by Tumelius' and Legutko's projects (see Section 5). Articulating the interaction order helps describe in more detail what kind of research materials it is possible to generate.

On top of the above-mentioned concepts that facilitate the reflection on the role of the researcher(s) and participants in a research project, NA also proposes to conceptually distinguish between three phases of research. The distinction between

the ‘engaging’, ‘navigating’ and ‘changing’ phases helps articulate the different foci of a research activity. Admittedly, the three phases overlap because the researcher needs to be aware of their positionality in the nexus of practice at all times, and not only in the beginning of the research process or because the presence of the researcher changes the nexus of practice since the very beginning and not only at the end of the project. Nonetheless, it can be helpful to reflect separately upon what it means to engage participants and why one is engaged in a given project, upon how the research materials are collected and what might have influenced the collection of materials, and upon the kind of change that results from a research project.

Finally, it is important to highlight NA’s change-oriented nature. In all four projects, the researchers were interested in tracking trajectories of social actions in either educational or socialisation settings. Tumelius explored the learning trajectories of pre-service language teachers in appropriating the pedagogical use of digital technologies, Legutko wanted to document naturally occurring teaching of language teachers before talking to them about possible development of their practices, Intke-Hernandez reflected upon the language learning trajectory of migrants in collaboration with her as the researcher, and Vorobeva encouraged reflection on the language use of single parents by conducting stimulated recall interviews. All these activities aim at increasing awareness among researchers and participants and developing change together. Such collaborative activities may blur the lines and power relations between participants and researchers and, as such, contribute to a more socially sustainable world. Even if apparent changes happen only at the individual level, those individuals act as part of communities. Thus, their thinking and actions can change practices and have an impact on society. The control and dissemination of information are central to these power dynamics. Researchers must be aware of how knowledge is produced, shared, and controlled within the research context, as these processes can reinforce or challenge existing power structures. By employing nexus analytical tools, researchers can better navigate these power relations and foster a more equitable and participatory research environment as the examples in the current article illustrate. Future studies should continue to explore these dynamics, particularly focusing on the mechanisms through which participants can influence research outcomes in ways that are meaningful for their communities.

To conclude, in change-oriented projects, researchers need tools to articulate more accurately what it meant for them to participate in the research project, and how research participants took part in it. This article contributed to the participatory turn in research (Schubotz 2020) by presenting nexus analytical tools that facilitate systematic reflection on different stakeholders’ participation in research. We encourage further engagement with those concepts in future research.

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