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Interviews with creative techniques: research with Russian-speaking migrant pupils

This paper explores the use of creative techniques in a study of the experiences of Russian-speaking linguistic-minority migrant children in English state-funded primary schools at Key Stage Two (7-11 years old). The methodology is based on an interpretative paradigm using a qualitative research approach: a longitudinal multiple-case study with four embedded cases (each case representing one pupil). Focusing on specific examples from the research, the paper considers the benefits of using creative techniques within interviews to generate unique data with linguistic-minority pupils, the constraints of the techniques, and possible solutions for these. The cyclic (i.e. rounds of repeated interviews) research design, which focused on the processes of change, called for systematic alternation of the techniques. I demonstrate the unique integration of board games (the 'interview-through-game') and the 'filling-in exercise' in the interviews. This enabled a continuous adjustment of the techniques by me and by the children, retaining both the systematicity and flexibility (or constraint and emergence) of the creative techniques' development and application. This design helped to reveal the experiences/issues of the participating children, which would otherwise be challenging to explore using other methods.

Keywords: creative techniques, interviews in research with children, migrant Russian-speaking pupils, linguistic minority pupils

Introduction

This paper contributes to the development and application of the creative techniques as part of the interview process in research with linguistic-minority children. Specifically, I provide detailed examples of how to apply the techniques in various contexts given spatial, temporal, and resources-related constraints. I focus on interviews incorporating creative techniques with four Russian-speaking recent migrant pupils in middle childhood (7-11 years old) in the context of English state-funded primary schools.

Research with children, let alone with potentially more vulnerable, migrant (or EAL, English as an Additional Language)[1] children, calls for the use of additional tools in interviews. Within the growing body of literature on creative approaches as part of research with children (Green and Hogan 2005), these 'tools' came to be known as 'creative techniques' or methods. In this paper the term 'creative techniques' is understood as a range of interactive techniques for research with children, e.g. social mapping, drawings, games, as opposed to more traditional semi-structured interviews (Veale 2005), wherein 'creativity' is deemed, in broader terms, as having an original, purpose-appropriate and dynamic approach to generating the data.

The use of creative methods and techniques in research has been established as an egalitarian and highly beneficial research design for children, provided its design is suitable (Robinson and Gillies 2012). Creative methods have been widely expanded and applied (Kara 2015), setting up numerous advantageous and appropriate conditions in research with children, with countless potent and original approaches (Gillies and Robinson 2012), such as reflective journaling (Leigh 2019), and arts-based (Blaisdell et al. 2019), video-based (Nolan, Paatsch, and Scull 2017) and photo-based (Woolhouse 2017) methodologies.–However, a discussion of *specific ways* creative techniques can be used as part of interviews, and adjusted in the process of research in view of the data collection's unforeseen issues without compromising the research aims and holistic

[1] The terms 'EAL' i.e. English as an Additional Language, or 'migrant', or language minority (Glenn and De Jong 1996) children are used interchangeably in this paper to broadly denote individuals younger than 18 years old who have migrated with their family and are immersed in a foreign-to-them country and school, emphasising that these children's first/dominant language (L1) is different from the national/official language of the country (L2).

structure, is limited in the current literature on migrant pupils in the context of English state-funded primary schools. This includes the forms and applications of techniques in the context of rich, content-informed interviews. These interviews contribute to the continuous engagement and excitement of children in the research, building good relationships with the participants. The use of creative techniques as part of the interview is distinct from self-directing, unrestrained and potentially less systematic participatory methods (cf. Barley and Russell 2018; Flewitt et al. 2018), or with the contingent nature, in terms of informativity and productivity, of drawing methods (Bland 2017).

The aim of this paper is, therefore, to explore specific, detailed ways creative techniques (the ‘interview-through-game’ and the ‘filling-in exercise’) are used to research the experiences of Russian-speaking migrant pupils in English primary schools, facilitating the capture of knowledge unavailable through other more conventional means. While considering the practical constraints of using these creative techniques, I show how these have helped to produce rich, informative data. A theoretical contribution is provided by demonstrating a development and application of the 'interview-through-game' and the 'filling-in exercise' creative techniques. This will address the limitations of the current literature in relation to the specific ways creative techniques may be applied in rich, content-informed interviews with Russian-speaking linguistic-minority migrant children in the context of English state-funded primary schools.

I begin this paper with a review of the literature related to creative methods and techniques as part of interviews with children, touching upon the substantial concerns associated with creative methods. I then move to the practical concerns regarding the development and application of the creative techniques in my study. Aiming to address

these, I further focus on two types of techniques used in the study: the 'interview-through-game', and the 'filling-in exercise'. Before I conclude, this is followed by a discussion of the findings in relation to the relevant literature.

Creative techniques in research with children

Understandings of the creative techniques

In this section I will briefly analyse the development of the creative techniques, their definitions and aims as described in the literature, reviewing the more participatory methods as opposed to those used as parts of interviews, including the filling-in exercises and board games. The distinctiveness of the methods in research with children is aimed to suit particular children in particular contexts (Griffin, Lahman, and Opitz 2014) and associated with the questions of empowerment of children, authority, and power relationships (Fine and Sandstrom 1988), as well as methodological and ethical considerations (BERA 2018). Specifically, research with children has a ‘methodological commitment to listen to those voices that usually do not get heard’ (Hohti 2016, 87). Part of recognising this commitment is the appearance of ‘new social sciences of childhood’ and the children’s rights discourse (Fargas-Malet et al. 2010; Flewitt et al. 2018), which has moved towards research for, from, and with children rather than about and on them (Christensen and James 2008; Fargas-Malet et al. 2010; Gabb 2008). Thus, creative techniques, as part of the research involving children, has emerged as a more suitable alternative to the traditional methods, resulting in the development of new interactive methods, including, for example, the mosaic approach (Clark and Moss 2011; Fargas-Malet et al. 2010).

Creative methods, or child-centred techniques (Barker and Weller 2003), have been defined as ways of research which are authentic to children (Finlay et al. 2013),

and as a rebirth of childhood research (Robinson and Gillies 2012), which allows us to reduce essentialist views of pupils in challenging environments. This includes linguistic-minority migrant children, looking at the children as social actors within challenging interpersonal dynamics (Doná 2006). Creativity facilitates such innovative techniques, in which the aptitudes and personae of children are central, physically and cognitively implemented in various settings (playground, classroom, research-specific sites) (Siibak, Forsman, and Hernwall 2012), and help participants to direct the study's process (Kramer-Roy 2015, 1207).

Although many studies have focussed on creative techniques in research with children (e.g. Flewitt et al. 2018), few of them centre around the less participatory ('child as a subject') approaches discussed in detail in this paper, and even fewer provide specific guidance of how these techniques may be used. Participatory methods ('child as an actor') are often portrayed as having clear advantages over less participatory ones ('child as a subject'), by allowing space for children to develop and manage their preferred areas of focus (Flewitt et al. 2018). While this is a valid point, less participatory methods may be more suitable for more constrained research designs and aims. Deacon (2000), for example, discusses various creative methods, which can be used as parts of interviews, rather than purely participatory methods in research. Relevant to this study, he touches upon writing exercises as a means of data collection, including journals and incomplete prompts: for instance, children designing their own newspaper front page based on their experiences.

This limitation also relates to the dearth of game-based research in the education of migrant children. Game-based research in general is pertinent to the discussion of teamwork for adults (Covert, Winner, and Bennett 2017) and online game-based market research (Adamou 2017). The use of board games as part of interviews in educational

research is unknown. More broadly, this approach was used, for example, to elicit future user needs for a future product (Slegers et al. 2015); in medicine, to aid the recovery of certain patients (Van Der Stege et al. 2016; Van Staa and Van Der Stege 2010); as part of mathematics learning (Moomaw 2015; Ramani and Siegler 2008); and in teaching the drawbacks of other research methods in higher education (Warburton and Madge 1994). Game-based interviews including board-game-based interviews have also been side-lined in educational research with linguistic-minority migrant children of primary age. Before elaborating on this through my data, it is important to examine the substantial criticism of creativity in research with children and the implementation of creative techniques.

Overcoming naivety of the creative techniques

Creative methods require strategic and purposive development and application since 'empowering' children through research should be implemented with caution (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008; Gillies and Robinson 2012; Komulainen 2007). For example, the approach of treating the child as a social actor, or child-participant – a 'methodology of participation' (Doná 2006) - may lead to the erroneous belief that these methods are a route to 'ethical and epistemological validity' being a 'panacea' in research with children (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008, 513). As Wong, Zimmerman, and Parker (2010) point out, researchers are not able to entirely transfer the burden of empowerment to the young people. Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) say that the concern lies in the unpredictability of the social world and children's behaviours. Thus, commonly perceived understandings of the empowerment of creative methods and ethics may reveal the challenges of the power dynamics (Gillies and Robinson 2012). The 'discourses of "participation" risk becoming tyrannous in research involving children' (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008, 500). This, perhaps, includes the danger of the

researcher's focus on participatory power actually destroying the project, as the chances of participation become too constrained by the researcher's rules and procedures as a predetermined action rather than freely participating as the methods advocate (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008). Associated with this is a potential danger of 'hierarchical and unidirectional' interpretation of power relations, which 'adults can give (or take from) children', distorting how the children actively create and set up their environments and experiences (Lomax 2012, 107). This perhaps involves a researcher's ethical choice to see children as inseparable from surrounding dynamic social relationships or as 'representatives of categories' (e.g. a 'boy', a 'student with special needs') (Hohti 2016). It is also important to be cautious about overestimating a child's unique insight into his/her own life and the subjective reality of his/her peers (Buckingham 1991).

It can be thus be inferred that, rather than superseding research with adults, creative methods are dynamic and engaging for children in ways that adjust and rectify adult-centric research (Lomax 2012). Thus, an open-ended attitude towards the research process, accepting that children might behave unexpectedly and the research design might be in need of adjustment is essential when employing creative techniques. Suffice it to say, by raising methodological, practical, and ethical concerns, creative methods need to be used with caution. Nonetheless, the current developments of creative methods in research with children demonstrate (albeit alongside the methods' substantial criticism, which only reinforces and refines the methods themselves) the formation of an indispensable approach to research with children. Furthermore, I will outline the methodology and ethics of the research as a framework for using the creative techniques.

Methodology

The methodology of the study comprises an interpretive paradigm employing a qualitative longitudinal multiple-case-study research approach with embedded ethnography. The use of a case study approach provides links and supports the application of creative techniques by offering a 'detailed examination' of individuals (Birch and Malim 1991, 12) with the help of extensive data generation (Creswell and Poth 2016).

Aiming to conduct an in-depth, detailed investigation, I chose to focus on the data from four cases within a multiple-case-study design. Each Russian-speaking migrant child-participant represents one embedded case (see Table 1). The cases have been selected through the following filters (Punch 2005): (1) identifying the cases and setting the boundaries that would most probably answer my objectives; (2) identifying a sample frame; and (3) selecting a focus within the cases. Employing 'purposive' case selection (Gerring 2016; Dörnyei 2007), I chose the typical cases within the criteria (characteristics) based on the aims of the research. The participants' recruitment criteria were

- They had arrived in the UK recently (not more than six years earlier before the time of research) and were first generation migrants.
- They speak Russian at home as their dominant language.
- They attend state-funded primary schools at Key Stage Two (7-11 years old).
- At least one of their parents/legal carers is a native Russian-speaking person.
- It is acceptable if they are multilingual, i.e. speak another additional languages apart from Russian or English (such as Ukrainian, Kazakh or Latvian, etc.).
- They are willing to participate in the research (together with the schools and parents).

The participants for this study were all first generation Russian-speaking migrant pupils. (see Table 2). All of the children use Russian as their expert language (L1) and home language. Using creative elicitation techniques, or 'researcher-initiated stimuli' (LeCompte and Schensul 2010, 177), a total of 51 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the children, each lasting for about 30 minutes (see Table 3). While 30 minutes might not be enough time to be fully 'creative', this was the agreement with the schools and proved to be an appropriate amount of time to conduct a semi-structured interview in a safe and enjoyable environment for potentially vulnerable children. Within the three schools, my participants were the only Russian-speaking migrants in their classrooms. The interviews with all the children were conducted in Russian. Nevertheless, children were given the freedom to use all their language repertoire in the interviews according to their preference. For this, they were offered two copies (in two languages) of the creative techniques' templates. All the children preferred using the Russian versions in most cases, inserting some English words in the creative techniques alongside Russian. Conducting these interviews in Russian (as a Russian-speaking researcher) was a clear advantage but also the only option, as most of the children were at the early stages of English learning. Methods of data collection also comprised ethnographic participant observations during a seven-month period, 'shadowing', (LeCompte and Schensul 2010), including chance conversations, and 'detached' observations (Gillham 2000), which contributed to relationship-building with the children and allowed a fuller, context-informed picture of pupils' experiences. However, considering this article's focus on creative techniques, full discussion of this is beyond its scope.

Ethics

The research complied with ethical standards and requirements, and appropriate use of the data (BERA 2018). All participants were assured of anonymity and privacy adhering to legal requirements of working with vulnerable participants and causing no harm ("The Children's Act" 2004; "The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child" 1989). Consent forms were obtained from children, parents, and teachers. I have also obtained a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. Pseudonyms are used for all the names mentioned.

Importantly, in my study, creative techniques were used as elicitation tools in the interviews to better understand children's experiences, or, as asserted by Lomax (2012), to gain contrasting as opposed to 'better' data, which might be seen as suitable for their migrant status and age-appropriate for my participants. Inter alia, I wanted to contribute to the empowerment and knowledge creation by children themselves, ameliorating the general research process (Kramer-Roy 2015). I will now turn to the discussion of the practical concerns of the development of the creative techniques in the planning phase of this research project.

Practical concerns of creative techniques' development

Context and design

The context (English state-funded primary schools in different parts of London) of my study, and the participants (recently arrived Russian-speaking migrant pupils between 7-11 years old) during the design phase of my study invoked (1) contextual and (2) design-related practical concerns. The former (1) refers to the time constraints on the interviews with the children, as agreed with the schools and parents (up to 30 minutes each session), which meant that I had to design/choose techniques which would fit in this time-frame. Another contextual concern was related to spatial constraints (the

setting of the schools), in which I was not able to choose the place for an interview but rather was given a space, oftentimes with other people present in the room, including other children. The setting for the interviews varied for each participant, but it was important for me to have a safe space for an interview in terms of noise and distractions levels, as well as not being entirely isolated, to assure the ethical safety of the study for the school and parents. While the children used Russian as their main language of communication, I felt that the presence of other people in the interview rooms did not pose any breach of confidentiality, unless children wanted to speak English. Therefore, I did not object to having more people in the rooms. However, the creative techniques that I chose had to be easily transportable in case I was relocated (which happened a lot) as well as something I could easily bring every day to distantly located schools. This was also linked to the limited resources, namely, my consideration of what I would be able to use in the school (which was pens and pencils) and what I needed to bring (everything else: papers, dice, and other resources, and, crucially, the recorder). The latter consideration, (2) design-related practical concerns, included concern regarding the purposefulness of the design. This comprised an assurance that the creative techniques would follow the theoretical framework and research questions, as well as a significant consideration regarding the monthly repetition of the interviews in terms of diversifying the techniques without changing the interview questions and compromising the systematicity of the research.

Taking these into account, I turned to variations of creative interviews that allow using additional tools of research that are familiar to children (Griffin, Lahman, and Opitz 2014) and thus help them to feel relaxed, open, and interested during the research process (Deacon 2000; Eldén 2012) and to ‘de-centre’ the interview by incorporating events, feelings, experiences beyond the interview process (Thomson and Holland

2005). Each technique was followed by a conversation based around it. During the seven-month period, interviews with each pupil were conducted approximately twice-monthly in order to explore the processes of change. Elicitation activities were designed to allow the child to choose: for instance, if they did not want to fill in the exercise, they could play a game, or just have a traditional semi-structured interview. None of the activities were obligatory and all would end upon the child's request. No children chose to opt out from completing a creative technique. Children were also able to withhold answers to an interview question. I explained to children they could say 'skip' ('пропускаю') in Russian as a sign signifying that they do not want to reply; Katerina used this in some interviews. An additional practical concern in relation to research design was adapting to the age of the participants by simplifying the techniques and considering my role as a researcher to adapt to their ages, which I will discuss further.

The age of the participants in my research (7-11 years old) emphasised the 'generational inequalities of status' (Gabb 2008, 20). The ways to minimize power inequalities in research are reflexivity (Fine and Sandstrom 1988), appearing as an 'uneducated' adult (Christensen and James 2008), and discussing the roles of children in the research (Christensen and James 2008; Fargas-Malet et al. 2010; Gallacher and Gallagher 2008; Komulainen 2007). As mentioned earlier, my research adopted the 'child as a subject' (child-centred) research approach trying to take the least 'adult' role in order to present children's perspectives and minimize the power dimensions (Warming 2011), which, as tested during my pilot study at the start of the study, seemed to best fit my research purpose. The 'child as a subject' research approach emphasises the importance of seeing a pupil as an 'expert' in his/her life, which allows us to learn from pupils (rather than about them) treating them with 'equality, insight and respect' (Christensen and James 2008, 3). However, during the study, I allowed space for

children to negotiate their roles, which was catalysed by my non-hierarchical role as a friend, and chose to build trust and be 'granted' the permission to observe the truth (Christensen and James 2008, 3). The role of a friend helps to motivate children by showing respect to them, allowing the researcher to ask 'ignorant' questions and let children feel free in his/her presence (Fine and Sandstrom 1988). It was important to show a lack of authority and lack of judgement of the child-participants together with a willingness to understand their social lives (Christensen and James 2008). Prior to the data collection, these speculative roles seemed to be straightforward but were challenged during the data collection phase; I will now turn to this issue, specifying the field-related advantages, concerns, and solutions of applying creative techniques.

Practical concerns and advantages of applying creative techniques

The advantages, concerns, and solutions of applying the techniques are further discussed from the perspectives of the two essential meta-aims: ensuring the flexibility of the design while retaining the holistic and systematic research structure; and building good relationships with the children, with the latter being of supreme significance for my study.

Researching experiences in the new L2 (second language) school environment

In order to ensure the flexibility of the design (being able to alter the techniques) while retaining the holistic and systematic research structure (being able to ask similar questions each month) so that children are enthusiastic about the interviews, I incorporated board games into the interview questions. This enabled me to obtain data unavailable through other means, e.g. other types of creative techniques. The 'interview-through-game' is an interview-game that was devised to understand general experiences, issues, and questions the child might have in a new L2 environment. This

interview process ensures children's 'prolonged' enjoyment of the repeated questions and methods and allows for the adjustment of the technique, while maintaining the same focus in the interview (interview questions). These games required a die, some counters, written questions or question marks and a set of cards with the interview questions as seen in Figure 1. The games were used throughout the data collection period with added and adjusted interview questions, as seen in this example. The game was adapted from Toth (1995) with added questions including some child-initiated drawings added to the game (Figure 2). Importantly, the games do not require vast resources, make the interviews exciting and allow for flexibility. In order not to repeat the same game, I chose three additional games using the same set of cards with the same interview questions (adjusted slightly for individual pupils). These additional games were adjusted with added question marks, such as the well-known 'snakes and ladders' game. Purposeful and flexible designs helped to 'dissolve' the general entertaining questions together with the research-specific questions. Some of the games already have additional general questions unrelated to the research topic to make the interviews more entertaining, e.g. the 'A day in my life' game (Myles 2000, 58-9).

Having explained the general rules of the games to the children, the games were then mostly directed by me (essential to the 'child as a subject' approach) together with the children through allowing the children to change the arrangement or withhold from responding. The freedom to adjust activities and in choice, and an 'absence of incorrect answers' were explained to all the children, and, unexpectedly, resulted in some children suggesting additions to the interview questions as well as grammar in the interview questions, which I gladly supported. Although I had written the questions for the interviews in shorthand English, and asked them verbally in Russian, the pupils often wanted to read and respond to the English versions which put me in 'grammatical

trouble' as some pupils wanted to correct my informal shorthand English. Figure 3 shows the way a Russian-speaking pupil (Rita) adds questions, adjusts some questions, and rightfully corrects my grammar in the questions at different times in the study. Putting the questions on individual cards, which were used in games and therefore accessible to children, enabled them to adjust the interview questions if they felt they needed to, or even write separate questions, e.g. 'Do you love school?' as can be seen in Figure 4. This seven-year-old Russian-speaking girl adjusts the board game in the interview (Interview with Katerina, 2017, my translation):

> K (Katerina): И щас я нарисую что-то... сердечко, у которых нету вопросов...
>
> L (Researcher): А что означает сердечко?
>
> K: Сердечко означает, что 'тебе можно'. А вот crosses означает, что 'тебе бяка'.

> K: And now I will draw something… a heart [on the squares] which do not have questions on them…
>
> L: What does this heart mean?
>
> K: The heart means, 'you can'. And the crosses mean, 'you get nothing'.

The 'interview-through-game', which intertwined the game-related interest with interview questions to such an extent that the children seemed to stop noticing the difference between them, showed itself to be an extremely successful technique for building good relationships with the participants, and raising their levels of excitement. It also resulted in openness and surprising honesty in answers even from some rather

reticent children. This is illustrated in the following extracts from the interviews (Interview with Yulia, 2017, my translation):

Y (Yulia): Игра! (Радостно).

L (Researcher): Сейчас посмотрим, нравится тебе эта игра или нет. А с кем ты поздоровалась, когда мы сюда шли?

Y: Это моя подружка.

L: Да? В общем, вот она. (Игра).

Y: YES! (Восторженно).

Y: The game! (Happily)

L: We shall see if you like this game; I am not sure. Who did you say 'Hello' to when we were walking here?

Y: That was my friend.

L: Oh yes? Here it is (the game).

Y: YES! (Excitedly).

L (Researcher): Это важно учиться хорошо в школе? Все успевать?

Y (Yulia): Да.

L: Почему?

Y: (Быстро) Закрашиваю! Потому, что мама у меня требует! (Возбуждённо).

L: Is it important to study well in school? To keep up with everything?

Y: Yes.

L: Why?

Y: (Quickly) I am colouring it in! (Refers to the next step in a game) Because my mum demands it! (Anxiously)

When I ask the same question in the interview using a drawing, rather than the 'interview-through-game' technique, Yulia responds curtly, revealing her boredom through her non-verbal behaviour (Interview with Yulia, 2016, my translation):

L (Researcher): Важно учиться хорошо в школе?

Y (Yulia): Да. (Зевает).

L: Is it important to study well in school?

Y: Yes. (Yawning).

These interviews were conducted in different months (the drawing-based example was conducted earlier (November 2016) as compared with the game-based example (January 2017). Thus, it may be argued that it was my friendly approach and good relationship with Yulia that resulted in her excitement and the level of detail provided in the interview. Although good relationships with children were certainly important in all the interviews, without which it would be impossible to conduct any interviews (as the child would not agree to take part), there was evidence in all cases that when the 'interview-through-game' design was used it resulted in excitement and a greater level of detail. This is illustrated, for instance, in the following extract in the early stage of the research (October 2016):

Y (Yulia): (Бросает кубик) Четыре! (Радостно)

L (Researcher): Ходи, пропускай [Клетку].

Y: Что больше всего нравится в школе? Мне нравится … перерывы, конечно! (Улыбается)

L: Почему?

Y: Ну потому, что на них весело. можно с друзьями поговорить.

L: А у тебя много друзей?

Y: Ну, так не много, но есть один очень хороший друг (также ученик-мигрант).

Y: (Throws a dice) Four! (Happily)

L: Go, skip. [Square]

Y: What do you like the most in school? I like… breaks, of course! (Smiles cheerfully)

L: Why?

Y: Well, because they are fun. I can talk to my friends.

L: Do you have many friends?

Y: Well, not so many, but I have one very good friend (also a recent migrant pupil).

During the 'interview-through-game' with another Russian-speaking girl, she reacts in the following way (Interview with Katerina, 2017, my translation):

K (Katerina): Fuck! Ха-ха-ха (смеётся)

L (Researcher): Так я не слышала! У меня уши заложило! А откуда ты знаешь это слово? Кто тебе сказал его?

K: [имя девочки]!

L: Это кто?

K: Девочка там.

L: В классе?

K: Угу аха-ха-ха (хохочет).

K: Fuck! Ha-ha-ha (laughs).

L: Well I didn't get it! My ears got blocked! How do you know this word? Who told you?

K: [girl's name]!

L: Who is this?

K: A girl there.

L: In class?

K: Yep, ha-ha-ha (giggles).

After this interview, this participant quietly whispers to me in Russian, ‘Не говори’ ‘Don't say [to teachers]’ that she said that word during the interview.

Another technique for exploring the general experiences and motivations of Russian-speaking pupils was the ‘filling-in exercise’ (Figure 5). This exercise allows children to reveal their learning issues, moods, perceived English level, and interests and issues in learning, while also letting children use their first, second or all language repertoires. As in this example, Ivan decided to use both, the L1 and L2, in different answers and generally illustrated various activities in his lessons, his well-being and enjoyment of learning (Figure 6). However, this technique also posited challenges for other children: for example, Yulia, a generally reticent girl, showed her isolation in

terms of her communication in learning, sadness, and even despondency, and rejected finishing all of the sentences by leaving question marks (Figure 7). This is in sharp contrast to her excitement during the ‘interview-through-game’ design-based technique described earlier. When I asked Yulia and Katerina about their experiences in the L2 schools, they made various noises (e.g. slurping, or horses neighing), or ran around the classroom, sometimes making a mess, e.g. Katerina throwing some sand she found in the classroom. This, on the one hand, assured me that they felt free to leave any questions without responses. On the other hand, it revealed the low spirits, distress and linguistic isolation of these Russian-speaking migrant girls due to their L2 level, as observations showed along with their own brief interpretations of the exercise. In a repeated exercise at a different time (Figure 8), Yulia responded in a similar fashion, commenting on it as follows (Interview with Yulia, 2017, my translation):

> Y (Yulia): Я была одна. Ни с кем не работала. Была одна только. Я слушала, читала, писала. А что вот это?
>
> L (Researcher): Это ты 'слушала учительницу'.
>
> Y: ...Слушала учительницу.
>
> L: А почему ты выбрала вот эти две?
>
> Y: Ну, потому, что мне было вчера ну как-то.... страшновато.
>
> L: А почему? Можешь рассказать?...
>
> Y: Ну, потому, что я была... одна.... мне было грустно очень.

> Y: I was on my own. Didn’t work with anyone. Just was alone. I was listening, reading, writing. And what this is? [Referring to the elicitation exercise picture]
>
> L: This is 'you were listening to the teacher.'

Y: ...was listening to the teacher.

L: And why did you choose these two?

Y: Well, because it was well like... scary yesterday.

L: Why so? Can you tell me?

Y: Well, because I was on my own...alone...I was very sad.

I took the pupils out for two interviews each month, and they enjoyed them, as seen in the following example (ibid.):

Y (Yulia): А нельзя, чтоб было три [интервью]?

L (Researcher): Я бы очень хотела, но...нельзя.

Y: Почему?

L: Ну такое соглашение.

Y: Is it possible to have three [interviews]?

L: I would really like that, but... no.

Y: Why?

L: Well, because this is the agreement.

I will now move to discussing the significance of the findings, addressing the aim of this paper.

Discussion

The aim of the study was to explore specific, detailed ways that two creative techniques – the 'interview-through-game' and the 'filling-in exercise' – are used to research the experiences of Russian-speaking migrant pupils in English primary schools in order to demonstrate how the techniques produced rich, informative data. This paper addresses

the limitations of the current literature in relation to specific ways the creative techniques may be applied in rich, content-informed interviews with migrant children in the context of English state-funded primary schools. These techniques helped to reveal context-dependent psychological issues, thereby generating unique data.

The practical concerns and solutions have been analysed from two perspectives: flexibility-systematicity collision and building good relationships with the children. Considering both is important in view of the methodological literature tending to inadvertently discount systematicity in educational research with children. Flexibility-systematicity is convergent with the complex dynamic system model of creativity introduced by Kupers et al. (2019), wherein creativity is defined by emergence (corresponding with the flexibility aspect) and constraint (corresponding with systematicity). Retaining the systematicity and flexibility of the study and building good relationships with the participants became the main methodological concerns, or meta-aims, of my research design and application of creative techniques, specifically during the data collection. In relation to the latter (building good relationships), in concurrence with Peek et al. (2016) and Flewitt et al. (2018), my study's design showed that building good relationships with the children was a primary developmental and application-related concern which ensured the successful outcomes of the study and it became a fundamental factor, though not the only one, in the development and application of the research design. The former (systematicity *and* flexibility) allowed for dynamism, emergence, and the iterative nature (Kupers et al. 2019) of creative techniques and this appeared to be the strength of this research with the migrant children as compared with the participatory methods. Barley and Russell (2018), Flewitt et al. (2018), Clark and Moss (2011), by focusing on the visual participatory methods of research, demonstrated the ways participatory approaches may be used with different age groups and, offering

unobtrusive, highly adaptive, child-led techniques (drawings, photographs), potentially addressed my concerns about flexibility. However, the high contingency in terms of productivity and informativity of the participatory methods, if used in my study, would not fully address the systematicity aim.

These considerations have been approached through the development of the ‘interview-though-game’ technique and incorporation of the 'filling-in exercise', which represent a theoretical contribution of this paper. The ‘interview-through-game’ design showed itself as an effective way of interviewing EAL linguistic-minority pupils in the context of my study, with the potential to incorporate a diverse number of games, while using different interview questions. Slegers et al. (2015) have found that using a board game to develop understanding of future needs as users of a product contributes to the participant’s safety and comfort in disclosing their views. My data supports this evidence in the research with the children-participants revealing their disguised and, at times, traumatic experiences. 'Dissolving' the general entertaining questions together with the research-specific questions in my study contributed to the development of trust and safety in the interviews and made the ‘interview-through-game’ an exciting and holistic experience.

The evidence from the dialogues during the interviews reveals that the pupils were open, honest, and excited in the interviews, but otherwise reticent, for instance, when using a drawing method, as shown in the examples from the extracts with Yulia. The ways of empowering children discussed by Kramer-Roy (2015) were promoted through the freedom for children to make adjustments to the games in my study. Children initiated adding and changing some questions, thereby increasing their participatory levels. Following the children’s ideas and views on interview questions, I subsequently adjusted the methods to suit the contextual needs of the participants. This

was achieved through reflexivity during the study on my own research processes as well as an acknowledgment and re-acknowledgement (a stable atmosphere of communication on the research topic) of my participants' freedom of choice, expression, and evaluation, leading to the children-initiated adjustment of the 'children as subjects' and 'children as actors' roles, and questioning the boundaries between these positions. From that point, participants negotiated the techniques and their participatory levels during the research process.

As the participants were at the very early stages of English language learning and development, the use of Russian in the interviews, i.e. engaging in translanguaging practices (Conteh 2018; Garcia 2009; Garcia, Seltzer, and Witt 2018; Garcia and Wei 2014; Rowe 2018), was essential for these children. It would not be possible to have detailed conversations with these children using only English. Translanguaging, viewed as a practical theory of language, allowed children to create an empowering and transformative *translanguaging space* (Wei 2018), erasing the divide between the languages and social spaces during the research, and accepting children's emerging bi/multilingualism. When Katerina swore in one of the interviews in L2 ('fuck'), while using L1 in the rest of the conversation, this showed playfulness and trust. But also by generating 'creative and critical moments' in a translanguaging space (Garcia and Wei 2014, 29), the use of L1 might reveal or hint at a certain level of child's criticality, the 'tensions, conflict, competition, difference, and change' (Wei 2018, 23) – embodying what was called the empowering nature of translanguaging. An example from the 'filling-in exercise' demonstrates that the children could use their whole language repertoire (important for children's sense of appreciation, freedom and identity) in the context of English schools, a place where the children are sometimes denied such a right. Freedom of language thus, potentially, helped to reach beyond their language-

related ‘incompetent’ migrant positions and, by empowering (Garcia and Wei 2014) them, helped them to be explicit, open and free in their behaviour in the interviews when disclosing their learning issues. The example in Figure 7 demonstrated the issues of sadness and isolation related to their language.

Although creating a translanguaging space in speech (Garcia and Wei 2014) was essential, it did not guarantee access to the otherwise unattainable knowledge, i.e. it was not sufficient for the children to open up in the interviews (as seen from an example with Yulia’s drawing). This was made possible through the additional tools provided to children – the ‘interview-through-game’ and the ‘filling-in exercise’ demonstrated in this study. Thus, the findings showed that building trust over time and using more common creative techniques (e.g. drawings-based methods) might not suffice for potentially vulnerable migrant children. The techniques need to be developed so that it is possible to create a safe but also exciting atmosphere for the children over time – through using ‘the interview through-game' format, for example – while providing a translanguaging space. Creative techniques, therefore, appear as emergent and, as it were, multimodal (Kress 2011) instruments of interaction during research that generate ‘moment-to-moment interactions that [may] form the basis of long-term creative development’ (Kupers et al. 2019, 93).

Both successful (informative interviews) and unsuccessful (rejection of the techniques) examples have been demonstrated, revealing the significance of both for the general research aims. The challenges in using the techniques was a valuable datum in itself, as it revealed the children’s issues. The challenges evolved in the cases when the questions asked were broaching a sensitive or difficult topic for the children to explain and the participant responded with a playful distraction; in each case, the technique could not proceed at that time. Some participants freely refused to respond (but not to

end the interview session), which reinforces the research's ethical credibility and the participants' understanding of the ethos of the study. The success of the techniques was demonstrated in that there were no cases of participants wanting to end the sessions; in fact, pupils openly expressed their disappointment and sadness at the end of the research, and two pupils asked for more than two monthly interviews. Despite the presented resultativity (i.e. excitement of children and informativity) of the techniques, these techniques might not be appropriate for much younger linguistic-minority migrant pupils. In application of these techniques with the older pupils, more cognitively deliberative board games could be selected as part of the interviews. The 'interview-through-game' design can nevertheless be applied to a range of contexts with limited resources, or time, spatial, and other constraints, resulting in a successful (informative) interview result, openness among the children and excitement.

The study's practical implications of the deep socioemotional issues for children signifies policy directions as well as ethical considerations as a researcher. The former could entail a statutory guidance (as e.g. developed by NALDIC 2018), at a national level, to enable schools to provide a defined level of support for newly arrived EAL pupils, which could include an induction programme with regular contacts between the schools and a parent, and a sharing of best practice across the sector. On the individual school level, there needs to be greater recognition of the socioemotional challenges facing these pupils and an understanding that such challenges are currently, to some extent, invisible to practitioners. As this research showed, these challenges can be revealed through the described creative techniques, meaning children find a voice for their experiences and do not suffer in silence.

Conclusion

The paper is intended to contribute to the discussion and development of creative techniques in research with linguistic-minority migrant children immersed in an L2 school environment. The results showed that the ‘interview-through-game’ and the 'filling-in exercise' were particularly efficacious for the presented study into the Russian-speaking migrant pupils’ experiences in English state-funded primary schools at Key Stage Two. Seen as dynamic and iterative, the main advantages of the creative techniques were their open-ended nature and flexibility, which also appeared as their main concern, juxtaposed with the systematicity-related concerns in my research. These active ways of expressing diverse experiences, both educational and personal, revealed participants' profound issues, allowing children to communicate their concerns, feelings, and motivations at different times in their learning.

Future research is nevertheless needed to address the issues of conducting the rich-content informed interviews with pupils of other age groups, possibly using more cognitively challenging games (for older pupils), as well as the possibility of using online gaming as a way of researching experiences of linguistic-minority migrant pupils. There is no single effective design of elicitation technique which would fit all children; however, the presented examples were particularly efficacious as they offered a logical structure with a playful essence, liberating these children from the need for English language expertise. Given their potentially challenging circumstances as linguistic-minority immigrant pupils, these approaches helped to reveal aspects of the otherwise covert experiences of these Russian-speaking primary-level children, reaching beyond their often vulnerable, even defenceless, positions as linguistically ‘incompetent’ migrants. Essentially, the study showed that, even when being used as part of less participatory methods, creative techniques can become emergent and multimodal, allowing for a translanguaging space. Such features of the creative

techniques have a potential to expand the affordances of creative techniques in educational research with migrant children.

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