"I don't want to talk any more": Reflecting on research into young children's perspectives on their multilingual lives

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Introduction

Brooker (2011) warned educators and researchers that there was still a long way to go if we wanted to truly value children's perspectives and take them seriously, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). This chapter aims to address Brooker's concern which, it is argued here, may also be applied to educational research and research into children's multilingual experiences where children's own perspectives are less evident. The chapter offers a reflexive account of a research study, which engaged with young children about their multilingual lives, giving specific attention to ethical and methodological design features and research experiences in the field. The focus for the research study was to i) develop an understanding of how children, who access and use a range of linguistic resources in their daily lives, reflect on those experiences, ii) explore what children's linguistic preferences might be, in their English medium primary schools in England and iii) to make these insights available to feed into educational practices for all multilingual children in similar contexts. The chapter begins with a description of the research study, including its rationale, research questions, context, methodological approach and finally the findings. There then follows a selective review of published research into ethical and methodological issues raised in studies of young children who use several languages in school and in daily life. Then, four vignettes of researcher and research participant engagement and interaction are explored in terms of their impact on the study, study in terms of methodology and ethics. The chapter ends with a concluding discussion of issues for research, and, potentially, educational practice, relating to the challenges surrounding valuing and seeking

out children's perspectives while being responsive to their preferences and willingness to engage in the moment.

Background to the Research

The research reported here was conducted in the school year of 2009-2010 and data were gathered in primary schools in two cities in England. The motivation for conducting this study was to respond to continuing linguistic diversity in the population and to add children's voices to educators' understandings of children's multilingual lives and address the implications for their learning in schools. There is a wealth of research into multilingualism and bilingualism with children undertaken from a range of linguistic perspectives e.g. Painter (1998) using systemic functional linguistics and Babayigit (2014) using psycholinguistic theory. However, it is suggested here that the majority of these studies tend to prioritise adults' perspectives on children's multilingualism, whether in their roles as parents, teachers or educational practitioners such as early years staff. Such research situates children as objects of research (by being observed or recorded in interaction) rather than as informants on their own experience and expertise. So, the research reported here sought to foreground children's perspectives on their multilingualism and learning and it also paid heed to Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989):

> In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

This research study, therefore, sought to explore perspectives and experiences of being multilingual 'with' children (in a collaborative ethos) rather than 'on' children (with an overt or covert hierarchy between researcher and participants). Children's actual experiences and future hopes were explored in small discussion groups which were designed to allow children to pursue ideas of interest to them, facilitated by open-ended prompts. The two main research questions were as follows: 1) what are children's perspectives on their

multilingualism? and 2) what is the potential for children's learning if they access all of their languages?

The findings from data gathered form the discussion groups to respond to the first question provide the material in vignettes 1-3 explored below and data gathered to respond to the second research question provide the material for vignette 4.

Research Design

As noted above the research was conducted in two primary schools in England where the age range of children is from 4 to 11. The two schools were in cities which both reflect superdiverse communities (Vertovec, 2007), some of whom are recently arrived, others of whom have been settled for one or more generations. The participating schools, known to have a linguistically diverse intake of pupils, were approached to elicit their interest in the research which represented an opportunistic approach to school sampling. The relevant background details of the pupils who participated in the research are set out below, with pseudonyms used for both the pupils and the name of their school.

The research methods used were qualitative in nature and informed by the Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2000). The Mosaic Approach was developed in the context of research with mainstream educational settings, rather than for applied linguistics research in particular. It lays out ideas for research which are particularly tailored for working with young children. They could include walking and talking or using visual techniques such as providing opportunities for children to lead conversations by taking photographs or drawing. Regardless of the specific technique used to implement the Mosaic Approach, the emphasis is always on a participatory ethos which allows the child to lead in documenting their experience and it conceptualises the child as a competent meaning-maker.

With the Mosaic Approach informing my research practice, I sought to engage children in my study using activities which could be expected to be familiar and easily accessible. To explore research question 1, above, the medium of drawing was used as a starting point for initiating small group conversations about languages and everyday interests between myself as researcher and

groups of between 3 to 5 children. In total I had conversations with 14 groups of children, aged between 5 and 10.

Audio recordings and transcriptions were made of the small group conversations and after each research encounter I wrote up a research diary recording my reflections about every aspect of my school visits and the conversations with the children. The data discussed in this chapter are offered as vignettes, using an approach which shares characteristics with the work of Blodgett et al (2011) who use vignettes as a way of presenting the data. In the case of this research, the vignettes are composed of elements of the recorded data together with my diary writing.

The four vignettes discussed in this chapter were taken from the full set of data from the study based on their relevance to considerations of ethics and methodologies in research with children. The main home language and ages of the children who took part in the research addressing research question 1 (noted below) are summarized in Table 1, based on information provided by the children themselves and by the class teachers.

Name (pseudonym)	Year group (average age in brackets)	Main home language (self-reported and teacher reported)
Primary school A (group a)		
Rabia	1 (age 5yr 6mth)	Malay
May	1 (age 5yr 6mth)	Malay
Primary School A school (group b)		
Samira	2 (age 6yr 6mth)	Hindi
Abdul	2 (age 6yr 6mth)	Bengali
Fahad	2 (age 6yr 6mth)	Bengali

Mariam	2 (age 6yr 6mth)	Arabic
Primary school A (group c)		
Rita	2 (age 6yr 6mth)	Chinese
Anil	2 (age 6yr 6mth)	Hindi
Jasmine	2 (age 6yr 6mth)	Hindi
Primary school A (group d)		
Tilly	3 (age 7yr 6mth)	Panjabi
Nahila	3 (age 7yr 6mth)	Bengali
Maria	3 (age 7yr 6mth)	Croatian
Emily	3 (age 7yr 6mth)	Chinese
Khalid	3 (age 7yr 6mth)	Somali

Table 1: Children's pseudonyms, year groups, average age and main home language

Table 2 below provides background data on children who participated in groupwork set up to address research question 2 (noted below).

Primary school B		
Name (pseudonym)	**Year group (average age in brackets)**	**Main home language (self-reported and teacher reported)**
Abdullah	1 (age 5yr 6mth)	Somali
Khalid	3 (age 7yr 6mth)	Somali
Salma	3 (age 7yr 6mth)	Somali

Ahmed	4 (age 8yr 6 mth)	Somali

Drawing Task Design

The small group conversations were elicited from an invitation to draw, which was expressed as "draw something about you and your languages that you'd like to share with us". This research approach was designed to be flexible and the children were reassured they could draw what they wished and what they wanted to share and they could keep their drawings after the activity. This offer was taken up by many of the children, which could be seen as a measure of children's willing participation in the activity and their care and investment in it. As part of my flexible research approach I had a list of guiding questions which I sought to explore with the children but I did not work through each question rigidly with each group but rather I bore them in mind as children shared their drawings and talked about their languages and interests. Given that the drawings were all personal and different, the conversations naturally took off in different directions and the children initiated questions with each other as well as responding to my questions. The guiding questions were as follows:

1) Which languages do you speak at home?

2) Who do you speak with in those languages?

3) Who decides which languages you use together?

4) What about at school?

5) What about in the future – would you like to use your different languages at school? Why, or why not?

6) Would using your different languages at school help you in your learning?

Discussion in Heritage Language Task

A second research activity was used in order to explore research question 2. The activity was designed to provide children with an experience of engaging in a classroom-type of activity using their heritage language e.g. Somali. The

children were grouped in a way that they would be able to engage in a shared language other than English. The children were asked to work with Dawes & Sams' (2004) "talk box" materials designed to promote talk in primary classrooms and based wholly on visual materials. Each activity involved an open-ended task which required interaction and decision-making in order to be completed. The activity was then open to being completed in a shared language without any prompting or framing in English. One of the activities chosen for use in the research involved sorting through a series of line drawings and discussing how they could be grouped and how the agreed rationale for the grouping could be explained/justified? . A second activity was to report the story conveyed in a set of images which contained no written text. My intention as a researcher was to audio record these interactions and to then translate and transcribe the data ready for analysis, however, as is shown later, this activity did not go as planned.

The findings of the study are outlined in brief in the chapter rather than in full detail. Their purpose here is essentially to provide context for the vignettes discussed later in the chapter and the focus of the vignettes is ethical issues, in keeping with this volume.

The data from the conversations conducted in relation to research question 1 were transcribed and then grouped for analysis into themes (Clarke & Braun, 2016), a process intended to be inclusive of the full data set to avoid the criticism of cherry-picking data to fit a pre-determined agenda (Mann, 2011).

The themes were derived from the data generated from the researcher's conversations with the groups of children. The themes reflected a wide ranging set of ways in which children engaged in everyday life using their languages in particular contexts and also translanguaging, that is, making use of different linguistic resources in a single interaction (see, e.g. García & Li Wei, 2013). The data were analysed and themes were derived inductively from the data as follows:

1.   children's demonstration of metalinguistic awareness

2.   children's appreciation of their multilingualism as a "private language"

3.   children's experiences of using languages with family and at home

4.   children's associations of languages with religious practices

5.   children's awareness of their language choices in contexts

As stated above, the data discussed in the remaining sections of the chapter are not directly based on the findings grouped into themes 1-5 above, instead, the four vignettes presented are based on my researcher reflections on the processes of the research which were written after each day of data gathering in my research diary. The vignettes were composed for their capacity to highlight wider issues of methodological choices and ethical realities in research with children, which is the focus for this chapter and the volume. These issues raised concerns I had at the time of researching, hence their inclusion in my research diary.

Review of Studies Exploring Children's Perspectives on their Multilingual Lives

This section acknowledges previous research into children's perspectives on their multilingualism and learning as opposed to the wider set of studies which explore the phenomenon of multilingualism or linguistic practices per se through e.g. interactional analyses. In particular, the selected studies reviewed are considered from the standpoint of the research and ethical practices used in eliciting children's perspectives on their linguistic practices. The rationale for this specific focus is guided by the main concerns of this chapter.

Ethical practices: choosing where to talk and with whom

Studies of languages use and interaction with/ involving children can be challenging to researchers in that they are using language to elicit the focus of their research which is also language and as such it is easily influenced by contextual factors such as place and people present at the time of data collection. Mills (2001) used semi-structured interviews to explore with third generation, British Asian young people their experiences of language, culture and identity as they grew up in the West Midlands, England. In the paper Mills offered detailed insights into her own? methodological and ethical research practices so that

readers would appreciate the conditions in which the data were gathered and understand what might be seen as the inner workings of the research process. Mills gave her rationale for the study that this group of young people were under-researched which signalled the ethical issue of whose voices are represented in research and whose are omitted. In the paper Mills gave particular methodological and ethical attention to the conditions in which she engaged in semi-structured interviews with the young people, who were defined as school-aged, ranging from 5 to 19 years old. Steps she took to ensure the children were comfortable within the research encounter included offering the opportunity for families' choices of when and where the interviews took place and avoiding interrupting the young people's school experiences. Also, Mills was flexible in her approach so that some interviews took place with the child's mother present if the young person showed a preference for this. The ways in which children's data was to be used was explained and Mills (2001: 385) reported "all children agreed that their mothers could read their transcripts later and were aware of this additional audience." Issues of place and people involved and present in the research encounters were important to Mills. These dimensions of her research practice open up, for other researchers, valuable ethical and methodological questions which merit consideration.

Children's linguistic repertoires and endangered languages

Pietikäinen (2012) also researched children's perspectives on multilingualism in their lives in the Sámpi area which stretches across northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and north-western Russia. As the author explains that children in this region may speak one of the nine Sami languages which have an endangered status. The ethical challenges of exploring linguistic practices and repertoires of endangered languages with children are fully discussed in the work. This includes issues of linguistic competence whether it assessed by the individual or by others, perhaps of different generations, within the same community. as well as identity issues as revealed through language use. Pietikäinen (2012) offers reflections on how different methodological solutions can facilitate rather than exacerbate sensitivities surrounding linguistic competence, or lack of competence, and identity. The use of a multimodal

research approach, such as eliciting children's drawings, allows the researcher to maintain their research focus while also perhaps making it less likely that researcher assumptions will be made about the phenomenon, in this case, children's multilingual practices or preferences. Pietikäinen showed how she protected children from any possible harm to self-esteem if a child's lack of fluency in a language became apparent during the research.

Researchers' linguistic choices in research with children

Martin & Stuart-Smith (1998: 239) sought to understand the "feelings about being bilingual and becoming biliterate" of fifty children aged six and seven who all shared Sikh heritage and the Panjabi language, and were living in the West Midlands in England. As part of their research practice the researchers designed a bilingual research approach so that children were interviewed firstly in Panjabi by a Panjabi-speaking researcher and then a second interview was carried out in English by the authors of the paper. In their words this was an important, methodological choice "if we were to investigate the notion that children construct their knowledge, meaning and identity through language" Martin & Stuart-Smith (1998: 240). The authors opened their study to the possibility that children may express themselves differently in their different languages and that by accessing children's wider linguistic repertoires a more "enriched" data set may, potentially, be created.

Child-centred techniques for researching children's languages

Yaacob & Gardner (2012) reported on their research using role-play as a technique to elicit children's language and also explored the classroom experiences of young learners aged between six and eight. Role-play was evaluated as being age appropriate as a research technique by the researchers in that it was highly authentic for the children who spontaneously engaged in socio-dramatic play regularly. Role-plays therefore provided a more authentic medium of communication in their research and they saw the possibility for authentic responses, which might take the form of a kinaesthetic or verbal response such as posing a new question to the researcher, as being important and in contrast to more traditional research methods such as interviews which tend to demand

responses involving self-analysis or reflexivity. Their approach to research with children was informed by the work of mainstream educators Clark & Moss' (2001) Mosaic Approach, explored earlier.

As stated earlier, the practical implications of these research principles, together with issues raised in this short, selected review of published studies, will be revisited in the concluding discussion in this chapter.

In summary, this short, selected review of previous studies exploring children's perspectives on their multilingualism has raised issues such as how methodologies can be crafted or selected to ensure they are age appropriate and engaging for children and young people as research participants (e.g. use of visual methods). Further, researchers have elaborated on how they set up ethical research encounters responsive to specific circumstances of the lives of children and their families and communities (e.g. respecting linguistic competence) as well as their preferences for engaging here and now (e.g. with parents present or not). Finally, the rights of children as participants have been respected through clear communication about how their engagement in the research will be used. These factors in research with children in relation to their languages provide me with a valuable background against which I can explore my own research practices and experiences in the following sections of this chapter.

Vignettes of Researcher and Research Participant Engagement and Interaction

This section presents four vignettes representing four dimensions of ethical dilemmas in researching with children. As already set out, each vignette is composed from elements of both my research diary and the audio recorded conversations. A discussion of each vignette accompanies each one and is linked to relevant sources and studies.

Vignette 1: Throwing hats in the air

The first vignette can be characterized as being concerned with issues of voluntary informed consent with children as participants. Gaining informed consent is a central concern of ethical research practice (see Chapter 1, this

volume), which has been extensively discussed by academic and professional associations e.g. the British Educational Research Association (2018) and the National Children's Bureau (2003). The nature of informed consent when researching with children is problematised, by Edwards & Alldred (2001) who question whether the location of research in an institution in which children have only limited choices and opportunities to exercise their agency in itself works in opposition to the concept of informed consent. The authors' consideration of this tension leads them to conclude that a more nuanced concept of 'educated consent' would be more valid when considering how children are introduced to the possibility of participating in a research project when in school. The term educated consent seeks to acknowledge the unavoidable power imbalance at play in a school context between teachers and pupils or adults and children, whereby, in the main, children are required to do as adults tell them. Educated consent would, instead, offer children in research studies an opportunity to learn about what is being asked of them prior to their assent or consent to participate and of course emphasise that not participating is possible. (The researcher would, of course, need to manage the situation where some children may wish to participate and others may not.) The challenge of this proposition for my research was about how I could present myself and my research interests to potential research participants and reassure myself that the information I was offering was clear and relevant to children's understanding of the world.

Figure 1: Vignette 1

To begin the group activity (drawing and talking) I explained who I was and what my research was about to a group of four children aged 6 and 7, including 2 girls and 2 boys. We were all sitting around the same table with drawing paper and pens available. I felt it was important not to make assumptions about children's understanding of my job and my research. To start off I said I worked in a university and asked the children who knew what a university was. At this point one of the children enthusiastically shared a response, speaking and using gestures to explain that his aunt went to the local

university. He gestured his understanding of what happened at a university by saying that he knew that at a university everyone had a hat and threw them up in the air "like this" at which point he mimed throwing a cap up in the air in delight, as he must have seen in real life or in moving or still images from a graduation day. Other children nodded or showed recognition of this brief comment and mime. I felt relieved, based on the children's responses, that I had provided a recognisable start to my introduction and that one child had felt confident to share their understanding and co-construct the event with me.

My reflections on vignette 1 are that in seeking informed consent it may help the researcher to conceptualise the process as a dialogue rather than as a researcher-monologue. The dialogue seems to be effective if it involves a sharing of understandings on the part of both researcher and research participants and such dialogues also naturally invite questions from the children which is a valuable practice in terms of establishing common ground. I felt reassured to know that the context I was sharing with the children was one that at least one child recognized and had their own family connections with.

Vignette 2: "I don't want to talk any more"

Children's continued willingness, in the moment, to engage with research is a challenge which researchers have noted in their work. In their research into the experiences of being involved in research of children with speech, language and communication needs, Press et al (2011) report on using a process of "monitoring" to identify any signs of the child's distress during research. Such signs would be taken as a withdrawal of assent to participate in the research at that time and the researchers would act accordingly. Similar monitoring was used in the research discussed in this chapter.

As noted earlier, my approach to interacting with children about their languages and everyday concerns was framed in small groups around the drawing of an aspect of children's personal interests which then was the starting

point for a conversation about the interest itself and languages used in connection it. In the majority of groups children appeared to be content to both draw and talk about their pictures and associated matters. It was important for me as a researcher, and an adult in the school context, however, to monitor children's levels of comfort and continued willingness to engage in the research activity. An example of monitoring in practice is provided in vignette 2 recounted below.

Figure 2: Vignette 2

In a small group of two year 1 children (aged 5 and 6), both girls named here as Rabia and May, began the drawing activity and started the conversations about the drawing and moving on to connected topics arising from the pictures. From the beginning of the speaking part of the activity Rabia seemed more impatient and less willing to talk than May. This was demonstrated at first by shorter answers and by her answers only adding her confirmation to what May had said for example saying "I'm like her", rather than adding a personal contribution. As the conversation progressed, mainly with May, Rabia joined in stating emphatically "I don't want to talk any more" and at the same time she turned her back to me. I made a gentle comment along the lines of that was fine and continued the conversation with May who still seemed willing to talk. As the conversation with May progressed through different topics, I kept an eye on Rabia and wondered if I should offer to take her back to her classroom. I was conflicted as to whether this was a good idea – would it draw attention to her discomfort or would it empower her decision not to continue with the conversation? With these conflicting thoughts in mind I continued talking with May for a short while. During this time, Rabia moved away from our table and appeared comfortable browsing some displays and books elsewhere in the room. Shortly after, and when May had engaged me with some new topics about her hobbies, Rabia returned to our table and rejoined the conversation about her own hobbies.

This vignette illustrates how researchers need to maintain an ethical awareness of how the research encounter is developing moment by moment during its execution. A researcher cannot rely on the knowledge that consent or assent has been given by children themselves and their gatekeepers (parents or guardians and teachers) and therefore they have continued permission to carry out their research plan in full. As noted above, the concept of monitoring, Press et al (2011), during a research encounter to notice continued or withdrawn enjoyment or comfort on the part of the participant is essential for the researcher to maintain ethical stance in their commitment to do no harm. This needs to be honoured by the researcher even when the completion of the research is put at risk. However, the researcher also needs to remember that sometimes the unexpected happens in interactions and in the case of vignette 2 the feelings of discomfort and withdrawal were temporary and shortly afterwards Rabia rejoined the dialogue demonstrating her preference and agency to manage her participation.

Vignette 3: "I speak Italian"

All researchers need to be aware of the risk that participants may seek to please them with the answers given in research interactions rather than those interactions being a reflection of actual thoughts, feelings or experiences. A different angle on this phenomenon is explored by Yaacob & Gardner (2012) who discussed young children's innate playfulness. The researchers capitalised on this by using role play as a research technique to explore children's perspectives which, they hoped, would be a familiar experience for the children. They also, however, suggested that this playfulness may extend to the point that in engaging with the researchers children may also be inventive in what they say to the researchers which may mean the research data elicited is characterised by playful invention, instead of being an account of first-hand experience. This possibility illustrates how researchers may find themselves balancing between wanting to engage children in motivating and familiar activities for their research whilst also generating data with the children which can answer their

research questions and be used in research reports. Vignette 3 below, outlines an incident within my research which raises similar questions about the status and nature of children's engagement in research.

Figure 3: Vignette 3

As I introduced myself to the group of 4 children I was conscious of sharing what might be relevant to the children in relation to what I was asking them to talk with me about. As part of this process, I explained my interest in the many languages people can speak and I offered some examples of the languages I knew or was learning. One of my examples was that "I can speak Italian". This language was not one of the languages which tended to be used in the school. When I finished my short introduction the children each said something about themselves which included, in the case of Samira, a pupil aged 6, that she spoke Hindi and Italian. None of the other 3 children mentioned knowing Italian, but rather, the languages noted were Bengali and Arabic.

Samira's comment that she spoke Italian put me in an uncomfortable position in that I felt unsure of whether she did in fact speak Italian or whether she was reflecting the tension, discussed by Edwards & Alldred (2001), about whether or not children really do have agency to express themselves and their preferences in school-based research. My conflicted feelings originated in questions such as, was Samira trying to please me, an adult, by aligning herself with my stated languages, or was I being disingenuous in not expecting one of the children to know Italian because I was being overly guided by the class-teachers' lead and she had not noted that any of the children knew Italian. By engaging in research which has been shaped by an adult researcher it is at moments like this that I question if I followed Brooker's (2011) call to take children seriously. Taking children seriously would perhaps be more effectively achieved if children were engaging with issues of importance to them, shaped by them and with them taking a leading role. Researchers need to be aware that the

way in which they introduce themselves and present the research may, inadvertently, shape the responses of the children, whose voices the researcher is seeking to elicit and listen to. To achieve an ethos of respectful engagement with children may require adult researchers to review when and how they introduce themselves in a research encounter.

Vignette 4: Whispering in groups

This vignette concerns authentic language use within the activity used to elicit language used in context for the research. The challenge for any researcher focusing on language in their research and using language to explore language has been discussed in e.g. Grosjean (1998), Holmes et al (2013) and as mentioned earlier in this chapter (Martin & Stuart-Smith, 1998). Grosjean introduced a set of methodological and conceptual challenges for bilingualism researchers, to describe how variables such as the context and task in which research data are elicited in, for example, can have an influence on the nature of the language used and whether or not code-switching is present on that particular occasion. Holmes et al (2013) make a call for researchers to share their choices and practices in a transparent way when engaging in research which involves moving between different languages at all stages of the research. Martin & Stuart-Smith (1998), as noted earlier, conducted their research in children's two languages in order to study how their responses differed in these two conditions. These issues show us that eliciting language use that is authentic for the research participants is not necessarily straightforward and vignette 4 below illustrates the many factors which may have an influence on research participants' communication style and the potential impact of a researcher and the context on the chosen communication style.

Figure 4: Vignette 4

The activity I set up to explore research question 2 (what is the potential for children's learning if they access all of their languages?) was based on some picture-based sorting activities from the Talk Box book (Dawes & Sams, 2004). I was in the school library with

a group of 8 Somali speaking children who had agreed to work with me in the research. I set up the activity with the task explained and the pictures shared out and explained that I would record them completing the activity. I wanted to ensure that I continued to have their informed consent. I gave the instruction that the group could complete the activity in the language that they preferred, which could be English or it could be Somali. I left the children to complete the task and went to browse some of the books further away from them so that they did not feel uncomfortable by being observed by me. As I moved around the library and I could hear the children's voices so that I knew they were engaging with each other, even if it was very quiet. When I felt they had had enough time I returned to the table and asked if they would explain to me how they sorted the pictures and what their rationale was which they willingly did. Later in the day when I listened to my recording I could not hear the children's utterances as they had appeared to whisper to each other to complete the task. The whispering could have been in Somali or English but it was too quiet to be heard.

My experience of vignette 4 brought home to me the artificial nature of what I as a researcher felt would be a straightforward activity on this occasion. Various ways of interpreting what happened can be proposed. The children could be interpreted as having used their agency to, politely, engage to some extent with the activity but to withdraw their full participation by whispering and not making their voices available to me as the researcher. Groupwork always had to be conducted quietly in the school so as not to disturb others, and this concern may have been reflected in the children's very quiet responses. Or, maybe the request of a non-Somali speaking adult in the school context to use their Somali language, a language usually associated with home, family and life outside of school, may have been intrusive or unwelcome in some way. Possibly I had not explained fully enough the purpose of my recording and the children had

not had time to become familiar with speaking together in Somali while being recorded.

As in the discussion of vignette 3, my reflection is that researchers' agendas would benefit more from being shaped by children's concerns and interests which would perhaps result in children's more active engagement and their confident voices being heard, in both the literal and metaphorical senses. Concrete changes to my research approach could have involved approaching the activities with a Somali speaking co-researcher who could have initiated some practice speaking activities with the children prior to the beginning of the recording. Alternatively more time becoming familiar with the goal of the research, being recorded and listening to the practice recordings could have broken down any barriers children may have felt.

Concluding Reflections

Children's languages in research

To begin this concluding set of reflections on my experiences of researching children's perspectives on being multilingual and the unexpected aspects of it, I present this quotation from Meena, the young character-narrator in Meera Syal's novel Anita and Me:

> *It felt so strange to hear Punjabi under the stars. It was an indoor language to me, an almost guilty secret which the elders would only share away from prying English eyes and ears. On the street in shops on buses in parks I noticed how the volume would go up when they spoke English telling us kids not to wander off asking the price of something intimate, personal, about feelings as opposed to acquisitions, they switched to Punjabi and the volume became a conspiratorial whisper.*

> Syal (1996:203)

A novel offers a fictional account of lives and experiences and is therefore different from a research study. However, this extract offers some possible

pointers for the researcher into children's perspectives on their multilingualism in terms of how children learn not just the languages themselves but *about* their family and community languages through the practices they encounter in everyday life. This could encourage researchers to re-interrogate their methodological approach and question whether it is consistent with their research aims, values and the phenomenon at the heart of the research. So, if, in the UK at the current time, languages other than English are most naturally occurring in communities and homes then aiming to elicit them, as I did (see vignette 4) in school may sound and feel unusual, in the same way Meena reports in the novel Anita and Me. An alternative research methodology may be more appropriate such as linguistic ethnography (as advocated in e.g. Martin & Martin-Jones, 2016) in the naturalistic setting of the home or the community.

As Pietikäinen (2012) noted in her research into the Sami languages, which are characterised as endangered, researchers need to take care that their research practices do not cause harm by exposing competences in different languages which may be viewed or judged in particular ways by different community members. Pietikäinen's response to this challenge was to make use of visual methods to engage with children and young people. This point leads to a second concluding thought which relates to the need for flexible, in the moment, review of ethical practice on the part of the researcher. Kubanyiova (2008) uses the term micro-ethics to refer to this type of research practice. In this case, it could refer to how researchers need to maintain their commitment to respecting children's rights in the research and managing risk of any kind throughout the research process.

Flexibility in research

Vignette 2 illustrated how, even after expected and standard informed consent processes have been used, it is not guaranteed that research participants will maintain the same level of willingness to engage in a study throughout. This issue applies equally when adults are research participants as well. With reference to Press et al' s (2011) concept of monitoring it seems essential for researchers to maintain an alert and flexible mindset during their research

practice. If a researcher practises monitoring during their data collection, it will bring them closer to maintaining their ethical duty their research participants. In the case of researching with children this could mean being attentive to children's engagement and flexible to children's changes in demeanour. When children's rights are respected then the right not to participate needs to be a feasible option for children. If a child does show signs of no longer wishing to participate a question about why this might be can be asked, which leads to the final, broad, reflection in the form of a question about who, in fact, has set the research agenda.

Whose agenda shapes the research? A possible way forward

Children's levels of engagement in my research varied according to the individuals involved and many factors including perhaps their level of commitment to what was being asked of them. This led me back to considering Brooker's (2011) demand that we as a society and as a community of researchers continue to work on how we can take children's views and rights seriously. As a researcher I am left with the recognition that although my research study sought research with children and learn about their perspectives, the agenda had been shaped by my adult view of the world. An alternative to the model of research I worked with would have used a stronger model of researching with children so the research would have been conceptualised as a collaborative process from the outset. An incident in my research also pointed the way to this approach. It happened when one child was describing, with enthusiasm, how in her family they all wore new, special clothes to celebrate Eid. At that moment another child joined in and asked her a question about this, matching the enthusiasm of the first speaker. A model of research into children's multilingualism in which children interview or find out from each other about questions they themselves have designed would be a promising, if challenging, prospect which, it could be hoped, would be engaging for children as participants and enlightening for adults.

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