

BAAL /Cambridge University Press Seminar 2026

Beyond the Default: Rethinking pseudonymisation in Applied Linguistics research

Programme & short talks abstracts



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Time (GMT+1)	Location	Session
9:30-10:00	C0.02	Registration and refreshments
10:00-10:15	C0.02	Welcome from seminar organisers and the representative of BAAL Executive Committee
10:15-11:00	C0.02	Interactive session: Small group discussions
		Short Talks Session 1a: To pseudonymise or not to pseudonymise? Chisa Matsukawa, University of Lancashire "Researchers' Dilemma: Balancing Recognition and Confidentiality in a Learner-as-Researcher Approach"
	C0.02	Minghao Hu, University of Warwick "Ethical concerns in social media-based journalism research in illiberal contexts: Beyond questions of anonymisation and pseudonymisation"
		Piotr Wegorowski, University of Glasgow "When to think about anonymisation: lessons from an ethics committee"
11:00-12:00		Short Talks Session 1b: The multi-layeredness of pseudonymisation Chengcheng Guo, Regent College London "Between Protection and Exposure: A Reflexive Account of Teacher Pseudonymisation in a Sino-UK Transnational MA Programme" (joining online)
	C0.08	Banish Ikhtlaq, Oxford University Press "Participant Agency and Power Dynamics" (joining online)
	Session available to online attendees	Chi-Jen Lin, National Taiwan University of Education "The Ethics of Calling in Hospitals: A Four-Mode Framework of Naming in Taiwanese Medical Contexts" (joining online)
12:00-12:15		Comfort break
		Short Talks Session 2a: Collaborative representation and cultural authenticity Toru Yamagami, University of Warwick "Who Am I Called? Self-Identity and Name Choice in EFL Learners' Pseudonymisation"
	C0.02	Dawit Dibekulu Alem, Bahir Dar University "Naming, Anonymising, and the Unspoken Ethical Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: A Retrospective Reflection from the Global South" (joining online)
		Siyang Shen, University of Graz "Same invitation, different responses: rethinking participant naming as collaborative representation"
12:15-13:15		Short Talks Session 2b: The pitfalls of pseudonymisation: Silencing and identity erasure Elhadj Moussa BenMoussa, University of East London "When a Pseudonym Silences: Naming, Academic Voice, and the Ethical Erasure of Multilingual Researchers in Qualitative Research" (joining online)
	C0.08	Tausif Zafar, Prince Sultan University, Saudi Arabia "The Rendering of "Mr T": Anonymisation and the Loss of Participant Identity" (joining online)
	Session available to online attendees	Gabe Jackson, University of Nottingham / University of Bristol "What makes for a 'gender-affirming' pseudonym?: Reflecting on the challenges of pseudonymisation in research with trans and nonbinary participants" (joining online)

Time (GMT+1)	Location	Session
13:15-14:15		Lunch Break
		<p>Short Talks Session 3a: Narrating the individual: Reflecting on ethical representation</p> <p>Louise Dearden, University of Birmingham "The appearance of Henry: Ethical representation in ESOL through creative nonfiction"</p> <p>C0.08 Sabina M Perrino, Binghamton University (SUNY) "The Paradox of Invisibility: Pseudonymization, Credibility, and Epistemic Justice in Linguistic Anthropological Research" (joining online)</p> <p>Jason Anderson, University of Warwick "Naming and faming expert teachers: Why and how I didn't pseudonymise the participants in my PhD study"</p>
14:15-15:15		<p>Short Talks Session 3b: Small contexts, high visibility: Confronting deductive disclosure and traceability</p> <p>Marianne Talbot, University of Leeds "Exercising ethical researcher discretion to de-identify participants using self-selected pseudonyms"</p> <p>C0.02 Jing Liu, University of Warwick "When Pseudonyms Are Not Enough: Rethinking Identifiability in a Case Study of Transnational Higher Education"</p> <p>Yanyan Li and Xinran Gao, University of Warwick "Representing Female Researchers with Caring Responsibilities: Ethical Tensions in Pseudonymisation and Analytic Integrity"</p>
15:15-15:30		Comfort break
15:30-16:30	Session available to online attendees	<p>C0.02</p> <p>Plenary discussion and Q&A</p> <p>Professor Ema Ushioda, University of Warwick Professor Maggie Kubanyiova, University of Leeds Professor Steve Mann, University of Warwick</p>
16:30-17:30	C0.02	Reflective session & Closing

Short talks abstracts

11:00-12:00 | C0.02 | Session 1a | To pseudonymise or not to pseudonymise?

Chisa Matsukawa "Researchers' Dilemma: Balancing Recognition and Confidentiality in a Learner-as-Researcher Approach"

The present study explores the impact of a pedagogical intervention in which a learner-as-researcher approach (Tarone & Yule, 1989) is employed on the development of intercultural competence (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009) among second language learners of Japanese and Korean at a British university before, during, and after their period abroad in Japan or Korea, with special attention to its relational aspect (Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021). In intercultural communication research, it is widely accepted that learners benefit from reflecting on their intercultural encounters (Spencer-Oatey, 2022). However, such reflection often focuses solely on learners' own experiences, resulting in a lack of insights from their interlocutors.

To address this issue, the present study adapts a learner-as-researcher approach in which learners interview exchange students from the countries where they plan to study abroad. The learners ask these exchange students to share problematic incidents they have experienced in the UK and analyse them using the rapport management model (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). In addition, learners are asked to carry out the same process with their own problematic incidents. In this process, learners take on a proactive role and develop ownership of the tasks.

To address the aims of the study, the researchers analyse the learners' accounts. This is an ongoing study, and the data analysis has shown that the quality of some learners' analyses using the model is notably high. This has led the researchers to reconsider the anonymity of the data, specifically whether to move from anonymised data (the current approach) to naming participants. However, detailed analysis reveals that some of the reported incidents contain highly private and sensitive information. Consequently, the researchers face a dilemma in balancing the recognition of participants' contributions with the need to ensure confidentiality.

In this presentation, we will discuss these issues in greater detail and aim to contribute to further discussion with the audience.

References:

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11:00-12:00 | C0.02 | Session 1a | To pseudonymise or not to pseudonymise?

Minghao Hu "Ethical concerns in social media-based journalism research in illiberal contexts: Beyond questions of anonymisation and pseudonymisation"

Amid the broader platformisation trend, researchers relying on digital data are confronted with new challenges, arising from the fragility of data anonymisation or pseudonymisation, whereby individuals may remain identifiable through technical traceability and contextual clues embedded within a searchable digital environment. However, existing scholarship pays less attention to journalism research, despite the fact that digital news data often involves identifiable news organisations, journalists, and publicly represented sources. Particularly in the Chinese context, such ethical concerns may extend well beyond identifiability itself by posing personal and political risks to concerned parties within an authoritarian polity, where critical discussions of structural oppression are frequently reframed through nationalist narratives surrounding "hostile Western forces". Drawing on my ongoing research, which conducts a feminist critical discourse analysis of Chinese gender-focused solutions journalism published on WeChat official accounts, this paper reflects on the ethical conundrums that emerge from the critical examination of socially sensitive news discourse. With the empirical research shedding light on how Chinese solutions journalism emerges as a form of professional resistance to state-sanctioned gender politics, its publication risks amplifying the political visibility of the journalists and news organisations involved. Such risks become particularly evident, given that several reports in my dataset were removed from their original WeChat platforms due to censorship and later published on less-regulated websites. Building upon critical self-reflections on the research process, I argue that ethical considerations in conducting critical research on news discourse need to extend beyond questions of anonymisation and pseudonymisation. Decisions about whether and how to name news organisations, attribute authorship, and cite initial news content in such contexts yield new forms of ethics in practice and warrant reflexivity. Taken together, this paper calls for researchers to reflect more on how critical knowledge production may itself participate in regimes of visibility and political exposure within illiberal contexts.

Short talks abstracts

11:00-12:00 | C0.02 | Session 1a | To pseudonymise or not to pseudonymise?

Piotr Węgorowski "When to think about anonymisation: lessons from an ethics committee"

Anonymisation and pseudonymisation of data is often treated as a default position, reflecting the often-misattributed legal position of data protection legislation but also a genuine belief that such practices are essential, demonstrating commitment to ethical research (Vainio 2013). Copland (2018) cautions against allowing participants to retain their true identities in research due to limited understanding of most participants as to what is actually involved in research practices. The practicalities of anonymisation have also received considerable attention. Saunders et al. (2015), for instance, argue for context-sensitive strategies aimed at protecting participants' identities. Others suggested a long time ago that anonymisation of linguistic data does not refer to naming practices only, pointing out the challenges associated with identifying and obscuring relevant details (Rock 2001).

In this talk, using my experience as a member of a university ethics committee, having reviewed close to 500 applications for research, I offer my reflections on the practicalities but also typical arguments for and against anonymisation practices. I want to suggest that an unproductive tension exists currently, with researchers battling against the default recommendations of ethics committees to retain anonymity as much as possible, while trying to justify the perceived benefits of empowering participants. These decisions, at the stage of ethics application, seem misguided. This is not to say that they are not necessary, but too often researchers make arguments without clear rationale. I echo Deakin-Smith et al.'s (2025) call to ground decisions about naming participants in relevant theoretical frameworks, but more importantly, I suggest that the decision-making process needs to be more flexible than a one-off declaration in an ethics application form. The decisions around anonymisation or lack thereof are complex, and as such require time, effort, and perhaps a change of attitude from how ethics committees deal with the issue.

11:00-12:00 | C0.08 | Session 1b: The multi-layeredness of pseudonymisation | Session available online

Chengcheng Guo "Between Protection and Exposure: A Reflexive Account of Teacher Pseudonymisation in a Sino-UK Transnational MA Programme" (joining online)

This paper presents a reflexive account of a specific methodological dilemma encountered during a longitudinal qualitative study within a Sino-UK transnational MA programme: how to pseudonymise teaching staff whose roles were central to participants' narratives, yet whose identities remained highly susceptible to deductive disclosure.

In small, bounded transnational education contexts, teacher pseudonymisation poses particular challenges that conventional guidance does not adequately address. The programme's limited size meant that contextual details — including references to individual staff — could readily identify specific individuals regardless of name substitution. When the researcher attempted to assign culturally neutral pseudonyms to teachers, a reflexive moment surfaced: an unconscious tendency to select male names for male teachers and female names for female teachers. This default move, seemingly innocuous, risked replicating the very identifiability it sought to avoid, since gender itself functions as a social marker within a small, known academic community (Guenther, 2009).

The researcher's eventual solution — designating teachers as Teacher A, Teacher B, and Teacher C, while retaining gendered pronouns — resolved the naming problem but exposed a further tension: gendered language, even without names, continues to carry identifying potential. This paper analyses these iterative, on-the-ground decisions as a window into two under-examined problems: the limits of conventional pseudonymisation in small, identifiable research contexts, and the ways researchers' own assumptions about gender unconsciously shape the naming process in ways that are rarely made explicit (Deakin-Smith et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024).

By foregrounding this reflexive decision-making process as data, the paper contributes a practitioner-level account of what ethically responsive pseudonymisation looks like when standard procedures prove inadequate — and calls for more transparent, context-sensitive reporting of naming decisions in Applied Linguistics research.

Short talks abstracts

11:00-12:00 | C0.08 | Session 1b: The multi-layeredness of pseudonymisation | Session available online
Banish Ikhlaq "Participant Agency and Power Dynamics" (joining online)

In qualitative research, naming and anonymisation transcend mere procedural safeguards, emerging instead as practices through which power, identity, and agency are shaped and contested. This paper investigates participant agency and power dynamics within collaborative and participant-led naming practices, scrutinizing the ethical and relational implications of researcher-assigned pseudonymisation compared to participant-directed self-naming. While conventional institutional ethics frameworks frequently mandate anonymisation for confidentiality, researchers who unilaterally assign pseudonyms risk perpetuating hierarchical power relations, thereby silencing participants' voices and severing individuals from the cultural, familial, and political meanings inherent in their names. These practices can lead to epistemic injustice, depriving participants of control over their representation and remembrance within academic knowledge production.

Grounded in feminist, decolonial, and participatory methodologies, this study investigates participants' lived experiences regarding being named, renamed, or rendered anonymous. It examines how naming choices influence narrative ownership, trust, and the legitimacy of research relationships. Evidence from reflexive scholarship reveals that collaborative naming processes—wherein participants choose, negotiate, or co-create pseudonyms—enhance agency, affirm identity, and reposition participants as co-producers of knowledge rather than objects of study. Conversely, imposed anonymity may be perceived as erasure, particularly within communities for whom names signify lineage, resistance, or communal belonging.

This paper proposes a dialogic, context-sensitive approach to pseudonymisation that transcends universal anonymization protocols. Ethical naming necessitates reflexivity, transparent negotiation, and institutional readiness to integrate participant preferences while simultaneously mitigating potential risks. By prioritizing participant autonomy, researchers are empowered to mitigate power imbalances and cultivate more egalitarian and reciprocal relationships. This argument advances ongoing discourse in qualitative methodology and research ethics, advocating for ethics review boards and scholars to conceptualize naming as a pivotal locus of power that necessitates participatory deliberation rather than administrative default.

11:00-12:00 | C0.08 | Session 1b: The multi-layeredness of pseudonymisation | Session available online
Chi-Jen Lin "The Ethics of Calling in Hospitals: A Four-Mode Framework of Naming in Taiwanese Medical Contexts" (joining online)

This paper reconceptualises naming in healthcare as a layered ethical practice rather than a matter of procedural compliance. Drawing on qualitative observations, medical humanities narratives, and clinical communication practices in a Taiwanese medical centre, it develops a four-mode framework of naming that operates across institutional, relational, and regulatory contexts.

The first mode, Procedural real naming is observed in outpatient and clinical paging systems, where full names are used in spoken calls, while partial masking may occur in visual display systems such as electronic boards, both designed to ensure patient safety. Although institutionally mandated, such practices remain relational, particularly in multilingual encounters where naming carries interpersonal significance.

The second mode, empowered real naming, emerges when patients or family members actively request the use of real names in public or narrative accounts. In these cases, naming functions as authorisation, moral witnessing, and the affirmation of narrative agency.

The third mode, relational or compassionate anonymisation, is commonly used in emergency and palliative care contexts. Culturally embedded identifiers such as "Mr Chen" preserve dignity and familial respect while reducing exposure. Here, anonymisation functions not as concealment, but as relational protection grounded in local ethical norms.

The fourth mode, regulatory full anonymisation, is evident in biomedical research and high-risk clinical documentation, where participants are represented through coded identifiers (e.g., A, B, C). This mode prioritises legal compliance and risk governance, removing relational and cultural markers to prevent deductive identification.

Together, these four modes challenge the assumption that pseudonymisation alone fulfils ethical responsibility in qualitative research. Naming is instead shown to be a dynamic ethical site where agency, power, dignity, and institutional governance intersect. By integrating narrative ethics, care ethics, and applied linguistics, this study proposes a reflexive framework that moves beyond the binary distinction between real names and anonymisation.

Short talks abstracts

12:15-13:15 | C0.02 | Session 2a: Collaborative representation and cultural authenticity
Toru Yamagami "Who Am I Called? Self-Identity and Name Choice in EFL Learners' Pseudonymisation"

Wang et al. (2026) make an important point that researchers should demonstrate care for participants not only by striving to make strong intellectual contributions to the academic field, but also by paying attention to often overlooked ethical issues such as naming practices. Furthermore, based on a review of 181 journal articles focusing on language learners in universities, they examine naming strategies in qualitative language learning research and report that researchers conducting studies in North American language classrooms are more likely to assign English names to participants than those conducting similar research in Japan or China. In this presentation, I introduce and interpret several interesting insights from my research on self-concept perspectives and role models among English learners, with a particular focus on how Japanese high school and university students perceive themselves during a collaborative pseudonymisation process involving participants. I also discuss the types of names that participants who have experienced English education in EFL contexts such as Japanese high school and university students tend to choose when assigning pseudonyms

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12:15-13:15 | C0.02 | Session 2a: Collaborative representation and cultural authenticity
Dawit Dibekulu Alem "Naming, Anonymising, and the Unspoken Ethical Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: A Retrospective Reflection from the Global South" (joining online)

This paper offers a broad, retrospective reflection on naming practices in my own qualitative research as a scholar working in the Ethiopian higher education and school contexts. Like many qualitative researchers, I routinely assigned pseudonyms to participants and research sites — but I rarely stopped to ask why I chose particular names, what those choices meant, or whether participants would have chosen differently.

Looking back across several studies involving teachers, students, and educational institutions, I now recognise that my naming decisions were often practical, unreflective, and shaped more by convention than by ethical engagement. I gave participants English pseudonyms, for example, without considering whether those names felt alien or inauthentic within their Amharic-speaking communities. I anonymised schools as "School A" or "School B" without asking whether that erased meaningful local identity. And I never once invited participants to name themselves.

This paper does not offer definitive answers. Instead, it raises questions that I believe many qualitative researchers — especially those working across cultural and linguistic boundaries — avoid or overlook. How do Western anonymisation norms travel to non-Western research contexts? When does pseudonymisation protect participants, and when does it silence them? What would participant-led naming practices look like in practice? And how might we document naming decisions reflexively, rather than hiding them behind methodological silences?

Drawing on my dual position as a researcher from and within the Global South, I argue that naming in qualitative research is never neutral. It is an ethical, cultural, and political act. This paper invites other researchers — regardless of career stage or disciplinary background — to revisit their own naming histories, acknowledge their unanswered questions, and imagine more collaborative, context-sensitive approaches to pseudonymisation and anonymity.

Short talks abstracts

12:15-13:15 | C0.02 | Session 2a: Collaborative representation and cultural authenticity
Siying Shen "Same invitation, different responses: rethinking participant naming as collaborative representation"

This presentation will offer a retrospective methodological reflection on participant naming in a longitudinal qualitative PhD study exploring the motivational experiences of British adult learners of Mandarin Chinese. While pseudonymisation is often treated as a routine ethical procedure in applied linguistics research, recent discussions have pointed towards approaches that move beyond procedural anonymity towards more relational and participant-centred forms of representation (Deakin-Smith, 2025; Guenther, 2009). Resonating with these conversations, participants in my study were invited near the end of the research process to choose their own pseudonyms, with the intention of creating more space for self-representation after extended engagement across the study.

Student participants responded to this invitation in notably different ways. Some actively engaged in the naming process by selecting names connected to a rarely used middle name, cultural heritage, or their Chinese name within the learning community. Others approached the process more cautiously or distantly, asking for additional time to decide, delegating the decision to significant others, or leaving the choice entirely to the researcher. Notably, preferences for greater distance from the naming process sometimes appeared alongside the sharing of particularly sensitive accounts, including episodes of disengagement and vulnerable personal experiences connected to language learning. In short, participant naming emerged as a negotiated and uneven process through which individuals chose to engage differently with visibility and representation, collaborating with the researcher in varied ways.

Revisiting the research process, I suggest that collaborative representation in longitudinal qualitative research may not be understood as uniformly participatory or inherently empowering. Instead, participants often orient differently towards visibility, self-representation, and researcher involvement. Some embrace opportunities for identity expression while others may prefer neutrality or partial invisibility. This talk therefore invites a more nuanced understanding of participant (in)visibility beyond pseudonymisation, foregrounding the relational and sometimes ambivalent nature of representation in applied linguistics research.

12:15-13:15 | C0.08 | Session 2b: The pitfalls of pseudonymisation: Silencing and identity erasure | Session available online

Elhadj Moussa BenMoussa "When a Pseudonym Silences: Naming, Academic Voice, and the Ethical Erasure of Multilingual Researchers in Qualitative Research" (joining online)

Within qualitative research in Applied Linguistics, pseudonymisation is typically treated as a routine ethical procedure intended to protect participant identity. However, emerging methodological discussions suggest that pseudonymisation is not a neutral act but a representational decision that shapes how participants' identities, voices, and positionalities are constructed within research narratives (Guenther, 2009; Moore, 2012). This paper argues that pseudonymisation can unintentionally erase key dimensions of participant identity particularly linguistic, cultural, and epistemic identity when researchers replace meaningful names with culturally neutral pseudonyms.

Drawing on qualitative research conducted with multilingual doctoral researchers in UK higher education, this study examines how naming practices shape the representation of participants whose identities are deeply connected to language, migration histories, and academic voice. The analysis focuses on moments in the research process where naming decisions became ethically complex: when participants expressed discomfort with Westernised pseudonyms, when pseudonyms erased cultural meaning embedded in names, and when anonymisation obscured the structural inequalities participants were describing.

Using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the paper examines interview data alongside the researcher's methodological decision-making process to explore three key tensions: (1) pseudonymisation as protection versus pseudonymisation as identity erasure, (2) researcher authority versus participant agency in naming decisions, and (3) anonymity versus the political visibility of marginalised voices.

The findings suggest that pseudonymisation may inadvertently reproduce the same epistemic silencing that critical Applied Linguistics research seeks to challenge. The paper therefore proposes a reflexive framework for participant-negotiated naming, in which naming decisions become part of the ethical dialogue between researcher and participant rather than a unilateral procedural step. By rethinking pseudonymisation as a relational ethical practice rather than a technical safeguard, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about ethical reflexivity, voice, and representation in qualitative Applied Linguistics research.

Short talks abstracts

12:15-13:15 | C0.08 | Session 2b: The pitfalls of pseudonymisation: Silencing and identity erasure | Session available online

Tausif Zafar "The Rendering of "Mr T": Anonymisation and the Loss of Participant Identity" (joining online)

This presentation offers a retrospective reflection on my experience of being anonymised as "Mr. T" in a Master's research project conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study explored English teachers' perspectives on the impact of online learning on Emirati boys, a topic to which I contributed as a participant during a period of prolonged professional and personal strain.

While anonymisation aimed to protect identity, I argue that the reduction of my personhood to a generic label resulted in a loss of participant agency and complexity. My contributions were selectively included, summarised, or omitted, highlighting the power dynamics inherent in researcher-led representation. Although I consented to participation, the process raises questions about how voices are curated and whose meanings are ultimately preserved.

This reflection situates anonymisation within broader methodological and ethical considerations in Applied Linguistics. I explore how pseudonymisation can obscure key aspects of identity, such as cultural background, migration history, and lived experience that shape participants' perspectives. In my case, being a British Asian expatriate teacher, a father, and a professional navigating challenging institutional conditions were all integral to my narrative, yet rendered invisible through simplification.

By revisiting this experience, I question whether conventional anonymisation practices adequately balance confidentiality with authentic representation. I also consider how greater participant involvement in naming processes might address these tensions.

This contribution aligns with discussions on participant agency, power dynamics, and the limits of anonymisation, offering an experiential perspective that foregrounds the often-overlooked voice of the researched.

12:15-13:15 | C0.08 | Session 2b: The pitfalls of pseudonymisation: Silencing and identity erasure | Session available online

Gabe Jackson "What makes for a 'gender-affirming' pseudonym?: Reflecting on the challenges of pseudonymisation in research with trans and nonbinary participants" (joining online)

The majority of transgender people change their name as part of their transition to better reflect their identity. For many, this process goes beyond merely evaluating whether a given name is perceived as 'masculine' and 'feminine', often involving careful consideration of family naming traditions, cultural practices, and input from loved ones (Obasi et al., 2019). Trans people's chosen names are frequently inextricably tied to their sense of selfhood and agency, a fact that is often weaponised to deny trans people their identity through 'deadnaming' (Turton, 2021). Asking a trans person to forgo their chosen name in favour of a pseudonym, therefore, can represent a unique opportunity for harm. This issue is further complicated for nonbinary participants, as simply choosing a 'gender neutral' name does not prevent readers from assuming a binary gender based on other contextual factors (Martin, 2023), increasing the risk that an assigned 'neutral' pseudonym may nevertheless be experienced as misgendering. However, pseudonymisation remains a pressing issue when conducting research with transgender participants due to this population's vulnerability to harassment and discrimination (Vincent, 2018).

This paper explores my own experience as a transgender researcher analysing transgender young adults' identity construction across online and offline contexts, balancing ethical considerations with the need to both reproduce participants' self-representation practices accurately and honour their wishes with regards to naming. Working with social media data also necessitates critically engaging with the limits of pseudonymisation, recognising the inherent risk of participant identification when including direct quotations from posts that may be retrieved via search engines. I highlight the pitfalls of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to working with transgender participants and outline instead my strategies for involving participants in making decisions about the representation of themselves and their data.

References

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Short talks abstracts

14:15-15:15 | C0.08 | Session 3a: Narrating the individual: Reflecting on ethical representation
Louise Dearden "The appearance of Henry: Ethical representation in ESOL through creative nonfiction"

This talk explores pseudonymisation as part of the ethical and representational work of research writing rather than simply a procedure for protecting participant anonymity. Drawing on a study conducted in an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classroom with adult migrant learners in the United Kingdom, I explore how creative nonfiction can offer alternative ways of representing participants relationally and ethically within research texts.

Informed by Levinasian ethics (Levinas, 1969) and recent work on ethical encounter in Applied Linguistics (Kubanyiova & Creese, 2025; Kubanyiova, 2025), I focus on several narrative episodes involving 'Henry'. Rather than treating pseudonyms as neutral substitutes for real names, I examine how participants come to inhabit their pseudonyms through gesture, silence, hesitation, spatial positioning, and everyday classroom interaction within reconstructed scenes. In this sense, naming becomes inseparable from the researcher's responsibility for how participants appear - and are encountered - on the page. The episodes discussed are drawn from a larger creative nonfiction representation of the study written as a three-part novel.

I argue that creative nonfiction preserves forms of embodied, sensory, and relational meaning often flattened by conventional transcription and reporting practices. At the same time, I reflect on the tensions involved in representing a learner with whom I had a sustained relationship as both teacher and researcher, including the risk that familiarity may create assumptions of greater knowledge or understanding than may be ethically possible.

The talk positions ethical representation not as the production of fuller knowledge about participants, but as sustained attentiveness to the complexity of their appearance within classroom research. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing discussions about naming, pseudonymisation, and reflexive ethical practice in Applied Linguistics research.

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14:15-15:15 | C0.08 | Session 3a: Narrating the individual: Reflecting on ethical representation
Sabina M Perrino "The Paradox of Invisibility: Pseudonymization, Credibility, and Epistemic Justice in Linguistic Anthropological Research" (joining online)

My narrative-based linguistic fieldwork with Northern Italian executives (2011-2025) reveals a fundamental paradox: pseudonymization aims to protect participants by making them invisible, yet it simultaneously undermines the authenticity of their narratives, fails to achieve invisibility in practice, and erases the epistemic authority of the very voices that constitute the data. When executives narrate their family business histories—recounting generations of glassmaking traditions and the construction of Made-in-Italy brand identities—their discursive performances and storytelling patterns are inseparable from their identities. Pseudonymizing these participants proves not only ineffective but ethically problematic, raising questions about credibility, traceability, and epistemic justice.

Three tensions crystallize this paradox. First, an ethnographic credibility problem emerges: anonymizing the executives whose narratives form the core data makes their accounts appear less authentic to readers, paradoxically undermining the truthfulness of their stories. Second, linguistic traceability renders pseudonymization illusory—narrative style, dialectal features, specific business histories, and publicly known family legacies make speakers identifiable regardless of assigned names. Third, unilateral anonymization enacts epistemic injustice by erasing participants' authority over their own representation, concealing contributions that merit recognition rather than invisibility.

In this paper, I draw on Black and Riner's (2022) care ethics framework, which offers an alternative grounded in transparency rather than bureaucratic "do no harm" conventions. Care ethics requires that researchers engage participants in deliberate conversations about representation, visibility, and naming—centering their agency rather than imposing anonymization by default. This approach acknowledges that in narrative-based research, participants' voices and identities are the ethnographic substance itself.

Moving beyond pseudonymization requires reflexivity: transparent consent processes addressing how participants wish to be represented, participant-selected pseudonyms or consensual use of real names, and acknowledgment of anonymity's limits. This reframes pseudonymization from automatic practice to methodological choice, requiring researchers to commit to care-centered practices that honor participant voice, narrative authenticity, and epistemic authority throughout the research process.

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Short talks abstracts

14:15-15:15 | C0.08 | Session 3a: Narrating the individual: Reflecting on ethical representation

Jason Anderson "Naming and faming expert teachers: Why and how I didn't pseudonymise the participants in my PhD study"

This talk will draw upon my own PhD study and subsequent outputs to argue that when research findings shine positive light on participants and they are fully informed of how they will be represented in the research, they can (and perhaps should) be given the option not to be pseudonymised. My research involved a partially participatory case study of eight expert teachers of English in India (Anderson, 2023b).

During the talk I will touch upon the procedures undertaken to ensure that participants had voice and agency in the project, as well as full oversight on how they would be represented in any outputs of the project (Anderson, 2023a). Only then did they (not me) make the decision to be "named and famed", rather than pseudonymised - and we're all still friends 6 years later!

References

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14:15-15:15 | C0.02 | Session 3b: Small contexts, high visibility: Confronting deductive disclosure and traceability

Marianne Talbot "Exercising ethical researcher discretion to de-identify participants using self-selected pseudonyms"

This presentation focuses on the ethics of decision-making related to participant de-identification using pseudonymisation of 10 teacher-assessor participants interviewed for my PhD project, which investigates the impact of qualifying as a Chartered Educational Assessor (CEA) on teachers' assessment practice. CEAs are highly qualified educational assessment professionals awarded their post-nominal status by the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors (CIEA, 2026).

I needed to reflect my participants' complex and personal contributions in how I referred to them without identifying them. I wanted my participants to feel more in control of their narrative by giving them a sense of power, ownership, and agency over the often intimate details they were sharing with me and the wider world through my research (Deakin-Smith et al., 2024), and self-selection of their own pseudonyms helps with "recognizing their autonomy" (Allen and Wiles et al., 2016, p.160).

The presentation discusses the relative merits of alternative methods of pseudonymisation, such as using codes (CEA A, B, etc), choosing a pseudonym, or using a random name generator, before explaining my decision to ask my interviewees to choose a name they felt comfortable with, but not one that would allow them to be identified. Considering these options, rejecting most of them, and then making decisions is an example of my researcher discretion, as discussed by van Drimmelen et al. (2024). I argue that being an ethical researcher requires ethical researcher discretion, especially in relation to something as potentially sensitive as participant de-identification.

I reflect on the effects of asking my participants to select their own pseudonyms, including their reactions and my retrospective data management of early field notes and calendar appointments, where I used my participants' real names. This presentation shows the importance of the careful consideration of participant de-identification from early in the research process, in all disciplines.

References

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Short talks abstracts

14:15-15:15 | C0.02 | Session 3b: Small contexts, high visibility: Confronting deductive disclosure and traceability
Jing Liu "When Pseudonyms Are Not Enough: Rethinking Identifiability in a Case Study of Transnational Higher Education"

This research offers a reflexive account of emerging ethical questions in an ongoing doctoral study of language policy implementation in an English-medium instruction (EMI) programme within transnational higher education in China. The study involves interviews with teachers and administrative staff, classroom observations, and analysis of institutional and curricular contexts. While participants can be assigned pseudonyms in conventional ways, the process of writing up the case has raised a more complex question particularly relevant to small-group qualitative research: what happens when identifiability is produced not by names, but by the accumulation of contextual, disciplinary, and relational details?

In a small and institutionally bounded case study, information such as programme structure, disciplinary specialism, course content, teaching responsibilities, and administrative roles may be analytically necessary for understanding how EMI policy is interpreted and enacted. However, these same details may also enable deductive disclosure, particularly for insiders familiar with the programme. This creates a tension between preserving the contextual richness required for meaningful analysis and protecting participants from being recognisable within their professional community.

Rather than presenting pseudonymisation as a final-stage technical procedure, this paper reflects on anonymity as an ongoing ethical and representational practice embedded in research design, analysis, and writing. Drawing on examples from the author's current research process, it considers what kinds of information should be retained, masked, generalised, or negotiated with participants. The research contributes to discussions of naming practices in Applied Linguistics by asking how researchers can move beyond replacing names towards a more relational understanding of identifiability, confidentiality, and participant representation.

14:15-15:15 | C0.02 | Session 3b: Small contexts, high visibility: Confronting deductive disclosure and traceability
Yanyan Li, Xinran Gao "Representing Female Researchers with Caring Responsibilities: Ethical Tensions in Pseudonymisation and Analytic Integrity"

This talk critically reflects on the ethical and methodological challenges of pseudonymisation in a discourse analytic study involving a small, potentially identifiable participant group. Drawing on the FECARE project, which explored the experiences of female postgraduate and early career researchers with caring responsibilities, it examines how anonymisation practices shape representations of identity, inequality, and lived experience in qualitative research with socially and institutionally marginalised groups.

FECARE aimed to understand the tensions experienced by researchers balancing academic work and caregiving, with the goal of informing university Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy and improving institutional support. Three online focus groups generated detailed accounts of stress, exhaustion, guilt, precarity, and uneven institutional provision, alongside participants' critical reflections on university cultures and policies.

Because participants belonged to a small institutional community, the risk of deductive disclosure was high. Meanwhile, identity markers such as ethnicity, linguistic background, and cultural positioning, often embedded in participants' names and narratives, were analytically significant for understanding how experiences of academic labour, care, and inequality were constructed in relation to sociocultural background and socioeconomic status. Within this discourse analytic framework, these dimensions were treated not as peripheral demographic details but as integral to participants' meaning-making practices. Consequently, pseudonymisation was approached not as a purely technical process but as an ongoing ethical negotiation (Gerrard, 2021; Saunders et al., 2015).

The talk explores tensions between protecting participants and preserving analytic integrity. While extensive anonymisation risked obscuring socially meaningful aspects of identity, retaining specificity increased identification risks. The study therefore adopted a partial preservation approach, selecting pseudonyms that broadly reflected participants' ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and, where possible, maintained phonetic similarity to original names. The discussion also engages with emerging debates on the politics of (re)naming and the relationship between naming, identity, and researcher power (Deakin-Smith et al., 2025), concluding with reflections on socially responsible research with marginalised groups.

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