

“You have ruined this entire experiment...shall we stop talking now?” Orientations to the experimental setting as an interactional resource

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Bio notes

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“You have ruined this entire experiment...shall we stop talking now?” Orientations to the experimental setting as an interactional resource

Abstract

One limitation widely noted in sociolinguistics is the tension presented by the ‘observer’s paradox’ (Labov, 1972), i.e. the notion that everyday language is susceptible to contamination by observation (Stubbs, 1983: 224). The observer’s paradox has been perceived to present significant challenges to traditional sociolinguistic researchers seeking to explore the processes at work during ordinary interaction. More recently, scholars have begun to argue that in fact the presence of a recording device, rather than being a mere constraint on spoken interaction, is in itself an interactional resource explicitly oriented to by participants (Speer & Hutchby 2003; Gordon 2012). Drawing on a collection of transcripts collected in experimental conditions as part of a wider project exploring the relationship between language and identity, this paper seeks to explore how these orientations manifest themselves in the context of Instant Messaging (IM) conversations. We show different orientations to the experimental setting, and different understandings of the role of the researcher – represented in this case by the IM chat archive – as both a topic of discussion and as a participant themselves.

Keywords: observer’s paradox; instant messaging; footing; audience; assuming identities online

1. Introduction

While the ability to record spontaneous language use is an undisputed necessity for studying it, the presence of a recording device has traditionally been viewed as a limitation on scholarly attempts to investigate ‘naturally-occurring’ interaction, and as inhibiting participants’ production of ‘naturalistic’ speech. Language produced entirely independently of the researcher has long been contrasted favourably with researcher-generated data (see Potter, 2004), owing to the myriad problems perceived to arise from researcher influence. Contrastingly, more recent scholarship (some of which is discussed below) has demonstrated that in studies of spoken language the audio recorder can actually serve as an interactional resource for speakers; that it can itself fulfil the role of a participant of sorts; and that it can be used to construct and maintain distinctive identities.

The concept of the ‘observer’s paradox’ was introduced by Labov (1972), who suggests that the influence of sociolinguistic fieldworkers should be kept to a minimum in order to capture ‘natural’ language use, and that the very presence of a researcher or recording equipment fundamentally alters interaction. It is widely acknowledged that the effects of the observer’s paradox cannot be entirely eliminated, but attempts to mitigate them are standard practice among sociolinguistic researchers.

Yet there are firm grounds for arguing that there is no such thing as truly ‘natural’ language use at all. Bell (1984; 2001), for example, suggests that shifts in style occur primarily as a result of the speaker’s audience, which is rather at odds with the suggestion that there is something called ‘natural speech’. For Bell, it is who can (or may be able to) hear us that has

1 a greater effect on how we speak than any other factor, rendering the very notion of an
2 individual's language patterns ever being 'uncontaminated' by the observation process a
3 rather ludicrous suggestion (see Wertheim, 2006).
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6 **2. Background**

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8 Perhaps the earliest attempt to turn the notion of the observer's paradox on its head and focus
9 on the effects of the recording device on speech as an academic object of interest was Wilson
10 (1987). Inspired by the observation that sociolinguists were going to great lengths to
11 minimise the effects of observational procedures and yet no evidence existed for the relative
12 success of these attempts, Wilson set out to focus on what might be 'sociolinguistically
13 interesting' about speech styles that are themselves created by methodological processes. He
14 observed that participants regularly made reference to the recording device and treated the
15 researcher as an audience. This is echoed by Schilling-Estes (1998), who remarked that
16 valuable insights can be gained through investigating what she terms 'performance speech'.
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21 More recently, the question of what constitutes 'naturally occurring' data has garnered
22 substantial debate, perhaps most notably in a 2002 issue of the journal *Discourse Studies*,
23 where scholars from a range of disciplines discussed the nature of the 'natural'/'contrived'
24 distinction (Lynch 2002; Potter 2002; Speer 2002a, 2002b; Tenhave 2002). Speer (2002a)
25 problematizes the distinction, arguing that from a discursive perspective it makes very little
26 sense to map it on to particular methods of data collection, as is standard practice within
27 Conversation Analysis and Discursive Psychology. Rather, she argues, it would be interesting
28 to focus on participants' own orientations, to examine how they "attend to the fact of their
29 being involved in a social science investigation, looking at moments where they treat the
30 setting as somehow non-natural, or attend to the occasion as a contrived one...and consider
31 what such orientations tell us about the impact of the research context" (2002a: 518).
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36 With this in mind, Speer & Hutchby (2003) propose an alternative approach to the issue of
37 authenticity by conceptualising orientations to the presence of recording equipment as
38 analytical objects in their own right. Drawing data from interviews and conversations where
39 participants were, in general, fully aware that their interactions were being recorded, they
40 demonstrate ways in which this knowledge comes to be treated discursively, and how 'being
41 recorded' is used as a resource for managing ongoing talk. It could be said that such an
42 approach shifts the perspective of the recording process from the analyst to the participant,
43 and in so doing allows for exploration of how participants exploit it in order to facilitate a
44 range of activities.
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49 Subverting the observer's paradox, Wertheim (2006) adopts Bell's (1984, 2001) concept of
50 audience design to account for the fieldworker's role in observed interactions. Noting that the
51 presence of herself as a language investigator almost invariably resulted in self-aware
52 'performance' styles of speech from her participants, Wertheim interprets the phenomenon
53 with reference to both the speaker's assessment of her social role, and to her participant role
54 in the speech event under scrutiny. Her analyses lead her to adjust Bell's (1984) hierarchy of
55 audience roles, since the end listener of recorded interaction is at once *ratified* and *unknown* –
56 criteria not fulfilled by any of the roles in Bell's framework. As Wertheim asserts, rather than
57 labelling the speech patterns of a participant who knows they are being recorded as
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‘unnatural’, we might instead want to consider the possibility that they are “trying to grapple with a participant role they have never dealt with before, that of the unknown eavesdropper who is nonetheless ratified” (2006: 721).

From an ethnographic perspective Monahan & Fisher (2010) seek to further the arguments for focusing on participants’ ‘performances’, arguing that they have the potential to “reveal profound truths about social and/ or cultural phenomena” (p. 358). They argue that as agents, participants need to make sense of and arguably influence researchers, and that responses to researchers are important data in and of themselves. Performances from participants, they claim, “are valuable treasures of meaning, abundantly wrapped in multiple layers of interest, assumption and concern; they are alluring conceits overflowing with interpretive possibility” (2010: 371).

Drawing on Goffman’s notions of ‘frame’ and ‘footing’, Gordon (2012) shows how participants in spoken interaction orient to the recorder variously as an object and as a person(s), within a literal or non-literal (‘playful’) frame. Within the literal frame she shows that participants variously orient to the recorder as a burden, as a data collector, and as a stand-in for the researcher, while within a non-literal frame she points to examples of participants staging performances for the recorder as if it were an audience for them to entertain. These varying orientations to the observation process highlight its position as a resource for participants, rather than merely an intrusive limitation on the ‘naturalness’ of the data elicited.

Most recently, Goodman & Speer (2016) strongly argue for a viewpoint which does not consider researcher-generated and naturally occurring data to be discrete ‘types’ of data, reiterating Griffin’s (2007) suggestion that the concept of *any* talk being ‘natural’ is problematic, given that *all* talk is mediated by the context in which it occurs. The presence of the researcher allows for the accomplishment of a wide array of interactional tasks, centrally the management of particular identities, and this is evidenced by Goodman & Speer’s analyses.

In summary, the research discussed here demonstrates that the re-examination of the presence of the observer – less as a paradox and more as an object of study in itself – has proven itself to be a worthwhile endeavour in the study of spoken interaction. Less well explored is the role of the researcher in the context of text-facilitated computer-mediated communication, specifically under the experimental conditions described above. This article represents an endeavour to address that gap.

3. Data and Method

Instant Messaging (IM) is a type of computer-mediated communication “involving two parties and done in real time (synchronously)” (Baron 2013). Communication is facilitated through written exchanges, and, like many other types of Computer Mediated Communication, IM combines qualities typically associated with writing – such as lack of a visual context and paralinguistic cues, physical absence of interlocutors – with properties of spoken language, such as immediacy, informality, reduced planning and editing, and rapid feedback (Georgakopoulou 2011). IM has thus been described as a ‘hybrid’ register (Tagliamonte & Denis 2008). Since IM is primarily used for one-to-one dialogue, it can be

1 argued that it is usually a private means of communication (as compared, say, to posts in
2 public fora such as Twitter and other social media), and the effects of a third observing party
3 on the interaction have therefore unsurprisingly received no scholarly attention up until now.
4 While IM conversations are textually produced and messages remain on the screen for some
5 time, they are often only archived if a user specifically sets up their IM client to do so. Thus,
6 while an awareness of the possibility that their contributions are being recorded may be part
7 of the normative practices of the medium, participants are unlikely to frame their ‘talk’ for an
8 indeterminate future audience in the same way as one would through, for example, formal
9 writing.
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12 Our data¹ are drawn from a study² which set out to examine the relationship between
13 language and online identity, and to investigate the linguistic criteria that are sufficient and
14 necessary for one individual to assume the identity of another (see Grant and MacLeod, 2016
15 for more on the wider project). Along with policing partners we were aiming to contribute to
16 a better understanding of the processes at work during identity assumption tasks by online
17 undercover police officers, particularly within the context of sexual grooming investigations,
18 in order to inform the training we currently deliver to them. We designed a series of
19 experiments aimed at systematically investigating how adept individuals are at spotting the
20 substitution of one interlocutor with another, what linguistic criteria individuals emulate
21 when engaged in impersonation, what criteria arouse suspicion in individuals looking for the
22 possibility of impersonation by their interlocutor, and the confidence with which these
23 judgements are made. We were also interested in the effects of preparation by impersonators
24 on how likely they were to go undetected. The experiments were run with four different
25 groups of participants, including University students (UG and PG), attendants at our annual
26 International Summer School in Forensic Linguistic Analysis (ISSFLA) and trainee
27 undercover police officers (hereafter UCOs). The experimental design required participants
28 to act either in the role of ‘Judge’, whereby they were required to be on the look-out for
29 impersonation and record their thoughts on when it occurred, or as one member of a ‘Pair’
30 interacting with the ‘Judge’, one of whom took over from and impersonated the other at some
31 unspecified point in the IM conversation. Thus, participants in the data extracts discussed in
32 the next section are labelled either as ‘Judge’ or ‘Pair’. Written consent was gathered from all
33 participants prior to their involvement in the experimental tasks.
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37 The use of experimental data in which the participants are in no doubt that their behaviour
38 will be observed presents opportunities for a level of analysis of the chat logs that is simply
39 not possible with data generated within genuine criminal investigations, where at least one
40 participant is generally unaware that their talk will be subjected to later scrutiny. In this paper
41 we examine how an awareness of the experimental setting specifically influences the
42 unfolding IM interaction. Exploring the roles ascribed to the researcher may not be one of the
43 central aims of the project, but occurrences of the phenomenon have emerged from the data
44 and presented themselves as worthy of further study. It is this aspect, rather than identity
45 disguise and detection thereof, that is our concern here.
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57 ¹ The data are available via Open Access and can be found at the following link:
58 <http://reshare.ukdataservice.ac.uk/852099/>

59 ² ESRC Grant Ref: ES/L003279/1
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1 Setting aside for now the overall aims of the wider project and our interest in impersonation
2 and detection of disguise, we focus here on examining the role of the researcher in the IM
3 data. We draw on the concepts of footing (Goffman, 1981) and audience design (Bell, 1984;
4 2001) to examine the alignments created and maintained by the participants through their
5 interaction with each other. We begin by identifying occasions in the chat logs where
6 participants either directly or indirectly addressed the recording process and/or the future
7 reader(s) of the chat. Like Gordon (2012) we focus here on the different footings, or
8 alignments, that are taken up by participants in relation to the recorder and to the future
9 reader(s). It is through these footings that particular identities are produced and maintained.
10 Inasmuch as we are focusing on participant orientations we necessarily draw on some
11 discussions within Conversation Analysis that apply Goffman's ideas about footings and
12 frames to explicate the processes at work during interaction (see, for example, Clayman,
13 1992).

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17 Bell (1984) uses Goffman's (1981) notion of participation frameworks as a starting point, and
18 proposes four distinct ways in which audiences of talk might be aligned by the speaker,
19 moving from the direct addressee of the talk, to a ratified auditor, through to overhearers and
20 eavesdroppers, with each role differing in terms of whether their presence is known by the
21 speaker, whether they are a ratified participant, and whether they are addressed.. At the heart
22 of audience design is the assumption that "speakers design their style primarily for and in
23 response to their audience" (Bell, 2001: 143). In other words, the amount of influence each
24 audience role has over the style of the speaker diminishes as we move further away from the
25 speaker. Thus, the displaying of orientations to potential audiences beyond one's immediate
26 addressee is not in itself a novel concept. In the 2001 revisiting of the model, Bell added the
27 role of 'referee', which he described as a "third persons not usually present at an interaction
28 but possessing such salience for a speaker that they influence style in their absence...referee
29 design can involve a speaker shifting to identify more strongly with their own in-group, or to
30 an outgroup with which they wish to identify" (2001: 147). However, as noted above,
31 participants in the current study were aware of the experimental context, and the researcher
32 was oriented to as a recipient of the talk, as we shall see in the following section.

33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 **4. Orienting to the Experimental Context: Results and Discussion**

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45 Gordon (2012) notes that the way participants talk *to* the recorder/researcher differs from
46 how they talk *about* it (p. 314), and it is on this basis that this analysis is organised around
47 these two distinct processes.

48 49 50 51 52 **4.1 Talking *to* the researcher**

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54 In the following extract, from an all-female triad of undergraduate students, the participants
55 explicate their awareness that their language will be observed by the first author, and the
56 location of this explicating also reveals their alignment with a 'sociolinguistics experiment'
57 footing.
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1 Prior to the start of this extract the participants have been discussing Judge 23's recent trip
2 into the city centre, where she did not buy any shoes but returned with rice cakes and carrots
3 – a hoard which Pair 24_22 then evaluates, as 'boring'.
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7 *Extract 1: UG*
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9 1 14:23 Judge 23: Ikr! What has happened to me?!?!?!
10 2 14:23 Pair 24_22: ikr?
11 3 14:23 Pair 24_22: that is a bit slangy for you
12 4 14:23 Judge 23: ikr = I know right
13 5 14:23 Pair 24_22: I know what it meant !!!
14 6 14:23 Pair 24_22: hahahhaa
15 7 14:23 Pair 24_22: knew*
16 8 14:23 Judge 23: ahahaha sure you did
17 9 14:23 Pair 24_22: I did indeed
18 10 14:24 Judge 23: And I totally believe you
19 11 14:24 Pair 24_22: don't get all chef-y on me
20 12 14:24 Pair 24_22: yes yes
21 13 14:24 Pair 24_22: hahah
22 14 14:24 Pair 24_22: I keep thinking what N is going to think when she reads
23 15 these transcripts
24 16 14:24 Judge 23: She's just going to laugh at us all
25 17 14:24 Pair 24_22: Indeed!
26 18 14:24 Judge 23: When you're reading this, N, please remember I gave you a
27 19 cookie!
28 20 14:25 Pair 24_22: Hahaha
29 21 14:25 Judge 23: So don't judge me too harshly.
30 22 14:25 Judge 23: Mel and Samia though? Ehh.
31 23 14:25 Judge 23: Ahahaha
32 24 14:25 Pair 24_22: Haha more like Adele!
33 25 14:25 Judge 23: Cookies absolve me of all insanity
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41 In line 1 Judge 23 uses the initialism 'ikr' (I Know Right), an internet slang term used to
42 indicate that the speaker agrees with some previously expressed idea – in this case that
43 buying rice cakes and carrots is 'boring' – and this is immediately and somewhat mercilessly
44 picked up on by Pair 24_22 in lines 2 and 3. The expression of familiarity with Judge 23's
45 usual style 'that is a bit slangy for you' frame their relationship as one in which they interact
46 regularly. Indeed, this conversation takes place in the 'Homework' condition, so on that basis
47 alone we would expect the participants to have some knowledge of how the other tends to use
48 language online. Judge 23 initially misinterprets Pair 24_22's outrage as a genuine request for
49 a definition of 'ikr', which she duly provides on line 4. Pair 24_22 exasperatedly informs her
50 on line 5 that she does not require the definition, at which point both participants indicate
51 their amusement at the misunderstanding with laughter stylisations on lines 6 and 8. Judge 23
52 uses sarcasm on lines 8 and 10 to indicate that, despite Pair 24_22's protestation on line 9, the
53 former does not accept that the latter understood what was meant by the slang term. It is
54 worth mentioning here that although Judge 23 is *expressing* disbelief, the disbelief is not
55 necessarily genuine; a more likely interpretation is that she is 'teasing' Pair 24_22.
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1 Identities are already in the process of being constructed here as Pair 24_22 works hard to
2 align herself with the internet-slang savvy Judge 23 while still maintaining her identity as a
3 skilled user of standard English for the benefit of the researcher (from whom she has received
4 instruction in a number of English Language modules in the past), even going so far as to
5 'correct' her tense on lines 5 and 7 (where arguably there was no 'mistake' in the first place).
6 What happens next, however, provides firm evidence for the important role in identity
7 construction played by the observation process. Referring to the first author by first initial,
8 both participants muse on what judgements might be made about the group (lines 14-17). On
9 lines 18 and 20 Judge 23 then directly addresses The first author and mock 'pleads' with her
10 not to judge her too harshly on the content of the conversation, on the basis that she gave her
11 a cookie prior to the experiment starting. It is with the introduction of the giving of the cookie
12 that Judge 23 instigates a shift in footing from one in which she is an undergraduate student
13 and the first author is a member of academic staff in a position to sit in judgement over their
14 patterns of language use – a footing that does not usually provide for the sharing of
15 confectionary – to an arguably more egalitarian relationship. Since this more equal footing
16 does not provide for one participant to judge the language of the other in the same way a
17 student-academic footing arguably does, Judge 23's invocation of the cookie provides the
18 'absolution' she refers to in line 24. Thus, the recording process is a powerful device for the
19 negotiation of identities and relationships. The positioning of the participants in the
20 'experiment' frame is collaboratively maintained by the participants on lines 21 and 23, as,
21 punctuated with laughter, they discuss which individual might be behind the keyboard at the
22 Pair's end of the chat.
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29 It is unlikely to be a coincidence that Pair 24_22 chooses the point immediately after a
30 discussion about internet slang use to situate herself firmly within the frame of an observed
31 experiment concerning language patterns. All the participants are in their second year of an
32 undergraduate degree in English Language; all have had some input about sociolinguistic
33 research and language variation (they received some of this from the first author in their first
34 year, explaining the student-academic footing that pervades the extract). It is armed with this
35 knowledge that we can begin to unpick the patterns of linguistic self-awareness evident in the
36 extract above, and understand why this self-awareness is made so visible to this observer in
37 particular.
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42 It is not only the undergraduates who set up an alignment with the researcher as being in
43 some position to judge the content of their conversation. In the following extract, an all-
44 female triad from the police trainee UCO group directly address the first author, this time
45 regarding the content of their conversation, rather than the language used.
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48 *Extract 2: UCO*
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50 1 18:09 JUDGE C: Had to 'work' in a fetish club. The most embarrassing bit
51 2 was leaving the hotel in my gear with everyone thinking I
52 3 was on the game
53 4 18:09 Pair C: brill!!!
54 5 18:10 Pair C: bet that was an entertaining job!
55 6 18:10 Pair C: did you get a taste for it and just continue then?
56 7 18:11 JUDGE C: Just a bit. It brought back memories of my dogging days
57 8 18:11 Pair C: i think that's a song.....dog days are over
58 9 18:11 JUDGE C: they so are after today
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10 18:11 Pair C: esp when they read all this chat
 11 18:12 JUDGE C: I know this is all made up DR!
 12 18:12 JUDGE C: I prefer being a hooker
 13 18:12 Pair C: of course!
 14 18:12 Pair C: to the people reading this in their
 15 dissertation,.....SORRY!
 16 18:12 JUDGE C: We are nice girls really
 17 18:12 Pair C: NOT
 18 18:13 JUDGE C: It's been a long couple of days
 19 18:13 Pair C: As the saying goes.....sorry I'm not sorry!

Extract 2 displays an orientation on the part of the speakers to the experimental setting and to multiple future audiences, including on line 11 ‘DR’, which is the term of address used several times throughout the chat to refer to the first author, who is overseeing the experiment, and on line 14 ‘the people reading this in their dissertation’. Appearing sequentially following a segment discussing fetish clubs and dogging³ these turns signal an understanding of those activities as unorthodox. The segment addressed to the first author appears to indicate a joking viewpoint that Judge C will be judged and admonished professionally for the content of her contributions as she and Pair C collectively put forward a scenario in which Judge C’s ‘dog days are over’ (line 8) especially when ‘they read all this chat’ (line 9). It is worth considering for a moment who is meant by ‘they’. Here and elsewhere in chats between this triad, an assumption that the future audience of the chat holds some responsibility for the participants’ professional progression on the basis of its content is made evident in the talk. This is not the case – although as external consultants involved in training we take part in assessing the trainees on their performance in the roleplaying task, the conversations collected under experimental conditions and reported on here are a separate matter and did not form part of any assessed work. Nevertheless, the trainee group constantly alluded to the situation as if they were being ‘tested’ in some way. It may be worth considering that the training environment had ‘primed’ them with these expectations, which was not true of the three other groups.

To counter any potential professional admonishment, Judge C jokingly directly addresses the first author on line 11 to inform her that the stories are all fabrications – evidence for the ‘jokiness’ arising from the exclamation mark on line 11 and the comment subsequent to the assertion of fabrication that she ‘prefer[s] being a hooker’ on line 12. The segment addressed directly ‘to the people reading this in their dissertation’ (line 14) is slightly different, and appears to be designed to protect the participants against judgements on their moral character- ‘SORRY!’ and ‘We are nice girls really’ – rather than against professional impingement. Thus, the researcher is cast as a decision maker of sorts, with professional gatekeeping responsibilities, while the other ‘people’ are simply being requested not to see the participants in a bad light.

In the following extract, taken from the same triad as Extract 2 above, it is not the researcher that the participants address, but the two senior police officers who are running the training

³ ‘Dogging’ is a British English term used to describe the activity of having sexual intercourse in public places, often with strangers watching.

1 course which the participants are currently following. It appears from this extract that the
2 participants are under the impression the chat will be read by the trainers on some subsequent
3 occasion, and they light-heartedly address this occasion thus:

4 *Extract 3: UCO*

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7 1 17:00 Pair C: soooooo.....heres a game... who would you rather do...
8 2 17:01 JUDGE C: oh no. Go on.....
9 3 17:01 Pair C: jim or gary?
10 4 17:01 Pair C: seeing as they are reading this... hello boys!
11 5 17:01 JUDGE C: This is going to get personal. we may fail the course
12 6 17:02 Pair C: or pass...
13 7 17:02 Pair C: depending on who u pick
14 8 17:02 JUDGE C: It's not too late.
15 9 17:02 Pair C: dont be shy....
16 10 17:02 JUDGE C: Ahh yes. I LOVE them all
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21 Pair C introduces the new topic of the two male course leaders, framing her question of
22 which man she prefers as a ‘game’, and displaying an alignment to the men as the direct
23 addressees of her ‘hello boys’ on line 4, leaving us in no doubt that they are cast as auditors
24 for the initial question. The use of ‘boys’ here is worthy of further comment, having as it does
25 the effect of downgrading the footing from the highly hierarchical one in might otherwise be
26 read to be, to one where commenting on one’s attraction might be considered acceptable.
27 Regardless of this label, much as the first author was framed as having some responsibility
28 for the speakers’ progression through the course in Extract 2, both participants here visibly
29 orient to ‘jim’ and ‘gary’ as holding positions that allow them to decide whether the speakers
30 pass or fail the course, and that this decision may be reliant on Judge C’s answer to the initial
31 question (lines 5-7). Judge C topicalises this footing as a means avoiding giving an answer –
32 ‘we may fail the course’ (line 5) and ‘it’s not too late’ (line 8), thereby constructing a
33 ‘mature’ and ‘professional’ identity. She finally responds to Pair C’s encouragement and
34 rather more positive framing of the situation – that they may ‘pass depending on who u pick’
35 (line 7) by providing an answer that is readable as positive and inclusive of both of her
36 superiors (line 10).
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42 The extracts analysed here demonstrate that there are a number of ways that perceived future
43 audiences of IM talk can be positioned by speakers once they have been cast in the role of
44 addressee. Whether it is the researcher, trainers, or unnamed (and unknown) ‘others’, these
45 ratified participants are framed as holding positions of authority over the style of language
46 used, the content of the conversation, or judgements about participants’ character. We have
47 also shown, however, that such footings are not set in stone – the recording process offers
48 opportunities for participants to re-cast the roles, and to negotiate their own and others
49 identities.
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55 **4.2 Talking *about* the research(er)**

56 There are a number of occasions where participants align themselves with the future
57 audience(s) of the chat without explicitly addressing them – that is to say, when participants
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1 talk *about* the future audience or the setting they are in, rather than talking directly *to* the
2 future audience, as we saw in previous examples.

3 As Speer & Hutchby (2003) point out, it is commonly argued that participants who know
4 they are being recorded will censor themselves when they speak “because they are made
5 nervous by the presence of the recording device, or are concerned about saying things which
6 are delicate, inappropriate, and so on” (p.319). While this has long been considered a
7 limitation of recorded language use, an alternative perspective is to focus on these occasions
8 as points at which what is considered to be ‘inappropriate’ for recorded discussion is
9 explicated, and the impact of discussing these topics is oriented to. The following extract,
10 involving the same female UCO triad as Extracts 2 and 3, provides an example of participants
11 topicalising the issue of what should and should not be talked about within the conversation,
12 with one of them stating at first that she will only tell her story ‘offline’. The participants are
13 discussing Pair C’s relationship with her husband.
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20 *Extract 4: UCO*
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24 1 16:34 Pair C: we are still at it like rabbits
25 2 16:34 JUDGE C: oooooh! yeeeo!!!! go girl!
26 3 16:35 Pair C: what does he think about going out with a girl in uniform?
27 4 16:35 JUDGE C: he loves it, I'll tell u a story... offline lol
28 5 16:35 JUDGE C: and when Im drunk
29 6 16:35 Pair C: oooh tell me now. I'm sure the Dr won't mind li
30 7 16:36 Pair C: hearing it
31 8 16:36 JUDGE C: no i mite get in trouble lol
32 9 16:36 Pair C: this is getting very interesting
33 10 16:36 JUDGE C: does ur partner enjoy it too?
34 11 16:37 Pair C: loves it. I have to wear it in bed
35 12 16:37 JUDGE C: lol cant think of anyone who wouldnt lol
36 13 16:38 JUDGE C: btw the boys are not hearing this convo!
37 14 16:38 Pair C: haha. Not so attractive when you have tramps puke all
38 15 over it
39 16 16:38 JUDGE C: not ruin the fantasy for them!
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46 In this extract Pair C urges a reluctant Judge C to share her story online by reassuring her that
47 ‘the Dr’ (the first author) ‘won’t mind [...] hearing it’, demonstrating an understanding of the
48 first author not only as an observer of the interaction, but also as someone who is in a
49 position to pass judgement on it, and this is shown to be an understanding shared by the
50 participants as Judge C goes on to cast the first author as someone with whom she did not
51 want to ‘get in trouble’. The context, then, is oriented to not only as an experiment, but as an
52 examination of sorts. Despite this framing, the first author is also cast as a fellow, allied
53 female – while the speakers are happy to continue the conversation about wearing of uniform
54 in bed in the knowledge that the first author will at some point be a party to it, the topic is
55 nevertheless explicitly marked as off limits for discussion around ‘the boys’ – the speakers’
56 male peers on the training course. Setting up this gender-based in-group out-group divide
57 indicates that the first author, despite holding the perceived elevated status indicated by the
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1 earlier comments, is nevertheless allowed access to this discussion on the basis of her
2 membership of the same gender category as the participants.

3 A further point to be explored in this extract is the reaffirming of the participants' shared
4 professional identity as evidenced in the discussion of the Police uniform. After Pair C
5 indicates on line 11 that her partner is aroused by the uniform and she has to 'wear it in bed',
6 this positive evaluation of the uniform is echoed by Judge C on line 12 where she frames it as
7 a universal trend: 'cant think of anyone who wouldnt'. Pair C then addresses the professional
8 reality of the matter: 'Not so attractive when you have tramps puke all over it' on line 14,
9 thereby drawing a line between the perceived popular perspective of the uniform as sexually
10 attractive – a viewpoint held by her presumably non-police partner, and the participants' own
11 rather less glamorous shared experiences of the uniform within the professional sphere.

12 There are occasions where the participants orient not to the researcher *per se*, but to the
13 experimental setting in which they are conversing. As outlined earlier, at some point within
14 each fifteen-minute IM chat, the individual with whom the Judge is interacting is substituted
15 with another individual. In the extract below, the Judge detects that the switch has occurred
16 after an inconsistency emerges over whether their interlocutor has ever owned hamsters.

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25 *Extract 5: ISSFLA*
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29 1 17:15 Pair 7: sure you were treating them right? 2 years doesn't seem a
30 2 lot
31 3 17:15 Judge 7: hahay es
32 4 17:15 Judge 7: look it up - that's about how long they live for
33 5 17:15 Pair 7: guess ill have to trust you
34 6 17:15 Pair 7: never had hamsters myself
35 7 17:15 Judge 7: you just said you had....
36 8 17:16 Pair 7: oops
37 9 17:16 Judge 7: you have ruined this entire experiment
38 10 17:16 Judge 7: well done!!!!!!!!!!
39 11 17:16 Pair 7: :P
40 12 17:16 Judge 7: shall we stop talking now?
41 13 17:16 Pair 7: nah, I think we can go on
42 14 17:17 Pair 7: you'll have to establish when we switched over as well
43 15 17:17 Judge 7: yes - I think I have already done that
44 16 17:17 Pair 7: ok
45 17 17:17 Judge 7: im hungry
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52 It is not particularly relevant for current purposes to know when exactly the switch occurred,
53 but it seems likely to have been shortly before the extract begins. Judge 7 exposes the content
54 inconsistency on line 7, and this is followed up on line 9 by a positioning of Pair 7 as having
55 'ruined' the experiment with this inconsistency. Judge 7 questions whether this warrants the
56 termination of the conversation, but is persuaded by Pair 7 that they can continue. The
57 participants then orient to their narrow identities as constrained by the experimental
58 conditions on lines 14 and 15, with Pair 7 setting out Judge 7's duties within the experiment
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1 4), that another trainee avoiding it was ‘lucky’ (lines 5 and 6), that it will continue to take up
2 more of their time and this is framed very negatively (lines 7-11) and that this has led to
3 Judge A becoming ‘angry’ (line 12). The seriousness of his anger is reiterated on line 15
4 where he insists, in response to Pair A’s explicit invocation of the ‘observed’ frame on line
5 13, that he is ‘not joking’. In the face of Pair A’s overt reminder that the interaction is likely
6 to be read subsequently, Judge A essentially rejects the warning – he appears not only to be
7 aware of this, but in fact to be primarily orienting to this future audience. Judge A continues
8 to characterise the experiment’s effect on his mood – ‘fuming’ (line 18) and ‘a rage’ (line
9 20), while both participants make explicit reference to the experimental conditions and the
10 other participants on lines 19, 22, 23 and lastly 25, where Pair A extends Judge A’s angry
11 mood to the entire UCO group – ‘its cos we’re all angry’, aligning them all as an in-group
12 and speaking on their behalf.
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16 Clearly the mode of communication here is being exploited to display dissatisfaction with the
17 experimental conditions in which the participants find themselves, and the dissatisfaction is
18 performed, at least in part, for the benefit of the future audience of the interaction. In the next
19 extract, taken from one of the ISSFLA triads, the participants’ dissatisfaction with the
20 conditions appears to take a ‘back seat’ to their desire not to appear in an unfavourable light
21 to the future audience.
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27 *Extract 7: ISSFLA*

29 1 15:50 Pair 2: So here we are nearly at the end of this experiment and I am
30 glad
31 2 about that, aren't you?
32 3 15:50 Judge 2: I am too.
33 4 15:51 Judge 2: I have some lessons to take with me too.
34 5 15:51 Pair 2: So now we just have to make this last a few more minutes but
35 6 let's go out with a blast.
36 7 15:51 Judge 2: A big blast!
37 8 15:51 Pair 2: What are the lessons?
38 9 15:52 Judge 2: I sure shouldn't post that on twitter!
39 10 15:52 Judge 2: Well, I now know I need to be more detailed in my
40 punctuations.
41 11 15:52 Pair 2: Yes, just to clarify, I AM NOT A Terrorist
42 12 15:52 Judge 2: :))
43 13 15:53 Judge 2: I really don't expect you to be one
44 14 15:53 Pair 2: You never know!
45 15 15:53 Judge 2: But we just never can tell, you know?
46 16 15:53 Judge 2: right!
47 17 15:53 Pair 2: That's true.
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55 The extract begins with both participants co-constructing the experiment as an event they are
56 glad is almost over, with Judge 2 nevertheless situating it within the wider context of the
57 Summer School from which he has ‘some lessons to take’, and Pair 2 framing its completion
58 as achievable ‘just have to make this last a few more minutes’ and emphasising their mutual
59 ability to make it a success ‘let’s go out with a blast’. This sentiment is echoed by Judge 2 on
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1 line 7, who then plays on the literal meaning of ‘blast’ by joking that Pair 2 ‘sure shouldn’t
2 post that on twitter!’. This warning is produced in the context of the discussion about what
3 lessons have been learned from the Summer School, since part of the course content had
4 involved the case of a man who successfully challenged his conviction for sending a
5 ‘menacing electronic communication’, which had resulted from him tweeting a joke ‘threat’
6 to blow up a nearby airport after heavy snow forced its closure⁴. Thus, Pair 2’s potential
7 actions are framed in the context of the so-called ‘Twitter Joke Trial’, leading Pair 2 on line
8 11 to ‘clarify, I AM NOT A Terrorist’. For whom is Pair 2 clarifying that he is not a terrorist?
9 Given that it has already been demonstrated in this extract that the two speakers are acting
10 within the same frame and with a shared background understanding of the case, it seems
11 unlikely to be for Judge 2’s benefit (although Judge 2 does treat it thus on line 13). Rather, it
12 appears this display demonstrates orientation to the experimental context and is produced for
13 the benefit of the future audience – acknowledging that ‘go out with a blast’ can be construed
14 in two ways, and drawing on his knowledge of the Twitter Joke Trial, Pair 2 jokingly asserts
15 his identity as a non-terrorist.
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22 5. Conclusions

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24 The analyses presented above have demonstrated that participants exploit the process of
25 being recorded in order to facilitate a range of activities. Some of the participants orient to the
26 experimental context and the eventual audience of their interactions – whether this is the
27 actual audience (the researcher) or some mistaken idea of other individuals – as being in a
28 position to sit in judgement over their language use, conversational topics or moral character,
29 as potentially having a say-so over their career development, or at any rate as an audience to
30 be ‘impressed’ in some way. These functions were played out either directly, by casting the
31 unseen individual(s) as addressee or explicitly orienting to them as an overhearer, or
32 indirectly, where the context allowed for a reading where the researcher was the intended
33 recipient.
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38 Others exploit the experimental context as a ‘sounding board’ of sorts, in order to vent their
39 dissatisfaction at being required to carry out the tasks. It is likely no coincidence that *these*
40 instances were never characterised by the researcher being directly addressed, since she is
41 likely perceived as the reason they are there. Rather, occasions of complaint were ostensibly
42 directed at the other participant, but the context of the talk and relevant background
43 knowledge allowed for alternative interpretations. Aside from participants being unhappy
44 with the constraints of the experiment as shown here, there were a number of examples in the
45 data of Undergraduates co-constructing complaints about their courses of study. Given the
46 researcher’s position as a member of academic staff in their department it is likely that these
47 too were produced at least partly for her benefit, as well as consolidating the participants’
48 shared identities as students of English at Aston University.
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53 This article, focussing on text-mediated IM communication, provides support for the idea that
54 the knowledge of having one’s language use recorded and subsequently scrutinised cannot
55 simply be viewed as a constraint on ‘natural’ language production, but that participants
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60 ⁴ See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-19009344>
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1 actively draw on it to carry out particular actions. The creation and maintenance of identities,
2 the situating of the chat in the wider context, and an array of other tasks are accomplished
3 through the positioning and repositioning of the researcher and the researched in relation to
4 particular footings and discourse roles. The process of interactions being shaped by
5 participants' awareness of being recorded and viewed at a later date has shown itself to be a
6 highly valuable focus of study.
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8 Certainly, the criticisms that are often levelled at the use of data that has been 'got up' by the
9 researcher – an issue that is “still something to be grappled with” (Potter 2002: 541) appear
10 less consternating when one considers researcher effects from this perspective. In contrast to
11 a viewpoint that sees the observation process as mere data contamination, a standpoint that
12 acknowledges the multi-faceted role it plays in creating participants' alignments allows for a
13 novel positioning of the researcher within the research site. Given the ongoing debates about
14 what constitutes 'good' data (see Speer 2002b; Goodman & Speer 2016), it is clear that
15 moving 'beyond the observer's paradox' (Gordon 2012), in researching both spoken
16 interaction and online language use is a movement in the right direction.
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21 We conclude with some thoughts on the implications of these findings for the policing
22 context of online operations against would-be paedophiles, as introduced earlier in this paper.
23 During online operations, one participant, the UCO, is fully aware of the context within
24 which they are operating, and is likely to produce 'talk' that orients to this investigative
25 context, in a way that the perpetrator does not (see Haworth, 2013 for more on the mis-match
26 of orientations between police and lay participants). This mirrors the awareness of the
27 experimental context that we have demonstrated in this paper, and has the potential to
28 jeopardise online operations if the suspect becomes aware of it. The findings discussed in this
29 paper, and an awareness of the implications of these conflicting orientations, might thus be a
30 worthwhile addition to future outings of our training course.
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