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

Abstract

This article aims to contribute to the discussion on interviews in qualitative research. More specifically, we focus on acquaintance interviews (Garton and Copland, 2010), that is, interviews in which the interviewer and interviewees have an established prior relationship. By using data from both of our doctoral studies, we illustrate how this prior relationship becomes salient and is made use of in the interviews. The data excerpts presented in the article showcase the potential of using acquaintance interviews to uncover the participants' genuine views, and grasp a more profound image of the phenomenon studied than in more traditional interview arrangements. The findings also demonstrate that acquaintance interviews offer a fruitful arena for utilizing the already existing common ground between the researcher and the participants to elicit more relevant and in-depth research material.

Keywords: qualitative research, acquaintance interviews, ethnography, frame shifting, social desirability bias, pre-existing relationship, co-construction

Introduction

In recent years, interviews as a method of empirical data collection have proliferated in many disciplines (Roulston, 2019). Although positivistic survey type approaches to interviewing (e.g. Singleton and Straits, 2012) where researcher involvement is kept to an absolute minimum have largely been abandoned in qualitative research, interviewees are sometimes still seen merely as *treasure chests* (Borer and Fontana, 2012) from which data should be extracted with as little researcher interference as possible. In general, there now seems to be a scholarly consensus that interviews are 'a shared product' of the interviewer and the interviewee and that 'what is in the mind of the interviewer influences the process and the content of the "data"' (Josselson, 2013: 1). However, there still remains some debate as to how this affects the actual data and their analysis. Although we are proponents of approaching interviews as sites of social action, we believe, similarly to Josselson (2013), that it is possible to achieve some level of understanding of people's experiences and perceptions through interviewing.

The impetus for this article stemmed from our doctoral dissertations in which we both had a personal relationship with the interviewees (Author, 2020; Author, 2019). When embarking on this perhaps unconventional method of data collection, we searched for articles and academic texts about the topic, and, to our surprise, found relatively few, even though it is fairly common for example in cross cultural research for the researcher to have a pre-existing involvement or understanding of the community they study (see e.g. Chaparro, 2019; Goncalves, 2013). It seems that Garton and Copland's (2010) article is the most comprehensive work on the specific topic of interviewing one's acquaintances. They aptly label these types of interviews *acquaintance interviews,* which is the term that we have also adopted to describe the interviews we have conducted for our doctoral dissertations. According to Garton and Copland (2010), in acquaintance interviews the interviewees can be for instance the researcher's friends, colleagues, family members or associates. Despite Garton and Copland's (2010) article being an insightful piece of writing, we felt that there is still a lot to say about the phenomenon of interviewing people with whom the interviewer has a prior relationship.

In this article, we endeavor to contribute to the discussion of acquaintance interviews, and reflect on their potential benefits. We will first briefly summarize both of our doctoral studies and how they relate to acquaintance interviews. We will then review how interviews in general have

been approached in qualitative research, and position the acquaintance interviews we have conducted in this discussion. After that, we will focus more closely on acquaintance interviews and, through authentic data excerpts, highlight some of their distinctive features. Although our research is situated in the field of applied linguistics, we argue that the phenomena addressed in this article have wider resonance and implications across disciplines.

The research contexts
Summaries of the research projects
In this article, we draw on data from two separate doctoral studies. The first being Author1's Ph.D. research in which he examined CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) from former pupils' perspectives (Author, 2019). The aim of the study was to investigate how the participants perceived the effects of their CLIL experience on their lives and touched upon topics such as language attitudes, foreign language self-concept and intercultural awareness. The participants (n=24), who were adults in their early 30s and who had been in the same CLIL class as the researcher for nine years in the 1990s, were interviewed in 2016 and 2017. The researcher thus had a prior relationship with all of them, although the nature of the relationship was not similar with all the participants. That is, the researcher had been in close contact with some of the participants up until the interviews while he had not interacted with others since their CLIL times. As a result, he was better acquainted with some participants than others but nonetheless had a shared history with each participant, which resulted in the interviews being labelled acquaintance interviews. The interviews followed broad themes that were sent to the participants in advance. The interviews, which were held in Finnish, were audio-recorded and translated verbatim. Consequently, the interview quotations used in this article are translated into English by the researcher.

The second set of data originates from Author2's longitudinal Ph.D. study with migrant parents (n=8) and family clinic nurses (n=7) in Finland (Author, 2020). The study focused on the role of English language in migrant integration. The overarching aim of the study was to gain a better understanding of voluntary migrants' individual integration trajectories, and the role perceived English proficiency plays in how these unfold. The parent participants were recruited through a multicultural parent-child group organized by a local non-profit non-governmental organization. The group convenes once a week, and welcomes all parents and children, both migrants and native Finns alike. The group's goals are to provide a safe space for newly arrived parents to network and share experiences with others, and help them get acquainted with the region. The researcher first observed the group's activities and participated in them with her own son, and, thus, became acquainted with the members of the group through informal discussions and shared experience. The role of a fellow parent made the researcher an "insider", a full-fledged member of the group (cf. Weinreb et al., 2018; Greenleaf et al. 2020), which helped her establish good rapport and recruit suitable participants for the study. Consequently, the researcher had a pre-existing relationship with her participants prior to the interviews, which classifies them as acquaintance interviews. Maintaining a good relationship with the participants was especially important due to the study's longitudinal nature and the researcher's wish to stay in touch with the participants throughout the three-year period of data collection. To investigate how the parents' integration and language learning trajectories unfolded, the participants were interviewed two to three times between the years 2015 and 2018. Similarly to Author1's study, the interviews followed general themes and they were audio-recorded and translated verbatim.

Interview locations

A typical feature related to acquaintance interviews is the interview venue. Acquaintance interviews are often conducted in less formal settings than traditional interviews such as in the researcher's or the participant's home or in a public place. According to Elwood and Martin (2000), the venue where interviews take place has received little attention in research in general. Akin to their views, we consider interview locations to have a direct bearing on the data generated and a less formal and institutionalized interview venue than, for instance the university premises, may induce more personal accounts from the interviewees.

In Author1's study, the participants were given an opportunity to choose their interview locations. The researcher, however, suggested either his home, the participant's home or a public place as a site for the interview. This was a conscious choice as conducting the interviews on university premises might have created undesired power positions for the interview situation and a deliberate attempt was made to diminish any such power imbalance. Out of the 24 interviews, 11 were held at the researcher's home, six at the participant's home, three in a public location and four via Skype due to pragmatic reasons. Particularly the interviews conducted either at the researcher's or participant's home at times resembled more a casual chit-chat than a formal interview. During the interviews, the interviewer and interviewees were reminiscing about shared past experiences and co-constructing meaning. The recorded face-to-face interviews were always preceded by a catch-up of varying length. It can be interpreted that this informal exchange between two old friends had an effect on the power relations at play and the interviewer and interviewee were more on an equal footing already from the start of the interview. Consequently, this had, in the researcher's view, significant implications to the data.

Author2's interviews, in turn, took place at the interviewees' homes, local cafés, restaurants or at the university. The venues were chosen by the interviewees, who mostly based their decisions on their families' current circumstances. In some cases, this meant that the participants were happy to invite the researcher to their home, since it was the most convenient location for parents of small children to meet. Sometimes the interviewees' children were also present in the interviews. In other cases, the participants wished to have a moment on their own *outside* their home, away from the daily hassles of family life while enjoying coffee, tea or lunch. The university also served as a venue in some occasions. The downside of meeting at the university was that it might indeed have increased the perceived power differential between the researcher and the participants, but it nevertheless offered a rather neutral and quiet arena for a talk. The interviewees were also free to choose between English and, at later stages, Finnish as the language of the interviews.

Conceptualizing interviews

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

With the interview as a research instrument approach, in turn, the researcher's role in generating the interview data is often left completely out of the analysis, as Talmy's (2010) review of several qualitative studies in applied linguistics suggests. Such an approach also fails to address

the underlying power differences for example in the institutional status or age between the interviewer and the interviewee. Such differences can, however, have substantial consequences both for the course of the actual interview as well as in the ensuing process of data re-contextualization (Talmy, 2010). In contrast, when research interviews are approached from a more social-practice-oriented perspective, more attention is paid to challenging 'the conception of interviews as a conduit into what people really think, know, or believe' (Talmy, 2010: 140).

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

Berner-Rodoreda et al. (2020: 296) have further coined their own distinct interview type under the umbrella of epistemic interviews called *deliberative interviews,* by which they refer to interviews in which both parties 'reason together, have about the same speaking time, and that they can question, even challenge one another in the joint search for a better understanding or more suitable solutions to the issues at stake'. Another postulate of deliberative interviews is that the interviewer and interviewee should have approximately similar amounts of information on the topic(s) addressed in the interview (Berner-Rodoreda et al., 2020).

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

With regard to Berner-Rodoreda et al.'s (2020) typology of qualitative interviews, we would place our acquaintance interviews in the middle ground of the doxastic–epistemic continuum. A point to note here is that acquaintance interviews may vary in terms of the level of co-construction between the interlocutors. The commonality of such interviews is the prior relationship between the interviewer and interviewee(s). Whether that prior relationship is utilized, depends on the study. Therefore, some acquaintance interviews can be categorized purely as doxastic interviews, whereas the types of acquaintance interviews we have conducted, include aspects of epistemic interviews (Berner-Rodoreda et al., 2020). Similarly, we consider Talmy's (2010) distinction between interviews as research instrument and interviews as social practice a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Thus, the acquaintance interviews we have conducted for our own research fall somewhere in between the above-presented interview approaches. Moreover, when it comes to Holstein and Gubrium's (2003) whats and hows and Byrne's (2004) interviews as a resource and interviews as a topic, the emphasis in our studies was on the former ones while not disregarding the latter. That is, although we were predominantly interested in the participants' experiences, we

acknowledged the nature of the interview situation and its potential impact on the data and explicitly addressed this in our research reports (Author, 2020; Author, 2019).

Author2's interviews could also be labelled ethnographically-oriented, which, in Berner-Rodoreda et al.'s (2020) classification, fall under doxastic interviews. However, the interview situations in Author2's research were highly interactional and meanings were partly co-constructed. In ethnographic research in general, it is an implicit postulate that the researcher is deeply involved in the research context as observations are the primary mode of data collection (Gobo, 2008). As a result, the researcher has established a relationship with the participants, often preceding the interview (Davies, 2007). As opposed to other types of acquaintance interviews, in ethnographic interviews, the researcher does not have a prior relationship with the participants but the relationship is established only through conducting the research (Garton and Copland, 2010). The relationships between, and the roles of the interviewer and interviewees, in ethnographical interviews still bring a distinct element to the data collection. As the interviewer and interviewees have interacted several times outside the interview setting, the interview may rather resemble a naturally occurring conversation than a formal research interview (O'Reilly, 2012). This was also the case in Author2's research.

Related to the co-constructive nature of interviews is the interviewees' behavior during the interview, Al-Yateem (2012) has suggested that the fact that interview participants are aware of their speech being recorded and analyzed by someone can affect their narrations. With that in mind, the participants often endeavor to give a positive image of themselves in an interview setting. This relates to the concept of *social desirability bias* (Kaminska and Foulsham, 2013) which refers to a measurement error in which research participants present themselves in a more socially acceptable way than their genuine attitudes, beliefs or behavior would perhaps suggest (Kaminska and Foulsham, 2013). The incentive for this can be the research setting, the interviewee's motives or their expectations about the consequences of their answers (King and Bruner, 2000). For instance, in an interview setting, the interviewee might filter their answers and provide answers that comply with their expectations of what the interviewer wants to hear (Kaminska and Foulsham, 2013).

Prior relationship and familiarity in interviews
In qualitative work in general, the researcher is often familiar with the topic and close to people they are interviewing. Therefore, the familiarity element in interviews can be considered more a continuum than an insider/outsider dichotomy. Although familiarity is present in many interviews to a varying degree, analysing the prior relationship between the researcher and the participants seems to be a fairly unexplored terrain. For instance, in his study, Palfreyman (2005) interviewed his colleagues but left this aspect entirely out of the analysis. Similarly, Prior (2011) conducted ethnographic interviews with a participant whom he had met a year before the first interview. In the research report, Prior (2011) focused on the co-construction of the narrative but gave the pre-existing relationship very little attention.

Among the studies that have explicitly acknowledged the prior relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is Weinreb et al's (2018) study. They authors propose that on the one end of the familiar/unknown continuum are insiders who are familiar with the community and the respondents. On the other end, in turn, are outsiders who represent the traditional stranger-interviewer norm, that is, they are not locals of the community nor have a prior relationship with the participants. Along the continuum are local-strangers who are familiar with the community but do not have a pre-existing relationship with the participants. Weinreb et al.'s (2018) study showed

that the participants disclosed more information to insiders and were also less inclined to lie to them than to outsider interviewers. Based on this, the authors suggest that insiders who have a prior relationship with the participants can 'collect superior data on some items' (Weinreb et al., 2018: 95).

Greenleaf et al. (2020), in turn, have distinguished two types of insider interviews, namely insider-friend and insider-acquaintance. The former one relates to a pre-existing relationship between the interviewer and the participants. The latter is used to describe a setting in which the interviewer becomes acquainted with the participant through the research process or has a passing relationship with them. Greenleaf et al.'s (2020) study indicated that the interviewers perceived the familiarity aspect to results in more honest narration but overall felt that the participants' personalities had the greatest effect irrespective of a prior relationship. Moreover, the interviewers did not make a distinction between friends and acquaintances but only between the aforementioned categories and unknown participants.

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

Garton and Copland (2010) have explored in-depth the topic of interviewing people with whom the interviewer has a prior relationship. They propose that acquaintance interviews often capitalize on the shared experiences and use them as resources for co-constructing meaning. The authors argue that the prior relationship between the parties has its bearing on the data and that not all data generated in acquaintance interviews are necessarily available to outsider interviewers. Garton and Copland (2010) also underscore that this needs to be made explicit in the research report. Garton and Copland's (2010) analysis showed that negotiations of asymmetrical relationships and *frame shifting* are distinctive to acquaintance interviews. Frame shifting refers to Sarangi's (2004) categorization of interview talk in three frames, namely *institutional*, *professional* and *lifeworld* frames. In the institutional frame, the function of an interview is made salient and both the interviewer and interviewee take on their institutional identities and adhere to the traditional question-answer mode. The professional frame is characterized by references to one's profession whereas the lifeworld frame refers to the interviewer and interviewee sharing and discussing their personal experiences and perceptions (Sarangi, 2004). Garton and Copland (2010) have suggested that shifting between the above frames is typical for acquaintance interviews. Our own interview data also substantiate this to a significant degree. In what follows, we highlight some key aspects of acquaintance interviews prominent in our data. We have divided the section into two sub-sections, namely '*frame shifting*' and '*capitalizing on the common ground between the interviewer and interviewees*'.

Key characteristics of acquaintance interviews
Instances of frame shifting
Our data coincide with Garton and Copland's (2010) views about frame shifting in acquaintance interviews. The interviews contained several instances where the roles of the interviewer and

interviewee seemed to be shifting between institutional, professional and lifeworld frames (Sarangi, 2004). For instance, in the following interview excerpt from Author1's interview, in which one of the participants, Kimmo[1], talks about the difficulties he had encountered in school when studying Finnish (i.e. his first language), this type of shift in frames is evident. Kimmo and Author1 had been close friends in primary school and thus knew each other's families:

Excerpt 1:

1	Author1:	So you didn't have grammar mistakes in them but it was mostly the content or..?
2	Kimmo:	Well yes. I'm sure there were grammar mistakes too but it probably wasn't the biggest
3		thing. Somehow it was just a bit too vague and then again because I haven't read literature.
4		Or I mean in secondary school we didn't, I don't remember that I would have. Maybe I
5		have read a few books entirely but many things you could pass just by reading a bit from
6		the beginning and the end of the chapter. And then you would give this kind of lousy
7		presentation of it and then people clapped their hands *whereas I remember that you read*
8		*books and liked it.*
9	Author1:	Yes in primary school. In secondary school I didn't. Or did I? I don't remember.
10	Kimmo:	But in our family nobody has ever really read a lot.

In lines 7 and 8, Kimmo makes a transition from an institutional to lifeworld frame (Sarangi, 2004) by referring to Author1's childhood and his reading habits. Author1 acknowledges the comment and responses to it after which Kimmo continues to elaborate on the reading traditions in his family. In our interviews, the shifts between the different frames were often relatively subtle and instantaneous as the above extract exemplifies. An utterance in the lifeworld frame was directly followed by a move back to institutional frame. Moreover, it was sometimes challenging to rigorously distinguish between the different frames. It could rather be interpreted that the institutional and lifeworld frames partly intertwined and occurred simultaneously (see also Garton and Copland, 2010). For instance in the above extract, Kimmo predominantly adheres to the institutional frame, and is determined to answer the initial question while making occasional references to the lifeworld frame which signal delicate changes from the more institutionalized interviewer/interviewee roles to the roles of two old friends. Despite the many instances of lifeworld frame, there was strong institutionality even in our acquaintance interviews which manifested in the way interviews were scheduled and arranged, and in the pre-determined themes that led the interviews (see also Sarangi, 2004). However, our data showed that acquaintance interviews naturally deviate from the prescribed scripts and generate information that may come to light only in this type of interview arrangement (see the section *Capitalizing on the common ground between the interviewer and interviewees*).

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

Excerpt 2:

1	Author1:	Do you remember at all what kinds of emotions it evoked? When there was some English-
2		medium teaching, for instance in [teacher's name omitted] class, what kind of feelings
3		were involved there?

---

[1] All the participants in both studies were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

4	Niko:	It didn't.. I can't make any other difference except that I clearly remember that
5		mathematics was always in Finnish. Maybe.. and then P.E. lessons were in Finnish.
6		Otherwise it's all very blurry and I can't even describe how big a percentage *we* had of
7		English-medium teaching. *You probably know how to answer this but for me it was more*
8		*like now we are just learning religion.*
9	Author1:	Why do you think it's hard to remember that?
10	Niko:	It didn't.. Maybe *we* were able to learn.. study those things with such a good.. or the
11		content at such a high level that it never felt like studying the language. It just felt natural.
12	Author1:	Yeah. When you reflect on it, *do you think that because we covered those things in*
13		*English that we learned somehow less than others*? I mean did *we* learn the content less
14		than others or more or the same amount?
15	Niko:	Well at least I didn't have the feeling that *we* learned less. Or I don't know what the reality
16		is. And also the fact that *we* had.. *Correct me if I'm wrong* but I think in practice *our*
17		*teacher* changed the language just like that. That there wasn't this kind of distinction that
18		now *we* are changing to English-medium teaching.

In the above interview excerpt, the shared history and prior relationship between the interviewer and interviewee becomes visible in several parts. First, in the middle of his utterances Niko makes two similar references to Author1's expertise on the topic being discussed (italicized in lines 7 and 8 and in line 16) which can be seen as shift to professional frame (Sarangi, 2004). Niko does not seem to expect a response from Author1 with regard to either reference but merely uses this speech act to clarify and remind the interviewer that he may not recall all the past events correctly while simultaneously explicitly pointing to the interviewer's professional and institutional roles. Second, the shared history becomes apparent also at a more micro-level. For instance, throughout the excerpt Niko and Author1 are using the pronoun '*we*' when referring to their class (italicized in lines 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18). It could be that Niko is using '*we*' simply to refer to his classmates in general but in his question in lines 12 and 13 (italicized), Author1 is deliberately using the inclusive pronoun '*we*' instead of '*you*' to make the shared history more salient, to reduce the power distance between the interlocutors (Talmy, 2010) and to move away from the institutional frame to the lifeworld frame (Sarangi, 2004). Niko seems to accept this frame as he continues in the same mode using '*we*' in his answer in line 15. In our view, these references illustrate how the common history and prior relationship was used as a resource to co-construct the interview talk, and also to build rapport.

Our third data excerpt about frame shifting originates from Author2's doctoral dissertation. The researcher interviewed eight migrant parents during a three-year period. As the interviews proceeded, it became increasingly evident how important the common ground of parenting was for building trust, sharing experiences and establishing a more equal relationship between the researcher and the participants. The parents also sought advice for various cultural or child-related concerns that they were facing in the new environment. Sometimes it even seemed like the roles were switched, as the participants turned to Author2 for information on the 'Finnish' way of life. This, in Author2's view, made the interview process more reciprocal, and reduced potential power differences to a significant degree. The interview excerpt below, from an interview between Katherina and Author2, illustrates the point very well. Katherina is originally from Hungary, and she had lived in Finland for five years with her Hungarian husband and two children at the time of the interview in 2018. She initially moved to Finland because of her husband's work.

Excerpt 3:

1	Katherina:	But, that's what makes me a bit worry that I don't know how to imagine how, I'm not the
2		first mother with two kids who, who does everything in the household and additionally
3		also works, at least six hours a day, wants to work six hours a day but, you know, how to
4		arrange everything so that you also have some, some time for yourself and also your
5		partner.
6	Author2:	That's an eternal question I think.
7	Katherina:	That's, yeah, but now and I know it's an eternal question, but I'm facing it at, now, today..
8	Author2:	yeah..
9	Katherina:	That ok, my six hours work means at the moment that it's only five hours, because I take
10		the kids [laughter]to the daycare and then, and pick them up, and then of course our whole
11		apartment is a mess, and then, and then..
12	Author2:	Laundry, cleaning, cooking..
13	Katherina:	Just, just to do, just that it looks a bit better, it takes, I don't know, at least half an hour
14		and then, and then there's some, yeah, lunchtime or something when you have to eat, and
15		then ok, we are at four hours aren't we?
16	Author2:	[laughter]
17	Katherina:	So what do you do?
18	Author2:	Yeah, yeah, I guess there are at least two ways of looking at it, well, for one, it's, it's
19		temporary, children will on- only be small for a few years, and, well, who cares about the
20		mess, it's not the end of the world.
21	Katherina:	Yeah.. [laughter]
22	Author2:	You just have to learn to live with it [laughter]or then take the time and do it.
23	(…)	
24	Author2:	I've tried to find a sort of midway.
25	Katherina:	Like the automatic hoover.
26	Author2:	[laughter] that..
27	Katherina:	For example..
28	Author 2:	That was my husband's find, [laughter] 'cause he was (xxx) with the mess.
29	Katherina:	We still talk about it with [my son], the automatic hoover, the laiva ('boat').

Katherina first describes how difficult it has been for her to balance between work and keeping her family life organized, especially since she works for their own company from home. Therefore, she is not able to escape '*the mess*' before starting to work. After describing her own situation, she asks Author2 directly: '*so what do you do?*' (line 17) challenging her to reciprocate, and comment on how Author2 has solved the issue in question. This can be seen as an instance of shifting to the lifeworld frame (Sarangi, 2004). A more obvious move to the lifeworld frame comes when after Author2's explanation, Katherina refers to a household appliance that her son was very impressed with (line 25), as they visited Author2's house some months earlier. This shared memory also made the talk more personal. In fact, the visit itself seems to have been important for Katherina and her son, as the boy still, months later, remembered the appliance in question, and a boat that was parked in Author2's driveway during their visit. Through these encounters, Author2 and Katherina had become much more personally involved and developed a friendly and mutually rewarding relationship.

All the data extracts above illustrate how acquaintance interviews utilize the prior relationship and shift between different roles and frames. At times, the interviews resembled casual conversations between acquaintances much more than research interviews between researchers and their informants, which is particularly typical of ethnographic interviews (O'Reilly, 2012). As evidenced by the data extracts, acquaintance interviews have a great deal of potential for providing research material that would be very difficult to obtain without an existing relationship of trust

between the researcher and the participants. Furthermore, such an atmosphere of trust allows the participants to address potentially sensitive, personal or controversial topics more freely than they would do in a more traditional interview. In what follows, we reflect on this point in more detail.

Capitalizing on the common ground between the interviewer and interviewees
According to Josselson (2013), the depth and extent of interviewees' narration is dependent upon the interview setting and how good the emotional and psychological interaction between the interviewer and interviewee is. She uses the metaphor '*stranger on the train*' (Josselson, 2013: 5) to describe a phenomenon in which the interviewer is able to create such a safe environment that the interviewees end up speaking openly and without restraint. Although this can be achieved in all interviews, we propose that this is a typical feature of acquaintance interviews and became evident in our data. We therefore suggest that, contrarily to what is often suggested (e.g. Rodriguez et al., 2015), acquaintance interviews can be particularly fruitful instruments of data collection for diminishing the social desirability bias (Kaminska and Foulsham, 2013). The most descriptive example of this is from Author1's study and in Juho's interview in which he talks about his experiences with people of other nationalities.

Excerpt 4:

1	Author1:	Has this CLIL experience somehow influenced your this kind of tolerance and attitude
2		towards difference?
3	Juho:	Well yeah in part it definitely has.. I get along with foreigners better.. I'm sure it has
4		influenced.. I'm really happy to meet.. if there ever is some foreigner.. foreign person..
5		I'll easily start chatting.. chatting with that person.. and I always take an interest in foreign
6		people.. [--] just out of interest.. that there isn't this threshold to find a common language..

Later on in the interview, Juho started to express his opinions about different nationalities more openly.

7	Juho:	The worst were Chinese and in some case Russians. Chinese were like.. it was very hard
8		to get along with them even though it was always emphasized to us in all things that there
9		are cultural differences and so but they are in their own world sort of. That somehow it
10		felt that sometimes they.. their worldview is truly.. totally different. That they don't like..
11		like un.. they don't think the same way as we do. There are like those exceptions. Often
12		they are then the ones who have lived in some western countries.. or that.. but who are
13		like.. hard to say that who are very smart.. cause the others aren't probably stupid either
14		but.. that there are.. there are those individuals with whom it is easy for a Westerner to
15		get along. That there are those as well.

This excerpt from the interview with Juho uncovers the potential of acquaintance interviews with regard to social desirability bias (Kaminska and Foulsham, 2013). Initially Juho answers Author1's question about the possible effect of CLIL on his tolerance and attitudes to differences in a positive way, presumably wanting to present himself in a favorable and positive light. However, towards the end of the interview, when Juho speaks about his experiences of group work during his studies, his remarks about different nationalities and stereotypes can be considered politically incorrect and even downright racist. It can be interpreted that the pre-existing relationship ultimately induced and uncovered more genuine opinions than first expressed as at times the interview resembled an informal conversation between two old friends. It can be suggested that the views presented by

Juho might not have come to light with another interviewer. This phenomenon contests the assumption to consider participants' recounts as an absolute truth of their reality, particularly with regard to highly sensitive topics such as racism and prejudices (King and Bruner, 2000). As Rapley (2001) has pointed out, participants in the interviews usually want to present themselves as certain type of people.

Another example of utilizing the prior relationship to uncover the participants' more genuine opinions stems from Author2's interview with Thomas. He was the only male interviewee in Author2's study and had had a very hard time settling in Finland. Thomas had originally moved to Finland to live with his Finnish wife, who was still in the middle of her professional training when they got married. At the time of the interview in 2016, Thomas did not have a job and, thus, was staying at home with their son while his wife worked. In the following, he describes some incidents that had made him feel like an outsider in Finland.

Excerpt 5:

1	Thomas:	Probably one of the hardest things I find is, I dunno, for example, we've had so many
2		people over here for dinner and stuff like that, but we never get that in return, so..
3	Author2:	Ok..
4	Thomas:	There's always this one-sided thing, and I've just, ah..
5	Author2:	You feel like you're just giving all the time.
6	Thomas:	Yeah..
7	Auhtor2:	And not getting anything back.
8	Thomas:	Yeah, and I find that, I dunno if it's a Finnish thing or if it's..
9		[...]
10	Thomas:	yeah, well, but even one of the, one of the hardest things I've found is when we had [our
11		son], and just, this is a really big cultural difference, is, in Australia everyone visits you
12		and stuff like that, an' I find that in Finland, like, no one visited us, we had family coming
13		to see him, but it was like none of that, like we had to throw a party for people to meet,
14		an' I was like, I was got smacked, so it was two months or three months after we'd had
15		[our son], and then we had, we have to have a party for people to come, an' I said I found
16		that very, very strange.
17		[...]
18	Thomas:	so, the other thing that I found really hard is to catch up with people, it's like booking a
19		doctor's appointment, it's so difficult in Finland, it's like, can we come and visit, oh yeah,
20		you can come visit us on Tuesday, an' at eight o'clock, we should be home then, and you
21		go there and there's like cake and coffee, it's like, no I just wanted to come and say hello,
22		look, I don't want the whole cake and coffee, I just wanna come over and say hello, you
23		can make me coffee an'..
24	Author2:	yeah, maybe people just take things a little too seriously, or they want everything to be
25		perfect every time they have company.
26	Thomas:	yeah, but I dunno, that's, for me, that's a very big difference as well that I've found.

First, Thomas explains that he felt strange, because they had been inviting many people over dinner to their home, but none of them had returned the favor (lines 1-2). He had also been disappointed that nobody had really reacted to the fact that they had had a baby (from line 10 onwards). A third difference between the Finnish and Australian way of life that he mentions, is how people go about visiting one another (starting from line 18). Apparently Thomas was used to doing this in a much more casual manner. Overall, Thomas felt that Finns are not very considerate or flexible. Being

already acquainted with Author2 undoubtedly helped Thomas to talk about these differences. It is likely that he would not have brought up these incidents with a random Finn, since vocalizing such sentiments is in direct conflict with the general impression Finns like to uphold about themselves as being considerate and hospitable towards newcomers.

To us, all this suggests that being better acquainted with one's interviewees adds depth to the interviews and allows access to such information that could not be generated in other ways, as Garton and Copland (2010) also suggest. In fact, referring to the extracts above, we would even suggest that a prior relationship between the interviewer and the interviewees makes the whole process more meaningful for both parties.

Conclusion

In this article, we have discussed the idiosyncrasies of acquaintance interviews through two broad themes, namely '*frame shifting*' and '*capitalizing on the common ground between the interviewer and interviewees*' and have endeavored to demonstrate the advantages of such interviews. Despite the potential of acquaintance interviews, they also call for a greater attention to the researcher's positionality and research ethics. First, interviewing one's acquaintances can compromise the full anonymity of the participants since the fact that the participants are the researcher's acquaintances narrows down the group of people they could potentially be. Furthermore, even though the participants might be anonymous to an outsider reader, there is a fair chance that the participants recognize each other in the research report. Therefore, it is essential that the participants have been sufficiently informed of the research and the consequences of participating in it.

Second, acquaintance interviews may also become highly personal in nature, which may result in the interviewees being increasingly worried that they may be recognized. In such a case, special attention must be paid to ethical considerations, and great care must be taken to anonymize the participants, and not to disclose too revealing background information about them. Researchers must also consider very carefully whether highly confidential or personal accounts should even be considered research data. For instance, Author2 decided to leave a tragic family event described by one of the participants out of the analysis. As one solution, the participants can be asked to review the final research report prior to publishing to ensure their consent to it which was done in one of Author1's Ph.D. articles.

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

In conclusion, this article has demonstrated how prior relationship between the interviewer and interviewees becomes salient in the interviews and how this may affect the data generated. We suggest that interviewing people with whom one has an earlier relationship (e.g. friends or colleagues) may throw light on people's experiences more profoundly and elucidate their more

genuine opinions than traditional interview arrangements. Moreover, particularly in acquaintance interviews, the co-constructive and situated nature of interviewing becomes visible.

Finally, as a practical implication, we would like to encourage researchers to utilize acquaintance interviews as a data collection method as long as this relationship, and its possible effect on the data, is carefully considered and discussed in the research report. We agree with Rapley's (2001) request to address the interactional side of the interviews in research articles much more than is presently done. In his words: '*at the very least* interviewers' talk should *always* be included' in the data extracts (Rapley, 2001: 306, original emphasis).

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