

*Garbutt Celine, Post Graduate Researcher  
Dr. Gabriela Meier, Dr. Richard Mansell  
School of Education, University of Exeter, Exeter, UK  
ORCID: 0000-0002-8987-1608*

## **VIGNETTE DEVELOPMENT FOR RESEARCH AT THE DISCIPLINARY CROSSROADS OF TRANSLATION, INTERPRETING AND LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

### 1. Outline

My doctoral research (Garbutt, 2026) explores the crossroads between undergraduate translation, interpreting and language education (TILE) from three perspectives, namely, educators working in TILE; language practitioners who have TILE learner experience; and, individuals with both profiles. A constructionist, interpretive paradigm informs my methodology based on existential phenomenology. This paper summarises the vignette research instrument development done as part of this research and aims to:

1) Define and explain the rationale for using vignettes in research exploring the TILE crossover;

2) Illustrate how my methodology informed instrument development, and how I sought to achieve congruence: aligning method and scope of research with participant reality.

### 2. Context of vignette research

The multi-method sequential design of my PhD uses semi-structured interviews together with vignettes. The goal of this research is to identify themes conducive to informing undergraduate TILE teacher development (Massey, 2021).

### 3. Rationale for selecting vignettes

Firstly, vignettes can have a dual purpose in educational research: to collect data and achieve research impact (ESRC, 2022). Secondly, vignettes bring ethical advantages. The distance between a real classroom setting and a hypothetical vignette (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020) can encourage more frank and credible exchanges on what may otherwise be a sensitive subject of revealing personal practice (Sampson & Johannessen, 2020). This is because in vignette research, like with interviews, data is collected in the form of an exchange which can be synchronous or asynchronous (Brinkmann, 2020). However, the exchange centres around a hypothetical scenario, and not the participant. Participants who do not want to focus on themselves can direct their attention to the vignette exercise. Instructions in the vignette explicitly state that all responses are valuable, there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ responses, and the activity is not an assessment. This can reduce risk of embarrassment or harm to self-esteem. Finally, vignettes focus on a specific point of practice. Exchanges reach a level of detail and complexity difficult to achieve in the same time through interviews (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014).

### 4. Defining vignette

Vignettes are hypothetical situations which serve as a prompt to stimulate discussion for data collection in research. Combining different definitions from the literature (Jeffries & Maeder, 2005; Sampson & Johannessen, 2020; Skilling & Stylianides, 2020), here, vignettes are:

- **Aligned with the research paradigm and methodology**

- **Short, simple, open-ended** scenarios
- **Realistic** situations based on **fact or fiction** drawn from practice and literature on translation, interpreting, or language education.
- **Flexible** enough to all participant profiles to identify with the scenarios
- **Open** to teacher and/or learner perspectives
- **Ethically designed** to create a safe data collection environment which respects and values diversity of experience, practice, and individual contribution to this research.

#### 5. Vignette development framework

I combined guidelines from Jeffries & Maeder (2005), Bradbury-Jones et al. (2014), and Skilling & Stylianides (2020) to create a framework. This paper discusses two aspects of vignette development from within this framework: alignment of the instrument with my research methodology, and achieving congruence through purposeful selection of vignette content and language.

#### 6. Method-methodology alignment

My methodology is based on a constructionist world view. This contrasts with subjectivist and objectivist world views. In contrast with subjectivism I do not believe that multiple realities exist. I do accept however, that there are multiple ways to be conscious of and interact with the world and others around us. As a result, while different meanings or truth are possible, they are necessarily attached in some way to an identifiable shared ‘reality’. Shared reality here refers to a system of intelligibility (Crotty, 1998) that constitutes the lived environment of participants. Questions in the vignettes were therefore designed to collect data which (1) elicits meanings participants give to practices in TILE; and, (2) indicates the lived reality to which these meanings are attached.

Secondly, like with objectivism, in constructionism objects can exist outside human consciousness (Crotty, 1998). However, *unlike* objectivism, objects do not contain an inherent meaning or truth waiting to be discovered. Consequently, (1) I do not seek to create a ‘scientific’ instrument that erases my influence on the research, because unbiased truth or meaning do not exist. (2) I am part of the data collection instrument. If complex interactions shape meaning and truth, then I am part of this complexity. Therefore, (1) I engage reflexively and am transparent about my positionality during the vignette development. (2) Vignette questions should generate data indicating how and what shapes participant reality. Data collection therefore aims to capture not just what participants think, but also the lived context shaping their thinking.

#### 7. Congruence

Vignette research requires participants active at the intersection between different disciplines to respond to questions about a hypothetical scenario. A key feature of this vignette development was thus achieving method-scope-participant congruence (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014). Congruence, here, means creating a scenario which makes sense to participants described in language that they understand (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014; Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). One of the complexities of my PhD research was the diversity in participant background, in terms of geographical, linguistic and cultural background, and education. Establishing congruence is an important aspect of vignette development for my research, because, like preparation for interviews, it contributes to ensuring quality of data collected (Kvale, 2011). Below, I illustrate briefly how these two aspects of congruence, setting and language, informed the development of my vignette instrument.

## 8. Choice of setting

Choice of hypothetical scenario in the vignette depends on what can be meaningful to all participants. Pilots and semi-structured interviews found that all participants had experience of university education and of being expert consultants. This justified creating a hypothetical scenario casting participants in the role of expert advisor to a team of educators in a fictional university.

## 9. Purposeful selection of language

Vignette language is chosen (1) to permit all participants to engage fully in the activity; (2) to ‘provoke’ a rich response (Agostini et al., 2024). All participants shared a strong command of English as a working language, were comfortable using terminology used from translation, interpreting and language education, and had very different views and assumptions about practice at the TILE intersection. This (1) legitimised choice of English for drafting the instrument; (2) helped narrow choice of classroom exercises to include in the vignettes down to three, which could also be found across TILE. Choice of layout, length and language drew on existing examples in literature specifically suited for engaging with different audiences within a single project (Campbell, 1996). The developed instrument consists of a single overarching hypothetical scenario with three broad questions, a list of points for reflection and three fictional classroom exercises. Key terms in the vignettes were chosen for their presence across the TILE intersection, and for the controversy they evoked, making them suitable for eliciting rich responses. An example is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Vignette development example**

Scenario	T&I literature (Delisle & Fiola, 2013; Gillies, 2013)	Language education literature (Hamada, 2019; Whitworth & Rose, 2025)
(Hypothetical teacher) Hi everyone, Today we’re going to try an exercise where you will listen to a voice recording, also sometimes referred to as ‘ <b>shadowing</b> ’. While you are <b>listening</b> , you <b>repeat</b> out loud what you hear at the same time.	<b>Shadowing</b>	<b>Shadowing</b> <b>Listen &amp; repeat</b> Pronunciation practice Listening while reading, ...

The three broad questions heading the activity encourage participants to step into the role of expert advisor. The points for reflection which follow give structure to participant responses. All questions are designed to generate data to address RQs 3 and 4. The flow of the exchange was modelled on interview choreography taken from Brinkmann (2020): (1) ask a question, (2) paraphrase for confirmation, (3) probe deeper (repeat 1-3), or (4) move on.

## 10. Conclusion

This paper introduced vignette research to explore pedagogy at the TILE intersection complementing semi-structured interviews in a multi-method inquiry. Using examples, I illustrated two aspects of vignette instrument development: alignment with methodology and congruence. Limitations of using vignette research are not discussed in this paper, but will be explored through future research.

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