Application of the Vignette Technique in a Qualitative Paradigm

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ABSTRACT

Vignettes are short depictions of typical scenarios intended to elicit responses that will reveal values, perceptions, impressions, and accepted social norms. This article describes how vignettes were developed and used in a qualitative linguistics anthropology study to elicit those responses as experienced by mixed-heritage individuals in attaining heritage legitimacy despite their inability to speak their heritage languages. The vignettes were administered during in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Eight participants were asked to reflect and respond to prompts which revolved around typical experiences where speakers were limited by their lack of heritage language proficiency. Based on the vignettes, the participants described how the speakers would linguistically strategize to compensate their limited abilities in using the heritage languages. At the same time, the cultural means through which speakers gain legitimacy within their own heritage groups were also identified. Essentially the use of the vignettes facilitated in generating data that would have otherwise been challenging to elicit given the culturally sensitive as well as highly private nature of the phenomena under investigation. The application of vignettes provided a less intrusive and non-threatening way of obtaining perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes based on responses or comments to stories depicting lived experiences of the participants that the researcher is otherwise not privy to as an observer. However, application of this data elicitation technique can prove challenging for the researcher. A critical analysis of the development, implementation and validity of vignettes as a research tool is extrapolated here within the setting of a heritage legitimacy study as an exemplar.

Keywords: qualitative research paradigm; vignettes; Linguistics Anthropology; heritage languages; mixed-heritage

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the use of vignettes as a data elicitation technique employed in a qualitative paradigm for an anthropological linguistics research investigating mixed-heritage individuals claiming heritage legitimacy. This examination is of particular interest in that it highlights the significant potential of using vignettes in place of participant observations for culturally sensitive research contexts that are also regarded as highly private in nature, such as the heritage legitimacy study. Drawing from the research by Mahanita (2016) on mixed-heritage people claiming heritage legitimacy, the development, applications and validity of using vignettes are examined and discussed in the following sections. This examination is significant as studies in using vignettes in the developing multi-ethnic world are emerging, but with no critical examination of their usefulness in such settings (Gourlay et al., 2014; Mahanita, Nor Fariza & Hazita, 2016). Thus this article will contribute towards this emerging

trend in the field of qualitative research methodology and in relation to multi-ethnic anthropological linguistics studies particularly. This article is, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, one of the very few methodological papers to examine the development and use of vignettes in mixed-heritage legitimacy studies within the field of linguistic anthropology in Malaysia.

BACKGROUND

The literature has described vignettes as short stories or concrete scenarios and examples of situations, people or individuals and their behaviours that are written about or pictorially depicted in specified circumstances (Finch, 1987; Hazel, 1995; Hall, 1997; Hughes, 1998; Renold, 2002; Wilt, 2011; Braun & Clarke, 2013). The employment of vignettes as a data elicitation technique encourages articulation of perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes from participants as they respond to or comment on the concrete scenarios and situations as depicted. The vignette has been found to be most useful for especially potentially difficult topics of enquiry as it is non-personal and perceived as less threatening (Barter & Renold, 2000; Hughes & Huby, 2002; Wilks, 2004). Most often, vignettes are employed together with other methods like interviews and focus groups in qualitative studies.

However, prior to this, the vignette was typically used in quantitative designs for health sciences, social work and psychology based studies. As a quantitative tool, it was usually presented with a series of predetermined responses with assigned values enabling respondents to rate a particular response (Wilks, 2004). Interestingly, many researchers found that the quantified data elicited from vignettes limited the potentials of the vignettes in generating information which are far richer and more complex. This realization persuaded them to lean towards qualitative paradigms when utilising vignettes for data elicitation (Barter & Renold, 2000; Landau, 1997; Kugelman, 1992). Discussions pertaining to vignettes as a quantitative elicitation tool nevertheless is beyond the scope of this article and can be accessed elsewhere (See Hughes and Huby, 2002; Wilks, 2004).

Increasingly, the use of vignettes is recognised to be most valuable for qualitative designs in place of naturalistic research approaches done through observations where researchers either situate themselves as a participant observer or non-participant observer (Wilks, 2004; Mahanita, Nor Fariza & Hazita, 2016). This is because there are major ethical and practical problems that accompany such an anthropological approach, compounded by potential observer effects. Previous studies in social work for example (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Wilt, 2011; Landau, 1997; Wilson & While, 1998; Kugelman, 1992) demonstrated how qualitative vignettes-based studies of ethical factors and dilemmas elicited richer and deeper understandings of the problem that are not captured in quantitative paradigms. Hence, the use of vignettes in research evidently can offer new possibilities in generating more meaningful and insightful understandings of complex qualitative relationships.

Interestingly, it is important to note that in the field of anthropological linguistics, a survey of the literature has revealed that there is currently no known published research on the use of vignettes in qualitative paradigms as an elicitation tool. Thus, the study by Mahanita (2016) investigating heritage legitimacy of mixed-heritage individuals using vignettes in place of participative observation is innovative in the aforementioned field, as it provides an alternative valid method to facilitate gathering of reliable data.

A range of social science literature, albeit limited, about the use of the vignette technique in qualitative research have claimed that vignettes technique is a useful and insightful way of eliciting perceptions (Jenkins et al., 2010; O'Dell et al., 2012; Gourlay et al., 2014), beliefs and meanings especially for sensitive issues of inquiry that may not be accessible through other methods. However, there remain methodological concerns and

challenges that need to be considered. Of particular importance is the internal validity and reliability of the vignettes in relation to their appropriateness, relevance, and realism, to ensure the interpretations and responses they elicit reflect actual behaviour. Hence, the application of vignettes in the study on heritage legitimacy highlighted in this article is an examplary illustration that elucidates the development, construction and internal validity processes of the vignettes used. A description of the application of vignettes in the context of the study on heritage legitimacy is described below. An account of the study's objectives and its research methodology design provide a context wherein the choice to use, the process in developing and validating the vignettes, as well as the procedures entailed in using them to elicit responses, is explicated.

VIGNETTES IN THE HERITAGE LEGITIMACY STUDY

There is an incremental interest in sociological and anthropological studies on aspects regarding the identity of mixed-heritage people in relation to their heritage languages. In the field of linguistic anthropology, a growing area of research focuses on mixed-heritage people and factors influencing the development of their identity (Renn, 2008). Among the factors that have been established to be significant are family, cultural knowledge, physical appearance; peer culture and acquisition of the heritage language (Khanna, 2004; Wallace, 2001).

Family has been identified as one of the important factors that create an impact on a mixed-heritage person's social identity (Yancey & Lewis, 2009). Close contact with family is vital not only for building a bond with members of the family but also for an individual's development in heritage language and culture.

A family network is made up of the immediate or nuclear family as well as the extended family, comprising grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. In fact, among mixed-heritage people, the development of intimate interaction and a sense of belonging to their particular heritage groups begin with the relationship and interaction that they have with their extended maternal and paternal family members (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002). This is supported by Wallace (2001, p. 87 as cited in Mahanita, 2016) who reiterated that the identity of a mixed-heritage person is shaped by these initial social interactions, impressions of and networking with single-heritage family members who are role models representing their respective heritage groups.

On the other hand, some studies have also shown that mixed-marriage families receive very little support from their single-heritage family network and society due to discrimination, rejection and stigmatization (Yancey & Lewis, 2009). These families also experience more conflict due to cultural differences as compared to those of same ethnic/race marriages. Hence, such rejection from and conflict with their single-heritage families, may cause some mixed-heritage individuals to lose contact with the heritage groups of their parents and are cut off from any linguistic or cultural exposure. There are also cases where the rejection from one heritage group results in assimilation towards the other (David, 2008).

Cultural knowledge is the second factor that influences the identity of mixed-heritage people. Wallace (2001) found that the participants in her study referred to elements such as choice of food, customs, traditions and festive celebrations when they were asked about heritage group membership. The extent of a mixed-heritage person's knowledge of heritage group culture depends on what they have learnt from the interactions with their parents or maternal or paternal relatives (Renn, 2008). Some may have extensive cultural knowledge of both maternal and paternal heritage groups whereas others may have knowledge of only one of their heritage groups or there are even those with no such knowledge at all.

Physical appearance or phenotype is the third factor that influences identity development in a mixed-heritage person. Physical appearance here refers to skin tone, hair colour or texture, shape of eyes and nose. Mixed-heritage people have reportedly encountered ignorance, disbelief, condescension and hostility from members of the society that they live in, just because their phenotype is a mismatch of what they claim to be (Pao, Wong & Teuben-Row, 1997; Romo, 2011). In addition, they also have to deal with the uncomfortable and provoking question, "What are you?" usually asked at the beginning of a conversation by those who are unable to categorise their ambiguous phenotypes as belonging to existing ethnic or racial groups within the society (Mahanita, 2016, p. 56).

Peer culture is another major factor that shapes the identity of mixed-heritage people. The availability of other mixed-heritage people in the surrounding community provides the much needed social support for mixed-heritage individuals (Renn, 2008; Rockquemore & Brusnma, 2002) in dealing with resistance, rejection and discrimination from single-heritage peers. This in turn, promotes the development of a separate mixed-heritage identity such as the one identified as multiracial identity (Root, 2001; Renn, 2008) where mixed-heritage individuals identify with other fellow mixed-heritage individuals.

In order to be able to claim legitimacy in their heritage groups, another aspect that is equally important is the ability to speak the heritage language (Pao, Wong & Teuben-Row, 1997; Shin, 2010; Renn, 2008; Wallace, 2001; Yancey & Lewis, 2009). According to Wallace (2001, p. 67) language is not only an "essential" dimension of a mixed-heritage person's identity, but also plays an important role in their daily interactions with family members and peers. Equipped with the ability to speak their heritage language as well as knowledge of their heritage culture, mixed-heritage people feel more confident to identify themselves as a part of their heritage groups (Renn, 2008). This is because being able to understand the nuances and subtleties embedded in their heritage languages and cultures gives them a feeling of rootedness within their heritage groups.

However, as mixed-heritage people who are unable to speak and understand their heritage languages are increasingly becoming the norm (Pao, Wong & Teuben-Row, 1997; Shin, 2010; Wallace, 2001), more research is needed in order to understand how they cope and improve their daily communication (Remedios & Chasteen, 2013) with their single-heritage family members. Soliz, Thorson and Rittenour (2009) assert that not much is known about the role of language and how it is used by mixed-heritage people in communicating with their family members. Shin (2010) concurred that research on mixed-heritage people from the linguistic perspective is still lacking.

In the Malaysian context, past studies on mixed-heritage people have only focused on the displacement of heritage languages and shifts to dominant languages such as Bahasa Malaysia and English that take place in their families (Soo, Chan & Ain Nadzimah, 2015; Lee, King & Azizah, 2010; David 2008; David & Nambiar, 2002; Kow, 2003). However, to the best of our knowledge, there are no published studies that investigate the scenario that takes place after the process of language shift. As such, a study as the one reported in this article is pertinent and propitious as it sheds light on the types of linguistic resources and strategic competences that the mixed–heritage individuals employ when communicating with their maternal and paternal families, in their endeavours to attain heritage legitimacy (Mahanita, Nor Fariza & Hazita, 2016; Mahanita, 2016).

Essentially this study explored the perceptions of the mixed-heritage individuals regarding their inability to speak and understand their heritage language(s) in relation to claiming legitimacy within their heritage groups (Mahanita, 2016). These perceptions are investigated based on the essentialist theoretical perspective on language and identity which posits that mixed-heritage groups commonly associate sense of self to the ability to speak their heritage languages; and inability to do so, disqualifies them from identifying with their

heritage groups (Lanza & Svendsen, 2007; Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Saville-Troike, 2003; Spolsky, 2001; Romaine, 2000). Relatedly, the ways in which they utilise their linguistic repertoire and strategies to compensate their inability to speak and understand their heritage languages reveal these challenges. The compensation strategies applied may include any other cultural means by which they attempt to accentuate their claim for legitimacy within their heritage groups.

For the aforementioned study, these challenges are mainly revealed through scenarios of communication. At the same time perceptions of their maternal or paternal family members in regards the legitimacy of the mixed-heritage individuals as members of the heritage groups provided another dimension for analysis. Given the aim of the study, ideally it is necessary for the phenomenon to be investigated through participant observation wherein the communication circumstances unfold through series of family related interaction events. This require an intrusive methodology as the researcher, as an outsider, would require permission to be included in the family realm on a daily basis or for selected occasions. Hence, for the researcher, an insight into these series of situations is nearly impossible to be participant to as they unfold or occur within the mixed heritage individuals' lived experiences.

Moreover, key to any research in linguistics anthropology is the recruitment of willing participants. Even so, these 'willing' participants establish borders that limit the researchers' access into their family spaces, forcing the research to be satisfied with third party perspectives. This was the case with many studies on mixed-heritage individuals and their related family members. The literature has shown that previous related anthropological linguistics researches on mixed heritage, language and identity (Remedios & Chasteen, 2013; Khanna, 2004; Khanna & Johnson, 2010; Romo, 2011; Kow, 2003; David, 2008) typically resorted to using questionnaires, secondary data, and in-depth interviews, respectively, mainly because it is very rare that researchers are granted access as participant observers in the families' realm. Seeking an alternative method that may provide richer insights into the phenomena, Wilt (2011) suggested using vignettes as a data collection technique in place of participant observation and the static questionnaires.

METHODOLOGY OF EMPLOYING VIGNETTES IN THE STUDY

The mixed-heritage study (Mahanita, 2016) discussed as an exemplar here adopted a qualitative paradigm applying a multiple embedded case study design. A multiple-case study examines several cases for the purpose of understanding their similarities and differences as well as increasing the reliability of its findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Meanwhile the embedded units incorporated within each of the case provided a detailed understanding of the issue of mixed-heritage individuals claiming legitimacy within their heritage groups (Yin, 1994). This was made possible as the embedded units of each case comprised a mixed-heritage participant and a single-heritage participant who are related to one another.

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit four mixed-heritage participants (Khanna, 2004; Tan, 2012) who are unable to speak and understand their heritage languages. The participants are aged between 21-42 years old and live in the Klang Valley. Their parents are from various ethnic backgrounds whose first languages include Tamil, Telugu, Sundanese, Thai, Bidayuh. In addition, another four single-heritage participants who are either the maternal or paternal family members (of the mixed-heritage participants) were also recruited. They are aged between 49-66 years old and represent four different ethnic groups. These single-heritage participants were included in this study because they are considered as representatives of their heritage groups. Their perspectives were sought regarding the

legitimacy of the mixed-heritage participants as members of their heritage groups (Mahanita, 2016).

Additionally, as it is important for a case study to incorporate the use of multiple sources of information (Creswell, 1998), this study employed triangulation of data obtained from semi-structured interviews, fieldnotes and vignettes. The semi-structured interview data consisted of family heritage background, mixed-heritage identity linguistic repertoire as well as other cultural means accentuated in their efforts to claim legitimacy within their heritage groups. Additionally, the fieldnotes provided descriptions of participants' behaviour, emotions, frame of mind; as well as effects of the setting on the participant, time, location and quality of recording (if any) written down by the researcher during the interview session.

Meanwhile, data from the vignette responses comprised the languages and communication strategies used by the mixed-heritage participants in communicating with their single-heritage family members. These data then were corroborated with data obtained from the semi-structured interviews with their single-heritage family members (i.e. maternal or paternal relatives) who provided perspectives representative of members of the heritage group. A more in-depth account of the said research and its findings can be found elsewhere by Mahanita (2016) and Mahanita, Nor Fariza and Hazita (2016).

The following section will elaborate further the rationale in choosing the vignette technique for the aforementioned study, including the development of the vignettes and their validity processes. Relatedly, of immediate concern in relation to validity and reliability of the methodology is the extent to which self-reported data elicited as responses to a vignette are accurate and credible (Creswell, 1998) or authentic and trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At the same time, it is important to note that the description provided with regards the use of the vignette technique described in this article is situated in the context of linguistics anthropology research such as heritage legitimacy studies. Hence, it is recognized that the use of vignettes may differ in terms of purpose as well as process of its applications for other types of studies. Nevertheless, of particular relevance are the steps explicated in this study that are intrinsic to the validity of the vignettes as reliable scenarios representing mixed-heritage lived experiences from four ethnic groups in Malaysia.

USE OF VIGNETTES IN THE STUDY

Harwood, Soliz and Lin (2009) and Wilt (2011) stressed that many studies on multiracial families have relied heavily on observations, self-reported data and interviews for data collection. In the same token, the qualitative data of the aforementioned study is mainly derived from participants' self-reports (i.e. introspection and retrospection) of their mixed-heritage experiences, albeit an alternative method. This alternative method gathered self-report data from the mixed and single-heritage participants through structured interviews and vignette methods instead of the traditional observation method or participant observer technique.

This method was employed because the participants rejected the use of the observation method, citing it as being extremely intrusive (Mahanita, 2016). The participants preferred the vignette technique as it helped to maintain a comfortable distance with the researcher when discussing sensitive matters from a third-person point of view. By doing so, it becomes less-threatening for them as compared to talking straight-forwardly about their personal experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Mahanita, Nor Fariza & Hazita, 2016). Moreover, the mixed-heritage participants felt more comfortable in revealing sensitive matters and sharing past experiences of frustration, exclusion or rejection with regards to their inability to speak and understand their heritage languages.

Even so, as with any self-reported data, the possibility that the participants only verbalise what they remember or are willing to partially share their experiences but withhold the rest, may jeopardize the authenticity of the responses prompted by the vignettes. Additionally their responses may contain discrepancies between what they say they would do and their actual behaviour in real life (Carlson, 1996). To avoid this methodological issue, the study introduced third party feedback provided by the single-heritage relatives. As described in the methodology above, embedded multiple case study design that was employed included the case participant as well as his or her family member representing either the single-heritage maternal or paternal side of the family. This way data from the mixed-heritage participants' self-reports are verified against the feedback from their single-heritage relatives. At the same time, the self-report data are also further verified through retrospective semi-structured interviews (Mahanita, 2016). This corroboration of data elicited from the self-reported responses as prompted by the vignettes provided some measure of validity and reliability in regards the authenticity of the responses in lieu of real observed behaviours.

DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION OF VIGNETTES

An important aspect about vignettes to be explained here is their development and construction. This section provides a description of the method employed in developing and constructing the vignettes used for the aforesaid study by Mahanita (2016). It is hoped that its explication will guide further use of vignettes in linguistic anthropological type of studies.

Authenticity and relevance are two aspects that should be aimed for in developing a vignette (Renold, 2000; Hughes & Huby, 2004) in order to ensure the quality of legitimacy in responses as well as encourage quantity of data elicited by the participants. The length of vignettes can also affect the quality and quantity of data elicited. Previous known users of vignettes in social work and psychology studies (Shin, 2010; Wallace, 2001; Wilson & While 1998; Pao, Wong & Teuben-Row, 1997) found that longer texts were found to generate careless and irrelevant data due to loss of interest while reading by the participants. On the other hand, the use of shorter vignettes consistently elicited optimum response rates in terms of succinct, concise responses and in shorter duration. The vignettes constructed by the researcher for the discussed study is short self-contained exemplars of typical scenarios and situations experienced by the mixed-heritage participants.

For this study on mixed heritage individuals' claim for legitimacy, two main sources of information informed the development of the vignettes. The first were detailed recollections of actual occurrences or occasions of their lived experiences that were retrieved through informal conversations and interviews with them (Mahanita 2016). Meanwhile the second source came from descriptions of events observed in past studies on mixed-heritage individuals in similar situations (Carlson, 1996; Cheek & Jones, 2003; McKeganey et al., 1995; Barter & Renold, 1999; Rahman, 1996).

Seven scenarios were constructed for the current study depicting a range of recurring problems experienced by mixed-heritage individuals in their family realm. These scenarios included those listed below:

Vignette 1	Attempts to reach out to heritage groups at a deeper level.
Vignette 2	Attempts to communicate resulting in confusion.
Vignette 3	Attempts to communicate resulting in suspicion.
Vignette 4	Attempts to communicate resulting in exclusion.
Vignette 5	Attempts to communicate resulting in insecurity.
Vignette 6	Attempts to demonstrate heritage membership through other means.
Vignette 7	Parental decisions in limiting exposure to heritage language.

To ensure internal validity and reliability of the constructs developed for the vignettes, they were piloted on five other mixed-heritage individuals between the ages of 20-24 years old. Nine vignettes that were originally piloted were reduced to seven as two particular vignettes were found to be redundant by the participants. For detailed description of the pilot study conducted please refer to Mahanita, Nor Fariza and Hazita (2016) and Mahanita (2016). Below (Fig. 1) is a sample of a vignette developed and administered for the study sourced from Mahanita (2016, p. 266). Other samples of vignettes are included in the Appendix.

<table>
<tr><td>Asha is a mixed-heritage girl. Her father is an Indian man, whereas her mother is a Bidayuh lady. Her father's heritage language is Tamil and her mother's heritage language is Bidayuh. She is very fluent in English language and her command of Bahasa Malaysia is good also. Unfortunately, she is not able to speak Tamil or Bidayuh except that she knows a few words from these two languages. When asked about herself, she claims to be both Indian and Bidayuh. She desperately wants to be able to share their jokes or gossips and also be able to express her inner-self to them; but she is unable to. In short, she is unable to reach out to her heritage groups at a deeper level because she lacked proficiency in their languages.</td></tr>
<tr><td>What do you think of Asha's problem?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Have you experienced a situation like this in your family?
How did you react?</td></tr>
</table>

FIGURE 1. Sample of a Vignette Used in the Mixed-Heritage study

Additionally, care was taken to ensure that the content of the vignettes were plausible and meaningful to the participants as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2003). Procedurally, in the actual study, the mixed-heritage female participants were given vignettes with female character, as were the male participants. They were then presented with each vignette depicting a scenario and were given time to reflect on their own similar experiences triggered by the scenario. While reflecting, each participant were asked to reflect and write short notes on their thoughts, feelings and actions with regards to how they dealt with each scenarios. At the end of their reflection they were asked to respond immediately to two open-ended questions and their responses were recorded and then transcribed for analysis. They were reminded to respond strictly from their own personal viewpoint. According to Hughes and Huby (2014), the open-ended questions posed with vignettes should facilitate to generate responses that should be similar to the participants' real life reactions. For this study, reflections that inform about the range of communication strategies employed by the participants when attempting to communicate with their maternal or paternal relatives, were of particular interest. Semi structured interviews were conducted on both the mixed-heritage participants and their related single-heritage family members before the vignettes sessions to profile in detail their personal and family backgrounds, and after, to clarify further their reactions as reported in their responses.

All responses to the vignettes and semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim using the playscript style (Gibson, 2010). The completed transcriptions were returned to the respective participants for content verification within three days so as to confirm the transcribed contents were accurately documented as recommended by Kurata (2011) and Hassan (2006). The verified transcription is then perused to identify the descriptions of communication strategies that the participants reported they used in their communication circumstances with their single-heritage family members. Simultaneously the examination of the transcribed responses to the vignettes revealed data regarding the affected participants' feelings about their inability to speak their heritage languages with the family members. Both of these data sources were coded and categorized accordingly. In addition the data source elicited from the vignettes received further verification through comparisons made with theoretical perspectives as well as past related literatures.

FIVE PRINCIPLES IN DEVELOPING VIGNETTES

Based on the use of vignettes in the referred study, the following five principles are put forward for consideration when conceptualizing vignettes for the qualitative paradigm. Firstly, the stories developed for the vignettes must have comparable dimensions of internal consistency to be relatable and authentic. This is to enhance participants' engagement with the situations described. Secondly, to elicit a reliable range of responses representative of actual reactions in real life situations, the depicted experiences should range from normal to unusual occurrences. Thirdly, the vignette should also have an inherent ambiguity in its content to be non-directional and non-prescriptive. While, it needs to contain sufficient features of typicality for the situation to be identifiable, it should be vague enough to force the respondents to interpret the situation from their personal perspectives. This concept is promoted by West (1982, p. 9) as 'fuzziness', which he regarded as value in this technique since it leaves the participant room to define the depicted situation in his own terms (Finch, 1987). Fourth, in relation to the previous point, the participants should be asked to respond at two levels, that is to first provide culturally and socially desirable responses and at another level, how they think they would actually respond personally in that situation. Finally, the format in which the vignettes are presented should be appropriate to the participating individuals and the objectives of the study. While written narratives texts, as used in the heritage language study, are most common, images such as picture scenarios, video recordings, music videos, music and computer assisted reproductions are varied mediums that could be introduced and employed. The following section on analysis of data findings elucidates the extent to which the use of vignettes employed in the study on mixed-heritage legitimacy elicited data quality which were reliable and valid, hence underlining their value as a research technique in linguistic anthropology.

TRUSTWORTHINESS OF VIGNETTES AS AN ELICITATION TECHNIQUE

This section will show the extent to which the use of vignettes achieved the main objectives of the study on mixed-heritage individuals and their legitimacy issues. The findings of the data analysis underscores the feasibility of the use of vignettes as a data elicitation technique in place of participant observation, as well as the comparable authenticity of the vignettes used in the study in its ability to encourage realistic disclosures from the members of the ethnic groups. As described earlier, the vignettes were supported with semi-structured interviews as well as fieldnotes, and aimed at revealing the extent to which lack of proficiency in heritage languages would affect a mixed-heritage individual's standing among their single-heritage group members in terms of his or her legitimacy as a heritage group member.

In the previous section, a framework of how vignettes were designed and applied in the discussed study was provided, and the resulting principles derived from this development and application has been put forward as guide for future applications of vignettes as a plausible technique in qualitative linguistics anthropology research. What is also relevant for this article is the question whether the use of the constructed vignettes has generated trustworthy data that reveal typical and natural occurring responses representing actual behaviours in real circumstances of a mixed-heritage situation. To demonstrate the trustworthiness of the vignette technique, the quality of data and its analysis as generated from the responses to the vignettes are used to illustrate this potential reliability.

In the referred study, vignettes were produced to depict difficulties among the four mixed-heritage individuals to communicate in their heritage languages when interacting with the four single-heritage family members. These heritage languages suggesting their parents' family heritage backgrounds, include an interesting range from Tamil (spoken by descendants

of Indian heritage), Bidayuh (spoken by descendants of Bidayuh indigenous heritage from Sarawak), Telegu (spoken by a smaller number of descendants from southern Indian heritage), Dutch (spoken by descendants from Netherland heritage), Sundanese (spoken by descendants from Sundanese heritage originating from Western Java, Indonesia), Malay (spoken by the descendants of Malays heritage and most Malaysians), Punjabi (spoken by descendants of the Punjabi heritage) and Thai (spoken by descendants from Thailand heritage). Table 1 below summarises the findings about the linguistic repertoire of the mixed-heritage individuals' and their heritage language backgrounds.

TABLE 1. Linguistic Repertoire and Heritage Language Background of Mixed-Heritage Participants

Mixed-Heritage (MH) Participant	Parents' Heritage Language Background	Heritage Languages MH unable to speak	Languages used to speak to single heritage members
MX1-L	Paternal Heritage-Tamil	Tamil	Paternal Member-English
	Maternal Heritage-Bidayuh	Bidayuh	Maternal Member-Malay
MX2-N	Paternal Heritage-Telegu	Telegu	Paternal Member-English
	Maternal Heritage-Dutch/Sundanese	Dutch Sundanese	Maternal Member-Malay
MX3-S	Paternal Heritage-Tamil/Thai	Tamil	Paternal Member-Malay
	Maternal Heritage-Malay	Thai	Maternal Member-Malay
MX4-H	Paternal Heritage-Punjabi	Punjabi	Paternal Member-English
	Maternal Heritage-Telugu	Telugu	Maternal Member-English

The information in Table 1 above illustrates a sample of data that is revealed through the vignettes. In this case study, the participants revealed that almost all of them are unable to speak their parents' heritage languages (except for MX3-S who speaks maternal heritage language-Malay) and rely primarily on Malay and English as the dominant vehicular languages when speaking to their single-heritage parent and relatives. Additionally, the vignettes prompted the mixed-heritage participants to reveal what they typically and frequently do when attempting to respond to a single-heritage family member speaking to them in their respective heritage languages. Upon analysis, these responses and reactions by the participants, as described by them, were identified as communication strategies. With reference to the sample highlighted above, the analysis revealed that the mixed-heritage individuals employed various communication strategies ranging from appeal for help to feigning understanding to salvage interactions with their monolingual family members. Some extracted examples of these are as illustrated below:

1. Appeal for help-- MX2-N: "I ask them what they are saying..",
2. Inferencing--MX3-S: "I try to guess words based on context of conversation..",
3. Circumlocution (e.g. MX2-N: "I attempt to combine simple words to express meaning of message.."
4. Miming--MX2-N: "I use hands to signal meanings.."
5. Language switch--MX1-L: "I may begin my reply in the heritage language but switch to Malay or English after that.."
6. Feigning understanding--MX2_N: "I just nod and smile.."

(Mahanita, 2016, pp. 172-175)

Nevertheless, cross analyses with response patterns from interviews with the single heritage family members revealed high instances of accommodation by them suggesting that the maternal and paternal relatives were tolerant and flexible with regards to the participants' inability to communicate using the heritage language. Interestingly, in contrast to the perceptions of the mixed heritage individuals, this generous tolerance of accommodation in

response to their lack of proficiency in the heritage language by the single heritage members suggested that proficiency in the heritage language, although is valued, is not a crucial requisite for gaining legitimacy within the heritage group (Mahanita, 2016:196). Although the mixed-heritage individuals get by with the vehicular languages and compensation strategies, they still harbour negative perceptions regarding their own inability to speak their heritage languages, even though the single-heritage families do not demand this of them. Table 2 below provides a briefed insight into their views on this matter.

TABLE 2. Perceptions of the Mixed-Heritage Individuals Regarding their Inability to Speak and Understand their Heritage Languages

Participants	Excerpts of participant's perceptions of their inability to speak and understand their heritage languages
MX1-L	• "I <u>regret</u> not learning Tamil when I was growing up. " • "My Bidayuh family members are warm people. …deep inside me, I am <u>angry</u> with myself because I don't know what they are saying.
MX2-N	• I <u>feel sad</u> that I couldn't understand…that I cannot speak my heritage languages…both Telugu and Sundanese."
MX3-S	• "… they shouldn't speak Tamil …, when they know I don't know how to speak Tamil. But they continued to do so. ... I felt <u>left out</u>.'
MX4-H	• "Yes, I do <u>feel sad</u> that I cannot speak Telugu and Punjabi. …. I have other ways to prove that I am a part of their group."

Source: Mahanita, 2016, pp. 167-168

In general, the excerpts from the responses generated by the vignettes show that the participants are disappointed with themselves for not being able to communicate using their heritage languages. The range of emotions that they expressed in response to the vignettes include "regret" and "angry" (participant MX1-L); "sad" (participant MX2-N); "left out" (participant MX3-S); as well as "feel sad" (participant MX4-H). These expressions of disappointment underlie the feelings of inadequacy or inferiority that fester in them as they perceive they lack one of the most important cultural credentials of their heritage groups. The authenticity of the findings and quality data generated from the vignettes is illustrated in Figure 2 below. The following exemplifies a selected vignette given to MX4-H which had prompted her to disclose her emotions towards the scenario depicted in the vignette. She had immediately identified with the scenario which triggered an emotional response as disclosed in Table 2 above. The scenario in the vignette had induced her to reveal that she felt sad but will compensate in other ways to be accepted when faced with similar real life experiences on several occasions before.

> Naveena is a mixed-heritage person. Her father is Indian and her mother is Kelabit. She speaks fluent Bahasa Malaysia and English because she learnt these languages from school. Every year, they celebrate Deepavali and Gawai. However, during Deepavali she has to be among her paternal relatives, who all speak Tamil. Even though they are her relatives, she feels somewhat uncomfortable to be among them because she cannot understand a word they are saying. She feels she is Indian and Kelabit at the same time, but there are also times when she feels like she is an outsider. As a result, she decided to try to solve the problem. She thought to herself, if she is unable to speak the language, then maybe she should focus on other aspects of being Indian when she is with her paternal relatives. One way to do it is to wear more of "*salwar khameez*" which is commonly worn by Indian women.
>
> What do you think of Naveena's problem?
>
> Have you experienced a situation like this in your family? How did you react?

FIGURE 2. Vignette that MX4-H responded to

Notably, it can surmised that the mixed-heritage individuals' integration into the heritage group is defined by the extent to which they embrace the cultural ways and the related religious practices of the maternal or paternal single heritage families. Based on the cross analyses of responses generated from the vignettes, the single-heritage members of the heritage groups expressed that the mixed-heritage individuals will be accorded heritage legitimacy instead, if they demonstrate cultural credentials and kinship interests such as attending religious and family rituals, and befriending others from same heritage groups. This revelation concurs with Khanna (2004) and Wallace (2001), as cited in Mahanita (2016, p. 199), whose studies similarly found that consistent and persistent exhibitions of cultural traits and demonstrations of kinship interest suggest an individual's heritage inclination which accords the individual heritage legitimacy by the heritage group. Hence, the data elicited in response to the vignettes significantly revealed that among the four heritage groups investigated, fluent proficiency in a heritage language is not a qualification for attaining heritage legitimacy into a particular heritage group as feared by the mixed heritage individuals. Table 3 below illustrates the range of cultural credentials that the mixed-heritage individuals had reportedly demonstrated which had gained them their heritage legitimacy as claimed by the single-heritage family members.

TABLE 3. Range of cultural credentials employed by mixed-heritage individuals to claim legitimacy

Participant	Mixed-heritage identity	Cultural credentials to claim legitimacy	Category	Heritage group trait
MX1-L	Bidayuh-Tamil	Wears *saree* and *bindi* when attending weddings.	Clothing	Tamil
		Celebrates *Gawai* and *Deepavali*	Celebration	Bidayuh
MX2-N	Telegu-Dutch/Sundanese	Wears *saree* when attending weddings and events at temple.	Clothing	Telugu
		Befriends Indian students at school and university	Friendship	Telugu
		Celebrates Deepavali	Celebration	Telugu
MX3-S	Tamil-Thai/Malay	Wears *baju kurung* and head scarf	Clothing	Malay
		Prefers Indian food and has culinary expertise	Culinary preference	Tamil
		Celebrates *Eid-ul-Fitr*	Celebration	Malay
MX4-H	Telugu -Punjabi	Celebrates *Deepavali*, *Chitrapaurnami* (Telugu New Year) and *Vaisakhi*	Celebration	Telugu
		Prefers Indian food.	Culinary preference	Telugu
		Wears a kurta to special events at the temple or wedding.	Clothing	Telugu
		Wears *kara* (a jewelry commonly worn by Sikh people) for important occasions at the *Gurdwara* (Sikh temple).	Jewellery	Punjabi

The cultural credentials which are listed in table 3 were noted as alternatives that the single-heritage members recognize as acceptable compensations for the mixed-heritage individuals' lack in their heritage language proficiency. Evidently, practicing them permits the mixed-heritage individual to claim their legitimacy within their respective groups. This tendency to compensate with cultural credentials according to Fernandez (1996) can dangerously be obsessive if the mixed-heritage individuals overcompensate in proving themselves as "more pure" (Fernandez, 1996, p. 31 as cited in Mahanita, 2016, p. 181) than members of their heritage groups. He cautioned this tendency to overcompensate for a

perceived shortcoming is detrimental to the self-identity in the long run as it prevents individuals from addressing the source of their inferiority and overcoming it.

However, the evidence from the responses in the study on mixed-heritage suggest that the compensation behaviours reported by the participants seem to be fluid and flexible in terms of which cultural credential they want to accentuate, in which context, with whom and when they feel they want to do so.

In sum, the findings of the study on heritage legitimacy of mixed-heritage individuals revealed that these individuals were accorded legitimacy as a member of their heritage groups even though they were not able to speak or understand their heritage language. Instead they were accorded heritage legitimacy based on cultural credentials and kinship interest that they consistently and persistently exhibited as witnessed by the single heritage members. Even so, there is evidence to suggest that heritage inclination towards maternal or paternal or even both sides of the heritage groups is dependent the individuals' perception of the single-heritage families' acceptance of the individual, as well as the degree of closeness of their relationship to either groups.

CONCLUSION

In this article, application of vignettes as a technique for rich qualitative data elicitation in anthropological linguistics type of research is described and illustrated through the mixed-heritage legitimacy study by Mahanita (2016) as an exemplar. The option to use vignettes in the aforementioned study is borne out of necessity as the eight participants, comprising four mixed-heritage and four single-heritage individuals were reluctant to give access to the researcher to observe and record behaviours pertaining to the use of (or lack of) heritage languages in their community and families' realm and private spaces. Although vignette-based methodologies are frequently used in the quantitative paradigm to examine judgment and decision making processes particularly in the clinical, behavioural, social work and health sciences domains, there are few known accounts about the use of vignettes within the qualitative research paradigm (Wilks, 2004; Hughes & Huby, 2002; Barter & Renold, 2000; Landau, 1997; Kugelman, 1992). This article, thus, contributes to highlight the potentials of vignettes as a qualitative data elicitation tool in place of participant observations where or when it is not plausible, or more significantly as a complimentary tool to allow the researcher to accentuate richer and more expansive insights that will generate patterns of behaviours for a more comprehensive analysis of a phenomenon.

Three defining features of the vignettes can be highlighted through the study on mixed-heritage legitimacy described in this article. Firstly, it is notable, based on the available evidence from the cross analysis conducted in the study, that the use of the vignettes demonstrated the feasibility of the scenarios depicted in generating similar responses to real-life scenarios of mixed-heritage individuals claiming heritage legitimacy. Several comparison studies and reviews in the quantitative field have yielded similar methodological conclusions where vignette methodologies demonstrated little difference from observations of actual behavior (Evans et al., 2015). Secondly, the utilization of vignettes is considerably high in terms of its flexibility and efficiency. As demonstrated in the development and construction of the vignettes exemplified in this article, the content of the vignette can be carefully tailored to provide accurate and concise contextual content concretely. Additionally, it is necessary to ensure a level of detail in them to support their realism and credibility as reproductions of natural occurrences, while omitting unnecessary and irrelevant information. Hence a carefully structured methodology using vignettes as an elicitation technique is more efficient in that it saves observation time, personnel of observers, funding and other related resources needed to carry out participant observation. Thirdly, this article and the literature suggest that vignettes

as a technique is valid, reliable, inexpensive, and practical for phenomenological types of investigations. Regarding validity and reliability, Gould (1996) and Veloski et al. (2005) contend that a major advantage of using vignettes is that participants are less likely to be influenced by the act of observation, as the distance afforded by the vignettes as well as indications of confidentiality and the non-evaluative nature of its design minimizes the observer effect where the individuals being observed may modify their behavior because of being observed. This reaction may have an impact on the in the findings. By the same token, the revelation by the mixed-heritage and single-heritage participants in the study highlighted in this article demonstrated these advantages.

Clearly, vignettes as a technique for data elicitation and even as a vignette-based methodology, evidently can be a flexible, practical and powerful tool, suited for studying multilingual and multicultural phenomenon that are usually highly sensitive and exclusive in nature. As noted earlier, previous limitations to using vignettes as an elicitation tool in qualitative study lie mainly in the lack of direction of how to develop vignettes that are truly representative of an observed occurrence. The element of authenticity is vital to ensure that the responses are true and not imagined. Thus, in addressing this gap, this article has provided the principles for development and construction of vignettes for socio-cultural linguistics contexts and has exemplified its use in a qualitative linguistics anthropology study through the mixed-heritage study.

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APPENDIX

SAMPLES OF VIGNETTES

Vignette 3	Ali is a mixed-heritage person. His father is an Indian man, whereas his mother is a Malay lady. At home, he mainly speaks Malay and English with his parents and siblings. His father's heritage language is Tamil but Ali's knowledge of Tamil is limited to only a few words. One day, he was playing table-tennis with his paternal cousins. While playing, some of his cousins spoke Tamil to each other. Deep down, he was frustrated because he was not able to understand what they were saying to each other. He pretended to be occupied with playing, but actually he was listening carefully to what they were saying to each other. He tried to pick out words that he could understand. He often did this. If he catches any familiar words, he will use these words combined with other relevant information at the time to figure out what they were talking about. Sometimes, he got it correct. Other times, he got it wrong. Due to this, he constantly feels that he is like an outsider. He has to be alert whenever he is around his Indian relatives. He does not want to miss out on anything that is going on in the family but he often feels he left out from their communication because he is not able to speak or understand their language.
	What do you think of Ali's problem?
	Have you experienced a situation like this in your family? How did you react?
Vignette 5	Naveena is a mixed-heritage person. Her father is Indian and her mother is Kelabit. She speaks fluent Bahasa Malaysia and English because she learnt these languages from school. Every year, they celebrate Deepavali and Gawai. However, during Deepavali she has to be among her paternal relatives, who all speak Tamil. Even though they are her relatives, she feels somewhat uncomfortable to be among them because she cannot understand a word they are saying. She feels she is Indian and Kelabit at the same time, but there are also times when she feels like she is an outsider. As a result, she decided to try to solve the problem. She thought to herself, if she is unable to speak the language, then maybe she should focus on other aspects of being Indian when she is with her paternal relatives. One way to do it is to wear more of "*salwar khameez*" which is commonly worn by Indian women.
	What do you think of Naveena's problem?
	Have you experienced a situation like this in your family? How did you react?
Vignette 7	Sara is a mixed-heritage person. Her father is Chinese and her mother is Iban. She speaks fluent Bahasa Malaysia and English because she learnt these languages from school. Every Gawai, they will visit her maternal relatives in Sarawak. However, when she is among her maternal relatives, she is unable to speak Iban. She feels uncomfortable to be among them when she cannot understand a word they are saying. Although they speak to her in Malay most of the time, but there are times when they speak to her in Iban. She is not sure if they are purposely doing so, to mock her (because she lacks the language) or that they genuinely doing it to acknowledge that she is a part of them.
	What do you think of Sara's problem?
	Have you experienced a situation like this in your family? How did you react?

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