Perception and Articulation of own Cultural Otherness in Elite Interview Situations: Challenge or Repertoire?

Sarah Anne Ganter SAG
University of Oxford, sarah_ganter@hotmail.de

Perception and Articulation of own Cultural Otherness in Elite Interview Situations: Challenge or Repertoire?

Abstract

Increasingly, researchers are conducting studies within a diversity of cultural contexts This paper discusses whether and how the researcher's own cultural otherness plays a role in academic interview situations. The argument is based on Goffman's theory of interaction under conditions of otherness and the empirical data from 118 interviews and notes during the years 2007 and 2010 and between 2013 and 2014. The empirical data presented in this paper illustrate how a lack of education, socialisation, and cultivation within the fieldwork context—one's own cultural otherness—assumes ceremonial and substantial meaning in academic interview situations and merits being the subject of methodological considerations.

Keywords

Creative Commons License

Acknowledgements

Perception and Articulation of *own Cultural Otherness* in Elite Interview Situations: Challenge or Repertoire?

Sarah Anne Ganter
University of Oxford, United Kingdom

Increasingly, researchers are conducting studies within a diversity of cultural contexts This paper discusses whether and how the researcher's own cultural otherness plays a role in academic interview situations. The argument is based on Goffman's theory of interaction under conditions of otherness and the empirical data from 118 interviews and notes during the years 2007 and 2010 and between 2013 and 2014. The empirical data presented in this paper illustrate how a lack of education, socialisation, and cultivation within the fieldwork context—one's own cultural otherness—assumes ceremonial and substantial meaning in academic interview situations and merits being the subject of methodological considerations. Keywords: Elite Interviews, Own Cultural Otherness, Interviewing Methodologies, Ethnographic Research

In this paper, I explore the notion of one's *own cultural otherness* in semi-structured elite interview situations. Cultural otherness, understood as having a lack of education and socialisation within the researched context, is a common characteristic of the contemporary researcher. As Livingstone (2003) expresses it, research becomes increasingly cosmopolitan, as international co-operations and research projects define academia to an important extent.

This means that researchers encounter situations in which they are in a cultural foreign context and thus face their own cultural otherness. In contradiction to this trend, this otherness is frequently perceived as hindering rather than enriching research (Kruse, Bethmann, Niermann, & Schmieder, 2012). The pressure to become an "ideal researcher" (Hammer & Wildavsky, 1989) is therefore particularly intense for the cultural-other researcher. A lack of language and context knowledge, access to data, and literature with a foreign context are just a couple of challenges foreign researchers face (Herod, 1999) and have to argue against in their research papers.

This imbalance figured in scholarly discussions in ethnographic writings along the tensions between emic and etic approaches in conducting research (Headland, 1990; Olive, 2014). The debate evolved from the question how a researcher who is different from the participants of a study can reach the best understanding of the object of study. In the fieldwork context, an emic approach means that the viewpoints represented by the field are considered when making the field-work decisions. Viewpoints from the field may not respond to etic perspectives which use universal understandings of proceedings often defined in very different contexts and realities to those of the field and thus need to be confronted with those established by the scientific community, or by the researcher.[1]

Frequently, research projects dealing with diverse cultural contexts try to resolve these tensions through research collaborations and background information from local colleagues. Immediate research situations, such as interactions with interviewees, seemingly make it difficult to act on one's own cultural otherness. Strategies of adaptation outlined in the literature

---

[1] The literature offers a deep acknolwegdement of a very wide spread use of the two terms – emic and etic (Headlad, 1990). The related discussions originate from their use across disciplines. The founding representatives of this discussion are linguist Kenneth Pike with his work "Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior" (1967) and anthropologist Marvin Harris with his work "The Nature of Cultural Things" (1964).

often fall short in the situation of immediate interaction; instead, more intuitive strategies, often based on experience, are needed (Harvey, 2009, 2011; Mikecz, 2012; Rakow, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 2002).

Understanding the object of research requires however direct interaction. Therefore, in the context of culturally challenged researchers, calls for *methodological cosmopolitanism* were issued some time ago (Beck, 2006; Livingstone, 2003) but have since diminished. The cosmopolitan researcher, in this case, is a type of academic that is interested in geographically diverse or unbounded objects and therefore frequently works at cultural intersections. Cosmopolitan researchers learn to explore the before described tensions between emic and etic approaches.

My "own cultural otherness" lead me to experience the tensions between emic and etic approaches in my research and to reassess the value of each for my own work. The interviewees articulated perceptions presented in this paper are an important manifestation of this analytical process of reassessment. Therefore, as a cultural different researcher it is important to respond to the articulations with the regard by exploring the experienced tensions. The "ideal" image of a researcher might differ according to the fields´ reactions. In this paper, I underline the necessity to actively reflect on the merits and challenges of the cosmopolitan researcher who relates inside and outside perspective on the pathways of knowledge making.

The argument leans on Goffman's (1959, 1967, 1969, 1971, 1974) theory of interaction under a condition of otherness, which outlines the idea of being the *technician of reality*, whereby each participant in the interaction can shape the interaction. In the paper, I explore whether and how the researcher's own cultural otherness matters in interview situations. Throughout the course of the paper, it is apparent that the researcher's cultural otherness is a recurring theme used by the interviewee. I have established that, based on this observation, as well as on the qualitative analysis and use of emblematic examples from the data corpus, there is general merit in the strategic use of the researcher's own cultural otherness in interview situations. The outlining of this argument implies that more analytical contributions towards the re-thinking of cosmopolitanism in social science research are needed. The paper, therefore, through thematising the cultural otherness of the researcher in elite interview situations, addresses Beck's (2006) call to deal with otherness in the social sciences.

Literature Review: Dimensions of *Otherness* in Social Science Research

Otherness, the condition of being different from the object researched or from the context in which the research is being conducted, is reflected in social science literature in the context of the wider fieldwork experience (Gurney, 1985; Wolf, 1996) and of interview situations in particular. Social science research addresses otherness in terms of gender identities (Gurney, 1985; Ostrander, 1993; Wolf, 1996), thematic identities (Mikecz, 2012; Rakow, 2009; Welch et al., 2002), and the cultural identities of the interviewees (Herod, 1999). The conceptualisation of otherness starts hereby from the role it plays in academic research as a part of underlying power relations.

Scholarly literature particularly emphasises the importance of power gaps in interview situations. Therefore, strategies on how to balance power gaps are important to reach a comfortable situation in which communication is liberated and the trust and credibility of the researcher, as well as the ability to access the information given, is enriched (Thapar-Bjoumlrkert & Henry, 2004; Thuesen, 2011). Feminist literature, for example, discusses otherness in fieldwork. Differences in gender have been argued as being critical for accessing data and for enhancing the richness of the provided information (Gurney, 1985; Ostrander, 1993; Wolf, 1996). Methodological work in elite interviewing also emphasises differences in status as being critical to the quality of elite interviews (Mikecz, 2012).

Scholarly accounts, however, hardly consider otherness by cultural experience. One exception to this is Herod's (1999) study on foreign elites. In this work, the author relativizes the "cult of the insider," a conceptual thought which is close to the concept of *otherness* as it separates the insiders from the outsiders, the others. Otherness in this case, however, is referring to the object of research while defining the interviewees as *the other* within a certain group of people. The particularity of this definition of *the other* is, however, that the researcher and her selection of interviewees create a construct of otherness that the researcher acts upon to understand the particularities of expatriate culture. Other accounts thematise the role of otherness less explicitly, as they establish terms such as "informed outsider" (Welch et al., 2002) or "concerned foreign friend" (Mikecz, 2012). These concepts describe, in fact, a form of otherness that has undergone transformation and certain approximation. The interviewee acknowledges both the informed outsider and the concerned foreign friend. The interviewers understand and describe themselves in similar ways while undergoing the research process and increasingly transcending the object. Both terms testify an interview interaction after which the otherness of the researcher reaches a positive twist, and thus either implicitly assumes that cultural otherness matters in interview situations.

In this paper, the discussion opens to the field of media and communication studies. Hereby, the argument considers the otherness of the researcher and his or her recognition and attendance by the interviewee. Interviewing media and communication policy elites per se is an endeavour which is challenging in terms of access, time, and availability of information (Herzog & Ali, 2015). Thus, conducting interviews within cultural foreign contexts poses multi-layered challenges.

Goffman's Theory of Interaction under Conditions of Otherness

The social figure of the other is a central theme in Goffman's work (1967, 1969, 1971, 1974). The theme of *the other* as opposed to *the normal* is elaborated upon particularly in his work on stigmatic interaction (1963) but constitutes a constant concern in his writing on various kinds of ritual interactions (everyday, institutional, and public). Goffman (1959) understands interactions as being a part of and taking place within certain frames and defines frames as a social establishment which "is any place surrounded by fixed barriers to perception in which a particular kind of activity regularly takes place" (p. 231). These can be social, cultural, or institutional frames that comprise the rules accepted throughout the interaction. Being new to a frame or constituting a frame in which the engaging persons stem from different backgrounds is thus critical in terms of negotiating and agreeing on a common set of rules that emerges from the interactive frame. Goffman's work was criticised for over-emphasising personal aspects of the interaction and for ignoring the power constituencies that might shape them. Rawls (1987) assessed these points of critique by explaining that the understanding of interaction includes the idea of an *interactive order* as a concept; Rawls argued that Goffman undertheorized this idea in his work, which leads to frequent assumptions about the failure to include power relations in his work on face-to-face interactions. Goffman himself believed that there is an order within any kind of face-to-face interactions we encounter and, as Rawls (1987) continued, Goffman considered the individual and structure not as competing entities but as "joint products of an interaction order sui generis" (p. 138). The notion of *order*, which is comparable to the process of established rules reached through negotiation, occurs in this context as the result of the set framework in which the individuals emerge as interacting agents. In fact, Goffman referred to the role of power in interpersonal interactions, for example when introducing the notion of situational control (1959), as follows:

Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind and of his motive for having this objective, it will be in his interest to control the conduct of others, especially their responsive treatment of him. This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan. (p. 15)

This example shows how Goffman included different characteristics of power relations, which are relevant when looking at communicative interactions such as academic interviews, in which both power constellations and maintaining control over the situation play an important role. In interview situations, particularly in those with elites, the creation of images in the interview situation is a dominant theme. Therefore, what the other person perceives is important to the definition of the cultural otherness one conveys. The other is, in this case, understood as opposing the known of both the interviewer and the interviewee.

Goffman (1967) established in his theory of interaction across his work two dimensions of central interactions, which can assume (a) *substantial* and (b) *ceremonial* meanings. Whilst substantial meanings carry their meanings within their articulations, ceremonial meanings assume mostly trust-building functions. In the interaction, Goffman identified the five moments that emerge during the interaction and are reflected throughout both dimensions. These moments consist of the field of *surprise*, *irritations*, *indirections*, *expectations*, and *disappointments* within the interaction. Goffman used these key moments to describe the interaction as a general field of surprise, difficult to calculate, but possible to understand through so-called *keyings*. These keyings need to be observed in detail, are an element of learning, and thus help one to understand the situations. Understanding the keyings is critical for interactions, which is why Goffman believed that the individual has the ability to work as a *technician of reality* if the keyings are considered. This means that Goffman's theory of interaction under conditions of otherness departs from the idea that otherness generally matters in interactions and that experiencing the five moments helps to establish a situation in which otherness is negotiated and mutual codes and rules, the order of interaction, are being established through the interaction. Such an order of interaction is vital for academic interviews, particularly for elite interviews, in which power relations are of particular relevance.

This is where the analysis for this paper departs from. It is based on my fieldwork experience and starts from three core questions: (1) In which contexts does cultural otherness play a concrete role in the interaction as the result of thematization by the interviewee? (2) How does the interviewee react to the interviewer's cultural otherness in these concrete situations? (3) What is the trajectory of the interaction in these cases?

Methods: Analytical Foundation and Data Corpus

This paper explores the question of whether and how the researcher's cultural otherness plays a role in interview situations. In the centre of this piece of research is the observation that when conducting field-work interviewees react often in similar ways to the cultural difference of a researcher. In the research process, I developed a particular interest in the related patterns that my interviewees shared in their articulated reactions towards me in the research process. The interviewees are therefore for the purpose of this specific analysis approached as a group which is being analysed from an ethnographic perspective (Harris, 1968; Wolcott, 2010). The departing questions as well as the presented results of the analysis derive therefore from extended observations made during the diverse fieldwork phases which served as source of

data. These observations, their description, analysis and interpretation helps us to understand how to turn own cultural otherness into something functional when interviewing elites in foreign contexts.

The analysis is based on 118 interview encounters and fieldwork notes recorded during the years 2007 and 2010 and between 2013 and 2014 in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. The material derives from several research projects on developments within the media systems of the three countries and stems from interviews with media (policy) elites. The research design made it necessary to focus on local elites, including political, economic, and social elites represented by the leaders of organisations that work with audiovisual policies. The sample comprised individuals who were actively and significantly involved in the design of audiovisual-media policy processes, as well as journalists, media company representatives, and film-makers. In most cases, middle-range officials who were involved in the formulation and design of audiovisual policies were interviewed; in some cases, access to high-level officials, such as national deputies, senators, or state secretaries, was obtained. The sample also included actors that are not a part of the governmental mechanisms but who would engage in the discourse at some point. The aim was to obtain a sample of interviewees from the representative countries whose work with audiovisual policies was the most similar.

The interview settings varied: Some interviews were held in cafés, but most were conducted in the interviewees' offices. Some participants arrived for the interviewees in pairs or in threes, but most interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis. Overall, 118 interviews, each of a 30-minute to 2-hour duration, were conducted by the author of this paper.

The home institution did not require a particular review for the protection of human subjects. Nevertheless, a declaration of ethical standards was sent to the participants in preparation of the interviews. In the declaration, it is stated that the research was conducted in full awareness and agreement with the ethical standards in research as proposed by the Ethics Commission of the home University and according to the propositions of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESCR) Framework for Research Ethics and the Nuremberg Code. Questions of confidentiality were discussed with the participants of the study and the data was used exclusively in the way and margins consented with the person interviewed before, during or after the interview. Subjects´ agreement to participate was given on a voluntary and informed basis.

The interviews were transcribed with the help of native speakers and analysed using NVIVO software. The data corpus was complemented and juxtaposed with notes from the fieldwork and discussions with colleagues from within the field. Based on the initial observation that my cultural otherness is a reoccurring theme throughout the data, the first round of coding helped to identify the interviewees articulated perceptions regarding my cultural otherness. In the search for patterned regularities (Wolcott, 1994), the material was organised in a second round of analysis in relation to Goffman´s five critical moments of interaction under conditions of otherness as defining moments of interpersonal interaction. This construct of interaction is used in the paper to describe, reconstruct and interpret (Wolcott, 1994) how interviewees perceive and articulate the researchers difference by cultural experience.

The reconstruction of the interaction focuses hereby consciously at the "cultural otherness" the interview partners both perceive and articulate. Throughout the analysis, it is shown that this articulation of "otherness" is a recurring theme used by the interviewee (1) strategically, (2) to trigger a momentum of learning, and (3) for explanatory reasons over the five momenta that Goffman identified as being key in each interpersonal interaction in which otherness is brought to the fore.

The analysis establishes the ways in which interactions with the cultural other are being constituted throughout the interview interactions during the five critical moments that

constitute a field: surprise, irritations, indirections, expectations and disappointments. Linking the fieldwork material to the theory of interaction conveys underlying ceremonial and substantial meanings of a researcher´s cultural otherness. These are manifested as the interviewee perceives, articulates, and uses this particular encounter in the interaction.

Based on the analysis, I argue that cosmopolitan researchers need to be aware and to consider their cultural difference in both concrete and subtle ways self-reflexively to grant the validity of their research (Maxwell, 1992; May & Perry, 2014). More importantly, researchers should contemplate on this issue as a source for establishing richer repertoires for gaining access to interviewees and for handling interview situations. Speaking in Goffman's terms, the cosmopolitan researcher can be the "technician of reality" within this interaction, as this self-consciousness reflection evolves and helps to strengthen the mutual exchange of (cultural) information in academic interviews as communicative interactions under conditions of cultural otherness.

Elite Interviews as a Case of Academic Communicative Interaction Under Conditions of Cultural Otherness

The term *elite* is one that qualitative researchers have been treating critically. An accurate determination of who could be claimed to have elite status is necessary when conducting elite interviews (Harvey, 2009; Peabody et al., 1990; Richards, 1996). As Harvey (2011) outlined, the term *elite* can mean many things in different contexts and thus has been used very broadly in the literature. Lipset and Solari (1967) defined Latin American elites as "these positions in society, which are at the summits of key social structures; i.e. the higher positions in economy, government, military, politics, religion, mass organizations, education and the professions" (vii). The understanding of *elites*, as applied in this work, is based upon the first definition. In the context of collecting the data used for this analysis, the term *elite* was defined in a broader sense to describe those that engage actively with policies to carry them forward and to shape them actively.

When integrating elite interviews as academic communicative interaction into Goffman's (1959, 1967, 1969, 1971, 1974) terminology, academic interview interactions can be seen as a fine-tuned act with performative properties. In this performance, the participants pursue diverse sets of interests and hereby depend on the perceptions and related reactions of the interviewed and the interviewee. The challenges of performativity tend to be particularly high in the communicative interaction with elite actors, as status, image, and resources are particularly tangible issues (Dexter, 1970; Hammer & Wildavsky, 1989; Harvey, 2011). Performativity can therefore hinder the success of the interview, its transparency and reliability, and its purpose to grant sense-making based on the produced data (Dexter, 1970). Herzog and Ali (2015) advocated the application of more ethnographic elements into the elite interview interactions and underlined particularly the aspect of methodological reflexivity. A part of this methodological reflexivity is the need to understand the challenges to produce data that are reliable and sound for the successful understanding of the researched object. The literature on interview interactions understands cultural otherness and its implications as an additional obstacle to successfully accomplishing that task (Kruse et al., 2012; Mikecz, 2012).

Indeed, from the perspective of a researcher who faces his or her own cultural otherness, conducting interviews with elites contains a variety of challenges. It is often difficult to gain access to elites, and sampling for elite interviews is therefore more complex and challenging than sampling for other qualitative interviews. Access to the elite interview and to good-quality information from within the interview depends on practical issues, such as time, availability, and sensibility to power structures and reputation. The general challenges of conducting interviews with elites have been examined widely in the literature (Dexter, 1970; Herzog &

Ali, 2015; Hunter, 1995; Mikecz, 2012). For the most part, those interviewed for the data corpus used here, were people situated in places where audiovisual policy is designed (cities in which relevant policy bodies are located in each country, i.e., Buenos Aires in Argentina, Brasília and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, and Montevideo in Uruguay). The particularities of the fields required strategies for adaptation regarding the establishment of contact, language, and negotiation of meaning, cultural codes, and interaction.

As about the cultural background of the author of this paper, it is important to mention that the own cultural otherness is a recurring theme in the interviews even though I have enjoyed intercultural university training on the pertinent cultural areas, and have lived in the studied region for a few years. The majority of interviews were conducted in Spanish as well as in Portuguese, although some were conducted in English. As a German native speaker, the language challenge had to be tackled through preparation and planning: the questions were prepared in Spanish, Portuguese, and English, with help from native speakers, before the field phase and were amended accordingly. The choice of the language was agreed upon before the interviews were conducted; most of the interviewees would choose their native language, unless, in those cases in which, due to their professional position, it would be natural for them to express their thoughts in Spanish or in English. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees and transcribed with the support of native speakers, using Listen N Write software.

The sample was derived from three studies conducted in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay between 2007 and 2014. As Maxwell (2008) pointed out, an "intensive, long-term involvement" is favourable to the quality of a research, as it "rules out spurious associations and premature theories" (p. 244). The repeated entering of the field is favourable to prolonging the overall contact time with the field, as the memory of networks can be reactivated when getting back into the field. Even though this long-term engagement with the "foreign" region might reduce or change the impression of one's own cultural otherness over time and lead to a cosmopolitan rather than to a cultural, foreign researcher, the general perception of the researcher as not being born, educated, and socialised in this context prevails. In fact, across the sample, the researchers' cultural otherness prevails as a recurring theme.

Results: Meanings of Perceived and Articulated Cultural Otherness in Academic Interview Settings

In this section, the analysis comprises two dimensions which reflect (a) ceremonial and (b) substantial meanings. The cultural otherness of the researcher is reflected in ceremonial meanings, which, for the most part, assume trust-building functions and generate interest and trust, whilst the substantial meanings are based on their articulations.

Ceremonial Meanings

The ceremonial level starts long before the first face-to-face encounter via emails and telephone calls to the office staff or to the interviewee themselves. In the typical interview situation, the first 5 to 10 minutes are dedicated to helping the interviewee understand the interviewers' (cultural) background. In this phase, *expectations* about the interview and the interviewer are established. These expectations relate, on the cultural level, mainly to the researcher's language and cultural knowledge. Interviewees also establish expectations for the basic codes of conduct, such as punctuality, reliability, and forms of greeting.

The language topic emerges frequently during the email exchange and triggers both irritation and *indirection*, as interviewees ask questions that, when answered, reveal more cultural properties of the interviewer ("In which language will the interview be conducted?"

Brazilian interviewee email). Also, the moments of *surprise* are being articulated at this first stage of contact: ("Your Spanish is very good […]." Argentinian interviewee email) and are directly indicating how this positive surprise is important for the established interviewer–interviewee relationship ("[…] it will be my pleasure talking to you"; ibid.). This first information frequently generates *irritation*, which frequently takes the form of curiosity on the side of the interviewee. That this irritation leads to increased interest can be derived directly from the following emails ("Are you Argentinian, but you study in Europe?" Brazilian interviewee email) or within the first minutes of the interview ("So, tell me, *NAME,* you are Brazilian and do your PhD in Austria—or where are you from originally?" Uruguayan interviewee, notes from the interview). The answers to these questions in email ("I am German, […], and I research South America.") very often lead to another follow up email announcing surprise and often including the confirmation of availability f++or an interview if not previously given ("How come you know Spanish? I look forward to talking to you." Uruguayan interviewee email).

Interviewees with this ceremonial history frequently would come back to this topic at the beginning of the interview by adding more questions. Sometimes interviewees use the opportunity to link these questions to the substantial dimension of the interview ("So, *NAME,* tell me, what brings you to South America? […] Why are you interested in South American media?" Uruguayan interviewee, notes from the interview). Summing up, an interviewee who articulates interest in the cultural characteristics of the interviewer tends to make this a recurring topic during the first phase of email contact. This facilitates the desire to keep in touch, triggers compromise, and establishes the possibility of breaking the ice within the first minutes of the face-to-face interview situation. In some cases, interviewees also possess knowledge about the researcher's cultural context and use the opportunity to share little anecdotes, to showcase their own language knowledge, or to ask about recent developments in Europe. ("I travel there once every couple of years. I always go to the city of Stuttgart and Pforzheim; we have some contacts in the industry there." Brazilian interviewee, notes from the interview).

The other recurring cultural themes that assume ceremonial meaning are basic codes of conduct, such as punctuality, reliability, or forms of greeting. In the data used for this paper, the latter is the prevailing expression of cultural differences other than language. Rooted in the expectation of my cultural otherness, it was common for me to greet interviewees with a handshake; however, they would say goodbye with a hug. It was often accompanied by the expression of insecurity or irritation through using a reassuring comment: ("I understand you know our habits quite well, so we can do this how we do it here." Brazilian interviewee, notes from the interview; "You know that this is how we say goodbye here, right?" Argentinian interviewee, notes from the interview). Sometimes, when meeting face-to-face, interviewees would raise the issue of otherness in greeting habits among the different cultures, thereby leading to indirections: ("How do you say hi and bye where you come from?" Argentinian interviewee, notes from the interview). The explanations following these questions and affirmations posed the possibility of continued asking and thus triggered other indirections towards the substantial level. Intermediate articulations happened frequently when interviewees asked about their reason for the interest in the purpose of the research ("Why are you doing interviews here? Are there no similar issues in Europe?" Co-worker of Argentinian deputy, notes from the preparatory interaction).

Overall, cultural otherness reached ceremonial meaning and matters in the interview when the interviewees articulated with the purpose of (1) learning about and displaying cultural experience and knowledge; (2) establishing common grounds; and (3) understanding, negotiating, and applying codes of interaction correctly. Ceremonial reactions additionally manifest the ways in which cultural otherness is relevant during the interaction. These

ceremonial reactions include laughter, silence, agreement, and changes in behaviour, for example when the welcoming greeting differs from the goodbye. These (positive) reactions are favourable to the overall communicative interaction and can increase activity while triggering recurrent agreement of codes and meanings throughout the entire interaction, as the mentioned examples show.

The acknowledgement of cultural otherness during the interaction establishes common grounds for further interactions. Therefore, it is important to provide sufficient time for the interviewees to articulate their expectations, irritations, disappointments, and indirections that are grounded in the researcher's cultural otherness. Interestingly, in the data corpus used for this paper, *cultural otherness* still emerged as a theme when shifting to the substantial dimension of the interaction. The interviewees applied their knowledge gathered on the cultural otherness of the researcher during the ceremonial interactions to the substantial interaction in purposeful ways. Three main purposes underlying the articulation of perceived cultural otherness were identified within the substantial meaning of cultural otherness established by the interviewees: strategic; learning-oriented; and explanatory.

Substantial Meanings

The researcher's cultural otherness was articulated by the interviewees in the context of substantial questions and answers and was therefore given substantial meaning, as well. The knowledge about the interviewer's cultural difference frequently triggered *expectations* on the substantial level. These expectations ranged from facing an interviewer with little expert knowledge regarding the studied context ("Well, probably you do not know anything about this, as you are not from here, and in Europe things might work differently." Government consultant 1) to expecting a highly eloquent expert ("You, as European, maybe you can help us…council us so we understand what we have to improve." Communications Enterprise Workers Union representative 1, interview) or colleague ("We are starting this [….]) initiative. Maybe you would like to participate; we want to give it an international characteristic." Government consultant 2, notes from the interview).

Other forms of expectations are linked to taking sides and to understanding the position of the interviewee:

> Well, I am sure you, as European, understand that this law is effectively a violation of the right of freedom of the press. […] I am talking to you, because I think it is important that people in Europe learn about what is going on here. (Interview with representative of media company 1)

These expectations led to *irritations* when interviewees understood that the role of the researcher was primarily bound to objectivity as researcher and that the foreign friend could not help with their agenda ("So, what is your opinion on the law, are you in favour or against it?" – "Well, I think that, as a researcher, I am not in the right place to answer that question." – "But if you had such a discussion in Germany or Austria or in the European Union, whose side would you take?" – "Well, it is very unlikely for such a discussion to appear in these contexts in the next years. Anyway, it is a very interesting debate you are having here." Interview with government representative 3).

In such a situation, the transformation of the articulated perception tends to shift rapidly from *foreign friend* to *foreigner* ("I do not understand what you mean; this is not Spanish." – Attempt to reformulate is interrupted – "We do not say this the way you express it." Interview with government representative 3). In this example, the irritation transforms into *disappointment*, and the researcher's cultural otherness becomes a power strategy of the

interviewee. In other situations, in which language was an obstacle, interviewees would try to help in a positive manner to overcome those issues, for example through code, by switching to a second language ("We have to …. [is thinking about which word to use] it's *juntar* in Portuguese…like bridge or unite in English, I think—do you understand what I mean—did I explain that okay?" Government consultant 2, interview in English).

Irritation also transformed into a positive form of *indirection* when the interviewee tried to link local processes to European situations

> Well, in Europe you have the Television Without Frontiers Directive, right? And then you have the Audiovisual Media Directive, correct? You see, here, things are just evolving, but this is where we want to be; we need a better institutional framework. (Government representative 4)

The interviewee also used indirection in the form of questions to find out about how much background information needed to be given, so that the interviewer could understand the answer provided ("So, even though you're not from here, you know more or less what the debate is about…the main conflicts, right? So I do not have to start from scratch, right?" Representative of NGO 1, interview).

Based on the cultural otherness of the researcher, substantial reactions related to consultations about meanings, clarifying questions from the interviewee, and, in rare cases, the denial to answer a question. These reactions resulted in increased background information, reframing of the questions, and initiating new topics through the constant negotiation of meaning and relevance of the questions posed. However, all these reactions were linked to a set of purposes and manifested the framework of the interview in which the researcher's own cultural otherness and the interviewee's perception of this circumstance influenced the interaction.

These examples show that one's own cultural otherness in academic interview interactions can assume strategic relevance and is frequently integrated into the strategy of the interviewee. The interviewees' approaches to the researcher's cultural otherness become manifested in their articulated, related perceptions. These articulations can result in both positive and distanced communicative interactions before, during, and after the interview situation. Throughout the analysis, it was shown that this articulation of *cultural otherness* was a recurring theme used by the interviewee in a purposeful manner. The cultural otherness of the cosmopolitan researcher thus carries both ceremonial and substantial meanings (Table 1).

Table 1: Overview of Ceremonial and Substantial Meanings of Perceived and Articulated Cultural Otherness in Academic Interview Situations

Ceremonial Meaning	Substantial Meaning
Learn about and display cultural experience and knowledge.	Strategic
Establish common grounds.	Learning-oriented
Understand, negotiate, and apply codes of interaction correctly.	Explanatory

Source: Presentation based on the qualitative content analysis of 118 interview encounters and note from the interviews between the author of this paper and media and media policy elites in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil between 2007 and 2014.

Discussion: Challenged Researcher or Technician of Reality?

The analysis of interview data with interviewees from South America during the last eight years suggests that the researcher's cultural otherness not only matters in terms of preparation for the interviews but also in the concrete interview situations themselves. Interviewees perceive, refer to, and use the cultural otherness of the researcher in a purposeful way throughout the interaction. The data suggest that ceremonial meanings of cultural otherness are raised with the purpose of learning about and displaying cultural experience and knowledge; establishing common grounds; and understanding, negotiating, and applying codes of interaction correctly. The perceived cultural otherness, in the ceremonial sense, offers the opportunity to create moments of identification and cultural bridges with which to break the ice and establish an interview situation in which both the interviewer and the interviewee enter into a positive communicative interaction. However, it is clear that the latter aspect has to be assessed according to the cultural context, as the data corpus relied on cultural exchanges between Western European and South American interview partners and thus bears little potential for cultural conflict.

Substantial meaning is reflected in three forms of acknowledgement: strategic; learning-oriented; and explanatory. The strategic use implies a strategy of persuasion, distraction, or belittlement. The momentum of learning was frequently created in situations during which the interviewee was perceived as a *foreign friend* or an *informed outsider* and often was attached to explanations that used cases from the interviewer's context for underlying communalities or differences between the contexts. This means that the interviewees acknowledged the cultural otherness of the interviewer in both favourable and less favourable ways with respect to the communicative interactions. In both cases, the particular situation of the researcher mattered.

In his theory of interaction, Goffman suggested that otherness is reflected throughout five key moments: *surprise*, *irritations*, *indirections*, *expectations* and *disappointments*. The strategic use of the interviewer's own cultural otherness by interviewees might account for some of the more disadvantaged interview experiences. However, Goffman also argued that the participants of the interactions can be technicians of the reality of the interaction. The interview data used for this analysis show that cultural otherness also carries opportunities for enriching the repertoire of interaction.

The scholarly literature on conducting interviews in cultural, foreign contexts primarily offers warnings about how to do it right and how to become the "ideal" researcher (Hammer & Wildavsky, 1989) regardless of the challenges cultural otherness clearly carries. In contrast to these accounts, this paper suggests that cultural otherness can be used as an additional tool for use by academic researchers. The interaction not necessarily has to end on the "down note" of disappointment in Goffman's circle of communicative interaction. However, it remains clear that preparation and observation are key to converting one's own otherness into a successful strategy.

The present analysis shows that, indeed, cultural otherness can raise new thematic issues and unexpected links, can increase interaction through asking back, and thus contributes to the engagement in the interview situation from both sides. Thus, the understanding, as well as the positioning, of *the other* is put into a place where it facilitates informational exchange and access to data. Thus, in accordance with Lefebvre (1991) it is important to recognize the creative capacity of being an outsider; he argues in his conceptualisation of space that in conditions of the modern world, the marginal, the peripheral has a creative capacity, as it is both inside and outside, included and excluded.

In line with this, the cultural otherness of a researcher clearly barriers challenges, but also potential for increased and mutual engagement in the interaction. To conclude, the

argument developed based on the analysis presented in this paper is that the capacity of the cosmopolitan researcher opens new repertoires for actively mastering academic research situations in cultural, foreign contexts. This so-far under-studied aspect should be addressed when preparing and conducting interviews in cultural, foreign contexts.

References

Beck, U. (2006). The cosmopolitan condition: Why methodological nationalism fails. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *24*(7–8), 286–290. doi:10.1177/02632764070240072505

Dexter, L. A. (1970). *Elite and specialized interviewing*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Goffman, E. (1967). *The interaction ritual: Essay on face-to-face behaviour*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Goffman, E. (1969). *Strategic interaction.* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Goffman, E. (1971). *Verhalten in sozialen situationen: Strukturen und regeln der interaktion im öffentlichen raum.* Gütersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Das individuum im öffentlichen austausch.* Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft.

Gurney, J. N. (1985). Not one of the guys: The female researcher in a male-dominated setting. *Qualitative Sociology*, *8*(1), 42–62. doi:10.1007/BF00987013

Hammer, D., & Wildavsky, A. (1989). The open-ended, semi-structured interview: An (almost) operational guide. In A. Wildavsky (Ed.), *Craftways: On the organization of scholarly work* (pp. 57-101). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Harris, M. (1968). *The rise of anthropological theory: A history of theories of culture.* New York, NY: T. Y. Crowell.

Harvey, W. S. (2009). Methodological approaches for interviewing elites. *Geography Compass*, *4*(3), 193–205. doi:10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00313.x

Harvey, W. S. (2011). Strategies for conducting elite interviews. *Qualitative Research, 11*(4), 431–441. doi:10.1177/1468794111404329

Headland, T. N. (1990). Chapter 1: Introduction. A dialogue between Kenneth Pike and Harris Marvin on emics and etics. In T. N. Headland, K. L. Pike, & M. Harris (Eds.), *Emics and etics: The insider/outsider debate* (pp. 13-27). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Herod, A. (1999). Reflections on interviewing foreign elites: Praxis, positionality, validity, and the cult of the insider. *Geoforum*, *30*(2), 313–327. doi:10.1016/S0016-7185(99)00024-X

Herzog, C., & Ali, C. (2015). Elite interviewing in media and communication policy research. *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*, *11*(1), 37–54. doi:10.1386/macp.11.1.37_1

Hunter, A. (1995). Local knowledge and local power: Notes on the ethnography of local community elites. In R. Hertz & J. B. Imber (Eds.), *Studying elites using qualitative methods* (pp. 151-170). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kruse, J., Bethmann, S., Niermann, D., & Schmieder, C. (Eds.). (2012). *Qualitative interviewforschung: In und mit fremden sprachen*. Weinheim, Germany: Beltz Juventa.

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Lipset, S. M., & Solari, A. E. (1967). *Elites in Latin America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Livingstone, S. (2003). On the challenges of cross-national comparative media research. *European Journal of Communication*, *18*(4), 477–500. doi:10.1177/0267323103184003

Maxwell, J. A. (1992). Understanding and validity in qualitative research. *Harvard Educational Review*, *62*(3), 279–300.

Maxwell, J. A. (2008). Designing a qualitative study. In I. L. Bickman & D. J. Rog (Eds.), *The handbook of applied social research methods* (2nd ed., pp. 214–253). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

May, T., & Perry, B. (2014). Reflexivity and the practice of qualitative research. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 109–122). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mikecz, R. (2012). Interviewing elites: Addressing methodological issues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *18*(6), 482–493. doi:10.1177/1077800412442818

Olive, J. L. (2014). Reflecting on the tensions between emic and etic perspectives in life history research: Lessons learned. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 15*(2), 6. Retrieved from http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs140268

Ostrander, S. A. (1993). Surely you´re not in this just to be helpful: Access, rapport, and interviews in three studies of elites. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *22*(1), 7–27. doi:10.1177/089124193022001002

Peabody, R. L., Hammon, S. W., Torcom, J., Brown, L. P., Thompson, C., & Kolodny, R. (1990). Interviewing political elites. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, *23*(3), 451–455. doi:10.1177/1468794111404329

Rawls, A. W. (1987). The interaction order suis generis: Goffman´s contribution to social theory. *Sociological Theory*, *5*(2), 136–149. doi:10.2307/201935

Richards, D. (1996). Elite interviewing: Approaches and pitfalls, *Politics, 16*(3), 199-204. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9256.1996.tb00039.x

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Thapar-Bjorkert, S., & Henry, M. (2004). Reassessing the research relationship: Location, position and power in fieldwork accounts. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *7*(5), 363–381.

Thuesen, F. (2011). Navigating between dialogue and confrontation: Phronesis and emotions in interviewing elites on ethnic discrimination. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *17*(7), 613–622. doi:10.1177/1077800411413998

Welch, C., Marschan-Piekkari, R., Penttinen, H., & Tahvanainen, N. (2002). Corporate elites as informants. *International Business Review*, *11*(5), 611–628.

Wolcott, H. F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Wolcott, H. F. (2010). *Ethnography lessons: A primer.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Wolf, D. (Ed.). (1996). *Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Author Note

Sarah Anne Ganter is a Research Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. The focus of her work is qualitative comparative research, media governance, media change and journalism. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: sarah.ganter@politics.ox.ac.uk.

Article Citation

Ganter, S. A. (2017). Perception and articulation of *own cultural otherness* in elite interview
     situations: Challenge or repertoire? *The Qualitative Report, 22*(4), 942-956. Retrieved
     from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol22/iss4/1