

Coding qualitative data

Dr Adrian Holliday | Professor Emeritus | Applied Linguistics & Intercultural Communication | Canterbury Christ Church University | Website: Adrianholliday.Com

Unless more recent, the material in this seminar is mostly taken from Holliday (2016)

This material can be found at <https://adrianholliday.com/handouts/>

Note about approach

Postmodern - recognising and managing intersubjectivity - the implicatedness of the researcher as part of the data (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Holliday & MacDonald 2020)

Constructivist - less about reporting what people do and say - more about **why they do and say** - how they construct their worlds and themselves (Berger & Luckmann 1966/1979)

Ethnographic disciplines - making the familiar strange, **submission** to the **emergence** of unexpected meanings, **phenomenological** positioning

Thinking about writing

Sociologists should surely be concerned with **how they construct and convey** their arguments: not only in relation to historical and theoretical texts, but also in terms of how the 'facts' and 'findings' of sociological research are conveyed in monographs and research papers. **For these are not matters of neutral report:** the conventions of text and rhetoric are among the ways in which **reality is constructed**. (Atkinson 1990: 2)

Coding?

Finding **key words, phrases, concepts** etc that help determine themes and sub-themes

A first step in classic thematic analysis (Thornton 1988)

Note that this is not the popular Braun & Clarke reference

1. Temporarily **put aside research questions**
2. Put all the data together and treat it **holistically**
3. Look for themes across all data types — with the added facility of searching electronic text for **key words**
4. Use the themes and sub-themes to **structure the data chapters**
5. Use the **extracts of data** that best demonstrate the themes as the main points of discussion in the data chapters

Teams of researchers working on large sets of data??

Brief example

1. What impact has doing a PhD had on your cultural identity?	Codes	Themes
<p>I think that doing my PhD in applied linguistics (Canterbury Christ Church University at the University of Kent; completed, 2012), on one level, has made me more aware of multi-culturalism or multi-nationalism on a wider spectrum. First of all, what do I mean by these terms? I would consider "culturalism" as some sort of identification and following of behaviour or discourses as established and/or practiced by a particular community, whether that community be an ethnic group, a political party, a discourse group, an academic department within a university, a professional association of bankers, and so on and so forth. (I apologize for not including references here, because I am certainly aware that I have constructed this personally-held definition at least in substantial part from academic readings). Secondly, I would consider "nationalism" as a specific type of "culturalism" whereby the "community" is somehow (and of course, no doubt, with many overlappings and subdivisions!) defined by country or nation. Consequently, I use the term "multi-nationalism" as one specific type of". More specifically, by the tem "multi-nationalism", I refer to one's identification with, exposure to, immersion within, or somehow moving around in discourses, ways of behaviour, or societal expectations that seem perceived as being related to different countries or nations.</p>	<p>Multicultural and multi-discourse awareness</p>	<p>Multicultural experience</p>

Holliday (2017)

High **interpretation** of what the codes mean

What is the impact of remembering the research question?

Therefore a lot of self-awareness and intuitive interpretation

And knowledge of who the people are

Might not be just words

<p>2. What do you think about the dominant view in some areas that doing a PhD in Britain is a particularly Western activity which might not have sufficient recognition of other backgrounds?</p>		
<p>Of the two questions, I think I'm struggling even more with this one. Does this question suggest that the way in which PhDs are structured in the UK is 'Western' and somehow doesn't recognize the backgrounds or talents of 'non-Westerners'? Or, is it suggesting that there is something unique about a 'British PhD'? Or is it suggesting possibly that 'the West' has a certain hegemony or monopoly on 'the business' of doing a PhD so that many 'non-Westerners' come to the UK to do a PhD? I'm not quite sure here.... I guess what I can say is that in my job I encounter a number of students who come to the UK with the idea of doing a PhD, but to many of these students, the whole PhD process is somewhat of a mystery. And yet, I felt exactly the same way when I thought about undertaking one. I didn't really know where to start and toyed with the idea for years. But it all seemed a bit of a mystery even though I was a relative 'insider' working within a university. I was able to get some advice and various people helped me navigate by talking about the process and work etc. But, I think for many people, a PhD is somewhat of a mystery. Now whether that is something that is unique to the UK, I couldn't even hazard a guess, but I wouldn't think so. And I think the element of 'mystery' can affect people regardless of any particular</p>	<p>More difficult The PhD is a mystery for everyone Also for insiders to the university</p>	<p>Different for everyone</p>
<p>The other thing that I have noticed is that there is no single way to do a PhD in Britain and I would guess in other places as well. I hear stories about students doing PhDs in, for example, Mechanical Engineering and while there is some overlap, a lot of what these students do is quite different to what is required of me. Even in other Schools (like Education) where one would expect significant similarities, I hear stories about their processes which leave me slightly surprised or where there appears to be significant differences – not necessarily a value judgment here. So, this is just at 1 university! I can't imagine how many various practices there are across the</p>	<p>Many types in Britain, universities, schools</p>	
<p>I'm aware of some particular differences in different countries or particular universities through talking to students, but these differences seem no more significant than the differences between practices even in just one university such as my own. People do PhDs all over the world.</p>	<p>Also countries</p>	

Interpretive micro-reading

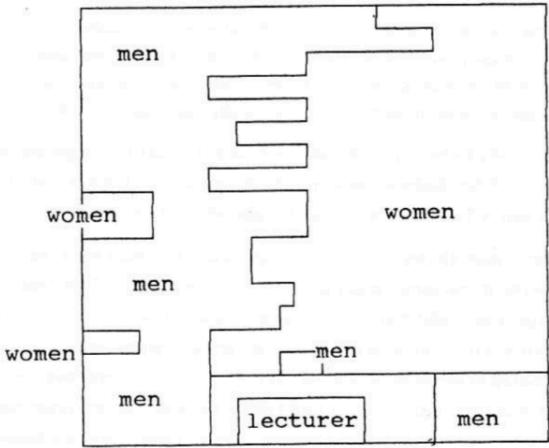
At the same time as thinking about larger extracts

Not a simple process of selecting and deciding

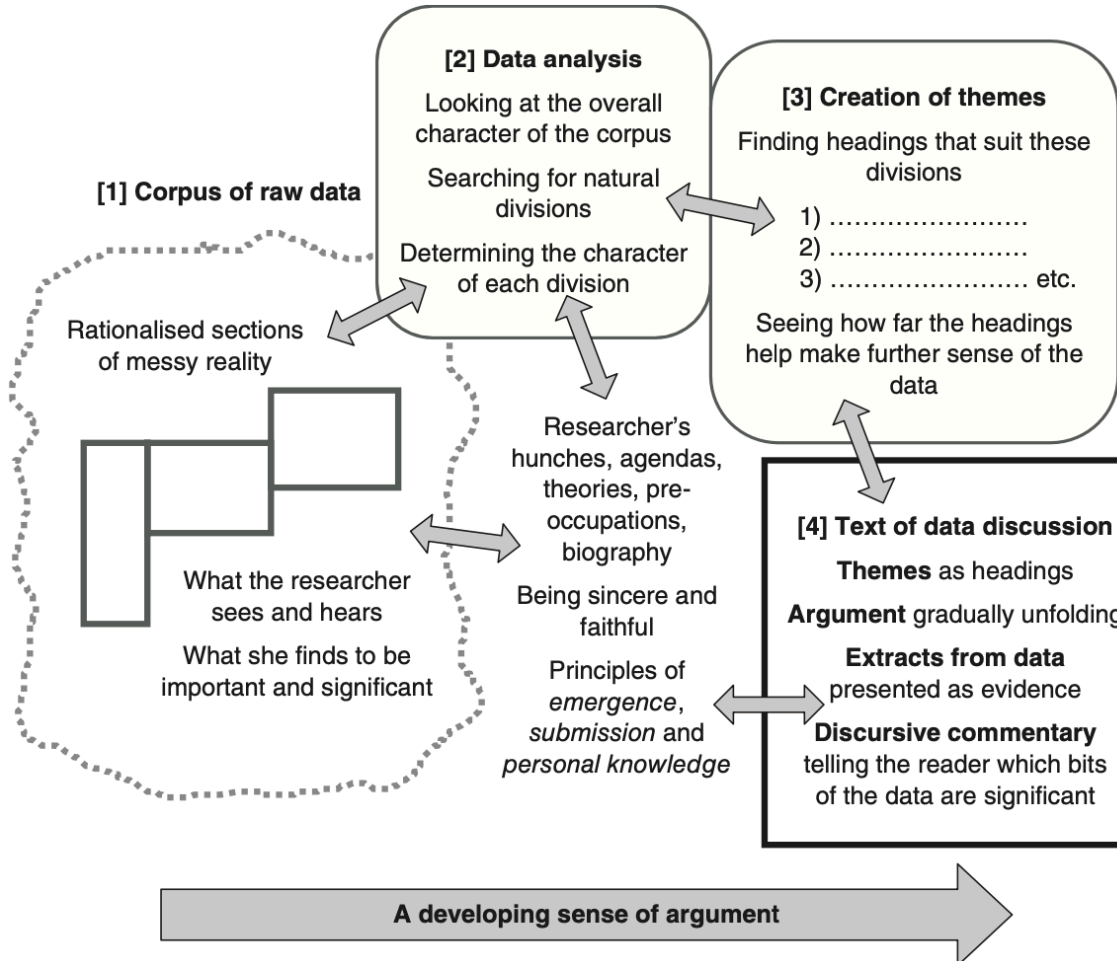
Data could also be visual or auditory

Images and drawings, speech and sound and video recordings

Holliday (1991)

		
<p>The students are blocked (cf. the American lecturer at site 8 reporting that at times of tension in Palestine, the blocking becomes Palestinians and the rest rather than men and women). As common in many classes, the women tended to be the majority in the front rows. There are classes where the women sit in the front half and the men sit in the back; but I have not seen the reverse situation.</p>		

The positioning of data and analysis



How data analysis is **located** in an always **highly subjective** process

Needs clear and precise accounting of **how** this is **managed**

Getting from inception and collection to convincing writing

Also, each stage is one more departure from the reality of what is being researched

The nature of the data

Multiple possibilities and combinations of data

Interview transcripts

Conversations

Documents, online materials, posters, adverts

Research diary, notes, drawings

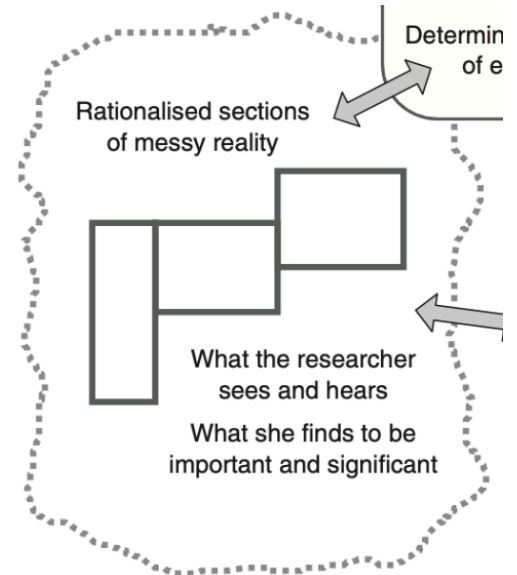
Photographs

Ethnographic and autoethnographic descriptions

Questionnaire responses

All partial and mediated (intersubjectively) by researcher gaze and behaviour

Which questions asked, where looking, research relations, locations, settings



Viva question: 'What did you do to ensure that the unexpected could emerge?'

The needs to understand the bigger politics

I've been trying to return to literature around coding of data as it still seems a bit like a very nebulous process. ... and I have a little project going on where we have a substantial amount of data from ...- email dialogue between our students. It's a challenge knowing the best way to approach this data and I feel **a bit like I'm making it up as I go**. (Experienced researcher)

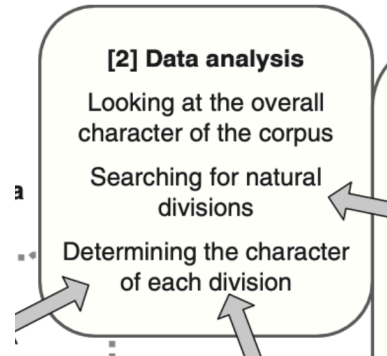
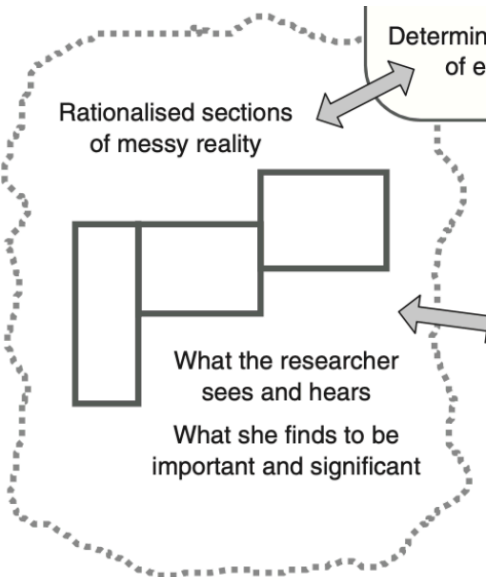
The ethnography's use of **classification** constitutes a use of language outside of its normal syntactic and semantic sense that point to or suggest other levels of meaning - that is, it functions as a trope that I shall call the **rhetoric of classification**. The understanding of ethnographic writing that I present here focuses on the **apparently pragmatic** way in which the text is organised into **chapters and sub-headings** within which is embedded **the 'verse' of daily life** as it is encountered in the fragmented rhythms of existence.

I argue that **the imagination of wholes is a rhetorical imperative** ... since it is this image of wholeness that gives the ethnography a sense of fulfilling 'closure' that other genres accomplish by different rhetorical means. (Thornton 1988: 285-286)

Ethnography? We need to be careful not to put things in tight boxes

The essential disciplines for coding and themes

‘What did you do to ensure that the unexpected could emerge?’

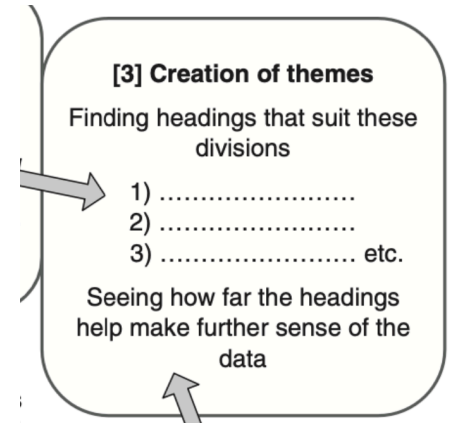


Close reading-analysis that takes you away from preoccupations

Occupying discipline and precision

Preventing you from just finding examples to ‘answer the questions’

Allowing the data to speak as much as it can in your (**hyper-self-conscious**) plan



Taking care to show that you are aware and taking care

All the interviews were transcribed, coded and sorted thematically. E-mail data, Field Notes and Critical Incidents from the author's Research Diary were also interpreted thematically and these latter either **extended** the themes arising from the interview data or were crucial in **developing new themes**. (Aboshiha 2008: 21)

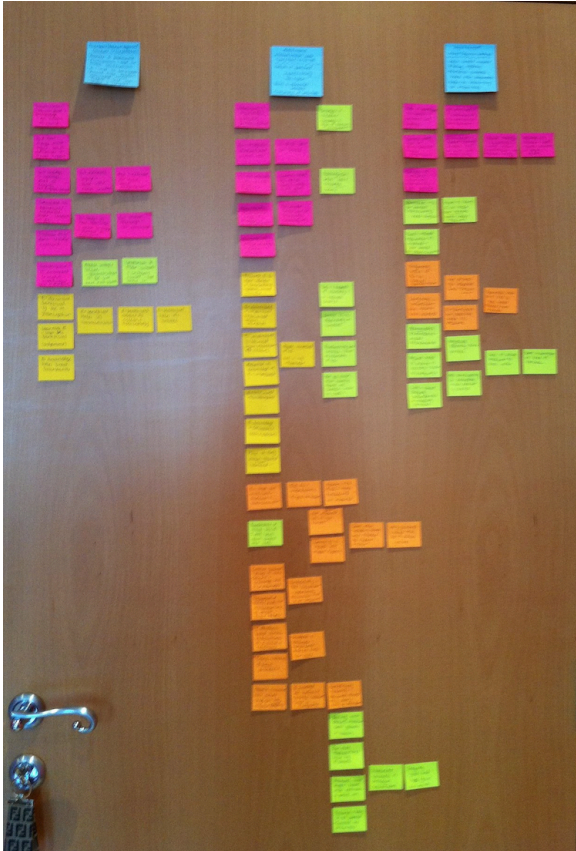
This I call '**data management**'. Specific and detailed conversations and tape-recorded interviews were transcribed in Canterbury. These too had to be selected primarily **according to the line of my enquiry and argument**. Subsequently they were, patiently and with exactitude, translated into English.

After a faithful translation was achieved, I highlighted, condensed, summarised, and presented these in short forms as texts in Chapter Four. Though 'fragments', these have each been read, and re-read again and again to make sure the specific terminology used by the participants, and the tone and direction of the 'whole' were preserved. This is **as much to do with my integrity, as is to do with theirs**. (Honarbin-Holliday 2005: 37-38)

Research questions ← 'line of enquiry' ↔ argument - the need to sort these out

Being disciplined in whatever you do

The picture from Ayesha Kamal (2012) shows the beginnings of data chapter formation



All the effort employed to develop this method **must be described in detail** in the thesis

As important as the data chapters themselves

Working with multiple data types

The first data corpus to be considered was my set of field notes which at the time consisted of approximately 15,000 words of raw data and included empirical data from the research setting. While a number of entries in the field notes were deemed to be largely insignificant **after coding the data, thirty-six entries** were considered to be suggestive of **nine broad themes** that could **tentatively** be considered. **Some** of these themes, i.e. 'naming', were ones that I had become aware of during the initial data collection phase and it was also clear that there were themes which overlapped substantially and needed greater clarification. These nine large themes were then **tentatively** arranged into the three following working groups.

There were also a number of sub-themes within each of these three groups:

- Group 1: Small Cultures; Disciplines and Structures; Teacher/Researcher Beliefs; Teacher/Research Identity; Naming;
- Group 2: Globalisation; Internationalisation; Discursive constructions of students and staff
- Group 3: Institutionalisation; Marketisation; Employability

These groups were **not considered as final**, but were placed to one side so that other data could be analysed and to **allow for thick description** and the **emergence of additional themes**. ...

The initial analysis in March allowed me to **tentatively identify** which data I judged to be of greatest relevance. I analysed the interview data to further establish emerging themes.

I elected not to use special software programmes such as N-vivo for this analysis, but instead read through the data and used a **colour coding system** which eventually resulted in **physical cuttings** of extracts of data placed into categories and arranged in **a spare room** within my home.

I expected there to be **substantial overlap** between the themes emerging from the field notes and those emerging from the interviews, particularly given that some of the field note entries were comments on particular aspects of the interviews, but I was **cautious against forcing data** into previously existing categories because I believed that **other previously unidentified** themes would emerge from what I considered to be a much richer data corpus.

(Collins 2016: 154ff):

Finding events instead of themes

This perception of the creatively co-constructed interview leads us to depart from the more established presentation of data through themes that emerge from coding. Instead, as with Amadasi and Holliday (2017), we have selected events that we feel best demonstrate the interplay of narratives, especially where the student leads us, the researchers, to contribute our own personal and occasionally grand narratives with our own agendas. They demonstrate how our own knowledge of particular grand narratives enables us both to analyse the data and to take part in the interviews. ...

Event 1: strategic holding back

In the first event, S tells us about an argument she has had with her 'host mother' about breaking her accommodation contract. Here, she describes how she does not reveal her anger during the confrontation but tells us what she was thinking when told that she can 'never be part of this culture':

(Amadasi & Holliday 2018: 246)

The events include the interviewer and show their intersubjective role

Encourages recall of the wider nature of the event and what led up to it

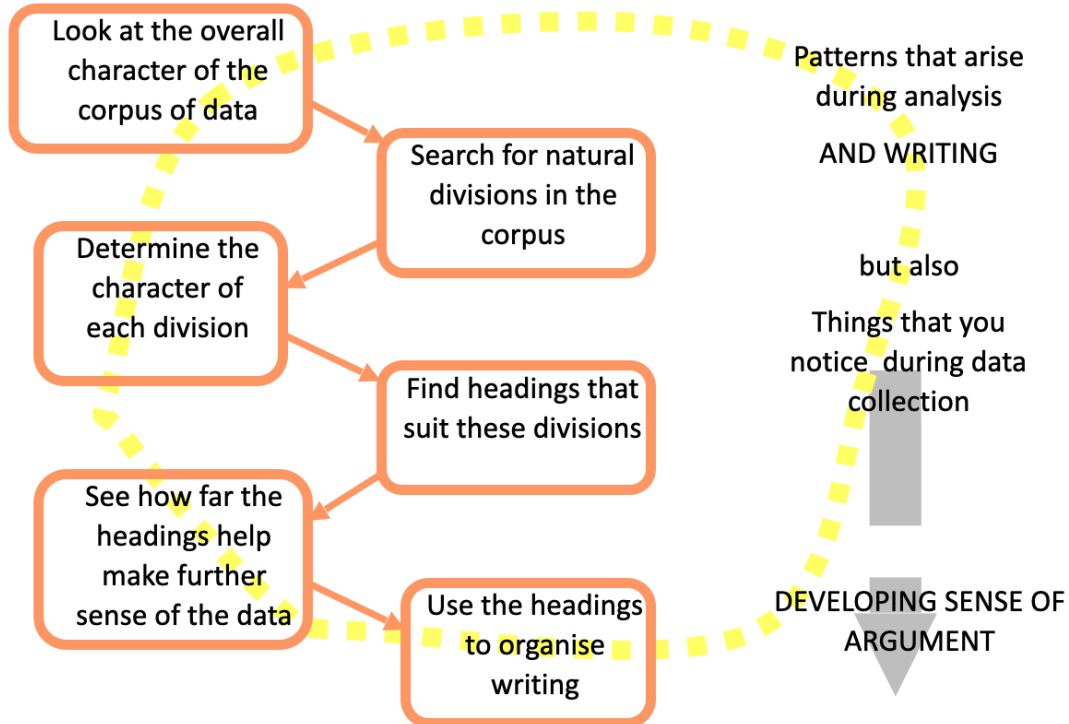
For example, a key to why S says what she says, and what she means, is how she is encouraged by the researchers and how she responded to the setting up of the interviews

'Sitting on my data' - sing Taoist principles

What I meant by 'sitting on my data' was that if we could forget ... the distinctions of data as 'them' and the researcher as the 'self', then we may arrive at a better understanding of the issues under scrutiny. I found that the whole data, like a flower bed, may, from a distance, appear to be brown, but when observed close-up, be found to contain vivid whites, reds or yellows. The researcher needs then to identify which colour among the flowers she considers most significant, and to alter her gaze accordingly. (Duan 2007: 71)

This was my adaptation of a core Taoist concept held by Zhuangzi, called *zuo wang*, literally meaning '**sitting in forgetfulness**', through which we might attain a state of absolute freedom, in which we **forgot the distinctions** between others and the self, and equate life and death, so all things become one'. (Duan 2007: 71)

Summary?



Bibliography

- Aboshiha (2008)**. Identity and dilemma: the 'native speaker' English language teacher in a globalising world. (PhD thesis). Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury.
- Amadasi & Holliday (2018)**. 'I already have a culture.' Negotiating competing grand and personal narratives in interview conversations with new study abroad arrivals. *Language & Intercultural Communication*, 18(12), 241-256.
- Atkinson (1990)**. *The ethnographic imagination*. Routledge.
- Berger & Luckmann (1966/1979)**. *The social construction of reality*. Penguin.
- Clifford & Marcus (Eds.) (1986)**. *Writing culture: the poetics of politics of ethnography*. University of California Press.
- Collins (2016)**. The emergence and institutionalisation of the intercultural: navigating uneven discourses in a British university. (PhD Thesis). Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury.
- Duan (2007)**. Yin and yang: the discourse politics of the Chinese university entrance examinations (the Gao Kao). (PhD Thesis). Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury.
- Holliday (1991)**. Dealing with tissue rejection in EFL projects: the role of an ethnographic means analysis. (PhD PhD thesis). Lancaster University, Lancaster.
- (2016). *Doing and writing qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- (2017). PhD students, interculturality, reflexivity, community and internationalisation. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 38(3), 206-218.
- Holliday & MacDonald (2020)**. Researching the intercultural: intersubjectivity and the problem with postpositivism. *Applied Linguistics*, 41(5), 621-639.
- Honarbin-Holliday (2005)**. *Art education, identity and gender at Tehran and al Zahra Universities*. (PhD thesis). Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury.
- Kamal (2012)**. Perceptions of globalisation among English language students at Kuwait University: voices of ownership. (PhD thesis). Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury.
- Thornton (1988)**. The rhetoric of ethnographic holism. *Cultural Anthropology*, 3(3), 285-303.