

## Anonymised examiner reports

### 'Part A' viva reports

#### *Example 1*

This thesis is clearly at PhD level. It addresses an important set of issues connected with international curriculum development in English language education, which is very topical, not only in ... but throughout the world, where the advance of English as an international language has the potential for cultural imperialism, and against a backdrop of questionable effectiveness in development programmes.

The positive features of the research project are that it collects data in an innovative way, focusing on key interest groups to build a gradual picture, thus illustrating the complex nature of curriculum change. The data is collected thoroughly and well catalogued in the appendices. There is a definite professionalism running through the whole work.

There is also a fresh angle on the relationship between ideology and culture within the interplay of aid agencies, publishers and teachers, and the educational cultures they bring with them.

There are however flaws. The presentation of the case study approach seems superficial because there is insufficient explanation for how the various strategies of data collection work together to make the macro scope of the study viable. Although a thematic analysis is claimed – as would be normal for an overall qualitative study of this nature – the data is presented in largely summary form, as it was collected, with a thematic retrospective in the penultimate chapter. This starves the thesis of thick description, depriving it of the rich interplay of data provided by the case study format. Furthermore, considering the candidate's stated sensitivity to ideology, there is little evidence that he is aware of his own ideology in the often prescriptive way in which data is collected.

The presentation of the thesis suffers from an understatement concerning the central ideas being developed. It is difficult for the reader to see what the overall thesis actually is.

Pending the viva, the following changes would seem necessary:

1. A clear statement of the thesis needs to be made in the abstract, elaborated in the introduction and confirmed in the conclusion.
2. Statements about thesis development need to be made throughout - setting the scene in the introduction, and in staged conclusions at the end of each chapter.
3. Greater attempt needs to be made to link the thesis with issues in curriculum development beyond ....
4. It would be useful to see a summary characterisation of the different angles represented by the different parties featured in the data – perhaps a diagrammatic map, which would provide texture for the discussion throughout. This could be linked with the demarcation of educational ideologies and relationship between applied linguistics and ELT.
5. There needs to be a clearer rationale for the case study approach, including a justification for what makes this a workable case study.
6. There needs to be a clearer justification, towards the beginning of the thesis, for not subjecting the whole of the data analysis to thematic categorisation – as would be more in keeping with a thesis rather than a report.

## Example 2

This is generally an extremely well written thesis with an excellent clear, analytical style throughout. However, at another level, in the second half there is often a lack of meta-statement to prevent us from getting lost in detail. There are also issues about how the themes within which the data is presented are truly emergent rather than driven by preoccupations arising from the literature.

The abstract is very clear in all respects; and in the introduction, the case of a particular teacher being dismissed by her university is a good way to introduce the issues of the thesis. There is an excellent summary of the whole thesis which says more than the average about each chapter. The first two literature review chapters, on language teacher identity, professionalism and culture and identity as position, are very well written, providing an excellent tour of relevant research which maintains a personal voice throughout. The second chapter focuses on the work of three or four theorists and Stewart carefully constructs her own argument between them, demonstrating a good mastery of their ideas while relating them to her thesis.

In chapter 3, the concept of researching position is taken from the previous chapter and located within professional and linguistic identity, and the decision to go with narrative data of the individual. There is a very competent demonstration of research strategy which makes good use of a reference forward to how one of the participants, Jane, is dealt with.

Chapter 4 provides a descriptive account of the context. However, after providing a good rationale for the need for this, much of the description of the education system does seem gratuitous. It is not clear how the criticism of the Japanese education system for being discriminatory against foreign teachers and conservative is grounded in evidence. Neither is there an explanation of how portraits of the teachers are grounded. It is difficult to see the relevance of much of the content of this chapter because we do not yet know what the 'data' will show. This chapter therefore seems the least useful – lots of information without explicit points being made. The conclusion says *that* it is important to provide the context, but does not summarise what the context has shown us.

The three data chapters each present a major theme within which to place the data; but it is not clear from where these themes emerge. The data is organized according to individual characters; and in each case fairly long extracts of data are very skilfully discussed with a sufficiently tight analytical style. However, apart from these extracts, the discussion is not explicitly anchored to reference to specific data. There are sometimes long summaries of the implications of other interviews which are also not specifically cited. Although interesting, and succeeding in getting to the complexity of each character's narrative, it is hard to see precisely what the researcher is getting at. It is easy to forget the research focus and drown in detail. The last part of each chapter is better in that it draws together issues from the characters, providing very interesting discussion, but still leaving the major points obscure. These chapters lack interim conclusions to show exactly where we are getting to. There are good final conclusions; but I am still wondering 'so what'. In some cases these chapters are also cluttered with literature review rather than getting immediately into the data. This makes one wonder how far the preoccupations of the discussion of the data emerges from the data itself.

...s stated intention to put to one side her own beliefs is a great strength of the thesis in the business of close analysis of data; but there then needs to be more of a standing back and clear telling of precisely what the core messages are. The conclusion that teachers' positions are affected by lots of things does not really tell us anything new.

In the concluding chapter, the opening statement is very clear, contrasting the case of dismissal at the beginning of the thesis, which seemed to be about cultural identity, with the way in which the data shows identity to be more complex than this. However, the rest of the chapter plunges once again into general discussion of the details of complexity, summarizing what the teachers said and felt, without firm statements – in a sense more of the same sort of analysis as we had in

the previous chapters. The bullet points right at the end on what this study provides us with is very good statement of what the thesis has told us; but explicit pointers as to how these points were emerging throughout the thesis would have been useful.

In the viva we will need to hear ... telling us in very precise terms exactly what she has found, and answering some difficult questions about emergence.

### **Example 3**

The major contribution of the thesis is a very detailed analysis of how discourse works in a particular event, thus contributing important extra insight into what we already know about current social dynamics. This contribution is strengthened by an excellent, very detailed discussion of theoretical underpinnings both of the nature of the social events being investigated and the research approach.

This is a largely very well written thesis. It generally has a very clear style which, which does nevertheless occasionally slip into less clarity, where points are not always clear. The introduction is very well written and succeeds in presenting a narrative of how the research developed in dialogue with professional experience. This displays a keen sense of professional history. A summary of the development of research questions would have been useful to aid the memory, perhaps with more explanation. The literature review comprises a fascinating account of how the attack on positivism went hand-in-hand with the demise of audiolingualism and the advent of communicative language teaching. This is followed by a less directional account of linguistic imperialism and language in development. Chapter 3 concerns the theoretical approach of the research, which begins with an interesting critique of 'instrumental reason' and then discusses CDA as a methodology. This is extremely dense; and the very short conclusion is not sufficient to draw the discussion together. Chapter 4 deals with the social and historical context of the research – of managerialism, modernity and change, and their connection with ELT. Although occasional connections are made with 'the data', the writing remains quite abstract and the precise points being made, with relation to the study, are not always clear. (The 'insider' reader can see the connections, but others might not.) Chapter 5 is a very clear explanation and discussion of how discourses can travel. Chapter 7, in conclusion, presents a very clear analysis of what has been learnt in each aspect of the research and indeed reconciles several of the issues raised earlier.

Apart from the occasional lapses into lack of clarity, my major concerns are with the way in which the data collection procedures are presented and integrated with the thesis as a whole. Most of the discussion of the data and its analysis is confined to chapter 6. This begins with a description of the data, which is not particularly clear and is sometimes repetitive. The discussion of the data, which one would expect to be in a separate chapter, is very clearly expressed, with an excellent analysis; but this comprises a very small, 20%, of the thesis. The question therefore arises as to whether this is (a) a theoretical thesis, drawing on a piece of empirical data as example, or (b) a piece of empirical research for which the theoretical discussion is background. If the latter is the case, there may be a problem with balance.

## **Final reports**

### ***Corrections, minor or major?***

1. Key statements from later in the thesis, especially at the beginning of the methodology chapter, and in the conclusion chapter, need to be used to frame the thesis from the beginning. There needs to be a stronger storyline throughout the thesis that gradually anticipates the excellent conclusion in the final chapter.
2. There should be a section in the introduction which states clearly why ... is relevant to the case study, as a lens through which to understand the outcomes of the ethnography, which will better set the scene for the literature chapters and the whole thesis.

3. The literature chapters need framing throughout to indicate how they relate to the thesis. The first one should be a conceptual framework not of ... but of how the research in this thesis is carried out, with a strong anticipation of the outcomes of the research. The second literature chapter should be less of an exposé of ... and more of a discussion of how ... contributes to the research project. There should be a clear indication of how ... is then made use of in the specific parts of the rest of the thesis, which explains why it is sometimes more and sometimes less explicitly present.
4. The methodology chapter needs a summary of all the data collected and participants in one place, to provide a quick reference map. This should provide further detail to the existing diagram.
5. The relationship between emerging themes, research questions and the data chapters needs to be re-set to show more clearly how the ethnographic process took place. This should be expressed through the following steps:
  - a. Delete reference to a pilot study, and instead, in the methodology chapter, describe how an initial engagement with the field produced emergent themes.
  - b. In the methodology chapter and at the beginning of the data chapters, explain how these emergent themes were the basis for organising the data chapters (and not, as is currently stated, research questions).
  - c. In the introduction, re-define the 'sub-questions' as themes that emerged from the initial engagement with the field.
6. Make it clear in the methodology chapter how the data chapters relate to ethnography.
7. Re-organise the data chapters so that reference to literature always follows data. Where the literature is formative in setting up concepts it should be moved to the literature review. The remaining reference to literature should therefore reflect on the data.
8. The relationship between ..., ... and ..., and the design of figure ..., needs to be explained more fully. This explanation should be either moved to where ... is dealt with in the literature review, or the cross-reference to that chapter should be made explicit. Similarly, the discussion of ... should be either moved to the literature review, where there is already discussion connected with this issue, or the cross-referencing should be made explicit.
9. The thesis should be checked throughout to make sure that the above changes are not contradicted.

### **Resubmission**

During the viva the issues of analysis and presentation of the data and concerns about the substantive findings and how far these contributed to new knowledge were discussed. It was felt that while the thesis was clearly at doctoral level, with elements of excellent writing and profound engagement with relevant issues of methodology, and while the data and literature cited was sufficient, it would require considerable re-writing. In the process of this rewriting it was felt that more focused realizations with regard to the substantive findings would be achieved. The candidate was therefore required to resubmit the thesis along the following lines:

1. Two or three new data chapters should be created. These should incorporate the data in chapter 4 and the elements in chapters 5 and 6 which refer specifically to it.
2. This reorganization will enable the reader to see precisely how the discussion of the data relates to the extracts of data to which it refers. To facilitate this relationship it may be necessary to say more about how the points raised relate to specific detail within the extracts, demonstrating appropriate analytical precision and caution.
3. The existing ordering and formatting of the data in chapter 4 may possibly be preserved, but this will depend on how well it works in the service of the discussion. The researcher's struggle to maintain the integrity of the data in longer chunks is appreciated and should be maintained wherever possible.
4. However, thematic headings which emerge from the data should be the best device to organize the discussion of data in these chapters.

5. In chapter 2, there should be an extra section which explains precisely the mode of analysis used; and this should explain how the thematic headings emerged and that rationale for how they are used to organize the data chapters.
6. The remaining material in chapter 5 should be used to form a literature chapter which provides background to prevailing issues within English language education which are the orientation through which to look at the data. The location of this chapter is best before the data chapters; but an alternative placing may prove more appropriate as the overall editing progresses.
7. The remaining chapters need to be edited to be brought into line with the above changes. It needs to be made clear throughout what the substantive focus of the research is – presumably the manner in which Rachael articulates a professional rationale in dialogue with her life story, thus showing a greater complexity than normally seen with regard to teacher thinking. The final chapters need especially to reflect this outcome.