

Using vignette methodology as a tool for exploring cultural identity positions

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In this paper we will examine how vignette methodology can aid understanding of cultural identity. Vignettes are typically short stories about a fictional character or fictional scenario appropriate to a particular study. The story places the behaviour of the character in a concrete context and allows the researcher to explore participants' positions and perspectives on the issues arising from the situation. We argue that within a framework of cultural development theory and dialogical self theory (Hermans, 2001) the identity positioning in which research participants engage when responding to vignettes can be explained in relation to the sociocultural context. To do so we report on part of a wider study about representations of children who work. In particular this paper will focus on language brokering when it involves translating or interpreting on behalf of family members who do not speak the host language. Language brokering requires the child to engage in the cultural contexts of both the host culture and the home culture and as such, the child must negotiate new cultural identities. Those interviewed were young people aged between 15-18 years – some of whom were brokers while others who were not. When looking at the language broker vignette scenario these young people often positioned the parents, teachers and friends of the language broker in the scenario in particular ways. Drawing on notions of adequacy and inadequacy, visibility and invisibility, theoretical ideas around cultural identity theory and dialogical self theory can provide an understanding of how the young people moved through different (often conflicting) identity positions.

Introduction

Vignettes are typically short stories about a fictional character or fictional scenario appropriate to a particular study. The story places the behaviour of the character in a concrete context and allows the researcher to explore participants' views on the issues arising from the situation. In this paper we use cultural developmental theory which draws on Vygotsky's (1978) ideas of development, allowing us to explore the relationships between the socio-cultural level of development (dominant representations of childhood) and the ontogenetic level (impact on cultural identities). Aiding us further in our exposition of cultural identity development is the dialogical self theory (Hermans, 2001) which suggests a dialogicality or multivoicedness in our self-identifications. In other words, in this perspective it is assumed that there are "multiple ways of representing reality" (Wertsch, 1991, p.13, which at the individual level can involve dialogues between the different positions an individual may adopt. In psychological research it is valuable to identify these multiple voices, and how they dialogue with each other, as an attempt to understand "how and why a particular voice occupies centre stage, that is, why it is "privileged" (Wertsch, 1987) in a particular setting." (Wertsch, 1991, p.14). In our view, vignette methodology is best understood when taking this theoretical frame in relation to the analysis of vignette methodology data.

Vignette methodology

When using vignette methodology, participants are presented with a short story/scenario about the fictional character engaging in some form of activity or experience relevant to the topic under study. The story places the behaviour of the character in a concrete context and allows the researcher to explore participants' views on the issues arising from the situation. Vignette methodology allows researchers to systematically explore issues that could, potentially, be sensitive to research participants as it allows participants to control whether they disclose personal information or not (Barter and Reynolds, 2004), and to discuss issues from a "non-personal and therefore less threatening perspective" (Hughes, 1998, p.383).

Debates amongst those researchers who have used vignette methodology have often centred around the correspondence between the participants' responses to the vignettes and what they would actually do in real-life (Parkinson and Manstead, 1993, p.296). Thus, there has been a focus on making the vignettes as meaningful and realistic as possible. Those who critique the method question whether a written narrative is ever able to capture contextual reality or extract real-world reactions to the stories (Sleed, 2002). Others have argued that the methodology can capture links between statements participants make about behaviour in vignette research and their actual behaviour in real life contexts. For example, Rahman (1996) argued that in her work on female carers of older people their responses were very similar to what their real life responses would be. Similarly, McKeganey et al (1996) found that intravenous drug injectors were more likely to talk about sharing needles in the vignette study than in a self report study, therefore apparently giving truthful information and not responding to the vignettes in a socially desirable way.

We suggest though, that both of these perspectives miss some of the complexity of participants' responses to vignettes. An alternative way of framing a researcher's interpretation of participants' responses to vignette material may be to explore dominant shared representations/understandings of practice that reflect the social and cultural milieu in which the research takes place and less dominant ones that may emerge due to the personal trajectories and specific experiences of a participant (e.g. having had a similar experience). The researchers' focus when analysing vignette responses would not then be on what participants would actually do in a specific situation, but on their subjective perceptions, feelings and experiences.

Vignette methodology as a tool for exploring cultural identity positions

Cultural identity is a way of understanding who we are in relation to the shared cultural communities that we belong to (Wenger, 1998). From this position "cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as "one people", with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history" (Hall, 1990, p. 51). Cultural identity combines the past, present and future (see Cole, 1996) as well as the role of the extended other as internalised in our self-identity (O'Sullivan-Lago & Abreu, 2008; Crafter & Abreu, 2010). It is the movement

between self and other which vignette methodology is particularly able to capture when viewed as a dialogical process.

In the past many researchers using vignette methodology have taken a monologic view - looking purely at the words said - to respondents' answers to vignette stories. Bakhtin (1973) argued that utterances are not just the creation of the self but also relate to positions and opinions given by others in relation to self. Therefore, singular or monologic approaches to understanding dialogue produced from a well constructed vignette cannot tell the whole story because they fail to recognize the interactional positioning which is constantly in the process of being re-created in dialogue. Instead, followers of Bakhtin, like Hermans (2002), argue that the self-other relationship is dynamic and dialogic.

The dialogical self is made up of I-positions (Hermans, 2001) whereby there are multiple internal positions (such as "I as a school child" and "I as my mother's language broker") which are negotiated in relation to external positions (people in the external environment relevant to the internal world of the individual e.g. my parents, my friends). Then there is the outside world - that which exists outside your own sphere of experience. Hermans' use of space as a metaphor for understanding different voices and positions is important in that, where people in talk move between I-positions they also move between 'me and mine' and 'I and you', illustrating the potential for many possible internal dialogues. It is argued in this paper that these can be captured using vignette methodology.

Using the vignette to explore language brokering

Language brokers are defined as children or young people who engage in activities where they mediate between two (or more) different languages. Language brokering involves not just the translation of words but is a sophisticated cultural activity in which children are required to negotiate and translate complex culturally embedded material. Language brokering is often part of a transitional situation for migrating families. Though reliable incidence data is not available, there are indications in the literature and from our own research (O'Dell et al. 2006), that the activities are more prevalent in some communities than might be expected from their low profile in the research literature (Hall & Sham, 2007; Weisskirsch, 2005; Dorner, Orellana and Li-Grining, 2007).

Our cultural developmental theorising has led us to understand language brokering as it relates to wider societal representations of activities that young people may engage in. Young people are most likely to engage in language brokering following immigration to a new country when, because they learn the host language faster than their parents, they are needed to translate in formal settings like school, the doctors, welfare services etc. We argue that this places these young people in fairly adult roles which do not match western dominant assumptions that the move to adulthood is based on a very gradual increase in engagement in more adult style responsibilities (Hobbs & McKechnie, 1997). Language brokering involves not just the deployment of knowledge of two languages but also an active engagement in social exchanges that are normally seen as exclusively adult territory such as discussions between teachers and parents or between landlords and tenants. This led us to question how young people, including those who do have

language brokering experience as well as those who do not, represent language brokering as an activity within the UK context. For the purposes of this paper there is a more pertinent question:

How can vignette methodology help us to understand how young people who are language brokers and non-language brokers talk about their identity positions?

The research study

The findings analysed in this paper draw on a larger research project sponsored by the ESRC (O'Dell, Abreu, Cline & Crafter, 2006). The participants interviewed were drawn from a questionnaire survey with six schools and colleges in the South East and South Coast of England. These schools were selected to represent a diverse range of types of institution, location and ethnic makeup. From the survey 46 young people aged between 15-18 years old agreed to be interviewed. The sample selected for interview included students with experiences of work activities that could be considered 'atypical' such as acting as a young carer or language broker and students who had engaged in working activities that could be considered 'typical' such as delivering newspapers or serving in a shop on Saturdays.

Table 1: Composition of interview sample

	Typical job		Atypical job				Total
			Language brokers		Young carers		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
White-British students	6	3	0	0	4	3	16
Ethnic/ linguistic minority students	4	12	5	7	0	2	30
Total	10	15	5	7	4	5	46

The vignette that is the focus of this paper is about a Portuguese young person who brokers for his mother. The characters were 14 years old, slightly younger than the participants, to allow them to identify with the characters and feel that they were familiar (a point confirmed by the pilot participants).

Vignette: Child language broker

Eduardo is 14 years old. He speaks English and Portuguese. Eduardo's mum can't speak English, so she often asks him to help her. Eduardo is proud and pleased to help his mum but is embarrassed when he translates for her at the doctors. Eduardo misses school some days because his mum needs him to help translate for her.

Individual character questions

1. What do you think about what Eduardo is doing?
2. What would their teacher/parent/friends think?
3. What do you think about Eduardo's mum?

4. Would you change anything about Eduardo's life?
5. What advice would you give if Eduardo were your friend?
6. What do you think will happen when Eduardo grows up?

Overall questions

1. Do you know anyone like these young people?
2. Which one has the hardest/easiest job?
3. Which character is most/least like you?
4. What do you want to do when you leave school?
5. We've been talking about work. What work do members of your family do?

Interviews were conducted by two of the research team in the student's school. A number of students were interviewed from each institution, information about the kinds of jobs performed by the participants was kept strictly confidential, all interviews were conducted in the same way.

The data was analysed using theoretical coding (Flick, 2002) which is a form of thematic analysis which utilises the theoretical approach as its basis. Once transcribed the data was analysed with the aid of analysis package NVivo.

Analysing 'I' positions in relation to vignette scenarios

"I as me" – identifying with Eduardo...

When the participants relate their own experiences to that of the vignette character they adopt a cultural identity position which links the 'I' with the 'me'. In other words the 'I-as-knower' links their own personal experiences with the 'me-as-known' through the character Eduardo. The voice of the individual comes through in relation to the vignette character. Here Bana, whose family originate from Albania, discusses her own experiences and how those might link with Eduardo's. The interviewer asks her:

What do you think his parents feel about it [Eduardo translating for his mother]?

Well, they feel proud for him. Well for my parents, my parents felt quite frustrated because we never had to - they feel the pressure because they couldn't speak themselves but all the time they learn

Did they feel bad?

Yeah, yeah, they did 'cause sometimes they needed for an hour [off school] and then I came back but I don't need to take the whole day off...

What do you think about Eduardo's mum?

I suppose she might be quite frustrated that she had to take her son out of school sometimes

Do you think she would learn English or do you think she would carry on using him as a translator?

Well, um, speaking from my own experience my parents only done it for a little while because my parents, my mum goes to college, and my dad, so, they both, it is just for a while until they learn English...everyone wants to learn English and everyone wants to get involved so it depends on how quick they pick it up or

what sort of things they do. I mean, my parents go to college and they try to, trying to learn English and trying to get, you know (Bana – LB, Albania)

Having first hand experiences of the language brokering activity Bana is able to impute a range of identity positions on behalf of Eduardo, and in this instance, Eduardo's parents. While she echoes the position of the vignette character by reasserting that Eduardo's parents would feel proud of their son she adds to that a voice from her own experience – one of frustration. Bana's parents wanted to learn English as soon as they could and were proactive in doing so.

When participants had brokering experience they were able to position themselves alongside the vignette character in a way which shows they had insight into the complexities of the task. On the other hand, it is not necessary to align themselves entirely with the character because, like Bana, the range of circumstances surrounding language brokering contexts are diverse:

What do you think about what Eduardo is doing?

Yes it's alright, it's cool.

Why?

Because I have to do it as well.

Do you translate as well?

Yes not as much as I used to do before 'cause my Mum she does know a lot of Portuguese and she does know a lot of English compared to most of the other people but there are certain things like my Dad knows a lot of English as well it is not as good as mine but if there is something that my Mum needs to do I will help her a lot.

So she can get by but you have to translate, so would you share Eduardo's feelings, did you ever feel slightly embarrassed by doing it?

I felt difficult sometimes 'cause I was trying to get the exact wording and can't find it so I had to think about it but not embarrassed. (Adrio, LB, Portuguese)

Here, Adrio does associate with the vignette characters' 'embarrassment' but seeks a more positive identity position because 'it's cool' to translate. Unlike Eduardo, Adrio's parents speak quite a bit of English so it may be this which allows him to distance himself from the identity position of Eduardo. On the other hand, another Portuguese language broker (Joao) did more closely position himself with the vignette character when talking about accompanying his own family to the doctors "As he said it's really, really embarrassing when you have to go to the doctor with your parents, it's just so embarrassing and you're like 'please, I don't want to know about this sort of thing'" (Joao, LB, Portuguese).

For Elena the internal and external world of her identity positions are synchronised because she lives in a cultural context where language brokering is common place or 'normal'. When asked to comment on the thoughts of Eduardo's friends she relates that back to her own experiences:

What would their friends think?

Um, they're like, they're Portuguese so they'll understand because at some stage they'll have to do the same. But like someone, if someone only speaks one language and they don't have to do the same as he does then they'll laugh at him and say 'ah your mum doesn't speak English and all that'

So he might be teased for it, what's your experience of that?

Well my friends all speak Spanish, it's normal for us because everyone has to do the same thing and for others, no, they think it's alright. But sometimes they're like 'why do you have to miss school to translate for your mum, can't she get someone else?' so, sometimes I'm like 'yeah whatever' innit? I don't really pay attention (Elena, LB, Ecuador)

Interestingly, Elena assumes that Eduardo's friends will be Portuguese even though there is nothing in the vignette to suggest this is the case. The link with her own 'I' position – whereby her own friends all speak Spanish, is imposed on the vignette character. She then assumes that monolingual speakers would make fun of Eduardo's mother because they lack a relatable identity position. The potential value of analysing such responses in terms of dialogical self theory is illustrated by an intriguing further shift in positioning at the end of this extract from Elena's comments. She implicitly positions herself with Eduardo when she notes that her friends express surprise that she sometimes has to miss school in order to translate for her mother. She rejects their criticism ("I don't really pay attention") and shows, in this, an implicit alignment with Eduardo's position. A full interpretation of her nuanced expression of a complex stance on friends' views of language brokering would not be available with a theoretical framework that emphasised the "realistic" prediction of real life behaviour.

This final quote for this section comes from Aida, whose family come from the Sudan. Like Elena, Aida's friends all engage in language brokering activities as well:

What would their friends think?

Er, what about, what?

His translating or?

His mum?

Um

Maybe a bit embarrassing in that sense, about his friends, maybe. But, my friends understand because they have the same situation, their mum can't speak well and stuff.

So you tend to socialise with people who...

Yeah

Do similar things...

Not really but it just happened that my friends had the same situation. But I won't tell them all my personal life anyway, I won't tell them blah, blah, blah, that's, no, I won't tell them that. I would probably lie and say she was sick or I'm sick or something

Aida is able to engage in an *I-as-knower* identity position through her own language brokering experiences in the sense that she translates and so do her friends - this supposedly negates the kind of embarrassment that Eduardo feels. Having said that though, Aida goes on to say that she does not discuss language brokering with her friends even though they all engage in the activity.

Even when the participants could position themselves in the same way as the vignette character Eduardo (because of the shared activity – *I-as-knower*) they sometimes presented contextual circumstances which also set them apart from Eduardo. This is where you can see the move between their internal world (the *I* position) and the external world (*I-as-known* – by my friends, parents etc...) becomes salient. For

example, Bana was a broker for her parents but they quickly learnt English so she can identify with Eduardo but her experiences depart when it comes to the external world of her parents. Like Elena she offers a nuanced account of how her I-position and external positions resemble and differ from those of others.

"I as you" ...positioning Eduardo's mother

Through the person-world interactions Hermans (2001) discusses the role of internal and external positions of the self. While internal positions relate to the self, external positions acknowledge the role of the external 'other' which are part of the environment or context (such as family or teachers). Here are some examples of the participants positioning Eduardo's mother in particular ways. While internal positions relate to the self part of identity, external positions acknowledge the role of the external 'other' which are part of the environment or context (such as family or teachers). The transactional nature of these internal/external positions are illustrated in the following quotes. The first quote comes from Ama, whose family originated from Ghana. When asked what advice she would give Eduardo if he were her friend she addressed the external other in his life – namely his mother:

What advice would you give if they were your friend?

I'd just tell him 'cause sometimes you can't choose circumstances, you must, I'm sure there's a reason why his Mum has to be here and not speak English, so you shouldn't be embarrassed because at the end of the day she knows her home language it's not like she's illiterate, she just doesn't know another language so perhaps he should, if he feels embarrassed about it he should help her to speak it, do you see what I mean (Ama – LB, Black African Ghanaian).

While Ama herself is a broker she does not position herself alongside him in her opinions of the brokering activity. She also positions his mother as competent in one context (i.e. she does speak a language) even if she is not competent in another (i.e. its just not English). This next quote is also from Ama. Here she uses a number of different identity positions which she places on the external other. In this case there are two external others – 'friends' and 'mother' and she examines the positions of her friends in relation to their own mothers. Towards the end she takes up the voice of Eduardo himself.

What do you think will happen when he grows up?

The thing about languages, I mean, when I speak to my friends sometimes, because they can speak English better, they feel, sometimes children feel a little bit better than their parents. When they can speak they feel like they know more so he could either become like a little bit disrespectful in the sense that, for example, if he taught her English it would be like "I taught you what you know" some of them do that, and if you didn't it would be like "I'm better than you because...", do you understand and some of them do that...it could either be that or it could either be that he is more comfortable with the fact that she like, I mean, he will be proud of himself 'cause he was able to help his Mum but she will find it difficult to communicate.

In the first part of this quote Ama alludes to the notion of the 'parentified' child who takes on a role reversal between parent and child within the family. Critics have been concerned with this kind of role reversal and the effect it may have on family relationships (see Morales and Hanson, 2005). Towards the end of the quote she offers another explanation, she echoes the position of the vignette character as an alternative identity – that of being proud to help his family.

In the next extract Elena (LB, Ecuador) begins by talking with an 'I-as-you' identity by positioning Eduardo's mother in a variety of contextual ways. In other words, she perceives the mother as wrong for removing her son from school but recognises that there appears to be no one else to help her when she is sick. At the end of the quote she cements her own 'I-as-me' identity position (though in response to direct questioning from the researcher about her mother). We asked Elena:

What do you think about Eduardo's mum?

In some cases I think his mum's wrong 'cause one of the most important things is like school 'cause it can help in the future but on the other hand if the mother is sick then of course she needs help and the only one who can help is her son. So in some ways you might think that it's wrong but in some ways it's sensible

Do you think Eduardo's mum understands that he's not meant to miss school or does she not realise he's not meant to do it?

I don't think she even realises, I don't think she realises that he shouldn't miss school.

Because you mentioned earlier that your mum doesn't always understand the implications for missing school

Yeah, she'll think that if you miss school it's like normal, fine, nothing is gonna happen. Maybe she might think the same as my mum

At the end of this extract there is a shift from looking at the external position of Eduardo's mother to the external position of her own mother. The fictional mother and the real mother are positioned as having a similar perspective and it is interesting that this requires that missing school for this purpose is reconstructed as 'normal'.

'I-as- other': I as inside and outside - "I don't broker but...."

As the quotes above have shown, those who engage in language brokering are often highly familiar or good friends with others who do the activity. This is particularly the case if they live in a geographical location where there are lots of other brokers. They articulate a few potential identity positions either through their own brokering or by positioning the role of friends or parents. They often did this by shifting between themselves and the vignette character.

In this section the participants may not broker but through experiences or interactions with other people who have engaged with the activity they have a sense of what it is like – linking internal and outside positions of identity. When this happens the activity is afforded a heightened level of visibility. Some of the non-language brokers had no direct experience of the activity themselves but through their relationships with an external other (friends or parents of friends) were able to draw on knowledge to identify with the vignette character. This next quote comes from Louise (non-language broker, White

British) who is a young carer. Although the activities are not the same she uses school as the mechanism to relate her own 'I' position with the vignette character 'other':

What do you think about what Eduardo is doing?

On the one hand I think it's a good thing but at the same time I think he's putting himself, and like, his own future prospects in jeopardy if he misses school because, yeah being proud of family is a good thing but when it comes down to it, and I'm just cynical about this, but when it comes down to it, if it puts you at risk of failure then you have to be a bit more selfish than that. I mean, 'cause my mum's disabled I have to do the same thing so at times its like 'oh please stay at home and help me do this' and I'm like 'why should I, I really physically can't do this' and at other times I'm like 'yeah ok, no problem'.

Louise perceives that her own young caring responsibilities create similar dilemmas to those experienced by Eduardo and his brokering. Missing school, something perceived to be a fundamental part of childhood, and the potential detriment are the central features of this quote. To some extent, for Louise, the kind of activity engaged with by the vignette characters is important in the sense that it removes the characters from the normal expectations of an appropriate childhood.

This quote comes from a participant who does not broker but whose parents speak another language, alongside English, at home. Peter (non-language broker, Serbo-Croat) makes links between *I-other*

What do you think about what Eduardo is doing?

It's good that he helps his Mum but I don't understand why he is really embarrassed to translate at the doctors. It's fair enough that he misses some school days 'cause I've got a friend in our year who's got like problems at home with his Mum and he helps her quite a lot as well.

So you can't see why he's kind of negative about it.

No I don't know what it is that embarrasses him at the doctors really, if he's seeing her that's one of the places that his translations are most important really (Peter, non-LB, Serbo-Croat).

This next quote is from Michael, a non-language broker who has learnt French and Spanish at school (but is an English speaker in his home context). His own enjoyment of languages, and being called out to help with foreign visitors, allows him to position himself with Eduardo despite not being a broker

Which character is least like you?

Probably Mary [young carer] again, I do speak 2 languages so I'm like Eduardo, I do French and Spanish at school so I can sympathise with translating for others 'cause when like foreigners are over I help them out and stuff, but Mary you can't comprehend what that's like.

So you speak quite fluently?

Well yes fluently-ish enough to get by.

How do you feel about it when you?

I like speaking languages. You feel like you're being useful, helpful.

Do you think you would be embarrassed to use it at somewhere like the doctors or the council?

Probably yes, I don't know, there are some things that you don't really want to get involved with but I don't know, I wouldn't have a problem at the bank or anything, doctors maybe, but bank or finances it's just saying words.

Taking a dialogical perspective when analysing vignette responses means that it is possible to show how participants who do not have direct 'I-as-me' identity positions can still use their own experiences to talk about representations of activities.

I as the outside other

In this section we draw on participants who have no direct experience of brokering and consequently must position the vignette character as an outside other – far removed from their own level of experience. Even though there was no sense of sharing identities as with internal/external positions, a number of participants tried to connect with the outside other through the vignette:

Which one [of the vignette characters] has the hardest job?

Probably the translator, it would be harder 'cause Eduardo's got to translate everything his Mum says to whoever she is talking to and he has got to be with her all the time - anytime she goes out. So it's quite a demanding thing to have to do.

Do you think it would be harder than Mary's job [young carer].

Yes 'cause they all know his job's hard, Eduardo's, 'cause he has to go everywhere with his Mum (Amy, non-language broker, White British)

Having no knowledge of brokering herself, or knowing anyone else who might, Amy presupposes the task to be very onerous. She assumes that the demands on Eduardo to be with his mother would be constant. Since she has no internal/external identity position to use she is not aware that in some communities so many people speak two languages that the activity can become normalised.

Being the outside other means that it is harder to settle on an identity position for the character in the vignette. This is a quote from Edward (non-language broker, White British):

What would their friends think?

I don't know, if they were my friends they would probably be understanding, but it depends again on what their views are and whether they understand or not or whether they've been told. It may be that they think Eduardo is missing school because he's ill all the time or he's just missing it because he's trying to.

Initially, Edward tries to use his own experiences as a guide by analysing the potential reactions that his own friends might have. In light of the lack of internal knowledge about brokering Edward can only theorise about a number of possibilities. Michael, another non-language broker (White British) uses his general understanding of the outside other to formulate a sophisticated idea for what could happen to Eduardo "Yeah, I think some people can be quite immature about these things 'cause translation boundaries are often discriminative. They're not like protests or anything but it's just sometimes people are unkind".

When the participants perceive they have no connection with the vignette character they used broad or dominant representations of relationships and activities to make sense of the vignette scenario. Even in these cases the participants can be seen to have drawn on the external positions, available to them through their own friendship relationships for example, in order to understand Eduardo. The problem for them, such as it is, is that the conventional representations with which they were familiar could be quite inaccurate when applied to situations that they have little knowledge of e.g. in assuming language brokers would be outsiders or lonely.

Discussion

In this paper we have argued that using the vignette methodology through the theoretical lens of the dialogical self, alongside cultural identity theory helps make sense of the data rather than seeing it as a problem. We have drawn on data from young people who either do, or do not engage in language brokering activities. In particular, we have analysed their answers to questions about the vignette character Eduardo, who translates for his mother. By drawing on dialogical self theory in the analysis of the data, we are able to show that our participants moved between differing internal characterisations, drawing on their own position and an internalised position of the character in the vignette. Some were also able to draw on external positions in identifying the role of peers, parents and teachers. In doing so, even some of those who had no brokering experience, but knew of people who did, were able to give voice to the vignette character. Other participants occupied an identity position that was outside of any personal experience of the phenomenon. Interestingly, these participants used generalised knowledge and dominant representations to make sense of an activity which was so far removed from themselves. For example, Edward (and many others) spoke about 'good friends' not caring if someone needed to translate for a parent.

The purpose of using the vignette is that it provides space for the participants to give corresponding identity positions whilst at the same time presenting diversity within their own range of experience. At times these identity positions moved away from the vignette character and were contradictory – for example, Aida did not align herself with Eduardo because all her friends did brokering which made the activity "normal". On the other hand, she said that she does not necessarily tell her friends about her activities and may even lie about why she is off school. Thus the methodology captured the complex ways in which brokers and non-brokers positioned the vignette character Eduardo. This indicates the potential of the approach for the development of a culturally meaningful research design in a complex multicultural society.

From a methodological point of view, the key issue for researchers is to design the materials with appropriately structured questions that enable and facilitate the exploration of participants' voices and I-positions. Applications of vignette methodology need to ensure that the approach to data collection and the social context of the research support that process. In the research presented in this paper we examined perceptions of language brokers in a school setting. Thus the interview was designed to stimulate talk about key characters in this setting - the teacher, school friends, and as

we wished to capture issues related to roles that conflict with demands from the family, the parent.

Documenting shifts in the positions that respondents express is only one step in the analysis. It is essential to examine possible clues to the personal meaning of these shifts. Do they reflect tension? Conflict? Disagreement? Agreement? Ambivalence? Conflicting representations in society and institutions can lock the self in certain types of dialogues. O'Sullivan-Lago and Abreu (2009) argue that these positions are not random and that the sociocultural context may constrain the set of possibilities the self perceives as available and in this way influence pathways. This is well illustrated in the interview extracts where participants such as Elena and Aida re-position language brokering as something normal because they live in communities where it is a regular cultural practice.

Hermans argues strongly that multivoicedness does not mean that participants do not have a stable sense of self or do not know their own minds. Rather it demonstrates the move between various legitimate social and personal positions that become relevant at different points to make sense of the topic in question. Grossen and Salazar-Orvig (2006) argue that the self is fundamentally heterogeneous (made through different voices) and also through systems of activity. Thus determining "who speaks" is not as self evident as it might seem (Grossen and Salazar-Orvig 2006). Wertsch (1991) argued that taking into account the heterogeneity of voices requires one to consider issues around why particular voices take centre stage or are privileged in certain settings. As dialogical self theory begins to take fuller account of the wider social context (O'Sullivan-Lago and Abreu, 2008), the use of vignette methodology has considerable potential as a research tool that can facilitate the research designs and analysis that are required.

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