

**The linguistic construction of identity
in transnational relocation narratives**

Examining discursive practices in expatriate blogs

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

York St John University

School of Languages and Linguistics

April 2018

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to many people for the support they have given me throughout my research process. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisors, Prof Helen Sauntson and Dr Andrew Merrison, for their support, feedback and advice, as well as for their confidence in me and my project. They have made me feel welcome and appreciated from the start.

I am grateful to York St John University for the scholarship that has enabled me to study for a PhD in the UK, as well as to the members of the research unit LIdIA for providing such a friendly and inspiring research environment. My special thanks go to Prof Chris Hall for his support in the course of my annual progress report meetings and his feedback on my work, to Dr Beverly Geesin for reading my finished thesis and discussing it with me in a mock viva, as well as to Dr Clare Cunningham and Dr Chisato Danjo for sharing many writing sessions and conversations.

Throughout my doctoral studies, I was given many opportunities to broaden my academic experience. I thank Dr Rachel Wicaksono for enabling me to be involved in teaching and assessment on several modules and for the generous support I received for co-organising and hosting the international postgraduate conference ConSOLE. I am further grateful for numerous very productive and fully funded writing retreats provided both by the research unit LIdIA and the Academic Development Directorate. Also, I am thankful to researchers in my field for interesting conversations and helpful feedback on my work in the course of conferences.

Working on my thesis would have been an isolating experience without the friendship of a community of fellow research students in the Graduate Centre to share the ups and downs of the process. There are too many to name them all, but particularly ‘the usual suspects’: Tracy Donachie, Winojith Sanjeewa, Dr Lauren Stephenson, Dr Esmie Smith, Linda Marshall Griffiths, Dr Vicky Crawley, Joyce Wambura, Charlotte Haines Lyon, El Stannage, Thilini Wijeratne, Parvaz Ahmad, Jihong Guo, Rob O’Connor, Andy Pendle, Emma Anderson, Duminda Rajasinghe, Margaret Zabiszak, and Dr Cath Heinemeyer.

It is difficult to find adequate words to thank the people who are always there for me. I am grateful to my partner, Mike Saxton, for his unwavering belief in me, his willingness to listen and the love and strength he is giving me, and equally to my parents Hans and Esther and my sister Claudia for their love and support, no matter what. It means so much. *Danke vilmol.*

Last but not least, I would like to thank participants for allowing me to explore their blogs. It is the sharing of stories such as theirs that has inspired and shaped my research.

Abstract

This research examines the linguistic construction of identity in personal narratives of transnational relocation to England in expatriate blogs. These constitute a form of transition during which individuals engage with who they are. Adopting a sociocultural linguistic approach to identity, the analysis draws on the frameworks of tactics of intersubjectivity (ToI) and membership categorisation analysis (MCA) to show how identity is constructed along the relational dimensions of likeness, realness and power, and how individuals engage in category negotiations throughout their first year abroad.

Most commonly, individuals create similarity and difference with regard to both their country of origin and of residence, as well as to other expatriates with whom they share joint foreignness. Less frequently yet more prominently, they authenticate identity, which involves sharing personal experience, displaying expertise, as well as positioning themselves as able to provide unadorned accounts of life abroad and as finding fulfilment through relocation. However, they also denaturalise identity through expressions of rupture, challenges and being out of place. Issues of power revolve around individuals' process of obtaining necessary documents and of legitimising their blogging. Category negotiation extends from the initial challenge of not yet having moved whilst already sharing relocation narratives, as well as experiencing liminality, to adopting category membership as expatriates, exploring its predicates and challenging non-members' assumptions.

This thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge in two ways: empirically by exploring linguistic identity construction in online transnational relocation narratives, which is relevant for an understanding of how individuals discursively engage with transition more generally, and methodologically and theoretically by employing and critiquing two diverse approaches which to the researcher's knowledge have not been combined in research on linguistic identity construction. Ultimately, this thesis contributes towards the consideration of how identity and transition can be theorised and investigated using linguistic frameworks.

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Abbreviations

CA	conversation analysis
CMC	computer-mediated communication
GIF	graphics interchange format
MCA	membership categorisation analysis
ToI	tactics of intersubjectivity
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

Transcription conventions

All data are rendered verbatim, including spacing, typos, bold and italics, but are normalised for paragraphing.

Hyperlinks are underlined and details provided in square brackets.

Post titles are bold and indicated in the discussion.

Identifying information is glossed in square brackets.

PART I SETTING THE SCENE

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Transnational relocation and the expatriate blogosphere

A person's life consists of phases of greater and lesser stability. There are moments when an individual feels that circumstances in their life are changing, that they are undergoing a transition from one state of being to another. Such moments of perceived instability, when things are shifting and changing, are particularly interesting from a linguistic point of view. Individuals may feel that the changes in their life impact upon who they are as a person, and they may attempt to make sense of this experience through narrative. Telling stories about themselves and their daily life opens up a space in which individuals can position themselves and explore who they are, not just for the sake of others but crucially also for themselves. Identity is thereby not merely expressed, but constructed through language (De Fina 2016). Of course, identity is constantly under construction, yet an engagement with matters of identity may be especially prevalent at certain times.

A particular experience that can impact on an individual's sense of who they are as a person is moving to another country. They may conceptualise this as the beginning of a new stage in life and a new phase in their personal development. Whilst moving abroad is not something that everybody experiences, it is certainly becoming more common. The number of international migrants has increased greatly in recent decades and is likely to rise further in future years (International Organization for Migration 2010: 3). In 2017, there were nearly 258 million international migrants worldwide, amounting to 3.4% of the world population (United Nations DESA 2017). From a more local perspective, 588,000 individuals immigrated to the United Kingdom (henceforth UK) in 2016. The main reasons for immigration were work (47%), study (23%) and joining others (14%) (Office for National Statistics 2017). International migration is hence increasingly common and pursued for a variety of reasons.

There exist a wealth of resources that cater to the needs of individuals choosing to move abroad, many of which are available online. For instance, various websites provide information and advice regarding relocation as well as life in the new country, ranging from logistic and financial to sociocultural matters. Beyond such a factual approach, personal aspects of life abroad have great currency: emphasis is placed on individuals sharing their own experiences, and there are a variety of channels that enable them to do so. Several websites regularly feature interviews with so-called and self-identified ‘expatriates’ about their life abroad, and some collected stories are published in book form (Peterson Fenn 2011; Harling 2012; Gindre and Richert 2016). Moreover, a variety of ways of engaging with others and building a community are available. For instance, *InterNations* is a social networking site for individuals who have moved abroad, which has the declared motto of “connecting global minds” and which in different cities worldwide enables local communities to form and meet regularly (InterNations 2017b). Online communities further emerge in forums, email lists and through blogging. It is the environment of ‘expatriate blogging’ as a site of identity construction which is the focus of the present research.

Online directories list a multitude of blogs about living abroad which are grouped according to country of residence. They typically provide a brief description and a link to the website, which enables interested readers to identify blogs on moving to and living in a certain country. These blogs form the expatriate ‘blogosphere’. *Blogosphere* is a term coined by Brad L. Graham in 1999 to refer to the network of blogs available online (Myers 2010: 24). The expatriate blogosphere is thus a collection of blogs on living abroad with various interlinked connections to each other. *Expatriate* is adopted in the present research because it is the term participants use themselves; terminology pertaining to migration is critically discussed in Section 1.3. Such expatriate blogs not only enable individuals to keep in contact with their family and friends in their home country, but crucially they offer individuals a personal space to share and reflect upon their unfolding experiences of transnational relocation and how this constitutes a personal transition.

The present research examines this transition from a linguistic point of view. The focus lies on identity construction in narratives detailing individuals’ experiences of relocating and living abroad. To this end, it examines personal blogs written by

American, Australian and New Zealand nationals who have moved to England – though in their blogs they may refer to Britain or the UK more broadly and not necessarily consistently. As a clarification, the term *abroad* is taken to signify that a person is in a country other than that which they have grown up in and would consider home. In the context of the present research, *abroad* is therefore used synonymously with *England*. Such a use of terminology adopts participants’ perspective and has the benefit of serving as a reminder that England is being viewed through the eyes of the other.

Life abroad is experienced in very different ways depending on the context of relocation. Many individuals who relocate to other countries within an international company may live in secluded compounds along with other foreign nationals and potentially compatriots who may constitute most of their social contacts (Fechter 2007). They thus live in what Fechter (2007: 47) refers to as an expatriate “bubble”: a fleeting space of “exotic attractiveness” created as separate from its surroundings. In contrast, participants in the present research, and arguably expatriate bloggers living in England in general, are not embedded in a secluded environment for like-minded foreign nationals and are often required to cope without support other than what the above-mentioned online resources can provide. Yet neither are they part of a physical community of compatriots who have relocated to England. Instead, they are more prone to engage with locals in their environment and to be perceived as individuals rather than as part of a group of people having relocated. This results in their comparative inconspicuousness in everyday life. It does however not entail that they do not engage with likeminded others who have undergone transnational relocation. Yet they do so in an online environment, and specifically in a multitude of personalised spaces within the expatriate blogosphere united by this common practice of expatriate blogging.

The blogs analysed in the present research contain narratives of settling in another country as a new place of residence rather than visiting it as a tourist. Expatriate blogs are, as such, distinct from travel blogs. The latter are a means of sharing travel narratives online and through them constructing identity (Mascheroni 2007). They are related to expatriate blogs for their documentation of exploring different countries and engaging to varying degrees with a different sociocultural environment. Recent research has explored individuals’ preoccupations with travel and tourism through

personal blogs (Snee 2014a; Bosangit et al. 2015). Yet little research has examined blogs written by individuals who relocate rather than merely travel to a different country. A notable exception is a German project on blogs written by French- and Spanish-speaking migrants to Québec (Kluge 2011; Frank-Job and Kluge 2012). However, an in-depth linguistic exploration of how identity is constructed in such narratives is lacking. It is this issue that this thesis seeks to address.

The above discussion has outlined that the present research argues that transnational relocation can engender narratives of transition in the form of expatriate blogging. Transition is taken to signify a “passing or passage from one condition, action, or (rarely) place, to another” (Oxford English Dictionary 2018), which may be experienced as a turning point or period of change. Such a passage occurs on multiple levels when individuals move abroad. Firstly, transition in its Latin origin (from *trans* ‘across’ and *ire* ‘go’) occurs literally in the going across national borders, although this meaning is marked as less common in the above definition. A move from one country to another requires considerable administrative and logistic effort, such as organising the packing and shipping of personal belongings, ensuring that the relevant documentation is obtained in time, and actually making the journey.

Beyond these physical aspects, moving abroad entails a breakdown of established structures, routines and possibly relationships and necessitates a re-establishing of these in the new environment. These range from house, work and school via financial and health arrangements to social aspects such as friends and leisure activities. To varying degrees these aspects apply to any relocation also within the same country. However, they are arguably heightened if the move involves crossing national, sociocultural and linguistic borders: the new community of residence will differ in its structures and conventional ways of doing things, and often unexpectedly so, rendering the newcomer a stranger in need of learning these new patterns and ways of doing things (Schütz 1944).

This leads to the third and most crucial level on which transnational relocation involves a transition: because it makes individuals into strangers needing to familiarise themselves with their new environment, it impacts on their sense of who they are and foregrounds questions of identity. Transition is therefore not just a mere change of circumstances, but the effect this has upon an individual (Bridges 2004). The narratives

shared in expatriate blogs not only revolve around the physical move and the organisational aspects it entails, but they also constitute a space for engagement with how living abroad impacts on individuals. At the same time, exploring linguistic identity construction in narratives of transition engendered by relocation does not imply that identity is stable before the move abroad, and then undergoes a transition to finally stabilise again in the new country. Rather, it is constantly constructed and negotiated, as outlined above. Yet the present research argues that identity is specifically salient to individuals who perceive themselves as being in a transitional phase, and that the negotiation of such an experience is accessible through expatriate blogs.

1.2 Aims and contribution of this thesis

The present research aims to explore linguistic identity construction in expatriate blogs. This section presents the questions that this thesis sets out to answer and discusses how they are addressed and why they are relevant. The first research question pertains to the construction of identity.

RQ1 How do expatriates linguistically construct identity in their blogs?

This question operates under a social constructionist understanding of reality, which posits that identity is discursively constructed and negotiated rather than being a stable essence or property of an individual. How current linguistic approaches conceptualise identity is further elaborated on in Chapter 2. An investigation of identity construction in expatriate blogs is worthwhile due to the insight this promises to yield on how individuals linguistically engage with experiencing phases of personal transition and potentially changing as a person. In fact, transition is to date “an under-researched area in sociolinguistics” (Angouri et al. 2017: 1) and deserves closer attention. Whilst identity may emerge from any semiotic resource, the focus here lies on discursive practices carried out through language. To gain insight into these, Research Question 1 is broken down into the following two subquestions.

RQ1.1 How does identity emerge from a discursive negotiation of likeness, realness and power?

RQ1.2 How do expatriates negotiate membership categories in the course of their relocation and first year abroad?

Both research questions require an engagement with linguistic data on the micro-level of interaction, yet they differ in focus. Research Question 1.1 aims to explore different dimensions within which individuals position themselves and others, and how these singly and jointly contribute to the emergence of identity. Focusing on more than one dimension allows for the complexity of identity and its construction. For this purpose, Bucholtz and Hall's (2004a, 2004b) framework of *tactics of intersubjectivity* (henceforth ToI) is adopted, which is detailed in Section 2.3 regarding its application in previous work and in Chapter 5 in terms of how it is employed in the present research. The findings answering Research Question 1.1 are then discussed in Chapter 6 (power), Chapter 7 (likeness) and Chapter 8 (realness).

Complementing this dimensional focus, Research Question 1.2 places an emphasis on categorisation for identity construction. For this purpose, it explores the data informed by *membership categorisation analysis* (henceforth MCA), an analytic approach developed from Sacks' (1992) work. The analytic focus lies on negotiations of categories and how individuals employ these throughout the course of their relocation and first year abroad to construct identity. This enables the present research to capture how transition is expressed. How MCA has previously been employed in research on identity is discussed in Section 2.4, and its application and adaption for the present research is detailed in Chapter 9. The trajectory of category negotiations emerging from the analysis is presented in Chapter 10.

These two subquestions serve to answer Research Question 1 and at the same time generate a second question, which in turn is concerned with the analytical approach of research on identity construction.

RQ2 What can an approach informed by membership categorisation analysis contribute to the tactics of intersubjectivity for an understanding of linguistic identity construction in phases of personal transition?

Having explored identity construction first through the lens of ToI and then informed by MCA, the present research engages with its own design. This not only enables a critical reflection on the benefits and limitations of drawing on different methodologies, but it also aims to generate a wider discussion of how identity can be analysed, specifically in data that capture individuals' linguistic engagement with personal transition. In the course of their life, an individual may undergo several formative experiences, and the present research hopes to engender a better understanding of how identity is constructed during such phases by providing insight into one particular context, transnational relocation as accessible through expatriate blogging. Research Question 2 is addressed in Chapter 10 wherever relevant connections emerge between the analysis and findings discussed in previous chapters. Subsequently, the main findings are revisited in Chapter 11, which addresses an integration of the two approaches.

Exploring the linguistic construction of identity in expatriate blogs is worthwhile for a number of reasons. In their commentary on the relationship between theorising and analysing identity, Bucholtz and Hall (2008b) point out that research on identity construction must be clear about its ultimate purpose and thus look beyond the mere application of a framework (such as ToI) to data. Instead, they propose a number of goals that the study of identity may pursue, of which two resonate with the present research. Firstly, such an exploration may serve "to describe an identity that has been unrecognized or misrecognized by researchers or cultural members" (Bucholtz and Hall 2008b: 160). As discussed in Section 1.1, migration is increasingly common, and there are available online a wealth of resources tailored to the needs of individuals experiencing such a move abroad, with expatriate blog directories featuring prominently. However, individuals who are undergoing transnational relocation and are sharing this in their personal blogs have remained largely unrecognised in previous work, a gap which the present research seeks to remedy. Secondly, such research may strive "to add greater nuance to the conceptualization of identity and its construction" (Bucholtz and Hall 2008b: 161). This is another goal of the present research, as argued in the above discussion of Research Question 2. The findings therefore promise to be of relevance beyond the context of expatriate blogging.

This thesis seeks to make an original contribution to knowledge pertaining to analysis as well as theory and methodology. Empirically, the present research illustrates that expatriate blogs are a worthwhile site for the study of identity construction. Firstly, they grant insight into participants' unsolicited narratives, and the present research supports a view of identity not merely as narrated, but rather as constructed through narrative, as elaborated in Section 3.1. Moreover, expatriate blogs show individuals' sense-making of transnational relocation over time, which makes them ideally suited for an investigation of identity construction in phases of transition and thus gives them a relevance that extends beyond adding to an understanding of migration.

Finally, regarding the theoretical and methodological aspect, the present research makes an original contribution by combining ToI with an approach informed by MCA, which aims to foster a dialogue between traditionally discrete fields of research. This is in line with recent work in sociocultural linguistics that calls for a greater exchange between different areas of study (Bucholtz and Hall 2008a), as detailed in Section 2.2. An in-depth application of ToI and MCA to new data promises to operationalise the frameworks and advance them by uncovering areas in which they may be expanded. Furthermore, it opens up space for discussion of how identity is conceptualised and explored in current linguistic research.

1.3 Categorisation in migration: a critical discussion of terminology

Researching individuals' linguistic identity construction in the course of migration is a complex issue and requires a clarification of what kind of migration experience participants are undergoing. The challenge does not only lie in outlining participants' experience as it is mediated through narrative, but extends to a struggle for terminology: the mere categorisation of individuals who migrate is problematic. However, the fact that migration is such a broad and interdisciplinary phenomenon results in a wealth of terminology, a choice of which inevitably entails a positioning within previous research. It is neither the aim nor within the scope of this thesis to resolve this issue, yet acknowledging it is an important step in framing the present research, especially as it is concerned with identity construction and categorisation as one means of doing so. This section therefore explains and critically discusses this

terminological challenge. It firstly sets apart *privileged migration* from other forms of migration and mobility. Subsequently, three ways of conceptualising privileged migration are outlined – *lifestyle migration*, *transnationalism* and *expatriation* – and the implications of such classification are reflected upon. Finally, the discussion provides a rationale for the terminology adopted in the present research.

The first distinction that needs to be made is between different forms of mobility. People spend varying amounts of time abroad and for very different reasons, and indeed the distinction between tourism and other forms of travel as opposed to migration is not as clear-cut as it may seem (Williams and Hall 2002). For instance, Cohen et al. (2015) discuss the phenomenon of *lifestyle mobility* as constituting a middle ground between temporary mobility and permanent migration, with individuals repeatedly moving on to new locations, but not necessarily back to their place of origin. Length of stay is a distinguishing factor between tourism and migration, as is the notion of residence, which changes for migrants but is taken to remain the same for tourists. The United Nations (United Nations DESA 1998: 10) use the term *long-term international migrant* to refer to “[a] person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence”. Central to this concept are hence a move across national borders, a stay in a country for at least one year and making this country one’s place of residence. A long-term international migrant thus relocates to and settles in a foreign country for an extended period of time and potentially permanently, whilst a traveller or tourist would not consider that country their place of residence.

Yet with an attempt at clarifying the boundary between travel/tourism and migration, the issue is still not resolved. The above definition of long-term international migrants is very general and does not distinguish between different circumstances, even though migration is a broad field that encompasses diverse experiences. This leads to a second necessary distinction, which needs to offer ways of characterising particular types of migration contexts. Yet before addressing this issue any further, a caveat is in order: the following discussion does not aim to simplify the matter by unquestioningly categorising individuals as certain types of migrants. Instead, it can provide only an overview of broad phenomena of migration and show how current research aims to

establish meaningful and coherent areas of investigation. Ultimately, every individual's experiences are unique and may well not fit neatly into one type or another. Furthermore, it needs to be acknowledged that terms like *immigrant* or *expatriate* are ideologically laden and have connotations that suggest something about individuals' environment and background, such as race and social class, which a mere focus on the denotations of these terms fails to capture. Therefore, as much as helping to clarify different circumstances of migration, the following discussion serves to illustrate just how complex the matter is.

Following O'Reilly (2012), migration may be classified into four broad areas: refugees and forced migration, domestic labour migration, labour migration and lifestyle migration. This is a distinction based on individuals' motivations for and circumstances of moving, including notions of privilege or lack thereof as well as the role of push and pull factors, a dichotomy of reasons driving individuals to leave their country and attracting them to another one (O'Reilly 2012: 40). However, O'Reilly (2012: 17) points out that both structure and agency are relevant in people's migration and that they are in fact interrelated. Under the umbrella term of labour migration, she discusses relatively low-skilled and low-paid migration of Mexicans to the United States (henceforth US). In turn, she illustrates lifestyle migration with the phenomenon of British people moving to the Spanish coast in pursuit of a better life, pointing out that this form of migration is "motivated more by quality of life than employment or escape from poverty or hardship" (O'Reilly 2012: 67). This distinction fails to capture the nuances of this latter form of migration. Hence, whilst O'Reilly's classification is helpful in distinguishing forms of relatively unprivileged migration, it does not treat in great detail more privileged contexts of migration. Therefore, the following paragraphs discuss privileged migration more generally, which is the area of research this thesis is situated in and of which lifestyle migration is but one part. In fact, various research has emphasised that privileged migration is underexplored (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Croucher 2012; O'Reilly 2012), which in itself already makes its study a worthwhile endeavour. Croucher (2012) refers to the various forms of crossing national borders by the term *privileged mobility*, which again highlights how subtle the distinction between migration and travel can be. However, in the course of the present research, the slightly narrower concept of *privileged migration* is favoured.

It needs to be stressed that when referring to the type of migration which is shared in expatriate blogs as ‘privileged’, this is by no means meant in any judgemental way. The term serves to distinguish individuals’ experiences from other contexts such as forced or labour migration, but in this sense privilege is a broad concept. Whilst it encompasses a notion of choice, the degree of control that individuals have over their relocation is not unlimited, as discussed in Section 6.2. Neither does privilege imply that all individuals undergoing such a move abroad are in a financially or socially privileged position, nor that they would consider themselves so. Individuals who could be deemed privileged may even experience a financial disadvantage after their relocation compared to life in their country of origin (Lawson 2017a: 59). Indeed, the analysis and discussion in subsequent chapters show that moving abroad is in no way straightforward and free of challenges. In this vein, expatriate blogs are testimony to the fact that people who relocate to a different country have stories to tell, and the present research demonstrates that these stories are worth listening to.

A first type of privileged migration, as outlined above, is *lifestyle migration*. Lifestyle migrants are “relatively affluent individuals, moving either part-time or full-time, permanently or temporarily, to places which, for various reasons, signify for the migrants something loosely defined as quality of life” (Benson and O’Reilly 2009: 621). Again, this points to the blurred boundary between tourism and migration, as some lifestyle migrants may be second home owners or seasonal rather than permanent residents. Research has for instance focused on British migrants on the Spanish coast (O’Reilly 2000) and in French rural areas (Benson 2011; Lawson 2016). A defining aspect of lifestyle migration is thus the striving for a better life abroad. However, this has been criticised given that ultimately all migrants seek a better way of life; what characterises lifestyle migration is therefore individuals’ options for a better life abroad as well as their relative ease – financial or otherwise – to implement such a move (Croucher 2012: 4). Indeed, Benson and O’Reilly (2009: 620) maintain that the phenomenon of lifestyle migration is worth studying because it is “both growing and diversifying”. This is further emphasised in their more recent work (Benson and O’Reilly 2016), which stresses that the concept is not intended to create distinct and homogenous categories, but rather to think about migration from the point of view of lifestyle considerations. At the same time, following Croucher’s (2012) appeal to focus on the availability of options and choice, Lawson (2016: 20) offers a definition of

lifestyle migrants as “people whose resources enable them to move elsewhere with a choice of possibilities available for a different, often better, lifestyle”. This brief discussion shows that even within lifestyle migration research, there is no absolute consensus; instead, a variety of foci and definitions are in play. What unites research in this area is that it generally takes a qualitative, ethnographic approach and explores motivations, relocation narratives and “changing identities through migration” (Benson and O’Reilly 2016: 23).

Secondly, privileged migration may be viewed through the lens of *transnationalism*. The notion of transnationalism emerged in the 1990s to capture contemporary migration experiences no longer strictly divided by national borders (O’Reilly 2012: 61). As Portes et al. (1999: 217) point out, the concept of transnational migration encompasses the circumstances of individuals who lead “dual lives”, engage in activities across national borders and are at home in two countries. *Transnational* is hence used to refer to forms of migration in which individuals are able to maintain connections to their home country due to advances in technology that allow them to travel and communicate across national borders and thus lead a life encompassing both their country of origin and country of residence (Leonard 2010: 12). Such research refrains from viewing immigration as creating “an abrupt rupture between ‘there’ and ‘here’” (Croucher 2012: 4), which enables it to see beyond a mere focus on whether individuals assimilate to their new country of residence (O’Reilly 2012: 61). Furthermore, a body of research within transnationalism, so-called ‘transnationalism from below’, focuses on the local rather than on more global trends by examining individuals’ experiences of migration (Leonard 2010: 12).

Research on transnationalism has largely assumed such migrants to be marginalised, although privileged migration is likely to involve a life across national borders, as Croucher (2012: 5) points out. Other than focusing on marginalisation, transnationalism has been taken to apply to members of a global elite, as in Beaverstock’s (2005) work on British inter-company transferees within the financial sector in New York. Yet little research has been done on such transnationalism which Conradson and Latham (2005a: 229) refer to as “middling”, involving individuals whose status both in their country of origin and in their new environment is middle class in terms of education and financial means. A case in point are New Zealanders on their so-called ‘Overseas Experience’

(Conradson and Latham 2005b: 300): they may move to London for a few years, not so much for financial reasons as to pursue some form of “self-realisation and self-fashioning”, and at the same time retain links to their friendship networks back home or even see their friends relocate to London as well. Such forms of migration can be conceptualised as relatively privileged, albeit not elite. Indeed, Conradson and Latham (2005b: 288) emphasise that people from more and more diverse backgrounds are beginning to view spending some time living in another country as a normal or even expectable life experience. Therefore, they argue, it is necessary to consider how mobility is conceptualised and studied, and exploring relatively privileged phenomena of transnationalism situated between elite and marginalised migration can offer a new perspective on this.

As another advantage of such an approach, the focus on the everyday dynamic engagement of people living their life in more than one country counteracts the tendency of previous work to view migration across national borders as abnormal (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). As such, it challenges ‘methodological nationalism’, which is “the assumption that the nation state society is the natural social and political form of the modern world” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 217). Transnationalism is therefore a worthwhile concept for exploring contemporary forms of relatively privileged migration.

However, the extent to which transnationalism applies needs to be critically examined in every research context. For instance, Fechter’s (2007) ethnographic study of transnational spaces in Jakarta illustrates that life for transnational migrants is not borderless. Instead, their housing situation, social clubs and networks create distinct spaces with more or less permeable boundaries. Nor does transnationalism fully capture the situation of migrants who strongly engage with their surroundings. In her work on lifestyle migrants in rural areas in France, Benson (2010, 2011) shows how her participants make an effort to integrate into the local community. Whilst they maintain transnational ties to compatriots both at home and living in the vicinity, they tend to downplay such connections as they appear to be opposed to their pursuit of full local integration. Research therefore needs to consider not only whether transnationalism aptly describes a given context, but also whether participants themselves would identify with or reject such a framework and its implications.

A third way of referring to people who move abroad under relatively privileged circumstances is by the term *expatriate*. It has evolved from originally signifying a loss of citizenship to today's understanding of denoting a person who resides outside their home country (Green 2009). The Oxford English Dictionary (2018) adds a nuance by defining the modifier *expatriate* as "living in a foreign country esp. by choice", which resonates with Croucher's (2012) focus on the options available to individuals for pursuing what they deem a better life abroad. Indeed, the term is used within human resources research for highly skilled professionals relocating to a different country for work purposes (for instance, O'Reilly 2003; Wang and Kanungo 2004). Expatriates may initiate such a move themselves, or they may be transferred abroad by virtue of being employees of an international company. The length of stay may be predefined or open-ended, but several expatriates will either relocate elsewhere or back home after a number of years, although this may only become clear to them in the course of their stay.

The above explanation of expatriation appears to delimit relatively clearly a particular migration context. However, referring to migrants as expatriates is not unproblematic, as this might be understood to imply something about the people involved. Outside an academic context, the term *expatriate* as opposed to *migrant* or *immigrant* may be taken to include only ethnically white individuals of a Western background or even more narrowly of a certain social class, national and linguistic origin (DeWolf 2014; Koutonin 2015). Yet such notions may also apply to academic discourses: Leonard (2010: 2) cautions against the term because it connotes "classed Western whiteness", and Croucher (2012: 4) maintains that whilst terms like *lifestyle migrant*, *transnational* or *expatriate* show the privilege connected with certain forms of migration, they at the same time reinforce such privilege. The distinction between expatriates and immigrants has further been criticised for its tangible impact, such as on integration policies. For instance, in the case of Switzerland, foreign nationals are required to learn a national language to show their willingness to integrate, which 'immigrants' need to demonstrate, whilst in the case of 'expatriates', monolingualism in English is taken to signify cosmopolitanism (Yeung 2016). A comparable situation is observed by Leinonen (2012) regarding US American migrants in Finland. Their use of English to interact with the local population is generally welcomed, yet suggests that they are not planning to stay in the country permanently. In contrast, speaking Finnish with an

accent positions them as immigrants, with potentially negative connotations. Leinonen (2012: 220) concludes that English-speaking US Americans are privileged not to be seen as immigrants, but as conducive to the country's "internationalization". Finally, a similar observation is made by Vora (2012) regarding the distinction between expatriates and migrants in the English-language blogosphere of the United Arab Emirates: English-speaking residents from a Western, middle-class background are seen as expatriates who contribute to discourses of cosmopolitanism and are positioned at the centre of the online community, whilst residents originating from South Asia are seen as migrants and positioned as not belonging.

Much research on this form of migration is situated in a human resources or management context and approaches the phenomenon from a positivist angle (Leonard 2010: 3). For instance, research has focused on expatriate adjustment, which can provide suggestions for companies in terms of human resources management (for instance, O'Reilly 2003; van Oudenhoven et al. 2003; Wang and Kanungo 2004; Lee and Sukoco 2008). Departing from such a focus, Leonard (2010) takes an ethnographic approach to expatriates and their work context, exploring expatriate identity and how race and ethnicity matter in their life. This resonates with the above-mentioned caveat of notions of Westernness and whiteness that expatriates may be associated with.

The term *expatriate* is further employed in an online context (Leonard 2010: 1; Croucher 2012: 4), as illustrated in the discussion of the expatriate blogosphere in Section 1.1. For instance, the social network InterNations conduct an annual survey amongst their members and other expatriates about their experiences of life abroad. As part of the report, they publish a typology which distinguishes between ten different types of expatriates. Beyond moving for work purposes (assigned, recruited or self-initiated) individuals are classified according to the further motivations of education, romantic relationship, family (accompanying spouse or family reasons), lifestyle (moving to a personal dream destination or looking for enhanced quality of life) as well as a desire for adventure (InterNations 2017a: 149-150). This shows that *expatriate* is used beyond the context of company assignments to refer to people moving abroad more generally, both by individuals themselves and organisations catering for their needs. Furthermore, the term is clearly taken to imply a notion of privilege or choice in migration, as no type in the InterNations typology captures individuals who have to

leave their home country because of hardship. It needs to be acknowledged that this typology is not aimed to contribute to academic discourse on migration and indeed simplifies a complex matter by suggesting the existence of clear-cut and mutually exclusive types of expatriates to which respondents can be unambiguously assigned. Nevertheless, the typology reflects a desire to make sense of and bring order into the experience of individuals moving to a different country. As such, it testifies to the fact that the challenge to classify individuals' circumstances is not only a concern of research on migration, but also of the individuals themselves involved in the experience.

The above discussion has illustrated not only that distinguishing migration from other forms of mobility is not always straightforward, but also that migration can itself take many shapes and that there are a variety of ways in which to conceptualise and approach forms of relatively privileged migration. Indeed, although O'Reilly (2012: 39) presents a classification of different forms of migration, she asserts that migration has "diversified beyond all attempts to define types and flows", so that any categorisation brings with it challenges and implications. Indeed, none of the above three terms completely captures the context of the present research. The practice of expatriate blogging cuts across classifications as it unites individuals who are in broad terms privileged migrants, yet with diverse backgrounds and motivations. Nevertheless, a reference term needs to be chosen for reasons of practicality. Based on the elaborations above, the present research refers to participants as *expatriates*, and their blogging is conceptualised as *transnational relocation narratives*. The following paragraphs present the rationale for this choice of terminology.

Whilst the term *expatriate* has the above-mentioned disadvantage of having a potential connotation of only including white Western individuals, it is usually employed to refer not only to individuals who relocate on an international assignment, but also more broadly in online contexts such as the expatriate blogosphere, both by directories and by participants themselves. It is employed in this thesis to refer to individuals who have relocated transnationally under relatively privileged circumstances for various reasons, as evident in their personal blogs. The present research therefore adopts participants' points of view rather than assigning them to a category with which they themselves do not identify. It thereby avoids imposing the researcher's take on their situation and

allows the data to speak for themselves, which is in line with the micro-level approach of both ToI and MCA. Hence, whilst the term *expatriate* needs to be understood critically, it renders it possible to remain close to the data and participants' lived circumstances.

The experience individuals undergo is here referred to as *transnational relocation*. In the context of the present research, *relocation* is understood as an individual's change of residence, specifically to a different country, and is used synonymously with *move*. The modifier *transnational* takes into account participants' sustained connection to home, which is found to be far more pervasive than occasional visits. In fact, the present research views expatriate blogging as a transnational practice. Such blogs are frequently begun with the declared intention to keep friends and family informed about life abroad. Yet over time they gain a larger audience, including people from the blogger's new sociocultural environment as well as others who have moved to a different country. Not only do expatriate blogs enable connections between individuals across national borders, but the crossing of borders extends to the way identity is constructed. Participants position themselves as similar or different both regarding their home and England, and show awareness of their audience as composed of individuals both from their old and new environment as well as fellow expatriates with whom they have connected through blogging. This is illustrated and discussed further in the analysis. The crossing of borders that warrants the term *transnationalism* need therefore not be physical, but occurs virtually in the expatriate blogosphere.

1.4 Structure of this thesis

This thesis consists of four parts, each with a distinct aim. Part I establishes the context in which the present research is situated. Chapter 1 outlines the understanding of transnational relocation and privileged migration adopted in the present research and emphasises the terminological challenge pertaining to it. It further argues that exploring linguistic identity construction in expatriate blogs is a worthwhile endeavour both in terms of its findings and for the contribution they in turn can make to how research conceptualises and approaches identity. Chapter 2 discusses identity and the conceptual framework of this thesis. It outlines current approaches to identity in linguistics with a

focus on sociocultural linguistics and the two methodological frameworks adopted in the present research, ToI and MCA. The chapter ends on situating the present research within the discussed fields of study, including a reflection on how ToI and MCA can work together in an examination of how identity is linguistically constructed. Chapter 3 explores narratives as a site of linguistic identity construction, and specifically in the context of transition, by reviewing previous work from both linguistics and other cognate disciplines. It first provides an overview of how the study of narrative in social sciences has developed in recent years. Blogs can be understood as a form of narrative engendered by new media, and the discussion traces how research on blogging has come to study this practice with a focus on what individuals do with it and its potential for identity construction. Subsequently, the discussion outlines liminality as a way of conceptualising transition, and finally details key findings of select studies engaged with narratives of transition. Chapter 4 focuses on the analysed data. The discussion encompasses a reflection on the researcher's position within the research context, the selection process, its rationale and potential limitations as well as ethical considerations. Finally, the selected data are described in more detail. This concludes the setting of the scene, which establishes the context of and need for the present research, its foundation in previous academic enquiry and the data it engages with.

Part II is dedicated to ToI. Chapter 5 discusses how the framework enables an exploration of dimensions of identity construction. It details methodological decisions and provides a brief overview of the findings on the basis of which the subsequent analysis is positioned. The ensuing chapters each discuss the findings for one dimension of ToI. The role of institutional power in identity construction is detailed in Chapter 6, beginning with how expatriates construct themselves as attaining legitimacy through *authorisation*. The chapter further explores moments of *illegitimation*, when such legitimacy is not granted. Chapter 7 focuses on the dimension of likeness. Constructions of similarity, *adequation*, and of difference, *distinction*, are discussed, both regarding individuals' origin and present environment in England, as well as their interrelation. Chapter 8 examines the notion of realness. It first explores the process of *authentication* through which expatriates establish authenticity. Subsequently, it argues for the important part that *denaturalisation* (the construction of identity as not genuine) plays in expatriate blogs. Indeed, the findings show that *denaturalisation* ultimately

contributes to *authentication*, which illustrates the dynamic interplay between the different tactics of ToI.

Moving on from a focus on dimensions of identity construction to matters of categorisation, Part III comprises the discussion of methodology and analysis of the MCA-informed approach taken in the present research. Chapter 9 describes the methodological procedure. Firstly, it details how the focus on category negotiations led to a distinction between individuals' engagement with their fit in a category and their change of category membership. Subsequently, the analysis centred on categories occasioned within a particular context, which is elaborated on under the label of *transnational relocation device*. The discussion then turns to methodological considerations and argues for the contribution an adaption of MCA can make. The findings from the MCA-informed analysis are discussed in Chapter 10. They can be broadly grouped into three parts by distinguishing category negotiations pertaining to before, during and after relocation. The findings show that negotiations develop over the course of participants' relocation and first year abroad. Of particular importance is individuals' engagement with predicates and a select number of categories to which they portray themselves as belonging, namely the liminal, the new beginner, the expatriate and the invisible expat. The chapter ends by discussing the impact of a perceived return of normality on identity construction in these blogs.

Part IV, finally, brings the previous chapters together and unites the findings from the two analyses. In the concluding Chapter 11, the research questions are revisited and answers discussed. Further, the present research is evaluated in terms of its limitations, including a discussion on how these were mitigated. Ultimately, the implications of the present research are explored and it is argued that the findings are not only worthwhile in their own right, but can also contribute to advancing academic discussions on how identity can be conceptualised and investigated.

This structure requires an explanation. As outlined, Chapter 5 comprises an engagement with ToI, whilst a discussion of the MCA-informed approach follows only in Chapter 9. It is acknowledged that distributing the methodological discussion to two chapters may be considered unconventional, yet it was favoured on the basis of a clear rationale. Firstly, the approaches were employed in two steps, distinct both temporally and analytically. The separate reporting on the methodological steps and decisions

involved is therefore true to the analytic process. Furthermore, this allows for consecutively presenting the methodological approaches and their corresponding findings. Not only does this make it possible to structure the thesis according to the analytic process into the four parts outlined above, but it also conveys a more coherent narrative. Ultimately, the integration of approaches aimed for in the present research does not lie in their joint discussion, but rather in the making of connections between the findings emerging from them and in the broader understanding of expatriate identity construction that this engenders.

Chapter 2 Identity

2.1 Current approaches to identity in linguistics

The notion of identity is fundamental to the present research. This chapter discusses how identity is currently conceptualised in linguistics, with a specific focus on sociocultural linguistics. It then introduces ToI and MCA, including a discussion of key elements and of how the frameworks have been employed in previous research. Finally, the present research is positioned through a reflection on their complementarity. Because identity is a wide research field that has seen a lot of activity especially in recent years, the following discussion makes no claim to being exhaustive. Its purpose is rather to discuss fundamental aspects in order to establish the field in which the present research is situated.

Broadly speaking, two conceptualisations of identity can be distinguished within linguistics (Angouri 2016): an essentialist and positivist view of identity as inherent in individuals and discoverable through systematic investigation of linguistic variables, and a social constructionist perspective of identity as socially constituted and observable through the study of discourse. This section briefly traces the development of these two paradigms and then outlines some points of criticism that have been raised pertaining to identity as a concept in research.

Early linguistic approaches conceptualised identity as what Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 24) call a “product of the social”: variationist sociolinguistics has investigated the impact of social variables such as social class on individuals’ language use (for instance, Labov 1972; Trudgill 1974). In such research, identity is viewed as a set of variables which are predefined, clear-cut and can be assigned to participants by the analyst, such as sex or gender, age, or socio-economic background. This presupposes the existence of such categories as unambiguous and pre-discursive, and individuals’ membership in them as relevant to and shaping their language production at all times. Identity in such studies is seen as a fixed characteristic – an essence or quality – pertaining to individuals and influencing their language use.

Such essentialist views of identity have been challenged by social constructionist thinking, leading to “a profound change in the theoretical paradigm” employed by research on identity (De Fina 2010: 205). An example of this is interactional sociolinguistics, which places social interaction and discourse at the centre of investigation. This change in research focus has gone hand in hand with a reconceptualisation of identity: interactional approaches posit that identity is not a fixed quality of an individual, but a process of construction achieved and negotiated in social interaction. For instance, through her analysis of narrative, Schiffrin (1996: 199) argues for a view of identity as “locally situated”, in contrast to variationist sociolinguistic conceptions of identity in terms of features which are “permanent properties of speakers”. Further work supporting this view is collected in Antaki and Widdicombe’s (1998a) publication on how identities emerge in talk-in-interaction, such as through the use of membership categories.

Social categories such as social class and gender are no longer seen as sufficient to capture an individual’s identity – indeed, the very existence of these categories as prediscursive and incontestable has been called into question by interactional sociolinguistics. Rather than assuming the existence of such categories as constitutive of a person’s identity and studying their effect on language use, research has turned to examining how such categories are constructed, reiterated and sometimes challenged in social interaction. For instance, Butler (1990) points out that language is performative and that gender emerges in interaction, and Barrett (2009) shows how performances by drag queens can play with norms and expectations to assert or subvert gender expectations. This is in line with the social constructionist view of identity as dynamic and produced intersubjectively in discourse and social interaction.

Social constructionism is an epistemology substantially shaped by Berger and Luckmann (1967) through their discussion of how reality is socially constructed (Gergen 2015). Whilst positivism and empiricism maintain that knowledge can be gained through observation, social constructionism understands knowledge as socially produced in everyday life. Through social interaction, practices emerge which shape people’s understanding of the world. These are specific to cultures and can change over time (Burr 2015). However, the epistemological position of social constructionism does not entail that a socially constructed understanding of the world is flawed or in any way

less real than an understanding gained through observation, nor does it reject the existence of a material world (Gergen 2015: 219-220). Instead it maintains that the meaning which the world becomes invested with is socially produced in interactions of individuals with each other and with their environment. Gergen (2015: 219-220) points out that individuals have to treat such meanings as real if they are to “get along in everyday life”. Therefore, such construction is worth investigating.

As the discussion so far has shown, there is a wealth of research on identity both within and outside linguistics. Indeed, Bucholtz and Hall (2010: 27) go as far as to proclaim “the age of identity”. However, research on identity had been met with criticism even before Bucholtz and Hall (2005) outlined the sociocultural linguistic approach. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argue that identity is not useful as an analytic concept, because it is either too broad, too narrow, or altogether ambiguous. They point out that identity has been adopted as a “category of analysis” for researchers, but that it is also a “category of practice”, thus a category employed by individuals in everyday life (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 4). Whilst acknowledging that this would not be problematic per se, they argue that it is problematic in the case of identity because it has come to be used in analysis like in everyday social and political practice and thereby has been reified. They distinguish “strong” (essentialist) approaches to identity from “weak” ones that conceptualise identity as socially constructed (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 10), and they extend this criticism of reification even to the latter. Their point is that such approaches often take the term for granted and do not discuss it any further other than predicating it with adjectives such as *fluid*, *multiple*, *constructed* and the like, on which explanations then focus (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 19).

Although this argument rightly criticises approaches employing identity without making its conceptualisation transparent, the use of identity per se can hardly be the root of this problem. Neither can it be detrimental that identity is taken to mean different things in different research strands, as long as researchers make clear where their work is positioned. As regards their criticism of conflating the analytic concept with the everyday use of the term, other research has emphasised that employing identical terminology is in fact an advantage over the use of related terms such as *persona*, *subject position* or *subjectivity*. Joseph (2004: 10) points out that identity is a term meaningfully employed by individuals in everyday life, and this for him is “the

principal criterion that should be followed in the choice of all terminology”. Alternative terms may just as easily be misunderstood, as he elaborates, warning against employing jargon that might confuse matters further. The following section addresses the above criticism by discussing an approach which despite employing identity does not reify it, as in this thesis it is conceptualised as a process rather than an entity. The sociocultural linguistic approach further shows the value of working with the concept of identity both at the level of participants and of the analyst, and advocates examining identity across a range of disciplines within the humanities and social sciences.

2.2 Sociocultural linguistics

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) propose a framework for analysing identity which they have termed the sociocultural linguistic approach. It is positioned within a social constructionist paradigm and provides a conceptualisation of identity as well as five principles governing its production, which are outlined below. Within sociocultural linguistics, identity is defined as “*the social positioning of self and other*” (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 586, original emphasis), and this definition is adopted in the present research. Thus, identity is fundamentally about how individuals position themselves in the face of others as well as how they are perceived or positioned by others in interaction. With regard to conversations, the notion of positioning was discussed by Davies and Harré (1990: 48) as “the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines”. Individuals hence constantly position themselves and others, both on purpose and unintentionally. The emergence of identity therefore does not completely lie in an individual’s power, but it is negotiated.

In the present research, social interaction is understood to encompass not only conversation, but to extend to other types of discourses where positioning occurs, such as personal narratives. Bamberg (1997) has elaborated on the concept of positioning by exploring it in the context of storytelling and distinguishing three levels at which it occurs: level 1 involves the positioning of the story characters towards each other, level 2 is the positioning of the storyteller towards the audience, and level 3 encompasses the positioning of the narrator to themselves, going beyond the actual moment of telling to

draw on wider discourses. This ability to capture identity construction at different levels makes positioning a fruitful concept.

From Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) understanding of identity as a process of social positioning, it follows that identity is not something that exists prediscursively and internally as a fixed essence. Instead, identity is constructed moment by moment through discourse, which means that it is always in flux, produced, negotiated and potentially challenged as the interaction unfolds. Beyond this fundamental idea, the authors point out that their definition of identity is intentionally "broad and open-ended" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 586). This makes it possible to approach the concept from various angles and with diverse foci, which is what sociocultural linguistics encourages.

The notion of identity as a process of positioning builds the foundation for Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) five principles in their framework for the analysis of identity. The first two are concerned with how identity can be understood ontologically. Firstly, the principle of *emergence* posits that identity is not a characteristic inherent in a person, but instead is produced in and emerges through interaction between individuals. Identity is not what a person is or a quality they possess, but what a person does when engaging with others. Identity is created through "social action", and language plays a particularly important part in this (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 588). At the same time, identity exceeds mere self-classification, as interaction and positioning are mutually achieved. Therefore, identity is "fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 588), whose investigation is possible by adopting a sociocultural linguistic approach.

The second principle, equally relating to the ontological nature of identity, is that of *positionality*. It is juxtaposed to conceptualisations of identity as expressed through social categories such as gender, nationality, or social class, such as form the basis for variationist sociolinguistic work. Positionality emphasises that identity is simultaneously produced at different levels of interaction. Whilst this may include categories on the macro-level of society, identity construction goes beyond that and extends down to the micro-level of interaction, thus including specific stances that participants may momentarily occupy during the course of a social exchange (Bucholtz

and Hall 2005: 592). Positioning of self and other thereby happens on several levels simultaneously.

Thirdly, the principle of *indexicality* focuses on how identity is produced. Indexicality is the way in which linguistic elements can impart social meanings. Such social meanings may be independent of the referential meaning of an utterance; for instance, phonological variation of otherwise identical utterances may index social class, and pitch may convey gender (Ochs 1992). To elaborate further on this, there is nothing intrinsic in pitch that would link it directly to gender, but given the general difference in pitch between men and women, pitch is no longer heard as a property of the speaker, but taken more generally to index gender. A link thus gets established between a linguistic feature and a social meaning such as a certain identity because the feature is experienced together with other aspects of that identity (Johnstone 2010). Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 594) point out that indexicality is closely linked to ideology, as participants draw on value systems inherent to their culture for making sense of linguistic features and the individuals producing them. Identity is indexically generated through various elements. Particularly noticeable is the “overt mention of identity categories and labels” (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 594), such as membership categories (Sacks 1992) that interactants assign to themselves and others in the course of social action. Yet the authors elaborate that identity can also be indexed more covertly by means of implicature, presuppositions, stances and roles adopted in a particular interaction, or features that are connected with certain identities by means of ideology, such as lexical and stylistic choices. Examples they draw from previous research include individuals implying sexual identity to ingroup members whilst keeping it hidden from outgroups (Liang 1999, in Bucholtz and Hall 2005), or choosing English over Tongan in order to appear cosmopolitan (Besnier 2004, in Bucholtz and Hall 2005). All of these aspects may play a role in the construction of identity in interaction, which emphasises the richness and complexity of this phenomenon.

To counter the impression that identity is agentively indexed and controlled by individuals independently, the fourth principle of *relationality* emphasises that identity is produced discursively in interaction between subjects – intersubjectively. However, this does not mean that only synchronous interactions with frequent speaker change can be analysed, such as conversations or chat messages. Rather, Bucholtz and Hall (2010:

25) point out that “even genres traditionally thought of as monologic are fundamentally interactional. Identities emerge only in relation to other identities within the contingent framework of interaction.” For example, narratives in expatriate blogs may receive few or even no comments at times, but they are nevertheless relational, as bloggers position themselves with regard to others, thereby simultaneously constructing identity for themselves and positioning others – the audience as well as individuals in their narratives – in certain ways. Yet the relationality principle does not only address how identity is constructed discursively even in seemingly monologic texts and always in relation to other individuals and other identities that would have been on offer (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 598). It also specifies by which means such identity construction is achieved: Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 598) challenge the notion that identity is simply a product of negotiating similarity and difference between individuals. They introduce the framework of ToI (Bucholtz and Hall 2004a, 2004b), which, in addition to the dimension of similarity and difference, incorporates the creation of realness and artifice, and of legitimacy and illegitimacy. This provides an answer to Blackledge and Pavlenko’s (2001: 250) call for future research to take into account that “certain identities may be non-negotiable” and to incorporate a focus on power into analyses of identity construction to differentiate whether in moments of positioning power is balanced equally, whether positioning is met with resistance, and whether such resistance is at all possible. As the ToI framework is employed in the present research, it is discussed in more detail in Section 2.3.

Understanding identity as relational, finally, leads to the principle of *partialness*. It acknowledges that identity must always remain partial and incomplete because it is constituted between subjects in local interactions through specific means, which may arise through intentions, habits, challenges in interaction or ideologies that participants adhere to (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 605-606). The principle of partialness resonates with approaches such as small story research (for instance, Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008) that challenge the view of identity as a unified whole which can be expressed through an all-encompassing narrative or through the total of a person’s life stories that create an overall coherence of who this individual is (Linde 1993). This is further discussed in Section 3.1.

Thus, these five principles encompass that in the sociocultural linguistic approach identity is viewed as constructed in and emergent through discourse and interaction. However, whilst this conceptualisation of identity and approach towards data contrast with essentialism, this does not entail that essentialist notions can be abandoned entirely. Indeed, as long as conceptualisations of identity as a stable core within oneself are found to matter to participants, they are “an ethnographic fact” and as such cannot be disregarded by researchers (Bucholtz and Hall 2004a: 375). This position is supported by Joseph (2004: 90), who argues that whilst researchers need to reject essentialism in their methodology, “there must remain space for essentialism in our epistemology, or we can never comprehend the whole point for which identities are constructed”.

Just as essentialism needs to be considered even in a constructionist paradigm, so does a single approach hardly do justice to the complexity of identity: because identity is partial, it can never be captured completely in one analysis, as Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 607) emphasise. Therefore, they encourage adopting an interdisciplinary perspective on identity. Rather than introducing a new approach, they advocate “new coalitions” between approaches concerned with language, society and culture (Bucholtz and Hall 2008a: 401). An exchange between disciplines as diverse in their methods as conversation analysis (henceforth CA), linguistic anthropology and variationist sociolinguistics may lead to “critical engagements and creative adaptations” (Bucholtz and Hall 2008a: 408). The present research aims to do precisely this by exploring the data discourse analytically through ToI as well as ethnomethodologically informed by MCA. Sections 2.3 and 2.4 introduce these two approaches in turn, and Section 2.5 concludes this discussion of identity by detailing to what extent they are complementary as well as the position that the present research adopts.

2.3 Tactics of intersubjectivity (ToI)

The ToI framework is situated within Bucholtz and Hall’s (2004a) relationality principle outlined in Section 2.2. It aims to understand the processes through which individuals establish relations with others and construct identity through discursive practices as well as through semiotic practices more generally, although the focus lies

on language. The framework examines social interactions in detail, focusing on participants' tactics to establish identity. At the same time, it can take into account the role of ideology and power in such relational positioning.

In this approach, four semiotic processes are engaged in the production of identity through language: practice, performance, indexicality and ideology (Bucholtz and Hall 2004a). Practice encompasses everyday social activity which is habitual and not necessarily intentionally executed. Performance, in contrast, is seen by Bucholtz and Hall (2004a: 380), drawing on Butler (1990), as "highly deliberate and self-aware social display" which creates a social reality. Indexicality, as outlined in Section 2.2, is the process of one thing signalling another, and through repeated action and practice may come to form stereotypes and ideologies. Ideology, finally, is a system which "organizes and enables all cultural beliefs and practices", which in turn creates relations of power (Bucholtz and Hall 2004a: 379).

Through these processes, Bucholtz and Hall (2004a: 382) attain a definition of identity as "an outcome of cultural semiotics that is accomplished through the production of contextually relevant sociopolitical relations of similarity and difference, authenticity and inauthenticity, and legitimacy and illegitimacy". This narrows down their broad definition of identity as a positioning that is accomplished socially, as outlined in the above discussion of their sociocultural linguistic approach, by specifying the dimensions along which this occurs. From this they derive three pairs of tactics of identity construction: *adequation* and *distinction*, *authentication* and *denaturalisation*, as well as *authorisation* and *illegitimation*. These are referred to as tactics of *intersubjectivity* rather than tactics of *identity* to emphasise that identity construction is social and interactive, as it always occurs in relation to others. Bucholtz and Hall (2004b) further maintain that each of these pairs should be understood as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. They use the term *tactics* rather than *strategies* to emphasise that they may be employed without intention and to convey that they are immediate and situated in specific contexts. The present research strategically draws on this part of the framework, exploring in detail the workings of the six tactics yet not those of the semiotic processes of practice, performance, indexicality or ideology more generally. In the following paragraphs, each of the pairs are described in more detail.

Adequation and *distinction* relate to similarity and difference. The term *adequation* derives from *equation* and *adequacy*, highlighting that it is concerned with the creation of “sufficient sameness between individuals or groups” (Bucholtz and Hall 2004a: 383). *Distinction*, in contrast, creates and highlights difference. Both can be achieved through a process of “erasure”, a concept that derives from Irvine and Gal’s (2000: 38) work and which “renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible” either by ignoring contradicting evidence or by finding other explanations for it. *Adequation* and *distinction* are thus not concerned with establishing how objectively similar or different individuals are – indeed, the idea of an objective social reality existing independent of discourse would run counter to a social constructionist standpoint (Burr 2015). Instead, they describe how notions of similarity and difference are socially produced. These two tactics form what the present research refers to as the dimension of likeness. *Likeness* rather than *similarity* is chosen as an overarching term for the dimension of similarity and difference to avoid the impression that it only involves similarity.

Authentication and *denaturalisation* are ways of establishing realness or artifice. The term *authentication* rather than *authenticity* is used to stress that this is a process rather than an essentialist aspect of a person’s identity (Bucholtz and Hall 2004a). Rather than focusing on what *is* authentic, this perspective explores how such features *are made* authentic by individuals or groups (Bucholtz 2003). Hence, rather than implying that individuals do not hold essentialist views of identity, this pair of tactics serves to describe how they are produced. They form the dimension of realness. Sauntson (2016) proposes an addition to the framework by showing that *authentication* can be hypothetical. What she refers to as “*irrealis authentication*” involves the expression of something that is desirable yet did not in fact occur (Sauntson 2016: 24, original emphasis).

Authorisation and *illegitimation*, finally, are concerned with relations of power, hence constituting the dimension of power. They encompass how participants may make an “attempt to legitimate an identity through an institutional or other authority” or deny an identity its right to exist (Bucholtz and Hall 2004a: 386). Again, Sauntson’s (2016: 26) analysis shows that *authorisation* may occur *irrealis*, as an expression of sought-after *authorisation* that was not bestowed. These *irrealis* additions further emphasise the

complexity of linguistic identity construction that is already acknowledged in Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) elaborations.

The ToI framework does not intend to reduce the complexity of identity to an identification of these six tactics. Not all of them may be relevant in a specific interaction, and if they are, they may collaborate or conflict with each other, producing "an ever-shifting matrix of identity relations" (Bucholtz and Hall 2004b: 506). Research in discursive psychology has also emphasised the relevance of these dimensions of identity. Whilst Bamberg (2011) does not make reference to ToI, he identifies three challenges that identity needs to negotiate jointly: the tension of changing over time yet retaining a sense of being oneself, being unique whilst being the same as others, and being agentive but also influenced by one's surroundings. These resonate with the respective ToI dimensions of (in)authenticity, similarity and difference, as well as (il)legitimacy. The framework thus enables an examination of what particular processes of identity construction are at work in a given interactional context and how they are linguistically achieved.

An example of an application of ToI is Jones' (2011, 2012) ethnographic work with a lesbian group, in which she explores how participants portray themselves as authentic lesbians in contrast to what they judge to be 'girly' positions. She emphasises that in order to successfully interpret the investigated tactics, researchers are required to possess an in-depth understanding of the context in which an interaction occurs (Jones 2012: 166). Her participation in the group enabled her to do so.

Bucholtz and Hall (2004b) argue for ToI as a way to theorise identity in the research context of language and sexuality, where it has been fruitfully applied (Jones 2011, 2012; Sauntson 2016). However, their approach offers insight into the construction and negotiation not only of gender and sexual identity, but of identity more generally. Neither is it limited to an examination of face-to-face conversational data, but it can be applied to explore other contexts, such as computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC). Through a brief discussion of further research, the following paragraphs illustrate the applicability of ToI to different contexts, which in turn warrants adopting the framework to investigate identity construction in expatriate blogs.

An example of research adopting the ToI framework in this respect is Clark's (2013, 2016) work on flight attendant discourse. She examines incident reports written by flight attendants to a government agency as well as interactions in online discussion forums for flight attendants. The analysis shows how participants in and across both environments establish a professional identity as well as a community. For instance, the terms *we*, *us* and *our* are used as opposed to *they*, *them* and *their* to create similarity and difference between flight attendants, pilots and passengers. Furthermore, Clark (2013: 206) illustrates how "[s]peaking like a flight attendant" is a way for participants to authenticate identity, and how they use institutional authority to render their identity legitimate. Finally, ideologies are shown to play an important role in the maintenance of a division between pilots and flight attendants. Clark's (2013, 2016) work hence illustrates the fruitfulness of the ToI framework for a discussion of how a specific group of participants constructs identity in different discursive sites, both online conversations and textual reports.

Furthermore, the framework has proved worthwhile for investigating cultural hybridity. In a study of how an Egyptian girl who has migrated to Cyprus positions herself with respect to the different gender ideologies she is confronted with at home and at school, Skapoulli (2004) shows the benefit of the concept of *adequation* over that of *passing*. The latter is generally understood as "the ability to be taken for a member of a social category other than one's own" (Bucholtz 1995: 351). In contrast, since *adequation* encompasses the creation of similarity that is considered sufficient, as outlined above, Skapoulli (2004: 247) argues that it is more suitable to explain individuals' positioning in situations of hybridity: in such moments, speakers may not wish to *pass* entirely in the eyes of their audience, but to claim partial similarity. That individuals' positioning with regard to hybridity may vary in different instances and the value of ToI for capturing this is confirmed by Gonçalves (2010, 2013a, 2013b) in her study of conversations between intercultural couples living in Switzerland. She discusses how participants may reject, admit or embrace hybrid identity, and may also merge these positions (Gonçalves 2013a: 170). What it means to be Swiss and 'do' Swiss is shown to be jointly negotiated in interaction. It involves both "*situated identity*", the relatively stable sense of an individual of their identity, and "*situational identities*", which are temporary and constructed in interaction (Gonçalves 2013a: 23, original emphasis) and can be explored through ToI. These studies resonate with the present research through

their shared focus on how individuals discursively construct identity in particular instances with regard to finding themselves in-between different sociocultural contexts. How *adequation* and *distinction* in expatriates' positioning can be intertwined is elaborated on in Chapter 7.

ToI is thus a key framework for the analysis of identity construction through positioning of self and other along the three relational dimensions of likeness, realness and power. Recent research has adapted the framework and applied it to different contexts and data. Yet it is by no means unique in its suitability to explore local identity construction through discursive practices. Another worthwhile approach for doing so is MCA, which is detailed in the following section.

2.4 Membership categorisation analysis (MCA)

MCA was first developed by Sacks in his lectures in the 1960s (Sacks 1992) as an approach to analysing naturally occurring data on the micro-level of specific instances. It hence originates from the same background as the more widely known method of CA, which focuses on the sequential analysis of talk-in-interaction. MCA, in contrast, examines what categories participants assign to themselves and others through language in specific exchanges and how they do so. Sacks' aim by closely investigating specific occurrences such as extracts from phone calls to a suicide helpline and group therapy sessions was to "build an apparatus" which through its application would produce the kind of phenomena he was exploring (Sacks 1992: 487, vol. I).

MCA can be employed as a tool for examining how identity is discursively constructed. As an ethnomethodological approach, it focuses on participants' own methods of sense-making and of engaging in social actions as observable in the data, and like CA it refrains from making inferences beyond this (Burr 2015). It thus takes an emic, bottom-up approach rather than imposing the researcher's analytic framework or terminology onto the data. Its concern with observing participants' practices makes MCA "not so much a method of analysis but rather a collection of observations and an analytic mentality" (Housley and Fitzgerald 2015: 6). MCA acknowledges that category membership is variable and constantly negotiated. This is compatible with Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) view of identity as situational and emergent from discourse, and

hence with their sociocultural linguistic approach to identity adopted in this thesis. Although being foremost a mindset to analysing data rather than a fixed analytic procedure, MCA has available a number of analytic tools which can shed light on what is occurring in a given interaction. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The central concept of MCA is the *membership category*, a category in which a participant or interactant – in ethnomethodological terminology a *member* – may be placed in a given instance. Sacks (1992) arrives at this concept through the following two sentences from a child's story: 'The baby cried. The mommy picked it up.' By referring to someone as a baby, this person is being made a member of this category in this particular moment of interaction. Related categories are gathered in a *membership categorisation device* (henceforth device). For example, the category 'baby' belongs to the device 'family', along with the categories 'mommy' and 'daddy' as well as 'brother', 'sister' and others. Within a device, there may be a *standardised relational pair*, a pair of categories "which typically go together" and whose relationship "constitutes a locus for rights and obligations", such as 'mommy' and 'baby', 'husband' and 'wife', 'doctor' and 'patient', to name but a few examples (Lepper 2000: 17).

In addition to being a collection of categories, a device contains rules of application. Through his analyses, Sacks formulated two rules that address how categorisation can do referencing and how categories may be selected. Firstly, the *economy rule* is concerned with what information is needed to make reference to a person. It states that "[a] single category from any membership categorization device can be referentially adequate" (Sacks 1986 [1972]: 333). Thus, for a person to be recognisable it suffices to refer to them by one category, such as 'the mommy', even though they will also be members of other categories. When categorisation is used over other means of person referencing has been discussed more recently by Schegloff (2007b).

The *consistency rule*, in turn, explains what categories may be chosen to refer to a person when other persons are categorised at the same time (Sacks 1986 [1972]: 333, original emphasis):

If some population of persons is being categorized, and if a category from some device's collection has been used to categorize a first member of the population, then that category of [sic] other categories of the same collection *may* be used to categorize further members of the population.

Thus, to follow an example provided by Schegloff (2007a: 471), if in a round of introductions in a meeting the first person is introduced as a sociologist, the device 'academic discipline' or 'occupation' is invoked and subsequent speakers are likely to choose a category from this collection. Employing a category from another device, such as 'nationality', is "registerable as a 'departure' from the relevancies already introduced, and can prompt a search for what has occasioned that categorization ('why that now')". The consistency rule is hence concerned with relevance, and Sacks (1986 [1972]: 333) derives from it what he refers to as the *hearer's maxim*: "If two or more categories are used to categorize two or more members of some population, and those categories can be heard as categories from the same collection, then: Hear them that way." This consequence from the consistency rule is one way in which MCA explains individuals' sense-making when faced with potential ambiguity.

Another crucial concept introduced by Sacks (1992) is that of *category-bound activities*. These are activities that are seen as typically done by members of a certain category. Drawing on his example from a child's story, Sacks (1992) identifies 'crying' as an activity bound to the category 'baby'. This enables him to formulate another principle, the *viewer's maxim*: "If a member sees a category-bound activity being done, then, if one can see it being done by a member of a category to which the activity is bound, then: See it that way." Thus, like the hearer's maxim, the viewer's maxim deals with what category may be found relevant to identify a person in a given situation (Sacks 1986 [1972]: 338). The concept of category-bound activities was expanded in later work, such as in Watson's (1983) analysis of how motives can be category-bound in police interviews with offenders, to *predicates* more generally, which include not only activities, but also "rights, entitlements, obligations, knowledge, attributes and competencies" (Hester and Eglin 1997b: 5). Following this, the overarching term *predicate* is employed in this thesis to encompass both activities and other attributes.

Finally, Sacks (1992: 40, vol. I) points out that categories are *inference-rich*, which means that "a great deal of the knowledge that members of a society have about the

society is stored in terms of these categories”. Hence, it is possible to make inferences based on one’s knowledge of a category; drawing again on Sacks’ example, knowing that somebody belongs to the category ‘mommy’ enables conclusions about the types of activities this person can be expected to engage in, such as picking up her crying baby. Categorisation as interactants’ means of establishing and making sense of social order is hence doing what has come to be known as ‘culture in action’ (Hester and Eglin 1997a). Crucially, such categorial knowledge is not a fixed property of a culture that can be applied in a top-down analysis, but it is occasioned and made relevant by individuals or interactants in particular moments, as Hester and Hester (2012: 565-566) elaborate:

‘Culture’, then, is to be found in action and categories are always ‘categories in context’ and this means that the task for MCA is to discover how collections, categories and predicates are used on the occasions of their occurrence rather than presuming their stable cultural meanings.

Context is therefore crucial: MCA examines categorisation work *in situ*, and how the elements of MCA – categories, devices and predicates – are configured is unique in every instance (Fitzgerald 2017a). Categories are therefore not to be understood as ontologies or discourse-external realities. They are “*not* mere taxonomic labels”, but “big-time players in how common-sense culture operates”, not only in talk-in-interaction, but also in other contexts (Schegloff 2007a: 471, original emphasis). As a case in point, Sacks (1992) based his initial discussion of this matter on stories by children which he encountered in a book, as well as on newspaper articles, thus adopting “a broadly multi-modal and ethnographic disposition towards data” (Fitzgerald et al. 2017: 52). Other examples of MCA on textual data include news stories (Eglin and Hester 2003) and lonely heart adverts and blogs (Silverman 2012).

Following Sacks’ (1992) lectures and a number of early investigations of membership categories, such as Watson’s (1983) work mentioned above, MCA has been revisited and has become more established as an approach (Hester and Eglin 1997a; Housley and Fitzgerald 2002). Identity as constructed in discourse (discussed in Section 2.1) has received increasing attention by studies united in their endeavour to explore ‘identities in talk’ (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998a), such as the interactional use of categories

(Edwards 1998) and the negotiation of membership and non-membership (Widdicombe 1998). Such ethnomethodological work on identity operates under the following principles summarised by Antaki and Widdicombe (1998b: 3, original emphasis): identity involves being “cast” as a member of a category with certain predicates, which is “*occasioned*” in a particular occurrence by interactants’ orientation to such identity as relevant and of consequence to what they are engaged in, which in turn can be seen in how they make use of structural features of their interaction.

Yet MCA has been criticised for being unable to fully explain the complexity of identity in talk. Deppermann (2013: 63) calls for an approach that draws on positioning, which according to him “includes MCA, but also goes beyond it”. He illustrates his argument with an extract from a conversation between peers, in which they collaboratively produce several stories and ultimately create a story featuring a future fictional exchange to mock an interactant. Deppermann analyses the extract on Bamberg’s (1997) three levels of positioning introduced in Section 2.2, arguing that positioning is able to attend to practices such as, amongst others, enactments and the way turns are designed. In his view, MCA “has to be supplemented by attention to practices other than nominal categorization and predicative description” (Deppermann 2013: 78). This criticism can be countered in two ways. Firstly and more generally, the demand on a single approach to be able to explain all aspects potentially relevant to identity construction is mitigated by Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005: 607) above-mentioned assertion that identity and therefore necessarily any investigation thereof is always partial. The second point concerns Deppermann’s (2013) rather limiting view of MCA, which in fact far from restricts itself to exploring explicit category mentions and descriptions. Instead, MCA is able to bring out the subtlety of the category work that participants undertake beyond explicit categorisation (Stokoe 2012a: 282). For instance, there is no reason why MCA should be unable to explore categorisation both within a story that is told (positioning level 1) as well as within the act of telling itself (positioning level 2): it has been shown that MCA has the scope to investigate so-called ‘turn-generated categories’ (Fitzgerald and Housley 2002). To adopt Deppermann’s (2013) example of collaborative storytelling, such turn-generated categories can be seen to operate on level 2, where peers take on the category of storyteller to sanction another peer, whom they categorise in unfavourable ways on level 1. This in turn categorises the peer on level 2 as somebody in need of morally defending themselves.

MCA therefore has scope for an analysis of identity in interaction, especially so because its analytic tools “remain flexible and adaptable” (Fitzgerald 2012: 308).

Despite recent interest in MCA, Stokoe (2012a: 278) points out that the approach has received much less attention than the well established, sequentially-focused CA, and that it is in danger of not surviving as a distinct discipline. In order to progress MCA, Stokoe (2012a: 280) calls for a more systematic way of conducting analysis by suggesting five principles as a guide: collecting data across different settings, building collections of categories and devices, locating their position in the sequence, analysing how the extract is designed and finally examining whether there is evidence of how recipients orient to the category. In terms of potential data, she points out that both interactional and textual data may be analysed, confirming that MCA need not exclusively be concerned with conversational data. However, in his commentary in the same issue, Fitzgerald (2012: 308) cautions against doing MCA through such a structured process, as this risks losing the flexibility which is “at the heart of and success of MCA”. The present research does not follow Stokoe’s (2012a) approach in its entirety, but instead draws on MCA in ways that serve the analysis, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

This adaptability of MCA beyond Sacks’ (1992) original elaborations has been supported by recent research exploring mediated environments of a relatively public nature. For instance, MCA can shed light on how new members join a community in an online discussion forum (Stommel and Koole 2010; Giles and Newbold 2013). Additionally, studies employing MCA have revealed how categorisation is done prospectively to an event and retrospectively modified in rolling news media (Stokoe and Attenborough 2015), and how interactants in arguments which were filmed and uploaded to YouTube or broadcast publicly in the news re-evaluate the nature of the relationship between categories and predicates in order to challenge norms (Reynolds and Fitzgerald 2015). Such recent applications are of special relevance to the present research: given that MCA can engender worthwhile findings pertaining to identity in public broadcasting, it promises to be a suitable approach to textual data of a potentially public nature, as can be found in the form of personal narratives in expatriate blogs.

MCA can further offer an in-depth exploration of identity construction in the context of mobility. For instance, how relevant place can be for categorial identity construction is

illustrated in McCabe and Stokoe's (2004) analysis of interviews with day visitors to a UK national park. The authors discuss how interviewees categorise tourists with regard to their use of places at different times and for different purposes, which produces a moral order and legitimises certain types of tourists and their practices over others. However, although categorisation has been explored in research on migration and identity, for instance in a study of border-crossing narratives (De Fina 2003) and in an analysis of posts in an online discussion forum for lifestyle migrants (Lawson 2016, 2017b), this is not necessarily undertaken from an MCA-informed angle, which could offer more than an exploration of category labels, as McCabe and Stokoe's (2004) study illustrates. Hence, as Angouri (2016: 45) points out, MCA can contribute to research on identity, even though it is "not widely known in social science research". The present research supports this argument and sets out to demonstrate the value of an MCA-informed analysis which is integrated into a sociocultural linguistic approach. The conceptual framework of this thesis and its position with regard to ToI and MCA are discussed in the following section.

2.5 Positioning this research

As sociocultural linguistics acknowledges, identity is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Therefore, an analysis of identity needs to be able to incorporate its diverse aspects and allow for flexibility. Indeed, research on identity crosses disciplinary boundaries (Angouri 2016: 38), and it is even considered whether "Identity Studies" may be developing as a separate field within the social sciences despite the variety of approaches towards identity and their conceptual and methodological differences (Côté 2006: 9). This entails that drawing on more than one approach may better account for the dynamics and complexities that identity construction involves and can bring out different ways in which it is achieved. In fact, Bucholtz and Hall (2008a: 422) encourage "creative combinations of diverse methodological and conceptual tools" in sociocultural linguistics to address the matters that are being researched.

A similar point is made by Angouri (2010: 40-41), who discusses mixed methods research, which combines qualitative and quantitative paradigms, as well as the mixing

of methodologies. She points out that such research designs can take “a more holistic perspective” and may contribute to a better understanding of “complexities in most research areas in linguistics in general”. She elaborates that mixed methods research has the further advantage that it may reach a wider and more diverse audience, bringing together scholars from different backgrounds. Whilst the discussion focuses on the combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis, these arguments are also valid with regard to the combination of different qualitative methodologies as applied in the present research to address a complex phenomenon from more than one angle and draw on insights from two different fields, aiming for their integration (Geluykens 2008).

However, whilst such a combination may be fruitful, it also warrants a caveat: it is questionable whether it should be done in a “pick-and-mix” fashion (Sunderland and Litosseliti 2008: 13), drawing on any resources the analyst may have at their disposal. Instead, the choice of methodologies needs to be motivated by the kinds of questions that are asked and the nature of the data under analysis. This requires a reflection on how the chosen methodologies are complementary, and what consequences this entails for the analysis and the nature of the findings they may generate. The following paragraphs discuss this matter with regard to ToI and MCA, elaborating on their aim and focus, approach to data, ontology and epistemology, as well as applications.

Regarding their aim and focus, ToI and MCA have in common a dynamic approach towards identity as produced through semiotic and, prominently, linguistic resources. ToI is a framework for analysing how identity is constructed along the intersubjective dimensions of likeness, realness, and power. In turn, MCA examines what categories participants ascribe to themselves and others in a particular situation, what predicates they associate with these categories and how they occasion them as part of certain devices. In this view, participants’ methods produce social order, such as identity, in local instances. MCA is therefore suitable for an analysis of identity construction; indeed, Angouri (2016: 45) maintains that categorisation is “an inseparable part” of how identity is theorised and analysed.

All dimensions of ToI may be made relevant by participants through categorisation. Firstly, *adequation* and *distinction* can form part of participants’ negotiation of what categories they belong to in accord with or in contrast to other people, thus positioning self and other for instance through comparison. *Authentication* and *denaturalisation*

may occur through participants' categorisations of themselves as members of certain categories especially when they assert how they fit (or do not fit) into these categories, by virtue of what activities they tend to engage in and what characteristics they ascribe to themselves. *Authorisation* and *illegitimation*, finally, may be a concern of participants when category membership is governed by institutional authorities granting or withholding legitimate membership. Both approaches can thus explore how identity is constructed by participants through their language use.

In terms of their approach to data, both ToI and MCA are qualitative frameworks engaging in a similar level of analysis: they examine in detail specific interactional moments, focusing on language use at the micro-level, although the ToI approach is not averse to making macro-level claims about power structures and ideologies based on such analysis. MCA takes an emic perspective towards data by exploring participants' own methods. Consequently, rather than approaching the data with a set of analytic criteria, the researcher aims to uncover the categories and identities that participants make relevant. In comparison, the ToI framework suggests three intersubjective dimensions along which identity is negotiated as part of a wider theory of identity. Whilst this could be seen as an etic approach, these dimensions are neither necessarily complete nor mutually exclusive (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 599), allowing other features to emerge from the data where relevant. Bucholtz and Hall (2008b: 159) in fact emphasise that their framework should not merely be applied in a top-down fashion because this would risk obscuring instances where the data do not fit into these dimensions. Hence, both ToI and MCA are open to exploring what can be discovered from a close engagement with the data.

A point of contrast are the ontologies and epistemologies that the two approaches adopt. The ToI approach takes a social constructionist perspective of identity, exploring how it is interactionally constituted. Conversely, MCA examines participants' own ontologies and epistemologies, refusing to commit itself to a theoretical viewpoint on participants' activities (Eglin and Hester 2003: 7). As an ethnomethodological approach, MCA does not aim to make claims about reality or knowledge thereof, but instead examines how participants themselves treat such issues (Stokoe 2008: 156). Therefore, Wowk (2007: 140-141) clarifies that ethnomethodology is not *opposed* to social constructionism as such, but rather is "indifferent" to such matters and therefore

“is, if anything, a-constructionist”. Nevertheless, to what extent ethnomethodology and social constructionism are similar or different is “hotly debated”, as Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 38) put it. De Fina (2010: 209), for instance, acknowledges MCA as “a core trend within talk-in-interaction approaches to identity”, which she in turn discusses as one of the key approaches employed under the social constructionist paradigm. MCA leaves space for participants’ notions of identity as a given and potentially fixed characteristic that they possess. Yet a social constructionist approach does not necessarily deny the importance of participants’ essentialist notions of identity either, as discussed in Section 2.2. On the contrary, it allows for a discussion of the researcher’s interpretations as opposed to participants’ view (Angouri 2016: 42), which Wowk (2007: 135) in turn portrays as being “in competition” with each other.

This leads to the final aspect of comparison: applications that the two approaches may find. MCA reveals members’ practices in local instances. Whilst it argues that these produce and make evident social structure, it refrains from discussing such social or moral order detached from the context in which it is produced, viewing it instead as ‘culture in action’ (Hester and Eglin 1997a). The present research therefore understands and draws on MCA as taking an interpretivist stance. This is, however, contestable: on the one hand, Wowk (2007: 136) maintains that ethnomethodology “eschews the use of such terms with their associations with cognitivism” and if at all would explore how participants themselves draw on the term *interpretation*. On the other hand, Baker (2000: 112) argues that because categorisation work is “largely unnoticed” and pervasive, recognising its impact is “a first step in challenging discourses and practices”. This suggests that MCA can build the basis of approaches with a transformative agenda and hence exceeding interpretivism, although it is not employed as such in the present research. In comparison, a ToI approach can equally result in an in-depth understanding of individuals’ sense-making and the dimensions from which identity emerges. Again, it is in this interpretivist capacity that the approach is employed in the present research. Yet it can also take a critical stance towards existing power relations as evident particularly through *authorisation* and *illegitimation* and when taking into account how the tactics are positioned within the semiotic process of practice, performance, indexicality and ideology outlined in Section 2.3. As such, ToI have the potential to be emancipatory, showing how institutions in power may influence identity and aiming to achieve social change (Grbich 2007: 7).

ToI and the majority of work in MCA thus differ with regard to the scope of their claims. However, rather than being a shortcoming, this can engender a fruitful discussion of what the different frameworks contribute. Drawing on multiple approaches, Sauntson (2012: 43) points out that tensions between them may not have to be resolved, but that it needs to be acknowledged that they may generate different understandings of the data. In the case of the present research, both frameworks are drawn upon in an interpretivist capacity to explore “the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences” (Grbich 2007: 8), thus for their close focus on the discursive workings of identity construction in particular instances. MCA can grant insight into participants’ local categorisations, offering a different angle to, yet not conflicting with, the intersubjective dimensions highlighted by ToI.

For ease of reference, Table 2-1 provides an overview of the key aspects discussed in the previous paragraphs.

Table 2-1. Complementarity of ToI and MCA.

	ToI (Bucholtz and Hall 2004a, 2004b)	MCA (Sacks 1992)
Aim & focus	Investigate how identity is constructed through a focus on the intersubjective relations of likeness, realness and power	Investigate members’ methods of achieving social order by focusing on membership categories, predicates and devices
Approach to data	Qualitative, etic/emic, micro/macro-level	Qualitative, emic, micro-level
Ontology & epistemology	Social constructionism: identities are discursively constructed and emerge through interaction	Ethnomethodology: categories are locally occasioned by members; researchers do not take a theoretical position
Applications	Interpretivist with emancipatory potential, can relate to wider structures such as ideologies	Predominantly interpretivist, yields insight into how social structure is locally produced

To conclude, there are both merits and caveats when combining methodologies, making it necessary to outline how ToI and MCA are complementary. These approaches are associated with different research traditions. They are either inspired by theory, which is predominantly the case for ToI, or instead are data-driven, such as MCA. These paradigms have traditionally been opposed to each other and have sparked debates about how to conduct analysis and what can be achieved through it (Schegloff 1997b, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Wetherell 1998; Billig 1999a, 1999b). However, the sociocultural linguistic approach supports a view of different approaches as “complementary, not competing” (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 608). This standpoint is shared by some researchers working with MCA. For instance, Fitzgerald (2012: 310) points out that “MCA would benefit from teaming up with other approaches” and that “its strength may well be its ability to diversify into different fields through providing an explanatory frame that is amenable to the particular contingencies within different research paradigms”. The present research agrees with this position and aims to show that a combination of ToI and MCA is feasible, as long as every part of the analysis and discussion displays an awareness of the methodological standpoint it operates under. Moreover, drawing on both ToI and MCA is of practical value, as it can generate a more thorough understanding of how identity is constructed through different discursive practices in expatriate blogs. The discussion now turns from identity to one possible site of its linguistic construction, namely personal narratives.

Chapter 3 Narrative and transition

3.1 Studying narratives

This chapter first provides an overview of different ways in which narratives have been conceptualised and studied, from a structural approach and life story research to a dimensional approach and an understanding of narrative as a practice in everyday interaction. It hence presents cornerstones in the development of the extensive field in which the present research is positioned, yet with no claim to exhaustiveness. On the basis of this, the discussion situates the present research with respect to these paradigms and details the definition of narrative adopted in this thesis. Section 3.2 outlines how research on blogging as a form of online narrative has developed with respect to its affordances for identity construction. Turning to transition, Section 3.3 introduces liminality as a fruitful conceptualisation, and Section 3.4 discusses previous work and key findings on transition narratives that are relevant to the present research.

From the 1980s onwards, research in the social sciences has increasingly focused on narratives. What has come to be known as the ‘narrative turn’ recognised that narratives are a worthwhile site of study and offer alternative approaches to the positivist paradigm and its quantitative methods (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012: 18). Narrative has been acknowledged as one fundamental way of experiencing the world, making sense of it and exploring questions of identity through “storied lives” (Connelly and Clandinin 1990: 2). This is arguably even more the case in moments where individuals perceive that aspects of their life are changing and impacting on them as a person, leading them to engage with such issues in narrative form. For instance, Bamberg (2011) identifies the tension between being exposed to constant change whilst retaining a sense of being the same person as a dilemma of identity. As such, it requires individuals’ engagement, and the ability of narrative to express chronological aspects makes it “the genre par excellence” for this purpose (Bamberg 2011: 8). Therefore, research exploring how identity is linguistically constructed finds in participants’ narratives a rich ground for investigation.

The study of narrative in sociolinguistics has been greatly influenced by the work of Labov (1977 [1972]), developed from Labov and Waletzky (2003 [1967]). Labov studied Black Vernacular English in New York. To gain access to a vernacular language use, he conducted interviews in which he elicited narratives of participants' personal experiences of having been in danger of death. He defined a narrative as consisting of a minimum of two clauses that comprise a temporal sequence, so-called narrative clauses, with optional free clauses not bound to the sequence of events. Narrative structure in Labov's (1977 [1972]) approach consists of up to six elements: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result or resolution and coda. The abstract provides an overview of the story to follow and the orientation sets the scene by providing information about place, time and the characters involved. The main content of the narrative – the events that occurred – is then comprised in the complicating action. The evaluation provides insights into the narrator's stance towards the narrated elements and shows to what point the telling was undertaken. It is not necessarily placed after the complicating action, but can occur throughout the narrative. The complicating action ends with a result or resolution and the subsequent coda links its events back to the present of the telling. However, not all elements are always present: a minimal narrative may consist solely of narrative clauses, thus for instance lacking abstract or coda. This model hence takes a focus on the structural properties of narratives of personal experience.

Labov's (1977 [1972]) approach has inspired many studies on narrative delivered in interview settings. For instance, life story research examines autobiographical narratives and how individuals create coherence even across several discrete tellings about their life (Linde 1993; McAdams 1993). Much research on autobiographical narratives aims to gain insight into a pre-discursive reality as conveyed through narrative: the basic premise of such research is that narrative is "an authentic and unmediated representation of experience" (De Fina 2016: 332). However, such a view of experience and identity as discoverable through thematic analysis has been cautioned against, and more recent research on narrative has increasingly focused on how identity is constructed and negotiated (De Fina 2016). The question of authenticity in narrative is especially salient for an analysis of CMC such as blogging and is discussed in greater detail in Section 4.1.

Whilst Labov's (1977 [1972]) structural approach has remained influential (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012: 36), subsequent research has identified some problematic aspects, as summarised by De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2008: 380): it focuses on relatively clearly structured narratives elicited by a researcher and delivered by a single teller in a monological form. It neither takes into account how the telling is interactionally situated, nor how meaning is co-produced between several tellers or teller and recipients. Hence, it is at odds with Schegloff's (1997a: 97) assertion that storytelling is "a coconstruction, an interactional achievement, a joint production, a collaboration". A more recent model by Ochs and Capps (2001) developed for the study of narratives in everyday life attempts to remedy these shortcomings. Their approach does not focus on the structural properties of narratives of personal experience, nor does it attempt to specify a set of defining features of narrative. Instead, it proposes five dimensions along which narratives can be classified and analysed: tellership, tellability, embeddedness, linearity and moral stance (Ochs and Capps 2001: 20). The dimensions are scales on which a narrative event can be placed. This allows researchers to explore also narratives which do not take the typical Labovian structure and are for instance not told by a single speaker and as an answer to an elicitation, but which occur in everyday conversation.

Tellership is concerned with the number of tellers, from just one in a Labovian sense to multiple tellers, for instance when a narrative is told by several parties in a conversational exchange. Tellability can range from high to low; thus a personal experience may be rendered well in a narrative or less so, based on the significance of the reported events to the parties involved in the telling and on how well the narrative is rhetorically shaped (Ochs and Capps 2001: 34) – hence tellability is determined by what is told by whom and to whom, and how it is told. Furthermore, narratives can be either embedded in an interactional sequence or detached from it. Linearity, in turn, deals with the chronological order in which events are recounted. The moral stance, finally, is the perspective on the event that teller and protagonist adopt, and it may be stable or variable (Ochs and Capps 2001: 45).

Ochs and Capps' (2001) dimensional model lends itself to exploring narratives occurring in interaction, and more recent work on narratives has turned its attention to what is termed 'small stories' (for instance, Bamberg 2006; Georgakopoulou 2006,

2007; Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008). This phenomenon includes “a gamut of underrepresented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, and shared (known) events, but it also captures allusions to (previous) tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell” (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008: 381). For instance, Bamberg and Georgakopoulou’s (2008) analysis of an interview discussion with a group of adolescent boys shows how the tellability of a story is constructed in interaction and how the roles of teller and listener as well as different storylines are negotiated. As pointed out above, in contrast to research on ‘big’ stories such as autobiographical narratives and life stories which examine how identity is represented in narrative, small story research explores how participants interactionally construct identity (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008: 382). This is in line with a social constructionist view of identity as adopted in the sociocultural linguistic approach (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Research has further turned its attention to online narratives as a form of small stories, such as produced between email and face-to-face interactions (Georgakopoulou 2004) and through “micro-blogging” (Rettberg 2014: 14) in Facebook status updates (Page 2010; West 2013) and on Twitter (Page 2012; Dayter 2015). How blogs constitute a form of online storytelling and why they are worth exploring is discussed in the following section.

To summarise, sociolinguistic approaches have explored narratives of personal experience in terms of their structural properties and elicited autobiographical narratives in order to gain insight into individuals’ representation of who they feel they are. More recent work has come to view narratives as discursively situated sites of identity construction. This thesis is positioned in the latter paradigm: it explores how individuals’ narratives of personal relocation experiences construct identity, not so much in terms of what is told, but with a focus on the telling itself. It thus refrains from conducting a structural or content analysis and instead examines how individuals position themselves and others in local instances within their narratives.

Defining narrative is a challenging task. Traditional approaches have posited the three defining criteria of temporality, disruption and consciousness, as Georgakopoulou (2007: 37-38) elaborates. In this view, narrative conveys a chronological sequence of events, engages with a challenge that needs to be overcome, and involves a form of sense-making and interpretation of what is told. Yet such a narrow definition excludes

several forms of small stories, such as stories about events that are still to happen (Georgakopoulou 2007: 38). In the context of the present research, then, narrative is conceived deliberately broadly as an individual's periodic though potentially irregular sharing of personal experience in their blog. The notion of sharing thereby requires a caveat: when employed in the subsequent discussion, the term refers to the act of making content available online, on the basis of its common use in social media. It does, however, not make claims about whether this content will be read, nor does it imply an unmediated rendering of some discourse-external reality; just like identity, experience is constructed in narrative.

Expatriate blogs follow an overall trajectory and chronological structure in as far as they contain bloggers' engagement with transnational relocation. However, they are not limited to tellings of past events with a Labovian structure, but inspired by a small stories approach they are recognised to include the telling of current events as they are unfolding as well as postponing of tellings. In addition, they encompass forms of telling without a chronological element, such as reflections or lists of observations. These function as narrative elements based on the context in which they occur: an expatriate blogger's list of and reflection on differences between their country of origin and their new environment, for instance, forms part of their narrative of transnational relocation and of the experience they are gaining in the process, even if it does not contain a telling of an event *per se*. This feature is not unique to expatriate blogs: in a similar vein, Page (2011, 2012) has found that narratives in cancer blogs may consist of what she terms 'Reflective Anecdotes', in which the evaluation of an event is foregrounded over its chronological telling. Thus the present research understands the entire act of blogging as a narrative practice that comprises many different approaches to and ways of telling as realised in individual blog posts. How blogs constitute online narratives and the trajectory of research on blogging is the focus of the following discussion.

3.2 Blogs as online narratives

Keeping a blog is one of today's various practices of sharing content online and has developed significantly since its beginnings in the mid-1990s. Early 'weblogs' contained lists of links to other websites that the author had discovered and

recommended to readers, often with few comments. They were thus literally a log of a person's online activity. In 1999, tools were made available that enabled the sharing of content without requiring knowledge of HTML (hypertext markup language), and blogs came increasingly to be used as online diaries (Rettberg 2014: 8-9). Indeed, after blogging had undergone a rapid surge in popularity in 2004 (Rettberg 2014: 12), a study of the blogging practices of Americans found that a majority were using their blogs to share personal experiences (Lenhart and Fox 2006). Herring et al. (2004: 1) offer a general definition of blogs as "frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence". Nowadays, blogging is a diverse practice serving many different purposes and covering an almost endless number of topics. Rettberg (2014: 17) broadly distinguishes three styles: "filter blogging", "topic-driven blogging" and "personal or diary-style blogging". Filter blogs show an individual's online activity, similar to early blogs. Topic-driven blogs provide information on a specific topic and may be produced by a team of contributors. Personal blogs, finally, function like an online diary in which individuals share their experiences, granting insight not so much into their life, but into how they write and reflect about it. This makes personal blogging a promising practice for investigation in various disciplines, and key linguistic research is discussed further below.

Generally, recent years have seen a diversification of blogging: the practice has expanded from interactions on a single site to incorporate other online spaces, as some bloggers enable readers to 'like' their blog on their Facebook page, 'follow' them on Twitter or view their pictures on Instagram. For instance, West's (2013) analysis of storytelling in CMC has found that whilst blogs facilitate longer coherent narratives on a topic, Facebook enables individuals to share quick updates whilst linking back to their blog. However, the degree to which bloggers interlink their blog with other social networking sites varies, and blogs remain narrative spaces worth investigating in their own right. Although it has been repeatedly suggested that the time of blogs is over (see Myers 2010: 18), the data of the present research and the wealth of blogs included in expatriate blog directories testify to the fact that such websites are still very much in use for the sharing of personal experiences. Indeed, Heyd (2017: 121) points out that blogging has "robustly survived" innovations such as micro-blogging. In any case, whilst blogging may ultimately merge with other forms of social networking, a form of sharing personal content online is likely to persist (Rettberg 2014: 170).

Research on blogging and on CMC more generally has undergone several shifts of focus over the years. Early studies were concerned with exploring the properties of these new and emerging online phenomena. From a linguistic point of view, this involved attempts to describe the language used and to investigate what linguistic differences could be found between new online and traditional offline genres. For example, research described the language of emails, chatrooms, virtual worlds and websites (Crystal 2001). Blogs were examined in terms of their genre properties (Herring et al. 2004) and the stylistic features of filter blogs were contrasted to those of personal blogs (Herring and Paolillo 2006). However, positioning online genres in a unified way as 'Netspeak' (Crystal 2001) overemphasises their commonalities with each other and their distinctiveness from offline language use. Contrasting types of blogs with regard to their linguistic features is similarly problematic, as it does not take into account that blogs are used by a diverse group of individuals and to different purposes. It is thus not only the medium with its stylistic features that needs to be examined, but also the social context of its use.

To distinguish new types of online data more thoroughly, Herring (2007) proposes a classification scheme that allows the description of both their technological and social aspects, which has remained a helpful tool for obtaining an initial overview of a specific form of CMC. According to this classification, defining medium features of blogs are firstly their asynchronicity, that is that they are not read at the same time as they are produced. Secondly, messages are transmitted as a whole, which gives bloggers the option to carefully craft and edit their posts before sending, should they choose to do so. Further, posts are not limited in word count and, depending on the blogger's preference, may contain text, pictures, video or audio files as well as hyperlinks to other pages. Also, posts are displayed in reverse chronological order, featuring the most recent entry at the top, whilst older contributions remain accessible further below or in an archive. Finally, some blogs enable readers to comment on posts or contact the blogger privately. The social aspects of blogging are more varied, depending on the type and purpose of the blog. Expatriate blogs are further described in Chapter 4.

Research has also examined the nature of narratives in blogs. For this purpose, Eisenlauer and Hoffmann (2010) apply Labov and Waletzky's (2003 [1967]) structural

as well as Ochs and Capps' (2001) dimensional approach. Whilst they acknowledge the scope of the latter, they propose an extension to make it suitable for an analysis of blog narratives by including a continuum of interactivity with readers (Eisenlauer and Hoffmann 2010: 104). Their model captures the dynamic nature of blog narratives, which they describe as fragmented into multiple blog posts, therefore allowing for individualised rather than predetermined reading paths. Their concept of interactivity further takes into account that such narratives may contain multimodal features such as pictures, video and audio files, and that narratives may span across several online spaces via hyperlinks. This extension hence enables a more comprehensive description of the idiosyncrasies of narratives in blogs.

Apart from an exploration of the structural characteristics of emerging CMC and how it is shaped by technological and social aspects, a research interest in its affordances in terms of identity has equally been present from relatively early on. The anonymity that many online environments grant their users has led to investigations into individuals' interpersonal behaviour and self-disclosure online, for instance how factors such as anonymity, asynchronicity and the ability to lurk as an invisible audience contribute to more self-disclosure and less reserve – the so-called 'online disinhibition effect' (Suler 2004). However, a later study on personal blogs only partly confirmed this effect: it differentiated between discursive and visual anonymity and found that individuals shared private information more frequently when they could not be identified by their real name, but also when they featured in pictures, which bloggers appeared to treat as not making them identifiable offline (Hollenbaugh and Everett 2013: 293).

Similar to the online disinhibition effect, early research emphasised that CMC allows individuals to take on different identities online and experiment, to "self-fashion and self-create" (Turkle 1995: 180). However, this view was later challenged. Research came to view online interactions not as a distinct realm in which to construct imaginary identities, but as interacting with and influencing offline social life (Hardey 2002: 583).

The distinction between online and offline identity was further softened by the finding that the identities individuals construct online do not differ substantially from their offline identities. For instance, a study of the language used in blogs written by teenagers found that bloggers reveal a lot of identifying information about themselves and discuss matters of their offline life online rather than pretending to be a different

person (Huffaker and Calvert 2005). At the same time, such research is still situated within an early understanding of CMC as ‘Netspeak’ (Crystal 2001) as opposed to offline language use: when Huffaker and Calvert (2005: no pagination) argue that blogs function as “an extension of the real world”, they presuppose that an offline environment is somehow more ‘real’ than online spaces, and that individuals have a coherent and stable offline identity which exists pre-discursively and can be contrasted to the identity they construct online. This view of identity contrasts with the position of the present research as outlined in Section 2.2. Nevertheless, Huffaker and Calvert’s (2005) case for viewing blogs as an opportunity for individuals to express themselves was a step towards exploring how and to what effect individuals engage in online spaces in their own right rather than as opposed to offline interactions.

Subsequently, research has moved away from examining the distinction between online and offline identities, as the various forms of CMC have come to be viewed as discursive sites worth exploring of their own or through acknowledging that they may interact with other contexts. This has engendered ongoing debates on how to approach such data both analytically and ethically. For instance, recent discussions amongst the network of scholars engaged in Microanalysis of Online Data (MOOD) have revolved around adapting conversation analytic methodology to meet the requirements of online data (Giles et al. 2015; Giles et al. 2017). Ethical considerations particular to analysing blogs have been raised in various work (Hookway 2008; Lomborg 2013; Snee 2013b), and their implications for the present research are detailed in Section 4.2. Thus, the focus of current research lies more strongly on what individuals and groups accomplish online, an example of which is the small stories approach to online data discussed in Section 3.1.

Furthermore, research has increasingly turned its attention to matters of identity and authenticity. For example, in her exploration of online consumer reviews, Vásquez (2014) emphasises the importance for participants to position themselves so as to legitimise their contributions, be it by claiming expert status or conversely by portraying themselves as lay persons similar to the reader and therefore trustworthy. Identity has also been explored pertaining to membership in online support groups, for example regarding eating disorders (Stommel and Koole 2010) and mental health (Giles and Newbold 2013). Focusing on sequential as well as categorial aspects, both

studies examine how a new participant is initiated into an online forum and becomes a group member, which involves a negotiation and adoption of the group norms. There is thus an emphasis on viewing such sites as discursive spaces, and membership as an interactional accomplishment.

To summarise, there has been a trajectory of research on CMC. Androutsopoulos (2006: 420-421) conceptualises the above-described stages as three “waves”: from an early focus on CMC as entirely shaped by the medium in which it occurs, which constitutes “technological determinism”, to acknowledging the role of other factors, such as the social aspects listed in Herring’s (2007) scheme, to an exploration of online interaction and identity construction. The present research views personal blogs as spaces for the sharing of narratives of personal experience, in the course of which identity is discursively constructed. Blogs are especially suitable for a negotiation of identity in perceived transitional phases due to their immediacy: blogging allows individuals to share very recent experiences and even still ongoing events. Such sharing of “breaking news” (Georgakopoulou 2004: 1) is not unique to blogs, but has also been observed through a small stories approach to other forms of CMC, such as emails (Georgakopoulou 2004), Facebook status updates (Page 2010) and tweets (Page 2012; Dayter 2015). In the case of expatriate blogs, this immediacy enables individuals to document their experiences of life abroad as they unfold and to engage in negotiations of how this affects them as a person. The collective of posts in the blog archives in turn provides insight into how identity is constructed over the course of this transitional phase, revealing both emerging themes and inconsistencies and therefore providing a rich ground for an investigation of discursive identity construction. Whilst narrative is a key medium through which bloggers position themselves, the focus of the present research lies on how identity is constructed with regard to likeness, realness and power (Bucholtz and Hall 2004a, 2004b) as well as through categorisation (Sacks 1992). An additional analysis of narrative features (see, for instance, Page 2012), multimodality or readers’ comments would however exceed the scope of this thesis. Having situated the present research within the context of blogging as online narratives of personal experience, the discussion now turns to a particular form of experience that individuals may engage with in narrative form (as indeed they do in the present research), namely undergoing personal transition. For this purpose, the concept of liminality is introduced in what follows.

3.3 Liminality

A worthwhile way of conceptualising experiences of transition is through *liminality*. The following paragraphs first outline the origin of the concept and its application in current research. Subsequently, the discussion explains how liminality is employed in the present research and whether and how it can be situated within sociocultural linguistics and a social constructionist understanding of identity.

The concept of liminality originates in anthropology. The term was coined in the work of Van Gennep (1960 [1909]) on rituals in tribal societies. He examined so-called “rites of passage” that individuals or groups undergo as part of their developmental process, for example as an entry into adulthood. Van Gennep observed that such rituals consist of a move from a relatively stable state through a phase of transition into a new stable state. As such, they encompass three stages, which Van Gennep (1960 [1909]: 11) named *separation*, *transition* and *incorporation*, or, based on the Latin term *limes* meaning ‘border’ or ‘threshold’, *preliminal*, *liminal* and *postliminal*.

Van Gennep’s work had a widespread impact on the social sciences, but not until nearly 60 years later when it was rediscovered and taken up by Turner (1967, 1969), as Szokolczai (2009) points out. Turner adopted Van Gennep’s distinction of the three stages, explaining in detail the extraordinary situation of individuals in the liminal phase as “neither here nor there” but rather “betwixt and between” the positions they held in society before and the ones they were to obtain afterwards (Turner 1969: 95). He conceptualised this phase as encompassing an *anti-structure* in which norms and regulations are suspended and privileges and obligations no longer apply, thus removing individuals’ previous attributes (Turner 1969: 102). Turner further pointed out that this leads to a social situation that he termed *communitas*. Through antistructure and *communitas*, individuals are made equal during the liminal phase, which allows them to create “a blank slate” (Turner 1969: 103) before adopting new social roles and identities upon reintegration into society. Liminality is thus inherently a transformative process.

Whilst Turner bases his elaborations on liminality as experienced in tribal societies, he points out that this structure of undergoing transition may also apply to modern

Western situations, for instance in initiation rites to fraternities or sororities in universities (1967: 101). Indeed, research across a range of disciplines has shown that the concept can capture transitional experiences beyond the realm of its original context, as discussed in what follows.

A noteworthy contribution to theorising experiences of transition is Schütz's (1944) reflection on what it means to be a stranger. Whilst the concept applies to anybody seeking to belong permanently to a new group of some form, such as for social or work purposes, Schütz illustrates it with the phenomenon of migration. He points out that every group has their own structures, behaviours and ways of making sense of the social world. Such knowledge is acquired and regarded as self-evident. However, an arriving immigrant or stranger will have a different set of knowledge due to their background. Applying this to the new environment will challenge it and lead the stranger to question what had previously been taken for granted. This requires the stranger to verify their assumptions about the group's "cultural pattern" one by one in order to adjust to it (Schütz 1944: 506). The stranger is in a "state of transition" from one system to another and as such "a cultural hybrid on the verge of two different patterns of group life" (Schütz 1944: 507). Should the stranger achieve the transition to this different cultural system entirely, they will no longer be a stranger. Schütz does not make reference to liminality; indeed his reflection was published before the concept became popular through Turner's (1967, 1969) work. Nevertheless, what the stranger experiences bears many parallels to liminality, namely the transition from one state to another, the dissolution of previously valid structures and the formation of new ones.

Current research on liminality has adopted and fruitfully applied the concept in a wide range of disciplines such as psychology, sociology, human geography and linguistics. Expanding liminality from its original context to also capture and explain modern Western experiences has led to a number of extensions and modifications. Most prominently, liminality can explain not only ritual experiences and ceremonies such as weddings, but has been applied to a wide range of transformative experiences such as motherhood (Phillips and Broderick 2014), career transitions (Ibarra and Obodaru 2016) or indeed any life stage or change in individuals' personal situation that might engender a psychological transition and impact on their sense of who they are (Bridges 2004). Focusing on a particular type of transition, research has employed liminality to

capture individuals' experiences of mobility, such as long-term travelling (White and White 2004) and lifestyle migration to the Spanish coast (O'Reilly 2000).

Liminality therefore offers a fruitful way to conceptualise various experiences of undergoing personal transition. Relocating abroad is such a transition, as argued in Chapter 1. The liminal phase as a transition between two stages is in line with the phenomenon of relocation and the production of narratives in which identity is negotiated, as in the case of expatriate blogging. This conceptualisation frames the understanding of the data examined in this thesis and shapes the approach towards data collection, as detailed in Chapter 4.

To conclude this discussion of liminality, it is necessary to elaborate on how the concept may be situated within the sociocultural linguistic approach adopted in the present research and its non-essentialist view of identity, as outlined in Section 2.2. As regards disciplinary concerns, the concept of liminality is applicable across various disciplines and to diverse contexts, as illustrated above, even though anthropologists may emphasise its origin in anthropology and its original focus on tribal societies (Szokolczai 2009: 165). This broad applicability makes it suitable for adoption in sociocultural linguistics, all the more as this approach supports an exchange between disciplines (Bucholtz and Hall 2008a).

The integration of liminality with identity as conceptualised in the present research requires comparatively more explanation. At first glance, liminality as a phase of transition between two stable states seems at odds with an understanding of identity in a non-essentialist way. A view of identity not as a quality that a person possesses as part of a fixed state of being, but as a positioning of self and other continuously undertaken through discourse, appears to contradict the stability assumed before and after the liminal phase. However, a distinction needs to be made between individuals' perception and their practices as understood through the conceptual framework. In a social constructionist view, identity is understood as constructed through discourse at any point in time. This also applies to phases that can be seen as belonging to more or less stable states, such as before relocation or once participants perceive themselves as settled in their new environment. Individuals' displayed perceptions of whether they are in a stable state or undergoing a transition therefore do not foreclose whether identity is constructed through discourse or not. Nevertheless, individuals who see

themselves as currently undergoing a transition through the changing circumstances in their life may be prompted to engage in a discursive negotiation of this transition. It is the very experience of change of their presumably stable identity that contributes to engendering and driving individuals' relocation narratives in the form of expatriate blogs. This means that participants' own essentialist notions are a crucial part of their negotiation of identity, and analysts need to take this into account to understand what it is that participants do in their negotiations, as argued in Section 2.2. Thus, from an emic perspective it can be argued that individuals portray their identity first as stable, then undergoing some form of change and then stabilising again. However, an etic point of view understands such a portrayal of a stable identity as a construction nonetheless. Therefore, liminality enriches rather than hinders an understanding of identity as constructed in phases of transition.

3.4 Narrating transition

As argued above, narrative is a central means for individuals to engage with their surroundings. This is especially the case in phases of change, so that studying narrative may reveal how individuals "make sense of turning points in their existence" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012: 19). This section explores previous research on how transition is narrated, the findings of which are relevant for the present research. Beginning with an overview of key studies on transition narratives told through CMC and particularly through blogging, the discussion moves onto focusing on transition inspired through mobility such as tourism and migration. This, finally, serves to identify a gap in current linguistic research on transition narratives in the context of privileged migration, which is where this thesis aims to make an original contribution.

Feelings of changing as a person may be engendered by very diverse circumstances, leading to a wide range of online transition narratives. For instance, Phillips and Broderick (2014) argue that becoming a mother impacts on individuals' identity and therefore constitutes a transition involving liminality. They explore how identity is constructed online through an analysis of contributions to *Mumsnet*, a website which hosts discussion forums and blogs and provides information and advice to parents. Yet whilst they acknowledge that identity is constructed through narratives of transition,

they conduct a qualitative content analysis rather than showing in detail how transition and liminality are discursively negotiated.

In contrast, a number of studies on personal blogging in diverse contexts have adopted a close focus on how individuals linguistically engage with experiencing transition. As argued in Section 3.2, blogs are suitable environments for individuals to share narratives of personal experience because they can be updated regularly and can therefore be employed to report on unfolding events and individuals' position towards them. Transition narratives have been examined in such diverse contexts as weight loss, illness and transgender blogging, as the following paragraphs illustrate.

The case of the weight loss blogosphere shows that sharing their experience of transition with an audience can be beneficial to individuals: a study of personal blogs documenting individuals' journey of losing weight has found that such blogs are not merely produced for the individuals themselves, but require an audience to hold the blogger accountable and support them throughout their endeavour. Therefore, weight loss bloggers are facing the challenge of achieving authenticity in their construction of identity, which they navigate through their writing as well as through the sharing of photographs, diet plans and food charts (Leggatt-Cook and Chamberlain 2012: 974). Given the importance of an audience for this type of blogging, it can be argued that weight loss blogs not only capture an individual's transition, but also support it further. Narrative and transition can hence mutually constitute each other.

Additionally, research has found that personal blogs can be a means of making sense of the experience of suffering from cancer and that identity is constructed through the narratives shared by individuals in their blogs (Page 2008; de Boer and Slatman 2014). For instance, Page (2008, 2011, 2012) compares the narratives of male and female cancer sufferers. Following Martin and Plum (1997), she distinguishes different ways in which evaluation happens: whilst recounts exhibit a temporal structure conveying some events with interspersed evaluation, anecdotes consist of a notable event followed by evaluation (Page 2012: 59). Yet her data further reveal a narrative structure warranting the introduction of a specific type of anecdote, the "Reflective Anecdote", as mentioned in Section 3.1: these are instances in which the evaluation is more extensive and moves the narrative focus from the events to the current moment of narrating (Page 2012: 63). Such reflective passages were only found to be present in

female bloggers' narratives, revealing a difference in the way men and women share their experiences of illness in personal blogs. Following a similar interest in the types of narratives told in such blogs, but adopting a longitudinal focus, de Boer and Slatman (2014) examine different narrative stages in cancer blogs. They identify a trajectory from expressions of rupture between individuals' healthy past and their present life with cancer to a phase of in-betweenness characterised by hopes of convalescence, which may finally lead to narratives of improvement and returning normality. Blogging thus allows individuals to express their experiences of transition engendered through illness.

In a similar vein yet pertaining to a different context, research on online transgender narratives has shown how video blogging (vlogging) can capture and share personal transition. For instance, Raun (2015) examines how vlogs serve transgender individuals as a means of transformation. Vlogging enables them to continuously share narratives of life as it is experienced, thus producing an autobiography as they go along. At the same time, their vlog acts as a mirror and a diary: it enables individuals to see themselves and explore different identities, as well as in the course of transitioning show their physical transformation to their viewers. Using their vlog as a mirror both for themselves and to share with the world, transgender individuals may find reassurance for themselves and from their audience, which enables them to reach authenticity (Raun 2015: 368). A concern with *authentication* of transgender identity through online narratives is also present in Jones' (forthc.) work: she has found that transgender vloggers portray their experiences as typical and position themselves as experts, which endows themselves and their situation with authenticity. Furthermore, their vlogs are produced in a relatively amateur manner and grant insight into their personal everyday life. This way of sharing their experiences again serves individuals to construct authentic transgender identity. Yet at the same time, Jones' (forthc.) findings show how by portraying their own experiences and practices as normal, transgender vloggers enforce heteronormativity and contribute to delegitimising experiences that differ from their own. Both Raun's (2015) and Jones' (forthc.) findings ultimately advocate an understanding of video blogging as a form of online narrative that enables individuals to share their personal transition experience.

Hence, previous work has explored various forms of transition as shared in personal blogs. Of special relevance to the present research are transition narratives engendered through individuals' experience of migration or mobility more generally. These occur not only in blogs, but may be elicited in research interviews. For instance, both De Fina (2003) and Gonçalves (2010, 2013a, 2013b) examine identity construction with regard to migration and closely represent interview conversations in which such narratives are embedded and co-constructed. This allows them to take a close focus on the interaction and the linguistic resources employed therein. Their research is situated in different migration contexts: De Fina (2003) explores border crossing narratives of mostly undocumented Mexican immigrants to the US, whereas Gonçalves (2010, 2013a, 2013b) analyses conversations with intercultural couples who are Anglophones and German-speaking Swiss living in Switzerland. Yet their results show commonalities in terms of how identity emerges from linguistic resources: in both studies, pronoun use, reported speech, and categorisation of self and other were means of constructing identity in relation to having experienced migration. Such instances of linguistic categorisation and positioning of self as opposed to other are also crucial means of identity construction in expatriate blogs, as detailed in the analysis.

Lawson (2016, 2017b) examines positioning strategies and ideologies of participants in an online expatriate forum as part of a wider project on British lifestyle migrants in the French Ariège. Her analysis shows that the forum offers a space to ask for information and advice on living in France and as such attracts queries and requests for help from newly arrived migrants. At the same time, however, established members uphold an idea of the 'right' kind of behaviour upon migration, which categorises the help-seekers as dependent on other British migrants and lacking the necessary effort to integrate into local society. Similar concerns with the 'right' behaviour emerge from ethnographic studies on lifestyle migration and integration (O'Reilly 2000; Benson 2010, 2011) as well as from studies on other forms of mobility, as discussed further below.

Yet how being confronted with a different sociocultural environment impacts on the way identity is constructed is not only examined in interviews with migrants, but also with travellers, which again highlights the blurring of different forms of mobility discussed in Chapter 1. For instance, a link between identity and travelling is affirmed by Desforges (2000) through an analysis of interviews with British tourists returning

from Peru. His findings show that many participants had decided to go travelling when aspects of their life such as work or social relationships were changing, and that making experiences abroad enabled them to share narratives thereof and through this construct identity.

This potential of travel for identity construction is further pursued by White and White (2004). They conducted interviews with long-term travellers through the Australian outback to examine whether transition is a useful concept for understanding the effect of extended travelling on individuals. Their thematic analysis reveals that travel is often motivated by an ending, such as a change in family life, work or a general desire for change, which resonates with Desforges' (2000) findings. Travelling itself then constitutes a "transitional zone" without boundaries (White and White 2004: 208). It allows individuals to experience a sense of freedom and enables "the shedding of old identities" (White and White 2004: 214). The end of long-term travel finally offers the chance for new beginnings. The interview narratives indicate that travelling can function as a "rite of passage" between the old and the new (White and White 2004: 216). Participants' narratives hence support the notion intrinsic to liminality that a person's previous identity can be 'shed' and a new one adopted. From the point of view of identity as discursively constructed, this illustrates how individuals make sense of their experience of travelling.

Similarly, Noy (2004) explores how young Israeli backpackers tell interview narratives of changing as a person. The changes shared by the interviewees were found to be solely positive and at the same time not very specific (Noy 2004: 90). Furthermore, the findings show that authenticity plays an important part in such narratives on three levels: the narrative of changing as a person is authenticated as resulting from a unique and authentic tourist experience, which in turn is engendered by visiting locations that are constructed as unique and authentic by the tourism industry (Noy 2004: 91-92). From this, Noy (2004: 96) concludes that authenticity is "a commodity" in tourism, which enables individuals to share not only narratives of their travel experiences, but "narratives of identity". Once more, then, travelling enables individuals to share transition narratives.

That travel is linked to notions of authenticity and personal change not only emerges from interviews, but also from narratives told in personal blogs. For instance, Snee

(2013a, 2014a, 2014b) analyses travel blogs written by British adolescents undertaking a gap year abroad. Supporting the position of the present research, she argues that blogs offer “a way of accessing *narratives of the self*” (2014a: 68, original emphasis). This is particularly relevant for gap year blogging because going on a gap year is generally seen as an opportunity for personal development through coming into contact with other cultures, being reflexive and thereby ultimately attaining a cosmopolitan outlook (Snee 2014a). There is therefore an expectation on gap year travellers “to do something worthwhile” (2014b: 858), which they meet through four types of narrative. Firstly, they emphasise that they are real travellers rather than mere tourists, and that instead of visiting the major sights, they gain true insight into other cultures and hence attain authenticity. Secondly, they point to their personal development through the acquisition of knowledge and skills that will be beneficial to them in their home environment. Further, they stress that the gap year enables them to help others through volunteering, whilst finally also acknowledging that they want to enjoy themselves while away from home (Snee 2014b: 849). However, a close analysis reveals that gap year narratives are generally not very reflexive. This allows the conclusion that in contrast to the general conceptualisation of gap year experiences, being confronted with a different sociocultural environment does not necessarily engender reflexivity and cosmopolitanism (Snee 2013a, 2014a, 2014b). Returning gap year bloggers frequently convey “feelings of change and transition”, making this the “standard narrative” of gap year travel, yet it is often neither detailed nor questioned by the bloggers (Snee 2014a: 160-161). This is in line with Noy’s (2004) observation on the positivity and lack of specificity of such narratives.

A similar discourse of changing as a person in the course of travelling abroad emerges from blogs written by British backpackers, as Bosangit et al. (2015) reveal. Bloggers were found to share travel narratives of taking risks, facing challenges and learning through new encounters with people and places. Travel blogging thus enables individuals to imbue their experiences with personal meaning and “express the transformational effects of their experiences for the self” (Bosangit et al. 2015: 12).

Concerns with authenticity and the ‘right’ way of being mobile are not limited to accounts of travelling such as explored by Noy (2004) and Snee (2014a, 2014b), but they are also present in blogs about living abroad. In a blog written by an American

expatriate in Italy, Cappelli (2008) identifies a hierarchy of mobility, where expatriates as permanent residents are placed at the top, above seasonal residents and travellers, with tourists as the lowest category. A discourse of hierarchy and distinction is also discussed in Vora's (2012) exploration of the blogosphere in the United Arab Emirates: English-speaking residents position themselves as the core of the online expatriate community and as able to judge appropriate online behaviour, in contrast to citizens and the state, all the while marginalising South Asian individuals as migrants who do not belong. Whilst these findings originate from diverse research contexts, this does in fact emphasise how pervasive such notions of authenticity and hierarchy are in contexts of mobility. How they emerge from the present research is illustrated in the analysis, predominantly in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8.

A further study on blogs about living abroad underlines the importance of authenticity in transition narratives. The project analyses blogs written in Spanish (Kluge 2011) and French (Frank-Job and Kluge 2012) by migrants to Québec. The authors take the position that migration represents rupture and change in a person's life, during which identity is constructed. For instance, Spanish-speaking migrant bloggers were found to describe their struggles with the French spoken in Québec, to engage with local stereotypes and to mark the anniversary of their migration as an incentive for self-reflection in their blogs. Furthermore, they categorise themselves as migrants through the naming of their blogs, which draw on discourses of distance or adventure or make reference to their destination or country of origin (Kluge 2011). Building on these findings, an analysis of the French-language blogs reveals that bloggers construct migrant identity through an authentic portrayal of their experiences. This involves the telling of events that occurred during their process of migration, the conceptualisation of migration as a path with milestones to be achieved, and the sharing of emotions experienced along the way (Frank-Job and Kluge 2012). These findings show blogging as an important means of identity construction for individuals experiencing a move to a different country.

To summarise and conclude this discussion on transition narratives, the present research remains to be situated within previous work. A number of studies have explored how identity is constructed in online narratives of transition engendered by diverse contexts (Page 2008, 2011, 2012; Leggatt-Cook and Chamberlain 2012; de

Boer and Slatman 2014; Phillips and Broderick 2014; Raun 2015; Jones forthc.). Regarding transnational relocation, whilst studies on lifestyle migration are interested in matters of identity pertaining to migration (Benson and O'Reilly 2016), they tend to be ethnographically informed and include interviews with participants (O'Reilly 2000; Benson 2011). When stories of transition are presented in the migration literature, they often appear as the researcher's thematic summary of individuals' experiences as learnt through research interviews (Chan 2014; Catalano 2016), although some studies explore such narratives with a focus on the linguistic resources employed in the interactional positioning (De Fina 2003; Gonçalves 2010, 2013a, 2013b). Interviews have also informed work on narratives of mobility more generally, such as by travellers and tourists (Desforges 2000; Noy 2004; White and White 2004). Key studies that examine blogs to gain access to narratives of mobility and their import for identity construction have scrutinised gap year bloggers' reflexivity and their means of claiming cosmopolitanism (Snee 2014a), shown the impact of sharing stories of risk, challenges and learning opportunities on backpackers' identity construction (Bosangit et al. 2015) and illustrated how bloggers share their migration experiences and work towards establishing themselves as authentic (Kluge 2011; Frank-Job and Kluge 2012).

The present research contributes to this field of enquiry by focusing on a different linguistic and sociocultural context and exploring in more detail how identity is constructed in unsolicited transition narratives through the relational dimensions of likeness, realness and power as well as membership categories. The latter analysis takes a longitudinal focus by discussing category negotiations at different stages of relocation, which makes it possible to capture in more detail how identity is constructed in transition. Having outlined previous work that informs this thesis, the discussion now turns to the phenomenon under study: expatriate blogs.

Chapter 4 Expatriate blogs

4.1 Approaching expatriate blogs

This chapter presents the data of this thesis. In a first step, it weighs the benefits and challenges of analysing blogs and details how expatriate blogs were identified and explored, including a reflection on the researcher's position. Subsequently, it explains the rationale and procedure of selecting a sample for analysis and discusses ethical considerations informing this process. Finally, it provides an overview of the collected data and the participants of the present research.

Blogging is a widespread practice nowadays, although its extent cannot be determined in precise numbers, as there is no single means of indexing and tracking blogs. According to Rettberg (2014: 16), the platform *Wordpress* communicated in 2012 that it hosted more than 50 million blogs, and that more than 100,000 blogs were begun every day. However, the internet is a dynamic environment, which sees the emergence of new practices and the decline of others, so that the present situation is likely to differ substantially from that in 2012. Heyd (2017: 122) reports an estimate of 150 to 200 million blogs, with the caveat that the number of blogs in actual use is likely to be considerably smaller, as blogs may be abandoned but remain accessible. This phenomenon was also encountered in the process of collecting data for the present research, as detailed further below. Therefore, instead of the number of blogs, the number of posts shared every day may be of greater informative value, a figure that may well exceed two million (Heyd 2017: 122).

Equally dynamic and varied is the purpose for which blogs are written. For instance, blogging may serve professional purposes, such as promoting business or research. Yet Puschmann (2013: 88) reports that research has revealed a majority of bloggers to use their blog for their own enjoyment and to express their thoughts, leading him to conclude that self-expression is an important motivating factor for blogging. Therefore, an investigation into how individuals linguistically construct identity in personal blogs is worthwhile. Unless otherwise specified, the term *blog* and its derivations are

subsequently employed to refer to personal blogging rather than other types as outlined in Section 3.2.

Blogging is a valuable data source for research on identity construction for several reasons. Firstly, blogs contain narratives that an individual chooses to share with a potentially wide audience. These are naturally occurring rather than solicited (for instance through interviews). Therefore, the themes that emerge and the way in which they are discussed are not influenced by a researcher, but fully originate with the blogger and the circumstances in which they find themselves. Through blogging, individuals position themselves as having something that is worth sharing and personally meaningful, such as their experiences of transnational relocation. This merits a closer exploration, as undertaken in this thesis.

Moreover, blogs enable individuals to share their experiences to their liking. By keeping a blog, individuals can carve out their own narrative space, tailor it to their needs and populate it with content of their choosing. They are in control of this space to the extent that some bloggers may delete or block unwelcome comments or not allow any input from readers altogether. In contrast to other social media sites such as Facebook or Twitter, where individual contributions risk disappearing in the wealth of users' newsfeed, posts in an individual's blog do not compete with other content. Instead, previous posts remain accessible through the archives, enabling readers to gain a comprehensive overview of a blogger's narratives. This again is of particular interest for an investigation of identity construction in phases of transition.

A further strength of blogging is what at first glance may appear a weakness: its relative mundaneness. Blogs offer narratives about the daily life of an individual, including events, observations and reflections, and are crafted and polished to varying degrees. It is for this reason, as Puschmann (2013: 88) points out, that the mass media often portray blogging as "vain or egocentric" when blogs are judged with criteria that would apply to journalism. However, the present research argues that blogs offer a window into everyday sense-making, showing for instance how individuals cope with transnational relocation and its impact on their sense of self on a daily basis. Hence, although they may be dismissed as mere musings, they are valuable sites both to participants and to analysts due to their affordances for identity construction.

Yet analysing blogs is also met with challenges both of an epistemological and technological nature. In terms of the former, the study of autobiographical narratives may treat such narratives as authentic representations of a discourse-external reality (De Fina 2016), as discussed in Section 3.1. Whilst taking data at face value is a potential risk with any data obtained from participants, such as interviews and questionnaires, it is exacerbated in the case of CMC, where it may be difficult to ascertain who participants are and whether what they share online is genuine. Indeed, blogs often contain carefully crafted narratives that allow individuals to portray themselves and their experiences in a favourable light whilst downplaying or omitting other aspects. Therefore, research on blogs may encounter concerns about participants' authenticity. Addressing this issue, Hookway (2008) questions whether it ultimately matters. Applying his argument to the present research, although it is highly unlikely that a blogger would only pretend to undergo transnational relocation, the language employed to share their presumed experiences would be no less real, as the individual would still draw on similar linguistic resources as other bloggers, and probably even more prominently so if their aim was to pass as an expatriate. Hookway (2008: 97) concludes that genuineness is only an issue for research which analyses blogs to draw conclusions about offline conditions rather than examining the effects that the blogs themselves produce. Thus, whilst acknowledging the matter, the present research aims to explore the construction of identity through the very notion of *authentication* as achieved through language, following Bucholtz's (2003) caution against treating authenticity as given.

A further concern regards the role of blogging in a quickly evolving online environment. As discussed in Section 3.2, it may be surmised that blogging is in decline, particularly because other social media sites have been developed, with which blogging may ultimately merge (Rettberg 2014: 170). Yet even if blogging ceased to exist altogether, this would not decrease the value of exploring linguistic identity construction in expatriate blogs, as at present this is a relevant means for participants to deal with transnational relocation. In fact, as long as research on CMC is viewed against the context in which it occurred, its findings will not become invalid with the decline of the analysed platforms, because they have added to existing knowledge and shaped the development of the field.

Finally, the dynamic nature of blogs needs to be taken into account. Not only is content continuously added to active blogs, but they may also undergo changes such as the removal of previous posts or comments, alterations of layout or migration to new hosting platforms, and indeed blogs may disappear altogether. These dynamics exceed the scope of any analysis, unless the researcher focuses on such changes by collecting data longitudinally. Therefore, the present research can make claims only about participants' narratives as they were found when the data were collected, which constitutes a potential limitation of this approach. However, the analysed posts are what the bloggers were content to share with readers and the researcher at that point in time and are therefore treated as a sufficiently close representation of how individuals engaged with their experience of transnational relocation at the time of posting.

Having outlined the benefits and challenges of analysing blogs, the discussion now turns to how the phenomenon of expatriate blogging was approached. Whilst the present research explores identity construction from a linguistic point of view, a broader understanding of the phenomenon as a whole needed to be developed first. This enabled the identification of relevant data and informed decisions on how to narrow down the wealth of available content to a manageable amount, as detailed further below. It also allowed the researcher to “develop a ‘feel’” (Androutsopoulos 2008: 6) for expatriate blogs. For this purpose, approximately half a year was devoted to an immersion in online expatriate environments. The researcher extensively read expatriate blogs, explored several websites and discussion forums, subscribed to email lists, followed expatriate services on Twitter, as well as joining the online community InterNations and attending a socialising event for members in a nearby city. During this process, extensive fieldnotes were kept. Whilst these fieldnotes are not presented in this thesis, they underpin the confidence with which the analysis was conducted. This is supported by Deppermann's (2013: 84) assertion that an ethnographic understanding is important for an analysis of positioning in narrative as it allows the researcher to comprehend what is relevant to participants. With respect to sociocultural linguistic analyses more generally, Bucholtz and Hall (2008b: 160) equally emphasise the importance of an ethnographic element, because it “provides the temporal depth we need to be sure that what we as analysts see in the data is how speakers as cultural members understand it. It allows us to understand the categories to which speakers

orient.” This was therefore deemed an important first step to a linguistic analysis of expatriate blogs.

Such an approach to online data has precedents in previous research, although the details and terminology differ. For instance, Androutsopoulos (2008) advocates ‘discourse-centred online ethnography’ as a combination of observing online data and conducting interviews with participants, whilst Kozinets (2010: 60) defines ‘netnography’ as “participant-observational research based in online fieldwork” which draws on “computer-mediated communications as a source of data” to understand an online phenomenon. Because no interviews were conducted in the course of the present research, the familiarisation period with the context of expatriate blogging is subsequently referred to as a netnographic approach.

A discussion of how the data were approached would not be complete without a reflexive comment on the researcher’s own position. This is especially the case for a netnographic approach to data, which needs to acknowledge that “we ourselves are inextricable from the research we do” (Bucholtz and Hall 2008b: 160). This position oscillates between insider and outsider. Beyond an inherent curiosity for language and how it shapes the social world, the personal experience of transnational relocation to England has granted the researcher familiarity with matters raised by participants and ways of constructing identity pertaining to them. However, the researcher is an outsider in terms of the narrative environment in which these negotiations occur, having never kept a blog. Blogging can therefore only ever be approached from the perspective of a reader with joint foreignness or from the point of view of an analyst. Nevertheless, an understanding of transnational relocation to England is beneficial to the analysis because it affords “a deep cultural understanding of local meanings and practices”, which Bucholtz and Hall (2008b: 158) regard as a crucial component of the sociocultural linguistic approach. This also holds true for an approach informed by MCA, which draws on participants’ displayed common-sense knowledge, as explained in Section 2.4.

To achieve further familiarity with the context of the present research, websites relevant to transnational relocation were identified and explored through a combination of online searches and ‘snowballing’ by following links from identified sources to additional ones. These websites provide resources and advice or feature discussion

forums about living abroad. However, identifying individual blogs on a topic is not a straightforward matter. Earlier research has drawn on blog search engines such as *blo.gs* and *Technorati* to do so (Huffaker and Calvert 2005; Herring and Paolillo 2006; Snee 2009), yet this is no longer possible: whilst popular in the first decade of the 21st century, blog search engines have mostly disappeared following the advent of other means of sharing content and linking to blogs, such as Facebook and Twitter (Rettberg 2014: 2). General internet searches did not yield many blogs about transnational relocation, and narrowing down the search to blogs about a specific country makes this task even more challenging. Despite the multitude of blogs in existence, they are hence surprisingly inconspicuous.

A solution to this is provided by blog directories, websites which list blogs according to certain criteria, and to which bloggers can submit their blog for inclusion. This enables readers to identify blogs on their topic of interest and supports bloggers in making their site accessible to a wider audience. Rather than searching for blogs on a topic, a researcher can hence orient to what participants themselves deem relevant. The present research draws on this resource to identify relevant data. Two directories were selected for closer inspection of their content in April 2015. Noticeably, no directories and only a few blogs were identified through searches combining *blog* with the terms *immigrant*, *immigration*, *migrant*, *migration*, *foreigner*, *foreign national*, *relocated* or *abroad*. The predominant terms in the blogosphere for the phenomenon of transnational relocation emerged to be *expat* and *expatriate*, which is in line with observations by Leonard (2010) and Croucher (2012), as discussed in Section 1.3. Indeed, the two directories that were selected appeared as prominent results in searches for *expatriate blog*. Both had recently updated their contents and listed an extensive number of blogs according to country of residence.

The first website features expatriate-related news, interviews with expatriates, a number of expatriate forums and a directory of expatriate blogs. The directory lists newly included blogs and the latest blog posts as well as providing a list of blogs sorted according to the bloggers' country of residence. By early May 2015, 2802 blogs were listed, of which 126 were blogs about moving to England. By mid-January 2018, these numbers had increased to a total of 3197 blogs in nearly 150 countries, and 150 blogs categorised for England. The directory emphasises the importance of maintaining a

community through the sharing of experience. This is evident in its ‘about’ tab, where its declared purpose in early May 2015 has remained unchanged by mid-January 2018 and is specified thus: “[The website] was born to serve the expat community. Created by expats for expats, our researchers travel the globe looking for stories that would interest their fellow expatriates.”

The second website provides information and advice for expatriates, including advertisements for jobs and housing and a business directory. It further includes a number of forums for different countries of interest. The posts are publicly accessible, but contributing requires participants to set up a membership profile. It further contains a blog directory, which can be sorted to display the most recently added blogs, the latest blog posts as well as the most liked and most visited blogs. By early May 2015, 8549 blogs were listed, which could be grouped according to country of residence, with 364 blogs for England. By mid-January 2018, the directory featured 9043 blogs in total, of which 398 for England, and an overall membership from nearly 200 countries. It equally highlights the notions of sharing and mutual support, specifying its purpose in its ‘about’ page in early May 2015 as follows:

We rely on the experience of expatriates by inviting them to share it on the website: everybody can participate! Designed by expatriates for expatriates, [the website] helps people who want to live abroad, wherever they are in the world, and wherever they would like to live.

This has since been modified slightly, in mid-January 2018 including a comment on providing “free information and advice to expats and expats-to-be”, whilst retaining its emphasis on personal experience and inclusivity.

Both websites thus claim authenticity and legitimacy by highlighting that they have been created by expatriates themselves. They further stress the importance of sharing experience with likeminded others, and one means to do so is by keeping a personal blog about relocating and living abroad. However, sampling blogs through these directories does not suggest that they necessarily constitute an overall community. This is an important concession, as research may otherwise risk “creating a community where there is none” (De Fina 2016: 338). Whilst the present research does not claim that all expatriate bloggers draw on these directories to read each others’ blogs, the very

existence of such directories corroborates that expatriate blogging is a socially relevant practice with the potential of uniting individuals with diverse relocation experiences.

At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that since the data for the present research were collected, a relatively small number of blogs were added to the directories, as evident above. This supports Rettberg's (2014: 2) observation that blogging is increasingly promoted through other social networking sites. Indeed, the surveyed websites both run a Twitter account through which they frequently promote interviews with expatriate bloggers published on their websites. They thus continue to highlight individuals' narratives of personal experience and provide expatriate blogging with visibility.

The directories are transparent in terms of the composition of their blog collection by specifying a number of inclusion criteria. Both require the listed blogs to regularly feature expatriate-related content and to contain a minimum number of posts upon inclusion (15 and 10 respectively). Bloggers are further prompted to specify their country of origin and country of residence. The first directory is limited to blogs written in English, regardless of bloggers' first language and whether English is spoken in their current country of residence. This is both inclusive and restrictive: whilst this makes blogs about a country potentially accessible to anyone, at the same time it requires sufficient proficiency in English to participate. The community that this directory promotes is thus not as inclusive as it may seem. In contrast, the second directory is not restricted to English. The website can be displayed in English, French, Italian, Spanish or Portuguese, and submitted blogs are not required to be written in English. Yet few blogs in this directory were found to be in a different language or featuring a language in addition to English; amongst the 364 blogs in the section for England, only 18 were identified. Hence, the expatriate blogosphere as represented in both directories appears to be largely based in English.

Of the 490 blogs surveyed in April 2015, 56 were included in both directories, yielding a total of 434 expatriate blogs about living in England. Of these, some were not accessible, either because they had been discontinued but not deleted from the directory, or in a few cases because they were password-protected, which is a surprising finding for blogs listed in a directory. Excluding these cases resulted in a database of 381 accessible blogs. All of these were accessed and key information

collected in a process of netnographic familiarisation with expatriate blogging. This comprised name and subheading of the blog, its description in the directories, and any information included in an *about* page. If ascertainable, the following elements were also noted: nationality and gender of the blogger, area of residence in England, languages used other than English, as well as oldest and most recent post. To complement this overview, blogs were read in depth and netnographic fieldnotes were kept in the process. These included any observations and reflections, such as on common features and recurring themes. Only on the basis of such netnographic insight could an informed decision be made with respect to which blogs to focus on and which to exclude. There are precedents in previous research on blogs for such a procedure. For instance, Snee (2009) viewed 700 gap year blogs which she had identified through blog search engines, and then for close analysis she selected a sample of 40.

The following paragraphs briefly discuss the demographics of the explored blogs in the England section of both directories regarding nationality and gender. Figure 4-1 provides an overview of bloggers' national background.

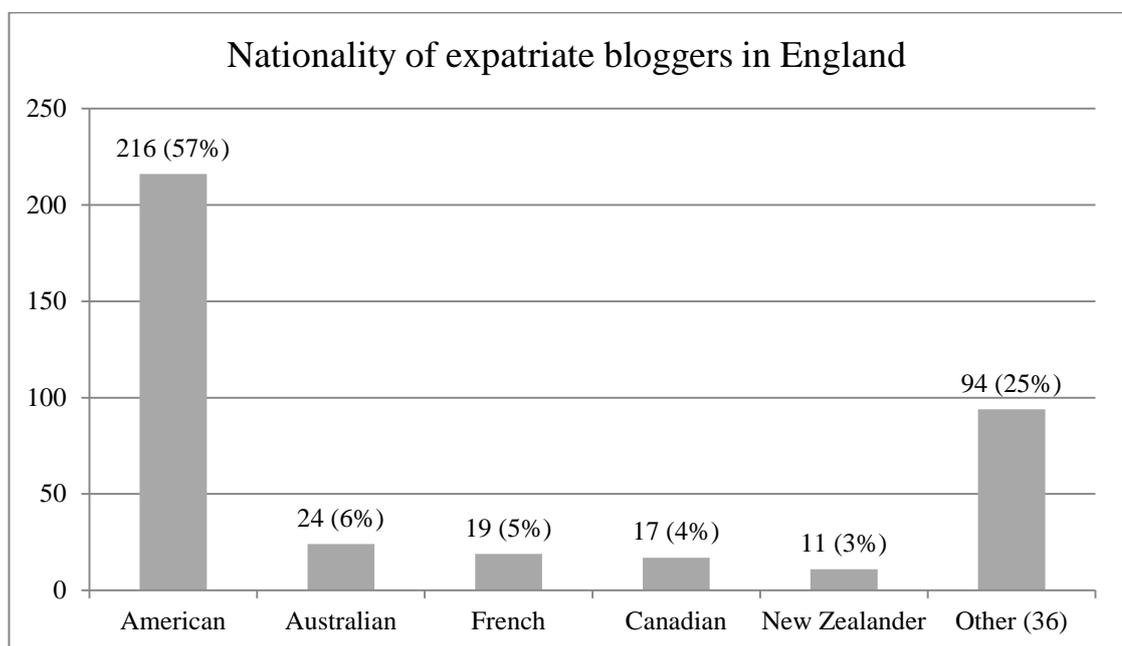


Figure 4-1. Nationality of expatriate bloggers in England (N=381).

As evident in Figure 4-1, a majority of blogs are written by Americans. Whilst blogs by many other nationals are included, for 36 nationalities these amount to fewer than ten. Although the number of nationalities corresponds to the inclusivity that the directories aim for, a closer look at the distribution paints a distinctly less varied picture.

The gender distribution is similarly uneven, as Figure 4-2 illustrates.

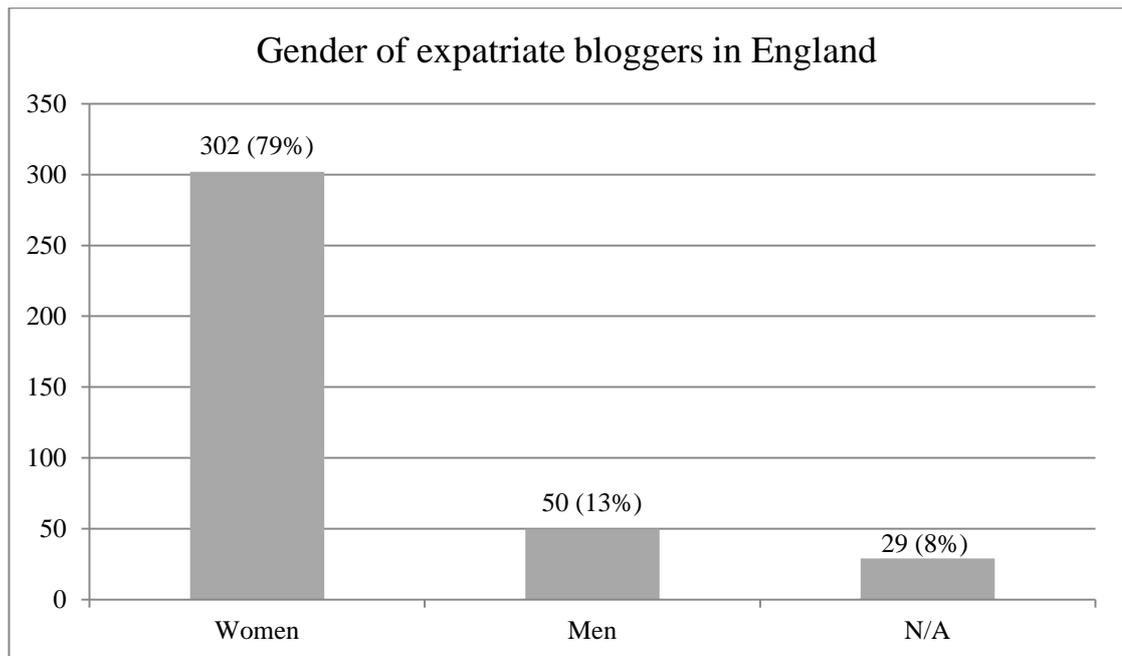


Figure 4-2. Gender distribution of expatriate bloggers in England (N=381).

A majority of expatriate bloggers appear to be women. In 29 cases, it was not possible to identify an individual's gender, or the blog was written by more than one person. Although Nowson and Oberlander (2006) found that personal blogs are mostly written by women, it cannot be ascertained whether expatriate blogging is a type of blogging mostly embraced by women, or whether women are more likely to include their blog in a directory. In any case, narratives told by women are clearly prevalent in the expatriate blogosphere as represented in the directories.

This chapter does not go into detail about frequent themes and ways in which bloggers construct expatriate identity, as these emerge in the analysis. However, two points need mentioning in concluding this overview: narrativity and addressivity. Whilst medium features of blogs are discussed in Section 3.2, narrative aspects specific to expatriate

blogs are briefly outlined here as viewed through Ochs and Capps' (2001) dimensional approach. The narratives in expatriate blogs are told by a single teller, but bloggers can choose to allow comments and emails by readers, and they may elicit and react to them in turn. Their tellability varies from events that are portrayed as highly significant to the documentation of everyday life, even with occasional reference to its mundaneness. In terms of their embeddedness, blog posts show an interesting dynamic. On the one hand, they are detached from other interactions and can be read as discrete tellings. On the other hand, they are embedded in a personal blog and need to be understood in terms of the wider context of their occurrence: not only are new entries situated chronologically by appearing at the top of the page with a time stamp, but in some instances they are presented with the displayed expectation that readers are familiar with earlier blog posts, for example making reference to previous tellings. As regards linearity, expatriate blogs provide an overall chronology of events as they encompass an individual's transition experience, yet not every post may adhere to this order, nor does it necessarily display an internal temporal structure. Finally, the moral stance is dynamic. The views that individuals express regarding transnational relocation, their new sociocultural environment and their compatriots can change throughout their experience. This is for example expressed through constructions of similarity, difference and (in)authenticity, as discussed in the analysis.

Turning to the question of who bloggers are writing for and who reads their blogs, this cannot ultimately be determined due to the public nature of blogging, even less so through a discursive analysis, nor is this the aim of the present research. Nevertheless, to gain a workable understanding of this matter, both the bloggers' contributions and the wider context can be considered. In terms of the former, bloggers were found to orient to and position themselves with respect to their anticipated audience. How this is done and how it contributes to identity construction is addressed in the analysis, particularly with regard to *adequation* (Section 7.2) and category negotiation (Section 10.3.2). Netnographic reading further shows that bloggers in their 'about' section frequently welcome new readers who have just found their blog, which indicates that they expect their readership to extend beyond their family and friends. For instance, a recurrent feature is the metaphor of bloggers inviting guests to their house, encouraging them to make themselves comfortable and even offering refreshments. Expatriate bloggers hence appear to write both for a familiar and an unknown audience.

Considering the wider context of blogging, Puschmann (2013: 94) suggests that the topic of a blog enables inferences about its readership; a likely audience for expatriate blogs are thus individuals who are also experiencing transnational relocation. Yet at the same time, he emphasises that bloggers may expect more from their audience than a shared interest in a topic – as argued in Section 3.4, the audience may for instance provide a blogger with support and accountability (Leggatt-Cook and Chamberlain 2012). Bloggers may monitor traffic to their site, yet Brake (2012) shows that whilst these technical means exist, not all bloggers wish to use them: of a survey of 150 personal bloggers, only a third indicated that they used traffic analysing tools, and a third of these respondents reported checking traffic monthly or less frequently. He concludes that “while personal blogging may seem to be mainly an intersubjective practice, its importance to those who are involved in the practice can be primarily intra-subjective” (Brake 2012: 1072). This supports the findings of an earlier study that a majority of bloggers viewed their blogging as personal rather than public and indicated that they blog predominantly for themselves (Lenhart and Fox 2006). Therefore, the present research conceptualises expatriate blogs as personal narratives and focuses on the identity construction that individuals engage in through them.

4.2 Sample selection and ethical considerations

Following the initial netnography of exploring the directories and the listed blogs, a sample was chosen for in-depth qualitative analysis. This section outlines the rationale and procedure of narrowing down the data and selecting the blogs which form the basis of the present research.

The 381 blogs were revisited in October 2015. Blogs were excluded from further analysis through a number of criteria. Firstly, blogs that had not had any content added to them since April 2014 were judged inactive and discarded, in order to ensure that the analysed blogs are relatively recent and their authors contactable and invested in their blogging practice. This was crucial as it was decided to obtain consent from the bloggers for reasons detailed below. Also, only single-authored blogs written in English were considered further. Only a small number of blogs were written in a language other than English, so that excluding them still captured the bulk of the phenomenon of

expatriate blogging, and it further ensured sufficient proficiency of the researcher to analyse the data. Equally, excluding the few co-authored blogs that were identified allowed the analysis to focus on personal narratives and identity construction by a single individual per blog.

Careful consideration was then given to the authors and content of the remaining 187 blogs. There was no further exploration of blogs by published authors, professional designers and photographers both for copyright reasons and to capture personal narratives of daily experience. Equally excluded were blogs by students who were spending time in England on a study-abroad scheme for less than a year. Furthermore, even though all blogs are written by foreign nationals living in England, some do not contain personal narratives about life abroad, but focus predominantly on fashion, photography, crafts or food. Whether a blog can be regarded as an expatriate blog is a gradual matter rather than a clear-cut distinction, given that many blogs feature multifaceted content that may vary over time as the author's interests change. Indeed, hardly any blog was found to be monotypical, because narratives about a person's daily life are naturally diverse. Whilst the decision to include a blog in a directory and thereby classify it as an expatriate blog rests with its author, it remains for the analyst to focus on the ones that allow the research questions to be answered. The aim of this thesis is not to describe the practice of expatriate blogging as a whole, but to explore how individuals construct identity pertaining to transnational relocation as shared in such blogs. The above-described exclusion criteria were therefore judged to be appropriate.

In a final step, it was assessed at what point in time individuals had begun their blog. As discussed in Section 1.1, the present research examines transition narratives. To this end, the focus lies on blogs that were initiated at the time of relocation. This includes blogs which were begun soon afterwards or a few weeks or months before, but with the first post orienting to the move and subsequent ones documenting the preparations. The selected blogs are hence concerned with transnational relocation from the onset. Further, they cover a timespan of at least one year abroad. This decision was based on the netnographic finding that many bloggers tend to be especially active and produce many posts about living abroad before and during the first year after their relocation. However, it needs to be acknowledged that there are other forms of sharing narratives

of transnational relocation through blogging, such as in an already existing blog or in retrospect after settling in.

Narrowing down the data through the steps described above resulted in a sample of 30 blogs. To summarise, these blogs fulfil the following criteria: they are publicly accessible, active, written in English by a single person for non-professional purposes, they contain personal narratives about transnational relocation to England for an extended period of time and were begun around the time of relocation and continued for at least one year afterwards. Of these 30, 12 bloggers agreed to be part of the present research. Why consent was sought is detailed in the following paragraphs.

Whilst human subject research entails general ethical considerations, additional issues arise from the study of online data. These predominantly revolve around questions of privacy and anonymity. To start with, there is a fine line between whether online data should be treated as public or private due to a necessary distinction between “technological” and “psychological” privacy: as Frankel and Siang (1999: 11) point out, even publicly accessible data may be perceived as private by their originators. Privacy thus needs to be considered “in terms of both access and content” (Bolander and Locher 2014: 17). Although obtaining consent from participants is an option to navigate this grey area between public and private, it has been argued that the mere announcement of a researcher’s presence in an online space may damage a community, so that, depending on the situation, “undisclosed observation” may be favourable (British Psychological Society 2017: 17). Managing questions of privacy is therefore not as straightforward a matter as it might seem.

Another consideration is the searchability of the internet. A researcher wishing to quote online data for instance from publicly available blogs needs to be aware that such quotations can in most cases be traced back to the original source (Snee 2013b: 59). Therefore, assigning pseudonyms to participants cannot guarantee anonymity. The alternative, not quoting or not quoting verbatim, may not be an option for studies concerned with participants’ use of language, as is the case for this thesis. Quoting data may have further ramifications for research on blogging, because blogs may be viewed as either representations of individuals or as texts (Lomborg 2013). The analyst therefore needs to decide whether to grant their participants anonymity as subjects or attribute authorship to them (Hookway 2008: 106).

Whilst academic discussions have highlighted prevalent ethical concerns regarding the use of online data, these need to be considered on an individual basis. Therefore, the ethics working committee of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) advocate “a dialogic, case-based, inductive, and process approach to ethics”, allowing ethics to remain adaptable to different contexts, responsibility for which lies with the researcher (Markham and Buchanan 2012: 5). Indeed, there is no clear precedent in the case of blogs, as some studies involve participants’ consent (Hookway 2008; Lomborg 2013) whilst others do not (Snee 2013b; Takeda 2013). For the present research, consent was sought even though the blogs are accessible and listed in directories. This was deemed appropriate because it acknowledges that an analysis of identity construction in transnational relocation narratives may involve a focus on quite personal matters. Also, individuals are potentially detectable through internet searches even though identifying information is withheld from the data and pseudonyms are used to grant them anonymity as subjects. Obtaining consent brought the added benefit that respondents confirmed that they approve of their blog being considered as a site where foreign nationals discuss their experiences of living abroad.

All 30 bloggers in the sample were thus contacted, where possible via email or through a contact form in order to minimise intrusion. Only if these options were unavailable was a public comment left below the most recent post. The message is provided in the Appendix. Bloggers were asked to contact the researcher should they be willing to participate. Whilst this was likely to result in a smaller acceptance rate than treating a non-response as silent consent, it ensured participants’ awareness. 12 bloggers gave consent to be part of the research, and 17 did not respond. Only one blogger explicitly wished not to be considered, explaining that she was a private person and therefore used a pseudonym, and that whilst she enjoyed sharing her experiences as an expatriate, she did not want her life to be analysed. At the same time, nevertheless, this blogger thanked the researcher for reading her blog and pointed out that there was more to come. This illustrates the complexity of the notion of privacy as discussed above.

The data chosen for analysis comprise posts from the beginning of each blog to one year of life abroad. A year is a meaningful unit in terms of how human beings measure time, as a closer inspection of expatriate blogs confirms: several bloggers mark their anniversary with a comment or even an entire post looking back and reflecting on their

life abroad up to this point, and many track the passing of time every few months by posting updates on their personal development of settling in. Selecting this time span for analysis thus takes participants' perspective into account and promises rich data in terms of transition narratives. All analysed posts had already been written and were contained in the archives at the stage when bloggers were contacted. This ensures that the data are not produced with a researcher in mind, thus avoiding the observer's paradox (Labov 1972). Focusing on previous posts rather than monitoring an ongoing practice further enabled the research process to minimise any interference and to remain as unobtrusive as possible.

Upon obtaining consent, the data were prepared for analysis. In February 2016, all data were imported into the qualitative data analysis software NVivo through the web browser extension NCapture. This extension allows researchers to capture either solely the blog entry or the entire page on which it is displayed, including comments, tags and other features such as the blogroll – a list of links to other blogs that the author follows – and advertisements. In an initial attempt, every post was captured as an entire page to ensure the researcher's access to comments and pictures, should the blog become inaccessible at a later stage. However, the captures proved to be displayed in a disordered way depending on the blog template, were difficult to code and increased the file size to an extent that the database was prone to crashing. Therefore, these entire captures were stored separately for any future reference and a comprehensive database was created in a second step, including all textual data from the blog posts but excluding comments and the majority of pictures. Multimodal data and responses feature to a varying degree across blogs: some contain a considerable number of pictures and occasionally GIF (graphics interchange format) animations or videos, whereas others are almost exclusively text-based, and whilst some blogs allow comments and attract several in certain posts, some blogs contain none at all. The interaction between bloggers and readers who contribute comments is a worthwhile subject of study in its own right and has for instance been examined with a focus on power (Bolander 2013). As regards multimodality, it has been argued that despite its multimodal features, blogging has come to be seen primarily as “a genre of text production” (Heyd 2017: 122). Whilst the researcher had access to the entirety of these features for contextual information, the analysis focuses on participants' narratives as

conveyed through language. For this purpose, capturing the blog posts and coding solely textual content was deemed most feasible and appropriate.

Once imported into NVivo, the posts were grouped into four sets to acknowledge the time span during which they were produced. The first set comprises all posts before relocation, as detailed in Table 4-2 below. The second set contains posts during relocation up to one month beyond to capture the actual relocation plus the earliest stages of settling in. Posts from two to six months were gathered in the third set, and those from seven to twelve months in the fourth. The rationale for this subdivision is based on the netnographic finding that blog posts are particularly frequent during earlier stages of settling in, when bloggers report on their manifold impressions and new experiences. However, the sets are not meant to suggest that individuals' experiences follow a clear-cut structure. Rather, they served as a resource to explore whether any patterns emerged following the coding with regard to these broad stages of participants' transition experience.

4.3 Overview of data

This section provides an overview of participants and the amount of data. All participants are in a relatively privileged position of having made the choice to move to England rather than following a need to leave their home countries. They further have in common their approach to blogging as a means of sharing and engaging with their experiences of transnational relocation. Beyond this, however, their circumstances are diverse. They relocate at different stages in their life and either with family or on their own. Whilst some bloggers move for work purposes or to undertake postgraduate study with the prospect of remaining in England upon completion of their degree, others relocate to be with their English partner or because their partner is transferred to England for work purposes, or because they seek a change in life. Some use pseudonyms and others provide their names, yet all have been given a pseudonym in the present research. Table 4-1 offers an overview of participants' background as ascertainable through their blogs.

Table 4-1. Contextualising information on participants.

Pseudonym and origin	Relocation background and typical blogging features
Sarah US	Sarah relocates with her husband, two children and a dog. Her posts usually include pictures of her environment, but not of her family.
Claire US	Claire relocates to live with an Englishman whom she has met online. She enjoys photography and includes many pictures in her posts.
Kim US	Kim relocates to live with her English boyfriend and pursue a postgraduate degree. She posts pictures of herself and her partner.
Aubrey US	Aubrey relocates because she seeks a change and is recruited for a job. Her posts often include links to other websites, such as news articles. She reveals little personal information.
Emily Australia	Emily relocates with her husband and daughter on an assignment of her husband's employer. They move from Japan after a three-year placement. Her posts are detailed but rarely include pictures.
Jessica US	Jessica relocates with her husband, two dogs and a cat when her husband is reassigned. They travel frequently within England and Europe and her posts include many pictures of trips away.
Megan US	Megan relocates with her boyfriend and their cats. Her partner has accepted a transnational assignment, and she also finds employment.
Ruth US	Ruth relocates with her English husband and two children to experience life in England and be near his side of the family. Her husband finds employment upon settling in.
Chloe US	Chloe relocates to England with her two cats to pursue a doctoral degree. She frequently explores cultural aspects of her surroundings. Her posts include pictures and many GIFs.
Leah US	Leah relocates to pursue postgraduate study, visiting her English boyfriend in another city. She posts especially frequently whilst preparing for her move.

David	David relocates for an ‘Overseas Experience’ and to explore Europe.
New Zealand	He finds employment subsequent to relocation and moves to a different city.
Abigail	Abigail relocates and subsequently finds employment. Her posts are short and usually include a picture of her environment. She reveals little personal information.
US	

As evident from Table 4-1, ten blogs are written by Americans, one by an Australian and one by a New Zealander, all from an Anglophone background. There are instances when participants display an expectation that England will constitute a broadly familiar sociocultural environment, for example in linguistic terms. Commenting on experiences of these expectations being confirmed or challenged provides participants with an important means to construct identity, as detailed in the analysis.

Eleven bloggers are women and one is a man. The gender distribution is a consequence of the sampling procedure and of the fact that a majority of expatriate blogs listed in the surveyed directories are written by women (79% in the England section, as illustrated in Figure 4-2). Whilst bloggers sometimes orient to gender in their narratives, this thesis refrains from adopting gender as an analytic lens. Whether men and women experience and share transnational relocation differently is an interesting subject of study that could form the basis of future research, but it is not the focus of this thesis.

Having briefly contextualised participants’ background, the discussion now moves to the posts they share in their blogs. As explained in Section 4.2, the chosen time frame encompasses the onset of each blog, which in all cases makes reference to moving abroad, and extends to one year after relocation. The analysis takes into account all posts in which participants make transnational relocation relevant. Table 4-2 provides an overview of all analysed data per blog.

Table 4-2. Analysed data per blog.

Pseudonym	Analysed time span	Analysed posts	Of which before relocation	Analysed words
Sarah	12 months	57	0	21,716
Claire	12 months	51	0	23,605
Kim	13 months	43	6	22,377
Aubrey	13 months	32	3	23,538
Emily	15 months	65	26	50,516
Jessica	17 months	62	5	30,065
Megan	15 months	37	8	13,425
Ruth	13 months	42	5	14,403
Chloe	14 months	37	13	21,099
Leah	20 months	96	66	39,183
David	13 months	24	3	9,565
Abigail	12 months	22	1	4,094
Total	169 months	568	136	273,586

Most blogs were begun some time before relocation, with early posts announcing the move and covering the preparation phase, such as the visa application process. As evident in Table 4-2, this period varies in length and can extend to five or even eight months in Jessica's and Leah's case. For Jessica, this does not result in a greater number of posts, because she updates her blog infrequently before relocation. She begins with an announcement that she and her husband are awaiting confirmation from his employer, which is then followed by a three-months hiatus and a subsequent update that they are still waiting. In contrast, Leah produces a considerable number of posts before relocation, in fact more than during her first year in England. This is due to her reporting in detail on the university and visa application process, although many of these early posts are short. After relocation, her posts are less frequent but long and

detailed. The amount of text generated after her relocation is hence greater than the figures suggest. Finally, Emily also produces a notable number of posts before relocation. In contrast to Leah, the early posts in her blog are no shorter than later ones and include detailed reflections on moving transnationally. Emily begins her blog with the prospect of moving soon, yet her family's relocation is delayed, which accounts for the great number of posts leading up to it. Table 4-2 thus illustrates that capturing a comparable period nevertheless yields a different amount of data for each blog due to varying posting frequency and because blogging may begin upon relocation or include the preparations for it. In addition, the posts vary in length both between bloggers and within individual blogs. This is evident for instance through a comparison between Emily's and Jessica's blog, or David's and Abigail's respectively, which differ greatly in word count despite featuring a similar number of posts. However, this variability does not pose a problem for the analysis, firstly because bloggers are not contrasted with each other, and secondly because neither ToI nor MCA relies on quantification for its validity. This point is revisited together with other methodological considerations in Chapter 5 and Chapter 9.

Having described expatriate blogging in general and in particular participants' context and their narratives, it is worth also acknowledging what is not said in these blogs. For instance, participants frequently share experiences of minor challenges of daily life, often in a humorous fashion. Yet instances of more gravity such as periods of loneliness may not be shared, or sometimes only in retrospect, and are then usually treated as accountable. Also, participants' transition is generally portrayed as a change for the better, which arguably is the way human beings conceptualise changing as a person, and which resonates with findings of previous research (Noy 2004; Snee 2014a) as discussed in Section 3.4. A linguistic analysis can explore what is conveyed through language, yet it is challenged by absences: although it may identify them, they are difficult to analyse because such observations are based on the researcher's understanding of the context and thus externally brought to the text. Whilst the analysis focuses on identity construction through discursive practices as realised in language, this is a caveat worth bearing in mind.

To summarise, introducing the data of the present research necessitates first of all a description of the phenomenon of expatriate blogging, including a reflection on the

advantages and challenges of analysing blogs, outlining the netnographic approach and positioning the researcher within this context. Informed by this, the criteria for narrowing down the data including ethical considerations can be specified, resulting in the sample of twelve blogs analysed in this thesis. Finally, an overview of participants' context of relocation and the distribution of data serves to situate the analysis. This chapter thereby concludes Part I, which sets the scene for the subsequent discussion of the linguistic construction of expatriate identity.

PART II TACTICS OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Chapter 5 Exploring dimensions of identity construction

5.1 Tactics of intersubjectivity (ToI)

Part II of this thesis comprises the methodological discussion and analysis pertaining to the ToI framework, as introduced and explained in Section 2.3. This chapter details how the part of the framework that the present research employs, namely the three dimensions of identity construction, were explored in the context of expatriate blogging. In a first step, the six tactics are outlined and illustrated with examples from the data. Subsequently, the discussion turns to how the data were coded and analysed through ToI as well as what considerations this process entailed. Finally, the chapter gives an overview of the occurrence of the six tactics across the analysed blogs to provide a basis for the ensuing discussion of the findings.

The ToI framework consists of three dimensions, which comprise two tactics each, situated at opposite ends on a scale, as detailed in Section 2.3. Their interrelation is visualised in Figure 5-1.

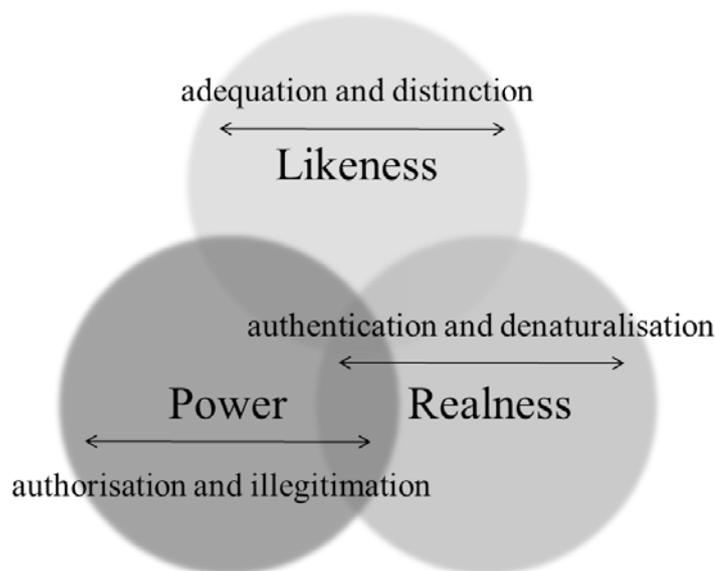


Figure 5-1. ToI, based on Bucholtz and Hall (2004a, 2004b).

The three dimensions along which identity is constructed are represented as intersecting and slightly blurred circles to illustrate that distinctions are not clear-cut and that one extract may be seen as pertaining to more than one dimension. Rather than treating the tactics as six discrete phenomena, the emphasis lies on viewing ToI as three dimensions comprising continua of positioning that the tactics serve to describe, visualised by the double-headed arrows. *Likeness* is used in the present research to encompass the creation of similarity and difference. Equally, *realness* comprises both the construction of authenticity and inauthenticity, and *power* that of legitimacy and illegitimacy.

Firstly, the dimension of likeness encompasses the tactics of *adequation* and *distinction*. These involve individuals positioning themselves as similar and different respectively to others both in terms of who they are and the practices they engage in. This is illustrated in the following examples.

Example 5-1 [Kim]

Sorry for the sappy-ness! (Here's a fun language tidbit...I have always said 'sappy,' but in England, they often use 'soppy,' which is what the Brit says, and it's definitely stuck for me.)

Example 5-2 [Sarah]

Alrighty – time for another list of things I find different here. Ready for a few? * Not only do they drive on the other side of the road, they walk up the other side of the stairs too!

Example 5-1 is an instance of *adequation*. Kim points out how her production of a particular linguistic item has changed, having been influenced by the British equivalent. She has thus adopted a practice that she associates with England, creating similarity towards her current environment. Example 5-2, in contrast, illustrates *distinction*. Sarah shares a list of differences she has observed between the US and the UK. Her first item addresses a cultural practice that she has found to be different. At the same time, she constructs a 'they' – the British – and thus implicitly contrasts this group with herself or Americans more generally. Whilst 'they' is also employed in Example 5-1, Kim embraces the linguistic difference she ascribes to others. *Adequation* here presupposes

difference. The two examples illustrate that *adequation* and *distinction* are situated on a scale and are interrelated, which is further discussed in Chapter 7.

This interrelation between tactics, and specifically between those within the dimension of likeness, poses a challenge because Bucholtz and Hall (2004a, 2004b) do not elaborate on how to apply their framework in detail. Whilst they specify that the tactics are to be understood as continua rather than dichotomies, the problem persists for researchers aiming to code their data for *adequation* and *distinction*. The solution of the present research is to treat displayed appreciation of sociocultural aspects pertaining to England as *adequation*, as illustrated in Example 5-1, even though their observation at the same time creates difference. In contrast, instances of mere juxtaposition of aspects such as through lists of vocabulary items are viewed as *distinction*, although they involve individuals' awareness of corresponding British terminology. This serves this thesis to discuss *adequation* and *distinction* and the ways in which they are done in a structured way, whilst nevertheless acknowledging their complexity.

The dimension of realness comprises constructions of (in)authenticity. *Authentication* involves portraying identity as genuine, whereas *denaturalisation* portrays identity as unreal, unnatural or otherwise challenging. Both tactics are exemplified below.

Example 5-3 [Emily]

The reason I started [name of blog] was to share what being an expat was like, and obviously it's only from my point of view. And while there are plenty of positives to be gained from this incredible experience, there are negatives. It's the YING and YANG of life!

Example 5-4 [Jessica]

Or if I am counting out my British coins, it takes me forever. I feel like a 7 year old counting out his pennies at the ice cream shop!

Authentication is illustrated in Example 5-3. Emily emphasises that she intends her blog to document expatriate life as gleaned through her personal experiences. This involves a differentiated view and openly addressing negative aspects just as positive ones. She thereby constructs identity as a person who honestly shares her real and lived experiences of life abroad. Jessica in Example 5-4, in contrast, denaturalises identity.

She points out that she is not confident handling British coins and takes a long time for it. Living abroad makes her feel challenged by everyday tasks, which leads her to compare herself to a seven-year-old who is only just learning to use money. *Denaturalisation* here involves a portrayal of identity as unnatural and challenging.

The dimension of power, finally, revolves around legitimacy granted or denied by predominantly institutional power. *Authorisation* of identity accepts it as allowed and legitimate, whilst *illegitimation* rejects or devalues it, as illustrated by the following examples.

Example 5-5 [Chloe]

As of yesterday, I've officially been granted the status of "unconditionally accepted" student at the school I'll be attending this fall.

Example 5-6 [Sarah]

So let's just cut to the chase. Nervous Nellie FAILED! I can't believe I actually failed the Hazard Perception part of the driving test. The horror!

Example 5-5 comprises *authorisation*. Chloe shares that the university where she aims to pursue postgraduate study has accepted her, which will enable her to apply for a visa and ultimately move to England. Identity is here portrayed as a matter of 'status', which is 'officially' 'granted' by an external authority. The opposite, *illegitimation*, is experienced by Sarah in Example 5-6. As an American in England, she has to take a test to be allowed to drive beyond her first year abroad. Although she has been driving in the US, she is not granted the same legitimacy in the UK automatically and indeed nor after failing her first attempt at the test. Whether regarding postgraduate study or competent driving, in both examples it is an institutional authority that grants or denies identity related to living abroad.

Although the six tactics are illustrated separately, they are interrelated, as discussed with respect to Figure 5-1. Bucholtz and Hall (2004b: 503) acknowledge the interrelation especially between the dimensions of realness and power given that what is seen as authentic is also often legitimised. Yet they emphasise that the distinguishing factor between the two dimensions is the institutional element pertaining to

authorisation and *illegitimation*. The close relationship between the two dimensions emerges further in Chapter 6 and Chapter 8, which amongst other things explore *authentication* that involves participants' legitimation of themselves and their blogging outside an institutional context. The following section addresses how the analysis was conducted.

5.2 Coding procedure and considerations

Once collected, the data were imported into NVivo, and were then coded for the six tactics of ToI. For this purpose, a coding scheme was developed to ensure consistent application of ToI to all data throughout the coding process. In an initial step, the first five posts of every blog were coded to establish familiarity with the data, the framework and the coding process. During this exploratory phase, notes were taken that helped develop the coding scheme later to be applied to all data.

To further ensure the validity of the approach and the coding scheme, an inter-rater validity test was conducted with another researcher. In their discussion of how to employ NVivo for qualitative analysis, Bazeley and Jackson (2013: 93) caution against having coding checked by a second person if the analysis is carried out by a single researcher. They emphasise that coding is a means to understanding the data, but not an analysis in itself, and that therefore every researcher will code the data differently. In their view, training another researcher to apply a certain coding scheme will only prove that coding can be taught, but not its validity. However, the inter-rater validity test conducted in the present research was not a matter of teaching the coding scheme to a fellow researcher, but of testing an already established framework for its applicability to a new context. It offered an opportunity to engage in discussion with a fellow researcher with experience of employing the ToI framework in her own work (Sauntson 2016).

For the inter-rater validity test, the first post of every blog was analysed by both researchers and subsequently compared, which revealed high overall agreement. The ensuing discussion revolved around the minute details of coding, predominantly where the boundaries of an instance of coding are and whether and how the approach should allow for double-coding of extracts to two tactics. In terms of the former, the

framework is not specific, leaving the decision to the analyst. The present research treated coding as encompassing units of meaning. An instance of a tactic may extend beyond sentence-length and can comprise an entire paragraph, and the same tactic may occur several times in any one post. However, this varying size of instances of tactics does not pose a problem for a qualitative analysis. Ultimately, as well as to be set into a relationship with other instances of the same tactic, all coding needs to be reviewed in the situated context in which it occurs, and NVivo offers the opportunity for both by collecting all related coding in one folder, a so-called node, as well as providing a link to the posts from which it originates, thereby retaining coherence. As regards interrelation of different dimensions of ToI, instances where this was found to be striking were double-coded rather than treating tactics as mutually exclusive. This is in line with Bucholtz and Hall's (2004b: 505) assertion that individual tactics may co-occur and interact.

Following the inter-rater validity test, all data were coded, proceeding blog by blog in the order displayed in Table 4-1. Whilst in the case of a discursive framework such as ToI this already constitutes a form of analysis, the finished coding was further explored in a subsequent stage of analysis. This involved studying all instances of every tactic in greater detail, running word frequency queries to support familiarisation, observing patterns within and between nodes as well as within the four time frames, taking notes and visualising observations in models.

In the case of the dimension of power, observations resulted in further subcoding. Firstly, *authorisation* was frequently identified as ongoing or pertaining to the future rather than the present. Therefore, such occurrences were subcoded as *irrealis authorisation*, an extension of the ToI framework developed by Sauntson (2016) and further discussed in Section 6.1. Such subcoding for *irrealis* was not conducted for the remaining tactics, however, as it was not found to be as relevant. Secondly, types of *illegitimation* were distinguished. Whilst instances of *illegitimation* are not numerous, as illustrated in Section 5.3, they appear very prominent in the data, potentially due to their very scarcity. This warranted a more detailed distinction, which is discussed in Section 6.2.

5.3 Power, likeness and realness: an overview

The analysis of identity construction presented in the three following chapters was carried out along the three dimensions of power, likeness and realness, and their corresponding pairs of tactics. The discussion focuses on the patterns that have emerged from the analysis mainly within each tactic, but also takes into account relationships between the tactics and their situatedness within the process of relocation where relevant. This chapter concludes with a general overview of all six tactics, establishing the foundation for a more detailed discussion in Chapter 6, Chapter 7 and Chapter 8.

An overview of how many instances were coded for each tactic across the examined posts yields a distribution shown in Figure 5-2.

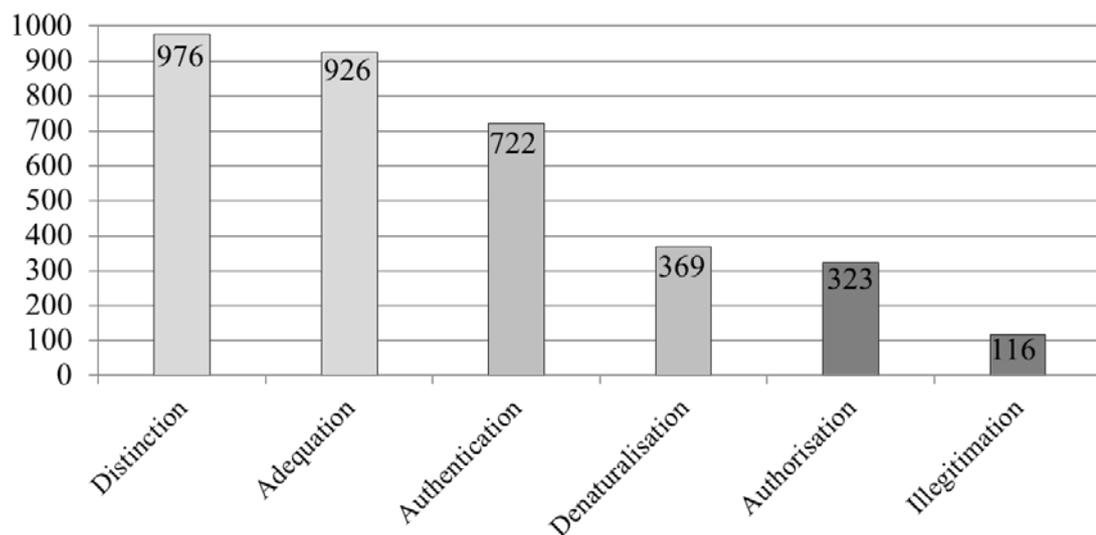


Figure 5-2. Number of instances coded for ToI.

The frequency of individual tactics broadly corresponds to the three dimensions to which they pertain, represented in Figure 5-2 as light grey for likeness, a darker shade for realness, and the darkest shade for power. Individual blogs mostly mirror the overall distribution, although some participants more often create similarity than difference, and one most frequently engages in *authentication*, yet closely followed by both *adequation* and *distinction*. Similarly, the subdivision into four time spans did not yield

any striking patterns apart from the phenomenon of *irrealis authorisation* discussed in Section 6.1.2. Therefore, the subsequent observations are based on the aggregated distribution across all blogs and time spans.

Yet a note of caution needs to precede this discussion. The extent to which instances of ToI can be quantified is not specified in the framework. Whilst Figure 5-2 provides a visualisation of which tactics are prevalent in the data, frequency does not necessarily imply that these instances are the most meaningful. In fact, less frequent tactics may stand out more and may be of greater consequence for identity construction when they occur. As pointed out in Section 4.3, the validity of ToI does not lie in quantification, but in the detailed exploration and discussion of specific occurrences and of their import for identity construction. This is what the next three chapters provide. Concluding this discussion of methodology is therefore an indication of the distribution of tactics that is necessarily limited to a rough overview.

The dimension of likeness has emerged as dominant in terms of its frequency of occurrence. This underlines the conspicuous role that negotiations of similarity and difference and comparisons of self and other play in the construction of identity. Within this dimension, both tactics are similarly prevalent, with *distinction* being done slightly more often than *adequation*. The detailed analysis discusses how similarity and difference are linguistically constructed and with regard to what domains individuals engage in such positioning.

The second most drawn on dimension for identity construction is realness, yet with greater internal variation: individuals were found to create authenticity far more often than challenge it. The production of real or authentic identity is thus a relevant practice for participants. However, the figures should not distract from the importance *denaturalisation* has in identity construction. Indeed, its sparsity makes it rather more impactful when it occurs. How *authentication* and *denaturalisation* are achieved and how *denaturalisation* can contribute to establishing authenticity is shown in the in-depth analysis of this dimension of identity construction.

The power dimension, finally, is the least frequent in the data. It also shows variation between the tactics it comprises: whilst *authorisation* occurs with a similar frequency as *denaturalisation*, *illegitimation* is rare. Nevertheless, both tactics are drawn on in the blogs and contribute to identity construction, with *illegitimation* being especially

marked for its scarcity. That individuals largely construct identity through negotiations pertaining to the likeness and realness dimensions rather than to institutional power is arguably an effect of the context. Expatriate blogs as transnational relocation narratives foreground personal experience of similarity and difference and lead individuals to engage in questions of authenticity pertaining to the perceived transition they are undergoing. Institutional power is made relevant predominantly regarding visa requirements and other necessary arrangements for transnational relocation and as such tends to be negotiated in the early stages of expatriate blogging.

The subsequent discussion of the findings takes this into account by beginning with a focus on participants' engagement with the dimension of power. Chapter 6 illustrates how individuals achieve *authorisation*, taking into account the ongoing nature of the process as well as challenges contributing to *illegitimation*. The dimension of likeness is the subject of Chapter 7, which discusses first *distinction* and then *adequation*, elaborating on which areas participants orient towards in their construction of difference and similarity. The dimension of realness, in turn, is explored in Chapter 8. The analysis comprises participants' *authentication* and *denaturalisation* of identity and shows how the latter can contribute to the former. Generally, whilst the discussion of ToI groups the tactics into different chapters and sections for reasons of transparency, they are intertwined and ultimately need to be understood not in isolation, but as operating together in the construction of identity. The following chapters therefore highlight where such interrelation of tactics is particularly prominent.

Chapter 6 Power: *authorisation* and *illegitimation*

6.1 Constructing legitimacy

6.1.1 Obtaining legal status: *authorisation*

Power is one aspect of identity construction, even though this dimension is not as frequently in play in expatriate blogs as likeness and realness, as shown in Figure 5-2. Nevertheless, *authorisation* occurs across all examined blogs, especially during the early stages of relocation, which warrants that its discussion precedes that of the other dimensions. This chapter examines both poles of the power dimension as well as considers a discursive practice situated on the scale between them, *irrealis authorisation*, a feature to which the sequential nature of blogging is particularly conducive. To start with, this section discusses how participants construct identity through *authorisation* by an institutional power.

A key phase before relocation for participants involves arranging all necessary aspects for their move. In the context of the present research, achieving the legal status required to enable participants to move to England involves obtaining a visa. Several bloggers provide detailed and step by step descriptions of this process as it unfolds, such as receiving confirmation from their employer or university, applying for and obtaining their visa, making shipping arrangements for their personal belongings, organising the necessary documentation for their pets, and so on. *Authorisation* therefore commonly involves announcing legislative milestones in the relocation process. This reiterates the *authorisation* that individuals received from an institutional authority, as the following example illustrates.

Example 6-1 [Emily]

Well, we have them. Those priceless, all-important UK Visa's that allow all 3 of us into Britain legally, long term.

Having informed her readers on the process of working to meet the requirements for applying for their visa, in the above extract Emily shares her success of having obtained

visas for her and her family. She points out the significance of these ‘priceless, all-important’ documents and the implications they have on their identity: they ‘allow’ entry and residence ‘legally, long term’. Her and her family’s identity as expatriates has thus been authorised.

Blogging allows individuals to share narratives of personal experiences step by step and keep readers informed of their progress. In Example 6-2, Chloe goes into some detail in her account of finding out that her visa had been issued.

Example 6-2 [Chloe]

I was approved for my visa last Wednesday, and emailed about my approval on Friday. However, I didn’t find out until **today** because said email did not arrive in my inbox until this morning at 11:11 AM.

Here, Chloe not only points to the fact that her visa has been granted, but details when it was approved and when she heard about it, specifying the exact minute the confirmation email reached her. The sharing of such important steps in the process of preparing for transnational relocation is a phenomenon also identified in Frank-Job and Kluge’s (2012) study on blogs by French-speaking migrants in Québec. As discussed in Section 3.4, their analysis shows that bloggers portray their preparation for migration as a path along which certain important stages need to be completed. The stepwise documentation of this process as it unfolds is made possible through the affordances of blogging, which provide individuals with a means of constructing their identity as authorised.

Whilst *authorisation* in the form of obtaining legal status as an expatriate mostly features at the beginning of the blogs, it is also found at later stages, when important steps are achieved, as in the following example.

Example 6-3 [Claire]

I'm Official... Limited Leave To Remain Approved!

[...] This little card is good for two years and confers more than a few benefits on the person to whom it belongs, chief of which for me is the right to stay in England with [husband]. Additionally, with my new status I can now work in the UK. For someone like myself who tends to be a bit of a workaholic, getting this card yesterday was reason for a celebration on multiple levels.

It is poignant how Claire takes obtaining her UK identity card to have an effect on her as a person, stating 'I'm Official' in the title of her post. She further elaborates on the privileges this 'new status' confers to her, such as 'the right to stay' as well as to 'work in the UK'. Whilst she was already living in England, she is now able to share how her identity as somebody enjoying some of the rights of the local population has been authorised.

Authorisation hence encompasses participants' successful navigation of legal requirements and administrative tasks. However, in sharing these milestones and how they were achieved, participants at the same time portray themselves as knowledgeable about the necessary steps. This in turn positions them as potential advice-givers for readers who are considering moving abroad themselves. Indeed, individuals use the blogosphere to interact and sometimes directly ask each other for advice, thus conferring expatriate identity onto the person they approach for guidance. For example, Chloe contacts Leah enquiring about the documentation required for a visa application, which Leah answers with a post detailing what is needed based on her own experiences. This phenomenon illustrates how different tactics can intersect, in this case through the interrelation of *authorisation* and *authentication*: whilst sharing her success of obtaining the legal means to relocate authorises Leah as an expatriate, being able to respond to Chloe's query grants her non-institutional legitimacy and positions her experiences as authentic. Another example of this is Megan's advice on moving pets abroad based on her own experiences, as illustrated below.

Example 6-4 [Megan]

I then looked at the health requirements for pets per the UK import policies. Since they are being imported from a third country (not the EU) they don't need a pet passport, just a certificate from the vet, stamped by the USDA. Here is the official UK website: <https://www.gov.uk/take-pet-abroad/overview>

Megan achieves two things in this extract: she firstly shares how she obtained legal *authorisation* for her pets, and she secondly portrays herself as a knowledgeable expatriate by outlining the legal requirements which she has learnt about through experience, as well as providing a link to the website for interested readers to follow her example. Sharing how she obtained the right to bring her pets into the country thus acts as a means for her to authenticate herself as an experienced expatriate well-versed in the relocation process by virtue of having gone through it herself. How participants draw on relevant knowledge and expertise to authenticate expatriate identity is further discussed in Section 8.1.2.

Whilst obtaining necessary documentation is a milestone that participants share with readers to authorise expatriate identity, several posts deal with the steps of attaining the required documentation. Sharing the process of arriving at this point is done through a form of *authorisation-in-the-making*. How participants discursively construct this anticipation of legitimacy is detailed in the following section.

6.1.2 Anticipating legitimacy: *irrealis authorisation*

A majority of the *authorisation* process involves waiting for the required documents, such as confirmation by participants' employer or university, or waiting for an appointment for their biometrics and passport photographs. Whilst this contributes to attaining legal status, it is not yet a confirmation. However, this anticipation of achieving *authorisation* in the future can be seen as *authorisation-in-the-making*, and blogging with its sequential nature affords participants the chance to express this. Example 6-5 illustrates this discursive practice.

Example 6-5 [Jessica]

The Waiting Game.....

Well, it's April 13th and we are still waiting on the "official" word that we are moving to England. It has been a month since we heard that [husband] was scheduled to fill the position at [Royal Air Force station]. So, the rollercoaster of emotions have been oh so fun (obvious sarcasm).

These are the title and opening lines of Jessica's first post. *Authorisation-in-the-making* is expressed through the fact that even though she and her husband have been 'scheduled' for an assignment in England, they have not yet received confirmation and therefore their move is not yet 'official'. Whilst Jessica has decided to begin her blog about their life abroad, she needs to point out that her *authorisation* as expatriate still lies in the future. This involves a waiting period on their part and a 'rollercoaster of emotions'. Her next update follows a whole three months later and highlights that this waiting period can be extensive, as the post is entitled 'STILL WAITING!!!!'. Waiting for confirmation is a pervasive feature in the early stages of these transnational relocation narratives. Indeed, the majority of the analysed blogs include posts covering the time before relocation, and in some cases a considerable number, as illustrated in Table 4-2. As Leah points out in one of her post titles, expatriates '[g]otta love the waiting game'.

Therefore, narratives of waiting for institutional confirmation function as a form of *authorisation* as well, albeit *authorisation-in-the-making*. Although it is present in over one third of all cases of *authorisation* in the analysed expatriate blogs, this phenomenon is not part of Bucholtz and Hall's (2004a, 2004b) original framework. However, Sauntson (2016) introduces the concept of "irrealis authorisation" to capture instances of *authorisation* which do not actually (yet) occur, but which are needed or desired by participants. Drawing on the framework of appraisal (Martin 2000), Sauntson (2016: 24) points out that expressions of the ToI may "relate to the future" and hence be "unrealised" or "irrealis" at the time they are made. *Irrealis authorisation* with a view to potential future *authorisation* is a common feature in expatriate blogs, and nearly half of all *irrealis authorisation* occurs at the early stage before individuals' relocation. This serves two functions: it keeps readers informed about participants' progress on their way to transnational relocation, and at the same time it allows individuals to construct expatriate identity even before their move, as the process of obtaining all required documentation is an important aspect of transnational relocation.

Another example is Chloe's narrative of the steps she is about to complete in order to move to England and begin a postgraduate degree.

Example 6-6 [Chloe]

I bought my plane ticket (SOOpah cheap) and completed my visa application! I'm printing the app and making a stack of my supporting documents. My Biometrics appointment is next Tuesday — then all my stuff goes in the mail! Plus, I'm all booked for the Meet & Greet and Int'l Student Orientation programs. Fingers, toes, eyes, arms, ankles crossed that my app gets processed without a hitch and my passport is back in my possession with a shiny, new visa sticker before it's time for me to go. To celebrate nearing the end of this hair-pulling, stomach-churning, nightmare-inducing process, I'm spamming your ear-holes with some British deliciousness.

Having already booked her flight and filled in her visa application, Chloe is planning on submitting it soon. She expresses her hopes that it will get processed smoothly, and envisages the 'shiny, new visa sticker' that will enable her to move abroad. Because she has yet to obtain the required documents, this is an instance of *irrealis authorisation*. Nevertheless, Chloe marks 'nearing the end' of this difficult process by sharing some British music with her readers.

Yet *irrealis authorisation* does not necessarily conclude upon transnational relocation. Instead, participants still draw on the medium of blogging at later stages of their life abroad to document the *authorisation* of certain aspects of their identity which is envisaged but not yet confirmed. For example, Abigail is aiming to find employment and wonders about 'the British way of doing things', which she follows with the subsequent extract.

Example 6-7 [Abigail]

I was very fortunate today to get an informational interview with a helpful director at [institution]. He gave me some really good advice about job search tactics that are worthwhile, and those that are not. Now, if I'm smart, I will follow his recommendations.

Although she has not yet obtained a position and been granted *authorisation* as a working expatriate, Abigail expresses *irrealis authorisation* through having undertaken the necessary steps in this direction and receiving recommendations to help her pursue her goal. That *irrealis authorisation* can be an ongoing aspect of expatriate identity construction well beyond the actual move is evident in a series of posts by Sarah, in which she updates readers throughout the first year on her progress in obtaining the

right to drive a car in the UK beyond one year. The following discussion revolves around selected examples from these posts.

Example 6-8 [Sarah]

With only a 33% pass rate for the UK driving test, I'll definitely enroll in driving school. I have one year to pass the test.

In this first instance, Sarah outlines the requirement for her to drive in the UK once the first year of her stay has come to an end. This is *authorisation* she will have to face, and one that she continues to return to in discussing her preparations, such as in Example 6-9.

Example 6-9 [Sarah]

To prepare like most driving expats, I'll need to invest in a CD-ROM program that will teach me the rules of the road (I've just been guessing so far) and 5-6 hours of driving school.

In this later post, Sarah outlines what she is aiming to do in order to be authorised like other 'driving expats'. As this still lies in the future, it functions as *irrealis authorisation*. The following extract from another post provides insight into how her *authorisation* progresses.

Example 6-10 [Sarah]

Well, here we go! Nervous Nellie is going to take the written UK driver's test this Friday! Woo hoo! I was unable to book at a test center close to my house, so I have a complicated drive to a town I can't even pronounce

Whilst the outcome is not yet clear, Sarah points out that she will undergo the required process for obtaining a UK driving licence, thus again engaging in *irrealis authorisation*.

In summary, the discussion has shown that *authorisation* of expatriate identity is prevalent in participants' narratives of reaching milestones in the process of relocation,

and that a finer distinction of instances which are directed at the future is worthwhile. In contrast to Sauntson's (2016) findings in interviews with lesbian, gay and bisexual young people, where *irrealis authorisation* was used to refer to *authorisation* that did not happen, *irrealis authorisation* in expatriate blogs nearly exclusively comprises *anticipated authorisation*. The waiting period before relocation is an important factor in this, yet as Sarah's continued narrative of working towards her UK driving licence shows, the anticipation of *authorisation* continues beyond the moment of relocation. *Irrealis authorisation* is therefore a valuable addition to the ToI framework, particularly for exploring how individuals construct identity in phases of transition, such as evident in transnational relocation shared through regular blog posts. Through its position between *authorisation* and *illegitimation*, it further serves as a reminder that although they are labelled after the poles of a dimension, the tactics are more usefully conceptualised as scales. To illustrate identity construction situated towards the other end of the continuum relating to institutional power, the discussion now turns to *illegitimation*.

6.2 Encountering obstacles: *illegitimation*

Throughout the relocation process, but also at later stages in their life abroad, participants may encounter problems or situations that challenge and delegitimise identity. *Illegitimation* can occur when *authorisation* fails, such as when a test is not successfully passed or when things go wrong in the process of obtaining necessary documents. A sense of being illegitimate can also be conferred when reflecting on the living situation of an expatriate, which often comes with a high degree of uncertainty about the future. A closer inspection of all instances of *illegitimation* in the data reveals that this tactic is expressed through a number of different means. These can be grouped into three problem areas, which are roughly evenly represented in the data: official matters and status, lack of access or resources, and lack of control. These areas are discussed in turn below.

Firstly, *illegitimation* can be related to official matters like laws and regulations, such as participants experiencing rejections or not having permission to stay indefinitely. Similarly, individuals may experience that their status is not official or lacks validity,

which impacts on their identity and places constraints upon them. The following two examples illustrate *illegitimation* through legal matters.

Example 6-11 [Sarah]

Hello Mr. Driving Test Man, I am very scared of you and your scary test. I know too many expats who have struggled to complete this rite of passage gracefully.

Example 6-12 [Leah]

It's also incredibly difficult at times to be confident that you'll even manage to stay after the fact when you've suddenly got to be better than all the EU or else get (quite literally) deported once your student visa is expired. There's no going back to mom and dad's for a few months until you land a job.

Example 6-11 is an extract from a fictional letter that Sarah writes to her assessor before taking her practical driving test. She aligns herself with other expatriates who had difficulties obtaining a licence, and based on their experiences of *illegitimation*, she expresses fear of failing the test and being denied the authority to drive a car beyond the first year of her stay. This affiliation with other expatriates at the same time functions as an instance of *adequation*, which is discussed in Section 7.2. Furthermore, Sarah calls the test a 'rite of passage', which emphasises the importance of passing it not only in terms of being allowed to drive, but also in terms of how it impacts on her identity. This evokes the notion of liminality or in-betweenness that such transitions entail, which is explored through the lens of category negotiations in Section 10.1.2. Leah, in contrast, reflects on the difficulties faced by individuals who have moved to England on a student visa, but who wish to stay in the country upon completion of their studies. She feels that there is a lot of competition and that if she is not 'better than all the EU', she will be '(quite literally) deported' from the country, which comprises the ultimate form of *illegitimation*. She further points out that for expatriates there is no safety net in place in the form of having their family close by, so that she experiences additional pressure when it comes to establishing herself in a job in England upon completion of her studies. Both Sarah and Leah hence express their worries about potentially impending *illegitimation*.

The perception of their identity being threatened by a failure to undergo a perceived 'rite of passage' and establishing themselves is closely linked to feelings of having an invalid status in England, as Megan's and Emily's reflections on their work situation illustrate.

Example 6-13 [Megan]

Job hunting was the thing I was dreading most, in a country where the connections and credentials I had didn't mean nearly as much.

Example 6-14 [Emily]

Most expat wives can not work even if they wanted to simply because of visa status 'dependent upon sponsored spouse'. There's seldom if ever negotiation from governments. It's enough they 'allow' your husbands inter company transfer, taking away a job from a 'local' let alone allow a second person to do the same.

Looking back on her initial feelings about moving to England, Megan elaborates that she was worried about finding work, as her qualifications and connections did not have equal validity as in her country of origin. This ultimately impacts on her identity, since she as a working person becomes devalued in the process of moving abroad. More extreme still according to Emily is the situation for most expatriate women who have relocated because of their husbands' jobs. In contrast to their husbands, Emily explains, most women are not allowed to work in their country of residence, as their status is that of a 'dependent' spouse. By moving abroad, they accept dependency and are illegitimised in the work context.

Secondly, and related to this lack of status, *illegitimation* is done through expressing a lack of access or resources. For instance, while waiting for her visa to be approved, Kim does not have access to her passport and therefore cannot visit her partner in England. This makes her reliant on him visiting her, as she explains in an aside in Example 6-15.

Example 6-15 [Kim]

(I would be doing all the traveling, but my passport was being held hostage, remember?!)

The expression that her passport is ‘being held hostage’ suggests that she feels quite strongly about not being allowed to travel freely and in that sense being illegitimised. Aubrey, in contrast, reflects on her living situation abroad and feels at a disadvantage being a non-UK citizen, as illustrated below.

Example 6-16 [Aubrey]

It annoys me even further because I pay heavy taxes here, yet I can’t access any recourse to public funds. In other words, if I’m injured and can’t work for a period of time, I can’t access unemployment insurance or other benefits since I’m not a United Kingdom citizen even though I pay heavy taxes.

She experiences a lack of access to resources despite contributing, which means that her status is made illegitimate in this context. Similarly, participants may struggle with finding accommodation, for example due to time constraints, as shown in the examples below by David as well as Ruth, who reports on the reaction she received when trying to find a new place to live once her family’s stay in their temporary accommodation was coming to an end.

Example 6-17 [Ruth]

Only to be told I’m looking much too early, to come back in May, I should only allow four weeks (FOUR WEEKS!) to find a place. Because there is such a shortage of housing here. Four weeks is not enough time, considering that I need to pack everything we own up (at least what isn’t already in a box), buy a sofa, some chairs, trash cans, appliances, a mattress.....

Example 6-18 [David]

I started work on Monday, but I don’t have a place to live. I’ve been in 4 different B&Bs in the last week. And when you have to walk everywhere and work for a full day, there isn’t a lot of time left to flat hunt or find alternative accommodation.

Ruth is worried about the limited time allocated to moving house in England, given that she has to purchase many of the items required for furnishing a house. Whilst the time frame may not be problematic per se, she makes clear that it certainly is for an

expatriate who does not own furnishings. David similarly experiences difficulties in finding accommodation due to a lack of time. Having arrived in England on a limited budget, he has managed to obtain a job, but the need to work limits the time he can spend on locating suitable accommodation.

Thirdly, *illegitimation* of identity can be done by indicating a perceived lack of agency, a lack of knowledge and certainty, as well as by an explanation of mishaps, of things that have gone wrong. All of these instances involve a lack of control and are therefore grouped together in this discussion. For instance, before their relocation, Chloe and Emily repeatedly write about the process they undergo dealing with the requirements of transnational relocation, as exemplified below.

Example 6-19 [Chloe]

Everything that can go wrong, will.

Example 6-20 [Emily]

‘TWO STEPS FORWARD ONE STEP BACKWARDS’

Is exactly how the lead up to an international transfer with work can feel.

In both examples, this lack of control is emphasised by being expressed in the title of the post. Chloe shares the pitfalls of having her passport delivered in time for her flight, and Emily outlines how slow progress is on trying to arrange their transnational move through her husband’s employer.

The process of moving abroad is thus fraught with mishaps beyond individuals’ control. Similarly, participants repeatedly mention finding it difficult to cope with the uncertainty of whether they will be able to move abroad, as well as feeling that they lack knowledge about how to deal with certain issues that arise upon relocation. The following examples illustrate this lack of knowledge and certainty.

Example 6-21 [Kim]

It was hard not knowing if I was really going to start graduate school or not, especially because I had no back-up plan which is not typical for me.

Example 6-22 [Jessica]

You will most likely be on a strict deadline and working with agencies in England can be a chore. I found that we had to do most of the work. And we had no clue about all of the rules and setting up new utility accounts etc. was crazy! I had no idea that we would need 2 months rent deposit, and then add on pet deposits. Yikes.

Kim outlines how she was not sure whether she would be able to enrol for university, and that she did not have an alternative in mind. Jessica, on the other hand, describes the challenges of arranging accommodation whilst having limited knowledge of the usual process in England. Both extracts show that lack of knowledge or certainty contributes to constructing participants as not entirely legitimate.

In a similar vein, individuals reflect on how little agency they have when it comes to determining the length of their stay abroad, depending on their employment situation and visa regulations, as discussed by Sarah and Megan.

Example 6-23 [Sarah]

Most expat assignments are 3 years, but at the last minute you could be shipped home or to another country (sometimes not a desirable one).

Example 6-24 [Megan]

Sometimes it feels like you have no control over your life. How long you can stay and when you must leave are often in the control of the government, a job or a partners position. Things can be bureaucratic or last minute. The agency in charge of your visa doesn't care about your plans, or whether 6 weeks is enough time to plan a move home...or un plan one. The future can feel very unsure and if you are a planner (I am) this is extremely frustrating, but you learn to live with it.

Sarah portrays expatriates as lacking control of their destiny, as they may passively be 'shipped home or to another country', whether they like this or not. Similarly, Megan outlines how she had to come to terms with the uncertainty and lack of influence over her life and her future in England, leaving her in a liminal state. In both cases, participants express that they are not granted control and self-determination. Instead, they convey a sense of aspects of their identity being dependent on others.

To sum up, *illegitimation* is expressed through a lack of status, access or control, as discussed above. This shows again that *illegitimation* and *authorisation* are two poles on the same scale, as lack of control may also be expressed with regard to the waiting process that participants must undergo in obtaining the required documentation for relocation. Whilst seeking *authorisation* by submitting their documents is an agentic process per se, the waiting documented through *irrealis authorisation* entails that a lot of the *authorisation* participants strive for is not entirely in their hands. Whilst they are proactive in taking the necessary steps towards *authorisation* of their status, they do not ultimately have control over whether they achieve it, nor within what time frame. This puts into perspective the focus of recent research on individuals' options and choice as a defining criterion for privileged migration or mobility (Croucher 2012; Lawson 2016), as discussed in Section 1.3. Whilst participants may choose to move abroad or embrace an opportunity that presents itself, the exact terms of their relocation may well not be in their control. This in turn impacts on how individuals construct identity. A final illustration of this is Example 6-25, in which Chloe points out the effect that the waiting process has on her.

Example 6-25 [Chloe]

My CAS [confirmation of acceptance for studies] still hasn't been issued, so I'm unable to deliver a post giving a play-by-play of the visa application process, or any other useful tips/insight about getting ready to make the move from the US to England. I don't even feel allowed to be excited about the move yet because so much still hangs in the balance. This post is my remedy.

Because she does not yet have the confirmation from her future university that is required to pursue her visa application, Chloe points out that she cannot contribute related content to her blog. She is unable to perform so much as *irrealis authorisation*, and expresses not even feeling 'allowed to be excited' yet. She highlights the impression that she is not entitled to feeling a certain way about her move, based on her lack of *authorisation* as well as on the lack of means to pursue it. At this stage, her identity as an expatriate is constructed as illegitimate, and to counterbalance this, she instead proceeds to write about what she is looking forward to in England.

However, whilst *illegitimation* contributes to identity construction in expatriate blogs, most situations that engender *illegitimation* are eventually resolved into *authorisation*. After all, the examined blogs are written by individuals who have succeeded in moving abroad and have thus ultimately obtained the necessary institutional endorsement despite complications and setbacks. The relatively privileged status of individuals who experience transnational relocation as shared in expatriate blogs is evident not only in the scarcity of *illegitimation*, but also in the extent to which the power dimension as a whole remains comparatively marginal for the construction of identity. *Authorisation* is prevalent before relocation, particularly in the form of *irrealis authorisation*, yet once institutional acceptance has been granted, it is not frequently drawn upon to construct expatriate identity. Privilege inheres in the absence of a discussion of power structures and hence ironically is not easily captured by analysing instances of *authorisation* and *illegitimation*. This does not suggest that participants do not write about persisting challenges, and the above-made point about questioning the concept of choice in migration remains valid.

As illustrated in this chapter, individuals' engagement with *authorisation* involves obtaining the right to move abroad and entails the notable tactic of *irrealis authorisation* before relocation. *Illegitimation* encompasses encountering obstacles, many of which are ultimately resolved. However, the predominant resources for expatriate identity construction beyond relocation are the negotiation of likeness and realness. To illustrate this, the next chapter focuses on the creation of similarity and difference pertaining to transnational relocation.

Chapter 7 Likeness: *adequation* and *distinction*

7.1 Constructing difference

7.1.1 Creating difference to origin

Narratives of transnational relocation are rich in negotiations of both similarity and difference, which serve participants to construct identity through a number of intersubjective relations. As evident in Figure 5-2, likeness is the most frequently mobilised ToI dimension in expatriate blogs. This chapter explores the two ends of this scale, but also aims to show how strongly they are interrelated. The elaboration begins with constructions of difference in relation to participants' origin and England, two contrastive terms which here are employed to subsume people, practices and the sociocultural environment in general. Subsequently, the discussion turns to constructions of similarity towards these two benchmarks, whilst also taking into account an additional reference point that emerges as relevant from the analysis: other people who are foreign in a place because they have relocated or are travelling.

In the course of transnational relocation, participants create *distinction* with regard to their origin by pointing out how they are becoming different to people 'back home'. This begins as early as before their move through the process of leave-taking from family, friends and the familiar environment. *Distinction* also comprises participants' anticipation of what they will miss before moving, and reflections on what they miss once they have relocated. Difference is further created when individuals distance themselves from their compatriots or from their origin once they have moved to England. These three ways of creating difference are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, in the stage before relocation, individuals frequently document their leave-taking process. For instance, they point out all the things they will be leaving behind, and write about saying good-bye to their friends and family. Whilst they have not yet made the move abroad, they are already distancing themselves from their current living situation and creating difference to people who will stay behind. Some participants mark the time they have left at home in their blogs, and Emily and Leah even build up

to the big day in daily posts. How counting down to relocation and tracking the passing of time authenticates expatriate identity is discussed in Section 8.1.1. Similarly, a number of participants write about things that they are doing for the last time and will leave behind. For example, in a post entitled ‘List of Lasts’, David notes the following.

Example 7-1 [David]

List of Lasts

Just over 1 day to go before I leave. Everything I do is tainted with the nostalgia of “this is the last time that I’ll...” I think I’ve driven a car for the last time, I’ve seen my friends for the last time, I’ve had my last pie. I’ve had my last meal out and my last haircut. Tomorrow I’ll have my last home-cooked meal and my last cup of tea. I hope you can get tea in England. I’ll be a grumpy bunny if you can’t.

His displayed awareness of all the people he will no longer be able to see and the things he will not do anymore mark him out as becoming different to his home environment, as a person who is leaving. At the same time, he subverts this *distinction* by emphasising that he is hoping for tea to be available in England, drawing on a cultural stereotype that produces a humorous effect.

Closely related to this form of *distinction* is the creation of difference by means of pointing out what is being missed about home. Missing something means individuals no longer have access to it or no longer do something they used to, and this change creates *distinction* with regard to their origin. Extracts about missing people and things are a common feature in expatriate blogs and often take the form of lists with brief comments on each item. Jessica compiles such a list in her ‘3 Month Expat Checkup’.

Example 7-2 [Jessica]

My friends: Good gracious I miss my friends. I should be used to leaving friends by now, but this time it is especially hard. I don’t have easy ways to make new friends. I know it can only get better though :)

Even though Jessica has moved house within the US before and could be expected to have got ‘used to leaving friends’, this is not the case. Her transnational move is different from her intranational ones and she admits to struggling more than previously.

She regrets the distance to her friends whilst pointing out that ‘new friends’ are not easily made. Her list further contains points such as missing her family and her job, but also more light-hearted notions like missing food items, the US metric system and the sun. All these items on her list construct her as subject to different circumstances than what she was used to experience.

Such narratives of missing home can occur at any stage during the examined time span, even in anticipation before the move. Ruth puts a twist to the practice of sharing such lists by doing the opposite before her relocation in a post entitled ‘What I Won’t Miss’, which she introduces as shown in Example 7-3.

Example 7-3 [Ruth]

What I Won’t Miss

There’s a lot I will miss about life in the States, but in an effort to not depress myself, I thought I’d make a list of what I *won’t* miss.

This is followed by elaborations on not missing the climate, and particularly large amounts of snow. Writing about the things she will not miss allows Ruth to take a positive outlook on her impending move. Simultaneously, she creates difference through distancing herself from aspects of her home that she dislikes.

Finally, participants create *distinction* through distancing themselves from their compatriots or from things ‘back home’ that they are no longer used to. The latter occurs when individuals return for a visit and see their former home from a changed perspective. Both Aubrey and Jessica report such an experience, as illustrated below.

Example 7-4 [Aubrey]

American fast food is gross, and I don’t just mean in terms of taste. American fast food has so many chemicals & other synthetic products [links to articles on a website for healthy eating]. I needed pocket change to ride public transportation, so I bought some Burger King fries to get change. I ate 1 fry and it was **disgusting**; I threw out the rest of them. I can definitely tell the difference.

Example 7-5 [Jessica]

Being back in the States is well, strange. The vast parking lots, the large highways, the unhealthy state of our people, all of it is strange. I am enjoying the the time with my family but I long for my British town! It is such a strange way to feel!!

Having got used to fast food in England, Aubrey points out that she notices a difference to the equivalent product in the US. She now dislikes food in her former home that she did not use to mind before, which portrays her as different from people in the US. Similarly, Jessica creates *distinction* through her description of being back as ‘strange’, which implies that she has changed in the course of living in England. Her situation is now one of liminality, as she finds herself in-between, wanting to spend time with her family and at the same time yearning to return to ‘my British town’.

As regards creating *distinction* from compatriots, participants do not often explicitly criticise people from their home country whom they meet abroad, but when they do so, the more noteworthy it is. Example 7-6 shows how David presents his perspective on fellow New Zealanders he passed in the street.

Example 7-6 [David]

While roaming the streets after that, I saw three New Zealanders. Let’s see: Blue jeans and All Blacks jerseys? Check. Each one clutching a can of beer? Check. Come on guys. Some of us are trying to undo the stereotypes. You are walking anachronisms.

David criticises his compatriots for fulfilling the stereotypes he perceives to be associated with New Zealanders. Whilst he positions himself as a New Zealander through the personal pronoun *us*, he portrays his behaviour as different and not corresponding to people’s preconceptions. He admonishes his compatriots for their behaviour, yet keeps his tone tempered: ‘Come on guys.’ In contrast, Aubrey strongly objects to the conduct of some fellow Americans whom she has encountered abroad, as rendered in Example 7-7.

Example 7-7 [Aubrey]

Because of my past travels, I've come to avoid most other Americans when travelling. I'm sorry fellow Americans, but some of you make us look bad worldwide. You have that damn **A-merry-can** Sarah Palin-esque accent, which annoys me to no end. ([American accents vary by region](#) [link to Wikipedia article on General American], but more often than not, this is the most common accent I've heard during my travels.) And your clothes, for the love of whatever deity might exist... **Buy some new clothes!** Do you *have* to wear the same tourist outfits – track suits or mountain gear? And don't get me started on the terrible American-centric Caucasian-centric superiority complex that many of you have, which makes America/Americans look even **more** stupid in the eyes of the rest of the world. Don't you realize that we're seen as a joke across the world? :-| Hell, it embarrasses me to the point that when people ask me where I'm from, I just mention my city to look better in the eyes of others. :-|

Similarly to David, Aubrey associates herself with her compatriots by addressing them as 'fellow Americans' and using the pronouns *we* and *us*, but only to adopt an opposing stance and emphasise a clear difference between her and the Americans she criticises, changing the pronouns to *you* as she does so. She points out that this impacts on how others perceive her as well – 'some of you make us look bad worldwide' and 'we're seen as a joke across the world' – and that she feels embarrassed to be associated with what she judges to be objectionable. The main issue for her seems to be Americans abroad and in interaction with people of other nationalities, through their accent, tourist outfits and outlook on the world. Her criticism constructs her as the opposite, which she emphasises by pointing out that she does not like to disclose her nationality. This is an attempt at erasure (Irvine and Gal 2000): by downplaying what she has in common with the people she criticises, Aubrey aims to position herself as different enough not to be associated with them.

Although Example 7-7 is an extreme case of objection, it illustrates another facet of *distinction* that can occur in expatriate blogs, albeit infrequently. The importance of distinction from other compatriots for identity construction has however been shown by research on lifestyle migration in the case of British nationals relocating to Spain (O'Reilly 2000) or France (Benson 2010, 2011; Lawson 2016, 2017a, 2017b). Individuals emphasise that they have no desire to return to Britain (O'Reilly 2000), or distance themselves from other British migrants whom they perceive as not making a sufficient attempt at integrating and coping before eliciting help from compatriots in an online forum (Lawson 2016, 2017b). Desired integration is juxtaposed to

transnationalism, with individuals downplaying their connections to home and to their compatriots who have relocated to the same area (Benson 2010). The way in which expatriate bloggers create difference in their construction of identity departs notably from this, as *distinction* from their origin frequently involves narratives of what they are missing, so that transnational connections are emphasised rather than minimised. In fact, expatriate blogging as a whole functions as a transnational practice, as argued in Section 1.3. It provides a space for individuals to keep in touch with friends and family and establish connections with other expatriate bloggers whilst engaging in negotiations of similarity and difference to both their origin and their new country of residence.

Distinction toward participants' origin thus comprises the documentation of the leave-taking process, reflections on what aspects of home are being missed, and the creation of distance towards their former home and occasionally towards compatriots. However, *distinction* is not unilaterally directed towards participants' origin. Instead, it occurs with regard to England as well, as the following section elaborates.

7.1.2 Creating difference to England

Other than from their origin, participants distinguish themselves from their environment in England. This involves pointing out differences they perceive in their daily life regarding customs and language as well as discussing unfamiliar physical surroundings and material products. One apparent difference lies in their vocabulary and spelling, as all participants use a variety of English other than standard British English, namely American, Australian or New Zealand English. This involves spellings such as *neighbor* or terms like *public transportation*. Whilst such linguistic features suggest that individuals are not British, they were not coded for *distinction* and are not discussed further, unless they are the focus of individuals' attention, such as in metacommentary on terminology or spelling. Instead, the following discussion centres on participants' comparisons, descriptions and lists of perceived differences, regarding people and predominantly sociocultural aspects and customs. It is further argued that although *distinction* can involve narratives of difficulties, it need not be negative and may comprise an appreciation of differences.

Several participants comment on how British English differs from their own variety, frequently by providing a list of juxtaposed vocabulary items. They also report incidents where this caused misunderstandings. For instance, Kim devotes a post to the subject, entitled ‘It’s the same language, but it isn’t’, in which she shares a few humorous anecdotes followed by explanations of the linguistic differences involved and comments on new expressions that she is learning. Similarly, Emily points out that language matters are not as straightforward as they may appear, as shown below.

Example 7-8 [Emily]

Sure it’s English, but even within our own mother tongue, what an Aussie calls a scone a Brit calls a cake.

Although Emily is able to converse in her first language, there are variances that she needs to take into account. She thus downplays the similarities and emphasises the differences. Such observations are frequent across the examined posts and point to the salience that linguistic features have for participants.

Yet language is not the sole focus of *distinction*. Comparisons are made between any aspects of life in England and individuals’ countries of origin, as well as between people. A case in point is Kim, who takes comparison a step further by referring to her partner and at a later stage fiancé as ‘the Brit’ throughout her first year in England, and occasionally calling herself ‘the Yank’, for example in the following caption to a photo of them.

Example 7-9 [Kim]

Just the two of us...the Brit and the Yank.

Whilst ‘the Brit’ becomes the usual term of reference and can feature several times within individual posts, it nevertheless retains emphasis on a salient difference between them. As such, mentions of ‘the Brit’ are instances of *distinction*.

Aside from people, participants compare customs and typical ways of doing things. The term *compare* is not used here in the sense of incorporating value judgements; instead,

it merely encompasses pointing out differences. Example 7-10 illustrates a comparison of a social practice and its impact on an individual's identity.

Example 7-10 [Leah]

You will get x's at the end of texts and emails from SO's [significant others], good friends, and family. Like, every single text and email. You will be asked why you aren't sending them back. You will possibly upset someone with a lack or surplus of x's. You will finally get used to it and then accidentally put them on texts and emails to people back in the US. They will be incredibly confused. The cycle will continue.

In a post on what she has learnt through living in England for six months, Leah describes her difficulties with what she perceives as the English practice of including symbolic kisses in texts and emails. She discusses her struggles with adhering to this norm and the potential for offending somebody by getting it wrong. She then moves on to explain that she has got used to this norm, which creates similarity towards English practices. Simultaneously, however, this entails a new form of *distinction*, this time regarding her origin, as she now consternates people in the US with her English habits. Making herself similar to England comes at the cost of becoming different to her origin. Leah does not present this as merely a personal experience, but she abstracts from this a general statement of fact through her use of the pronoun *you* and the auxiliary *will*. She further portrays the interrelation of similarity and difference as a never-ending process of negotiation, as a 'cycle' which, as she anticipates, 'will continue'.

Another instance of a comparison between customs and the careful positioning work this entails is illustrated in Example 7-11. Here, Ruth comments on Christmas traditions and how her British husband was holding on to some of them when they still lived in the US.

Example 7-11 [Ruth]

Ah, the Christmas pudding. Banned by the Puritans, feared by the (modern) Americans, loved by (most of) the British. My husband has been making Christmas pudding to scare my family with for years, as it simply isn't Christmas for him without one. As for me, my thoughts on Christmas pudding are this: *meh*.

Ruth humorously juxtaposed the extreme reactions of love or fear that this Christmas specialty typically evokes with British people and Americans respectively. She thereby produces *distinction* between the two groups and positions herself on a middle ground.

Whilst comparisons are common throughout the data, they vary on a scale in terms of their explicitness. They can involve a juxtaposition of nationalities, yet participants may also remain more implicit by describing a situation they have encountered in great detail. This implies that it is novel to them and different from what they are used to, rendering an explicit contrast unnecessary. An example are observations on appliances in England, the likes of which are recorded by several American participants soon after their relocation and revolve around the size of the fridge, freezer, washing machine and tumble drier in their new homes. Example 7-12 is a case in point.

Example 7-12 [Sarah]

We have a standard Barbie-sized European washer and dryer. It takes two loads to wash the linens from our king size bed. Just as the Norwegians have a lot of words for 'snow' (don't they?), the English have an equal number of creative contraptions for drying laundry, so you know it is a big deal here. Just a small sampling:

Following this introduction, Sarah describes the appliances in her family's new house and includes pictures of them. Although she points out that they are 'standard Barbie-sized European', she does not explicitly contrast them with American appliances. Yet she achieves such a comparison nevertheless by virtue of treating the subject as worth discussing in her blog, which implies that it is surprising, funny, inconvenient or otherwise noteworthy. Through the comparison she positions herself as different to her environment. Thus identity is constructed not only through comparisons to other people, but also with regard to participants' position on customs and the physical environment in their new country of residence. How standing out as different can have a direct impact on individuals is evident in an observation by Abigail upon finding employment.

Example 7-13 [Abigail]

The first five days I was here, I was beginning to despair. Temp agencies wouldn't take me on. They brushed me off as soon as I said my phone number. I've come to realize that the confusing inconsistent phone numbers are a strange intelligence test. Some numbers have twelve digits, some have eleven. Mobiles are different from land lines. If you pause between the wrong numbers, [local residents] immediately dismiss you as if you are an idiot.

Abigail constructs difference through recounting her experiences with employment agencies in England and her retrospective realisation of the different conventions for providing phone numbers. She attributes her initial failure to find work to not having followed these norms and consequently having appeared like 'an idiot'. This further illustrates how *distinction* can lead to *illegitimation*, as Abigail presents not being given work as a consequence of being marked as a non-local.

As a further common form of comparison, several participants produce lists of differences between England and their country of origin. Such lists may contain juxtapositions of vocabulary items, as discussed above. Yet they can also feature more detailed reflections on sociocultural differences. For instance, Leah's observation on adding symbolic kisses in Example 7-10 is but one item in a list of 50. Additionally, having lived in England for a while, Jessica, Megan and Leah all post a list of things that they did not expect about life as an expatriate or that nobody told them about before moving abroad. These are addressed to readers and can function as advice, as Jessica makes clear in Example 7-14.

Example 7-14 [Jessica]

So I'm lending my advice to the online world of expats or soon to be expats with things I wish someone would have told me.....

This introduction to her list functions as *adequation*: Jessica positions herself as similar to other (future) expatriates by anticipating their needs. This form of constructing similarity is detailed in Section 7.2.3. The points contained in the subsequent lists are based on individuals' own experiences and frequently cover linguistic and sociocultural differences, as the following two extracts show.

Example 7-15 [Leah]

Everyone will assume as an American that you understand all of English social norms. You will not. Be prepared to get exasperated expressions and sighs.

Example 7-16 [Megan]

You'll try to guess how long it will take someone to comment on the fact that you're not "from here". Usually it's as soon as I start to talk. Or I say elevator instead of lift. Oops.

Leah constructs difference by pointing out that not all 'English social norms' are apparent to her, even though she is expected to be aware of them. In this case, being American does not constitute "sufficient similarity" (Bucholtz and Hall 2004b: 495). Leah's experience of not meeting her own and others' expectations regarding her knowledge of social norms provides her with an opportunity for identity construction, as mentioned in Section 4.3. Megan, in comparison, is made aware of how she differs from the locals based on her accent and vocabulary. She lists this as one of seven points about expatriate life that nobody had told her about beforehand.

Such lists of differences demonstrate how participants position themselves as undergoing a transition over the course of their first year abroad. They make experiences and gain new insights, which they can then share with others. This portrays them as more knowledgeable than before their relocation and may function as advice. Advice-giving, in turn, is a way of authenticating expatriate identity through claiming expertise, which is elaborated on in Section 8.1.2.

The above examples illustrate how some comparisons are presented in a light-hearted and entertaining way. However, *distinction* can also entail negative assessments. Individuals may point out that they do not appreciate the new situation they find themselves in, or acknowledge experiencing difficulties. For example, in a post entitled 'Combating Expat Loneliness', Megan writes about the difficulty of being different.

Example 7-17 [Megan]

Combating Expat Loneliness

Starting your life over in a foreign country isn't easy, and neither is re booting your social life. Sometimes it feels like everyone back home is moving on without you, while you are off in a parallel universe, making different choices and living a completely different life. The time difference doesn't make it any easier to communicate either. On top of that, sometimes it's hard to feel like an outsider in your new home on a regular basis. As soon as I open my mouth, people know I'm not from here, and sometimes feeling like I'm alone (ish) in a strange place makes me lonely and nostalgic as well.

Megan describes how she feels that she is starting to lose touch with people 'back home', as they are all 'moving on' whilst she gets left behind in a 'parallel universe'. This instance is doing both *distinction*, stressing the growing differences between herself and her home, as well as *denaturalisation*, feeling out of place and distanced from her former home, which is discussed further in Section 8.2.3. Yet not only does Megan regret becoming different concerning her origin, but she also struggles with being different and 'an outsider' in England. This liminality of being in-between both sides makes her feel 'lonely and nostalgic'. She experiences 'Expat Loneliness' because she is different with regard to both her home and England, and alone in her difference.

Another example of how difference can engender loneliness is Emily's reflection in a post entitled 'Invisible expat or local?'. Being Australian and having lived in Japan as part of an expatriate community before moving to England, she experiences life very differently now.

Example 7-18 [Emily]

To have had 11 friends share my birthday recently was testimony that we have settled well and have made friends, so why do I feel so lonely so often? There, I've said it. I'm an invisible expat and I'm lonely. I'm also bored more than I care to admit. There just isn't the number of people, mums around to share days with.

At first Emily does *adequation* by pointing out that she and her family 'have settled well and have made friends'. Nevertheless, she admits to feeling 'lonely' and attributes this to being an 'invisible expat'. She does not have a network of fellow expatriates around her like she used to in Japan, and she seemingly blends in with people in

England whilst still being different. Thus, the issue is not necessarily that she is different as an expatriate, but that she is the only expatriate in her environment and invisible to locals. This matter is further discussed from the point of view of category negotiation in Section 10.3.3.

However, although the construction of difference may entail expressions of concerns and difficulties, it is not inherently negative. Indeed, challenges and struggles tend to be expressed through *denaturalisation* rather than *distinction*, as Section 8.2.2 shows. Instead of phrasing *distinction* as negative, then, participants appear to appreciate many of the differences they are able to experience and share. They may even comment on how they have come to accept differences rather than try to avoid them. Thus, participants do not necessarily strive for *adequation*, as the following examples illustrate.

Example 7-19 [Jessica]

At first, I felt like I should try and adopt some of the differences but it seems silly sometimes. Trying to pretend that I say words differently than the way I have spoken them all of my life is silly. We are American, we are different, and that's what makes this experience so interesting!

Example 7-20 [Leah]

My accent seems unlikely to change in the near future. The idioms have altered, but I still very commonly stand out as an American. And honestly, I'm fine with it. At first I wanted to do everything I could to blend in quickly, but now I'm finding it alright to just be who I am. Within reason anyway.

Both Jessica and Leah no longer aim to 'blend in' or 'adopt' the differences they encounter. Jessica even frames this as being inauthentic: she would have to 'pretend' and would feel 'silly' doing so. Both affirm that they are American and therefore different, that they are who they are. Thus, embracing rather than avoiding difference serves to authenticate identity. Furthermore, both contrast their initial and current position on being different. 'At first' they sought to create similarity, but in the course of living abroad, they have changed their approach. Jessica writes this reflection four months after her relocation, and Leah after ten months. This supports the observation

that individuals undergo a transition when living abroad, although in this case it consists of accepting to be different rather than trying to assimilate at any price.

To summarise, *distinction* from England involves more or less explicit comparisons and descriptions of mainly linguistic and sociocultural features. These can also take the form of lists, and although they may be negative, they frequently are presented in a rather light-hearted manner and can entail an acceptance of difference. *Distinction* is a pervasive feature of identity construction, yet no discussion of this tactic would be complete without taking into account its opposite and complementing end of the scale, *adequation*, which is the subject of the following section.

7.2 Constructing similarity

7.2.1 Creating similarity to origin

As with *distinction*, *adequation* is done with regard to individuals' origin as well as England. As an additional third dimension, however, participants also emphasise similarity to other expatriates or more generally people who are foreign in a place. *Adequation* can involve bloggers' alignment with their anticipated readers, who may belong to one of the above groups. These three relational areas are discussed in what follows.

Whilst writing about their experiences in England, participants may emphasise similarity with regard to their country of origin, its people and customs. This firstly comprises reflections on maintaining friendships and staying in touch with people 'back home', praising blogging and other technology. An instance of this is the following comment by Emily in her first post.

Example 7-21 [Emily]

We are truly blessed that family and friends are able to visit, and we travel back at least once a year. If I say it once on here, I'll say it many times, thank goodness for Facebook, Skype, and even good ol' fashioned email! How people did this with out technology scares me.

Emily creates similarity with respect to family and friends by emphasising that they are able to see each other regularly and also keep in touch via modern technology. She portrays this as a means of easing transnational relocation. Leah takes a similar position, which she sums up in the title of a post as follows.

Example 7-22 [Leah]

Closeness Has Nothing to Do With Distance

It is truly astounding how easily you can stay in contact with anyone across the globe if you really want to. This is why it annoys me to no end when people go on a sermon about the evils of technology and how we all need to put down the tech. If the only thing keeping my tenuous link to loved ones is my tech, you can get off my case. I wouldn't take away similar from you.

Leah emphasises that maintaining contact with 'loved ones' across the world is possible due to technology, which warrants its use by people who have relocated abroad. As a consequence for her, emotional closeness is not hindered by physical distance. This exemplifies how expatriate bloggers not only preserve connections to home, but also freely admit to such ties, in contrast to lifestyle migrants, who were found to downplay transnational connections (Benson 2010).

Connections to home can also take the form of participants aligning themselves with their compatriots and potentially challenging attitudes that they encounter in England. Whilst not common, such instances stand out. Abigail's comment below is a prominent example.

Example 7-23 [Abigail]

Equally strange, I've found myself defending Americans a lot lately. No, I'm not an American hater; I just usually agree with what most rational people think about Americans, just like I agree with what most rational people think about the English. However, I can't abide idiocy on either side of the Atlantic. I find myself butting in and saying things like: "No, they're not all fundamentalist Christians." "No, they're not all thick as planks." "Actually, some American humor is quite funny. Have you seen the American version of the office? It's better (and more painful to watch) than the English one."

Having relocated to England, Abigail is ‘defending Americans’ by challenging stereotypes that she picks up in conversations. The fact that this appears ‘strange’ to her and that she emphasises that she is not ‘an American hater’ suggests quite a critical stance towards Americans. However, she makes the issue one of rationality rather than of nationality, pointing out that she shares objective views about Americans just as about English people. She noticeably uses the pronoun *they* rather than *we* in her reported speech, yet at the same time draws on her insider knowledge of her compatriots to defend them.

Participants stress connections not only to people, but also to things and customs in their country of origin, such as ways of expressing or conducting themselves that they have retained despite living abroad. This comprises comments on what food items or behavioural rules they are used to, comparisons of traditions such as on Christmas and Easter, and a displayed awareness of holidays which are celebrated in their country of origin but not in England, like Thanksgiving and Independence Day in the case of participants from the US. Several individuals write posts on these occasions, as exemplified in the following extract of a post by Kim with the title ‘Happy 4th from across the pond!’.

Example 7-24 [Kim]

So, I hope you all have a happy 4th of July in the good ol’ U.S. of A and enjoy all of the goodness that comes along with celebrating the day!

Kim engages in *adequation* with respect to her origin in two ways. Firstly, she shows awareness of her readers in the US by wishing them happy celebrations. Secondly, even though it is not celebrated in her surroundings, she notes the holiday and positions herself as an insider who has celebrated the day herself and therefore knows about ‘all of the goodness that comes along’ with it. Such identification with traditions, cultural norms and material products allows individuals to emphasise similarity with regard to their origin.

Participants further create similarity to their origin somewhat paradoxically through an emphasis on familiarity with aspects of life in England. For instance, individuals may point out that their new environment reminds them of home, or that things are not so

different in England from what they are used to. Megan, for example, makes such a comparison between working in England and working in the US.

Example 7-25 [Megan]

I can't believe this is my 5th week of work, the day's definitely go by faster now. It is going well so far and not so different from working in the U.S. Even if I have to stop myself from saying kips instead of kilo newtons on occasion.

Here, then, similarity is created through emphasising the lack of any noteworthy difference, as the acknowledgement of varying units of measurement occurs like an afterthought. This shows again how closely related the tactics of *adequation* and *distinction* are. Comparisons may thus be made even when the outcome is not discussed as being particularly remarkable.

Moreover, familiarity based on previous experiences is not limited to one area such as work, but can encompass a wider notion of feeling accustomed to life in England. A case in point is an observation on familiarity by Emily, as illustrated in Example 7-26. Her situation is special insofar as her family have not moved directly from home in Australia to England, but first lived in Ireland and then Japan and have relocated from there. Approximately five months after relocation, she reflects on life in England as opposed to Ireland and Japan.

Example 7-26 [Emily]

Now we've returned to familiar territory, even if we've never lived in the UK before. Its comfortable, but still not quite the right fit.

Being from Australia and having lived in Ireland, Emily sees England as 'familiar territory' compared to the differences she has experienced in Japan. She creates similarity regarding life in England, but at the same time she distances herself from the idea that such familiarity is sufficient to feel completely settled: although living in England is 'comfortable', she has not fully adjusted yet and England is 'still not quite the right fit'. Thus, whilst expressing familiarity contributes to creating similarity, it is

a relative matter – how different or similar participants position themselves to be regarding their environment depends on the comparisons that they are making.

As discussed in this section, individuals can engage in *adequation* concerning their origin by emphasising that they are maintaining connections to people from home as well as retaining customs of their country of origin. They may further express familiarity with aspects of life in England based on previous experiences, thereby making the creation of similarity a matter of insufficient difference. However, participants emphasise similarity not only with regard to their origin, but complement *adequation* by generating similarity to England. This aspect of *adequation* is discussed in what follows.

7.2.2 Creating similarity to England

In the course of relocating and living abroad, individuals frequently write about exploring their new place of residence, getting to know people, customs and circumstances in England. They do so in a way as to construct similarity with their new environment. This is done in a number of ways. Most commonly, participants express their appreciation for local people and customs, describe how they explore and learn about life in England, or emphasise that they have found their place in this new country. These three aspects are subsequently discussed in more detail.

Firstly, several participants stress the importance of making friends in their new environment. They describe activities they have taken up and other ways they have found to meet people, and may phrase this as advice to readers who are potentially in a similar situation. This is exemplified in the following extract from a post by Megan entitled ‘Combating Expat Loneliness’, the introduction to which is discussed in conjunction with *distinction* in Example 7-17.

Example 7-27 [Megan]

Say yes to invitations. So your first choice of activities wouldn't have been sushi/coffee/ the mall. Say yes anyway because this is how you make friends, meet new people and find new places to go. Plus, you may have a great time and discover a new interest.

Megan has found that by accepting invitations regardless of how keen she was on the suggested activity, she was able to align with other people's interests, which helped her to connect with locals and get to know more about her environment. As her elaboration is based around the pronoun *you* rather than *I*, she does not explicitly acknowledge that this form of *adequation* worked for her, but this is implied on the basis that she now recommends it to others. Similarly, Example 7-28 shows the connection between creating similarity to others and finding friends.

Example 7-28 [Jessica]

While we were there, we met some [UK town] residents who decided to take it upon themselves to show us around the [UK town] night life. They let me practice my British accent with them and apparently I speak "posh" British. Well of course I do! We had a fun night and met a lot of people. Everyone is curious about the Americans and I see us making friends very easily around here.

Jessica expresses her joy of creating similarity to locals by trying to adopt a British accent. She describes how thanks to some residents, she and her husband have been introduced to many people who are open-minded about getting to know people who are not locals. As a final example, Emily also points to her reliance upon others to establish a network of friends.

Example 7-29 [Emily]

We met people thru the kindness of others – mutual friends who thought to reach out and introduce us to their friends. Twelve months on, and the circle of friendship is complete and we are so happy to have come to the UK and have these people in our lives.

Emily expresses her gratitude for the help she has received in making friends, and for having been accepted into pre-existing friendships. From an analysis of expatriate blogs hence emerges that finding a network of friends in England is an important step for newly arrived individuals and one that is based on creating and embracing similarities. Yet not only do participants make themselves similar to locals, but they also frequently express their appreciation of aspects that form part of English life. This comprises a wide spectrum of comments on sociocultural, material and environmental matters.

Especially frequent are remarks revolving around language, as in the following examples.

Example 7-30 [Ruth]

First, what is it with this liberal spreading of butter on bread, followed by peanut butter? The first time I saw my husband combine the two, I was disgusted. Butter and peanut butter? I was brought up to believe, as I think were most of my fellow Americans, that peanut butter requires no accompaniment besides jelly. (Pardon me, I'm in England now: jam.)

Example 7-31 [Jessica]

British jargon: "Bits and pieces", "reckon", they say Aluminium correctly (al-u-MIN-i-um), "cheers", "mate", "I fancy him", "the telly", "mum", and a million other funny words that I love to hear. And the different dialects. I love it!

Ruth is sceptical about eating peanut butter alongside butter, and in an instance of *distinction* points to the American way of combining spreads. As she does so, she acknowledges that due to living in England she should no longer use the term *jelly*. She playfully makes herself similar to her new environment whilst maintaining other aspects she has in common with her 'fellow Americans'. This is another instance where the creation of similarity goes hand in hand with an emphasis on difference. Jessica in turn produces a list of aspects she loves about England. Like Ruth she shows herself aware of linguistic differences. By cherishing these features she makes herself similar to people who use them. This illustrates that *adequation* is based on difference, because for Jessica to notice these words as special entails that she has not used them herself before. This challenge is revisited in the conclusion of this chapter.

Thus, *adequation* is not only done with regard to people, but also through an appreciation of aspects of English life. This leads to the second means of creating similarity as mentioned above: individuals' emphasis on their explorations and learning process. As part of settling into their life in England, participants write about exploring their surroundings, gaining new insights and acquiring new skills. For instance, in the following extracts, Sarah concludes a description of her first driving experience in England, and Kim explains in a side note why her post is entitled 'It's just not cricket'.

Example 7-32 [Sarah]

But I have to say driving has been a bit of a snap ever since. Now I can check that big bull off my list :) Mission accomplished.

Example 7-33 [Kim]

(I asked the Brit to help me come up with a title for this blog post and he informed me that they use the saying of 'It's just not cricket' when something isn't right. So, there you go and I just learned something today!)

Sarah shows herself relieved to find that she is able to drive without any problems once she has overcome her first day on the road. She portrays this as a big step to achieve and one that constructs similarity with people in England, as she is now a regular driver as well. Kim is even more explicit about her development, pointing out that she has 'just learned something today' by acquiring a new idiom thanks to her partner, whom she calls 'the Brit' as discussed in Section 7.1.2 – an instance of *distinction* embedded in this wider move of *adequation*.

Apart from acquiring new skills and ways of expressing themselves, individuals also share their insights gained from travelling through the country or to mainland Europe. This is another aspect of making themselves similar with respect to England, by becoming aware of their surroundings. For instance, Megan sums up her success a year after having begun her blog as follows.

Example 7-34 [Megan]

I have successfully navigated the NHS [National Health Service], and the roadways of the UK, dealt with taxes and renting an apartment. I think the expat lifestyle has definitely grown on us :) Just over a year ago was our first trip to Europe, it's hard to believe I'm a resident now, and have traveled to 5 new countries and many places around England, Scotland and Wales as well. I've become much more well versed in international travel, planning, packing and culture and look forward to learning even more!

Several hurdles have been overcome, such as understanding taxes and securing accommodation, which is another instance of acquiring new skills and knowledge.

However, Megan further discusses how frequently she and her partner have been able to travel, both within and outside of the UK, and what she has learnt in the process. This does not only create similarity with regard to her English environment, but it also marks her out as an explorer, a type of person who leads an ‘expat lifestyle’ such as the one she has come to appreciate. The construction of similarity towards other expatriates as an area of *adequation* is discussed in more detail in Section 7.2.3.

A third aspect of how individuals create *adequation* with regard to England is by describing how they have found their place in everyday English life. This is expressed through discourses of settling in, adjusting, and feeling at home. A case in point is Chloe’s collection of six things that she is looking forward to about life in England, of which one is listed below.

Example 7-35 [Chloe]

Making it mine. Whenever I move somewhere new, the thing I look forward to most is becoming part of the fabric of where I live. Finding the spots I love and becoming a regular. Not needing to use a gps or ask for directions. Introducing the friends and family who visit to the things I’ve discovered and love most about where I live.

Beyond aiming to be similar, Chloe wants to fit in as much as to become ‘part of the fabric’. Making herself similar is hence an issue of belonging, of ‘[m]aking it mine’. This is not restricted to transnational relocation, but applies to any move elsewhere. But not only does Chloe look forward to settling into life in England, she also anticipates sharing her new life with her friends and family, thus aiming to create similarity towards them. This is an example of how *adequation* can be done with regard to more than one area simultaneously.

How strongly participants make finding their place a matter of identity is exemplified further through both Aubrey’s and Claire’s observations.

Example 7-36 [Aubrey]

I’ve begun settling in & adjusting here. I’m beginning to feel at home. I hope that this is a signal of things to come. It’s good being back in my 2nd home.

Example 7-37 [Claire]

I've never lived anywhere where I could recognize so many people and feel as if they're getting to know me as too. Whether it's a "Hi ya" said in passing to me, or a smile and a wave when I'm out on a run, I'm settling in here in a place where instead of just being a visiting American, they're beginning to know my name.

Having come back from a stay in the US prompts Aubrey to reflect on her life in England. She is beginning to see it as a second home and is 'adjusting', thus undergoing a transition and becoming more similar to her environment, which she takes as a positive sign. Similarly, Claire emphasises the process of starting to fit in and becoming recognisable to the people in her village as not just a visitor limited to her nationality, but as an individual with a name. This observation is not only an instance of *adequation*, but it also authenticates Claire as a resident: rather than visiting England, she has shifted her life to this new environment and is beginning to find her place in it.

To summarise, participants make themselves similar with respect to life in England through several means. They discuss meeting locals and making friends in their new environment and point to aspects about the English culture and way of life that they appreciate, including linguistic differences. They further show themselves willing to undergo a learning process, exploring differences and adopting some of them. Finally, *adequation* also comprises expressions of having found their place in the new country and beginning to view it as home. Having focused on similarity created with regard to either individuals' origin or current residence, the discussion now takes into account a further area in which participants can establish similarity: comparing themselves to other individuals who are foreign in their surroundings.

7.2.3 Creating similarity through joint foreignness

This section explores *adequation* towards other individuals who have relocated to a different country or are in the course of doing so, and towards individuals who travel extensively and find themselves far from home. The analysis shows that *adequation* not only happens towards compatriots who have also moved to England. Rather, similarity within transnational relocation is created regardless of individuals' country of origin or current residence. What is foregrounded, then, is joint foreignness: individuals

construct similarity to others on the basis of both being foreign in their surroundings, wherever these may be, and having undergone the transition of leaving home and settling in elsewhere. This illustrates the contribution *adequacy* makes towards *adequation*: what matters is not some objective or measurable form of similarity, but the process of creating “sufficient similarity” (Bucholtz and Hall 2004b: 495). In the context of expatriate blogging, having undergone transnational relocation – regardless of where from and where to – suffices to be positioned as similar by virtue of this experience. This involves erasure (Irvine and Gal 2000), a downplaying of conflicting aspects, for instance nationality. Such a process is at work in a post discussing what Sarah calls the ‘expat community’. She describes that she felt on her own during the move, unfamiliar with the process and with nobody by her side who was in the same situation. She then contrasts this with her experiences in England as follows.

Example 7-38 [Sarah]

Yet when we moved here, I quickly met other women who had moved the same week or month as us – we stumbled through our new country together. Seasoned expatriates were like Bree from *Desperate Housewives* with a basket of goodies and information, asking me what questions I had. I found the expat community to be very warm, supportive, and down-to-earth. Yay!

The other expatriates Sarah meets are equally new to England, so they can explore and adjust together. Some have undertaken several transnational moves and are able to help her with information. Sarah describes feeling part of a community and feeling welcomed and supported. She continues her post by discussing the financial situation of expatriates and how it may vary depending on the exchange rate and their contract, and draws the following conclusion.

Example 7-39 [Sarah]

As you can see, natural identifiers of ‘who we are’ can be shed in the expat world. What crowd you ran with, what groups you joined don’t matter here. It is refreshing to just show up as you are. When else does that happen?

Sarah describes how being an expatriate transcends 'natural identifiers' and that it is possible to arrive 'as you are'. This simultaneously authenticates her as an individual and creates similarity to other expatriates through their unifying experience.

Similarity is also created with respect to expatriates who are not present in participants' physical community, but in the blogosphere. Expatriate blog directories promote such links, and the blogrolls and comments sections of the analysed blogs confirm that mutual blog reading between expatriates does indeed take place. Yet similarity is created not only through links and comments, but also throughout the narratives of transnational relocation. For instance, Emily describes the steps and the uncertainty leading up to a transnational move and then shows herself aware of how her experiences are similar to those of other expatriates, as evident in Example 7-40.

Example 7-40 [Emily]

Expat friends reading this will be laughing at this scenario as we have all gone thru similar experiences.

Based on their comparable experiences, Emily anticipates her expatriate readers' reaction to her situation and thereby portrays them as alike. Similarly, Aubrey praises individuals who have moved abroad based on her own struggles and the personal strength she deems necessary for such an endeavour.

Example 7-41 [Aubrey]

Anyone who can make it at least 6 months in a foreign land without packing up all one's shit & returning to the comforts of home(land) is a damn strong person. For those of you who've done it, you deserve a toast and so much more.

Aubrey shows awareness of having expatriate readers and creates similarity towards them by appreciating their achievement. She can do so from a position of personal experience. This at the same time authenticates her as an expatriate, as she is open about the negative sides of moving abroad based on having encountered them herself. This is further discussed in Section 8.1.3.

Finally, the construction of similarity by virtue of joint foreignness can extend to include travellers who are confronted with differences away from home. For instance, Jessica documents the trips she and her husband undertake and shares with others her love for travelling, as she emphasises in Example 7-42.

Example 7-42 [Jessica]

And this gives me the perfect opportunity to thank all of my readers! I really and truly love “talking” with all of you about travels and making a new home in a new country :) You are all blessings!

By responding to her readers and thanking them for the conversations they are able to engage in through expatriate blogging, Jessica aligns herself both with travellers and people who are ‘making a new home in a new country’. In a similar vein, Megan orients to both expatriates and travellers in a post entitled ‘Haters Gonna Hate: The Awkward Expat Conversations’. After describing an incident during which she was insulted on the basis of her nationality, she concludes her post as follows.

Example 7-43 [Megan]

Expats, or world travelers, does this ever happen to you? What have you found is the best way to respond?

Megan calls upon two groups of individuals who may have had comparable experiences and whom she anticipates as represented amongst her readers. She positions both expatriates and travellers as able to give her advice, which creates similarity between them and her and marks her blog out as relevant to them.

Creating similarity on the basis of being foreign can thus construct not only expatriate identity. Although the present research treats expatriate blogs as distinct from travel blogs, as clarified in Section 1.1, it needs to be acknowledged that some expatriate blogs do in fact contain narratives that could be found in travel blogs, and that they may therefore attract a diverse readership. This supports Williams and Hall’s (2002) argument presented in Section 1.3 that differentiating between migration and tourism is

not necessarily straightforward. Nevertheless, foreignness remains a unifying element in these blogs and a means of doing *adequation*.

Apart from their origin and country of residence, participants hence draw on the experience of transnational relocation and being foreign in a place to construct similarity to others. This comprises experiences in their immediate physical environment as well as the unifying potential of the expatriate blogosphere.

7.3 Interrelation of *adequation* and *distinction*

As discussed, *adequation* and *distinction* can be explored with regard to participants' origin and England, as well as concerning other individuals who are experiencing foreignness. Despite the division into discrete sections, the two tactics are interrelated, as repeatedly illustrated. This section expands on this by addressing the complexity of the issue that exceeds methodological guidelines within the ToI approach, before concluding the chapter with an elaboration on how expatriate identity emerges from this intricacy.

The previous discussion shows that participants establish similarity and difference through different intersubjective relations: their origin, England, and other individuals who are experiencing foreignness. This does not imply, however, that only one of them is drawn upon at any one time, as pointed out concerning Example 7-35. Indeed, *adequation* can be created simultaneously to individuals' origin, their new environment and their anticipated readers. The following extract is a case in point.

Example 7-44 [Chloe]

I may not be spending the holidays with family and old friends this year, but I'm incredibly thankful to have new friends in my new home — a place I've wanted to call home for ages — and to be doing what I love with the support of the loved ones I've left behind. I'm also thankful for everyone who reads this blog. It's nice to be part of a community, even when you can't see the people who comprise it.

Chloe regrets not being able to spend Christmas with her 'family and old friends'. Whilst she feels supported by 'the loved ones' that she has 'left behind', she points out

that she is happy to have found ‘new friends in my new home’. This is an instance of *adequation* both with regard to her origin and her new environment. Additionally, she creates similarity to her readers and potentially other expatriates, expressing her thanks to them and positioning herself as ‘part of a community’. The potential of blogs about transnational relocation to establish a community is also noted in previous research (Kluge 2011; Frank-Job and Kluge 2012). Example 7-44 hence shows that doing *adequation* towards one area does not preclude establishing similarity to any of the others.

A further example of how *adequation* can be done with respect to more than one area is participants’ bridging of potential gaps of understanding between their different readers. The following two extracts illustrate this.

Example 7-45 [Ruth]

Trainers, for those who don’t know, are what Americans call sneakers.

Example 7-46 [Kim]

Before I show some photos, I have to explain for my British readers (I know I have a few!!) that a bridal shower is **not** a hen do. (After seeing some photos, I think the Brit has finally figured out that this is not the time when rude games are played and a stripper is expected...that is a bachelorette party!)

Both Ruth and Kim show awareness of what their American or British readers might misunderstand, and then provide an explanation. They can do so based on their personal experiences: Ruth is commenting on a local newspaper article, anticipating that the word *trainers* may be unclear to Americans and able to explain it because she has encountered it before. This creates similarity to her origin because she is adopting an American perspective, and similarity to England because she is able to explain what is necessary. Kim in turn shows awareness that a traditional American bridal shower is different to a hen do as celebrated in England, and that this might confuse her British readers, as it has confused her British partner. The above extract is followed by a detailed explanation of what happens during a bridal shower. Kim equally creates similarity to her origin through her displayed knowledgeability of American customs, and similarity to England because she adjusts to British readers’ needs by explaining

the concept. Through living abroad, Kim and Ruth have gained an understanding of both sociocultural contexts and are therefore able to adjust to either side as necessary and act as what could be called a cultural translator.

From the analysis further emerges that participants create similarity and difference not only by positioning themselves with regard to other people, as illustrated in Example 7-44, but also by orienting to sociocultural aspects of life pertaining to their origin or England. The appreciation of such practices entails that *adequation* tends to encompass a positive outlook and favourable assessments. Whilst *distinction* can include negative assessments, it also involves a joyful negotiation and embracing of difference, as argued on the basis of Jessica's emphasis in Example 7-19 that being different makes her experience interesting, and Leah's reflection in Example 7-20 on no longer trying to blend in.

Yet there exists a connection between *adequation* and *distinction* not only with regard to the areas they relate to and the assessments they engender, but also because they are situated on a scale and depend on one another. Indeed, examining the position of *adequation* and *distinction* with regard to each other shows that the two tactics often occur within the same paragraph or across several paragraphs, revealing a frequent interplay between these discursive practices. This is for instance evident in Leah's negotiation of similarity and difference regarding whether to add symbolic kisses to greetings in texts and emails, as shown in Example 7-10. In short, for similarity to be constructed, some form of difference may be evoked first, which is then presented as overcome. This may in turn generate difference with regard to another area, as Leah's elaborations illustrate.

The interrelation of *adequation* and *distinction* shapes what identity emerges from this. At first glance, it could be argued that instances of *distinction* from England, for instance, are merely producing national identity. Although this may be the effect of separate occurrences, the fact that participants at the same time engage with *adequation* towards England shows that the matter is more complex than that. What participants construct in several instances is not national, but liminal identity, when having undergone transnational relocation to live abroad for them entails being neither completely foreign nor completely local. Expatriate identity thus emerges from the very interplay between *adequation* and *distinction* to both origin and England, and

particularly from the creation of similarity through joint foreignness. This navigation of in-betweenness has been noted by previous research on individuals' experiences of mobility (Takeda 2013), and it particularly resonates with the emphasis on how ToI can contribute to an exploration of cultural hybridity (Skapoulli 2004; Gonçalves 2013a, 2013b), as discussed in Section 2.3.

To conclude, *adequation* and *distinction* are the most common ways of constructing identity in expatriate blogs. Both tactics encompass positioning towards participants' origin as well as England. Additionally, *adequation* can involve an emphasis on sharing foreignness with other individuals who have undergone transnational relocation, and this may entail bloggers' displayed orientation towards their anticipated readers. Yet few instances of *distinction* towards compatriots or other expatriates are apparent, in contrast to research on lifestyle migration (O'Reilly 2000; Benson 2010, 2011; Lawson 2016). An explanatory factor may be the affordances of expatriate blogging: from participants' narratives emerges that they expect their blog to be read both by people from their home and by fellow expatriates, a virtual presence which makes them less likely to criticise these groups. Lifestyle migrants, in contrast, are better positioned to distance themselves from compatriots in their absence, such as in everyday interactions and in research interviews. *Distinction* in expatriate blogs is frequent overall, but tends to involve more light-hearted notions and in its interplay with *adequation* constructs expatriate identity as being in-between the relational dimensions of origin and England. Yet despite the prevalence of *adequation* and *distinction*, identity construction in expatriate blogs involves more than matters of similarity and difference: negotiations of realness emerge from the analysis as a crucial means of constructing identity. These are the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 8 Realness: *authentication* and *denaturalisation*

8.1 Constructing authenticity

8.1.1 Sharing experiences as they are gained

The engagement with authenticity is a key aspect in the construction of identity in expatriate blogs. As evident in Figure 5-2, the realness dimension is less frequently employed than the dimension of likeness, and *denaturalisation* especially occurs less often. However, as discussed in Section 5.3, frequency of occurrence alone has limited explanatory power. Indeed, this chapter argues that *authentication* and *denaturalisation* emerge as central aspects of constructing expatriate identity. This section details how participants establish authenticity, whilst the following section focuses on the opposite, the *denaturalisation* of identity. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how *denaturalisation* contributes to authenticating expatriate identity.

Participants authenticate identity pertaining to transnational relocation in a number of ways: by sharing experiences as they are gained, displaying expertise, providing deep insights and unadorned accounts, and claiming having found personal fulfilment. These are detailed in the following elaboration. As in the discussion of power and likeness, these different ways of creating authenticity are not meant to be mutually exclusive. Instead, they are a way of breaking down a complex phenomenon into prevalent aspects to enable a structured discussion. It is worth iterating here the caveat raised in Section 3.1: although authentication involves the sharing of experiences as they are gained, this is not meant to suggest that blogs offer an unmediated representation of such experiences. The analysis is solely concerned with how individuals draw on them to construct identity.

Sharing adventures with anticipated readers entails a commitment to blogging that participants can be seen to orient to. For instance, they tend to apologise to readers after periods of not posting any new content and explain the reasons. This is situated at the intersection of the dimensions of realness and power: of the instances coded for both *authentication* and *authorisation*, three quarters contain metacomments on blogging. These enable individuals to authenticate expatriate identity by sharing narratives of

transnational relocation, whilst at the same time making this act of sharing legitimate. The importance for a narrator to create authenticity and authority to tell their story has previously been discussed by Page (2012: 164) in the context of fictional video blogging and inauthentic status updates on Facebook, and some forms of CMC (such as expatriate blogging) have retained the notion that a person's right to share a story is based on the fact that they have experienced the events themselves (Page 2017: 400). A case in point of this phenomenon is an extract from Kim's first post, which is written before relocation and announces the aim of her blog.

Example 8-1 [Kim]

So, what has brought me to begin this blog? I'll be moving to England come September to actually (*finally!*) live in the same place as the guy I am dating and to begin graduate school! Although I won't be able to share my adventures as an American living abroad as they are actually happening until then, I do have much to tell from the five weeks I spent in the UK at the beginning of this summer. So, for the time being, I'll be writing about that along with all of the other fun stuff that goes with preparing for a move across an ocean.

Kim promises to write about her 'adventures as an American living abroad', but acknowledges that she cannot currently do so because she has not yet moved to England. Nevertheless, she emphasises that there is 'much to tell', both from her first impressions of visiting England in the summer and from her preparations 'for a move across an ocean'. This authenticates her as a person who is about to move abroad, and at the same time it legitimises her blogging. This is a form of *authorisation*, albeit in a non-institutional way. Bucholtz and Hall (2004a: 386) specify the power dimension to involve "an institutional or other authority". In cases where *authentication* is done at the same time, this tends to be non-institutional *authorisation*, such as Kim declaring that she already has many experiences to share. Kim's legitimation of her own narrative is linked to the concept of tellability (Ochs and Capps 2001): she implies that her blog is worth reading because she has many genuine experiences and insights to share. Whilst the present research does not examine the notion of tellability in detail, an exploration of how expatriate bloggers position their narratives as tellable and how readers respond to them would be a worthwhile undertaking for future research. The

legitimation of participants' narratives through metacomments on blogging is thus an area where realness and power are negotiated together.

Participants tend to specify their motivations for blogging at the beginning of their blogs and sometimes throughout. A key point is the sharing of narratives about their experiences of relocation and life abroad, as shown in Example 8-1. The following extract from Claire's first post illustrates this further.

Example 8-2 [Claire]

I hope to share my life here in England though regular posts written for you like a series of picture postcards from abroad.

Through her blog Claire aims to keep readers informed about her life experiences in England as they unfold, likening the serial entries in her blog to postcards that provide periodic illustrations of her life abroad. In this initial post, she also points out that she expects mostly friends and family members to read her blog, yet after a year she comments on having found and appreciated a much wider audience and having built new friendships.

Expatriate blogging affords an immediacy of sharing, as interesting aspects pertaining to life abroad can be posted with little delay or even as they are unfolding. An example of the latter is Sarah's serial narrative of obtaining a UK driver's license, as discussed in Section 6.1.2. This immediacy allows individuals to create authenticity, as they can convey to readers a sense of gaining insight into their daily life. As part of this, many mark the passing of time and comment on steps in the process of their relocation that they deem meaningful. For instance, several bloggers count down to the day of their move, which marks a significant change in their life. In the extract below, David uses a countdown in his first post to introduce himself to his readers.

Example 8-3 [David]

My name is [David] and I leave New Zealand for the UK in 10 days. I have 5 days of work left. I sold my car today. If quitting my job and selling my wheels were not dramatic enough, I also polished my shoes, which only ever happens on momentous occasions.

David points out when he is going to leave as well as the things he has to take care of until that point. The move abroad for him entails some ‘dramatic’ changes and presents a ‘momentous’ event, humorously culminating in the mundane activity of polishing his shoes. In Ruth’s first post, she similarly points to her imminent move abroad and constructs it as a major change.

Example 8-4 [Ruth]

One Month and Counting

My little family of four is relocating to the UK in . . . one month. One MONTH.

The title of her post stresses the fact that she is counting down. The repetition of ‘month’ and the capital letters emphasise how fast relocation is approaching and serve to portray it as a big step. This is further underlined by pointing out that her ‘little’ family will move to a new country, adding a sense of adventure. In a similar vein, Leah points to the significance of the change ahead and how conscious she is about doing everything for the last time, as evident in Example 8-5.

Example 8-5 [Leah]

I am getting into the week of Lasts. Of course there’s the big obvious ones like Last Time to See Friends and Family, Last Chance to Find Something Important I Need, or Last Experiences in [US state]. However, there are also the little ones like Last Laundry Day, Last Night of Cat Purring on My Head, or Last Time Just Sitting in the Living Room with Family that seem to make me even more emotional. The big things you can mentally prep for – it’s the little things that will get you unexpectedly.

This emphasis on the people, things and habits Leah will give up on creates *distinction*, similar to David’s ‘List of Lasts’ discussed in Example 7-1. At the same time, such *distinction* functions to authenticate Leah as a person who is about to move abroad. What makes this experience so real for her are not the big changes and farewells ahead, because she knows that she will have to face those, but as she puts it ‘the little things’, changes to her everyday life, that are suddenly making her appreciate the reality of her impending move.

Counting down time to relocation is further meticulously done by Leah and Emily, who post every day for the last ten and fourteen days respectively before their relocation. Shortly after her move, Emily comments on her frequent blogging during the countdown as follows.

Example 8-6 [Emily]

I've loved all the comments received about how much you've enjoyed the Countdown over the transition period. I did wonder if it was too much at times, but according to those who have emailed apparently not.

She expresses relief that her readers enjoyed the regular updates and being able to follow this 'transition period' in real time. The pervasiveness of counting down across the examined blogs outlines the importance of this behaviour for individuals undergoing transnational relocation. It allows them to record and share this marked period, whilst at the same time authenticating them as individuals who are about to move abroad – their experiences are portrayed as real and as taken straight from their daily life, and the reader can follow them step by step as they unfold. This feature is revisited in Section 10.1.2 with regard to how it enables participants to negotiate liminality.

Counting time to mark their life as expatriates is a practice maintained by several participants throughout their first year of blogging. Ruth, for instance, pauses to review and reflect on her experiences abroad after two, four, six and twelve months. Example 8-7 comprises the introduction to one of these posts.

Example 8-7 [Ruth]

Today marks the six month anniversary of our move here, which seems significant. Half a year of driving on the other side of the road, new schools, new house, new job, new life.

These landmark moments are 'significant' to Ruth, leading her to detail how her life has changed and become 'new' in so many ways. Whilst this is authenticating her as an expatriate, her elaborations in the post address difficulties that she is continuing to face.

Jessica equally posts regularly to monitor the passing of time, namely after three, four, six and nine months as well as at the one-year anniversary. She calls this practice ‘expat check-up’, and as ‘expat wellness check’ these posts present a chance for her to reflect on her life abroad, as exemplified in the introduction to her nine months post below.

Example 8-8 [Jessica]

Happy Nine Months to me!!! It has been 9 months since I stepped off the plane at [UK airport] with my monstrous luggage and dizzy head. It has been a whirlwind but I feel like I could stay in England forever. This is proving to be the experience of a lifetime and I feel like I never want it to end! I love England and living as an expat. My views have expanded and I will be changed forever! I have seen and done so much in 9 months....here are a few highlights!

This announcement is followed by a list of her favourite experiences thus far, mostly involving travelling. Jessica emphasises how being an expatriate has made her a different person. This supports the conceptualisation of transnational relocation as transition, as discussed in Section 1.1. However, whilst Jessica stresses that she ‘will be changed forever’ and that living abroad has broadened her mind, she does not elaborate in what respect this is the case. Mentioning positive personal development has been identified as a common feature in narratives pertaining to mobility such as backpacking and gap year travelling, and such accounts have been criticised for their lack of specificity and reflexivity (Noy 2004; Snee 2014a), as discussed in Section 3.4. The presence of these features as a means of *authentication* is thus a commonality between expatriate blogs and other accounts of mobility.

The most consistent timekeeping feature for all blogs is the marking of the one-year anniversary. Seven participants do this explicitly, and a further two share reflections about the past months. The anniversary of relocation as an occasion for reflection and identity construction has also been noted in previous research on blogs about moving abroad (Kluge 2011). Aubrey, for instance, takes this opportunity to write two extensive posts about the things she likes and dislikes about living in England, the first of which she introduces as shown in Example 8-9.

Example 8-9 [Aubrey]

If you check(ed) out [my last written post](#) [internal link to post], you'll see that I reached 1 year since my move here. Looking back at the past year is amazing because it went by so fast. I'm taking a little time to think about my overall experience here, then put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard). Please bear with me, as it may take at least 2 posts for me to get through this. I'll begin with a list of 10 things that I hate about this country. I'd rather start with the bad so as not to give anyone any illusions about being an expatriate. I've always said from the start that I'd share the full experience, not just the roses & daisies.

Marking the anniversary presents a chance for Aubrey to take stock, which authenticates her as an expatriate who can offer first-hand insight into what it is like to live in England. She stresses that she does not want to 'give anyone any illusions' about life as an expatriate and that she therefore reports her honest opinion rather than only the positives. Such emphasis on providing unadorned accounts of life abroad is another way of authenticating expatriate identity, which is detailed in Section 8.1.3. Example 8-9 thus illustrates that the different means of doing *authentication* which are discussed in this chapter are not mutually exclusive. Participants have been shown to express their ongoing experiences of living abroad in their blogs and to mark the passing of time, which is one means of authenticating expatriate identity. Another practice which builds on this continuous sharing involves conveying such narratives in a way as to display expertise and offer advice. This is the focus of the next section.

8.1.2 Displaying expertise

A further way of authenticating identity in expatriate blogs is through an emphasis on expertise, which encompasses sharing insights into matters relating to transnational relocation as well as to living in England. A striking example is the following comment made by Jessica after having lived in England for more than eight months.

Example 8-10 [Jessica]

Perched high above the sea side on a rocky cliff, Tantallon Castle looks like something right out of a fairytale. I overheard an American girl at Edinburgh Castle say that she felt like she was in a fairytale. Well, she was wrong...Tantallon is the fairytale! After seeing [so many castles](#) [link to her previous castle posts], I feel like I have the authority to rank castles on fairytaleness :)

Jessica portrays herself as knowledgeable about castles on the basis of having seen ‘so many’, emphasising her claim by providing a link to her previous posts on the subject. She points out that she feels she has ‘the authority’ to judge to what extent a castle seems like sprung from a fairy tale. She legitimises her judgement and at the same time authenticates herself as an expatriate who can draw on her acquired expertise, by means of contrasting herself with another ‘American girl’. This person, presumably a tourist, is ‘wrong’ in her opinion of Edinburgh Castle, because she has not yet seen Tantallon Castle and hence does not have the wealth of experiences to draw on that Jessica does. Example 8-10 is another case situated at the intersection of *authentication* and non-institutional *authorisation*.

Displaying expertise occurs with varying degrees of explicitness. Personal narratives may serve to convey information about participants’ experiences, but they also have the potential to be read as advice (Harrison and Barlow 2009). For instance, in a ‘[I]ast weekend check list of THINGS TO DO’, Emily details what she will have to do before relocating to England, including personal steps such as storing photos and artwork for shipping. This may address a need to share these experiences and keep readers informed on her progress, yet it may also function as advice to inexperienced movers. Such inherent ambiguity can mitigate the potential face-threatening quality that advice has in an Anglo-Western setting (Locher 2006: 113). In either case, the list authenticates Emily as currently undergoing transnational relocation.

Participants have acquired the insights that they convey to others by undergoing a particular experience themselves. They are thus “invoking lived experience” to display expertise, a phenomenon previously discussed with regard to online discussion forums (Davies 2013: 34). For instance, Leah dedicates long and detailed posts to how travelling by train works in England, or what supermarkets look like and how online grocery shopping is done. Having become an insider to these sociocultural practices, she can now share them with readers who may be unfamiliar with them. Example 8-11 is the conclusion of one of these detailed posts and addresses the audience directly.

Example 8-11 [Leah]

Hmm... Have I missed any important bits? Have any questions? Feel free to leave me a comment, especially if there's something about life here you've been curious about.

Portraying herself as able to answer her readers' questions about life in England endows Leah with authenticity, as she is knowledgeable due to having experienced aspects of this life herself. This supports Kluge's (2011: 201) point that blogging about their transnational relocation can provide individuals with a confirmation of being experts on migration. In Example 8-12, Ruth similarly encourages her readers to contact her should they want more information about life in England.

Example 8-12 [Ruth]

And what about you, dear reader? Any mysteries of the British you'd like me to attempt to explain? Or perhaps there are some you can clear up. Stay tuned, because I have loads more to share.

This extract concludes a post entitled 'Things I Don't Understand About the British, Part 1 (Of Many)', in which Ruth writes about issues she has encountered and is unhappy with, namely the size of her refrigerator and the lack of closets in her house. This shows her personal involvement with the topic, even though she does not agree with the British way of doing things, as the title of the post emphasises. Pointing out that she may also learn from her readers portrays her as genuinely in the middle of learning about life in England, which again authenticates expatriate identity.

Claiming expertise can also be achieved through explicit advice-giving. Indeed, several participants point out that they are hoping to support others who may find themselves in similar situations, as the following examples illustrate.

Example 8-13 [Chloe]

All of the information and documents you need can be found on the Pet Travel Scheme [website](#) [link]. However there are things you should probably know, no matter where you're moving to, that won't be on the website. So, friend to friend, I've got some tips of my own for you.

Example 8-14 [Leah]

At this point, I've decided to make a timeline of this ordeal for anyone else that may be searching the internet wondering where their visa and passport are if they end up in a weird situation like I did with an approved visa that just wouldn't come home! Without further ado, I give you – *The Great Visa Event*:

Advice in expatriate blogs is frequently given with regard to matters of transnational relocation, such as visa procedures or moving pets abroad, as exemplified through the above extracts. Chloe and Leah both display awareness of readers' potential need for guidance, which they can provide due to having gone through pet relocation and visa procedures themselves. They even point out that readers 'may be searching the internet' and accessing relevant websites, yet may not find sufficient information. In this case, the help that official authorities may provide is surpassed by that of non-professionals, whose expertise lies solely and crucially in their personal experiences. This phenomenon and its import for *authentication* has also been observed in the case of other forms of online narratives, such as consumer reviews (Vásquez 2014) and transgender video blogs (Jones forthc.). Participants' own experiences hence serve as advice to others, which in turn bestows authentic expatriate identity upon them.

8.1.3 Providing deep insights and unadorned accounts

Another key means for participants to authenticate identity is positioning themselves as having deep insights into life in England. This involves emphasising that they are living abroad rather than just visiting a foreign country and brushing the surface like a tourist might do. As a consequence, the narratives shared in their blogs are portrayed as unadorned accounts encompassing not only the exciting experiences of exploring their new sociocultural environment, but also the negative aspects that transnational relocation entails. How participants set themselves apart from tourists is exemplified below.

Example 8-15 [Sarah]

Victorian Plumbing 101. So here is something your average tourist does not get to see: the inner workings of Victorian plumbing. Our home was built in 1898, the era of Queen Victoria.

Example 8-16 [Ruth]

It no longer feels like we are on vacation here, I am no longer waiting to pack up my bags and head to the airport.

Sarah posts a picture of what the drains in her garden look like and observes that this is ‘something your average tourist does not get to see’. She provides her readers with insights into real details of her housing situation in England and thereby authenticates herself as a person living abroad. Similarly, Ruth points out after six months in England that she has ceased to think of herself as a person who is merely on holiday and going home soon. Her presence in England has become a permanent situation rather than a ‘vacation’, and she has accepted that she will not ‘head to the airport’ anytime in the near future. Participants hence distance themselves from people merely visiting a foreign country, which enables them to claim their experiences to be genuine, encompassing real life in England rather than merely superficial involvement. A similar pattern has emerged in previous research: how emphasising deep engagement with their surroundings and distancing themselves from tourists authenticates individuals has been shown both in the context of migration (O’Reilly 2000; Cappelli 2008; Benson 2010, 2011) and gap year travelling (Snee 2014a).

Participants further emphasise that they provide unadorned accounts of what it is like to live abroad, in order not to give a wrong or idealised impression of expatriate life. This is for instance highlighted by Aubrey when she takes stock of her first year in England, as illustrated in Example 8-9. Other than listing negative aspects, participants may also acknowledge that their everyday life is not as exciting as might be surmised. Example 8-17 shows Kim’s reflections on this matter.

Example 8-17 [Kim]

Sometimes, I feel there is an assumption that when you move abroad your life will immediately be more glamorous and full of adventure. I admit that is an easy trap to fall into; wishing that every day I had some incredibly amazing story to tell. And yes, sometimes my life here is more glamorous than my life in the US (and I love those times too!), but it’s the every day that has become so meaningful to me. The mundane to me is the perfect.

Kim acknowledges that whilst sometimes her life is ‘more glamorous’ now that she lives abroad, expecting it to be ‘full of adventure’ and enabling her to blog daily with ‘some incredibly amazing story’ would be a misconception. Instead she concedes that what has become really special for her is paradoxically the mundaneness of her life. Having moved to England to be with her partner, she appreciates ‘the every day’. This contrasts with the shallow desire for glamour and adventure that people may project onto life abroad. Shallowness has been associated with inauthenticity (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1990), and by challenging this mindset she authenticates herself and her life abroad – not always full of adventures, but genuine and perfect for being ordinary.

This aim to provide an authentic and unadorned account of life abroad is also expressed by Emily, who a few weeks into her blogging sums up her intentions as follows.

Example 8-18 [Emily]

When I started [name of blog] the timing was perfect because it coincided with our transition from Japan to UK. My goal was/is to share with you the good-the bad- and the so-so of expat life (plus whatever else popped into my head that I thought someone else might be interested in).

Emily’s blog is a space to write about positive as well as negative experiences and anything else she would like to share. She then takes stock, detailing how she and her husband decided on their current plan for relocation. Nearly one year later, she writes a post about her struggles with feeling isolated, and concludes it by directly addressing readers.

Example 8-19 [Emily]

You wanted to know about expat life with [Emily] bet you thought it was all long lunches, girls weekends away and parties. Bet you didn’t realize that there’s this aspect too, the one of loneliness even tho there’s people around you.

Emily mitigates her account of the challenges she is confronted with by orienting to the fact that this might surprise readers. Nevertheless, she maintains that this is what her blog is about. If readers want to know about her life as an expatriate, they are going to get an unadorned, quotidian account encompassing not only a life of leisure, but also

struggles that may be hidden away from public view. This transparency endows Emily with authenticity as an expatriate, as she does not strive to mask challenging aspects of this way of life.

Similarly, as her first year abroad unfolds, Ruth increasingly writes about the difficulties she experiences. More than half a year into her life in England, she comments on how her blogging has shifted from her original intentions.

Example 8-20 [Ruth]

When I started this blog, I decided that I wanted to keep things light here, and humorous, as much as possible. Partly because I knew how difficult our move was going to be, and I wanted to highlight the fun stuff, the quirky things, the new experiences. I knew our adjustment would be full of peaks and valleys.

Even though she had intended to keep her blog humorous, as time goes on Ruth cannot help but comment on the challenging aspects of living abroad. She points out that she was aware that transnational relocation would be difficult, and now sees her anticipations confirmed. Consequently, her blog is beginning to provide a more rounded picture as her first year abroad unfolds, which in turn invests her with authenticity.

Participants thus create authenticity by positioning themselves as having deep insights into transnational relocation, for instance by distancing themselves from tourists and embracing the mundaneness of everyday life abroad. They further emphasise that they provide unadorned accounts that do not exclude the difficulties encountered in the process. Despite such challenges, several participants maintain that transnational relocation has enabled them to find personal fulfilment, which is discussed as a further means of *authentication* in what follows.

8.1.4 Finding personal fulfilment

Reflections on finding personal fulfilment are a crucial means of *authentication* because they imply that individuals are realising their genuine self. This involves drawing on essentialist notions of identity as a fixed property within individuals that may have been hidden before it is embraced. Several participants contrast their life

before relocation which was rich in personal belongings with their life afterwards, now rich in experiences. They further reflect on how moving abroad appears to have always been a natural step in their life and how they seemed predestined to such a move, or on how their life feels right and complete now that they are living abroad. These aspects are elaborated on below.

A major step in transnational relocation is mastering the logistical challenge of the physical move, which involves decisions on what to bring and what to leave behind as well as arrangements for packing and shipping. The majority of expatriate blogs feature posts about this, enabling individuals to construct authentic expatriate identity. For instance, Emily's second post is entitled 'Living Light and Lovin' It' and details her reflections on the benefits of not having too many possessions when moving transnationally, especially if subsequent moves to other countries are likely. Comments on possessions are not limited to the actual packing phase, but occur throughout the blogs. In her one-year anniversary post, Jessica also emphasises how she has learnt to cope with fewer things, and Ruth comments after more than seven months in England that one of her family's reasons for moving was related to their belongings.

Example 8-21 [Jessica]

I am learning to live on a smaller scale and to really think about our "things". Having less space means I really have to think every purchase through. I have ONE, yes ONE closet in my house. So it really has been a great change for us. Less things, more life experience.

Example 8-22 [Ruth]

Why *did* we move? Because we wanted our children to experience life in another country. Because we wanted them to get to know [husband]'s side of the family better. Because we wanted to get away from the American emphasis on "stuff" and have more life experiences. Because there were no jobs for [husband] where we were living and we were looking at moving anyway. (Though I thought [US city] would be nice.)

For Jessica, living abroad 'on a smaller scale' means that she has to restrict herself in what she can purchase. However, whilst she has fewer possessions now, she emphasises her increase in 'life experience'. A strikingly similar choice of words is evident in Ruth's reflections, who equally links having fewer possessions to a life

richer in experiences and presents it as one of the reasons for moving abroad. Jessica and Ruth hence associate living life to the fullest and making genuine experiences abroad with having fewer possessions.

Not only is life abroad portrayed as richer in experiences, it is also presented as natural and fitting. Several participants locate their inspiration for travelling or transnational relocation in their childhood. Chloe's and Aubrey's comments below are cases in point.

Example 8-23 [Chloe]

My first words, according to my parents, were "Go, go, go!" and I've been on the move ever since.

Example 8-24 [Aubrey]

My love for seeing the world began as a child. When adults would ask me what I wanted to be when I grew up, one of the things that I said was "a tourist". I read an atlas, had pen pals in Europe, Africa and South America, and thought about living abroad. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I'd be "a tourist" when I grew up.

Chloe obtains symbolic significance from her first words, which for her foreshadow her character trait of always being 'on the move'. Living abroad and exploring seems natural for who she is because it is constructed as grounded in her childhood. In a similar vein, Aubrey points out that she has always wanted to see the world as a tourist and has had an interest in engaging with other places and cultures. She also 'thought about living abroad', which extends beyond a tourist experience, as discussed in Section 8.1.3. Now she is indeed able to see the world, as by moving abroad she has become some sort of tourist, albeit one in quotation marks. She expresses great surprise about the fact that her childhood dream has come true. This both denaturalises her current life by pointing out how special it is, and at the same time creates authenticity as she has been able to realise her dream and become the person she has always aspired to be.

Similarly, Claire portrays transnational relocation as a natural continuation of her childhood experiences, as Example 8-25 illustrates.

Example 8-25 [Claire]

I've had traveling feet for as long as I can remember. As a child, we moved so often that people assumed we were a military family and while many girls born in my generation learned to cook or sew from their mothers, my memories have more to do with how to navigate through a big move rather than how to cook a meal or sew on a button. I'm still not sure why my mother seemed intent on changing the locations of our lives so frequently, but I believe that my ability to make friends wherever I go is partly a result of having learned to say hello and goodbye with such regularity. [...] I've carried my longing for a life of change and adventure right into adulthood so it's really no surprise that I would fall in love with a man in another country and "move house" as they say here in order to be with him.

Claire contemplates that having moved house frequently as a child has enabled her to make friends anywhere. This ability, her 'traveling feet' and her 'longing for a life of change and adventure' have always remained with her, and like a dormant potential have been fulfilled in her move to another country to be with the man she loves. Transnational relocation therefore is 'really no surprise'. Her identity as a person living abroad has always been inherent and has now been realised, which endows it with authenticity.

This narrative of having been predestined to live abroad and now fulfilling this potential is an important means of *authentication*. At the same time, it builds on essentialist notions of identity as an inherent property of individuals that can be activated by favourable circumstances or remain hidden. This illustrates Bucholtz and Hall's (2004a) point on how important essentialism can be in the discursive construction of identity if it is expressed by participants, as argued in Section 2.2.

A further way in which participants authenticate identity is by portraying their life abroad as natural and complete. This can occur at different stages: in Example 8-26, Chloe does so in her first post after moving to England, whereas Example 8-27 is an extract from Kim's reflections on her birthday, at which point she has lived abroad for eleven months.

Example 8-26 [Chloe]

I'm really loving it here, and not because everything has immediately fallen into place and I'm a wealthy, baroness with a slew of servants, 5 best-sellers to my name, and everything I could ever want at my feet. I love it here because it feels good and normal and right. Because I already know it wasn't a mistake.

Example 8-27 [Kim]

This year, I moved to England. It hasn't been the easiest year as I left everything that seemed familiar and comfortable to me. However, every time I get on a plane to return to England, I always know and feel how right it is to be heading east and back across the Atlantic to [UK county].

Both Chloe and Kim feel that their life in England is 'right', despite emphasising that moving and settling in has not been easy. Chloe asserts that moving abroad was the right decision: whilst it does not mean that all her dreams have instantly come true, it feels good and natural in a more realistic way. Kim describes similar sentiments whenever she returns to England from a visit in the US. They both authenticate themselves as individuals who have found the life that is right for them, with all the difficulties that this might (yet) entail.

Such a sense of genuineness is further expressed by participants who declare that they can be themselves. This is illustrated with two further extracts, this time from the first post in Kim's blog and at five months after Chloe's relocation.

Example 8-28 [Kim]

It was me wanting to introduce myself as me, as the girl about to embark on a very exciting chapter in her life. I always want to write so that my personality shines through. I want to share stories about my life straight from the heart. I want you to feel like you're right there with me. To me, those are always the tales that keep my attention the most.

Example 8-29 [Chloe]

I made this life for myself, and that makes me proud. I've seen new things and made new friends (among which I count the lovely readers who comment here :D), found a place to live, and a city where I feel happy to be who I am.

Following a reflection on why she found it difficult to write a perfect first post, Kim points out that she aims to write 'straight from the heart' so that readers feel like they are 'right there' with her. She voices a desire for sharing genuine stories about her life abroad and authenticates herself as an expatriate blogger. Chloe in turn looks back on

the life she has created for herself in England, which allows her to feel comfortable to be herself. There is thus an emphasis in both examples on the genuineness of individuals and their narratives.

To sum up, *authentication* is created through a step-by-step sharing of experiences as they are gained, frequently making reference to the passing of time. Related to this, participants display their expertise pertaining to transnational relocation, either more implicitly through conveying narratives of personal experience, or more explicitly through advice-giving. *Authentication* further results from individuals portraying their insights into life abroad as deep, and from providing unadorned accounts of expatriate life rather than an embellished version. Finally, participants stress that living abroad offers them more life experiences, feels right and enables them to be themselves, as well as that their relocation was a natural consequence of the experiences and traits acquired in an earlier stage of their life. Whilst these means of *authentication* are plentiful, expatriate blogs are also testimony to the opposite phenomenon, involving instances when identity is challenged and portrayed as unnatural. Such *denaturalisation* of identity is discussed in what follows.

8.2 Denaturalising identity

8.2.1 Rupture

Denaturalisation of identity occurs in three major forms in expatriate blogs. It can comprise expressions of rupture, of a radical break with what was before. It can also be conveyed through a discussion of challenges, doubts and a perceived lack of normality in daily life. Finally, individuals may point out that they feel out of place or like living in an alternative reality. These forms of *denaturalisation* are discussed below, beginning with the phenomenon of rupture.

According to Bucholtz and Hall (2004b: 501), *denaturalisation* can comprise a “rupture” of identity. In the case of expatriate blogs, these are moments when individuals distance themselves from a former self and home, or from a view or practice they used to adhere to but no longer do. Identity is ruptured in as far as they no longer fully identify with who they were or what they used to believe or do. Formerly

familiar and natural elements are denaturalised and questioned on the basis of individuals' new living situation. This underlines the significance of moving and living abroad for expatriates and the personal transition this entails. At the same time, it contrasts with how research on transnationalism conceptualises migration, given that it avoids focusing on such rupture and instead acknowledges the existence of relationships across national borders (Croucher 2012: 4), as elaborated in Section 1.3. Once more, then, a distinction needs to be made between participants' resources for identity construction and the etic conceptualisation of a phenomenon. Recognising the transnational nature of expatriate blogging does not entail that rupture is not at times mobilised within it.

Rupture can occur during the packing process, when individuals are faced with the decision of what to take with them and what to give away, having to confront and tidy up their past life. This can be a challenging task, as evident in the following extracts.

Example 8-30 [Leah]

Life sold at garage sale? Check.

Example 8-31 [Claire]

As most of you who've been following my blog lately are aware, I've just completed the enormous task of downsizing 48 years of my physical life into a box measuring 200 cubic feet for shipping to England where I now live with my husband [name]. As you might imagine, 200 cubic feet is not a lot of space especially for a woman with a tendency to place value on the memory of a day or event and hold on to whatever object heightens the memory.

Leah uses this checklist as the title of her post, in which she reports that she has managed to sell most of the things she was intending to. The magnitude of this is underlined by her choice of words. 'Life sold' implies that she has broken with what used to be by giving away any physical reminders. At the same time, however, she contrasts the significance of this step with the brief and unemotional style of a checklist, as if parting from her previous life could be achieved quickly and without further ado. This juxtaposition of momentous and incidental creates a bathetic effect and mediates the big step that she has taken. Like Leah, Claire likens the sorting-out

process to a break with what used to be: she was faced with ‘downsizing 48 years of my physical life’, which posed an ‘enormous task’, especially because the objects she had to sort through hold so many memories. Having to take leave of their physical home and life is one challenge participants encounter and negotiate in their blogs, denaturalising the act of leaving and all that it entails.

Furthermore, participants may express rupture by pointing out a distance they perceive to their former home. Megan’s announcement of her move in her first post illustrates this.

Example 8-32 [Megan]

I am moving away from home, away from the beaten path where my life to date has led me and definitely beyond the range of my current experiences.

For Megan, transnational relocation comprises not just physically moving away from home, but also away from what she has known thus far, entailing a new living situation and new experiences. Her focus lies on going ‘away’ and ‘beyond’, distancing herself from her former life whilst at the same time implying that this move will have a big impact on her and is by no means normal or usual.

A sense of being distant from home is further expressed as individuals have been away for an increased period of time, as Example 8-33 shows, and especially when they return for a visit, as in Example 8-34 and Example 8-35.

Example 8-33 [Emily]

We do miss [Australian city]. It’s home in so many ways, but the longer we are away the less familiar it feels to us.

Example 8-34 [Emily]

We are also blessed to go ‘home to [Australian city]’ regularly to catch up with family, friends and play tourist.

Example 8-35 [Megan]

Going “Home”

One of the most bizarre things about expat life is taking trips back to your home town, and being on vacation while everyone else is living the life you used to live as well.

While missing her city and pointing out that it still is ‘home in so many ways’, Emily also stresses that it feels increasingly ‘less familiar’ as time passes. She expresses a sense of distance to what used to be well-known and natural. As the second extract shows, while her family still call it home, they now visit and ‘play tourist’ rather than being residents, which again conveys a sense of distance. Example 8-34 illustrates that whilst transnational ties are maintained, a form of rupture is nevertheless expressed. Megan relates similar experiences, explaining how ‘bizarre’ it seems to her to return home, a term which she now puts in quotation marks in the title of her post. Whenever she does, she is ‘on vacation’ and hence becomes a tourist in her former home: she no longer fits in as a resident, but watches people ‘living the life’ which used to be hers as well. Experiencing home from the position of an outsider is unfamiliar and denaturalises expatriate identity.

The notion of distancing is prevalent in both *denaturalisation* and *distinction*, yet though similar the phenomena are not identical. The commonality is evident in Ruth’s list of what she will not miss in Example 7-3, which creates *distinction* from her origin to help her leave, yet does not convey as strong a sense of unfamiliarity as the examples discussed above. More clear-cut is the difference to distancing from England through points that participants note in lists, such as in Example 7-15 and Example 7-16. What Leah and Megan foreground there is not how unnatural or remote a previous understanding of themselves has become, but what they have discovered about how they differ with regard to their surroundings.

Although the previous examples may suggest otherwise, individuals’ increasing sense of distance to their former home is not constructed as necessarily negative. Indeed, Example 8-36 illustrates that individuals may welcome change and reject stagnation.

Example 8-36 [Aubrey]

Although there are some things that I miss about my 1st home that'll always be authentic to it, I saw that I haven't missed much of anything. The old neighborhood looks the same. Many people are doing the same things they did (if anything at all) before my departure. There's a lot that remains stagnant. Hopefully this realisation will help me to refrain from being stagnant.

During a visit to what she calls her first home, Aubrey discovers that she has not 'missed much of anything', as little has changed in her absence. This prompts her to aim for embracing change rather than 'being stagnant', and living abroad offers an opportunity to do so. A similar goal is expressed by Chloe in a post describing her feelings on the plane to England.

Example 8-37 [Chloe]

I had a freak-out on the plane ride over. I was somehow convinced for a little while that living and studying in England wouldn't be what I wanted it to. That every past failure would absolutely follow me, and being in a new environment would do nothing to improve my mind or my life. I'd be my old self in a new place, bringing nothing of value with me. I'd watch everyone around me follow their dreams while sitting stuck in the mud. I wouldn't make any friends. I wouldn't write anything worth reading. I'd be forced to go back to America defeated.

Chloe also voices concern over remaining the same person despite moving abroad. She describes how for a moment she feared being 'my old self in a new place'. This implies that for her, relocating presents a chance to start afresh, to become a different person and make the most of new opportunities. Not to do so would mean to be 'defeated' and to have to leave again. Thus, denaturalising identity by creating distance to their home and to who they used to be need not be a negative experience for individuals; in contrast, it may well be what they have set out to achieve.

Yet this form of rupture for all its positive potential can also present a challenge. Individuals may express uncertainty as to who they are or where they belong. This occurs not only immediately before and during the physical move, but is present well into the first year of life in England. A case in point is Example 8-38, in which Emily contemplates her situation at a point when she has lived in England for more than ten months. In posts preceding the extract below, she concedes that she struggles and feels 'invisible' as an Australian expatriate in England, which is discussed in Section 10.3.3.

In the present post, she quotes from an email she received as a reaction from a reader, who observed that living in England as an expatriate ‘can impact your sense of identity’. This prompts Emily to share the following reflection.

Example 8-38 [Emily]

It's the word IDENTITY – is it cos I've just turned 50? Is it cos I'm an expat in the UK? Is it cos I'm not working and most people around me are and I feel somehow 'less worthy'? Is it cos I'm starting to feel displaced from [Australian city]? Is it because several really close friends ignored by 50th recently? Is it because I am tired of always being seen as the organizer and have been disappointed by others being out'n'about when I always think to include them? MissM [daughter]'s only 8 but she is needing me less and less. DH [Darling Husband] is working such long hours these past few months i've realized i'd make a crap single mum and an even worse wife-who's- husband-travels. Who am I these days? I love being a wife and mum. There's way more to me than just that but i'm not sure where it's gone! Nor how to get her back, even if it's a new version.

Emily considers various potential reasons for the difficulties she is experiencing. She questions different aspects of her identity, like being an expatriate in England and as such not working. She also admits that she is ‘starting to feel displaced’ from her home town. This culminates in the question of who she is, and she expresses regret of having lost some aspects of her identity beyond being a wife and mother as well as uncertainty of ‘how to get her back’. Yet she does not necessarily long for her old self, as she would also accept ‘a new version’ of herself if only she could find her. Here, then, Emily expresses a rupture of identity, denaturalising her current state of being as one that seems to be missing a part, even though she is ‘not sure where it's gone’. This example illustrates how undergoing transnational relocation and having to come to terms with a new living situation may result in individuals experiencing their identity as uncertain, unnatural, fractured or incomplete. At the same time, this serves as a reminder of the complexity of identity: Emily's experiences of life as an expatriate in England are shaped by her husband's long work hours, her role as non-working wife and mother and her limited social network. Whilst this intricacy cannot be explored in greater detail in the present research due to participants' diverse backgrounds, it certainly needs to be acknowledged. Gender roles and identity construction in transnational relocation narratives are undoubtedly a worthwhile area for further exploration.

To sum up, *denaturalisation* as a rupture of identity is expressed in expatriate blogs by individuals distancing themselves from a former home and the memories attached to their possessions, or from a version of themselves that they feel no longer exists. Whilst this need not be negative, *denaturalisation* frequently encompasses individuals' engagement with challenges. The following section illustrates this further.

8.2.2 Doubts, challenges and lacking normality

Identity can be denaturalised in ways other than through rupture such as discussed above. At several points throughout their move and first year abroad, participants discuss challenges they are facing, issues they are struggling with as well as doubts and feelings of awkwardness and a lack of normality. The following extracts show how David and Aubrey describe feelings of anxiety before their move.

Example 8-39 [David]

I'm beyond stressed and into a sort of zombie-esque state in which I wander round the house without a goal, or sit staring at nothing. Tomorrow is going to be ugly.

Example 8-40 [Aubrey]

I woke up that morning and was so anxious that I almost vomited. I sent a mass text message to my friends at 5 a.m. (sorry if I woke y'all) asking them "What the hell did I get myself into?" A few of them wrote back and reassured me that I was courageous, doing the right thing for myself. Vomit or not, onward I was going.

With just a day left before leaving, David describes his condition as 'zombie-esque' and is worried that the next day may be even worse. Aubrey looks back on her experiences on the morning of leaving in similar terms, the uncertainty making her 'anxious' to the point of nearly being sick. She points out that she doubted her decision and elicited reassurance from her friends. These are instances where transnational relocation is experienced as unnatural and daunting.

Comparable feelings of doubt may persist well after the move. Expressing them is a way in which participants denaturalise identity regarding their new living situation. This is illustrated through the following two examples.

Example 8-41 [David]

There've been days when I wonder if I've made a colossal mistake.

Example 8-42 [Ruth]

We've had doubts about this move, before, during, and after; those doubts are especially strong right now [...]. We miss our house, we miss our friends, we miss our cats, we want to feel we are "home" again, in a place that is ours, with our furniture, our curtains, our things, not a mish-mash of stuff belonging to us and the rest belonging to the people who own the house we are in now.

Both David and Ruth concede that they wonder occasionally whether moving to England was the right decision. Ruth further expresses a desire to feel at home again, which implies that their current state is unsettled. For her, not feeling at home is linked to the place they are living in, which is temporary accommodation and belongs to another family who are currently away. The notion of belonging is central here: the repeated use of 'our', 'belonging' and 'own' emphasises that for Ruth, the concept of home is connected to personal possessions. This relates to the observation that for participants being an expatriate entails an awareness of their possessions and may necessitate having fewer of them. Whilst in Section 8.1.4 this is linked to having more life experiences, such as by Jessica in Example 8-21 and Ruth herself in Example 8-22, it here also entails feeling less at home in the new place. A similar observation is made by Emily, who discusses her daughter's reaction to the impending move as shown in Example 8-43.

Example 8-43 [Emily]

She's worried about what we're taking and what we're leaving behind (silly me thought it was a good idea to get her input into which of her toys/books etc she had grown out of using and offering it to the children in Tohoku who have nothing after the tsunami). I didn't for one minute think it would make her feel so unsure of the things that [make] our home home.

This is another instance where home is linked to material possessions, and uncertainty arises for Emily's daughter as to which objects contribute to making her home and

which are expendable. Parting from their belongings hence has oppositional consequences for participants. It can authenticate expatriate identity by enabling them to focus on novel life experiences abroad. Yet it can also denaturalise their new living situation through a perceived lack of home, which in turn may lead individuals to doubt their decision to move abroad.

Denaturalisation is further created through a perceived lack of normality. Given the contested nature of this term, the analysis refrains from determining what may or may not be 'normal', ordinary or expectable in the context of transnational relocation. Rather, the term is employed because it emerges as a concern for participants themselves. When discussing the challenges of living abroad and the doubts that may accompany them, expatriates occasionally point out that their life is not normal. They show themselves aware of the fact that they and their circumstances are different to the people around them. For instance, they initially may not have a big social network, as this takes time to establish. Example 8-44 is an extract from a post in which Emily discusses how she struggles during school holidays when she spends most of her time alone with her daughter.

Example 8-44 [Emily]

Without extended social networks, and family/friends close by so much does end up on my shoulders. We have a few good friends but if they are busy or away that's that. I'm not sure in 'normal' situations you could ever say, hand on heart that ALL your friends are away or busy. There's no aunties, uncles, cousins, friends offering sleepovers. This isn't a sob blog, far from it. It's a reality blog written by an expat with a very limited network despite all efforts to create a larger one.

As most of their family and friends are not nearby and their social network is limited, Emily expresses regret that sometimes truly 'ALL' their local friends are unavailable. She points out that this is unlikely to ever happen in 'normal' circumstances, hence to people with an established social network. This experience of loneliness is one that sets expatriates apart from local residents, who have had much more time and opportunity to build a circle of friends. This *denaturalisation* of her experiences is defended against potential reproaches of being too pessimistic: Emily emphasises that her post is 'a reality blog' and that she has tried in vain to amend the situation, which serves to portray her struggles as genuine.

The feeling that life is not normal is not limited to the early stages of relocation, but can persist beyond the point when all necessary arrangements have been made and a routine has been established. After five months in England, Jessica writes about her experiences and how difficult it is to express them, coming to the conclusion that the issue for her is one of confidence, as illustrated below.

Example 8-45 [Jessica]

When the newness and excitement of an overseas move wears off and you begin to settle in, there is a strange feeling that may overcome you, or maybe its just me. It's a little uncomfortable, kind of awkward and I've been trying to figure out how to put it into words. Trying to figure out how to explain to my friends and family what it's like to live in a foreign country. Because I should be on cloud nine everyday, right? And most of the time I am, but what are these feelings of being uncomfortable and awkward actually affecting in me? Well.... It's confidence. And there it is. Living your life as an expat can truly shake your confidence in ways that you never thought possible.

The initial 'excitement' is succeeded by a process of settling in, and it is then that Jessica feels 'strange', 'uncomfortable' and 'awkward'. She points out that according to general expectations, she should constantly be happy, yet this is not the case. She describes sometimes feeling awkward because she lacks confidence in situations that she did not anticipate. In the remainder of the post, she illustrates how everyday situations and tasks, such as driving a car or paying for groceries, make her lack confidence, and she provides encouragement to herself and any reader who may be experiencing similar challenges. Again, Jessica's concession of doubting herself and feeling uncomfortable because she is not in her normal element is a way in which *denaturalisation* is expressed.

A final example is discussed here to illustrate that whilst individuals write about challenges they are facing, they may have a differentiated view on them, such as displayed by Ruth in Example 8-46, who takes stock of her feelings after six months in England.

Example 8-46 [Ruth]

If I could go “home” tomorrow, would I? Oh yeah. But I can’t. We haven’t been here long enough to abandon ship, everything is still so new, and it’s easy enough to look back at our life in the U.S. with rose-colored glasses and blame all of our frustrations and sadness on having left. But that wouldn’t be fair, or correct.

Ruth openly admits that she would like to return home and that she and her family are feeling frustrated and sad. However, she acknowledges that this would mean ‘to abandon ship’, and that it would not be ‘correct’ to attribute all difficulties solely to having moved abroad. She denaturalises her own view of the US as involving ‘rose-colored glasses’, and by exposing and rejecting such a simplified interpretation, she ultimately achieves genuineness. The interrelation between *denaturalisation* and *authentication* is detailed in Section 8.3.

To summarise, *denaturalisation* comprises expressions of challenges, struggles and doubts as well as instances when individuals point out that their experience of transnational relocation is not normal. Similar to this last point, *denaturalisation* can also be voiced as feeling out of place or transported to an alternative reality, as discussed below.

8.2.3 Alternative reality and being out of place

Participants may portray moving and living abroad as unreal, both before their relocation and afterwards. This can have positive connotations, such as when they compare their experiences to being in a dream, film or fairy tale. Yet it can also imply that they are feeling out of place in a negative sense, such as Megan’s observation on being ‘off in a parallel universe’ in Example 7-17, which at the same time is an instance of *distinction*, as discussed in Section 7.1.2. The concept of being ‘out of place’ is drawn from Snee’s (2014a) exploration of gap year travel blogging, where it refers to the experience of difference abroad which engenders narratives of personal transition and cosmopolitanism. The following discussion first illustrates participants’ positive associations with alternative reality, before moving on to highlighting its challenges. A first example is Chloe’s anticipation one week before relocation.

Example 8-47 [Chloe]

I officially have 7 days until I'm supposed to leave this place. I'm excited, crazy nervous, and a little scared. During my day-to-day, it doesn't seem real. I know in some vague way that I'll be leaving, and I'm ready to do it, but it still feels like any second I'll wake up in the same spot and say, "Oh, I just dreamed it all." Having a visa would probably help cement the reality of leaving for me, but, you know...

Chloe conceptualises being so close to starting her life abroad as more like a dream than reality. Whilst she is 'ready' to leave and looking forward to it, she also feels 'crazy nervous' and 'a little scared' about it. The impending move seems even more unreal because Chloe has not received her visa yet, so at present she lacks the *authorisation* to begin her life abroad, as if she could be woken up from her dream any moment. In this instant, the dimensions of power and realness are clearly intertwined.

How unreal living abroad may appear is also emphasised by Jessica. In a post entitled 'Expatriate Life – What they didn't tell me...', she gives advice to future expatriates that she wishes she would have been given herself before the move. In the introduction to her post she stresses, however, that she might not have listened to any advice as she had her own conception of what life in England would be like, as displayed in Example 8-48.

Example 8-48 [Jessica]

But to be honest, I'm not sure I would have listened to anyone telling me about the realities of moving to another country. Before we moved, I imagined a fairytale life ahead of me, frolicking through the European streets, eating delicate pastries and sipping tea. No one could interrupt my fantasy with reality!!

Jessica imagined her life to be like a 'fairytale' and 'fantasy' and has since been confronted with the reality of living abroad, such as finding a house and feeling awkward and stressed, for which she subsequently gives advice. She thus distances herself from her former views, which allows her to claim greater authenticity at the current stage of her life abroad and which positions her as a suitable advice-giver.

Yet observations on life being out of place or unreal persist beyond the actual relocation, as noted for the perceived lack of normality discussed above. For instance,

the process of making the necessary arrangements and settling in is characterised by Emily as an in-between state which is difficult to cope with.

Example 8-49 [Emily]

For all the stress and emotion of leaving somewhere, I think I prefer that to this part of arriving. Being in limbo in so many areas of your life is hard.

Shortly after arrival, Emily details how she is trying to find a house and a school whilst living in temporary accommodation. She describes herself as being ‘in limbo’: she has left, yet has not truly arrived and is therefore in-between and somewhat out of place, denaturalising her current state of being. Such liminality is discussed further in Section 10.1.2.

Another way in which participants share this feeling of being out of place or in an alternative reality is by comparing their life abroad to a holiday, as the following example illustrates.

Example 8-50 [Megan]

Sometimes I still can't believe we really are here and that this is our new life, not some bizarre never ending vacation.

Just over a month after her move, Megan points out that she occasionally still feels as though she is on holiday rather than having a ‘new life’ in England. However, at a later stage, after roughly eight months in England, she reflects that it feels ‘bizarre’ to be on holiday back in her home country, now distancing herself from her former home, as illustrated in Example 8-35.

Tourism and holidays are hence evoked in expatriate blogs to construct identity through the creation of authenticity as well as a lack thereof: as detailed in Section 8.1.3, participants may point out that their insights into their country of residence exceed those of a tourist, which is a means of *authentication*. In contrast, acknowledging that they occasionally still do not feel like residents in England serves participants to denaturalise identity, pointing to the extraordinariness of their current situation. The

relationship between tourism or migration and discourses of authenticity has been addressed by previous research (for instance, Noy 2004; Cappelli 2008; Benson 2010, 2011; Kluge 2011; Frank-Job and Kluge 2012; Snee 2014a), as discussed in detail in Section 3.4. The discourses surrounding expatriate bloggers and other mobile individuals in terms of (in)authenticity are thus remarkably similar.

To conclude, an analysis of *denaturalisation* shows how individuals position themselves as undergoing transition upon moving abroad, be it through rupture, challenges or being out of place, such as in a dream or an in-between state. Yet *denaturalisation* can occur with *authentication*, and indeed it can contribute to the construction of authentic expatriate identity. The following section explores this interrelation.

8.3 From *denaturalisation* to *authentication*

Examining the relationship between *authentication* and *denaturalisation* reveals that the two tactics can occur in close textual proximity. Whilst they can function independently, they also work in unison. *Denaturalisation* is thereby a means towards *authentication*: when participants distance themselves from their previous self or a view they no longer hold, the contrast to their current situation allows them to create authenticity. This section illustrates this discursive practice, beginning with the following extract posted by Chloe in anticipation of her move.

Example 8-51 [Chloe]

There's a lot I'll be leaving behind, but I'm not particularly sad about it; I know my life lies ahead. And thanks to the level of tech we currently have access to, I can stay in touch with the people I'll miss. Like anyone who picks up their life and sets it down elsewhere, it's not only people I'm leaving behind, but past experiences and versions of myself that weren't quite right as well. Cheddar-cheesy as it sounds, each day is a new chance to bring your goals and your best self into better focus. In fact, it's the opportunity for a clean slate that keeps me going whenever I encounter disappointment.

Chloe distances herself from previous experiences and from who she used to be, denaturalising this as only being 'versions' of who she is, which 'weren't quite right'.

In contrast, she now focuses on the future and aims for her ‘best self’, thereby creating authenticity. The transition of leaving and starting afresh is a necessary part of the process: Chloe is a person who ‘picks up their life and sets it down elsewhere’, which implies a clear break with anything but the elements she chooses to bring with her. Going ‘elsewhere’ does not necessarily involve moving abroad, but a clear transition is implied to be a prerequisite.

Similarly, Claire reflects on how leaving things behind has enabled her to start a new life that is right for her, as detailed in Example 8-52.

Example 8-52 [Claire]

It was during the first bit of sorting and selling that I came up with the name of my blog...[name of blog]. Having surrounded myself so long with things that held memories that I considered part of my story, I never would have believed I would or could consider letting them go. It would have seemed almost as if I were being asked to slice off a finger or a toe. I thought I needed those things to help me balance and connect to what was important. It was during the time when I was selling off the furniture and things that made my house so cozy, that I realized the gifts I was receiving in learning how to let go of the physical stuff in exchange for my deepening connection with [husband]. I had no idea where we would go or really how we would get there, but what I did know was that my house and all the things inside were not what made it a home. Freeing myself from the belongings that I thought had to have, gave me the opportunity to start over in a life I could not have imagined would be so right for me.

Claire distances herself from her former attachment to her belongings, which she used to value almost like a part of herself for all the memories she associated with them. In retrospect, she describes how she was learning to give them away upon preparing to move to England to live with the man with whom she fell in love. She denaturalises her former point of view by emphasising that all her things ‘were not what made it a home’, which enables her to contrast it with her fresh start in a life that is ‘so right’ for her. *Authentication* of her identity is linked to possessions and her detachment from them, in line with other examples discussed in Section 8.1.4, and is strengthened by its position following *denaturalisation*.

Such a transition from an old to a new life is also discussed by Kim in Example 8-53, again denaturalising what used to be in order to achieve authenticity in the present.

Example 8-53 [Kim]

These past few months, as I thought about entering a new decade of life, I reflected on where I thought I would be at this time in my life. And, I will admit that where I am is not where I thought I would be. But, I wouldn't change a thing. I know this life is the one I was meant to live, and that the path I was once headed down was not right for me (maybe, someday, I'll write about that, but for now, I'd like to focus on the now).

On her birthday, Kim reflects on the changes in her life and denaturalises the course it was previously going to take as 'not right for me'. In contrast, she authenticates her present identity, as she is now living the life she 'was meant to', even if she did not foresee this at the time. Again, making a transition in life has enabled her to claim identity that is right for her.

However, whilst starting afresh and distancing themselves from their previous life is discussed as successful by some participants, others point out that transnational relocation alone has not made them a different person or resolved issues they might have been facing. Leah discusses this point at length in a post entitled 'Changing Your Postcode Will Not Change Your Life'.

Example 8-54 [Leah]

However, it really bears mentioning that when you do this [live or travel in the UK or Europe] you cannot expect it to magically make whatever life issues you are having better. This isn't to say I think anyone is delusional about life at all, but going abroad seems to be a similar trap to losing weight. "When I get to my goal weight then I'll be more confident and fall in love." "When I'm skinny I'll go for that job I've always dreamt of." "When I'm not fat anymore I won't get depressed so easily." Sound familiar? Well, I've heard similar things about moving far away from home too. It seems to be a default behaviour that we all fantasize about every now and again – running away from our problems and starting fresh in a new place. And in a way you can. However, you've got to face those demons first and learn from what's making you struggle before you move on to bigger and better things.

Leah rejects the idea that moving abroad will 'magically' make a person's life better. She denaturalises this as a 'trap' and a fantasy which people, and herself 'now and again', are harbouring. Distancing herself from this alleged solution is possible by virtue of her experience: she has taken the step and undergone transnational relocation herself and she is therefore in a position to challenge the assumption that moving abroad allows people to escape from their problems. This rejection confers authenticity

to her as it positions her as experienced and sophisticated. The phenomenon of participants challenging other people's assumptions about life abroad is discussed in more detail in Section 10.3.2.

Yet Leah's position does not entirely contradict the potential for personal transition through transnational relocation as discussed above. Indeed, she acknowledges that 'starting fresh in a new place' is possible. However, it requires facing one's problems and understanding them first. The *denaturalisation* of the stereotypical carefree expatriate is the flipside of the *authentication* strategy of providing unadorned accounts of what life as an expatriate is like, as discussed in Section 8.1.3. Again, thus, *denaturalisation* serves to create authenticity.

In conclusion, participants authenticate identity by sharing experiences as they are gained, displaying expertise, providing deep insights and unadorned accounts as well as describing having found personal fulfilment. In turn, *denaturalisation* involves expressions of rupture, challenges and being out of place. As with previous dimensions, the two tactics are shown to interact in a way that *authentication* of identity can work on the back of *denaturalisation*. This means that individuals who experience rupture and challenges and work through such issues in their blog thereby achieve *authentication*. Expatriate identity emerges not only from leading the carefree life that may be associated with expatriates, but crucially also from the very challenge of this notion.

The present research does not explore in detail how expatriate bloggers position themselves towards readers, nor does it examine how such positioning is received and whether the creation of authenticity is ever contested. Nevertheless, *authentication* appears to be a concern for expatriate bloggers themselves and not merely a performative element for an audience. Individuals portray their experience of transnational relocation as impacting on them as a person, and such transition is what Bamberg (2011) identifies as one key challenge of identity as outlined in Section 2.3: navigating change whilst holding onto a sense of being oneself. Indeed, the dimension of realness emerges as a crucial aspect of identity construction in expatriate blogs. It complements individuals' positioning of being in-between through negotiations of similarity and difference, and contrasts with the comparative scarcity with which issues of power are mobilised. Hence, whilst all six tactics are explored separately in terms of

how they contribute to identity construction in expatriate blogs, the overall analysis maintains that it is ultimately the acknowledgment of their dynamic interplay that allows a deeper understanding of how individuals construct identity in phases of personal transition. This concludes the discussion of ToI and thereby Part II of this thesis.

PART III MEMBERSHIP CATEGORISATION

Chapter 9 Exploring category negotiations

9.1 *Category fit, category change and the transnational relocation device*

Exploring dimensions of identity as outlined in the ToI framework focuses on the relational aspect of identity (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). This shows how individuals position themselves with regard to power, likeness and realness to construct expatriate identity. Another way in which identity emerges is through categorisation. Individuals place themselves and others into categories to make sense of and negotiate who they are. Categories are typically understood to entail certain expectable attributes or behaviours, which can be made relevant in a particular occasion of their use. For instance, in the case of ‘undergraduate student’, these may be attending university, living in shared accommodation, working in a part-time job, going on regular nights out, and many more. However, these are not fixed meanings in a culture. Instead, the use of categories, predicates and devices is “situated” and “occasioned” and MCA shows how category work is achieved in a particular interaction (Hester and Hester 2012: 566). The category ‘undergraduate student’ may for instance be treated as bound to being lazy or hard-working depending on the context. Certain characteristics or behaviours can thus be taken to index certain identity, and such indexicality (Ochs 1992) is outlined in Section 2.2 as one of the five principles of identity in Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) sociocultural linguistic approach.

Participants’ engagement with categories and the way they linguistically construct identity through this is what Part III of this thesis explores. This is achieved by adopting an MCA-informed approach, drawing on its core notions of categories, predicates and devices. This chapter first outlines what phenomena were investigated and why. This is followed by a focus on how the data were coded and analysed, including what issues arose during this process and how they were addressed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how this approach can be situated within MCA,

where it departs from it and what its benefits and limitations are. The creative adoption of MCA undertaken in this thesis necessitates comparatively more elaboration than the corresponding methodological discussion of ToI in Chapter 5, which explains why this chapter is longer.

Identifying categorial matters and their import for identity construction involves a different analytic approach to the analysis of ToI. Whilst the latter framework suggests analytic criteria in the form of six tactics that may be relevant in the data, MCA operates with the broad notions of categories and predicates, yet how they are employed by participants differs in the interactions and has to be examined for every case locally. An MCA-informed analysis therefore works bottom-up, examining participants' own methods of sense-making and negotiating who they are.

Before the discussion of this process can ensue, two terminological and conceptual specifications are in order. Firstly, the concept of *category* adopted in the present research needs to be clarified. Categories as pre-given labels or essences are contested in interactional sociolinguistics (see Mendoza-Denton 2002) and need to be treated with great care when employed as part of the research design. However, within MCA the notion of a category is crucially different: MCA does not assign categories to individuals, nor does it accept them unquestioningly as some kind of discourse-external reality. Instead, it examines the very way in which such categories are used by participants and what they accomplish (Housley and Fitzgerald 2015: 6). Thus, when the term *category* is employed in the present research, it is done so from an MCA-informed perspective, which is compatible with a social constructionist view of identity as emergent through discourse (Bucholtz and Hall 2005).

Secondly, MCA refers to individuals in society as *members*, who may be *incumbents* of a certain category. In contrast, the present research adopts the terms *participants*, *individuals* or *expatriates*, reserving *member* to express membership in a category. This decision was made with respect to the integration of two different methodologies, for it allows referring to participants uniformly throughout all chapters of this thesis. Whilst this may be uncommon in MCA, it is justifiable within research informed by MCA.

This MCA-informed approach resulted in two phases of identifying and analysing categorial matters. The first phase explored *how* categories are negotiated, leading to a distinction between *category fit* and *category change* which is further elaborated on

below. The second phase in turn examined *what* categories are negotiated in the context of relocating abroad as part of what the present research calls the *transnational relocation device*, also as detailed below. Subsequently, the identified category negotiations were revisited chronologically by grouping them into four time spans comprising negotiations (i) before relocation, (ii) during relocation to one month beyond, (iii) from two to six months and (iv) from seven to twelve months into life abroad, as introduced in Section 4.2. The coding already formed part of the analysis and was complemented by simultaneous and subsequent note-taking and occasional recoding, making the analysis an iterative and holistic process. The two phases of identifying and coding category negotiations are explained in more detail in the following paragraphs.

As a first step, a sample analysis of twelve posts – one per blog – was conducted to gain an understanding of how categories are employed by individuals in their narratives. The posts were chosen on the basis of prior readings of the data that revealed categorial matters to be salient within them, such as reflections on what being an expatriate entails, or why the move abroad was undertaken and its effect upon the individual. The sample analysis confirmed an expectably great variety of categories both between and within posts, yet a commonality was identified in the way they are produced. Categories are not only mentioned, but frequently negotiated – membership is explained, justified or even questioned and thus becomes an issue that is “demonstrably relevant” (Hester and Hester 2012: 567) to participants. Negotiation in this context is understood as the working through of a categorial issue in the form of an engagement with a category and its predicates that involves interactional work. In contrast to a mere mention, a negotiation entails a surplus, a linguistic effort. Instances of category negotiation are thus focal; they are the point of what participants are doing at that particular moment and are thus interactionally relevant as demonstrable by the linguistic work they involve. Such category negotiations were found to be key means of how participants construct identity and therefore deemed worth exploring. The sample analysis further revealed that such negotiations occur in two ways: they either comprise an engagement with the *fittedness* of a category and its implications, or the telling of and reflection on a perceived *change* of category. On the basis of these initial findings, all 568 posts were analysed, now with a specific focus on the negotiation of categories.

This allows the research question of how participants draw on and engage with membership categories to linguistically construct identity (RQ1.2) to be answered.

One way in which category negotiations occur is centred around what in this thesis is named *category fit*. Here individuals examine a category internally, that is to say with a focus on what it entails and whether they are a fitting member. Figure 9-1 represents the engagement with what a category (c) means and what its predicates (p) may be.

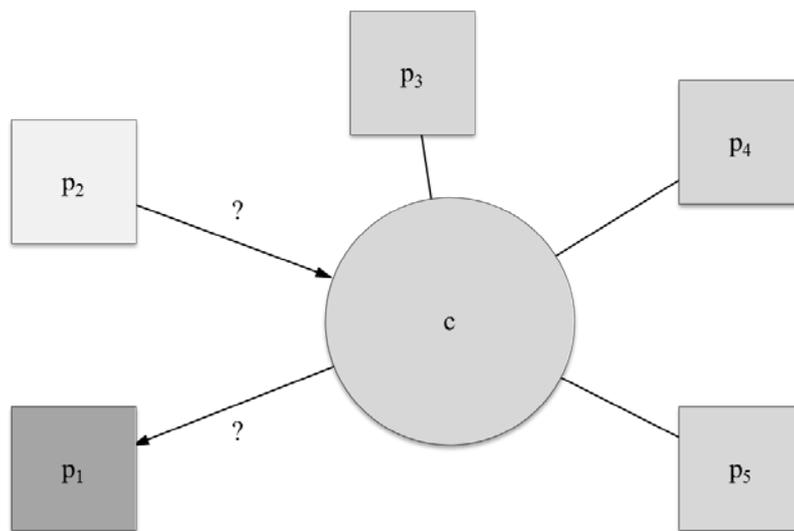


Figure 9-1. Negotiating *category fit*.

Figure 9-1 shows the negotiation of *category fit* in localised interaction. It does not aim to make claims about any discourse-external reality or pre-existing relationship between categories and predicates. The lines between predicates and category therefore represent relationships that are established or questioned (indicated by the question marks in the figure) *in situ*.

Category fit comprises several aspects. Firstly, individuals may identify an incongruity or mismatch between the category and the predicates which are expectably bound to it. Such an incongruity between predicates and category is illustrated in Example 9-1.

Example 9-1 [Sarah]

Typically a person's home and car often tell a lot about a person's economic status. But here, if a middle class family has a robust expat package, they could be living like kings. In contrast, a wealthier family may be living in a small home because they have to pay their own way.

Sarah explains how in the case of people living abroad on an expatriate package, the predicates of having a certain type of home and car cannot be taken to indicate what category people fall into in terms of their economic status. This is a case of mismatch between predicates and category.

Similarly, such mismatch occurs when individuals do not relate themselves to predicates that they at the same time occasion as bound to a category that they place themselves in. An instance of this can be seen in Example 9-2.

Example 9-2 [Kim]

Blech. I dislike packing. You'd think after my many travels that I'd have this down to an art. Not quite.

Kim points out that as a well-travelled person she could be expected to be competent and efficient in packing her bags. Yet she denies that this is the case for her.

Finally, *category fit* entails a discussion of what a category involves, constructing the category or its predicates as problematic and in need of being treated explicitly. Example 9-3 illustrates this phenomenon.

Example 9-3 [Emily]

So the talk will soon be 'we are leaving on such'n'such a date' and it will come up very fast indeed. Such is the life of an expat. So much waiting for confirmation of your move, then wham-bam you're gone but hopefully not forgotten

Having waited for a long time to have their move confirmed, Emily finds that once their move is definite, they are in the middle of their preparations and time is passing quickly. Whilst this may appear unusual to someone who has never moved abroad, Emily explains that waiting for a long time and then leaving on short notice is indeed a typical practice for members of this category: 'Such is the life of an expat.' Their *category fit* is here treated as problematic and in need of explanation.

Aside from *category fit*, negotiations can also involve a discussion of *category change*. This consists of an external ‘working through’ of category membership. Rather than scrutinising one category and its predicates as in the case of *category fit*, *category change* highlights a change from one category to another, which potentially share some predicates. Figure 9-2 illustrates *category change* negotiation, the arrow representing either an ongoing transition or one that participants look back on and negotiate in a particular instance.

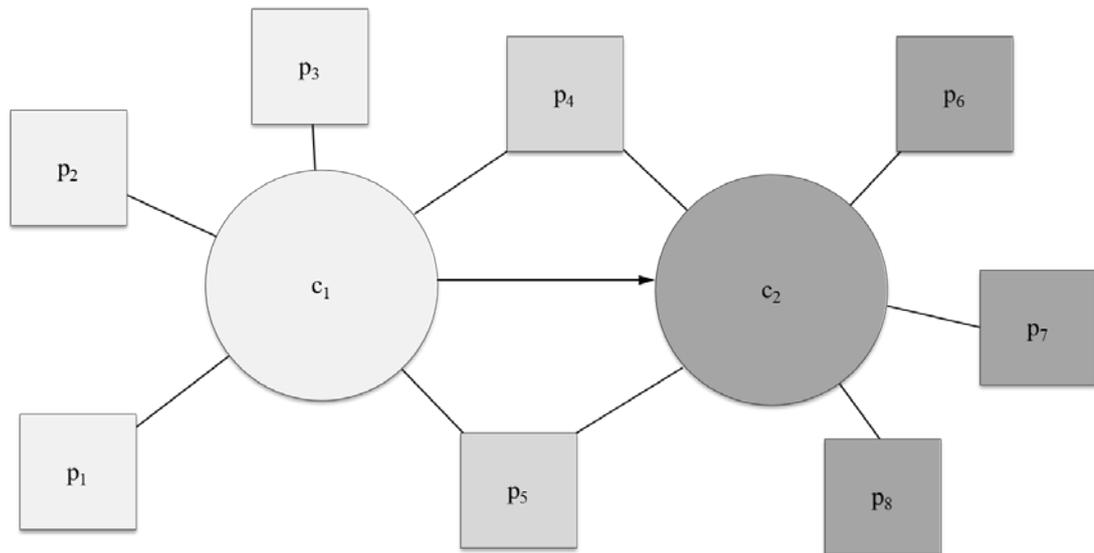


Figure 9-2. Negotiating *category change*.

Category change thus involves a perceived change of category, and this may take different shapes. It can comprise individuals’ claims to a new category, be it as an alternative or an addition to a previously held identification, for instance by pointing out how they no longer fit into a certain category but into another one.

Example 9-4 [Sarah]

I haven’t been an anglophile since my high school days, but I think I am turning into one

In a post on cultural differences between the UK and the US, Sarah notes in Example 9-4 how she is in the process of becoming ‘an anglophile’. She is regaining

membership of a category that she associated herself with when she was in high school, but has not considered herself a member of since.

Another way of negotiating *category change* is through juxtaposition of one's category membership in the past and present, and even in the future – categories that are anticipated or intended. Example 9-5 shows such a juxtaposition between past and present.

Example 9-5 [Claire]

In the last year, my travel life, business life, and love life have all gone through dramatic changes. Airports look different to me now. Instead of moving at breakneck speed towards departure gates or rental car pickups, I travel for love. Flying these days is about reuniting with family and friends or exploring places I've never been before.

Claire discusses how she has stopped travelling for business and has become a different kind of traveller due to living in England. Within the device 'people who travel' she is no longer a business traveller, but a traveller for love. The move abroad has thus caused a change of category.

As outlined in the previous discussion, the first phase of coding examined how categorial negotiations either involve the fit in or change of a category. This observation grants insight into *how* participants work through categorial matters. However, the findings do not reveal details about *what* categories are occasioned. Therefore, in a second step of analysis the focus was narrowed down from a general investigation of category negotiation to particular instances. Further explored were negotiations directly linked by participants to the phenomenon of transnational relocation. What this entails and how the analysis was conducted is outlined below.

Participants employ various categories and predicates to position themselves as a person having moved abroad. The device these pertain to is subsequently referred to as *transnational relocation device*: the categories are occasioned as comprising a type of person moving to a different country. The prefix *trans* emphasises that despite their move abroad individuals are maintaining ties to their home country, for example through their blogging, as discussed in Section 1.3.

The *transnational relocation device* is a researcher's rather than participants' term. Participants themselves are engaged with negotiations on the category level, but do not name the device that collects these occasioned categories. However, all participants have included their blog in an expatriate directory, all orient towards their relocation in their first posts, and most blogs even contain a reference to living abroad in their name, containing similar discourses as identified by Kluge (2011) and mentioned in Section 3.4. This is evidence that transnational relocation sets the context in which these narratives are produced. This is not to claim that all posts orient to moving abroad, as acknowledged in Section 4.2. Nor do participants exclusively construct identity with regard to having moved abroad, as naturally there is a wealth of other categories available to any individual at any time. Nevertheless, life abroad can always expectably be made relevant in these blogs. Sacks (1992) observes a similar phenomenon in his discussion of a group therapy session: that participants therein are patients and a therapist may not always be relevant during the interaction, but it might become so at any point. The device that collects the categories 'therapist' and 'patient' is in this case "omni-relevant", which Sacks (1992: 313-314, vol. I) defines as follows:

An 'omni-relevant device' is one that is relevant to a setting via the fact that there are some activities that are known to get done in that setting, that have no special slot in it, i.e., do not follow any given last occurrence, but when they are appropriate, they have priority. Where, further, it is the business of, say, some single person located via the 'omni-relevant device,' to do that, and the business of others located via that device, to let it get done.

For instance, the therapist might at any point introduce a new group member, move the discussion back to a particular issue, or close the session. Similarly, in the case of expatriate blogging, a blogger might make their relocation relevant at any point, even when discussing a different topic. Therefore, the present research argues that transnational relocation functions as an omnirelevant device in expatriate blogs: not always evoked, but always evocable. Hence, the researcher may have labelled the device, yet it is participants who assemble it and occasion categories *in situ* as belonging to it.

However, no claim is made for the exclusivity of the *transnational relocation device*: categories occasioned as part of it might also be locatable in a different device. Sacks

(1992) outlines this phenomenon in the case of ‘baby’, which can belong to either of the devices of ‘family’ or ‘stage of life’ depending on the context of its occurrence. Indeed, some of the categories occasioned in the *transnational relocation device* which are discussed in the analysis could be more broadly situated in a *personal transition device* with a focus not on relocating abroad but on any change in circumstances that makes a person experience a personal transition, such as changing jobs or careers (Ibarra and Obodaru 2016), losing weight (Leggatt-Cook and Chamberlain 2012), motherhood (Phillips and Broderick 2014), illness (Page 2011, 2012), coming out (Sauntson 2007) and many other of “life’s changes” (Bridges 2004) that are negotiated through personal narratives, as discussed in Section 3.4. However, the present research explores the construction of identity in narratives of transition engendered by moving abroad, which warrants a focus solely on categories within the *transnational relocation device*.

As a considerable variety of categories were identified to be occasioned as part of the *transnational relocation device*, space precludes a detailed discussion of all of them. A select number of categories were analysed in greater detail and are discussed in the next chapter. The present discussion therefore restricts itself to briefly illustrating what shape such a category negotiation may take. The following example shows the title and opening of a post in which Sarah engages with being an American in England aiming to adopt a British accent.

Example 9-6 [Sarah]

An American Attempts The English Accent

So I must confess that I was very excited about the idea of my little Americans wearing an English school uniform and adopting the English accent. I’ll also confess to trying to sound all English too. Why? Well, it would be nice to walk into a restaurant and ask for a table without turning heads. It actually serves a purpose when not trying to call attention to yourself (‘Oh, clumsy AND American’). So I’ve been working on it. I’m getting my ‘lessons’ by regularly listening to my fav DJs on the radio and repeating after them. I am able to end the last word of a sentence with an accent, but I cannot hold the accent for an entire sentence.

Sarah repeatedly categorises herself as American. Having moved abroad makes her national, sociocultural and linguistic differences salient. She refers to her children as ‘my little Americans’ to contrast their American background with the English practices

they are now confronted with. Sarah not only mentions her American nationality, but engages with what it means both for herself – standing out in public – and how she is perceived by others. Adopting a British accent is portrayed as desirable for Americans living in England, and the remainder of the post lists typical phonetic features and comments on her progress. The category ‘American’ is here occasioned within the *transnational relocation device*: the negotiation centres around not what it means to be American in general, but American having moved to England.

To summarise, participants’ engagement with categories is prevalent and can take the shape of *category fit* or *category change* negotiations. The focus of the analysis lies on categories occasioned within the *transnational relocation device*. The analytic process did thus not follow a pre-set course, but was adapted as the understanding of the observed phenomenon developed. Such a procedure is in line with the relative freedom that MCA offers through not being a rigid methodology, but rather an “analytic mentality” (Housley and Fitzgerald 2015: 6). Having illustrated the analytic concepts that emerged from the data, the chapter now turns to the mechanics of coding, what issues were encountered in the process and how they were resolved.

9.2 Coding procedure and considerations

As for the ToI analysis, the qualitative data analysis software NVivo was used. This allowed for category negotiations to be collected and later reviewed together with other negotiations of the same manner (*fit* or *change*) or the same category without losing a sense of their original context. Whilst NVivo may not frequently be used for ethnomethodologically informed research, King (2010) argues for its usefulness in undertaking MCA and illustrates the different types of queries that can be run in NVivo, such as searches for a particular term or for the most frequently used words. Although these were helpful at the onset of the research as a means of familiarisation with the data, categorial matters were found to be more complex than King’s (2010) explanations suggest. This is because they do not necessarily involve a mention of a category per se, as discussed in greater detail below. NVivo is a tool that helps organise and revisit materials and ideas, yet the actual analysis is still for the researcher to carry out (King 2010: 13; Bazeley and Jackson 2013: 2).

In the process of analysis, a number of issues needed to be considered, and the decisions taken are addressed in the following discussion. A first reflection centres around the mutual exclusiveness of the analysed phenomena. *Category fit* and *category change* are treated as mutually exclusive even though the fit in and the change of a category can depend on one another. For instance, the change of a category may be based on a rejection of one's fit in it. It is thus acknowledged that such negotiations are intricate. In challenging cases the decision was made based on which sense emerged more strongly from the data, that is whether the focal point was the negotiation of the fit in a category or the change this might engender. It is acknowledged that some isolated cases may therefore be debatable between different analysts, yet this is no different to other qualitative approaches, nor does it affect the analysis as a whole, because instances of coding are not discussed numerically in the present research. Furthermore, developing a mutually exclusive coding scheme allowed for a better grasp of the nature of the negotiations by breaking down a complex issue into more manageable aspects and keeping the coding of a substantial amount of data meaningful. In what sense this coding scheme links to previous research and makes a contribution is discussed in Section 9.3.

In contrast, the categories within the *transnational relocation device* are not treated as strictly mutually exclusive. At times individuals may be seen to negotiate not one, but the interplay between at least two categories, for instance when writing about their experiences of being an expatriate in conjunction with being a stay-at-home mother. The fact that categories are occasioned *in situ* necessitated coding them when they arose and building a collection of category negotiations as the analysis progressed rather than trying to identify any preconceived categories in the data. NVivo is a useful tool for such a procedure because it enables the creation of collections as the analysis progresses, which can later be revisited and potentially modified or merged. The occasioned rather than ontological nature of categories entails that they do not neatly arrange themselves into hierarchies in the sense of mutual exclusiveness on the same level. For instance, categories such as 'expat' and 'invisible expat' can be used alongside each other, or 'expat' can be turned into a device itself, of which 'invisible expat' may then be a category. Consequently, a collection of negotiations of the same category across the data will include diverging uses and inconsistencies. Rather than being a defect, this is a natural consequence of interactional sense-making and indeed

warrants an examination of *category fit* and *category change*. All category negotiations within the *transnational relocation device* overlap with *category fit* or *category change*, so that the combination of both manner of negotiation (fit vs. change) and content (what category) enables a closer focus on a subset of the data.

Secondly, the relationship between explicit mentions and category negotiation needs to be clarified. On the one hand, there are several instances of explicit mentions of categories in which no negotiation takes place. Whilst it could be argued that the mere naming of a category makes it notable, in some instances the categories are treated as unproblematic as they are not further attended to linguistically and no ‘working through’ occurs, as the following example illustrates.

Example 9-7 [Megan]

Since there are other Americans in the program he [partner] is in, we were able to talk to people who currently live over there [target area in England] and get advice on what towns to look in and which letting agents are best.

Whilst Megan names the category ‘Americans’, she does not elaborate on it. The category mention positions her and her partner as Americans seeking advice from compatriots living in England, but at no point is their category membership or what it entails called into question. Mere naming of a category stands in contrast to the demonstrable amount of work that may go into category negotiation. Therefore, mentions without negotiation are not considered further. On the other hand, negotiations need not necessarily mention a category term, but can also consist of a discussion of predicates occasioned as expectably bound to a category in the context of negotiation, thus in expatriate blogs or within the *transnational relocation device*. Hence, whether a category is mentioned or not does not predetermine whether an instance constitutes a category negotiation.

Based on the decision to exclude mere category mentions from the analysis, consideration thirdly needs to be given to what constitutes a categorial matter. In numerous cases negotiations do not involve naming the actual category, but instead centre on predicates from which a category may be inferred. This presents a challenge for an analysis of membership categories when they are not named by participants.

Indeed, this issue has been raised as a point of criticism of MCA. For instance, Sacks (1986 [1972]: 335) comments that it is “obvious” that an activity is bound to a category (in this case, ‘crying’ being bound to ‘baby’). However, Schegloff (2007a: 476) sees this link as problematic: “The ‘obviousness’ of it is not the investigator’s resource, but the investigator’s problem.” Similarly, Stokoe (2012a: 282, original emphasis) concedes that “the appeal (and danger) of MCA is to try to *unpack* what is apparently unsaid by members and produce an analysis of their subtle categorization work” and that the ambiguity inherent in MCA has come to be treated as “some kind of defining problem with the method” (Stokoe 2012b: 352). Therefore, Schegloff (2007a) argues that the analysis must be able to show how a category emerges from participants’ interaction rather than through the analyst. This is not to say, however, that category terms need to be mentioned explicitly for the analyst to conclude that participants are oriented towards them (Schegloff 1997b: 182). After all, as Stokoe (2012a: 282) reminds readers, categories are “inference rich” (Sacks 1992: 40, vol. I). And indeed, it can be argued that when categorial work remains implicit because it is “taken-for-granted”, it is all the more “powerful” (Baker 2000: 111). The approach adopted in the present research is therefore to focus on what can be shown to be relevant to participants by virtue of their spending linguistic effort on its negotiation, as explained above. It is this very negotiation that is analysed regarding its import on identity construction.

From this follows on a fourth consideration, which is concerned with the size of the unit of analysis. Category negotiation may be accomplished in as little as a single sentence, yet may also extend to an entire paragraph or beyond. Furthermore, negotiations can link to and depend on each other. For instance, a category may be named, yet negotiated only later within a post, or taken up again in a subsequent post. Thus, the identified instances should be seen as units of meaning whose length can vary greatly, and there are cases when several need to be considered in relation to each other rather than treated as separate instances. Whilst identifying occurrences of category negotiation makes them countable, this alone does not endow them with validity, as mentioned in Section 4.3, and it should not distract from the fact that they are intertwined as elements in a complex network. Therefore, the focus is not on a numerical count of how often or extensively *category fit*, *category change* or a certain

category within the *transnational relocation device* occur, but on how they occur and how they contribute to the construction of identity in a particular context.

Hence, the analysis progressed once clarity had been reached with regard to mutual exclusiveness, the relationship between explicit mentions and category negotiations, the challenge of pinpointing categorial matters as well as the size of the unit of analysis. These decisions are specific to the present research, warranting the subsequent reflection on its original methodological contribution.

9.3 Contribution

To conclude these remarks on methodology, the approach adopted in the present research is positioned in the field of MCA with regard to two aspects: the building of collections and the focus on negotiations of fitting into or changing a category. This serves to demonstrate in what respect the present research integrates with previous work and what its contribution is.

Firstly, as similar category negotiations may occur across different interactions, such phenomena may be comparable. According to Stokoe (2012a: 278), analyses of membership categorisation frequently focus on interactions in a particular context to show in detail how category work is carried out between participants, resulting in an analysis of a few select extracts. However, she suggests that MCA may progress by building collections of categorial phenomena for analysis, and proceeds to illustrate this approach by showing how gendered category work can be used to answer questions, provide advice or give accounts (Stokoe 2012a, 2012b). Focusing on issues of identity, McCabe and Stokoe (2004) have demonstrated how an analysis of interviewees' category work pertaining to place and their use thereof can shed light on how they construct identity as tourists, as discussed in Section 2.4. This thesis takes a similar approach by examining what categorial negotiations across a certain type of setting – expatriate blogs – can reveal about participants' identity construction. But rather than building collections of how categories can do a certain action (Stokoe 2012a, 2012b), the present research explores the phenomenon of transnational relocation in terms of what category negotiations individuals engage in over the course of their first year abroad. It therefore needs to be emphasised that the categories discussed in the analysis

are by no means exhaustive. They were chosen because they emerged as key aspects of expatriate identity construction in this initial phase of transition.

Secondly, exploring how category negotiations occur resonates with previous research in the field of MCA. As outlined above, the phenomena of *category fit* and *category change* emerged from a sample analysis and were found worthwhile to pursue further. However, previous research has identified similar features. Given that categorisation work is situated, categorial transformations can occur, which are akin to *category change* negotiations. For instance, Sacks (1992: 330, vol. II) discusses how the action of offering food can transform in the course of an interaction into a request, a warning and ultimately a threat and how this also changes the identities of the interactants, bit by bit transforming the rejecter into a “stubborn old man”. Yet such transformation need not necessarily occur on the category level; it is also possible for a category to be transformed into a device and vice versa (Hester and Hester 2012), or to be retrospectively modified in order to mark it as ironic (Silverman 2012). In the context of news reports, categorial transformations have been discussed regarding how the same event can be portrayed differently through different news stories (Eglin and Hester 2003) and how the revising of categorisations in rolling news on unfolding events constitutes “reality-in-the-making” (Stokoe and Attenborough 2015: 61). With regard to CMC, research has further explored how individuals negotiate and finally embrace a new category in the context of initiation into membership of an online forum (Stommel and Koole 2010).

Parallels pertaining to the concept of *category fit*, in turn, can be found early on in Sacks’ (1992: 336, vol. I) discussion of how certain knowledge about a category does not change when it does not apply to a category member, but leads that person either to conform or to question how well they fit into the category:

And one of the important things about ‘knowledge protected against induction’ is that members who find for some of it that it doesn’t hold for them, have a program laid out, which is to make it true for them. Furthermore, for some such things they may come to feel, again, not that the knowledge is wrong, but that they’re ‘phonies;’ they’re not real members. That is, one way persons come to see that they’re ‘phonies’ is by virtue of some piece of knowledge, holding about a category they belong to, does not hold about themselves.

Hence, when certain knowledge – or more generally predicates – do not apply to a category member, this results in an engagement with what it means to be a member, similar to negotiating *category fit* based on some incongruity as discussed above.

The relationship between categories and predicates has further been detailed by Reynolds and Fitzgerald (2015), who analyse challenges in public conflict talk during protests uploaded to YouTube. They argue that the term *category-bound predicate* has “tended to serve as a catch-all term for all relationships between category features and categories”, and instead they distinguish three forms of relationship between categories and what they refer to as ‘features’ (‘predicates’ in the present research) (Reynolds and Fitzgerald 2015: 99): firstly, features which are ‘category-tied’ are treated by interlocutors as having to be made explicit because they are not taken for granted. In contrast, ‘category-bound’ features, whilst still being made explicit, are treated as taken for granted. Lastly, ‘category-predicate’ is a relationship where a feature is implicit because it is taken to be implied by a category or a device. Reynolds and Fitzgerald (2015: 102-105) illustrate the difference with a detailed discussion of a challenge occurring during an environmental protest against globalisation, which is here summarised in a necessarily simplified version: having established that their target has children, the challenger proceeds to ask ‘do you care about their future’, receives the response ‘of course’ and concludes that in that case ‘you better oppose the geetwenty’. The challenger ties being a parent to caring about one’s children by treating the relationship as not taken for granted. This is contested by the target by treating the relationship as evident and the feature thus as bound rather than needing to be tied to the category. Finally, the relationship between the target as a parent and the norms they should adhere to is category-predicate because it is implied. This distinction highlights the complexity of possible relationships between a category and its features and constitutes an addition to the MCA toolbox (Reynolds and Fitzgerald 2015: 121). The present research agrees with this treatment of the relationship between categories and predicates as important, similarly focusing on how individuals make this relevant in their category negotiations. Yet it does not classify instances along the lines proposed above and therefore retains the terminology of *category-bound predicate*.

Another parallel to *category fit* negotiations lies in so-called “puzzles” which recipients need to work out (Silverman 2001: 151). Examples are combinations such as ‘al-

Qaeda' and 'blond with blue eyes', which do not usually co-occur (Stokoe and Attenborough 2015: 65-66). Stokoe (2012a: 281) maintains that such puzzles can be used to achieve certain effects, and illustrates this with the example that jokes can be based on pairings such as 'women drivers'. Similarly, Baker (2000: 103) points out that such combinations, which she refers to as "category-predicate anomaly", are used in headlines, providing the example of 'killer sheep'. Just as category puzzles can be a resource for participants, so can *category fit* negotiations function as means of identity construction.

This discussion shows that previous work has engaged with building collections of phenomena and explored notions related to the change of and fit in a category. Yet the distinction between *category fit* and *category change* as such, which has emerged as worthwhile in the present research, has to the researcher's knowledge not been made before. It is suggested that it may prove worth investigating further in future studies.

Category fit, *category change* and the *transnational relocation device* were hence analysed in order to explore how participants draw on categorial matters to construct identity. The chosen approach is MCA-informed and offers insight into individuals' own sense-making resources and experiences of moving abroad. The following analysis in Chapter 10 discusses such category negotiations of transnational relocation and their import for identity construction.

Chapter 10 Category negotiations of transnational relocation

This chapter explores participants' negotiations of categories and predicates pertaining to transnational relocation and how these relate to the construction of identity. As the examined data span from the beginning of each blog to one year beyond relocation, category negotiations occur at different points in time and to different ends. Therefore, the chapter is broadly structured into three parts which trace this chronological order. Section 10.1 focuses on categorisations before relocation, Section 10.2 moves onto negotiations occurring during relocation including up to one month afterwards, and Section 10.3 examines participants' engagement with categories throughout the remainder of their first year in England. In the course of this, a select number of categories within the *transnational relocation device*, as explained in Section 9.1, are explored which predominantly pertain to one of the three stages, but not exclusively so: the liminal before relocation, the new beginner during relocation, as well as the expatriate and the invisible expat afterwards. Whilst further categories were occasioned, such as the expatriate spouse related to gender issues or the traveller and explorer drawing on discourses of adventure and mobility, a discussion of these exceeds the scope of this thesis. Figure 10-1 illustrates the three broad stages of transnational relocation and the trajectory of category negotiations that they were found to engender. What they entail and how they contribute to identity construction is discussed in the corresponding sections below.

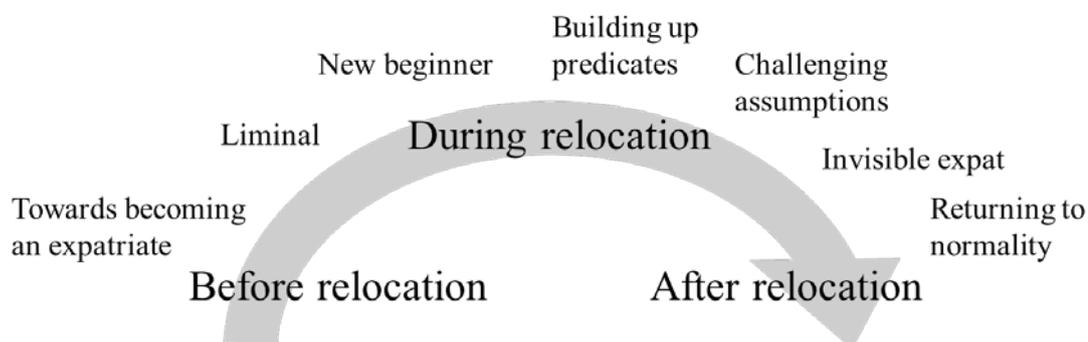


Figure 10-1. Category negotiations over time in expatriate blogs.

Adopting a chronological structure has several advantages. Firstly, it allows the present research to explore participants' engagement with categories and predicates as they occur, tracing their experiences and sense-making methods *in situ*, which is suitable for an MCA-informed approach. Moreover, it is in line with an understanding of expatriate blogs as narratives of personal transition and provides a structure not predetermined by the analyst or the methodology, but emergent from the phenomenon under investigation. Finally, it enables a discussion not only of what categories are negotiated and how, but also of what is achieved through this in terms of constructing identity as a person relocating abroad.

10.1 Before relocation

10.1.1 Towards becoming an expatriate

Several expatriate bloggers begin their blog before relocation, documenting the process leading up to it. In terms of identity construction, this puts them in a delicate position: on the one hand, they do not live abroad yet, so cannot yet claim to be an expatriate and share their insights about life in England, as is evident in Kim's comment in Example 8-1. On the other hand, they know that the move is impending and are busy organising it and saying goodbye, which already provides them with experiences to share. Participants deal with this dilemma in two ways: they either draw on aspects of their past to position themselves as a prospective expatriate, or they share narratives of not yet being a category member, but getting there, thus of working towards becoming an expatriate. These negotiations are illustrated in what follows.

Drawing on past experiences and relating them to their new identity as expatriates is a feature that participants employ not only before relocation, but throughout their blogs. This is discussed in Section 8.1.4 in terms of its authenticating function by means of claiming fulfilment of an underlying potential, such as Claire explaining her 'traveling feet' in Example 8-25. An example where the same strategy is employed at the beginning of a blog is Aubrey's first post, a part of which is also discussed in terms of how it achieves *authentication* in Example 8-24. This extract is revisited in an extended version below.

Example 10-1 [Aubrey]

My love for seeing the world began as a child. When adults would ask me what I wanted to be when I grew up, one of the things that I said was “a tourist”. I read an atlas, had pen pals in Europe, Africa and South America, and thought about living abroad. Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I’d be “a tourist” when I grew up. I’ve not only visited those continents, I was crazy enough to pack up and move to one of those continents. Job opportunity and personal growth – what more can one ask for? You’ll have answers to that question, and many others, as you follow my journey from American dreamer to expatriate extraordinaire. Hello world! indeed.

Aubrey points out that she has always had a ‘love for seeing the world’, which authenticates her as an expatriate by portraying her as having reached personal fulfilment, as discussed in Section 8.1.4. She treats this as a predicate of the category ‘tourist’, along with the open-mindedness of having transnational penfriends and being interested in other countries. However, she also considers living abroad, which is not an expectable predicate of the category ‘tourist’, as tourists remain visitors rather than residents. That Aubrey puts the category term in quotation marks may point to an awareness of this. It either renders indirect speech of herself as a child or marks the category term as not quite fitted as a candidate within the device ‘jobs’ or with regard to the mentioned predicates. Focusing on the present, Aubrey then asserts that she has become a member of the aspired category, which she portrays as a big step: she had to be ‘crazy’ to do so, but it offers her opportunities in terms of employment and ‘personal growth’. She finally emphasises the impact transnational relocation has on her by making explicit the ‘journey’ and *category change* that she is undergoing. She has ceased to be an ‘American dreamer’, either a person pursuing the American dream of individual fulfilment in the US or an American merely dreaming about her future. Instead, she is becoming an outstanding expatriate ready to explore more of the world, in line with predicates she has had since her childhood.

A further example of how participants draw on their past experiences to negotiate expatriate identity are Leah’s reflections five days before moving to England.

Example 10-2 [Leah]

It felt kinda weird hanging out and saying goodbye to everyone over the last week because I wasn't bursting into tears when we hugged, but it's slowly starting to creep in. I think some of it is also because even though I won't see everyone again in person for some time, I'll still be very much in contact with them. Moving to [Western US state] from [Eastern US state] four years ago helped with this process immensely. In my last major undertaking I moved thousands of miles to a place where I knew no one and definitely suffered some culture shock. [...] With this round, some of the challenges will be the same – thousands of miles away, new school/town, and some culture shock. However, I have distance tested friends in the States, in England, and a good amount spread across Europe and Asia that I know will always be there. I've also had some help in acculturation beforehand, and have a great desire to be there and make the absolute best of it. There may be a lot of yes's and not as much sleep and I may not see much of my flat, but if this isn't a jolt to go out and enjoy life without hesitation or fear, then what is the point of going out so far on my own? I am both sad and happy, scared and excited, and I wouldn't want it any other way. :)

Leah points out how saying good-bye is made easier by virtue of her experience with a previous move. Despite moving within the same country, her prior relocation was a 'major undertaking', involving a great distance, the forging of new relationships and consequently 'some culture shock'. Leah then likens intranational to transnational relocation, pointing out that they share the above-mentioned predicates. She thus positions herself as a person who will cope with moving to England due to her previous experiences. Furthermore, she expects her friendships to withstand the distance and is ready to embrace the experience, having 'a great desire to be there' and being open to things to come. Whilst finding herself at a new beginning, she is able to draw on her predicates as a person who has accomplished a new beginning once before. The category 'new beginner' is discussed in greater detail in Section 10.2.1.

A final example of drawing on past experiences to negotiate category membership is Emily's categorisation of herself and her family in her first post. Similarly to Leah, Emily has moved before, and has in fact relocated transnationally. Currently living abroad, she already is an expatriate who has decided to begin a blog to share her third transnational move. Nevertheless, she invests linguistic effort into determining her category membership, as Example 10-3 illustrates.

Example 10-3 [Emily]

We are far from experienced expats, tho we do feel like we are global nomads, and as we prepare for our 3rd move maybe we are. As we are leaving sooner (4-6 weeks max) rather than later, I decided to just DO the things that i know from past experience need doing to make the move as smooth as possible

Emily is an expatriate, yet she concedes that she is ‘far from experienced’, negotiating her category membership. Nevertheless, she admits to feeling that her family are ‘global nomads’. Their upcoming transnational move being their third allows her to claim category membership, yet it remains ambiguous whether she sees this as a predicate of ‘global nomads’, ‘expats’ or both. Emily proceeds to point out that their move is imminent and that ‘past experience’ allows her to make the necessary preparations. This is followed by a list of 17 items that she has already taken care of. Whilst Emily displays a reluctance to openly embrace the category ‘experienced expat’, she can draw on her past to suggest her *category fit* both to herself and her readers.

The previous examples illustrate how individuals draw on predicates from their past to negotiate expatriate identity even before their move. Another strategy employed at this stage as mentioned above is working towards being an expatriate. This is widely done by Leah, whose posts are more numerous – albeit generally shorter – before relocation, as mentioned in Section 4.3. She frequently not only posts updates on her visa application process, but also encourages herself to take the step to becoming an expatriate. Claiming expatriate identity before relocation is further undertaken by Chloe, who at that time is still waiting for the necessary documents to apply for her visa. Because she does not yet have official confirmation, she points out that she does not even feel ‘allowed to be excited’ yet about moving abroad, which is an instance of *illegitimation*, as illustrated in Example 6-25. In the remainder of the post she lists what she is looking forward to when in England, which supplies her with category negotiations to share even at that point before her relocation. Example 10-4 and Example 10-5 illustrate two ways in which she engages with being a prospective expatriate.

Example 10-4 [Chloe]

4) Decorating my space. I. Can't. WAIT to put my own stamp on my room. There isn't much I am able to do to prepare for my move at this point (I'm still in the waiting zone), but I do have the prints and photographs I plan to put up packed and ready to go. What you love (and why you love it) says so much about you. It's so much fun for me to walk into someone's place and try to guess things about them based on what I see on their walls and shelves. It's even better when you're getting to know someone and start making definite connections between their personality/history and their interests. Decorating is a way to talk about yourself without saying a word. My new friends will have a LOT to look at/figure out when they enter my space :)

Whilst Chloe is still waiting for the documents to begin her visa application, she has already packed what she intends to decorate her room with in England. For her, this is not just a matter of decoration, but one of identity, as it 'says so much about' her and allows her to 'talk about yourself without saying a word'. She already imagines her new friends' reaction and how they might draw inferences about who she is. Chloe is thus considering how she may appear to others, having already selected the predicates she wants to display to her new friends in the form of 'prints and photographs'. Presenting certain aspects about herself and making new friends offers a chance for a new beginning and allows her to position herself as a person about to undertake a big move, even at a time when she does not yet have official *authorisation*.

Yet Chloe has not only chosen the predicates she wants to convey to her new friends, she is also anticipating becoming established in her new environment. The following extract is discussed in Example 7-35 with reference to its function of *adequation* and is now revisited in an extended version.

Example 10-5 [Chloe]

6) Making it mine. Whenever I move somewhere new, the thing I look forward to most is becoming part of the fabric of where I live. Finding the spots I love and becoming a regular. Not needing to use a gps or ask for directions. Introducing the friends and family who visit to the things I've discovered and love most about where I live. My mom is planning to visit during Christmastime, and I can't wait to take her for afternoon tea at Harrods (a place we both luuuurve), to the Tate Modern and the British Museum, and to show her around my campus and [UK county] in general.

Chloe aims to become 'a regular' in her new favourite places, so much so that she becomes 'part of the fabric' of her new environment. This implies a *category change*

that she is anticipating: from being a foreigner to being a resident including the predicates of fitting in and finding her own way. This will enable her to show her friends and family around, which positions her as a local as opposed to her visitors. Example 10-5 hence illustrates again how Chloe negotiates her future expatriate category and its predicates as a way of overcoming the time before her actual relocation.

Such prospective category negotiation by means of drawing on past experiences or working towards category membership serves a function similar to the phenomenon of *irrealis authorisation* discussed in Section 6.1.2: it allows individuals to construct identity and share experiences pertaining to living abroad whilst not yet being expatriates. Yet unlike *irrealis authorisation*, the above examples are not concerned with institutional *authorisation* of identity, but with the non-institutional claiming of expatriate identity. An analysis through ToI alone fails to identify this feature: Example 10-4 is an instance of *authentication*, dealing with realness and how who a person is can be expressed through what they love, whilst Example 10-5 is *adequation* regarding Chloe's new environment. In contrast, an MCA-informed approach with a focus on category membership and predicates sheds light on participants' prospective negotiations and how this positions them as expatriates before having moved abroad.

10.1.2 The liminal

A category occasioned by individuals around the time of the move is that of the liminal, the person experiencing liminality. As discussed in Section 3.3, liminality comprises in-betweenness, a person's position on the margin between an old and a new structure and identity (Van Gennep 1960 [1909]; Turner 1967, 1969). The analysis has shown that participants position themselves as in-between with regard to three aspects: space, identity and structures such as arrangements, routines and relationships. Additionally, being in-between is frequently combined with a temporal reference, for instance demarcating a fixed period of time or emphasising that waiting is required. The following discussion draws on key negotiations of being liminal and in the process illustrates these three aspects of in-betweenness and how they are discursively constructed.

Leah explicitly engages with the concept of liminality a few weeks before her relocation. She explains it quoting from a Wikipedia article (rendered in italics in Example 10-6) and proceeds to reflect on how it applies to her situation.

Example 10-6 [Leah]

*In anthropology, **liminality** is the quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of rituals, when participants no longer hold their pre-ritual status but have not yet begun the transition to the status they will hold when the ritual is complete. During a ritual's liminal stage, participants "stand at the threshold" between their previous way of structuring their identity, time, or community, and a new way, which the ritual establishes. [...] This idea of liminal space sums up this waiting period before leaving as best as I could define. No longer am I an undergraduate, intern, or denizen of [US city], but I am not a graduate student or resident of [UK city] either. Moving back up to Mom and Dad's for this time period just makes the 'ritual' (if you will) all the more potent, being in a space in between two major points in my life. It's a great moment to recuperate and prepare for the next identity shift, but at the same time I am itching to just delve into the new unknown and feel a little more established in this new identity. Bittersweet and longing for both past and future is what I have at the moment. It's a strange feeling that seems to take away the concept of time fluidly moving forward while I'm in it, but one that I'm sure everyone will experience at some point in their lives before they too transform into a new person in their own life stories.*

Leah positions herself as liminal, a person between identity categories with respect to two devices simultaneously. Regarding her occupation, she has ceased to be an undergraduate and intern, but cannot yet claim being a graduate student, and with respect to her residence, she no longer lives in the city she used to, whilst not yet having moved to England. Her in-between status during the 'waiting period' is made concrete in space as she has moved back in with her parents whilst making the necessary arrangements for her relocation. Being liminal provides Leah with a chance to 'prepare for the next identity shift', which she eagerly anticipates whilst simultaneously desiring the past. The liminal is occasioned through a *category change* negotiation and is positioned in the space created when one category membership has been given up but a new one not yet taken on. Leah draws on this to conceptualise her identity in an essentialist way as a property she can exchange for another 'new identity' in which to become 'established'.

Liminality is further linked to time in Example 10-6: it comprises an in-between and unstructured phase in a ritual whose ending will result in the re-establishing of structure

and a new identity (Turner 1967, 1969), but whilst being liminal, Leah feels that time has stopped ‘fluidly moving forward’ for her. She portrays her situation as abnormal and as involving a rupture between her current state and her previously held identity. From a ToI perspective, this is another instance of *denaturalisation* as discussed in Section 8.2.1. Yet despite portraying being liminal as ‘a strange feeling’, Leah represents her experience as not uncommon. She asserts that ‘everyone’ will at one point ‘transform into a new person’ and temporarily be liminal, so paradoxically feeling abnormal is normal in the sense that it is a predicate of this category.

Whilst Leah positions herself as liminal, other participants portray themselves as being in-between without making explicit reference to the concept of liminality. Nevertheless, this analysis treats them as instances of negotiations of the same category. As argued in Section 9.2, due to being “inference rich” (Sacks 1992: 40, vol. I), categories can be invoked through reference to predicates alone. Indeed, a mere collection and analysis of category terms would fail to reveal the richness of categorial negotiation and its import for identity construction. Instead, the familiarity with expatriate blogging and in particular the analysed data achieved through a netnographic approach (Kozinets 2010) grants deeper insight into how categories are negotiated also in terms of their predicates. This argument is supported below with two extracts from Emily’s blog. Example 10-7 is the introduction to a post written two weeks before her relocation and entitled ‘13 sleeps’, and Example 10-8 concludes a post she shares on her first day in England.

Example 10-7 [Emily]

13 sleeps

We’ll be THERE instead of HERE. While things don’t usually change much day to day, these next 13 days will be unusual cos every day something is happening or will happen that will influence our opinion thereby changing plans. OR nothing will change and DH [Darling Husband] will go to work everyday, MissM [daughter] will go to school and I’ll buzz around with friends in between making sure the apartment is ready for packing next week. I thought it might be fun to blog every day, so you can experience this final phase of ‘leaving’ and of course, continue it with the ‘arrival’. Life won’t be ‘normal’ again for us for at least 6-8 weeks. Hope you enjoy the ride.

Reflecting on the 13 days ahead of them, Emily points out that this phase before their impending move will be ‘unusual’ as they are making their final preparations for leaving. This brings with it a level of uncertainty because the details of their relocation may still change. Emily shows herself aware of how moving to England will impact on them: first of all, the immediate consequence can be pinpointed in space, being ‘THERE instead of HERE’. Yet beyond this, transnational relocation entails a lack of normality, which Emily expects to endure for considerably longer than the actual physical leaving and arriving. As in Leah’s reflections in Example 10-6, abnormality is again portrayed as expectable. Nevertheless, it is delimited in time, marking the threshold between one thing ending and another beginning. Because this liminal phase dissolves the normality and structure of everyday life, it is highly tellable: Emily announces that she will blog daily so her readers can ‘experience’ it with her and ‘enjoy the ride’. She then proceeds to do so, counting down the number of ‘sleeps’ left in the titles of her subsequent posts and thereby adapting her activities to fit the new category of the liminal that she has positioned herself in through this *category change* negotiation. The opening of the ‘13 sleeps’ post thus serves to introduce not only the abnormal transition period she and her family are entering, but also the change in her blogging practice during this liminal phase.

Example 10-7 thus illustrates how Emily positions herself as a person experiencing liminality without employing the terms *transition* or indeed *liminality*. She continues such positioning as in-between not only through the subsequent posts detailing their preparations for the move, but negotiates her continuing state as a liminal person upon arriving in England, as shown below. Example 10-8 contains the conclusion of Emily’s first post after relocation and is discussed in a shorter version in Example 8-6 to illustrate how time keeping is an authenticating feature in expatriate blogs.

Example 10-8 [Emily]

I’ve loved all the comments received about how much you’ve enjoyed the Countdown over the transition period. I did wonder if it was too much at times, but according to those who have emailed apparently not. The next few weeks will be the other side of transitioning to a new country – finding a house, school, friends, hairdresser, chiro, doctor etc. Finding things to do on the w/ends will be a no brainer here for sure – pacing our selves, or, pacing MOI more to the point. Hope you continue to enjoy reading,

Here Emily explicitly refers to the leaving phase as a ‘transition period’. However, the state of being in-between is not over yet; the physical move has merely marked the entrance to ‘the other side of transitioning to a new country’. Being a liminal person is discussed through its predicates. It involves breaking down and re-establishing arrangements, routines and relationships, such as finding accommodation and a school placement for her daughter, setting up health-related and other services, and making new friends. The dissolution of old structures before order is re-established is indeed a significant feature in the experience of liminality (Turner 1969). As in Example 10-7, being in-between is linked to time and conceptualised as finite. Emily ends this post by emphasising that she will continue to share her experiences, and the list of structures that need to be re-established suggests that the lack of normality will engender further narratives.

Example 10-7 and Example 10-8 illustrate how Emily positions herself as a liminal person undergoing transition not only in terms of space, but especially regarding the dissolution and rebuilding of structures of everyday life and the lack of normality this engenders. She is constructing identity of being in-between by counting the days to relocation and in a later post making reference to having done so, her readers’ comments as well as what the transition will entail next. The data thus show that being in an in-between phase is relevant to participants themselves; here liminality may be an analyst’s term, yet it is certainly a participants’ concern.

The previous extracts involve participants’ discussion of being liminal in terms of space, structures and identity, and are all concerned with the time span just before or surrounding the physical relocation. However, being in-between does not cease to be relevant to individuals. At times participants explicitly negotiate in-betweenness well into their first year of living in England, as the following two examples illustrate.

Example 10-9 [Sarah]

As a parent, I worry about raising our kids outside their home country. Eventually feeling neither American nor European, what are the repercussions of morphing their identity?

After just over three months in England, Sarah discusses liminality not so much pertaining to herself as in terms of how it may affect her children. She mobilises the category 'parent' and the category-bound responsibilities she holds towards her children that make her 'worry'. She expects that her children are subject to a permanent state of in-betweenness, which will eventually result in them identifying with neither category. According to Sarah, living abroad means 'morphing their identity'. As an aside, contrasting the category terms 'American' and 'European' positions Sarah as non-British, albeit probably inadvertently so, as British people would arguably use 'European' to refer to individuals from mainland Europe as opposed to themselves. This extract thus illustrates how liminality is not restricted to the period of the physical move.

Similarly, Ruth reflects on her status of in-betweenness throughout her first year in England, especially at key points like monthly anniversaries of her family's relocation, as exemplified below.

Example 10-10 [Ruth]

Last week we passed the 9-month mark of our move here and while I can't say England feels like home, I can see—almost—that maybe one day it will. I'm not certain of that, the jury is still out, and we still have so much settling to do but I *want* to feel settled again, to know my place here. To have a purpose rather than feel at such loose ends. These things take time, but I am not feeling especially patient. Sooner or later, it will come. (Won't it?)

After nine months in England, Ruth still does not feel at home, even though she wishes to 'feel settled again' and have a 'place' in her new environment. She is still in a liminal phase, lacking normality and structure and instead feeling 'at such loose ends'. Being in-between is not only explicitly related to uncertainty, but also discursively so through a back and forth negotiation of anticipation and doubt: whilst Ruth shows herself aware that settling takes time, she is 'not certain' whether she will ever feel that England is home. She can 'almost' imagine that 'maybe' it will, but then she questions this again: 'Won't it?'

Both Ruth's and Sarah's reflections of in-betweenness differ from how liminality is traditionally conceptualised in anthropology (Van Gennep 1960 [1909]), where the

liminal phase would be confined to a transformative ritual and would consequently be temporary. Recent research has argued that in modernity, liminality may become permanent and lead to a state of enduring transition, which can be “deeply unsettling and upsetting” (Szokolczai 2014: 33). However, although Example 10-9 and Example 10-10 show that liminality is not bound to the phase of relocation alone, the present analysis cannot go as far as to assert that participants are generally in a state of permanent liminality, as the matter is more complex. Even though expatriates are neither tourists nor natives, they may express contentedness with their situation and familiarity with their new environment rather than making reference to any in-between position. Although identity is permanently under construction, participants do not orient to liminality at all times; they only do so in prominent moments when their in-betweenness becomes salient to them. Such instances are what the concept of liminality can shed light on without it being overused.

This holds true also from a ToI perspective. As shown in Section 7.1 and Section 7.2, participants construct identity through *adequation* and *distinction* with regard to two major reference points, both their country of origin and England. Nevertheless, this does not equate to constructing identity as permanently liminal for two reasons. Firstly, participants often construct identity by negotiating similarity or difference with regard to one reference point at a time, positioning themselves but not making any in-betweenness relevant. Liminality would in that case be imposed by the analyst rather than occasioned by participants. Secondly, if every positioning along the lines of similarity and difference was seen as doing in-betweenness, the concept of liminality would be diluted and lose any purchase. Rather than a mere positioning between two poles, liminality encompasses a *marked* state of in-betweenness that participants orient to in ways illustrated in the preceding extracts.

To summarise, participants occasion the category of the liminal to position themselves as in-between with regard to space, identity and structures like arrangements, routines and relationships. The category is predominantly negotiated around the time of relocation and is generally delimited in time, yet not exclusively so. Exceeding a positioning between the poles of home country and country of residence, being liminal encompasses marked instances of in-betweenness made relevant by participants to construct identity pertaining to moving and living abroad.

10.2 During relocation

10.2.1 The new beginner

The discussion now turns from identity construction through categorisation predominantly before relocation to focusing on the moment of relocation and up to one month beyond. The rationale for this time span is provided in Section 4.2. This captures the physical move and the first phase of getting accustomed to life in a new country. The analysis explores participants' category negotiations of being a new beginner, a person who is starting out on a new phase in their life. Being a new beginner on the one hand is occasioned to require strength, as it involves facing doubts and overcoming difficulties. On the other hand, individuals portray themselves as open to novel experiences. Whilst participants may not explicitly state the category term 'new beginner', they nevertheless portray themselves as such and negotiate what this involves by engaging with relevant predicates, similarly to the categorisation work around being a liminal person discussed above.

Being a new beginner is firstly occasioned as undertaking relocation despite the challenges it entails. For instance, having arrived in England, Aubrey looks back to the time before her move as follows.

Example 10-11 [Aubrey]

Moving [link to website with advice about moving] is **not** for the faint of heart & spirit. Contrary to popular belief, I didn't relax, party, & dance in flowery pastures. Those last weeks before my departure were busy, nerve-wracking, and exhausting. There were goods that needed shipping, accounts to close, friendships in limbo, and a car sale..... and that was only the beginning.

Whilst she had some time off work preceding her relocation, Aubrey emphasises that she was by no means idle. Preparing for the move involved a lot of effort and was also emotionally 'exhausting'. She lists some of the tasks that transnational relocation entails and posts a link to a website providing advice about moving. Having undergone this experience enables her to conclude that moving is an endeavour not to be

undertaken by ‘the faint of heart & spirit’. She contests her friends’ and family’s view that moving did not involve a great effort and simultaneously positions herself as a strong person able to overcome such challenges.

As evident in Example 10-11, beginning something new involves endings, such as ‘accounts to close’ and ‘a car sale’. These are occasioned here as predicates of a new beginner and serve to emphasise what is coming next. It may well be that orienting to new beginnings is a human way of making sense of transition. Indeed, previous research on blogs has found that individuals conceptualise change through mobility as for the better, yet without going into any detail (Noy 2004; Snee 2014a), as discussed in Section 3.4.

A further negotiation of how being a new beginner is fraught with challenges can be found in the opening section of Chloe’s first post after arriving in England, in which she discusses experiencing doubts as a predicate of a new beginner. The beginning of the subsequent extract is discussed in Example 8-37 in terms of how it presents a rupture, constructing denaturalised identity at the moment of relocation. The negotiation is now analysed in an extended version below.

Example 10-12 [Chloe]

I had a freak-out on the plane ride over. I was somehow convinced for a little while that living and studying in England wouldn’t be what I wanted it to. That every past failure would absolutely follow me, and being in a new environment would do nothing to improve my mind or my life. I’d be my old self in a new place, bringing nothing of value with me. I’d watch everyone around me follow their dreams while sitting stuck in the mud. I wouldn’t make any friends. I wouldn’t write anything worth reading. I’d be forced to go back to America defeated. Wrong, wrong, WRONG. I didn’t realize until that moment on the plane how frightening and important removing yourself from a comfortable routine to begin building a life elsewhere truly is. Probably because I was distracted by doing all I could up until the very last second to make that flight. So finally, sitting thousands of feet above ground, my brain caught up with what I was doing and the anxiety-palooza began. I’m sure you’ve had (and will continue to have) similar moments of insecurity right before taking a giant risk. It happens; we’re human. Luckily, I was proven wrong pretty quickly :)

Chloe presents herself as an individual who desires to become a new person. She expresses her hopes for her relocation to have a positive impact on both her mental state and her life more generally. Moving abroad promises a clear break from ‘past

failure' and a chance for a new beginning. Chloe constructs identity as a new beginner through the negative: she worries that the desired predicates might not apply, that she might be her 'old self in a new place'. Her 'freak-out' is hence brought about by telling herself that moving to England will merely involve an external change of situation rather than an internal transition to becoming a better person. However, she proceeds to stress that such a mindset is 'wrong' and attributes it to only just realising that 'building a life elsewhere' means a break with a 'comfortable routine' and is indeed 'frightening'. Chloe thus emphasises that the anxiety she is experiencing is a predicate of a new beginner: moving abroad to start a new life is 'a giant risk' and therefore involves insecurity. Taking this one step further, she asserts that anyone who is about to take a risk in life will experience similar feelings, enabling others to relate to her situation even if they are not moving abroad themselves. Hence, Chloe constructs identity as a new beginner by virtue of relocating to England, and admitting to feeling insecure enables her to strengthen her category membership because she has predicated anxiety to moving abroad and starting afresh.

In a similar vein, Aubrey considers her initial feelings upon arrival in the light of experiencing a new beginning abroad.

Example 10-13 [Aubrey]

I landed in [city], United Kingdom a little after 10:00 a.m. GMT. I've visited [UK city] twice before, but this was different..... now I'd be living here for at least the next few years. What the hell had I gotten myself into? :-| That question, and many others filled with doubt, are part of the process. If you've ever lived abroad for a long time, I'm sure you've had those doubts cross your mind at least once – thinking that you're crazy for doing this, wondering if it was the right decision, wondering if it's worth it, etc. But here's the thing – I'd arrived. The physical aspect of the move – leaving one's home country – is one of the biggest parts to overcome. Vomit or not, like it or not, my hard-earned money, blood, sweat and tears brought me here. There was no turning back.

Aubrey expresses alarm about her decision to live in England. She experiences doubts and portrays transnational relocation as a big undertaking involving 'hard-earned money, blood, sweat and tears'. At the same time, she stresses that these struggles are predicates of a person living abroad: they are indeed 'part of the process'. Whilst beginning a new life abroad is portrayed as a strenuous and challenging undertaking,

she embraces it. Like Chloe in Example 10-12, she asserts that other members of the category will make similar experiences.

Examining category negotiations of being a new beginner around the time of relocation necessitates a comment on how these differ from categorisations as liminal, given that both imply a new beginning of some sort. The distinction is one of perspective. The focus of liminality negotiations is on the in-between stage a new beginning necessitates, whereas categorisations as new beginner focus on just that, on the new experiences to come. Revisiting Example 10-12 illustrates this: although at the very moment of her relocation, Chloe does not position herself as in-between, but with regard to what she expects from living in England, presenting herself as a person 'building a life elsewhere'. The distinction between the two categories is therefore not one of the objective stage of relocation which individuals are at, but of how they portray themselves and their circumstances. Both are discursive categories rather than discourse-external realities.

As with liminality, category negotiations of being a new beginner may be concentrated around the time of relocation, but it is a category that is available to participants throughout the analysed data. For instance, individuals may portray themselves as embracing a new beginning despite its challenges at the onset of their blog when they announce their move abroad. An extract from Megan's first post illustrates this, the first half of which is discussed in Example 8-32 in conjunction with *denaturalisation*.

Example 10-14 [Megan]

I am moving away from home, away from the beaten path where my life to date has led me and definitely beyond the range of my current experiences. [...] I will be moving from [US region], where I have lived my entire life, across the pond to England in the fall. It was a difficult and complicated decision, but I am confident it was the right one.

Megan points out that she is going to leave the place where she has spent her 'entire life'. This entails much more than just a physical relocation, as it means abandoning the 'beaten path' of her life so far and going beyond what is familiar to her. Making the decision to move therefore was 'difficult and complicated', but she has overcome these feelings, asserting that what she is doing is 'right'. From the start of her blog, she

positions herself as a person about to undergo a transition in life. That individuals portray major events as leading to personal transition is confirmed by research on narratives of changing as a person told by backpackers: Noy (2004: 91-92) argues that “remarkable personal changes are constructed and communicated as a natural consequence of a remarkable experience”. Megan’s emphasis on how big a step transnational relocation is for her therefore serves to lay the foundations for her transition narrative.

Beginning afresh by relocating abroad is however not only related to doubts and challenges, but also to open-mindedness regarding the new experiences this entails. For instance, throughout the months following her relocation, Leah shares posts detailing how daily activities are accomplished in England, such as grocery shopping and travelling by train. She establishes her position towards such new experiences through a category negotiation one week after her move, as illustrated below.

Example 10-15 [Leah]

I would like to apologise to the now local (:D) people in my life as the anthropologist in me has been having a field day. Coming to a new place you’ll always have new experiences to process, (*sometimes happens just crossing America*) but instead of just shrugging it off with a “well that’s odd,” I have an intense curiosity to find out why things work that way. It’s my motto to always look at life and new things as interesting, never weird or “not like home.” The world works around things in many different ways, and societies are fascinating because of it. Over the space of dinner my poor friend was questioned on how the bank overdraft in the UK works (*you can pull much, much more over the limit of what you have in your account than in the US*), the why/when/how of putting x’s at the end of text messages (*best stick to loved ones to be on the safe side*), and the curious absence of doggie bags/boxes in UK restaurants (*though honestly, if you walk everywhere it’d be a pain to carry that around*). And of course, any time you share restaurants around the world, you’re bound to get a giggle out of the menus and signs.

Leah likens herself to an anthropologist ‘having a field day’. Her blog reveals that she has indeed a degree in anthropology and is pursuing postgraduate studies in a related field. She ‘maps’ (Watson 1983: 33) the predicates typically bound to ‘anthropologist’ onto a person making new experiences in a new place, be it abroad or in a different part of their home country: rather than just pointing out differences, Leah endeavours to understand why they exist and how different ‘societies’ work. Curiosity about different ways of doing things is a predicate Leah treats as category-bound both to individuals

studying other cultures (anthropologists) and to expatriates beginning their life abroad. Rather than just quietly exploring for herself, she asks the people ‘now local’ in her life about how things are done. At the same time, she shows herself aware that this may inconvenience others, feeling the need to ‘apologise’ to the ‘poor’ people exposed to her questioning. Nevertheless, she asks how aspects of everyday life in England are carried out in order to cope in her new environment, such as by becoming aware of the social norms of adding kisses to text messages. Such behaviour is what Schütz (1944) identifies as a necessity for who he calls “the stranger”, as discussed in Section 3.3: when exposed to a different sociocultural environment, the stranger’s established practices and ways of thinking hitherto assumed to be universal are exposed to be particular to the stranger’s own culture and in need of adaptation. This is what Leah is confronted with. As a newly arrived expatriate unfamiliar with English ways of doing things, she needs to make a conscious effort to acquire these new social norms and practices.

As mentioned above, negotiations of what being a new beginner entails occur throughout the data, and apart from the moment of relocation they are especially prevalent when individuals monitor their own progress of settling in. Even though the physical move allows participants to construct identity as a person living abroad, they may not immediately identify as such. Megan’s first post after moving to England is a case in point.

Example 10-16 [Megan]

So I’m officially a UK resident as of last week! Sounds strange to say, but it is true.
The unpacking and exploring have begun!

Whilst Megan asserts that she is now a ‘resident’ and can claim this identity ‘officially’, she does not yet fully embrace her category membership, as it still appears ‘strange’ to her. Even though being a category member is determined by where Megan lives, a condition fulfilled as soon as she has moved, she holds back on constructing identity as a member. She still needs to unpack and store away her belongings as well as familiarise herself with her surroundings, predicates which are not expectably category-bound to a local resident.

Megan continues her negotiation of what beginning life abroad means in the weeks following relocation and points out that she still does not fully identify with being a person living abroad. This is illustrated below, expanding an extract that is discussed in Example 8-50 in conjunction with *denaturalisation* through being out of place.

Example 10-17 [Megan]

It has now been over a month since I moved to my new home in the UK. Sometimes I still can't believe we really are here and that this is our new life, not some bizarre never ending vacation. [...] The thing I've found hardest to accept is that I can't expect my life here to pick up where my American life left off. I need to work hard to make new friends, and I can't expect the next step in my career to fall in my lap. It's more of an effort to stay in touch with friends and family back home. The handful of job rejections I've received has been painful, but the successful interviews (and hopefully offers!) outweigh them and feel like a real triumph. So it's getting there, slowly but surely. ***What did you struggle with when adjusting to expat life? What things from home are the hardest to live without?***

Even though Megan moved to England more than a month before sharing this post, she occasionally still does not identify as a person living abroad, but rather sees herself as a tourist on a strange holiday that has no end. She proceeds to reflect on her progress with settling in, emphasising how big an effect her move has had on her life. In this *category change* negotiation, Megan portrays herself as a person who had to make a new beginning, as the life she leads in England is different to her 'American life', presenting a clear break with what she is familiar with. She needs to make an effort both in her work and social life. Whilst this is not easy, she shows herself confident of her progress and that she is 'getting there'. The post concludes with a prompt to readers to share their experiences of 'expat life', positioning them as members of the same category. At the same time, this occasions struggles during adjustment as a predicate of an expatriate: they are to be expected, so enquiring after other expatriates' difficulties becomes possible.

In summary, an individual may portray themselves as a new beginner throughout the data, yet predominantly at the moment of relocation. Category-bound predicates include requiring strength to overcome challenges and being open to novel experiences. Generally, being an expatriate may appear to be a claimable membership category from the moment of relocation, thus with a clearly defined external event. However, as

argued in Section 10.1.1, expatriate identity can be evoked before the move by means of drawing on past experiences and narratives of anticipating membership. Similarly, whilst living abroad would suffice for participants to position themselves as expatriates, this may not be the case: as Example 10-16 and Example 10-17 illustrate, identification with the category may follow only later. This is not restricted only to expatriates; in general, identity may be constructed gradually and the category label only claimed once identification with the predicates occurs. For instance, in their analysis of an online support forum, Stommel and Koole (2010) show how category predicates and adherence to the group's norms are negotiated with a new member before they are accepted into the group. Thus in the case of moving abroad, participants become members of the category 'expatriate' upon relocation, but what this entails only becomes clear as time goes on and they explore life in their new country of residence. As individuals' experience increases, so does their ability to negotiate the category and its predicates, or to 'fill up' the category with predicates (Fitzgerald 2017b). Having a better understanding of what the category involves not only enables participants to share their insight with others, but it also grants them a position from which to engage with the predicates that are treated as category-bound by non-members such as their friends and family or the media. This tends to take the shape of a *category fit* negotiation: an internal engagement with the category, what it entails and how well participants themselves fit into it. Such category negotiations occur throughout the data, but predominantly in the months after relocation. They are the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

10.3 After relocation

The subsequent discussion moves beyond participants' relocation and initial settling covered in the previous sections, now focusing on category negotiations throughout the remainder of their first year in England. It thus combines the two time frames after relocation introduced in Section 4.2. Firstly, Section 10.3.1 explores how individuals engage with their own view of what it means to be an expatriate and what evidence they bring to bear for their deepening insights into expatriate categorial matters as time goes on. Subsequently, Section 10.3.2 shows how expatriates challenge other people's

perception of this category. In Section 10.3.3, the discussion then moves onto an analysis of Emily's category negotiations surrounding what she calls being an 'invisible expat', and how this relates to other participants' engagement with the category 'expatriate'. To conclude the analysis of participants' category negotiations after relocation, Section 10.3.4 explores how participants negotiate the return of normality with increasing familiarity with life abroad.

10.3.1 Building up predicates of an expatriate

Once participants have relocated and are settling in, they begin to display a better understanding of what it means to live as an expatriate in England. This enables them to share their insights through predicates that they treat as category-bound by virtue of their own experience. For instance, after two months in England, Sarah shares the following list of observations about life in England.

Example 10-18 [Sarah]

You Know You Are Living In England When...

1. You pay \$150 to fill the gas tank (and you are okay with it)
2. The 'meter reader' guy pops by unannounced to read the meter in your house
3. The grocery cart performs 'doughnuts' in the aisle, whether or not you want it to
4. You miss boxed Mac & Cheese, effective laundry stain-remover, and Reece's Peanut Butter Cups
5. You have to try to speak with an English accent to be understood
6. What had been a mundane task in your home country is now a huge adventure
7. You surrender to the impossibility of memorizing the multitude of phone numbers with their infinite digits
8. Pigeons & parakeets frequent the backyard
9. Book club meetings are with the author, at a pub, and/or in the actual historical location
10. Your daily commute is through the woods past swans, weeping willows, and a charming church built in the 1800s

From a ToI perspective, Example 10-18 is predominantly doing *distinction*. However, an MCA-informed approach reveals that this is not merely a list of differences between life in the US and England. Beyond that, the list enables Sarah to share her insights as a

categorial matter pertaining to an American living in England. Introducing the items with ‘You Know You Are Living In England When...’ sets them up as predicates of this category. At the same time, Sarah personalises the predicates through the repeated use of the pronoun *you*. This implies that these are not just general observations but instead insights from her own experiences of life abroad, which transforms even ‘a mundane task’ into ‘a huge adventure’. Having spent two months in England and experienced such everyday adventures, Sarah is now able to share with others what it means to be an American living in England.

How individuals’ insight into a category develops can also be seen from a further post by Sarah, which is entitled ‘As An Expatriate’ and is written at roughly four months in England. A substantial extract is rendered below.

Example 10-19 [Sarah]

As An Expatriate

Would they have yachts? Second and third homes all over the world? How would I fit in? Like the first day in a new school, I wondered what my future expat community would be like. [...] I quickly fell into the naive trap of asking others, ‘Where are you from?’ Sounds innocent, but actually it is quite loaded and can grate on peoples nerves. Let me show you why... One lovely friend is a mum from Lebanon (hi sweetie!). One child was born in Belgium; one in Ireland. Her husband is Dutch and commutes to Switzerland from London. I ask you, how are they supposed to answer the question of where their family is ‘from’ in just a few words? Exactly. Typically a person’s home and car often tell a lot about a person’s economic status. But here, if a middle class family has a robust expat package, they could be living like kings. In contrast, a wealthier family may be living in a small home because they have to pay their own way. Lives can be dramatically effected by the exchange rate too. If one comes from Finland, everything would appear really cheap, and one could live a more extravagant life. Yet if one comes from a country with a weak currency, s/he may have a modest house, travel little, and only buy the necessities. As you can see, natural identifiers of ‘who we are’ can be shed in the expat world. What crowd you ran with, what groups you joined don’t matter here. It is refreshing to just show up as you are. When else does that happen? In case you were wondering, I haven’t met anyone with a yacht. It doesn’t seem to be in anyone’s expat package :)

Sarah begins her post looking back to how uncertain she was before her relocation about what other expatriates might be like, searching for category predicates and worrying that she might not ‘fit in’. She then elaborates on what she has learnt since she has become a category member, now being able to speak ‘As An Expatriate’. In a

category fit negotiation, she discusses a number of unreliable predicates: according to her experiences, expatriates' origin and economic status cannot easily be pinpointed and impressions may be misleading, as discussed in Example 9-1. Sarah concludes that upon becoming expatriates, individuals 'shed' such 'natural identifiers' or predicates and are welcomed into the community the way they are, which functions as both *adequation* and *authentication* as discussed in Example 7-39. At the same time, the notion of abandoning predicates establishes a parallel between expatriates and liminal situations, which Turner (1969: 102) describes as involving "the stripping off of preliminal and postliminal attributes". In this case, then, Sarah's observations may be heard as an engagement with liminality beyond relocation. The concept of 'identifiers' indicating 'who we are' is an essentialist view of identity as composed of fixed attributes. Sarah's confirmation that these may be discarded challenges essentialism and serves to authenticate her as a category member: because she is now an insider to the community, she is aware of its complexity.

Similarly exploring the predicates of being an expatriate, Jessica shares her insights after roughly five months in England in a post entitled 'Expatriate Life – Holding on to your Confidence'. She compares how she felt before being an expatriate to her current situation, following this with a list of things she tells herself to maintain her confidence, as Example 10-20 illustrates.

Example 10-20 [Jessica]

Living your life as an expat can truly shake your confidence in ways that you never thought possible. Living in America for 29 years, no matter what city, I have always felt confident in my daily decisions, like where I grocery shop, what lane I need to be in while driving, how to communicate with people, how to dress, how to buy movie tickets, HOW TO CROSS THE STREET, etc, etc. Having never lived as an expat, I've never thought twice about how to do daily activities and have felt confident in my decisions. I have had almost total confidence in myself. [...] There will be setbacks upon setbacks in regaining your confidence. But guess what, tomorrow is a new day and you can try again. Take your confidence shakers and learn from them. I hate crossing the road here, but guess what, I gotta keep trying. And one day, I *will* look in the right direction for oncoming traffic!! I hope you have a most hilarious picture in your mind right now of me trying to cross the road and not looking in the right direction! I've literally been pulled back by a British friend, like I was a child and she was my mom telling me not to walk into the street!

Jessica asserts that living abroad makes her feel uncertain in aspects of daily life that she did not anticipate, which contrasts sharply with the confidence she felt in her home country. Only after experiencing differences in how things are done in England is she able to share these insights, not having expected to feel unsure about such everyday matters. This relates again to Schütz's (1944: 506) observations on being a stranger: once the stranger's own cultural norms have become unreliable, every mundane situation in the new environment involves uncertainty and difficulty. Jessica then illustrates her struggles with the otherwise routine act of crossing the street through a categorial negotiation, comparing the relationship between her 'British friend' and herself to that of mother and child. The latter two categories form a standardised relational pair (Sacks 1992), as they often occur together and have rights and obligations towards each other. Jessica 'maps' (Watson 1983: 33) these predicates onto the relationship with her friend: like a child in need of protection, she had to be 'pulled back' by her friend and feels that she requires support and guidance in basic aspects of everyday life. Whilst she is obviously not a member of this category, pointing out that as an expatriate she shares some of its predicates allows her to distance herself from her actions, denaturalising her identity as a foreign person challenged by daily tasks that may appear second nature to locals. How referring to problems and doubts can achieve *denaturalisation* is discussed in conjunction with the introduction to this post in Example 8-45.

At the same time, Jessica achieves self-deprecation by drawing on what Sacks (1992) calls *positioned categories*: if 'child' is understood as a category as opposed to '29-year-old' within the device 'stage of life', it is positioned at a lower hierarchy. This feature can then serve to criticise an individual, for as Sacks (1992: 241, vol. I) points out, "the way we construct the denigration of somebody is to propose about them that they are doing something that is bound to some category that has a lower position than theirs". Hence, walking into the street as an adult warrants Jessica's comment about behaving like a child. This categorial self-deprecation achieves a humorous effect, and Jessica makes this intention explicit, acknowledging her aim to inspire 'a most hilarious' mental image in readers. Overall, the post positions her as a person who has first-hand insight into what being an expatriate is like and who is able to work on her confidence to better adjust to life abroad.

Another categorial engagement with adjusting to life abroad occurs in a post written by Megan just over three months after her relocation, the beginning of which is rendered in Example 10-21. As argued in Section 10.2.1, individuals may not identify as a person living abroad from the moment of relocation, despite being able to claim category membership, which is illustrated through Megan's category negotiations in Example 10-16 and Example 10-17. The following example shows how Megan's engagement with being a person living abroad has developed since then, which provides evidence for how she is continuously building up predicates.

Example 10-21 [Megan]

Going Native

I would like to think I'm finally getting the hang of life here. I've got a few favorite pubs, I know that when someone says the first floor, they really mean the second floor, I bought some British clothing items (intimidating because of the size difference but I survived!) and I got a British hair cut. This is progress right?

Megan's accomplishments since relocation include establishing herself in her surroundings and setting up a routine – locating her 'favorite pubs' and finding a hairdresser – as well as being able to operate in her new environment through being a cultural translator capable of navigating clothing size and potential style differences and understanding British expressions for what they 'really mean'. This allows her to conclude that she is making 'progress'. Whilst she treats these as predicates of the category of someone who is 'getting the hang of life here', her post is entitled 'Going Native', which can be understood as adopting the practices of locals. Becoming more established as an expatriate is thus expressed through a *category change* negotiation of becoming native. Notably, however, of the discussed aspects not all are typically seen as predicates of natives: whereas being settled in their environment and having favourite places are attributes of people born into a culture and locality, being skilled at cultural translation is not expectably category-bound to natives. Megan is emphasising that she is settling in, but this narrative is one that only a foreign person can tell, not a native. Equally, given that she was not born and brought up in England, 'native' is a category membership that is not attainable for Megan. Her blog can discuss the

approach towards this category, but the *category change* cannot go beyond being native-like.

Further evidence of how participants build up the predicates of an expatriate and fill the category with personal meaning can be gleaned from posts which explicitly state what has been learnt since relocation. Two examples by Megan and Leah are discussed in what follows, beginning with Megan's insights after nine months in England, to which she dedicates a post entitled '7 Things No One Told Me about Expat Life'.

Example 10-22 [Megan]

7 Things No One Told Me about Expat Life

I got a lot of advice, good and bad, about moving abroad, and when a friend who is moving from the U.S. to Australia asked me about the pros and cons of moving to another continent, it got me thinking about the things I had no idea about before I moved. So here is a list of things I wish I'd known before hopping on that one way flight from [US] airport to [UK city].

Megan points out that since her relocation she has discovered aspects about life abroad that she previously 'had no idea about' despite the advice she had received from others. Having experienced life in England as an expatriate, she is now in a position to share her insights with others. Notably her reflections are engendered by being asked for advice by a friend moving to Australia, which shows that her insights pertain not just to life in England, but to being an expatriate more generally. Subsequent to this introduction, she lists predicates of an expatriate, which cover amongst others culinary aspects, having a different accent, and experiencing a lack of control. Hence, as a category member she is now able to share what nobody had been able to tell her about life as an expatriate.

Similarly, in a post entitled 'Six Months On: Things I've Learned', Leah shares her insights since relocation, many of which revolve around being a person living abroad. Example 10-23 displays her introduction and four points to illustrate the types of observations included in her extensive list.

Example 10-23 [Leah]

Six Months On: Things I've Learned

So I've been here for over six months now, and I'd like to think I've learned something from this experience besides just educational material. Over the last week I've been thinking about the little things learned, and have created a running list. Some of these things might be particular to living in [UK city], and some are just from life experiences as a 25 year old. These are generally things I would like to post on here, but didn't really take up enough space to warrant an entire blog post. In no particular order, I give you 50 of my probably odd observations since moving here. [...]

9. Make an effort to blend in to the culture, but don't try to fit in. You will always be marked as an other.

10. Enunciate! You may think a standard American accent is very easy to understand, but many will argue with you on that. Be prepared to use different terms to get a point across.

11. Don't bother explaining you aren't a tourist and actually live in the country right now. Nobody will believe you or particularly care. [...]

15. Everyone will assume as an American that you understand all of English social norms. You will not. Be prepared to get exasperated expressions and sighs.

In contrast to before her relocation, Leah is now able to share what she has learnt based on living abroad. Her insights are rendered in second person, addressing readers or a generic *you* but implying that the items are based on her own experiences. In the list she engages with category negotiations, illustrating what life in England means for her. For instance, whilst she portrays herself as a current resident, she emphasises that this identity is not granted to her by people she encounters, to whom she appears to be 'a tourist'. She further positions herself as a foreigner who will remain 'an other' no matter how hard she tries to 'blend into the culture'. This is linked to her lack of understanding of 'English social norms' and her accent marking her as American. Thus, Leah experiences being American in England through a tension of similarity and difference: whilst expected to cope with social norms and expecting to be understood, she has found that neither are reliably the case. She can only share such category negotiations after having lived in England for a while and having experienced the described responses herself. Predicating personal experience, in turn, enables individuals to share insights, and at the same time it authenticates and legitimises their contribution (Fitzgerald and Housley 2002). Example 10-23 therefore further supports the finding that participants' engagement with being an expatriate and its predicates develops in the course of living abroad.

That the predicates of a category may be built up continuously has previously been found with regard to interactions in online health discussion forums. An analysis of categorisation in new members' posts and established members' reception thereof has shown that new members need to learn what predicates are acceptably bound to a category (Stommel and Koole 2010; Giles and Newbold 2013). However, whilst in the case of forum interactions such an understanding emerges from negotiations with established members, in expatriate blogs individuals build up predicates of an expatriate by virtue of experiencing life abroad themselves, as illustrated above. This may be due to the affordances of blogs as opposed to discussion forums: new forum participants enter an already established online community, but expatriate bloggers create their own space in which their narrative, even if comments are enabled, remains the dominant one.

Participants hence build up predicates of living as an expatriate through their own experiences. However, it is not just the implications of category membership that are negotiated; categorial engagement may extend to the category term itself. After roughly half a year in England, Megan shares a post entitled 'What's in a name?' to address what the term *expat* may evoke.

Example 10-24 [Megan]

It was brought to my attention recently that the term “**expat**” can be considered by some to have a bad connotation, and implies certain things about a person's national origin and status. I was really surprised to hear this, as this is the legal term (well, expatriate is) used to describe a person living in a foreign country, and according to the [dictionary definition](#) [link to online dictionary entry] is the correct term for a person living in another country. The word immigrant doesn't apply to me, as I'm here for a relatively fixed period of time and won't be able to settle in the UK permanently. I intend to return home to the US. So for now, I stick to expatriate, or the lengthier explanation of, well I'm an American, but I'm living in the UK for a few years, not sure quite how long yet. We're here because my partner's position got transferred here. **Do you identify as an expat? Do you find the term offensive? If so, how do you describe your situation to others?**

Megan points out that her reflections were triggered when she was made aware that referring to herself as an expatriate may be problematic. She goes on to defend her use of the term by referring to perceived authorities: it is not just a matter of her personal use, but is 'correct' according to the law as well as the dictionary, and she supports this

by providing a link to a dictionary definition. In the process, she draws on an alternative formulation, ‘a person living in a foreign country’, occasioning one predicate of an expatriate to be that they live in a country other than what would be considered their home country. Her search for an alternative concise term is abandoned upon maintaining that *immigrant* is not an appropriate term for her on the basis that she does not fulfil the predicate of permanence she treats as bound to that category. She resolves to retain the term *expatriate* as the best fit for her whilst supplementing it with a longer explanation revealing more predicates: beyond being a foreign national living in a different country for a limited period of time, she acknowledges uncertainty about the length of her stay and points out that it depends on her partner’s employer. She concludes this categorial negotiation by opening up the issue to readers, thereby positioning them as fellow expatriates. From this reflection it becomes clear that Megan’s concern is not whether living abroad is relevant to her as a person, but it is a matter of terminology, what term to use to best categorise herself. Categorisation is hence a key issue for participants and an intrinsic part of identity construction due to its expression of how participants see themselves and how they aim to be perceived by others. Megan’s struggle with categorisation does not only reflect the problem of committing to a term to refer to participants in the present research, but also the terminological challenge of migration studies more broadly, as discussed in Section 1.3.

In summary, participants build up predicates of the category ‘expatriate’ by virtue of their own experiences of what living abroad involves. This is done through listing observations as predicates or contrasting expectations of the category before relocation with what has been learnt since. In addition, individuals draw on alternative categories to convey what settling in as an expatriate entails for them, be it through equating lacking confidence in completing daily tasks with being a child or describing overcoming such difficulties as becoming native. Finally, Example 10-24 shows that whilst category membership of being a person living abroad is not questioned, how to refer to the category is portrayed as problematic, especially taking into account what terms like *expatriate* or *immigrant* might be taken to imply by others. This leads to an exploration of how participants engage with categorial matters by challenging other people’s notions and ultimately even the category itself, which is the focus of the following discussion.

10.3.2 Challenging other people's assumptions of a category

In the course of discussing what it means to be an expatriate, participants not only build up predicates by virtue of experiencing them, but also challenge what they perceive non-members to associate the category with. An instance of this can be seen in Example 10-11, where Aubrey positions herself as a new beginner who overcomes difficulties, challenging her friends' and family's perception that relocating allowed her some time off. The subsequent discussion focuses on two further extracts, both of which contain extensive category negotiations. Challenging other people's expectations often involves considerable linguistic effort. It requires participants to first portray what is going to be challenged, and then do so whilst at the same time establishing a position that validates their opinion over others'. The examples below include substantial extracts in order to illustrate how such category negotiations are carried out.

Expectations of what being an expatriate entails are firstly challenged by Sarah in a post entitled 'The Life Of An Expat'. At this point, Sarah can share her insights into being a category member, having lived in England for almost nine months. She engages with the category as illustrated below.

Example 10-25 [Sarah]

The Life Of An Expat

It would make great television. An exaggerated life of an expat wife is filled with lunches with girlfriends, tennis, pedicures, and shopping. Typically expat women don't work because they don't have work visas. They have relocated due to their husbands' jobs. In some countries (but not the UK), 'hired help' is the norm – nannies, drivers, maids, cooks, gardeners. Sounds like a life of luxury. Let's take a closer look... [...] Your house contents may look exactly like all the other expats. Houses are usually rented, sometimes in guarded expat 'compounds' in some countries. Often the furniture is rented too, making houses look really similar with the same rental package. Nails might not be allowed, so walls go bare. Sentimental items such as Christmas decorations might be left at home because the company gave a small budget for shipping necessities only (i.e. clothing). [...] You also are unsure about the new neighborhood you picked in just 3 hours of touring the area in a rush to find a house. You are confused by the rental documents and not sure if they are 'pulling a fast one' or if the requests are valid. New to the country, you have no one to consult. You just have to trust. [...] And then there is the uncertainty of when you may leave. Most expat assignments are 3 years, but at the last minute you could be shipped home or to another country (sometimes not a desirable one). You and your children see expat friends come and go. You miss important friend and family events

at home such as birthdays, births, and even funerals. The life of an expat is an amazing experience with a lot of rewards, but also a whirlwind of intense emotion at times. So far, living in England has been nothing short of wonderful for me, with HUGE rewards – surrounded by beauty, history, lovely people, and amazing experiences. Great brain food. But there are trade offs too that many don't think of.

Sarah challenges the perceived assumption that expatriates lead 'a life of luxury', and especially so women who do not work. Whilst she sets out depicting clichés associated with this gendered category, her subsequent discussion encompasses expatriates regardless of gender stereotypes. Sarah first presents the benefits that expatriates apparently enjoy, such as abundant spare time for leisure activities and domestic workers who take care of daily chores. At the same time, she portrays these predicates as 'exaggerated' and stresses that they belong to the realm of television rather than real life. From a ToI perspective, she denaturalises such expatriate identity by detaching it from reality. The remainder of Sarah's post then offers 'a closer look' at expatriate life more generally, implying that her discussion will move beyond stereotypes, which she is able to do due to her category membership. Her discussion of what life as an expatriate involves is personalised by the pronoun *you*, similar to her list of category predicates in Example 10-18. This brings the category closer to her readers whilst implying that at least some of these observations are based on personal experience.

Sarah portrays the negative sides of being an expatriate mainly as a matter of lack of agency and control resulting in uncertainty. For instance, according to her, expatriates have no influence over the interior of their house and insufficient time and experience to select appropriate accommodation, which renders them vulnerable as they 'just have to trust'. Neither can they control the length of their stay or their next destination, risking to 'be shipped home or to another country' at their employer's discretion. Sarah also treats a discontinuity or rupture of identity as a predicate insofar as expatriates are portrayed as unable to personalise their homes and bring personally meaningful items or attend important family events. This contrasts with Sarah's post 'As An Expatriate' discussed in Example 10-19, in which she emphasises how 'refreshing' it is to be herself and be free of 'natural identifiers' such as markers of socioeconomic status. In Example 10-25, however, she suggests that having few personal items and an interior looking 'exactly like all the other expats' can be difficult. This shows that what participants appreciate about life as an expatriate may also lead to some of its

drawbacks. Such subtle distinctions are more easily accessible to category members. Whilst Sarah emphasises that her experiences of life as an expatriate in England have been very positive, she maintains that there are disadvantages that may be unexpected to non-members of the category. She thus challenges their assumptions by providing a broader picture of life as an expatriate.

Another example of a participant challenging other people's expectations is a post by Leah entitled 'Changing Your Postcode Will Not Change Your Life' and posted after five months in England. An extract of this post is discussed in Example 8-54 to illustrate how *denaturalisation* can be employed to achieve *authentication*. Leah opens with the disclaimer 'I love you all dearly, but we need to talk'. She explains how she has received emails from her friends about how wonderful it must be to live abroad, which she then proceeds to contest. Example 10-26 illustrates one of her arguments.

Example 10-26 [Leah]

Studying or living abroad will also not mean that you'll suddenly become brave and beautiful and exotic and have people falling in love with you for being foreign. I get this jokingly from a lot of my friends, asking if I'll find them a British Boyfriend. Ladies, there is no Mr Darcy or some stereotypical man in posh dress waiting to sweep you off your American sneakers. There are men that are anti-America, pro-America, or don't care, and the only differences you'll find between the American and British men (and I mean this in the best of joking intentions of course) are that the ones here will sound funny to you (and sometimes hard to understand) and make cultural references to things you don't get. That's it. I may be letting the cat out of the bag, but people from other countries are in fact, just people and you should be dating them because you like them as a person and not because they say loo instead of toilet. Dating and falling in love will still be scary, and you won't get off the hook any easier being somewhere far away and new. Though resorting to genial stereotypical teasing about your respective countries is always a fun perk. :)

Leah's friends joke about finding a 'British Boyfriend', a category which Leah ironises through capitalisation and by likening it to 'Mr Darcy or some stereotypical man in posh dress'. She challenges the romantic expectations of her American friends, positioning them as 'Ladies' hoping to fall head over heels in love. She further portrays her friends as treating the predicates of being 'brave and beautiful and exotic' as bound to the category of a person living abroad, and proceeds to challenge this: being 'foreign' is not a sufficient criterion for being desirable. Instead, Leah jokingly maintains that the only difference between British and American men lies in the

mundaneness of everyday comprehension difficulties. She ultimately challenges not only the predicates her friends are portrayed to associate with a person living abroad, but the very notion of the category itself as having any import in everyday life: ‘people from other countries are in fact, just people’ and she contests that there is anything intrinsically different or exciting about them. She thus advocates treating them as individuals rather than category members. Yet that this needs to be emphasised points to the prevalence of categories and predicates in everyday sense-making.

Leah is in a position to challenge the predicates that others tie to the category of a person living abroad by virtue of being herself a category member, in contrast to her friends. Having experienced life in England allows her to share her insights and confront assumptions that she exposes as unrealistic. At the same time, this authenticates her category membership, given that she can tell her friends what life abroad is really like, and it warrants her doing so. Example 10-26 thus illustrates how discussing what being an expatriate involves links to the tactic of *authentication* and allows participants to emphasise their category membership.

The discussion of the above two extracts exemplifies a phenomenon that pervades the analysed blogs: an engagement with expectations, clichés and authenticity. A majority of participants share categorial negotiations of what it means to be an expatriate and justify their membership in instances where they display predicates that do not seem to fit the category. They achieve this by turning the argument on its head: they emphasise at various points in their blogs that being an expatriate does not necessarily involve an exciting and luxurious lifestyle including idleness, long lunches and a life free of worries. Instead, they may experience isolation and boredom or struggle with feelings of not fitting in or not being in control of their life. Whilst to non-members these may not appear to be category predicates, participants emphasise that they are indeed very much part of being an expatriate. In fact, facing the ups and downs of everyday life in a different country is what allows expatriates to set themselves apart from tourists and claim experiencing real life abroad, as detailed in Section 8.1.3. By virtue of being a category member, participants can challenge predicates seen as category-bound by non-members. Seemingly paradoxically, then, they authenticate expatriate identity by being atypical in the eyes of others.

Accordingly, it is not necessarily the display of expectable predicates that positions individuals as members of a category; indeed, such an approach may have the opposite effect. Examining how authentic membership in a subculture is achieved, Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1990) distinguish between 'doing' and 'being' a category. Group members are found to not only contrast ingroup and outgroup, but also older and newer members, and to portray the latter as shallow and lacking true commitment. Furthermore, participants attribute new members with features that are seen as typical of the particular subgroup, which serves to portray them as not genuine and as merely 'doing' category membership. Displaying the right predicates is thus not enough; they also need to be present for the right reasons (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1990: 274). Similarly, this analysis shows that participants are not merely 'doing' being expatriates, but that at times it is their very divergence from and challenge of others' expectations of the category that positions them as authentic expatriates.

At the same time, participants orient to breaking readers' expectations by making the breach explicit and potentially accounting for it. For instance, they acknowledge that their struggles may not be what people will want to read about, as Example 10-27 illustrates.

Example 10-27 [Emily]

Having waited a while before posting this - thinking should I? Shouldn't I? Don't people only want to read the good stuff? Like a friend who travelled to the UK, two European cities, 2 cities in the USA with her kids (husband stayed behind to work); or several friends who returned 'home' for between 4-6 weeks of summer fun; or others who cruised or a few who managed two different vacations for two weeks each location! Now that's expat life, isn't it!

In a post openly describing her isolation, Emily concedes that she was unsure whether to share this at all because she suspects that readers might only want to read about the positive sides of life as an expatriate. She lists some of her expatriate friends' exciting holidays and presents them as the typical lifestyle of an expatriate, yet exaggerates the claim through an interjection ('Now'), a tag question ('isn't it') and the use of an exclamation mark. This enables her to implicitly challenge non-members' assumptions about the category and present her struggles as an equally fitting predicate of an expatriate.

Participants' perception that readers only want to read about the positive sides of being an expatriate may partly stem from the similarity between expatriate blogging and travel blogging. Whilst expatriates may explore their new town, country of residence as well as others nearby and share such experiences, their life abroad also encompasses routines, chores and difficulties that would not be encountered by people present simply for the duration of a holiday. Expatriate blogging hence involves not only travel experiences, but issues of everyday life.

To sum up, participants may challenge perceived assumptions regarding life abroad. They are able to do so by positioning themselves as category members with a deeper understanding than non-members, which links back to the tactic of *authentication* through displaying expertise and providing deep insights, as discussed in Section 8.1.2 and Section 8.1.3. Building up predicates by virtue of their own experiences and challenging the assumptions of others are hence two ways for participants to engage with being a person living abroad. Another way to negotiate this is discussed in the following section, in which Emily challenges her own assumptions and positions herself as an 'invisible expat'.

10.3.3 The invisible expat

As argued in the previous discussion, individuals are increasingly able to negotiate what it means to be an expatriate as they experience living in England. Participants not only engage with what the category means for themselves, but also challenge non-members' assumptions about it. However, whilst what being an expatriate entails can be discussed by virtue of individuals' experiences, this can also be developed from the negative, when certain predicates are expected but not fulfilled. This is the case for one participant, Emily, who occasions the category 'invisible expat' to make sense of her life in England and the consequences for her as a person. She engages with issues surrounding this category in ten posts, beginning at roughly three months in England and continuing intermittently throughout the remainder of the first year. All instances of this category in the dataset are occasioned by Emily and therefore reflect the experiences of an individual blogger. Nevertheless, they promise deeper insight into the previously discussed category negotiations of being an expatriate and warrant further investigation, as they allow to approach the category from a different angle: Emily has

already experienced life abroad, first in Ireland and then in Japan, where she is living at the time when she begins her blog about her impending relocation to England. Consequently, rather than building up predicates of being an expatriate, Emily is contrasting her previous experiences as an expatriate to her current ones. The following analysis explores Emily's categorisation as an 'invisible expat' and its implications for identity construction.

Once Emily has overcome the phase she refers to as 'transitioning to a new country' as evident in Example 10-8, she takes stock of how she has experienced life in England up to this point, as illustrated below.

Example 10-28 [Emily]

Kinda figured moving to an English speaking country was going to be a very different experience and so far, it is, so no surprises there. What is surprising is how much I miss being different, being surrounded by new sounds and smells, actually being an expat.

Whilst she anticipated life to be different given that she knows the language spoken around her, Emily did not expect to miss living in a foreign environment. She treats 'being different' as category-bound to 'actually being an expat'. The experience of not standing out hence makes her question whether she is in fact still an expatriate. Indeed, difference as a distinguishing feature of an expatriate is worked out further in a subsequent post, in which she compares her expatriate experiences in different countries as follows.

Example 10-29 [Emily]

Doing [Irish city] first was brilliant as it gave us the confidence and courage to live this life and live it well. However, having been in Japan for 3 years [Irish city] wasn't an expat gig really – JAPAN was an expat gig! Now we've returned to familiar territory, even if we've never lived in the UK before. Its comfortable, but still not quite the right fit.

Her first experience of living abroad in Ireland does not seem 'an expat gig' in retrospect given the opportunity to compare it to life in Japan. To an Australian, Japan offers a degree of sociocultural foreignness that neither Ireland nor England can

provide. Following on from Japan, England appears to be ‘familiar territory’ although Emily has no experiences of living there. According to Emily, there are thus degrees of foreignness in transnational assignments with real expatriate experiences involving life in a completely different sociocultural context.

However, being familiar with her surroundings does not mean that Emily needs no adjustment, as Example 10-29 further illustrates: whilst living in England is ‘comfortable’, she is not fully established yet and feels that it is ‘still not quite the right fit’. Indeed, Emily expands on this idea in a subsequent post, an extract of which is rendered in Example 10-30. Not fitting in transpires to be an issue not based on culture but on social structures and networks.

Example 10-30 [Emily]

No lunch marathons for me here. Being an invisible expat (love the term coined by expats) is hard work. Everyone around you is working full or part time (which is normal I know and probably what i'd be doing if we were in [Australian city]), helping older parents, grandparents, and extended family members with all sorts of things, have a network of friends they are already involved with, belong to various clubs and groups. Having a slightly mad Aussie family arrive one day, with a huge expectation of friendships and joined lived isn't what they were thinking back in November.

Emily describes why integrating with people in her surroundings is a challenge: they are often at work, which she concedes to be ‘normal’, have family and an already established social network. This makes it harder for Emily to connect with others. She acknowledges that her family’s arrival into the local community was unexpected and that therefore her hopes of connecting with locals are not easily met. In her posts, Emily repeatedly discusses the importance of being part of a community and spending time with expatriates, which explains her reference to the lack of ‘lunch marathons’ to take part in. In this *category fit* negotiation, she treats her experiences as bound to being an ‘invisible expat’, a category term whose creation she attributes to other expatriates. She is invisible in the sense that she does not have a network of other expatriates to spend time with, nor is she recognised by others as an expatriate.

What it means for an expatriate to be invisible becomes clearer in a later post, which is entitled ‘Invisible expat or local?’. Emily points out that moving to England has been

harder for her than her previous two moves and that she is feeling isolated. She first describes how socially engaging the expatriate community in Japan was to then contrast this with her experiences as an ‘invisible expat’ in England as rendered below. Example 10-31 contains a substantial extract to illustrate the extent and import of the negotiation of this category.

Example 10-31 [Emily]

I’m now what expats call an ‘invisible expat’ and as much as I focus on the friendships we’ve made and relish being literate again, the feeling of invisibleness is taking it’s toll. Don’t get me wrong. I’m very happy here. Tho if I’m honest, I’m more content than happy. It’s NICE to be surrounded by English after 3 years of being illiterate; it’s NICE to be able to shop for shoes and clothes and know you’ll fit; it’s NICE for MissM [daughter] to have opportunitise to do after school activities, and school holiday camps. It’s NICE – but not exciting, or different and maybe that’s the issue. Japan indulged me as an expat. We loved being different. We enjoyed standing out in a crowd. The color, the sights, the sounds of Japan were intoxicating even ifyou didn’t really understand what was going on. I enjoyed being part of a community, tho at times that community felt so small you felt like a stone plunking into a pond making that rippling effect. I really enjoyed the opportunity to learn new things on (practically) a daily basis. Even being illiterate was a fun challenge, tho at times you felt like sitting down in the supermarket and crying from sheer frustration. I think being an Aussie in the UK is a dime a dozen situation and no one really cares. Don’t get me wrong. We’ve made lovely friends and we’re very happy to have met them. But the connections are different to what we’re used to because they are from here, they have family and an existing network of friends. As we get older maybe making room for new friends is hard work but for expats it’s our livelihood and we gravitate to new friends like bees to honey. To have had 11 friends share my birthday recently was testimony that we have settled well and have made friends, so why do I feel so lonely so often? There, I’ve said it. I’m an invisible expat and I’m lonely. I’m also bored more than I care to admit. There just isn’t the number of people, mums around to share days with.

Emily was able to share her life in Japan with a community of expatriates equally foreign to their environment. Also, she was stimulated by being able to make new experiences and explore the ‘intoxicating’ impressions the country had to offer. Whilst she concedes that being foreign was difficult at times, she nevertheless ‘loved being different’ and ‘standing out in a crowd’. In contrast, living in England as an Australian makes her ‘a dime a dozen’. In this instance, being an ‘invisible expat’ is occasioned to involve a difference in terms of physical appearance and by implication race. This association with whiteness (Leonard 2010) makes *expatriate* such a contested term, as discussed in Section 1.3. Yet Emily brings the explanation of her issues back to matters

of connecting with others and making friends. As she points out in a previous post illustrated in Example 10-29, life in England does not feel foreign, but neither does it seem entirely comfortable and fitting. She is thus caught between neither being a local and established in her environment nor being different enough to benefit from an expatriate network or any other provisions in place to help her settle and connect with people around her. Whilst she is an expatriate in the sense that she lives abroad, she blends in too much to be perceived as such, which renders her ‘invisible’.

It is worthwhile to summarise Emily’s category negotiations in the previous examples and compare them to Megan’s. Emily treats being an expatriate as bound to standing out as different, exploring a foreign culture, being part of a community of equally foreign and like-minded others and being able to engage in social activities with that community. The predicates differ somewhat from the ones discussed by Megan in Example 10-24, namely temporarily living in another country due to her partner’s position and experiencing uncertainty. This shows that a category can be occasioned to mean different things to different participants or at different times, which is consistent with the notion of building up predicates as discussed in Section 10.3.1. It is therefore important to stress that the categories discussed in this analysis are not the analyst’s, but participants’ categories, and that as such, they are at times inconsistent.

Whilst the predicates that Emily treats as bound to the category were applicable to her life in Japan, she does not find them fulfilled in England, which renders her category membership negotiable. She constructs identity as a modified member: she is an expatriate, but invisibly so. At times, she even questions whether she should identify as an expatriate at all during her stay in England. This is illustrated in Example 10-28, where she concedes that she misses ‘actually being an expat’ like she was in Japan, and it is also evident in the following extract.

Example 10-32 [Emily]

A close expat friend suggested I stop thinking of myself as an expat while we are here after all there’s nothing expatish about an Aussie in England LOL.

Again, being an Australian in England does not involve sufficient difference to warrant the category label 'expatriate'. Emily presents this not only as her own opinion, but also that of a close friend and fellow expatriate, which renders it even more compelling. However, in her continued engagement with the issue as time goes on, Emily moves from challenging her category membership as an expatriate to concluding that the context does not allow her to live out this identity. Upon reading a blog post by another expatriate, she reconsiders her situation and draws conclusions from it, summing up her reflections as rendered below.

Example 10-33 [Emily]

While reading *The Life of An Expat Wife*, which is short and sweet, I realized that being an Expat in a non-expat society is the core of my issues. Nothing more. Nothing less. So, from today I promise to be more optimistic and less expat-ish in my attitudes (which i have to admit aren't as expat-ish as some LOL) and expectations (unless with other expats) until the next gig, which should be somewhere between 2 and 4 years (OK, promise is a very strong word, let's change that to I'll try really really hard)

Emily no longer questions whether she is an expatriate, but attributes her difficulties to living in an environment that does not provide for expatriates. She therefore resolves to hold back on expecting to be treated as one, except by fellow category members. Hence, whilst she still identifies as an expatriate, she is ready to not have all her expected predicates fulfilled.

This analysis of Emily's category negotiations revolving around being an 'invisible expat' allows for three conclusions to be drawn. Firstly, whilst most participants progressively build up predicates of a person living abroad, Emily's engagement with being an expatriate differs: rather than exploring predicates of a new category by virtue of experiencing membership, she is looking for the predicates that she has previously experienced as bound to 'expatriate' and struggles with not finding them fulfilled. Hence, participants' circumstances and consequently their ways of constructing identity differ. Yet this is not a limitation of the data, but their strength, as a case that differs from the others appears in a new light and at the same time provides further insight into what constitutes the norm.

Secondly, being an ‘invisible expat’ involves a delicate positioning on a continuum of similarity and difference, linking back to the analysis of *adequation* and *distinction*. However, it adds a twist: rather than struggling with not being able to create “sufficient similarity” (Bucholtz and Hall 2004b: 495), Emily’s issue is not being sufficiently different. Viewing this from an MCA-informed approach reveals how she constructs identity not just in line with who she feels she is, but also with how she feels others perceive her: she is an expatriate, but remains invisible.

Finally, from the role the environment plays for categorisation, as shown in Example 10-33, follows that being an ‘invisible expat’ is a relational matter. Identity cannot simply be constructed by claiming categories. Instead, such membership must also be attributed to an individual by others. Even though Emily identifies as an expatriate, the fact that her environment neither sees nor treats her as such therefore renders her membership invisible.

10.3.4 Returning to normality

The previous sections illustrate how after relocation participants build up predicates of an expatriate as they experience life abroad. This may involve challenging other people’s assumptions about the category, and even their own. Yet the notion of building up predicates does not imply that individuals come to a conclusive answer of what being an expatriate entails. Instead, the category and its predicates are constantly changing as they are occasioned *in situ*, and being an expatriate may be seen differently at different stages of life abroad. After preparing for the move, undergoing relocation and embracing new beginnings, there comes a point when individuals settle into their new environments and establish a routine, when excitement and adventure tend to become less prominent. The final section in this chapter explores how individuals negotiate returning to – albeit a new – normality when living abroad. As in the previous discussion, normality is an issue for participants themselves, which warrants an examination of how the concept contributes to the discursive construction of identity.

Upon moving to England, individuals work on establishing new structures, both logistically in terms of work and accommodation as well as socially by building new relationships. These can mark the end of participants experiencing themselves as liminal, as discussed in Section 10.1.2, and instead provide a sense of normality. Emily

makes this explicit after two months in England in a post entitled ‘It’s been a while coming, but LIFE IS GREAT’. She describes how she is generally feeling happier, and follows this by taking stock of her current stage of relocation as shown in Example 10-34.

Example 10-34 [Emily]

My ‘need’ to blog has lowered, in as much as life has taken on a normalness that you experience every day. The ups and downs of the move have gone til next time. The mini drama’s of finding a house, school ect have gone, til next time.

The relocation phase with its ‘ups and downs’ and ‘mini drama’s’ is over, so Emily perceives her life as normal again. Yet she shows herself aware that this is only temporary and that her family’s next move will involve another turbulent period. Just like her liminal experience of moving to England inspired her to increase her blogging frequency to daily, as shown in Example 10-7 and Example 10-8, experiencing normality makes her feel that she can blog less often. She concludes her post by announcing that in the future she will just blog occasionally as a means of chatting with friends. The *category change* from liminal to a person who is settling into life abroad thus impacts on her blogging practice.

Such a return to normality may be desired by participants after a move which may have been logistically and emotionally challenging. Example 10-35 is an extract from Ruth’s four-months update on life in England and shows how she reflects on her husband finding a job.

Example 10-35 [Ruth]

But it’s also time for him to go back to work, for us to find some semblance of normal and routine.

Earlier in the post, Ruth points out that she is somewhat nervous about the change that her husband’s employment will bring. Nevertheless, she acknowledges a desire to find some form of ‘normal and routine’ again, which they have been lacking up to this

point. From a ToI perspective, Ruth authenticates expatriate identity by portraying her family as aiming to lead life abroad with all that this might entail.

Another example of welcoming everyday life is a reflection by Kim on what normality means to her and how she might share this with others. In a post after five months in England, she points out that everyday ‘mundane’ experiences are ‘perfect’ to her, which is discussed in Example 8-17 to illustrate how participants authenticate expatriate identity by distancing themselves from tourists. Example 10-36 shows how she subsequently links this to the fact that she is no longer in a long-distance relationship, having moved to England to join her partner.

Example 10-36 [Kim]

Perhaps, being in a long-distance relationship has that effect on people. A trip to the grocery store is not something to complain about. Instead, it’s something I enjoy because we never had the luxury of the every day until about 6 months ago. As I’m writing this now, I realize we *always* go to Tesco together and we have our own little routine when it comes to our shopping trips. I love that. I hope that feeling that the ordinary should be cherished doesn’t go away for us. [...] When a classmate at uni asks me how my weekend was, I’m not ashamed to say, “Not too exciting, rather dull actually.” But, by saying ‘rather dull’, it’s more to save them from having to hear the normal every day things that we did that the Brit and I enjoyed together — like a drive to the mall just to pick up something my mom requested, hanging out around the kitchen table at the Brit’s parents’ house, or making enchiladas together for the first time.

Living in England enables Kim to share her ‘every day’ with her partner. At this point, being a person living abroad is occasioned to entail no longer being in a long-distance relationship and instead engaging in routine daily activities together such as grocery shopping, cooking and visiting family. Although Kim values ‘the ordinary’, she acknowledges that this may not be easily shared with others: she presents her activities as ‘rather dull’ to ‘save’ her interlocutors from ‘having to hear the normal every day things’. She is “doing ‘being ordinary’”: Sacks (1992: 218, vol. II) observes that whilst individuals monitor the world for “storyable characteristics”, if nothing they consider tellable is found, they will report that “nothing much” was done, for example that their weekend was ordinary. In Example 10-36, Kim does just this: despite appreciating the novelty of everyday life with her partner, she orients to what her environment may regard as an acceptable telling and hence presents her experiences as nothing much to

report when asked by her classmates. In contrast, blogging offers Kim a chance to share not only her appreciation of the ordinariness of life abroad, but also a metacomment on what may be tellable in everyday interactions. She negotiates the *category fit* of ordinariness and a person living abroad, and aims to retain the feeling of normality being special.

Yet normality is not necessarily desirable or unproblematic, as Emily's posts show. Having commented on her life returning to the everyday after the relocation phase in Example 10-34, she contrasts her experiences of three months in England with her family's previous assignments in Japan and sums up her insights as illustrated below.

Example 10-37 [Emily]

Three years in Japan was awesome, at times overwhelming, frustrating, rewarding, different. Being part of a small, tight knit community had it's pro's and con's but overall it was a lot of fun. There's was always someone doing something. [...] Our UK experience so far is very different indeed. In fact, I'd go so far as to say it's particularly normal and as we haven't been normal it's new for me.

As opposed to being an expatriate in Japan, Emily experiences life in England as 'particularly normal'. The juxtaposition establishes that being normal is not a predicate of an expatriate. On the contrary, normality is a new experience for Emily after three years of being different. That this is not necessarily positive emerges in her categorial negotiations of being an 'invisible expat', which she engages with in a number of posts in the course of the following months, as discussed in detail in Section 10.3.3.

A final example of how participants engage with experiencing life abroad as normal is an announcement by Leah towards the end of her first year in England. As discussed in Section 8.1.1, many participants treat their first year abroad as a meaningful timespan and mark the occasion of their first anniversary by posting a reflection on how they have changed in the course of it. Example 10-38 illustrates how Leah negotiates *category change* and its implications.

Example 10-38 [Leah]

Also in terms of shift, it also feels like it's time to shift this blog a bit. I suppose you can be a tourist forever, but if you want to live somewhere permanently, it becomes detrimental. I'll continue to write (*and hopefully a little more regularly*), but rather than being an intrepid reporter for all things *different* between the US and the UK, I'd like to just write about life as it happens. Things that surprise, comfort, amuse, confuse even. It's not going to devolve into a Dear Diary thing (*I hope*), but it just feels more and more awkward to write in the style I have been for the last few months. Instead, I'm going to try to tell stories. Hopefully decently written stories, but stories of settling into a new phase in my life and of all the cast that appear in it. I might even do an overhaul of the blog layout!

Leah notifies readers that she will make changes to her blog. This is warranted by establishing a connection between her style of blogging and her category membership within the *transnational relocation device*: she positions herself as having been 'a tourist' up to this point, with her reporting on all the cultural differences that she was experiencing as a predicate. In a previous post, she treats her close study of differences as bound to an anthropologist, as evident in Example 10-15. Her categorisation of herself as a person viewing England through the eyes of a foreign explorer – be it a tourist or an anthropologist – has thus been in line with her style of blogging. However, given that she intends to remain in England, she points out that maintaining membership in the category 'tourist' would be 'detrimental'. In fact, she has already begun to distance herself from her blogging practice of scrutinising differences, pointing out that it has become increasingly 'awkward'. This is a means of expressing ongoing *category change*, as predicates that used to work well for her no longer seem to fit. Instead of focusing on differences, Leah aims to write about her everyday experiences, to 'just' share stories of 'life as it happens'. At this stage, she has not only become more accustomed to life in England so that what used to be different now appears normal, but she has also finished her master's dissertation and is about to move in together with her partner in a different city, as she shares in the opening of this post. Hence, Leah experiences being a person living abroad no longer as being exposed to sociocultural differences, but as leading an ordinary life. She aims to use her blog to share stories about this rather than make comparisons, and she considers marking this shift in perspective also visually through changing the layout of her blog. This is another example of how a participant's blogging may change depending on their experience of transnational relocation at a particular point in time. Just like Emily

captures the extraordinariness of what she calls the ‘transition period’ shortly before and after her move by blogging daily, as illustrated in Example 10-7 and Example 10-8, Leah acknowledges that experiencing life in England as normal requires her to change what she shares in her blog.

The above discussion illustrates how participants portray living in England as becoming increasingly normal, and how they engage with such felt normality as either problematic or desirable. When previously foreign and thus remarkable aspects about living abroad become familiar, their tellability (Ochs and Capps 2001) undergoes a change. Schütz’s (1944: 507) concluding remarks on ‘the stranger’ support this: when the stranger becomes familiar with the cultural practices in their new environment, these ultimately become “an unquestionable way of life”, and it is at this point that the stranger ceases to be a stranger. Thus, whilst participants remain expatriates in the sense that they are foreign nationals who have relocated to live abroad, their practice of occasioning categories as part of the *transnational relocation device* may change. For instance, although transnational relocation is an omnirelevant device in the context of their blogging, participants may draw less and less on category negotiations pertaining to this device to construct identity. They have previously engaged with the predicates of an expatriate and shared insights about life abroad. These negotiations remain as common ground (Clark 1996) with regular readers, but are also available to new visitors through the blog archive, so that bloggers may feel that they need not be revisited. Beginning to experience life abroad as normal can therefore pose a problem for expatriates’ blogging given that it reduces the number of highly tellable narratives they are able to share about transnational relocation. Having relocated may no longer be the most relevant aspect about themselves, which may cause them to abandon their blog (Kluge 2011: 213). Indeed, during the netnographic (Kozinets 2010) exploration of the expatriate blogosphere specified in Section 4.1, several blogs were encountered that had either been discontinued after the blogger had lived abroad for a while, or had shifted to covering different topics.

Based on the analysis of category negotiations, the present research therefore argues that expatriate blogging comprises transition narratives that are best told during the intensive phase of preparing for transnational relocation, undergoing it and beginning to settle into life abroad. These are periods when individuals are intensively engaged

with what moving and living abroad means to them. The moments before relocation and after settling in are comparatively harder to share, but individuals develop means to make them tellable in their blogs, as the discussions of working towards becoming an expatriate in Section 10.1.1 and of returning to normality in Section 10.3.4 show.

Yet the structure of this chapter is not meant to suggest that individuals' categorial negotiations of transnational relocation are limited to their first year abroad, nor that they progress in a linear fashion. Rather, the perceived overcoming of liminality and setting in of normality differs between individuals, as it is personal, gradual, and may be cyclical. For instance, in Example 10-10, Ruth negotiates being liminal nine months after her relocation, whilst in Example 10-34, Emily points out after two months that her life in England feels normal, but she subsequently experiences the challenge of being an 'invisible expat', as detailed in Section 10.3.3. However, whilst individuals' category negotiations may not take a linear course, blogging does, as new narratives are continuously being added and previous posts remain accessible and chronologically ordered in the archives.

In summary, participants construct identity by engaging in categorial negotiations with regard to transnational relocation. The findings reveal a broad trajectory of negotiations as visualised in Figure 10-1. Individuals anticipate becoming an expatriate, experience new beginnings and in the course of their first year abroad build up predicates of an expatriate, challenge non-members assumptions about the category and finally negotiate returning to normality. In the course of this, the analysis focuses on select but prominent categories occasioned within the *transnational relocation device*: the liminal, the new beginner, the expatriate and the invisible expat. These are not confined to but tend to occur predominantly at particular stages during relocation and life abroad. The analysis further shows that category negotiations can function as any of the six tactics of ToI. Yet they frequently encompass the realness dimension of *authentication* and *denaturalisation*, such as when engaging with liminality, being a new beginner, challenging non-members' assumptions and embracing normality as opposed to being a tourist. This concludes Part III of this thesis and leads over to Part IV, which discusses in greater detail how the findings of a ToI analysis and an MCA-informed approach can be integrated to reveal more about expatriate identity construction.

Part IV IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN EXPATRIATE BLOGS

Chapter 11 Discussion and conclusion

11.1 Identity construction in expatriate blogs

The final part of this thesis brings together the discussions in previous chapters to show how they contribute to an understanding of identity construction in expatriate blogs. This chapter firstly revisits the research questions, demonstrating how and where they have been answered, summarising key findings and pointing out their relevance. Section 11.2 reflects on limitations of the present research and how they were managed. Finally, Section 11.3 elaborates on avenues for future exploration and emphasises the original contribution and potential impact of the present research.

The first research question pertaining to linguistic identity construction is divided into two subquestions. The following discussion addresses these in turn.

RQ1.1 How does identity emerge from a discursive negotiation of likeness, realness and power?

Research Question 1.1 involves an analysis through ToI, as outlined in Chapter 5 and presented in the three subsequent chapters. Firstly, Chapter 6 considers how participants negotiate notions of predominantly institutional power in their construction of identity, for example the acquisition of official documentation such as visa (Example 6-1), pet accreditation (Example 6-4) or limited leave to remain (Example 6-3). This not only legitimises them, but also enables them to share their insights with readers and provide advice, which links *authorisation* to *authentication*. The analysis shows that such negotiations pertaining to the power dimension occur throughout the data, but are particularly prevalent in the early stages of relocation. Specifically, individuals share their progress in obtaining the above-mentioned documentation, which functions as *authorisation-in-the-making* or *irrealis authorisation* (Sauntson 2016). This enables them to share their experiences and position themselves as prospective expatriates even

though they have not yet been granted official *authorisation*, as exemplified in Jessica's account of still waiting for confirmation of their move (Example 6-5). *Illegitimation*, in turn, pertains to official matters and status, or individuals' experience of either a lack of resources or a lack of control, as Megan's reflections on having no control over her life illustrate (Example 6-24). Hence, participants position themselves with respect to notions of institutional power predominantly before their relocation, but also throughout the ensuing first year abroad.

How identity is constructed with respect to similarity and difference is discussed in Chapter 7. *Adequation* and *distinction* are the tactics most frequently drawn on in the construction of expatriate identity. Individuals position themselves as similar or different both with respect to their country of origin and England. This shows that such positioning is not a question of objective similarity or difference, but a relational matter depending on whom participants compare themselves to and whether they choose to emphasise commonalities or points of divergence. *Distinction* involves aspects such as leave-taking and missing home, or making comparisons to people and practices experienced in England. Yet *distinction* does not necessarily entail a negative assessment. On the contrary, participants may position themselves as appreciating the differences they experience, such as Jessica, who emphasises how being different makes living abroad interesting (Example 7-19). *Adequation*, in turn, involves individuals' discussions of appreciating people and customs both at home and in England, exploring and learning more about life in England and finding their place through settling in and feeling at home. Furthermore, *adequation* can comprise an expression of joint foreignness: participants position themselves as similar to other expatriates even from different backgrounds, as evident in Sarah's reflection on sharing with other expatriates her first experiences of being in a new country (Example 7-38). This also involves eliciting comments from readers in comparable situations, as Megan does when faced with an insult (Example 7-43). This points to the importance of the expatriate blogosphere in providing not only a platform for such negotiations, but also a like-minded audience with respect to which expatriates can construct identity.

Even though *adequation* and *distinction* are discussed separately, the analysis reveals that they are closely linked. They frequently occur in proximity and may depend on each other. For instance, *adequation* towards English practices may involve an

elaboration on how they differ from participants' previous experiences, on the back of which expatriates can then position themselves as acquiring such cultural understanding. Similarly, the mere acknowledgment of certain features as part of *adequation* presupposes their salience to an expatriate based on difference, whilst a local may take them for granted. This interrelation between *adequation* and *distinction* is discussed with respect to Leah's observations on conventions for signing off text messages and emails (Example 7-10). Identity hence emerges through a complex positioning with respect to both similarity and difference.

The third ToI dimension, realness, is explored in Chapter 8. After negotiations of similarity and difference, *authentication* is the next most frequent tactic in the data. *Authentication* comprises a sharing of events as they unfold, providing real-time insights into relocation and life abroad. An illuminative example is Leah's reflection of how she experiences her 'week of Lasts' (Example 8-5). This can be linked to the concept of tellability (Ochs and Capps 2001): by portraying their experiences as worth sharing, individuals non-institutionally legitimise their telling and at the same time achieve *authentication*. Further, *authentication* involves a display of expertise pertaining to life abroad, for example when participants give advice to readers based on their personal experiences, such as Chloe's tips on moving pets abroad (Example 8-13). This is a feature that closely relates *authentication* to *authorisation*, even though in these cases legitimacy is not granted through institutions, but through having experience of transnational relocation. In the course of conveying their experiences, individuals authenticate expatriate identity by distancing themselves from tourists and stressing that their sharing of insights into everyday life abroad is unadorned, as exemplified by Kim's embrace of the mundane (Example 8-17). Finally, participants position themselves as having found fulfilment and their true self through their move abroad. This can be seen in both Chloe's and Kim's emphasis that life abroad feels 'right' (Example 8-26 and Example 8-27).

The other end of the continuum, *denaturalisation*, involves expressions of rupture, which comprise individuals' distancing from a former self, thus no longer identifying with who they used to be or their beliefs and practices, as Emily's questioning of who she is illustrates (Example 8-38). *Denaturalisation* is further achieved through negotiations of challenges, doubts and a perceived lack of normality, as for instance

expressed by Ruth (Example 8-42). Also, it can comprise expressions of feeling out of place or in an alternative reality, such as Emily's portrayal of her situation as 'in limbo' (Example 8-49). Just as similarity and difference, *authentication* and *denaturalisation* are interrelated: experiencing doubts and challenges ultimately authenticates expatriates because it distances them from tourists and emphasises that what they share about life abroad is unadorned and real.

Research Question 1.1 has thus been answered through an in-depth application of ToI to the data. Identity emerges not only from a negotiation of the six tactics separately, but from a complex interplay between them: not only are the pairs of tactics situated as two poles on a continuum for each dimension, but the dimensions themselves intersect. This illustrates that identity is the outcome of intricate positioning which is discursively achieved. Recognising the interrelation between *adequation* and *distinction* is advantageous because it leads to the understanding that expatriate identity emerges from their dynamic interplay and hence from individuals' positioning as in-between, neither entirely local nor entirely foreign. Further value lies in expanding the focus from negotiations of likeness to power and particularly realness because this enables a more holistic appreciation of how identity is constructed. In terms of the former, *irrealis authorisation* as a key feature before relocation, its frequent resolution into *authorisation* and overall the comparative scarcity of negotiations of power in expatriate blogs are testimony to the relatively privileged position of individuals undergoing this form of transnational relocation. An analysis regarding the latter is insightful because it brings out that genuineness is a key concern in identity construction in narratives of personal transition, both in the prevalence of *authentication* and how it emerges particularly strongly when based on instances of *denaturalisation*. Finally, the findings are beneficial on a more general level because they demonstrate the applicability of ToI to the context of transnational relocation.

To further explore the complexity of linguistic identity construction, the data were subsequently approached from a different angle, as laid out in Research Question 1.2.

RQ1.2 How do expatriates negotiate membership categories in the course of their relocation and first year abroad?

This research question aims to investigate how participants negotiate membership categories as a means of identity construction, which allows an emic approach to the data. As discussed in Chapter 9, examining how participants occasion categories leads to a focus not on mere mentions of categories, but on category negotiations and how these are achieved. This shows the discursive practices that individuals engage in and how they explore the meaning of categories in the process of working through who they think they are. The analysis as presented in Chapter 10 encompasses three aspects: it answers the question of *how* categories are negotiated through an examination of *category fit* and *category change*, discusses *what* categories are occasioned as key categories within the *transnational relocation device*, and achieves both by focusing on *when* category work is done, hence during what stage of the transitional phase these negotiations occur. The main findings emerging from the overlay of these three aspects are summarised below and their relevance discussed.

Several expatriate blogs are begun before relocation to capture the process of moving abroad. Even though individuals are not yet expatriates at that stage, they do engage in identity construction in relation to that category. Section 10.1 shows that individuals draw on their past to position themselves as prospective expatriates, such as Aubrey by reflecting on wanting to become a tourist (Example 10-1), or display a working towards becoming a category member, as Chloe does in her post on anticipating how she will decorate her room and become a resident (Example 10-4 and Example 10-5). Moreover, participants occasion the category of the liminal, portraying themselves as a person in-between, predominantly at these early stages before and during their relocation, as Leah's reflections before her move to England illustrate (Example 10-6). In-betweenness is generally delimited in time and pertains to space, identity and structuring features such as arrangements, routines and relationships. These categorial negotiations show that participants treat identity not necessarily as a property they have at a particular point in time, but also as something they can aspire to: individuals may mobilise past characteristics and their present experiences of in-betweenness to construct identity towards the future.

During their move and shortly afterwards, participants position themselves as new beginners, embarking on a new phase in their life due to their transnational relocation. As discussed in Section 10.2, participants portray this both as requiring strength to

overcome difficulties and as being open-minded. Beginning anew is shown to frequently be done through an emphasis on endings, such as individuals' *category change* negotiations of leaving their country and past experiences behind (Example 10-14) and in the process dealing with the administrative aspects of a move (Example 10-11). That being a new beginner is a relevant category for individuals at that stage is corroborated by Chloe's description of her anxiety at the prospect that beginning afresh might not be possible (Example 10-12).

Yet whilst individuals can claim membership in the category 'expatriate' from the moment of relocation, identification with the category may only follow later, as knowledge of the category and its predicates is being built up. Upon taking on membership in a new category, its predicates may be negotiated with other – already established – members, as was found in the case of online discussion forums (Stommel and Koole 2010; Giles and Newbold 2013). Yet negotiations in expatriate blogs differ inasmuch as they do not necessarily constitute an environment for fellow members, as readers may not be expatriates themselves and therefore not act as gatekeepers to a community. Instead, Section 10.3 illustrates that expatriates predominantly engage in *category fit* negotiations on the basis of their own experiences as their life abroad progresses. This involves a discussion of observations and insights since relocation, such as Sarah's encounter with other expatriates and how this allows her to be herself (Example 10-19), or Leah's list of what she has learnt about living abroad (Example 10-23).

In addition, expatriates' categorial negotiations challenge non-members' assumptions about what being an expatriate entails, for instance Leah's denial that living abroad makes people more interesting (Example 10-26) or Emily's displayed reluctance to share personal struggles that her audience may not want to read about (Example 10-27). Such negotiations run counter to notions of typicality: individuals construct themselves as authentic expatriates by sharing real, lived predicates rather than dwelling on features that may expectably be perceived as typical. A case in point is Sarah's challenge of the view of expatriates as enjoying a life of unlimited leisure, and her acknowledgement of the difficulties that such transnational relocation entails (Example 10-25). This and other instances of such category negotiations entail that a genuine expatriate does not exhibit the predicates that non-members view as category-bound,

but in fact the ones that Sarah by virtue of her category membership occasions despite common expectations. For individuals, authenticity hence means more than being merely typical, which is supported by Widdicombe and Wooffitt's (1990) observations on the difference between 'doing' and 'being' a category. This is a valuable finding because it sheds light on how individuals engage in *authentication* through categorial negotiations not so much detached from but indeed counter to other people's expectations.

Hence, the predicates of the category 'expatriate' are built up by means of personal experiences and positioning as opposed to non-members. This leads to distinct negotiations in the case of Emily, who has undergone transnational relocation before. She now finds life in England to be different from her previous experiences, which leads her to engage in whether she still is a category member and to conclude that she is now an 'invisible expat'.

Similarly noteworthy is that whilst their continued living in England allows participants to build up predicates of an expatriate, it also entails an engagement with an increasing sense of, desire for, or struggle with normality. Although transnational relocation is an omnirelevant device in the context of expatriate blogs, it is not the case that any category and predicates are equally negotiable at any point and by any means, and individuals may draw on the device less frequently as they have settled into their life in England. Transition narratives of relocating abroad are thus especially tellable during the earlier stages of the move and settling in, when individuals engage in negotiations of *category change* and *category fit* pertaining to being an expatriate as experienced by themselves and asserted against the assumptions of others.

Yet the focus on categories as a means of identity construction requires a caveat: it does not suggest that participants are merely category members rather than individuals. Instead, as outlined in Section 2.5, the present research takes the position that individuals operate with categories as a way of making sense of themselves and the social world. As part of this, participants may challenge expectations and even the very relevance of category membership itself, as shown in Section 10.3.2. It is this situated use of categories and its import for identity construction that this thesis explores.

The above observations are worthwhile because they grant insight into categorial identity construction in expatriate blogs, thereby answering Research Question 1.2.

Specifically, both *category fit* and *category change* negotiations are relevant means of engaging with categories in phases of personal transition: individuals take on new category membership and upon doing so build up predicates and challenge other people's assumptions. Moreover, the focus on a number of prevalent categories occasioned within the *transnational relocation device* at broadly different stages of relocation shows how individuals engage with being in-between, embrace new beginnings and make sense of what it means when category membership is not granted to them by others.

To sum up, by approaching the data both from a ToI and an MCA-informed perspective, Research Question 1 has been answered. It is restated here for convenience.

RQ1 How do expatriates linguistically construct identity in their blogs?

This thesis argues that identity construction in expatriate blogs is achieved through various discursive practices. Identity can be fruitfully examined as emergent from individuals' positioning on scales of different relational dimensions. The analysis shows that next to similarity and difference, notions of (in)authenticity and (il)legitimacy are highly relevant in the construction of expatriate identity. Even though they may appear as discrete units of analysis, these dimensions intersect and jointly shape identity that emerges from them. At the same time as positioning themselves with respect to these dimensions, expatriates negotiate membership categories and predicates to construct identity. Although these are occasioned locally, the analysis reveals the importance of their situatedness within personal experiences of transnational relocation ranging from before the move up to one year beyond. The point in time at which they occur is thus relevant for a full understanding of how they operate.

Identity is partial, as it encompasses amongst others a relational dimension, in which participants position themselves with regard to likeness, realness and power, and an indexical dimension of categories and predicates (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). This partialness entails that research on identity construction can benefit from examining more than one aspect, uniting "complementary analyses" to understand identity more

fully in its complexity (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 606). What an MCA-informed approach can add to an analysis of ToI is the focus of Research Question 2, to which the discussion now turns.

RQ2 What can an approach informed by membership categorisation analysis contribute to the tactics of intersubjectivity for an understanding of linguistic identity construction in phases of personal transition?

Research Question 2 is addressed in the methodological discussions in Chapter 2, Chapter 5 and Chapter 9, yet it can only be fully answered in the light of the actual analyses. The following discussion revisits the benefits of re-introducing categories into the analysis, addresses the temporal aspect of identity construction in the context of transnational relocation, provides an overview of the key aspects emerging from both analyses and finally elaborates on how the two frameworks complement each other.

An MCA-informed approach brings back to the analysis the notion of the category, which has been problematised in sociolinguistic research under a social constructionist paradigm. However, the category is re-introduced into the analysis not as the analyst's criterion, but as participants' resource. Examining what categories individuals occasion as relevant to them in particular moments allows the analysis to adopt an emic focus, exploring identity construction by starting with the data rather than from a theoretical point of view. This differs from the ToI analysis, which approaches the data through the concepts of likeness, realness and power. Yet emic and etic perspectives are not incompatible, and integrating them is valuable, as long as researchers acknowledge the perspectives they are taking. The present research demonstrates the importance of paying attention to participants' categorisation of themselves and its import for identity construction. Indeed, as emphasised in Section 2.5, categorisation is "an inseparable part" of how identity is theorised and analysed, from which it follows that MCA can contribute to research in the social sciences even though the approach may not be well known in this context (Angouri 2016: 45).

The focus on participants' negotiation of categories has enabled a stronger understanding of the temporal aspect of these blogs. The present research argues that expatriate blogs are personal narratives of transition, which informed the decision to

capture and analyse data spanning the period from (before) relocation up to one year beyond. No aspect intrinsic to either approach makes one of them specifically suitable to analysing identity construction over time, and both are predominantly used for an analysis of a particular moment in time, given their focus on the local occurrence. However, this does not mean that the wider context in which particular moments are situated may not play a part. An MCA-informed analysis is free from pre-given analytic criteria and instead examines what participants themselves make relevant for their sense-making in particular situations. In the case of expatriate blogs, this brings the passing of time into focus, as participants orient to their changing experiences of life abroad as time goes on. Therefore, an MCA-informed approach is more apt to pick up such aspects in the analysis. The analysis shows that participants' category negotiations are influenced by the stage of the relocation experience during which they are produced, from drawing on the past to building up predicates and challenging non-members' assumptions. It thus provides an understanding of how participants construct identity at particular points within their relocation. This is one contribution that an MCA-informed approach can make to a ToI analysis.

In contrast, an analysis through ToI does not quite do this aspect justice since the framework is not particularly laid out to allow for the influence of time on identity construction. When grouping the data into different time spans, no clear pattern emerged regarding how the six tactics are distributed, because they are all potentially relevant at any point. Where necessary, the present research adapts the ToI approach to account for the temporal aspect by drawing on the notion of *irrealis* tactics introduced by Sauntson (2016), namely *irrealis authorisation*.

Four key aspects repeatedly emerge in the analysis from slightly different angles. Firstly, the construction of identity pertaining to the future: the ToI analysis shows how individuals engage in *irrealis authorisation* and aim to authenticate expatriate identity even before their relocation. From an MCA-informed perspective, they work towards being an expatriate through category negotiations that draw on past experiences and look ahead to becoming an expatriate. Secondly, the issue of recognisability is pervasive, and in it inheres the notion of an 'other' and of identity as relational rather than merely revolving around the self. Participants engage in *adequation* and *distinction* through foregrounding certain aspects and missing out others, which enables

them to emphasise joint foreignness, make an effort to blend in or embrace difference. *Category fit* negotiations and in particular Emily's experience of being an 'invisible expat' without a like-minded community revolve around a similar concern: they direct attention to what makes individuals recognisable as members of the category 'expatriate' and show how insufficient difference renders category membership invisible to others. Thirdly, the importance of depth of insight transpires from both analyses. Participants achieve *authentication* of expatriate identity through an emphasis on sharing expertise and providing unadorned accounts exceeding the insights of tourists. They also build up predicates of an expatriate on the basis of their own experiences and as members of this category challenge non-members' assumptions about it. Finally, the notion of normality is relevant to the findings of both approaches. The *denaturalisation* of expatriate identity can involve expressions of a lack of normality or feeling unreal and out of place. A similar engagement with normality pervades participants' categorial negotiations of being liminal and lacking normality, which contrast with their perceived returning to normality at later stages of their life abroad. Related to this is also individuals' engagement with predicates, specifically *category fit* negotiations pertaining to what can be seen as normal or expectable for an expatriate.

There are thus considerable commonalities between ToI dimensions and categorial negotiations. As different approaches bring the analysis back to related phenomena, these gain more support in the process since they emerge as not merely dependent on a particular form of analysis. So whilst it may not be epistemologically possible to triangulate findings through different qualitative approaches given their interpretivist nature (Geluykens 2008: 72), analysing data from different angles adds to an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, and a combination of methods or methodologies can provide "a more holistic perspective" (Angouri 2010: 40). The aim is thus not so much one of triangulation, but rather of integration (Geluykens 2008).

The analysis hence illustrates that ToI and an MCA-informed approach are complementary. Whilst MCA, or ethnomethodology more generally, is not social constructionist in the sense that it refuses to take an ontological stance on reality, it shares with the latter its understanding of identity, as Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 51)

elaborate: “Both [ethnomethodology and social constructionism] argue that identity is not an individual attribute or role but an ‘emergent feature’ of social interactions.” Therefore, the present research integrates the analytic power of an MCA-informed approach within its social constructionist framework. Ultimately, research may take into account at the same time locally occasioned categories and wider identities: whilst it may acknowledge the importance of the local, it does not follow that it should refrain from also considering wider issues that may play a part in participants’ sense-making (De Fina 2006: 355). The sociocultural linguistic approach indeed emphasises that researchers should see their “diverse theories and methods as complementary, not competing”, as only this will allow them to understand identity more fully (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 608). Similarly, Angouri (2016: 44) points out that “continuing the dialogue on the affordances of the different traditions for the study of discourse can be particularly beneficial for future research on identity”. It is on these grounds that the present research aims to offer a contribution.

11.2 Evaluation

In the course of the present research, a number of difficult decisions needed to be made. Whilst challenges intrinsic to the methodologies and their application are discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 9, this section briefly outlines more general considerations, provides a rationale for them and reflects on their implications.

One limitation pertains to the fact that the analysis does not extend to readers’ comments, on which grounds the interactivity of the data may be challenged. Whilst the comments would present an interesting area of study themselves, the present research focuses on participants’ narratives of transition rather than their uptake. Nevertheless, the posts themselves constitute a form of interaction: they are shared with an audience, contain moments where bloggers explicitly take a position with regard to their anticipated readers, as discussed in terms of *adequation* predominantly in Section 7.2.3, and form part of a bigger social practice, expatriate blogging. Indeed, although the ToI framework focuses on identity as emerging intersubjectively, Bucholtz and Hall (2010: 25) maintain that even seemingly monologic forms of language use are in fact interactional, as pointed out in Section 2.2.

A further challenge the present research has faced is of a terminological nature. As discussed in Chapter 1, referring to participants as *expatriates* rather than *migrants* or any other term risks evoking unintended connotations or even “perpetuating” ideologies of white privilege (Croucher 2012: 4). Yet neither is the term *migrants* free from connotations or expectations. There lies some irony in the fact that the very essence of the present research, how language and particularly categorisation constructs identity, presents a challenge for the research and how it can be conveyed. This testifies to the importance of linguistic identity construction as a field of investigation. On all accounts, the advantage of the term *expatriate* is that it is the one used in the context of expatriate blogging not only by the providers of the blog directories, but also by several participants themselves. Adopting their terminology is in line with the ethnomethodological approach to categorisation taken in the present research with its close focus on participants’ own displayed understanding of themselves.

Finally, as with much qualitative research, the question of generalisability needs to be addressed. The sample size of twelve blogs is necessarily limited not only given the scope and time frame of this thesis and the number of posts one year of blogging can generate, but also due to the level of detail both ToI and MCA require, as opposed to for instance a thematic content analysis. Therefore, the findings clearly cannot be generalised to apply to every expatriate blog, nor can expatriate blogging be seen as representative for the whole expatriate population. However, this does not take away validity from the present research, as generalisability was neither its aim nor its proof of success. Instead, it has provided insight into how identity is constructed in the analysed data and how this is locally achieved through discursive practices. Whilst not all of these findings may apply to other contexts, they do point in the direction of what processes and ways of positioning might be relevant in other forms of transition narratives, and they demonstrate how ToI and MCA can be fruitfully employed. This point relates to what the original contribution of the present research is and how it may be developed further, to which the discussion now turns.

11.3 Implications

This section briefly outlines how the present research may be developed further and discusses its original contribution and impact. A promising approach would be to investigate further how participants construct and convey their transition experience in their blogs. This could be achieved by adopting a narrative focus and examining the types of tellings that occur in expatriate blogs as well as their tellability (Ochs and Capps 2001). For instance, whilst some blog posts revolve around recent past events, others describe ongoing events or allude to topics which are then either promised for later or refused altogether, as evident in Sarah's ongoing driving test story (Example 6-10) and Kim's deferral of sharing former issues (Example 8-53). These are patterns identified by small story research in the case of other forms of CMC (Georgakopoulou 2004; Page 2010; Dayter 2015). An in-depth analysis of these aspects may reveal how such forms of telling serve to construct identity in particular moments of transnational relocation, which would allow further exploration of the chronological aspect inherent in the data.

Equally worthwhile would be a complementary approach that focuses on spatial elements in expatriate blogs and the personal transition they document. As discussed in Section 8.2.3, *denaturalisation* is linked to notions of space and place, with individuals portraying themselves as feeling out of place or in an alternative reality. Similarly, the relevance of space emerges in Section 10.1.2 from category negotiations of being liminal and feeling in-between both literally with regard to space and more metaphorically concerning identity and structures such as arrangements, routines and relationships. On top of that, expatriates frequently document their explorations of their new neighbourhood and their travels both in the UK and in Europe more generally. An investigation into and mapping of how this is achieved through linguistic and visual means promises insight into a further aspect of expatriate identity construction.

This leads to a further point worth exploring in more detail: multimodal features, which are present to a varying degree in expatriate blogs. Some bloggers keep their posts almost exclusively text-based (such as Emily), whilst others intersperse their writing with pictures (Jessica) or GIFs (Chloe), or frequently link to other pages for further information (Aubrey). All of these features are means of constructing identity and as such merit further investigation. Examining multimodality for emerging patterns across

such a wide variety of instances and contexts is challenging, and current research is engaging with such issues, for example by discussing how traditional approaches may be adapted to analysing CMC (Giles et al. 2015; Giles et al. 2017), or by exploring so-called ‘mummy blogging’ of ‘selfies’ on Instagram through multimodal discourse analysis (Zappavigna and Zhao 2017). Analysing expatriate blogs with a focus on multimodality would hence make it possible to join ongoing conversations in this field of study.

Additionally, future research would benefit from expanding its scope to take into account data in languages other than English. For instance, the present research and work on blogs written in Spanish and French (Kluge 2011; Frank-Job and Kluge 2012) could be complemented by an investigation of German data. This would enable a cross-cultural and cross-linguistic perspective and help counterbalance the dominance of English-language data in academic discourse.

Another angle to take the present research forward entails participants’ involvement: as they have shown interest in and given consent to the present research, follow-up interviews could provide insight into their perspective on the findings. This may enable a discussion on identity, transition and the role language plays in constructing and conveying these notions. It would raise challenging questions on agency in research and may give something back to participants, such as an insight into linguistic analysis and how their blogging may be perceived differently by diverse audiences. Finally, such interviews could encompass the complementary and frequently untold side of transnational relocation: several participants have moved back to their home countries after a number of years abroad. Such repatriation entails its own challenges and merits an analysis on how individuals construct identity pertaining to it.

Ultimately, the original contribution of the present research is twofold, as it is empirical as well as methodological and theoretical. It encompasses firstly the study of identity construction in unsolicited narratives of transition in the context of privileged migration. Secondly, it involves the application and critique of two frameworks that have to the researcher’s knowledge not hitherto been combined in the study of linguistic identity construction, as well as a reflection on their potential for integration. This makes a contribution to discussions in sociocultural linguistics of how identity can be theorised and analysed. These aspects are elaborated on below.

Part II of this thesis involves an in-depth application of ToI to a new context. Although developed and employed in research on gender and sexuality, the framework has recently been taken up in different fields, as discussed in Section 2.3. The present research further expands its scope by demonstrating that it can be fruitfully applied to analysing online narratives of transnational relocation. This required an operationalisation of ToI on a larger scale, in the process of which issues such as interrelation of the tactics and size of the unit of analysis were encountered and addressed, as discussed in Chapter 5. Specifically, whilst Bucholtz and Hall (2004a, 2004b) emphasise that different tactics can operate together and that they are continua rather than dichotomies, they do not provide suggestions as to how to account for this in the analysis. This poses a challenge particularly for the coding of negotiations of similarity and difference, because they are strongly interrelated. To counter this, the present research views the mere juxtapositions of sociocultural features as doing *distinction*, whilst a displayed appreciation and potentially adoption of such differences is treated as engaging in *adequation*. In cases where the researcher strongly felt that more than one tactic was at work, the extract was double-coded, which is for example the case for some instances of *authentication* and *authorisation*. The size of the unit of analysis was taken to be a unit of meaning and thus variable. However, as long as tactics are not quantified in an attempt at validation without a subsequent in-depth discussion in the context of their occurrence, this variance is no detriment; on the contrary, it illustrates the dynamics and complexity of such relational positioning. Bucholtz and Hall (2008b: 161) themselves point out that an application of their framework should not be the ultimate aim of new research, but a tool to enable further work in sociocultural linguistics. Yet adopting their framework is worthwhile both for the insights it can yield as well as to test and sharpen this tool for future analysis.

Whilst the findings of the present research testify to the analytic value of ToI, they also reveal two aspects where the framework may be expanded. Firstly, ToI do not address the issue of temporality, as they do not distinguish whether a tactic is employed with respect to the past, present or future. A way around this matter is the introduction of *irrealis* tactics (Sauntson 2016). Whilst the modification through *irrealis* may be an option for any tactic, in the present research it is only pursued within the power dimension because such instances emerged as particularly prevalent in expatriate blogs. The focus on *irrealis authorisation* as one way of creating legitimacy has proved

worthwhile in this context because it enables individuals to continuously engage in expatriate identity construction even before relocation. The present research therefore supports the efficacy of *irrealis* tactics as proposed by Sauntson (2016) in the context of narratives of transition and advocates them as a valuable addition to the ToI framework.

Secondly, the analysis shows instances where legitimisation is crucial, but is not done with reference to institutional power. This is for example the case when bloggers initiate their narratives of personal experience before having moved abroad and consequently treat them as in need of legitimising, as seen in Kim's justification of her blogging (Example 8-1). Double-coding such instances for *authorisation* and *authentication* signals that matters beyond institutional power are at play and is in line with Bucholtz and Hall's (2004b: 503) acknowledgement that the two tactics often co-occur. However, these instances are more closely linked to the notion of tellability (Ochs and Capps 2001) and participants' ability to share insights as members of a category. The present research focuses on the latter aspect. It demonstrates that individuals' category negotiations towards becoming an expatriate by drawing on the past and working towards membership are important means of identity construction in the early stages of expatriate blogs. Applying a second analytic framework to the interrelated negotiations of legitimacy and authenticity can therefore shed further light on this intricacy.

Part III, in turn, draws on MCA to illustrate what insight it can provide into identity construction beyond a purely ethnomethodological study. In the process, the approach was modified by introducing a distinction of *category fit* and *category change* not previously made in MCA which emerged in the course of exploring how participants negotiate categories. Furthermore, the analysis takes a more strongly chronological view: although every instance of categorisation is explored as locally occasioned and negotiated, these insights are also considered in relation to each other, from which appears a general pattern of category negotiations broadly dependent on the stage of relocation during which they occur. Whilst previous work shows how knowledge of a category is negotiated with new members in an online context (Stommel and Koole 2010; Giles and Newbold 2013), the present research explores negotiations beyond the initiation into a category to a more established membership.

Beyond this methodological contribution, the present research advocates blogs as a legitimate and worthwhile object of study. Far from being inconsequential musings, expatriate blogs constitute rich data that show how individuals make sense of transnational relocation and how this entails a personal transition impacting on their understanding of who they are. Such transition in turn has not yet received much attention in sociolinguistics (Angouri et al. 2017: 1). The sequential nature of blogging allows to view how individuals engage with these issues both in discrete posts and as time progresses. Expatriate blogs can thus reveal a lot about individuals' sense-making and identity construction as made relevant by them rather than solicited by a researcher.

Furthermore, expatriate blogs can grant insight into how individuals make sense of privileged migration, which has remained underexplored (Croucher 2012). Stories of privileged migration have been presented in previous work, yet as a summary of participants' experiences by the researcher as learnt through interviews (Chan 2014; Catalano 2016), as pointed out in Section 3.4. This departs markedly from the linguistic focus of the present research, which in contrast investigates transnational relocation narratives as engendered by individuals themselves. This enables the analysis to look beyond what experiences participants share to explore what discursive practices they engage with in the process and how they construct identity through them. Yet at the same time, the present research also touches upon aspects of what tends not to be said and may be unsayable in expatriate blogs. For instance, although Section 8.1.3 shows that giving unadorned accounts of life abroad serves to authenticate expatriate identity, individuals still display an understanding that openly writing about problems may run counter to readers' expectations of expatriate blogs. This is discussed in Section 10.3.2 regarding Emily's reluctance to share her feelings of isolation (Example 10-27). Such comments show that even though posts often revolve around more light-hearted creations of similarity and difference, individuals struggle with deeper issues as well. Understanding the impact transnational relocation may have on individuals' sense of who they are, as well as the discursive practices they draw on in their blogging to deal with this and manage their personal wellbeing is of value beyond academia, as such insight may inform current or prospective expatriates as well as organisations catering to them, such as employers and human resources departments, online communities and expatriate directories. Indeed, previous research has argued that blogs can function as online resources of support for expatriate adjustment (Nardon et al. 2015), and based on

the finding that sharing stories of personal experience enables learning about other sociocultural environments, it has been suggested that companies should consider hosting blogs on their intranet to encourage such a practice (Gertsen and Söderberg 2010).

Yet beyond privileged migration, the findings of the present research are relevant in a wider context since they identify several broader phenomena, as illustrated by the trajectory of category negotiations in Figure 10-1. They encompass how individuals solve the dilemma of positioning themselves in relation to a category they are not yet a member of, engage with endings, in-betweenness and new beginnings, negotiate rupture and challenges, portray themselves as similar and different with respect to others in both their old and their new environment, bond with others in similar circumstances, stress their own experiences, share expertise and insights, discuss typical features, challenge non-members' assumptions, and finally deal with returning normality and the issue of tellability. These aspects are all potentially conducive to how individuals construct identity during experiences of personal transition more generally. This is briefly illustrated by comparing some of the above-mentioned findings to previous research on online narratives of transition.

As discussed in Section 3.4, previous work shows that individuals keep blogs or video blogs to share transitional experiences engendered not only through travelling as a means of experiencing new places (Snee 2014; Bosangit et al. 2015), but also through other changes in their life circumstances, such as transgender transformations (Raun 2015; Jones *forthc.*), weightloss (Leggatt-Cook and Chamberlain 2012) or illness (Page 2008, 2011, 2012; de Boer and Slatman 2014). Some of the findings from these studies resonate with what emerges from the present research. These are in particular the following four aspects as detailed in the subsequent paragraphs: undergoing challenges and learning, experiencing rupture and a trajectory, engaging with endings and new beginnings, as well as negotiating normality and expertise.

Firstly, a commonality between the present and previous research is the role that challenges and learning play in identity construction. Travel bloggers have been found to narrate challenges, contrast them with 'normal' experiences and endow them with personal meaning. Additionally, they share narratives of making new experiences and learning (Bosangit et al. 2015). This relates to expatriates' sharing of challenges, which

denaturalises identity (Section 8.2.2) and constructs them as new beginners in the face of adversity (Section 10.2.1). It also bears parallels to how participants build up predicates of an expatriate on the basis of their new experiences (Section 10.3.1) and portray themselves as learning about and assimilating cultural aspects, thus constructing identity through *adequation* (Section 7.2.2). Experiencing challenges and engaging in learning are therefore relevant to identity construction not only in the context of transnational relocation, but regarding encounters with new places and people more generally.

Secondly, research on online illness narratives has explored how individuals make sense of their experiences as time goes on. For example, feelings of rupture and loss of continuity and individuals' response through narrative have been examined with regard to blogging about cancer (Page 2012; de Boer and Slatman 2014). The tendency of a trajectory has been identified in which following the experience of rupture, participants portray themselves as being 'transient' – in an in-between state with hopes of getting better – and they finally at least partly share narratives engaging with the return of normality and improvement of the self (de Boer and Slatman 2014). This resembles the categorial negotiations in expatriate blogs, which, although they may occur at any point in time, can be broadly grouped into stages as discussed in Chapter 10. Two parallels in particular stand out, namely negotiations of being liminal (Section 10.1.2) and of returning to normality (Section 10.3.4). It can therefore be argued that such ways of experiencing and narrating transition are not limited to transnational relocation.

Individuals' engagement with new beginnings is a third commonality regarding identity construction in transition, which can be identified between expatriate blogs and transgender vlogs. Research on the latter has found that vloggers authenticate trans identity. The medium allows them to share their stories of life as they experience it, and individuals convey transition "as a continuous production of new beginnings, which also implies letting go of older versions of self" (Raun 2015: 374). This bears parallels to *authentication* in expatriate blogs: participants share aspects of life abroad as they are encountered (Section 8.1.1), thus emphasising that they grant insight into an authentic expatriate experience. Additionally, becoming an expatriate entails negotiations of being a new beginner (Section 10.2.1), and by denaturalising identity before relocation through discussing rupture, individuals authenticate expatriate

identity (Section 8.3). Especially resonant with Raun's (2015: 374) observation is Chloe's reflection on beginning anew and leaving behind what she refers to as 'versions of myself that weren't quite right' (Example 8-51), which again highlights that such identity construction does not pertain exclusively to expatriates, but extends to contexts other than transnational relocation.

Finally, an engagement with normality and expertise emerges as an authenticating feature in both expatriate blogs and transgender vlogs. Vloggers were found to point out what is typical and expectable of transgender individuals and to position themselves as experts (Jones *forthc.*). Expatriate bloggers similarly engage with typicality and expectability: they negotiate predicates of an expatriate based on their own category membership and their experiences of life abroad (Section 10.3.1), yet at the same time they also challenge non-members' assumptions and clichés associated with expatriates (Section 10.3.2). They can do so given their expertise as members, and this in turn authenticates them (Section 8.1.2). Once more, then, key features of constructing identity in expatriate blogs are closely related to findings from research on other transition narratives. Other transitional experiences that individuals may engage with through blogging encompass, amongst others, dietary and lifestyle choices, employment, parenting, religious faith, ageing or grieving. On the basis of the preceding discussion it can therefore be argued that beyond being an investigation of expatriates' identity construction through intersubjective dimensions and membership categories, the present research can find wider application.

In conclusion, this thesis supports the call of sociocultural linguistics for coalitions between different approaches and research traditions (Bucholtz and Hall 2008a). Such a division is particularly evident in the classic debate between ethnomethodological and conversation analytic research on the one hand and critical discursive and poststructuralist research on the other (Schegloff 1997b, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Wetherell 1998; Billig 1999a, 1999b). Moving beyond the theoretical level, the present research applies what Bucholtz and Hall (2005, 2008a) outline in their programme for sociocultural linguistics: an analysis of the same data through ToI and informed by MCA shows not only that they can lead to interesting findings in their own right, but that they can be integrated to show the different ways in which identity is linguistically brought into being, which in turn can advance academic debate on how identity is

conceptualised and approached. Traditional dichotomies such as emic and etic approaches to analysis need not be a dividing line along which research is positioned. Whilst the research design needs to be transparent in its approach, this does not entail that one is more favourable over the other nor indeed that both cannot be adopted within the same research project. Identity can be understood as produced both through positioning with regard to the dimensions of likeness, realness and power, *and* through participants' negotiation of categories and predicates. An analysis that takes both into account adds to the current state of knowledge and understanding not only through its findings, but also by acknowledging the complexity and pervasiveness of identity and its linguistic construction.

Appendix Consent forms

[Subject:] Blogging research

Language and identity in expatriate blogs

Dear [blogger's name or pseudonym]

I've found your blog [blog title] in an expatriate blog directory. I'd like to tell you about a research project that I'm working on, and to invite you to participate.

Who I am and what my research is about

I'm a research student in linguistics at York St John University. As a Swiss national living in the UK, I'm interested in how one's identity is affected by living abroad and how this is expressed and negotiated through language. I'm particularly interested in the stories and reflections that foreign nationals or 'expats' tell in their personal blogs about their life in England. You can find some more information about me and my research interests here: [link to personal profile page on university website].

What my research will involve

I'm especially interested in your blog posts and the comments leading up to your relocation to England until one year afterwards, as well as the title and the 'about' section in your blog. My research will involve an analysis of these entries in terms of how identity is constructed and negotiated in them. The collected information will be used for my PhD thesis and potential projects and publications beyond. My research has been ethically approved and the authorisation code is 150218_Walz_140092297_BS.

If you are willing to participate

If you agree to participate in the research, I will collect all posts and comments in your blog from before your move to England to one year afterwards for analysis. All collected information will be stored securely and treated confidentially, and of course you are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. Finally, if you'd like to hear about my findings, I'm happy to share them with you once my research is concluded.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please contact me on [university email address] to confirm that you are the author of the above-mentioned blog, that you have read and understood the above information and that you consent to take part in the research project. Should you wish to know more about my research before making your decision, I'm happy to discuss any further questions via email.

Many thanks and best wishes

Linda

[YSJ email signature]

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