The Hall of Mirrors: Examining the Interplay of Researcher and Learner Identities in Narrative Studies

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This article discusses some of the methodological issues surrounding research on identity in language learning research. The aim of this paper is to develop a basic understanding and awareness of the challenges and issues involved in conducting research in identity studies by bringing the notion of researcher reflexivity to the forefront. Attention to researcher reflexivity in any empirical research is nothing new, but how it is actually incorporated and manifested in the research process has not received much attention. The purpose of this paper is thus to discuss the intricate interplay in which learner identity and researcher identity are negotiated, constructed, and presented in the research process, where identities are constructed through the social practices and discourses that are embedded in the research context. It concludes by suggesting further investigation of the collaborative nature of reflexivity as one possible way forward.

言語教育におけるアイデンティティ研究において、質的研究手法が多く用いられる傾向にあることはいうまでもないが、その反面、それと並行して様々な課題も増えていることは事実である。本稿では学習者のL2　アイデンテイテイ構成を探った研究データを使用し，reflexivity（再帰性）を柱に研究者のアイデンティティのみならず、それが参加者のアイデンティティといかに複雑に交差しているプロセスであることを検証したものである。本研究は研究者のreflexivity（再帰性）を追求するにあたり「協同的対話」(collaborative dialogue)の重要性を示唆している。

Keywords

identity, narratives, reflexivity, researcher – participant relationship

キーワード

アイデンティティ、ナラティブ、再帰性、研究者と研究協力者の関係

O ver the last two decades, we have seen a surge in research on identity and its relationship with language learning (Preece, 2016). During these years, innovations and developments in technology coupled with people's increasing transnational connections have brought about new understandings of ourselves in the global world. This phenomenon has resulted in the emergence of transnational identities that were not imaginable two decades ago (De Costa & Norton, 2017). This rapid expansion of the field has been accompanied by various conceptual changes in our understandings of the notion of identity. From a theoretical point of view, early studies originated from an essentialist view of identity, whereas recent studies (e.g., Block, 2007) are founded on poststructuralist viewpoints where identity is multiple, non–unitary, and ever evolving. Such theoretical developments have inevitably led to a call for methodological diversity and methodological innovations to ensure continued development and advancement in identity studies in language learning research.

One of the research aims I have pursued in investigating identity in language and education over the past few years has also been mainly methodological. In my own research I have used narrative inquiry quite extensively. By focusing on questions of researcher identity in narrative studies, the most widely used research approach employed in current identity research (Miyahara, 2010; Rezaei, 2017), in this study, I aim to address certain methodological issues

and challenges that emerge in the narrative research process by focusing on the often cited and underexplored area of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. It is quite apparent that, in participatory research, our multiple identities, for instance, our ethnic identities, our linguistic profiles, our educational or personal background or experiences as well as our identities as researchers greatly impact how our participants respond or react to the research inquiries. We should take into consideration and examine the impact of the researcher's identity throughout all stages of the research, that is even at the initial stages where we form our research questions, structure the research design, conduct fieldwork (data collection) as well as at the stage of the research where narrative data is analyzed, interpreted and presented. Drawing on one of my previous research projects (Miyahara, 2015) that offers unique insights into the understanding of the process of L2 identity construction and development, the main research question in this paper is to discuss the intricate interplay in which learner identity and researcher identity are negotiated, constructed, and presented in the research process.

I believe that by focusing on the concept of *researchers' reflexivity* (Edge, 2011; Mann, 2011), and by highlighting the importance for researchers of developing and establishing a space for critical and reflective thinking, I can probe the issues at stake. Considerations of reflexivity, especially how it operates in the qualitative paradigm, may not be new; but how reflexivity is *incorporated* and *managed* in the various stages of the research process still warrant much discussion. In this paper, I attempt to explore this subject by focusing on how reflexive thinking was incorporated at the analytical stage of the research I conducted in 2015. In other words, here I explore the stories of my participants were analyzed, interpreted and presented. In the process of doing so, I find that the reflexive approach did not only help shape my scholarship, but myself as well: it provided me with a valuable opportunity to know the various aspects of myself more intimately. In the next section, I provide an overview of related theoretical framework of the study. It will then be followed by a short description of the study used for this paper. I conclude by suggesting a critical collaborative approach as a possible direction narrative and identity studies could pursue.

Situating the Study
The Concept of Identity

Norton's (2000, 2013) often-cited and seminal work on identity revolutionized the notion of identity from a non-essentialist point of view (one based on the poststructuralist and constructivist theoretical viewpoints), where one's identity is understood as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space" (2013, p. 45). Here, identities are multiple, fluid, and socially constructed (Block 2007). However, the social nature of identity does not always allow people to "choose" the identities they would like to represent. As Preece (2016) succinctly summarizes, among other things, their identities may be limited by their access to the social spaces where their identities are constructed, negotiated, and/or performed; their identities may be ascribed regardless of their preference, and could often position, or limit their rights to participation in the community they desire to operate in. A university student on a summer study-abroad program might, for example, see their "self" diminished if they find themselves unable to participate freely in the discussion sessions with others, and such an experience could lead students to be ascribed "unwanted" identities.

Narrative Studies

In this paper, following Bruner (1990) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narratives are understood as fundamentally stories of "experiences". People, both individually and socially, lead storied lives. Life is "storied" in the way that people make sense of how they are (and others are) by interpreting their past in terms of their present lives and selves as well as their future lives and selves. Narratives are not only about people describing their past experiences, but also about how individuals understand those experiences, and how they ascribe meanings to those experiences (Clandinin, 2007). Mishler (1984) was the first to introduce to researchers the co-constructed nature of narratives: that is "narrative produced in interview conversations is the outcome of social interactions between speaker and listener" (p. 87). It thus follows that the meaning-making process is also a collaborative work.

The research questions in the study that I draw on in this paper required me to examine the experiences of my participants and to listen to their "voices" to understand the complexities involved in forging their identities, and how the affective dimension might be implicated in the process. This called for a methodology that would allow me to be sensitive to the learners' accounts of their experiences, and thus, a narrative approach where I could emphasize my role in co-producing the narratives appeared to be the best way to probe the inner complexities of my research participants.

My Interest in Reflexivity

More than we would like to admit, researchers are inevitably a much a part of a study as the participants. How we take into account the effect of our presence on our research is a critical issue. Although discussions of incorporating researcher reflexivity in the research process have increasingly been recognized as an important strategy (e.g., Finlay, 2012; Mann & Walsh, 2017; Miyahara, 2015; Prior, 2014; Riessman, 2012; Roulston, 2010a), there appears to be no common understanding about the notion of reflexivity, and the concept is often confused with reflection. In fact, one of the reasons for my interest in the notion of reflection emerged from this very question: what is the difference between *reflection* and *reflexivity*? In this paper, following Finlay (2012), I take reflection to mean "thinking about" something after the event, and reflexivity, in contrast, to involve an on-going self-awareness. That is, reflexivity could be understood as more than reflection in the sense that reflection is to take one step back from the phenomena under examination, but reflexivity is reflection on the reflection (Jenkins, 1992). That is, the former, reflection, is more of a descriptive process, whereas, the latter, reflexivity, refers to how you position yourself in the research context, and contemplate how your own self could influence the actions you take (self-awareness). In short, it is a constant "mirroring of the self" (Foley, 2002, p. 45).

My interest in researcher reflexivity originated when I ventured out in publishing my book based on my doctoral work, *Emerging Self-Identities and Emotion in Foreign Language Learning: A Narrative-Oriented Approach,* in 2015. As many scholars have done in the past, I, too, found myself turning the mirror on myself. Looking back at one's own work is nothing new: autoethnography employed in anthropology or sociology is one example. Some scholars have criticized self-reflexivity because of its self-indulgent nature, but as Doyle posits, researchers' backgrounds and their emotions "must be thought about and analyzed, and the analysis used purposefully in the research process" (2013, p. 253). In my view, the important point is to always consider how the researcher's personal disclosure influences narrative analysis, and how it contributes in understanding the phenomena at hand. Furthermore, self-reflexivity should not be just about the self, so to speak. Researchers should not merely discuss how their personal identities shaped their narrative projects, they should also consider how these

identities intersect with the institutional, cultural, and socio-political context (Nagar & Geiger, 2007). Extending one's reflexive gaze also helps to reinforce and further one's awareness of the self. Lastly, the process of turning the mirror on my previous works revealed the situatedness (the academic, theoretical, political, social, etc.) of my interpretations. It is often assumed that it is easier to identify one's assumptions and the "blind spots" after some time has passed as this allows for stronger reflexivity. For this very reason, many scholars have framed reflexivity in terms of its cyclic nature (Edge, 2011). Reflexivity illuminates a social phenomenon from many perspectives. Researcher reflexivity is like a kaleidoscope: the same event can be approached differently, yielding different findings based on how you turn the kaleidoscope.

There are different ways of working with reflexivity. Some are connected to the co-construction of data, while others are concerned with how the researcher and the participants are positioned and their ever-changing relationship, and so forth. There also appear to be several dimensions to reflexivity (for details Finlay's *Five Lens of Reflexivity*, 2012), and for this paper, I focus on what Finlay (2012) would call *contextual discursive* and *relational reflexivity.* I aim to consider how the researcher's and the participants' multiple and ever-changing identities interact at the analysis and representation stage. I will now provide a brief sketch of myself before going on to offer contextual information of the research that I use as a sample to illustrate my point.

The Researcher

My research interest in identity and language learning is largely rooted in my educational experiences in and out of Japan. I was born in Tokyo, Japan, but spent most of my formative years overseas, namely, in the United Kingdom and the United States After graduating from high school in New York City, I returned to Japan and transferred to a college in Tokyo, which happens to be the research site of this study. My educational experience as such is what some academics like Kanno (2003) would call the "returnee" experience. One apt phrase that would characterize my language learning experiences over the years would be a "roller coaster ride": riding on a virtual roller coaster of ups and downs in language learning experiences and, henceforth, undergoing identity shifts and periods of mixed emotions towards myself as a language learner, and later as a practitioner and researcher. As for my professional life, my career as a teacher, practitioner, and researcher started at the tertiary level after having obtained my master's and my doctoral degrees in London. The rewarding experiences that shaped my thinking, and the intense exposure to the academic world, as well as my experiences as a practitioner and researcher at the institution where I now work, form the basis of what I am today.

Sample Study and Analytical Procedure
Overview of the Study

The narrative data for this article is drawn from a study that aimed to shed light on the understanding of the process of L2-related identity construction and development among Japanese English learners at the tertiary level (Miyahara, 2015). Unlike previous language learning research on identity grounded in poststructuralist theory, the particular feature of this study was its attempt to integrate socially and psychologically oriented perspectives on L2 identity formation. Contrary to the poststructuralist theory of identity in language learning research (e.g., Block, 2003, 2009; Norton, 2013), the study problematizes the current dominant emphasis on the social dimension of identity in the poststructuralist framework and calls for a

more balanced approach. It emphasizes that the psychological and social aspects of identity formation need to be attended to more equally. The research contributed to highlighting the instrumental agency of individuals in responding to and acting upon the social environment, and in developing, maintaining and/or reconstructing their desired identities as L2 users. It offered insights into the role of experience, emotions, social and environmental affordances, and individuals' responses to these, in shaping their personal orientations to English and self-perceptions as English learner-users. The original study revealed the past, present, and future dimensions of individuals' L2-related experiences and trajectories, and showed how these dimensions are intertwined through the process of narrative construction as participants relate their thoughts, and the researcher represents and interprets their stories.

Participants

The research site, a private university located in the suburbs of Tokyo, aims to build a global community where a diversity of people from various ethnic and religious backgrounds gathers together. This institution is also famous for its bilingual identity, and, in Japan, the graduates and alumni are regarded by the general public as being fluent and well-versed in English and the English-speaking culture. English is used on a daily basis as a means of communication not only in classes, but also in the daily lives of the students and faculty alike. The university has several college-wide courses that are required components for all students, and the English Language Program (ELP) is one of them (in 2011, the program was renamed English for Liberal Arts, ELA). Students for whom English is a second language must study English intensively for the first two years. The main focus of the program is the study of English for academic purposes with a focus on critical thinking. The curriculum is further complemented by a study abroad program referred to as the Study English Abroad (SEA) Program. The first- and second-year students are able to take part in the six-week program during the summer break at various universities located in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

Six students, all volunteers, going through their first year of their two-year English language curriculum, participated in the study (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Participants' profiles (names are pseudonyms)*

Name	Gender	Past English Language Learning Experiences	Experiences Abroad Episodes Before College
Sayaka	F	From Pre-K	Yes (two-week study abroad program)
Maki	F	From Pre-K	Yes (international school in Bangladesh for three years)
Megumi	F	From Pre-K	No
Yui	F	From elementary school	No
Hinako	F	From junior high school	No
Takehiro	M	From junior high school	Yes (two-week study abroad program)

Analytical Process

The method employed in this study was what is generally characterized as autobiographical narratives. I used a narrative interview strategy based on a series of semi-structured questions to generate data in that I did not have a list of questions but rather a range of topics to

be covered (Block, 2008). The language in which talks were conducted is related to the jointly constructed nature of the interview process in narrative studies, and, thus, the participants were given choices, but none opted for English, and thus, the language used in all interviews was Japanese. Five sets of interviews over a period of one year were conducted, each kept within an hour and a half, mainly for practical reasons. The narrative data was supplemented by other sources such as weekly journals, audio recordings or group discussions, and weekly self-reports during the six-week study abroad programs for those who participated in the SEA Program. The talks were audio-taped and transcribed in their entirety using a simplified transcription style (see Excerpt 5.17 Sayaka as an example). In terms of practicality, translations from Japanese to English were prepared for selected sections during the analysis. The transcripts were translated by the researcher and were reviewed and cross-checked by a bilingual colleague.

> Excerpt 5.17: Sayaka
>
> When there is someone really fluent in my group I am not able to express myself. I feel intimidated in front of them. I lose confidence in myself. This was the first time I had felt this way about myself. It was like showing a part of me that I never thought existed. (Miyahara, 2015, p. 92)

As the researcher, I also kept a journal composed of written entries that recorded my reflections, ideas, commentaries and memos throughout the research process in the attempt to make explicit my assumptions and values, and how they came about, and also to evaluate how they shaped the research process. A dialogue between myself and journal entries reinforced my belief that with any reflexive activity there is no escape from the "self" (Roulston, 2010b). As Roulston posits: "It [reflexivity] means turning the researcher lens back onto oneself to recognize and take responsibility for one's own situatedness, within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation" (2010b, p. 220). In order to gain a better understanding of the role of self in the construction of knowledge, as noted earlier, it is significant to take into account the impact that the researcher's assumptions, beliefs, and identities could have on their research. In practice, this is no easy task. Thus, to give myself some practical guidelines to address the concerns above, the four typologies outlined by Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2001) were used as a strategy to assist entries in my journal (below):

> Observational notes (describes events such as observation and interviews)
>
> Methodological notes (focus on the researcher/ participant's action and role)
>
> Theoretical notes (focus on articulating initial explanations from the data)
>
> Analytical memos (bring together inferences through review of other notes and literature and work towards patterns and themes).

Based on the above, I made comments about what occurred during the interview interactions with participants as well as thoughts, hunches, and questions that arose during the research process. I believe guidelines and models are not prescriptive rules for others to follow, but rather mediational tools for us to mindfully consider our actions and interactions with others. I also believe that guidelines help us to consciously sensitize ourselves to matters that we would normally not be able to discern or observe. The accounts of my reflections were thus used to analyze the talks. The aim was, as Hertz (1997) suggests "presenting the author's self, whilst simultaneously writing the respondents' accounts and representing their selves" (p. 23). Examples will be presented in the next section to illustrate how this was carried out in practice.

Narrative Analysis and Researcher Reflexivity
The Analytical Model: Incorporating Researcher Reflexivity

The analytical approach taken in this study was situated in its philosophical approach to its analysis within the constructivist perspective on narratives (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002), where the focus is more on the *how* questions as opposed to the *what* questions. The *what* questions include "What happened?" and "What were the experiences people had?", while the *how* questions include "How do the participants position themselves while telling the stories?" and "How does the interpersonal and/or social relationship shape the making of the stories?" (Frost, 2011). Obviously, any analytical model will oversimplify the empirical practices of narrative analysis. I do not intend to prescribe or endorse a certain model, but the Six Step Analysis Model (refer to Miyahara, 2015 for a detailed account of the model) represents my attempt to take into account the content (what) and form (how), as well as the context, ranging from the micro-local to the macro-global. The purpose in providing the analytical framework is to offer a guide to how the analysis was carried out, and also, to give transparency to the process of attempting to offer some insightful order to the multiple accounts of human experiences that my participants brought to the research site. The precise framework used will naturally depend on the enquiry, but in any narrative analysis, the reflexive involvement of the researcher at various stages of the analysis and representation of the data is inherent, and akin to what Mann (2011) refers to as the researcher's "sensitivity".

Researcher Reflexivity in Action

As noted earlier, in line with Riessman (2008) and many leading scholars, narrative analysis is an iterative process: there is no specific moment when data analysis begins or ends. For instance, researchers usually find that in the process of transcribing the oral data, they are already beginning to analyze the data (for that matter, analysis might even begin while conducting the interviews). Indeed, my own processing did not always occur in a linear fashion as the Six Step Model (Miyahara 2015) mentioned earlier might suggest, as the steps overlapped and quite often, I found myself moving back and forth in a cyclical manner.

Overall, the cyclic nature of the analytical process, however, enabled me to see how and in what ways researcher reflexivity could be manifested in the analytical process. Writing yourself into your narrative study is easier said than done. As mentioned earlier, the process could simply mean to reveal your personal identities and thinking; on the other hand, it could also refer to how your identities intersect with the wider context of the institutional, material, and of the sociopolitical sphere. Sociologists such as Presser (2005) make a distinction between strong and weak forms of reflexivity. "Strong" reflexivity questions the institutional and political structure that contextualizes the research, whereas the "weak" version focuses more on the researcher's background, their thinking and emotions. In this paper, I seemed to have combined aspects of reflexivity from the weak version with some of the socio-cultural dimensions of the strong version.

The next point is how we incorporate reflexive acts in our research practices and how we manage our reflexivity in our research practices, which is also the main purpose of this paper. To illustrate this point, I now present parts from my previous research as mentioned earlier. I particularly focus on certain mediational tools to manage researcher reflexivity. These tools can be largely grouped from theoretical, cognitive or practical perspectives (Maynard 2005). Theoretical tools refer to theories and frameworks that researchers can draw on to examine the "process, context and outcomes of the research and interrogate the construction of knowledge" (Finlay, 2012, p. 317). Finlay's five critical lenses, mentioned earlier, could be one example. Cognitive tools are items such as journals, subjective statements, notes used to

stimulate cognitive and metacognitive process of the researcher reflexivity. Practical tools include practices that facilitate the managing of the researcher reflexivity; storing one's reflexive comments using Moodle platforms could be one example. My reflections that consisted of my thoughts recorded in my journal writings were revisited with data that emerged from the analytical model adding another dialogic dimension in relation to other data sets that were demonstrated in the form of "reflexive vignettes" (RV). This extra step was not only effective in locating my subjectivity, but also enabled me to consider different aspects of myself (e.g., identities, positions, and roles as well as my beliefs and assumptions), and evaluate the impact they could potentially have on the entire research. Such a reflexive space also gave me the opportunity to carefully monitor how and in which ways our beliefs and biases are crucial to the understanding of the self in the creation of knowledge. The following are from my notes: two examples from my research journal and reflexive notes in verbatim.

Example A:

From my research journal #5 : April LL, 20XX

I made arrangements to distribute the flyers to recruit prospective participants sometime at the end of April (April is the first month of the academic year in Japan). This should be a good time since the students should have gotten over the beginning-of-the-term craziness. In the flyer, I kind of mentioned that I was an alumnus of this university. Hope this helped to create some kind of rapport, and also help to send out the message, "I can understand what you are going/or going to go through". Naturally, did not distribute the flyers to my own students but, I was surprised to find out that almost 40 participants (a total of 100 flyers had been distributed) showed interest in my research.

From my corresponding RV for the above journal entry:

I made use of my position as an alumnus and *senpai* (senior member of a community). My aim was to create a rapport in order to recruit as many participants as possible; but, could I have been using my power as their *senpai*? In the Japanese culture, the notion of *senpai* can be sometimes quite powerful. Some of the participants noted in their journals that they decided to take part in the research because they were interested in 1) the concept of identity and their own identity, 2) welcomed the opportunity to talk to me who was a *senpai* as well as a teacher in this intensive language program. This was interesting: *the participants themselves* were intentionally taking advantage of my role and position.

Looking back at these extracts now, there are several key notions that I would briefly like to comment on, that is, the researcher-participant relationship, positionality (both claimed and assigned), insider-outsider role, and identity. Since, for the large part, most of our identities overlap and are linked together, instead of focusing on each item one by one, my discussion here will be holistic in the sense that they will be considered as a group of interrelated factors.

My reflexive vignettes in Example A helped me to pin down and grasp my position as a researcher. In this research context, my positionality was multiple and complicated. For example, I am a researcher, practitioner, alumnus, and *senpai* in this study. Turning on my reflexive gaze, so to speak, it was clear from the outset that I was positioned in the role of the "insider", and, as such, this offered certain benefits at various stages of the research process. For example, my position at this university, as well as my identity as a teacher in this language program (although I had avoided interviewing students in my classes), undoubtedly ac-

corded me certain advantages. In addition, my knowledge of the immediate research context enabled me to recruit, set up and manage the interviews with the participants with ease and sensitivity. My background (and identity) as an alumnus of this university appeared to have facilitated a rapport with my prospective participants and allowed me some degree of access and connection to my participants lived experience.

With regards to data collection, my familiarity with the research context enabled me to address the appropriate questions. However, because of my insider position, it was also very clear that I had to be keenly aware of how my presence could shape the discursive nature of our talk. Researcher positionality clearly has the potential to shape data collection. Also, what was most interesting to me, and something I did not foresee, was the way the participants would re-position me and assign identities as exemplified in my reflexive notes. This highlights the ways in which research identities and the positionalities that are both claimed or assigned by the researcher and the participants influence the research process, and eventually, the final outcomes of the research. The interesting point that can be drawn from this example is that, in terms of issues surrounding researcher-participant dynamics, research is not "on or for" the participants, but rather "with" the participants. This, I believe, is a more proactive and empowerment-oriented approach for all those involved in the research, and one that allows the researcher and the participants to be placed on a more equal footing. Being reflexive could thus mean empowerment for the participants as well, since they are positioned as equal contributors in the research process.

However, having said that I do not intend to claim that a reflexive approach to qualitative research solves all issues and challenges of the so-called "backyard research" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1991, p. 21) such as this particular study, but in this current postmodern age, listening to and understanding multiple voices, multiple subjectivities, and recognizing the particularities of each research context is crucial in generating new knowledge. What is paramount is to attempt to have a significant level of objectivity through being transparent about the research process and about one's own beliefs and attitudes.

The next example highlights the reflexive process more at the analysis stage, while Example A focused on the pre-data collection phase.

Example B:

From my research journal # 9, May MM, 20XX

Maki seemed particularly interested in my experiences as a "returnee". She appeared to have an *akogare* (desire) towards returnees. I spoke to her about the negativity, so to speak, associated with the term, a topic that is not openly discussed. She was definitely very intrigued by it. This helps to facilitate our discussions about her images of an ideal English speaker, and how she has (and also is) striving towards it. She clearly makes the distinction between herself as an English-learner and English-user.

As most of my participants have expressed at one time or another, they differentiate between their identity as a learner and user (although they do not use these terms). Studying for term-end exams or college entrance exams mean they see themselves as English-learners; contrastively, picturing themselves as English-users means that they are able to see themselves as using English with their peers, teachers, returnees, overseas students on campus, etc. Such a desire or, if you want, imagination, to become English-users prompted me to think about their idealized selves, especially, Dornyei's notion of Ideal L2 self.

> From my corresponding RV for the above journal entry:
>
> Had I taken advantage of my experiences as a returnee? It was interesting talking to her about the returnees. I could picture exactly what they were feeling and thinking. Maki said she would sometimes listen to American teen music; although she herself preferred J-pop. I remember some of my friends took similar actions when they wanted to establish friendship with me. Although Maki did not explain her actions, I could guess……but in this case, should I have asked Maki her reasons? Am I assuming things here?

Maki's case above is interesting. At the age of two, her family moved to Bangladesh, where she received her pre-school education at an international school. Coming back to Japan a couple of years later when she was four years old, Maki does not consider herself as a returnee as can be observed below from her interview, where she claims her memories of her pre-school are vague but "fun and full of excitement".

> Excerpt (from the original interview transcript)
>
> I don't remember much since I was only two years old, but it was a time of fun and full of excitement. Although I have no experience of going to schools overseas other than this, I have always envied people who can live abroad and attend schools there. As far as I am concerned, living only for two or three years when I was little does not make me a returnee.

We can observe Maki's struggle from this excerpt. There appears to be a discrepancy in how Maki regards herself as a returnee and how she is positioned by others. She regards herself to be on the periphery in terms of the community of returnees; but to the general public, Maki *is* a returnee. I can keenly resonate with Maki since I have noticed similar frustration that some returnees experience upon their return to Japan. There is a division among the returnees themselves as to who the "legitimate" returnees are. Maki, who had spent only two years at a pre-school in Bangladesh, may not be considered as a returnee compared to those of her peers who had lived overseas for an extended period of time. The point is that I could identify the issue at stake here for Maki coming from a returnee background. That is, I could "see" my identity as a returnee through Maki's stories, and perhaps, Maki was telling me her stories out of her desire to become like a returnee.

What figures prominently from Example B is, firstly, the co-construction of knowledge, or what Barkhuizen terms as "narrative knowledge" (2011), that occurs in the conversations (interview process). The discussion of returnees which enabled Maki to consciously distinguish between language learner and language user was a notion that was co-constructed between the researcher and the participant. Secondly, with respect to the researcher/participant experiences and identities, in the process of analyzing the data, my experience as a returnee at this institute allowed me to bring to the surface, and offer explanations for, phenomena that could have otherwise been difficult. Maki's *akogare* (longing/desire) (Piller & Takahashi, 2006) towards the returnees and her desire to become a part of the returnees' community serve as a good example. This shared experience (Berger, 2015) provided me with the insights to sensitize myself to certain dimensions of the phenomena under study that probably an outsider would have overlooked. However, here again, the insider position required me to be extremely watchful to maintain the distance (or rather my position) between myself as the researcher and the student who was my participant. Furthermore, my familiarity with higher education in Japan contributed towards appreciating my participants' stories from a different perspective. My position enabled me to obtain deeper insights into the narratives of my participants because I could operate in both worlds. However, again, because of this, it was more

important for me to maintain an awareness of the effects that my position might have had throughout the analysis (as well as the entire research process). There exists always the tension between "involvement" and "detachment". Reflexive engagement could be a vehicle to balance out such tension. Reflexivity is the deciding factor in a narrative research context, and it can serve as a strategy to monitor the quality of the research. As Roulston (2010b) states "it [reflexivity] can be conceptualized as a means for quality control" (p. 228).

Summary and Thoughts for Further Discussion

If narrative studies, the dominant methodology used in identity studies, are fundamentally interpretative and subjective, the role of the researcher and the participants as well as the relationship between the two parties becomes even more relevant. In this relationship, an examination of the ways in which the researcher's involvement influences and informs the research at all stages of the research process is an important methodological consideration, and it requires a careful reflexivity on the part of the researcher. The issue of researcher reflexivity or the understanding that researchers' involvement could change the object of the study dates back even to the age of Labov (1972), but the main question is how and in what ways? In this paper, I have attempted to present a possible way to address this issue by bringing reflexivity to the center stage. The reflexive component should be an inherent part of narrative studies and any reflexive engagement should be considered as a way to secure the rigour of the research study.

In this chapter, I have focused on matters related to the researcher's identities, positionality, insider–outsider roles, and researcher–participant relation in line with the main theme of this third issue of the LD Journal. My research has a strong biographical element to it. Whilst I recognize the value of attempting to acknowledge my own identities, bias, and ideas, I must admit, it was, and still is to a certain extent, a struggle. On reflection, one of my main struggles to write myself (researcher's voice) into the study is related to my often–overlapping roles and identities as a practitioner/researcher, which are combined with the experiences I shared with my participants that made it difficult for me to reflect critically at certain stages of the research process.

Another was the ever–evolving nature of my identities as a researcher and the transformative nature of reflexivity. Going back to my original data and dwelling on my reflexive notes to write up this paper, I noticed that sometimes my interpretations of a certain excerpt of the transcript had undergone some changes. Although this paper has focused on the influence the researcher has on the research, there is also another dimension to reflexivity: that is, the influence of the research on the researcher (Edge, 2011). Many reasons could be attributed to this phenomenon. But this would make sense if we consider reflexivity as comprised of two facets that move in a "hermeneutic cycle of mutually shaping change as the researcher constructs the research, works to see how his/her subjectivity influences it, pursues research goals, and works to see how s/he is (being) influenced, in turn, by these processes and outcomes" (Edge, 2011, p. 37). Reflexivity can thus be both developmental and transformative, but we still need to explore how and in what ways these two dimensions intertwine with each other. Hopefully, this study would serve as a starting point for further inquiries in this area.

So, where do we go from here? One possibility could be to investigate the collaborative nature of reflexivity to advance our understanding of the notion of researcher reflexivity. Drawing on reflexivity as comprising of a social as well as an individual dimension, although the mediational tools suggested in this paper are based on the researcher's inner dialogue with themselves that are situated in a certain context, sharing these internal dialogues in collaboration with other researchers could contribute to fostering and developing researcher reflex-

ivity. Such attempts would lead to a broadening as well as a deepening of our understanding of the interactive, dynamic multidimensionality of reflexivity in narrative studies, and, concomitantly, qualitative research in general.

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