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**Race, gender, & language on campus: Black British Female
students' experiences of language at a predominantly White,
elite university in the UK**

By

Olivia Griffith

St Hugh's College, Oxford University

Word Count: 20,000.

Acknowledgments

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Contents

Acknowledgements.....	4
Contents.....	5
List of Abbreviations.....	7
List of Tables.....	8
List of Figures.....	9
Abstract.....	10
1. Introduction.....	11
1.1. Statement of problem.....	11
1.2. Key terms.....	13
2. Literature Review.....	14
2.1. Language & Power.....	14
2.2. Language & Culture.....	15
2.3. Language & Black culture.....	17
2.4. Language & Black identities.....	18
2.5. Black identities in Education.....	20
2.6. Black British Language.....	21
2.7. Black experiences in Higher Education.....	23
2.8. Theoretical framework.....	26
2.8.1. Critical Pedagogy.....	26
2.8.2. Critical Pedagogy & Race.....	27
2.9. Summary.....	28
2.10. Research Questions.....	28
3. Methodology.....	29
3.1. Participants.....	29
3.1.1. Recruitment of participants.....	29
3.1.2. Interview participants.....	29
3.2. Procedure.....	30
3.3. Interview analysis.....	31
3.4. Materials.....	34
3.5. Survey pilot study.....	35

3.6. Ethics.....	37
4. Results.....	38
4.1. RQ1.....	39
4.2. RQ2.....	41
4.3. RQ3.....	49
4.4. RQ4.....	53
5. Discussion.....	55
5.1. Language.....	55
5.2. Identity.....	61
5.3. Online University.....	64
5.4. Limitations.....	65
6. Conclusion.....	66
7. References.....	69
8. Appendices.....	93

List of Abbreviations

Oxford: Oxford University

The university: Oxford University

BLM: Black Lives Matter

BFT: Black Feminist Thought

MLE: Multicultural London English

AAVE: African American Vernacular English

PWI: Predominantly White institution

ACS: University of Oxford AfroCaribbean Society

SES: Socioeconomic status

List of Tables

1. Interview participant information.

List of Figures

1. Participants' survey responses to how they perceived their way of speaking at university in comparison to at home.
2. Participants' survey responses to how they perceived people at the university to speak to them in comparison to others.
3. Participants' responses to whether they expected to be judged at university by the way that they spoke.
4. Participants' responses to whether they expected others to be judged at university by the way that they spoke.

Abstract

This research focuses on the self-perceived linguistic experiences of Black British female undergraduate students at the University of Oxford. Such experiences of a British higher education institution have hitherto been under-researched. Through an online survey (n=14) and interviews with five participants, this study demonstrates the shared and diverse nature of the academic experiences of this group. Descriptive statistics from the quantitative survey data, alongside a thematic analysis of the qualitative survey data and interview transcripts, informed the results for this study. All participants discussed how certain members of the university expected them to express themselves with a specific type of academic language, which some students perceived as overly-complex and others as an expected feature of academia. In both examples, the students found that their language on campus altered accordingly and thus differed from the language they used at home. It was also reported that some participants changed their way of speaking in social spaces at Oxford University in order to fit in with their environment and perhaps to avoid 'stereotype threat'. The way in which the participants related their language on campus to ideas about race and identity is significant. Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) well-known *burden of acting white* hypothesis is discussed in this instance and analysed alongside their proposition of a Black oppositional collective identity. The unique experiences reported highlights how a critical pedagogy approach to education could elevate some of the challenges faced by this group, and subsequently shows how this could improve the educational experiences of other marginalised communities.

1. Introduction

The experiences of Black women are in no manner monolithic. By existing at the intersection of two historically oppressed groups the experiences of Black women are distinctive. However, despite the varied lives of Black women, they are often perceived by society as homogeneous (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Black women are frequently depicted as 'loud' and 'promiscuous', and the '*angry Black woman*' narrative is one that has been reiterated since the end of the transatlantic enslavement of Black people (Ashley, 2014; Mirza, 2015; Kilgore et al., 2020). Simultaneously, Bvuma (2018) suggests that representations of intelligent Black women are limited. Therefore, by exploring the narratives of this group within education, this research aims to counteract the negative, one-dimensional stories surrounding Black women that already exist. This study focuses on academically high-achieving Black British women in Higher Education, in order to critically acknowledge the multifaceted nature of their academic experiences and examine how this intertwines with their language.

1.1. Statement of problem

Based on the Office for National Statistics (2012), 86% of the population in England and Wales is White and 3.3% is Black (African/Caribbean/Black British). In the academic year 2019/20, 8% of undergraduate students in the UK identified as Black and 74% as White (HESA). Thus, it appears that Black students are overrepresented in proportion to the overall population. However on average, 73.2% of White students who apply for undergraduate degrees at UK universities receive an offer, compared to 59.6% of Black applicants (UCAS, 2019). Only 47.7% of Black students who apply to Russell Group universities receive an offer, compared to 66.2% of White students (UCAS, 2019). Russell Group universities refer to 24 highly ranked institutions in the UK that pride themselves on outstanding research and teaching (The Russell Group of Universities, n.d.). In 19 of these 24 universities, Black applicants receive the lowest percentage of offers when compared with other ethnic groups which include White, Asian, Mixed, and Other (UCAS, 2019).¹ Therefore, Black students attending these

¹ Black refers to British individuals of African, Caribbean, or Other Black heritage; White refers to British, Irish, Gypsy/Irish Traveller, and Other White; Asian describes British individuals of Indian, Bangladeshi, Chinese, and other Asian heritage; Mixed

esteemed universities face entering Predominantly White Institutions (henceforth 'PWIs') (Holliday & Squires, 2020).

This research focuses on the language experiences of these students within higher education because this is largely under-researched within British academia. Studies regarding the linguistic experiences of Black (female) students in PWIs are rather scarce and what has been published is frequently situated in America (Taylor, 2015; Holliday & Squires, 2020). The way in which anti-Blackness plays a role in the structural make-up of America seems to be more widely acknowledged, especially in light of the recent Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests as a result of the death of George Floyd (BBC News, 2020), but the same cannot always be said for Britain. The UK Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (2021) published a report which explained, "we no longer see a Britain where the system is deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities" (8). Yet, in England and Wales, there are 6 stop and searches per 1,000 White people and 54 per 1,000 Black people (GOV.UK, 2021), and 8% of deaths in police custody are of Black people despite only 3.3% of the population consisting of individuals who identify as Black (Statista Research Department, 2020).

Whilst Britain perceives itself as distant from the racism in America, similar issues of institutional racism still exist here. Institutional racism was first introduced by Carmichael and Hamilton (1967), and describes a form of racial discrimination that occurs from systems embedded within institutions (Nazroo et al., 2020; Bourne, 2001). For example, the institutional racism associated with the underachievement of Black British school students and their disproportionate rate of expulsion has been addressed in educational research (Crozier, 2005; Tomlin et al., 2013a, 2013b, 2014). It is equally necessary, however, to emphasise the academic successes of Black students and investigate how they navigate educational spaces. As Wright et al. (2021) explain, focusing on the educational successes of Black students offers a new perspective on intersectionality within education. Intersectionality describes experiences of

describes British people of multiple ethnic groups, e.g., White and Asian; the category Other is for British individuals who do not identify with any of the other terms offered, including Arab and any other ethnic group (GOV.UK, 2018).

discrimination that result because of social labels such as race and gender being interconnected (Davis, 2008). Ultimately, it is vital that this research continues to be explored and, because Wright et al.'s (2021) book centred exclusively on the experiences of Black British *male* students, I felt it was necessary to focus on Black British female students. Additionally, as a Black British woman I recognised the numerous benefits (such as insider status and mutual trust) related to researching a group that I identify with (Altorki & El-Solh, 1988).

Moreover, whilst the experiences of women in history have often been overlooked (Hertz, 2001; Waxman, 2003), contemporary research increasingly focuses on how ingrained sexism affects the academic experiences of women and demonstrates the significance of education in female empowerment (Stromquist, 2002; Eisenmann, 2007; Edwards, 2017). Black women experience marginalisation on two fronts: as part of Black communities and as women. Thus, this research aims to contribute to the growing field of Black feminist thought (BFT), which encourages Black women to perceive themselves and their lives in a way that places value on their subjective, experience-driven knowledge (Collins, 1989). Black feminism emerged in the 1960s and continued to grow as the study of Black cultures and women filtered into academia (Dill, 1979). The work of Collins (1986; 1989; 2002) in this field is prolific and she proposes that Black women decode reality differently to dominant groups and therefore, their standpoint is worthy of academic attention. Indeed, Sobande (2019) explains that this perspective equally empowers Black women to articulate their experiences outside of academia. It is important that Black women also express their narratives throughout their daily lives, and through mediums such as art and music.

1.2. Key terms

Before progressing, the following terms require definition. Any mention of Black people in this research refers to individuals of African, Caribbean, or any other Black heritage, and includes individuals of mixed Black heritage. Furthermore, when discussing the intricacies of Blackness it is necessary to consider race. Omi and Winant (1994) highlight that the concept of race, whilst utilised as an indication of biological phenotypes, is inextricably linked to historical processes and social constructs. In fact,

some believe that race is completely separate from biology (Howard, 2010). Haney-Lopez (1994) defines race as a group of individuals who are attached by social and historical features of their ancestry; they argue that terms such as Black and White are entirely social and therefore not related to DNA. Essentially, one's race is not inherent, and this research acknowledges this phenomenon.

Moreover, the notion of selfhood is discussed throughout this study and is used to refer to how an individual defines themselves, and how they outline the parameters between themselves and others (Moon, 2012). The placement of others is integral to the concept of selfhood, because the self is also defined by how an individual identifies similarly and differently to others (Hall, 2000; Buckingham, 2008). Selfhood, the self, and identity are used interchangeably in this research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Language & Power

An acknowledgement of power is integral to comprehending the core meaning of society (Hoy, 1986). Hierarchies have been a defining quality of the social condition since the establishment of society (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Mooney & Evans, 2019; Toelstede, 2020). Koski et al. (2017) define hierarchy as the order of sub-groups within a larger social group based on their authority. Social hierarchies promote the unequal distribution of resources and benefit those that are ascribed higher-ordered positions (Gelfand et al., 2004). Language plays an important role in maintaining hierarchies because it assists in shaping how we perceive certain groups (Evans et al., 2009). Lytra (2016) explains that the power of language in its ability to define group identity is frequently linked to the emergence of nationalistic ideologies at the end of the eighteenth century. From this, language was utilised to distinguish and control different groups; ergo, language is fundamental in constructing social perceptions.

Foucault (1982) explains that this mechanism of power (of using language to define groups) has become embedded into daily life. Communities have been successfully labelled by ascribing a version of reality to them, which the group members know to exist, and which out-group members see in them. Holliday and Squires (2020)

emphasise that such labels are inflicted and kept alive through language. Importantly, Foucault (1982) reinforces the notion that the way one entity dominates over another can be performed through language, but that language is not power itself. Essentially, the way individuals linguistically express themselves carries with it a notion of power that is used to reiterate social hierarchies.

According to Foucault (1982), processes of oppression have been enacted socially, politically, and institutionally since the establishment of Western European societies, and they ultimately shape how we think. Foucault views power relations as being deliberate but, simultaneously, lacking a specific individual with cognisant intentionality (Foucault, 1982; Hoy, 1986). An individual with power is not choosing to implement their authority over another, but instead has become a subject within existing relations of power. This implies that the foundations of society are inherently hegemonic and various groups became the subjects of different positions of power. Hegemony describes the systemic control of one social group by another which is enforced, not through violence, but through cultural, political, and institutional dominance (Ahern, 2017). Hegemony is built on the superiority and inferiority of different communities and perpetuates ideas about social normalcy and dominant worldviews (Williams, 1997; 1983). Language plays a part in hegemony. Describing Black people's speech as "*uneducated*" or "*slang*", places them at the lower end of cultural hegemony. Both the language produced by a community, and the language that is chosen to describe a group of people, are therefore used to enforce hegemonic dominance.

2.2. Language & Culture

The linguists Sapir and Whorf are often cited in discussions of language and culture, and the strong Sapir-Whorf perspective hypothesises that the language a culture uses determines how they think and therefore how they view the world (Sapir, 1929). Whorf (1956) describes the rigidity of language because it encourages a person to adopt a certain perspective; they only have at their disposal a specific set of (linguistic) tools by which they can express themselves. Simultaneously, Whorf (1956) suggests that neither language nor culture acts as a clear predecessor of the other; circularity is

a founding aspect of their relationship. Despite the range of perspectives, linguistic research does demonstrate how language is a vital ingredient of culture and, to some extent, can interact with a community's way(s) of thinking (Burgess, 1973; Moore, 1976; Green & Smart, 1997; Chen, 2015).

Language and culture are also relevant to linguistic sociocultural theory. This viewpoint assumes that the functional qualities of language, that is to communicate meaning to other speakers and form social bonds, are integral to our understanding of language (Mathiot & Garvin, 1975). Ahern (2017) reiterates that a sole focus on the structural characteristics of language limits our linguistic knowledge. Saussure (1986) suggests that the survival of language is dependent on a speech community. People must use language for it to exist. A speech community describes a group whose shared goals establish their collaboration. Their linguistic characteristics, practices of life, and belief systems transpire from their joint understanding (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Gumperz, 2001). It is unsurprising that ethnicity can be at the centre of the joint understanding that establishes a speech community—particularly in the case of diasporic groups. Alim (2016) supports that one's ethnic identity plays a significant part in their language. For example, a child of Caribbean heritage born in Britain recognises, through their primary socialisation, that their speech community consists of other Afro-Caribbean individuals. This child adopts the linguistic repertoire of their community and begins to develop a sense of self. Given that their community is linked by their ethnicity, the language the child chooses to produce can act as a demonstration of their ethnic identity. This situation can, of course, become more complex, once a person — and therefore their identity — become integrated into multiple speech communities, especially if these communities exhibit different, or even clashing, practices. Given that people use language to express their identity and to relate themselves to their speech community (Bailey, 2001), engaging in conflicting speech communities can impact a person's identity. For example, Baez (2002) describes feeling distant from his Spanish identity and Puerto Rican heritage once he moved to the United States in his adolescence, and became embedded in English-American speech communities.

Furthermore, Burgest (1973) discusses language from the view that it is a source, as well as a carrier, of culture. Chiu and Chen (2004) proposed a Culture-Carrier-Context model which supports the idea that culture is conveyed through language. This reinforces that our linguistic choices are an indication of our cultural background and equally that our cultural practices are transmitted through language. Some researchers imply that an individual's language can often be explained by the practices of the sociocultural group that they are a part of (Brown, 2006; Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Joseph, 2016). Language acts as an intricate mirror that reflects a person's individuality, identity, and wider social context (Johnson, 1951; Bakhtin, 1981). Consequently, analysing language in relation to its social purpose provides an insight into the inner workings of a cultural group.

2.3. Language & Black culture

As previously explained, race can manifest as a social process; this section explores this concept in relation to language. Alim (2016) hypothesises that one is not born 'Black', but instead, experiences a process of becoming Black and whereby racialisation (a subsidiary of socialisation) is implemented through language. Given how we actualise race – through various social means, which involve language – 'Black' is a term used to indicate a way of life and therefore a way of speaking. Consequently, social ideologies regarding race and those of language are often shared and ideological linguistic markedness (i.e., difference from the norm) can transpire as a consequence of racial markedness (Bucholtz, 2001). This means that race can be linked to the ways that certain manners of speaking are marked.

Markedness theory stemmed from the field of linguistics to define linguistic features that differ from what is perceived as 'normal' (Wurzel, 1998), and has since been applied to the study of anthropology to explore cultural identity (Ramanujam, 2014). Discussed from this perspective, dominant cultural groups remain 'unmarked' in contrast to groups that are 'marked' because they exist outside the boundaries of dominance and unmarkedness (Battistella, 2001). Groups can be marked for various reasons but essentially it is because some characteristic of theirs has been deemed as diverging from the 'standard'; a standard which has been set by unmarked groups.

Markedness can be racialised whereby the bodies of individuals who are “not white enough” become marked (Bucholtz, 2001: 84). In a Euro-American context the standard is often perceived as synonymous with Whiteness, and so practices endorsed by White-dominant groups act as a yardstick of normality by which everyone else is measured, and therefore marked (Alim & Smitherman, 2012). Through such processes, Black culture and therefore the language associated with Blackness is frequently perceived as ‘marked’.

Attinasi (1997) also articulates that linguistic departure from ‘standard’ English is used as an explanation for ethnocultural prejudice. The variety of English for which we assign the label ‘standard’ — a version of English that was given its title by White, western individuals — is used to discriminate against those whose worldview and cultural upbringing are different from that. Indeed, since explicit racism became taboo in contemporary British society, linguistic judgement emerged as an implicit form of racial discrimination (Phillipson, 1992; Blackledge, 2006). Ergo, language exists at the heart of racialised experiences (Ashcroft, 2003; Wodak, 2008). Nevertheless, language simultaneously acts as a performance of political resistance (Omoniyi, 2009). Language has played a significant role in rearticulating societal perceptions of Black communities and has allowed them to rewrite their own narratives through, for example, the reclamation of terms such as “*nigger/nigga*” (Coles, 2016; St Clare, 2018). Language has therefore also assisted in building strength in a Black identity.

2.4. Language & Black identities

According to Joseph (2016), a person’s identity involves belonging to a community that was established in the past and which has transferred its practices of life through generations. Language is a vital part of this identity-building process, because it is through language that one’s heritage is learned and handed down. The way a group communicates relates to how they choose to label themselves and others, and plays a role in how they express their place within society, which intertwines with their identity development. Given that one’s identity is inextricably linked to the past, to understand the cultural identity of Black diasporic communities is inevitably to discuss the historical enslavement of Black people and the events thereafter.

Black diasporic culture is somewhat dissimilar to that of Black communities who live in spaces where Black people are the majority because, in such places, the cultural hegemony of a White gaze is more literal than figurative (Stephens, 2009). A White gaze refers to “a set of practices that communicates whiteness and reinforces white supremacy” (Rabelo et al., 2020: 4). This phrase describes a reality whereby Whiteness is viewed as a marker of normality by which other communities become racialised, and is rooted in relations of power (Yancy, 2016; Pailey, 2019; Rabelo et al., 2020). Black diasporic culture has been directly born in a White gaze environment. Hall (2006) explains that the “rearticulation of European ideologies, cultures and institutions, alongside an African heritage” led to particular features defining Black (popular) culture (109). Such features include how to speak, how to express oneself, what music to listen to, how to walk, dance, stand, how to do your hair—these became a way of establishing kinship and history in Black communities. Some researchers believe that residing amongst the aftermath of a strong White gaze has contributed to the various forms of Blackness that have emerged in diaspora communities (Fanon, 1986; Stephens, 2009).

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) present what they term, an “*oppositional cultural frame of reference*” whereby African American communities became a collective who, in order to separate themselves from oppressive groups, partially established a cultural identity that was oppositional to that of White Americans (181: italics in original). The way, post-slavery, White groups clustered Black people together under an umbrella of detrimental stereotypes added to the emergence of this collective self. According to Foucault (1982), this form of power assertion centres on the inquiry, “Who are we?” (212). The mass inclusion of all Black people under one identity disregards their individuality. Simultaneously, in being grouped together by the oppressor, Black communities united to support one another and to build networks of companionship that were opposite to those of White communities (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). This oppositional collective identity also filtered into attitudes towards education. Given that Black Americans were historically excluded from so many facets of society – and then, once allowed, remained segregated and were offered access to a poorer

education system, which White societies felt they deserved – African Americans started to associate high academic achievement with Whiteness, and, therefore, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) hypothesise that a lack of interest in education became a feature of Blackness.

2.5. Black identities in Education

A Black American oppositional collective equally emerged because African Americans viewed their oppression by White people to be that of a collective identity. Thus, if a Black student performed well in school or spoke standard American English, they would be described as ‘acting White’, and would subsequently be penalised by their Black collective (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). To ‘act White’ was seen as siding with the adversary (DeVos, 1967). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) explain, similarly to Alim (2016), that because of the social weight of race, and therefore the connotations of Blackness, one can be biologically Black but still rejected by Black communities because of their failure to conform to Black practices. Consequently, high-achieving Black students experienced what the researchers refer to as “the burden of acting white”, as the students attempt to be accepted in PWIs, and yet remain true to their Black identity as it is perceived by their Black peers (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986: 203). Thurston’s (2012) book, *How to be Black*, satirically describes such experiences, and addresses how this collectivity can subtract from the multilayered characteristics that contribute to Blackness.

Whilst this research is America-based, given that America acts as a global cultural hegemony, similar portrayals of Black culture are present in Black communities across Europe, including Britain (Sudbury, 2001). Nevertheless, this hypothesis of Black cultural development is historical and it is necessary to address how this manifests in current Black communities, especially given that culture exists in a dynamic state (Øyvind, 2014). The current study engages with the diversity of Black British students’ language use, despite them sharing an ethnocultural history.

2.6. Black British Language

Whilst the notion of ‘sounding Black’ is inherently arbitrary, it is likely that, amongst British people, such a phrase is not entirely unfamiliar. Utterances of this nature are present in British society and Blackness tends to be associated with a certain way of speaking (Drummond, 2017; Wheeler, 2017). The language used by Black British communities became distinct following the mass arrival of Black, particularly Caribbean, people to inner city regions in Britain (e.g. London) between the 1950s and 1970s (Wells, 1982; Hewitt, 1986; Edwards, 1989). The linguistic features of Black British language, sometimes referred to as ‘Black British talk’ (Tomlin et al. 2014), often involves the transference of West Indian, particularly Jamaican, Patois to Standard British English. For example, *Wagwan* (which means *what’s going on*) and *Bredrine* (meaning brethren/brothers) are terms used by British speakers that have been borrowed from Jamaican Patois (Dębosz, 2020). This variation in vocabulary and grammar from Standard British English that is present in Black/multicultural areas in Britain, most prominently London, has been labelled Multicultural London English (MLE) (Cole, 2020).

Cheshire et al. (2011) discuss the emergence of MLE (sometimes referred to as *Jafaican* because of its links to Jamaica), and explain that this English sociolect emerged from large groups of London residents acquiring British English as their second language. MLE is important when discussing ‘Black British talk’ because, statistically, a large proportion of Black British people live in London and the outer-city regions. According to the Office for National Statistics (2018), 13.3% of the London population identifies as Black, meaning that, 58.4% of people who identify as Black in England and Wales live in London. Given London’s diversity, it is understandable how ethnic background has played a role in the growth of MLE and therefore also why it has become a characteristic of ‘Black talk’.

Torgersen (2012) administered a perception test with London participants and found that they were able to accurately classify various speakers from London into inner- or outer-regions of the city. The participants were able to recognise White-British speakers from Havering (a largely White outer-city borough) as White and classified

multicultural speakers as being from London, even though some of the voices were individuals of non-London (e.g. Birmingham) Afro-Caribbean backgrounds. Fox and Torgersen (2018) further researched MLE by interviewing young and old groups (16-19 years old and 70-80 years old respectively) from Havering and Hackney, an ethnically diverse inner-city borough. The researchers found that there were several linguistic differences between young British ethnic minority speakers from Hackney and young White-British speakers from Havering, whose friendship groups were ethnically diverse, compared with older White-British speakers. For example, British ethnic minorities displayed a greater level of DH-stopping (voicing /ð/ as [d], for example, *them* as *dem*) which is also present in Jamaican English and AAVE. Furthermore, the quotative *this is + speaker*, which was found in the English of ethnic minority speakers in Hackney, was also identified in the language produced by London Jamaicans in the 1980s. A quotative device is used to introduce reported speech (Blyth et al., 1990), and an example of the *this is + speaker* structure is “*this is my mum ‘what are you doing?’*” (Fox & Torgersen, 2018: 202; italics in original). Fox and Torgersen (2018) concluded that it is predominantly young communities, either ethnic minorities or White-British individuals immersed in multicultural environments, who produce MLE. The fact that White-British people residing in multicultural areas shared a linguistic repertoire with ethnic minority communities ties in with the aforementioned idea that race is not inherent but acquired.

Indeed, implicit in the term ‘Jafaican’ is the notion that this manner of speaking is associated with being Black (Kerswill, 2014), despite the fact that other varieties of English also influenced MLE (Kircher & Fox, 2019). Cheshire et al. (2017) emphasise that negative attitudes towards MLE risk becoming racialised and threaten to worsen the existing educational attainment gap present between adolescents, often ethnically diverse, who speak non-standard varieties and those who speak Standard British English. Tomlin et al. (2014) reiterate that many Black British children enter the education system producing ‘Black British talk’ and their schools perceive this as wrong. Whilst the government’s *Teachers’ Standards* for England state that all teachers must promote the “correct use of standard English” (Department for Education, 2011: 11), English that diverges from the standard should not be perceived

as inherently incorrect (Cheshire et al., 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to explore whether – and if so, how – this perceived divergence from Standard English amongst Black communities intertwines with their experiences in education.

2.7. Black experiences in Higher Education

Ethnographies that focus on language within educational institutions highlight how certain manners of speaking are deemed worthy of merit, whereas others are seen as undesirable (Alim, 2009). The high value placed upon ‘standard’ English in academia scrutinises other English varieties and, because of racial history, this linguistic prejudice can correlate with racial markedness. Flores and Rosa (2015) explore the sociolinguistic notion of ‘standardised’ languages and discuss how this concept is bound to “*raciolinguistic ideologies*” which attach linguistic inferiority to particular ethnic communities (150: italics in original).

Research that investigates the stories of African American students at PWIs found that the participants are subject to feelings of isolation and exclusion, which these students perceive to be racially charged (Strayhorn, 2008; Shavers, 2010). Shavers and Moore (2014) conducted 15 semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of Black American female PhD students at PWIs. The racial environment perceived by the participants interfered with the sense of belonging they developed whilst studying and negatively affected their academic engagement. All of the post-doctorates in this study described (what the researchers coded as) “academic masks”, which the participants used as a coping strategy throughout their programmes (Shavers & Moore, 2014: 397). These academic masks involved the students regulating their language and behaviour to control how others viewed them, which they felt was necessary because of their awareness of the pejorative stereotypes associated with Black women; and equally because of the archetypal characteristics that had been placed upon them by their colleagues. Similar examples of gendered, racialised experiences have been reported by Black female academics at British universities (Wright et al., 2007; Cohen, 2020), but a view of such experiences through a linguistic lens is less present within British research.

A PhD dissertation by Taylor (2015) is another example of American research that explicitly explores the language use of Black female students in higher education. The five participants' contribution to the survey, one-to-one interviews, and focus groups highlighted how American expectations of what it means to be a Black woman affected their language. Multiple participants had been labelled as loud or aggressive while at university, and encountered comments such as '*you don't sound Black*', accompanied by their peers or tutors being shocked by their proficiency in expressing academic ideas. Taylor (2015) also identified a theme of style-shifting, whereby participants altered their register, pronunciation, and intonation when speaking in PWIs in order to conform to their environment.

However, Taylor's (2015) study has some limitations. Unlike Shavers & Moore (2014) who calculated interrater-reliability for their interview analysis, Taylor (2015) did not. Taylor (2015) explains that she approached interview analysis holistically, but also depicts how the "less significant" codes were cast aside, which suggests that data she viewed to be unimportant was neglected (78). This subjective method is limited in that relevant data could have been mistakenly abandoned because it did not appear significant in the first coding stages. Equally, by adopting a method of narrative analysis, Taylor's (2015) analysis partially relied on her interpretation of possibly implicit meanings encoded by the participants. Whilst interpretation is an important part of coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006), one must be careful not to over-interpret what has been said. Nevertheless, Taylor (2015) does include direct quotations from the interviews to allow the reader to view her interpretation alongside the original utterance. Lastly, however, some of the interview questions were leading in nature. For example, Taylor (2015) asked, "What role do you think language plays in a person's success in school?" (181). Leading questions have been shown to increase a person's susceptibility to suggestion (Sharman & Powell, 2012), and therefore limit the reliability and validity of a study's findings. Despite these limitations, this study is still valuable in its thoroughness and its attempt to understand the students' experiences. Equally, it is significant in foregrounding this topic within the field of Applied Linguistics.

Importantly, the topic of code/style switching acknowledged by Taylor (2015) has also emerged in other research that concerns how Black people act in PWIs. The term codeswitching first appeared in linguistics to describe how a person uses and/or alternates between more than one language in a situation (Weinreich, 1953). Sociolinguists have since recognised the sociocultural functions of codeswitching and its purpose(s) in social groups (McCluney et al., 2021). As in the studies above and in other research (Glenn & Johnson, 2012; Boulton, 2016; McCluney et al., 2021), Black people have reported codeswitching in order to be accepted by their White peers and to avoid stereotype threat. Stereotype threat describes when an individual of a stigmatised group fears that their actions may be perceived as corroborating a negative stereotype that is associated with the group that they are a part of (Spencer et al., 2016; Trinkner & Kerrison, 2019). If Black people are perceived to speak in a 'Black' way, then they may be linked to other Black stereotypes. Grehoua (2020) anecdotally discusses how Black women raise the pitch of their voices in professional environments in order to be perceived as more friendly, avoid being seen as aggressive, and therefore progress in PWIs. Pitch here refers to "the relative highness or lowness of a tone" (Britannica, n.d., Definition 1). The experience of Black British women being subject to negative stereotypes associated with how they speak has been captured in various ways in contemporary society.²

Holliday and Squires' (2020) very recent study also used the self-reported experiences of 30 African American college students to investigate the racialisation of language in higher education. Their study discloses the involvement of language in the feelings of exclusion experienced by Black students in American PWIs. The researchers articulate how the positionality of African American students affected their experiences with identity and language. They highlight the contrast between the AAVE spoken by the students and the demand for speaking Standardised English as reinforced by American universities. The participants reported an awareness of the negative connotations associated with AAVE and that they felt a pressure to assimilate even in non-

² See Jorja Smith's lyrics featured in the song *Peng Black Girls* stating, "raise my voice, you're gonna say that I'm angry, kiss my teeth and now you say that I'm hood, kid at sixteen you say it's my destiny, drive a range you think I'm up to no good".

professional spaces on campus. Holliday and Squires (2020) explain how these students, similarly to those in Taylor's (2015) study, used code-switching as a tool for resisting stereotype threat.

Given the higher prevalence of such research within America, this study questions whether (or to what extent) similar experiences are present in UK universities, and at the University of Oxford in particular. The University of Oxford opened in 1096, yet the first Black man graduated from the university 780 years later in 1876 (University of Oxford, 2017), women became eligible for full admission in 1920, and in 1935 Kofoworola Ademola was the first Black woman to graduate from the university at St Hugh's college. Moreover, White students make up 76.4% of Oxford's UK intake, while Black UK-domiciled students comprise 3.7% (University of Oxford, 2020).

Ultimately, the role education systems play in perpetuating linguistic norms and adding to dominant social narratives is apparent in these studies and the topics discussed above. Therefore, it has been argued that a shift in the philosophy of education will engender change, and such ideas have been utilised to inform the theoretical framework of this research.

2.8. Theoretical Framework

2.8.1. Critical Pedagogy

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, introduced the notion of 'critical pedagogy' in his 1968 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (published in English in 1970). Freire (1970) suggests that the liberation of the oppressed can only emerge from those who experience such oppression and that, through this emancipation, those who are oppressed equally free those who act as the oppressors. In this view, those who take part in the oppression of others also need liberating; they need to be freed from the dehumanising performance of suppressing others. Freire (1970) describes how those who are oppressed become products of their oppressors and thus dominate other subjugated groups; Freire subsequently explains that the pedagogy he writes of aims to deconstruct such layers of oppression. He (1970) highlights the importance of establishing a pedagogical framework with, instead of for, those who are oppressed;

this pedagogy highlights the realities of societal dominance and engages with the experiences of marginalised communities. Freire (1970) explains that those who make up the societally dominant groups and therefore have access to different forms of privilege — whether they want it or not, simply through their race, their place of birth, or their sex, over which they have no control — are equally dehumanised through the process of oppression and will recognise this truth through critical pedagogy.

Freire's (1970) introduction of critical pedagogy primarily exists in a theoretical state and, since his publication, other academics have explored the possibility of operationalising this theory in the classroom. Kyrlo et al. (2010) explain that by valuing indigenous methods of knowledge and rethinking standardised examination, this theory of pedagogy can be implemented in schools. Aliakbari and Faraji (2011) argue, as do others (Dehler et al., 2001; Kyrlo et al., 2010), the idea that critical pedagogy rejects the traditional structure of education, whereby students, who assumedly know nothing must drink from the teacher's reservoir of knowledge in order to gain information and develop their academic selves. Importantly, the foundations of the teacher's knowledge tend to be underpinned by the perspectives of the oppressors (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). Critical pedagogy subverts this position and this can be introduced into classrooms by allowing students to critically analyse how they are being educated and recognise that their experiences, which may differ from their teachers', contribute to their knowledge. Moreover, teachers can equally expand their own knowledge by engaging with their students; education becomes an egalitarian endeavour.

2.8.2. Critical Pedagogy & Race

Despite the rather revolutionary stance of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, lower class communities were focused on as members of the oppressed; however, critical pedagogy was later applied to race as well. Allen (2004) explains how race directly interacts with critical pedagogy; he articulates how this framework empowers minority ethnic students in recognising how oppressive Whiteness has allowed them to view themselves and their ethnic group as inferior. This theory encourages White students

to attentively analyse their racial privilege and the continuation of racism in education (Allen, 2004).

I will be using this as a theoretical framework, because critical pedagogy is a tool for addressing systemic prejudice and, whilst this study is concerned with understanding the problem, critical pedagogy is useful for actively challenging the issues experienced by ethnic minority students at PWIs.

2.9. Summary

To conclude, this chapter has presented the complex role of language within society and highlighted how such complexities have manifested themselves in educational institutions. By exploring the concept of race alongside language, relations of power, culture and identity, it is clear how the residuals of historical discrimination are present in modern society.

The findings of previous studies were presented to introduce the hitherto reported linguistic experiences of Black (female) students in higher education. However, as formerly mentioned, these are the perspectives of American students; the narratives of Black British female students at PWIs are under-researched. One of the aims of this research is to compare the findings gathered in a British institution (specifically, the University of Oxford) with the existing (mainly US-based) literature. Therefore, it was important for the current study's research questions to concern the students' perceptions of language and identity. Moreover, given that this study was carried out during Covid-19 it was appropriate to reflect on whether the students' perceptions were impacted by the pandemic and the introduction of online teaching.

2.10. Research Questions

As a result of the themes reviewed in this chapter, the subsequent research questions were investigated in this study:

1. How do Black British female university students perceive their own use of language at an elite university in the UK?

2. In what ways, if any, do these students perceive the university setting to influence their language use and language choices?
3. Do these students associate language with creating a sense of self? If they do, how do they perceive their sense of self to be affected by their language use in an elite academic environment?
4. Are there any differences in these students' perceptions of language use and selfhood in the university setting between learning in-person and learning online?

3. Methodology

This chapter explains the quantitative and qualitative methodology used for this research. The target group consisted of Black British female undergraduate students at the University of Oxford who identified English as their first language.

3.1. Participants

3.1.1. Recruitment of participants

In May 2021, I advertised a survey on the University of Oxford AfroCaribbean Society (ACS) Facebook group. The ACS Facebook group is an online community which includes Oxford students who are members of ACS. ACS accepts students of any background but the majority are British students of African and/or Caribbean descent. Advertising with ACS allowed me to directly target the required demographic for this study (see Appendix for advertisement). Snowball sampling was also adopted as a method of recruitment. 18 students who met the inclusion criteria responded to the survey, but four withdrew by closing the browser page. So, a total of 14 undergraduate students, aged 18 to 22, completed the survey and eight of these additionally provided their email addresses to show their interest in being interviewed. Numerical codes such as P1705 (P referring to participant) are used to label the survey respondents who did not take part in the interviews.

3.1.2. Interview participants

The eight survey participants interested in being interviewed were sufficient in representing the various perspectives displayed in the surveys, and so all eight

students were sent an email to ask if they wished to proceed. Following their responses, seven were sent an interview participant information sheet and written consent form. Five of those participants satisfactorily completed their consent forms within a reasonable timeframe, and are introduced in Table 1. The first interview took place on the 26th May 2021 and the final one on the 3rd July 2021.

Pseudonyms	Age	Degree	Degree year	Home	Secondary school
Inez	18	Psychology	1 st	Manchester	Private
Olivette	20	History	2 nd	Essex	Private
Irene	21	Archaeology & Anthropology	3 rd	London	Grammar
Joyce	20	Politics, Philosophy, & Economics	2 nd	London	Private
Amina	20	French & Arabic	3 rd	London	Grammar

Table 1. Interview participant information.

3.2. Procedure

Survey data was gathered over a period of four weeks. At the end of the survey participants were able to opt in to an interview (by writing their email address) and then, from the resulting pool of volunteers, five interviewees were selected based on their ability to represent the range of views displayed in the survey. After I had received confirmation emails from all five interviewees, they were sent an information sheet and written consent form. The semi-structured interviews were one-to-one, conducted online via Teams and lasted approximately 45 minutes each. The interviews were recorded but there is currently no functionality to isolate audio from video recording. Participants were therefore instructed to switch their cameras off before the recording began in order to protect their identity. The interviews were transcribed afterwards and all audio recordings and transcriptions were stored on the researcher's password-protected laptop and backed up on the University's password-protected OneDrive.

3.3. Interview analysis

Transcriptions were thematically coded for analysis. Thematic analysis, which centres on classifying text by themes, was selected as most appropriate for analysing the data (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). This method is often used to analyse individuals' experiences (Vaismoradi et al., 2013), which matches the data in this research. Thematic analysis can be both a constructionist and/or an essentialist method. Constructionist methods investigate how experiences are conditioned by various discourses within society, whereas essentialist methods disclose the personal narratives of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The multifaceted possibilities of this method aligned with the interviews, because they focused on the participants' perspectives.

Practically, thematic analysis consists of becoming immersed in the data (once it has all been gathered), creating preliminary codes, collating codes into themes, revising the themes, and then labelling the finalised themes (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). Coding is an integral part of qualitative analysis and allows the researcher to analyse their data in a significant way (Creswell, 2015; Elliot, 2018). I adopted a process of open coding, which refers to reading transcriptions line by line and coding sections accordingly instead of coding text in chunks (Holton, 2007); this system was selected to avoid neglecting parts of the data. In thematic analysis, the researcher can either focus on a specific set of themes or code all of the data to see what themes emerge (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The latter method is beneficial when studying an under-researched topic and, given the limited publications discussing the themes in this research in a UK context, this process was implemented to ensure that the analysis accurately expressed the experiences of the participants instead of placing preconceived themes onto the data.

The interviews were analysed prior to the qualitative survey data, even though the interviews were administered afterwards, because the interview data was both the main focus of this research and more qualitatively rich. Five central themes were

identified, which were labelled as follows: 1) Language, 2) Oxford University, 3) The Black Experience, 4) Identity, and 5) Covid-19 (see appendix for the full coding framework). The labels composed are written in simple language because, as advised by Garrison et al. (2006), overly complex labels can negatively interfere with reliability and validity. Anderson et al. (2001) also suggest that the aim of a coding framework is to ensure it can be explicitly understood and applied, with relative ease, to the data by multiple coders. This was important because a colleague used my coding framework as a measure of interrater-reliability (explained below).

Both a semantic and latent approach was utilised to identify the themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that a semantic approach recognises explicit, surface level themes. A latent approach involves an element of interpretation and implicit meanings are identified. A disadvantage of latent-level analysis is the possibility of misinterpretation on the part of the researcher. Nonetheless, a significant characteristic of thematic analysis is assuming a reflexive role as a researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Reflexivity describes an iterative approach whereby the researcher acknowledges their subjectivity in order to recognise how their biases influence their analysis. This can involve reporting one's bias in a journal preceding data collection (which is the method I implemented; see appendix 7.) and, in doing so, aims to increase transparency regarding possible bias (Rasmussen et al., 2016; Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016).

Pavlenko (2007) argues that thematic analysis is limited because it depends on codes recurring and that the source of codes is often unclear. To counteract both of these limitations, all codes that emerged were analysed instead of analysing only those codes which recurred in the data. Moreover, the codes were sourced directly from the interviews; no pre-existing models/themes were used for analysis. Whilst certain themes were likely to arise because of the research questions (e.g. language use), the manner in which participants articulated their experiential perspectives was not predetermined and thus all themes that arose were of value and analysed accordingly.

Furthermore, I implemented a system of reliability checking to reduce subjectivity bias in my coding framework. Assessments of reliability are a vital component of developing a coding system (Mikhaylov et al., 2012). Hayes and Krippendorff (2007) describe coding reliability as a moment whereby the same data elicits the same codes within “a tolerable margin of error” (78). Whilst some researchers advocate that reliability measures have no place in qualitative research, because they are inherently quantitative (Hruschka et al., 2004), low reliability significantly impacts the validity of research (Garrison et al., 2006) and so I chose to incorporate a reliability assessment into my analysis. A colleague coded a sample of my data with my coding framework, which follows an interrater-reliability procedure. Interrater-reliability measures the extent to which more than one coder agrees on which codes are used to label a specific sample of data (Garrison et al., 2006). Mikhaylov et al. (2012) explain that an 80% match in codes between multiple coders is widely recommended. Two consecutive pages from each interview were selected (using a random number generator) for the interrater-reliability sample. My colleague also received my coding framework so that she had a greater understanding of what each code represented. Whilst one full interview would have been beneficial in providing my colleague with a more contextualised picture of a single participant, because of the diverse themes that arose in each interview, certain codes were not present in some interviews at all. Subsequently, I chose to include five extracts in the sample to aim for optimal coding reliability assessment (by ensuring that as wide a range of codes were represented in the reliability sample as possible).

My colleague identified 73 codes in the sample. There was 100% interrater agreement between the codes my colleague had identified and how I had applied these same 73 codes. However, the total number of codes I applied across the sample was 87. Consequently, there was an 84% interrater match between our codes from the outset, which is above with the 80% benchmark suggested by Mikhaylov et al. (2012). Perhaps this difference transpired because I was much more familiar with the data and the coding framework. After all, the framework consists of 68 codes, which is a significant amount of information to read, digest, and then immediately apply to a ten-page transcription document. Another method of reliability assessment would have been to

personally recode a sub-sample of transcripts after a certain time period (i.e. allowing intrarater-reliability to be calculated); nevertheless, there is merit in having a different perspective. The individual selected was appropriate because she was a fellow applied linguistics colleague who has conducted empirical research. She is also a White British woman at the University of Oxford and so is familiar with the academic environment in which the participants are located and some of the topics addressed in this study. Furthermore, her out-group status adds to the fact that her perspective was different to mine.

3.4. Materials

The first section of the survey included introductory questions, such as participants' age, and their SES. De Vaus (2014) explains that surveys should begin with concrete questions before leading to open-ended, abstract questions, which confirms the layout for this survey. The second part of the survey consisted of questions specific to participants' linguistic experiences with multiple-choice options in the form of a Likert scale (see appendix 4.). I chose to implement Likert scales because they are frequently used to quantify affective variables (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). Given that the topics regarded participants' experiences, the survey had to capture respondents' opinions and therefore a Likert scale format was appropriate. Stem statements were written using simple language and avoided double-barrelled aspects (when a statement addresses more than one matter) to ensure that they were easy to understand (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Nemoto and Beglar (2014) explain that a Likert scale should incorporate four to six options and that a surplus of six is seldom justifiable. Accordingly, I chose to implement four- and five-option Likert scale questions. Johns (2010) warns of acquiescence bias, which describes respondents' inclination to agree with stem statements, which is why *strongly disagree* was the first option for scales regarding level of (dis)agreement. Despite this potential limitation, I found Likert scale formats less leading than direct questions. For example, some stem statements were inspired by Taylor's (2015) survey questions such as "did you expect to be judged by others

because of the way you speak?” however I reframed this inquiry to reduce the possibly leading nature of this question (187).

My Likert scale also included a neutral option, articulated as *I don't have a view on this*, which meant participants were not coerced into (dis)agreeing with something they had no genuine opinion on (Johns, 2010). All Likert questions were followed by a textbox that prompted participants to explain the reason(s) for their choice(s). Respondents had the opportunity to explain their options because open questions provide deeper insights into participants' feelings (Nunan, 1992; Turner 1993). Descriptive statistics were drawn from the quantitative survey data (the Likert scale responses) in order to reinforce and/or contrast with the interview data.

I administered semi-structured interviews to understand participants' own experiences. This interview format allowed for comparability between interviews but also ensured that participants were not led towards certain conclusions (May, 2011). Whilst the entirely subjective and situational nature of interviews can be seen as a limitation (Taylor et al., 2016), this research focuses on participants' perceptions of reality and therefore utilising interviews was necessary. Interviews are an extremely beneficial method for exploring personal perspectives and will likely continue to be an integral part of qualitative research (Talmy, 2010; Taylor et al., 2016).

All interviews began with open questions, asking participants to recall their experiences of arriving at Oxford. According to Robson and McCartan (2016) it is useful to start interviews in a conversational style with warm-up questions to make the participants feel comfortable before discussing sensitive topics. The interviews also meant participants could elaborate on their survey responses, and allowed for relevant follow-up questions. My role as the interviewer, as well as asking questions, was to listen to participants, provide prompts to guide conversation, and encourage further detail in participants' explanations when necessary. Taylor et al. (2016) articulate the importance of remaining non-judgmental, listening attentively, and displaying a sincere interest in the participants' stories, which explains my attitude as interviewer.

3.5. Survey pilot study

A prototype of the survey was distributed to a small number of undergraduates from St Hugh's college at Oxford University via a WhatsApp group chat. I distributed the pilot on a WhatsApp chat where the number of Black British female undergraduates was small, as ideally those students would remain eligible to take part in the main study. The pilot was only distributed amongst undergraduates because I wanted the pilot participants to overlap with the intended participants in some manner. It was important for the pilot demographic to be similar to the target demographic in terms of university context, to ensure that the feedback was as useful and relevant to the context of the main study as possible.

I did not target Black female students in the pilot, since this might have reduced the size of my actual sample in the main study, given the limited pool of potential participants. Whilst Thabane et al. (2010) suggest that the pilot sample should target the exact same demographic as the main study, van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001) explain that main study participants may respond differently in the official survey if they encounter the intervention beforehand. I did not want to skew possible responses by encouraging potential main study participants to complete the pilot. This approach has limitations because it could be argued that it is worth having pilot participants who identify with the target demographic, but I felt that a shared academic context was sufficient for understanding the appropriateness of the survey, while equally avoiding the already limited potential target demographic.

The purpose of the pilot was to test the appropriateness of the survey. Doody & Doody (2015) highlight the importance of pilots in their ability to assess the effectiveness of the researcher's intended data collection. Therefore, I used the pilot to assess how successfully the questions elicited the relevant answers. Rich qualitative data was immediately present in the pilot responses, which demonstrated the effectiveness of the survey in drawing out applicable, interesting answers from the participants. For example, multiple participants perceived a structural linguistic difference between the way they spoke at home compared to at university. This rich data reassured me that

the questions were appropriate, and did not need to be changed for the official research.

The pilot included an additional feedback section asking participants how easy the survey was to fill out, whether the questions were easy to understand, whether the length of the survey was appropriate, and whether they had enough space to explain their answers. The target sample size for the pilot survey was five, and five participants completed the survey within one week. All five participants agreed that the survey was easy to fill out and that there was enough space to explain their answers. Four out of the five participants also confirmed that the questions were easy to understand and that the survey was of an appropriate length. The participant who disagreed with these two statements explained that they found the *'please explain your answer'* textboxes to be vague and would have liked more guidance on what they were expected to write. Consequently, I rearticulated the prompt and wrote *'please explain the reason for your choice(s)'* and provided more detail in parentheses that was relevant to each question. However, I refrained from providing examples, because I did not want to unintentionally suggest particular answers; according to De Vaus (2014), question instructions should remain 'general' and not leading. It was noted that some participants wrote rather short explanations in the textboxes and so an introductory sentence was added to reassure participants that there was no right or wrong response and to encourage them to give as much detail in their answers as they felt they had time for; this was intended to prompt longer explanations but also not to deter those who were completing the survey within a restricted time frame.

3.6. Ethics

Informed consent was gathered from all participants prior to their participation in the survey and (if appropriate) the interview. The first section of the online survey consisted of a detailed ethics participant information statement (see appendix). Students then had to confirm that they were over the age of 18 years and that they agreed to participate in the survey. If either/both of these consent criteria were not confirmed by the participant, the survey automatically closed. Survey participants had

the option to remain anonymous if they chose not to register their interest in being interviewed.

Participants who provided their email addresses in the survey were no longer anonymous. Their email addresses were removed from the main dataset and stored separately in an Excel file on the researcher's password-protected laptop, backed up to my folder on the University of Oxford's password-protected OneDrive. The email addresses were not shared with anyone and were only used to correspond with interviewees. For the participants who left their email addresses, a unique identifying number was created so that their email address could be matched to their survey responses (this method of identity protection is supported by Eynon et al., 2017). This allowed me to ensure that the interviewees were a representative sample of the survey, and to ask follow-up questions during the interviews about participants' survey answers. The unique identifier was stored with the email addresses of the relevant respondents separately from the main dataset, so that the main dataset remained anonymous.

Participants who confirmed that they wished to be interviewed were emailed a participant information sheet and written consent form, which they had to complete to participate (see appendix 5 & 6). It was made explicit to all students that their participation was completely voluntary and they could withdraw from the study—survey respondents by leaving the browser page and interviewees by informing me of this decision at any point. Any abandoned surveys were discarded and any data gathered from interviewees who chose to withdraw was permanently deleted using [filesrecovery.com](https://www.filesrecovery.com/). The deadline by which participants could withdraw any information they had contributed was 13th July 2021, prior to my thesis being submitted.

4. Results

The results in this chapter will be presented in line with the research questions for ease of comprehension. Those who experienced both teaching formats answered questions in relation to both online and in-person teaching and so there are 14 survey responses to questions relating to online university and only 11 for in-person

university. One of the interviewees had experienced online only teaching, and the remaining four interviewees discussed both their online and in-person university experiences.

4.1. How do Black British female university students perceive their own use of language at an elite university in the UK?

The way in which the survey participants perceived their way of speaking at home compared to university is displayed in Figure 1. No participants perceived their way of speaking at home to be the same as how they spoke at university. This suggests that the participants' language differed depending on their environment. Equally, this begins to create links with RQ2, because perhaps it is the university setting which has influenced this difference.

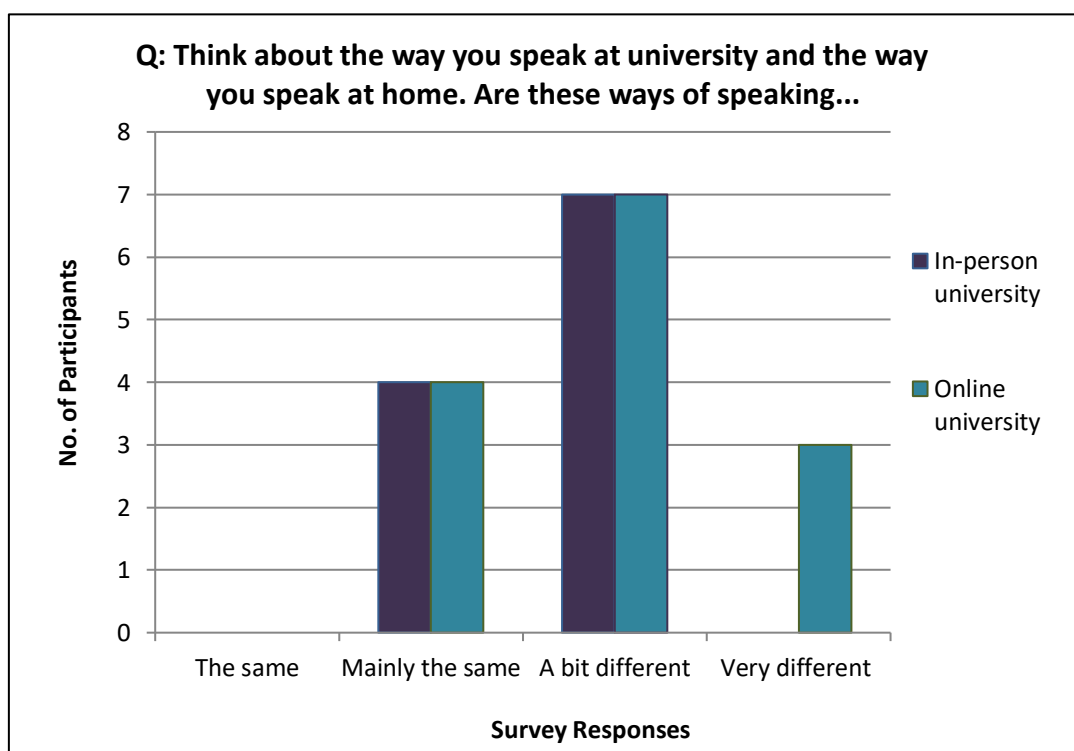


Figure 1| Participants' survey responses to how they perceived their way of speaking at university in comparison to at home.

Secondly, in Figure 1, three participants identified their way of speaking at home and online university as *very different*, which no participants selected in relation to in-person university. Two of these three participants had also experienced in-person

teaching, and so recognised a contrast between how they spoke at in-person university and online university. These two respondents selected *mainly the same* and *a bit different* in regards to how they spoke at in-person university compared to at home.

Two respondents indicated that they perceived their language use at the university to include different lexical choices compared to when they were at home, because they felt more comfortable in their home environments. Three other participants shared this experience, but said that they did this because of intelligibility reasons. Amina perceived her use of language at online university to be “more RP” to ensure that she was clearly heard. During her interview, she further described how she “over-enunciated” at online university. Another survey participant wrote, “I am much less likely to contribute to things online and therefore when I do speak I feel more strained” (P04)³. Olivette disclosed a similar experience as she articulated how her way of speaking had become “stilted” at online university.

Additionally, in the interviews, Inez explained that she perceived herself to speak with a reduced amount of slang whilst at Oxford. Joyce similarly perceived a tendency to limit her use of slang (slang which she associated with London), and having to “tone it down” when speaking with friends at Oxford. She mentioned that she refrained from using certain slang vocabulary to ensure mutual intelligibility. Furthermore, Joyce, Olivette, Irene, and Amina all said that their language on campus displayed a higher degree of formality. Specifically, Amina perceived her use of language in social spaces at Oxford to be “a bit more intentional” compared to at home.

Irene perceived her pitch to be noticeably higher whilst at university. Irene felt that she adopted this way of speaking at Oxford because she was not “automatically comfortable” with people at the university. Whilst she suggested that increased comfort with a person at Oxford reduced her need to raise her pitch, Irene also described how her university friends had commented, “You talk differently when you’re around your Black friends”. In fact, both Irene and Inez remarked on perceiving

³ These numerical codes are used to label the anonymous survey respondents.

themselves to “switch” between Oxford settings on the one hand and, on the other hand, home environments and places where they felt wholly comfortable (Irene; Inez).

Essentially, a trend emerged which showed that all participants perceived their use of language at Oxford University to diverge from their use of language at home. If we view the students’ language at home to be a marker of their respective normalities, the fact that they perceived a difference in their language at Oxford implies that this environment influenced this change, which links to RQ2.

4.2. In what ways, if any, do these students perceive the university setting to influence their language use and language choices?

In answering RQ1, it is apparent how the students’ perceptions of their language use at Oxford was influenced by the university setting. To first understand how the participants perceived the language landscape at the university, we must look to Figure 2. Figure 2 presents how the participants perceived members of the university to speak to them compared to how they spoke to others.

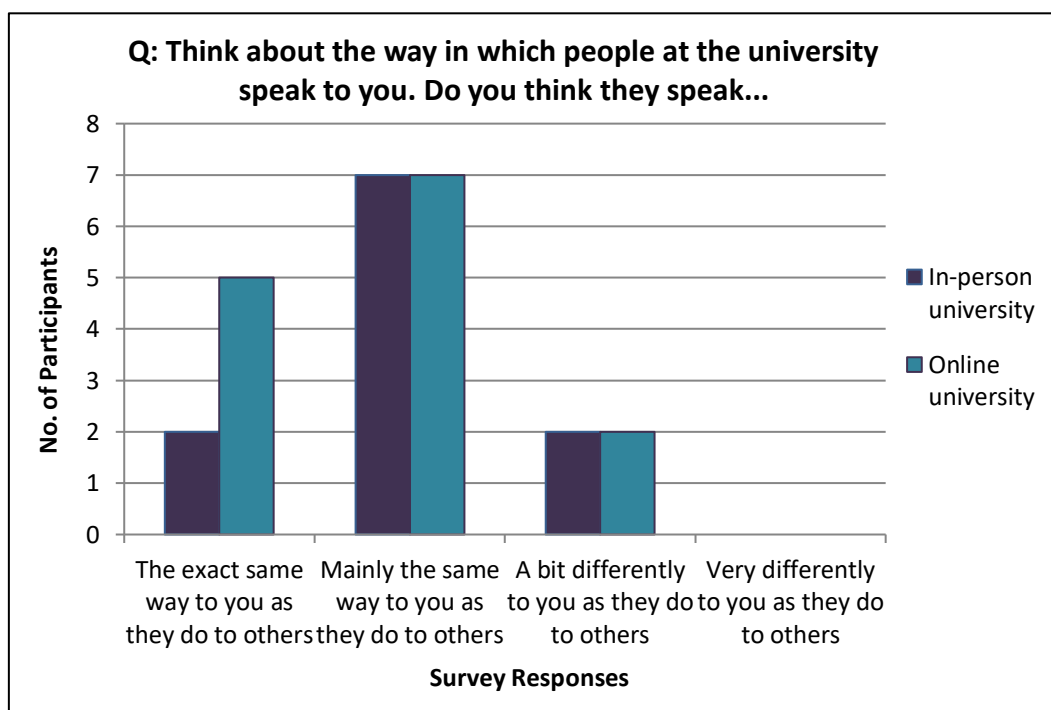


Figure 2. Participants’ survey responses to how they perceived people at the university to speak to them in comparison to others.

No participants felt that people at the university spoke very differently to them compared to how they spoke to others. Therefore, the difference that some of the participants perceived was subtle. Most of the students felt that people at the university spoke mainly the same to them as they did to others, with seven respondents selecting this option in relation to both in-person and online university. Importantly, the seven people who selected 'mainly the same' for in-person university are not the exact same seven people who chose this answer for online university. Only four respondents selected 'mainly the same' in response to both in-person and online university.

Moreover, only one of the three additional participants who perceived others at online university to speak exactly the same way to them as they did to others had only experienced online university. Therefore, the differences in this graph (between the number of participants who selected 'the exact same' for in-person and online university) cannot be explained by the fact that three participants only experienced online university. For example, one student selected 'mainly the same' for in-person university, and then selected the 'exact same way' for online university. P04 attributed this experience to the fact that during in-person classes others are receiving visual input alongside the way that she used language; she explained, "people tend to assume my background and upbringing based on things like my hair so I feel like I'm sometimes spoken to differently in person" (P04 assumedly had her camera off during online tutorials).

Furthermore, P01 described instances where members of the university had attempted to "code switch because they know I'm from London (Black). Sometimes it's a bit cringe". P03 shared this experience and explained that people at Oxford sometimes try to "match my slang (bit weird)". Amina expressed that people at the university patronised her more frequently, but she (likewise to P04) perceived this to be less apparent at online university because "interactions are possibly more standardised because there's less to go off in terms of how you relate to someone".

Throughout the qualitative data, it is clear that the majority of participants perceived the university environment to influence their linguistic experiences. Whilst three participants perceived themselves to naturally speak in a similar way to their Oxford peers and thus not feel that the university had impacted their use of language, this experience is not representative of the average participant narrative. Joyce was one of the participants who felt that her use of language had remained consistent whilst at the university and that altering how she spoke for academic settings was to be expected, and was a shared experience of most students. However, Joyce also remarked that “there are some people who definitely always sound like they’re in an academic setting, and I’ve definitely encountered quite a few people like that”. Olivette and Amina also referred to students who naturally spoke in a manner that aligned with the academic language that was expected at Oxford; Amina described how people spoke with a “finesse telephone voice”. Similarly, Irene stated that private school students with limited student debt

“Were already doing half of the things that Oxford expects you to do before they came here. So I don’t think like they were changing themselves in any way, and I think like a lot of the Black people that I’ve met, I don’t think necessarily change themselves in a tutorial setting, but it’s clear that they’re not wholly themselves”.

Another narrative that emerged in the survey that was not shared by many but is worth noting is how one participant depicted that London and/or non-White communities at the university had influenced her way of speaking. P1705 explained that she was raised in “predominantly White, middle-class areas” and so, by comparison, she was more frequently in London and/or ethnic minority spaces at Oxford, and she felt that this setting encouraged her to adopt MLE. MLE was the exact term used by P1705, and this is the only time in all of the data that a participant uses this term to describe theirs or others use of language. Instead of using MLE, most participants described using a repertoire of slang which they associated with speaking in a London manner.

Conversely, eight survey respondents articulated that their way(s) of speaking had altered in response to the expectations that some members of the university held regarding how one is supposed to speak. P01 summarised, “in Oxford settings, academically and socially, you usually feel the need to speak ‘proper’ English, minimal slang”. One survey respondent explained that the university has a raised awareness of how people speak and therefore, as a student, she felt she had to apply more conscious thought to how she produced language in university settings. Importantly, ‘Oxford University’ was personified by four of the interviewees and one of the survey respondents. Whilst these five participants distinguished between different tutors and students, they also used ‘the university’ to personify the actions taken by higher-up administrative individuals who they perceived to be representative of the values upheld by Oxford University. An example of such actions articulated by Amina was “the fact that they won’t take down Cecil Rhodes”.⁴ Irene spoke about how she was positively impacted by tutors who “made me realise that I don’t actually have to conform to this like academic jargon”, but that those who were the opposite to this “represent the college that I go to. I associate them with like Oxford at large” and that essentially “Oxford represents a system of intellectual oppression” (this personification of Oxford is discussed in the following chapter).

Moreover, all five interviewees discussed the Oxford-specific language that they encountered when they first arrived. Irene expressed the use of vocabulary such as “tute”, “rad cam”, and “bod”⁵, which students feel they must adopt in order to be perceived as ‘real’ Oxford students. Irene also felt that, in order to be taken seriously, for others to feel as though what you have said carries meaning, you must produce utterances with “unnecessarily convoluted words”. Likewise, Olivette perceived herself to speak very differently to the “stereotypical Oxford person” and she subsequently (unconsciously) adjusted her manner of speaking. Olivette described how she only recognised that her way of speaking had been influenced by Oxford when she first went home and could identify a difference in her language. Olivette continued to articulate how academic spaces at Oxford demand that you verbally express yourself

⁴ <https://rmfoxford.wordpress.com/>.

⁵ These refer to tutorials, the Radcliffe Camera library, and the Bodleian libraries.

with particular academic lexis, which contrasted with what she had previously experienced; she stated, “In the beginning I found it really hard. I didn’t really enjoy it because I just don’t naturally think that way, and I don’t naturally speak that way”. This aspect of the university environment captured why Olivette perceived her use of language at Oxford to be significantly ‘posher’ compared to at home. Olivette provided the two following lexical choices as examples of how her vocabulary had been influenced by Oxford: *spenny* (meaning expensive) and *shag* (meaning to engage in sexual intercourse). Olivette explained that such vocabulary was produced unconsciously but that she perceived it to be “gross” when she used this language.

This experience is also shared by Amina who illustrated that when she was at Oxford she “was on the phone to someone and then just like listened to myself and I was like, oh, that sounds really posh and I don’t really speak like that, and it was just a bit weird”. Inez also depicted how the university setting had affected her lexical choices, for example she said *lotion* instead of *cream* because she recognised that this was more frequently used in social/residential spaces on campus. When questioned as to why she felt a need to make such a marginal change, Inez attributed it to feeling it was necessary to fit in. Perhaps the university influenced the language of the participants because they felt a pressure to conform to their environment because they feared being judged if they spoke in a way that was natural to them.

Figures 3 and 4 capture whether the participants expected themselves and others to be judged at the university by the way that they or others spoke. In Figure 3, most participants disagreed with the statement ‘I expect to be judged at the university by the way that I speak’ in regards to online university but contrastingly agreed with the same statement in relation to in-person university. Even though more participants perceived themselves to speak very differently at online university compared to at home, more students perceived people at online university to speak to them in exactly the same way as they did to others and expected the environment to be less judgemental.

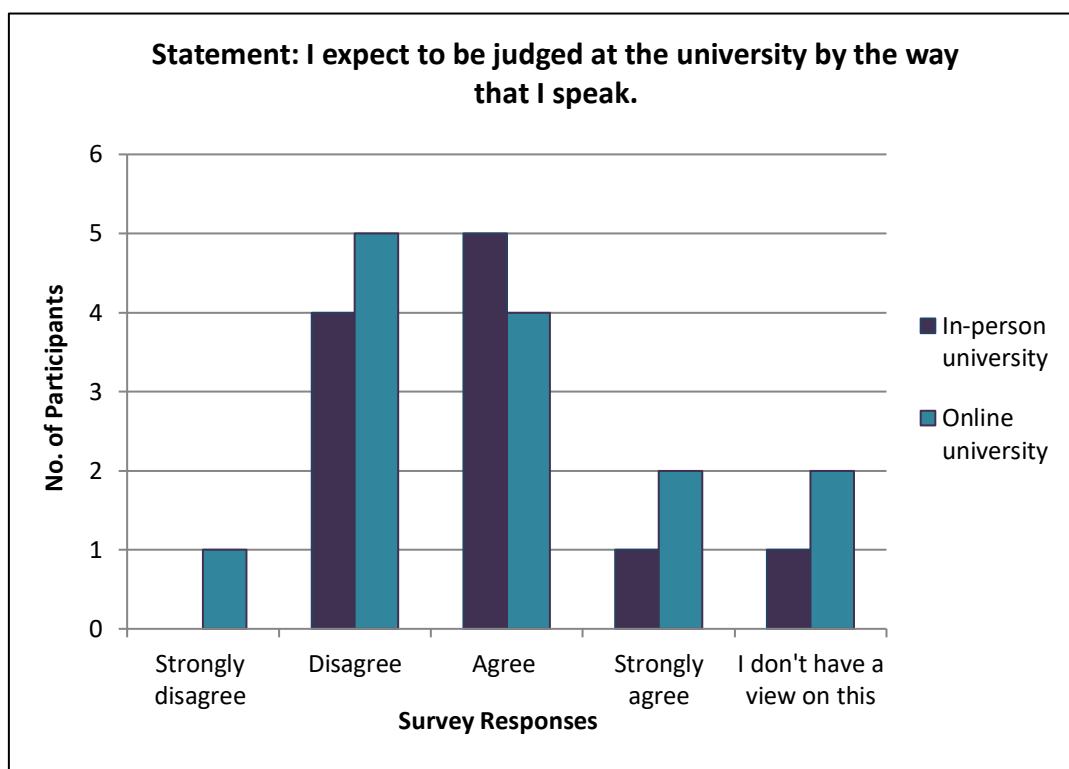


Figure 3. Participants' responses to whether they expected to be judged at university by the way that they spoke.

This relates to the aforementioned data where participants felt that it was more difficult to make judgements on an individual you are encountering online. However, of the 11 respondents who had experienced both methods of teaching, 10 selected the same response for both teaching formats. The one participant who differed from this trend agreed with the statement in regards to in-person university, but selected that she did not have a view on the statement in respect of online university. Therefore, most of the differences that transpired for this question between in-person and online university can be attributed to the three participants who had experienced online teaching only.

The qualitative data collected explained how the participants felt that they were judged at the university and provided an insight into why they subsequently perceived their language to have changed whilst at Oxford. Four survey respondents perceived their intelligence to be underestimated if they spoke, at the university, in a way that was natural to them. One of these four participants explicitly related her race to this phenomenon: she wrote, "I assumed that people will judge how well I can express my

thoughts in a tutorial because I assume they think I'm not smart because I am Black" (P01). This speaks to wider societal stereotypes of Black people being unintelligent (Mgadmi, 2009); this is something that other participants also commented on. In the survey, when asked whether she thought people assigned her to an ethnic group when they heard her speak, P06 answered "I think that 'being able to do so' comes from prejudices that Black people speak badly or in a certain way but I speak quite well and so these people don't apply these prejudices to me". The way that P06 wrote "but I speak quite well" itself carries the presupposition that certain varieties are bad and that others (here, a standard/academic register) are good. Although this participant commented on the problem of prejudices based on how people speak, it seems she has perhaps herself internalised these prejudices and is reproducing them (even if subconsciously).

Somewhat similarly, Irene related race to her expectations of being judged based on her use of language. She disclosed that when she first arrived at Oxford she expected to be judged by the way that she spoke and believed that, as a result, she would be treated differently in both academic and social spaces on campus. Despite Irene realising that "my voice cannot negate what I've said if what I've said is of value", she still perceived herself to speak in a certain non-natural way around people (particularly non-Black people) because she feared being judged. Irene wrote "it took some unlearning but I still find myself, when I'm not around other Black people I guess, not sounding the same as when I am with Black people or friends I am incredibly comfortable around. I guess it's somewhat ingrained at this point". Perhaps this expectation and experience of judgement adds to how the university setting influenced participants' language.

Importantly, most survey participants perceived their way of speaking to be judged at the university in a way that other students' language was not, which can be seen in Figure 4. Figure 4 depicts whether the participants expected others at the university to be judged by the way that they spoke. Most participants disagreed with the statement in regards to both in-person and online university, followed by 'agree' as a close

second. Eight participants selected the same answer for both in-person and online university in response to the statement in Figure 4.

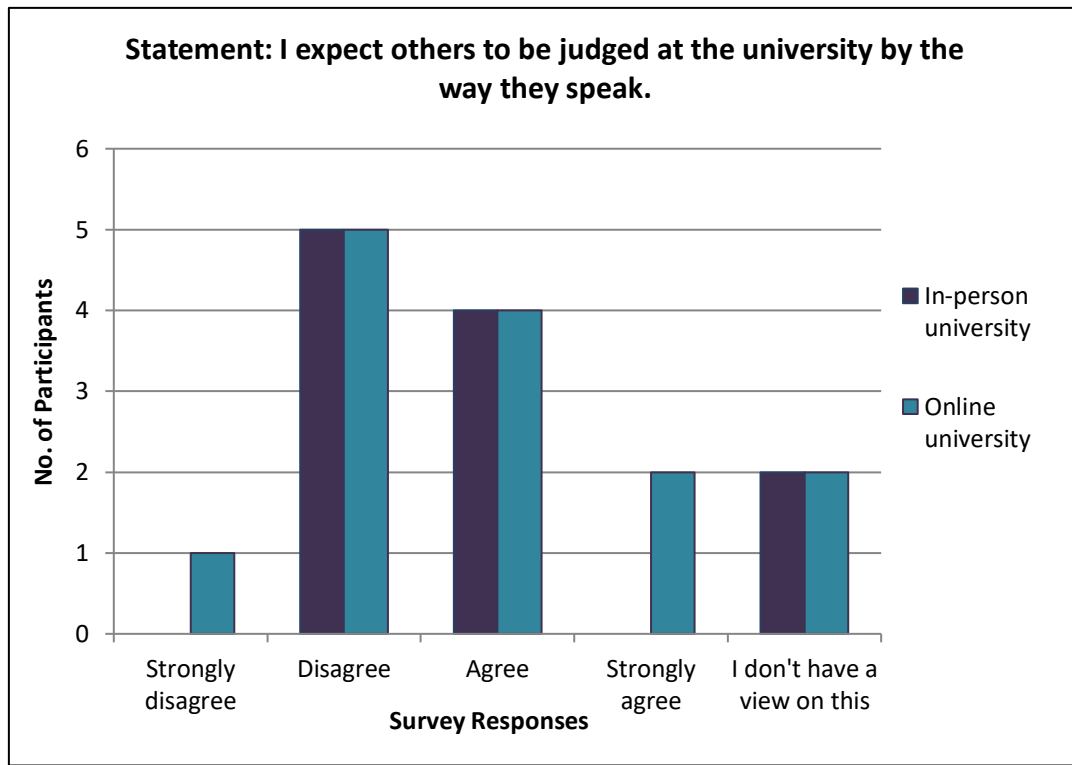


Figure 4. Participants' responses to whether they expected others to be judged at university by the way that they spoke.

Five respondents provided the same answer across both statements in Figure 3 and Figure 4. Essentially, they felt the same about whether they expected to be judged by the way that they and others spoke, and the teaching format did not affect this. Of the five participants who were consistent in their responses, three disagreed with both statements in Figure 3 and Figure 4 in regards to both online and in-person university, and two participants agreed across the board.

Likewise, there were a range of combinations displayed by those who had experienced both teaching formats and who were not consistent across Figures 3 and 4. For example, one participant disagreed with the statement in Figure 3 for both in-person and online university, but agreed that she expected others to be judged at in-person university and strongly agreed that she expected others to be judged at online university.

This range of responses is reflected in the qualitative survey data. Amina described how she felt others were more likely to be judged because she had a “relatively ‘normal’ accent” whereas students with Northern accents were mocked at the university. The manner in which Amina depicted her accent to be ‘normal’ highlights how Southern accents are perceived to be the unmarked form at the university by which all other British accents are measured; Amina benefits from this privilege. However, the way that she wrote normal in inverted commas (and how she later spoke on this topic in the interview) indicated her awareness of this linguistic inequality and of her consequent privilege in this respect. Irene similarly commented on how Northern-accented Oxford students were ridiculed for their regional accents. Four out of the five interviewees expressed having observed Northern undergraduates being mocked for their accent on campus. Indeed, it was not only Northern-accented students that the participants expected to be judged at the university. P1705 wrote:

“One of my friends has lived in London her whole life and has received comments from certain tutors about the way she articulates herself in discussions and has been told to speak more officially or corrected on her grammar.”

To conclude, the participants perceived the university setting to influence their language use and language choices. As a result of the linguistic expectations perpetuated by certain members of the university both academically and socially, alongside feeling they would be judged if they spoke naturally, the students’ language altered. The next section will address the women’s experience(s) with language at the university in relation to their sense of self.

4.3. Do these students associate language with creating a sense of self? If they do, how do they perceive their sense of self to be affected by their language use in an elite academic environment?

Across the data language did emerge, both implicitly and explicitly, as a phenomenon that the students associated with creating a sense of self. Alongside language, the interviewees also identified other aspects, such as race and regional identity, as

contributing to their sense of self. Joyce articulated how she perceived her lexical choices as a tool for presenting her identity. She expressed that when she was in an environment where she could use vocabulary that she naturally produced, which Joyce associated with “London slang” (*peak* was the example she provided⁶), she felt most comfortable in her identity and the self that she was putting forward. Olivette similarly entwined her use of language with her regional identity; she stated that her “sounding quite Essex” frequently flouted the expectations of individuals at Oxford and that “since being here [Oxford University] I feel like being from Essex plays a really big part of my identity”.

Furthermore, all interviewees discussed how, subsequent to Oxford’s influence on their use of language, their feelings towards themselves adjusted. As previously mentioned, Olivette perceived her university peers to interject vocabulary such as *spenny* into her lexicon and, in response to using such words, she thought “I would never say that before and I’ll be like, err that’s so gross” and “I notice it sometimes and I’m like Oh my God like you sound so posh”. Amina described a similar instance where she had a somewhat negative reaction (depicting it as “weird”) to the ‘posh’ language she used as a result of being at Oxford. From these experiences, it seems that both participants perceived their language to be a portrayal of who they were as a person. Both Olivette and Amina presented themselves as having a strong sense of self and clearly the language that they used enacted this, which is why they felt different when they noticed themselves speaking in a way that they perceived to poorly represent their ‘true’ selves.

Likewise, Irene and Joyce presented a strong sense of self and, in fact, only Inez appeared to display an uncertain sense of self. In regards to developing one’s identity, Inez’s experience was rather divergent from the four other interviewees. Inez discussed how her family moved from London to Manchester when she was five-years-old, and how this significantly impacted her sense of identity. Inez stated:

⁶ *Peak* refers to something that is bad/unfortunate and is a part of MLE vocabulary (Warren-Smith et al., 2020).

I was born in London and there was like in an area with like a lot of other Black people. And like I'm I'm Muslim as well, so I used to like go to a Muslim school when I was younger. Then I moved to Manchester. It was like a a very White area. Not many Muslims so I feel like I kind of lost that—those parts of my identity and like I think I just stopped, kind of, not caring, but like I didn't think about it as much, like it wasn't a big part of my identity anymore. Like *being* a Black person like it kinda just wasn't anymore"

Here, Inez intertwined a strong sense of self with feeling secure in one's Blackness and religious identity. The participant then discussed how language played an important role in this experience. Once Inez moved to this "very White area", she received discouraging remarks about the language she produced, and so began to alter the way that she spoke to conform to her environment. Inez explained:

"I just moved to this posh school, I remember there were certain things that I'd say and people be like ohhh why you saying it like that? So I feel like that kind of, like I used to say youse for like you all, like youse, I think that's a Mancunian thing but yeah, that's something that made me more conscious of it because of the people that picked it out"⁷

When asked about the people who made such comments, Inez described them as "White and posh". Inez also believed that if she had stayed in London, then she would have spoken differently and that, because her older sister lived in London for a longer period of time and attended a nonselective, state college in Manchester whilst retaining her London friendships, she used language differently from Inez. The participant explained that she thought her sister would fit in with the ACS community unlike Inez who felt that she was different to them because of how she spoke and because she was unconfident in her Black identity.

⁷ *Youse* is a word from MLE to mean you plural, and this shows how MLE whilst dominated by speakers from London and hypothesised to originate there, has also spread to other large cities in the UK, especially where ethnic minorities reside (Goldbeck, 2018). Note that *youse* is also a feature in other regional British English varieties, such as Scottish English (Hickey, 2005).

Indeed, unlike the other participants, who perceived Oxford to influence how they spoke in a 'posh' way that they felt did not align with their identity, some aspects of the language that Inez encountered at the university helped her to develop a strong sense of self. Whilst Inez had experienced feelings of alienation at Oxford, the university also offered her a concrete Black community (through the ACS). Inez stated that she learned how to assimilate her language to her environment in Manchester and continued to adopt this strategy when she arrived at Oxford. However, from her perspective, encountering larger Black spaces and witnessing how Black students at Oxford conversed with each other helped her recognise that she did not need to conform to others' linguistic usage, which subsequently contributed to her building a stronger sense of self. In Inez's opinion, "if you're a Black person that grew up with other Black people around you then you have that kind of support and you don't need to be as like conforming, like conform to other White people"; "I think like seeing more Black people here than in school has kind of helped me to not feel like I need to fit in as much, like, I feel like I'm getting a bit more of my independence back". Witnessing fellow students speak in a way that participants perceived to be nonconforming to their environment is an experience also depicted in the surveys. This is captured by P1705's comment that "I get surprised when friends from London use slang/colloquial language when speaking to high-status members of the university, as I make sure to codeswitch whenever necessary". P1705's use of terminology such as MLE and codeswitch perhaps implies that she has a greater knowledge of linguistics compared to the other participants.

The notion of relating language and selfhood to race at the university also emerged in other qualitative data. Joyce shared how Black people (both before and since being at Oxford) have commented that she spoke in a White manner. She stated, "there's always the classic oh like you, you talk White kind of thing and and that can kind of like be difficult because obviously I I'm like I'm fully Black I love to claim like my identity, my culture, and my heritage". It appears that such comments have interfered with Joyce's sense of self and the way that she performed her ethnic identity. Perhaps, since the university setting influenced her language use, in that she regulated her use of slang (as explained under RQ1), this has affected how her Black peers perceived her

and thus intruded on her identity. This phenomenon of ‘talking White’ also arose in the survey, as five respondents explained that people either have remarked that they sound White or that they sometimes “put on [their] White voice” (P03). Ultimately, the students associated language with creating a sense of self and they have different and shared experiences in regards to how their academic environment influenced this.

The following section will address whether the participants’ perceptions of their language and identity were changed by the online learning space.

4.4. Are there any differences in these students’ perceptions of language use and selfhood between learning in person and learning online?

Given that this research was conducted in the age of Covid-19 it was appropriate to consider whether, and if so how, the participants’ perceived experiences of language at the university had been affected by the shift to online teaching as a result of the pandemic. Interviewees who had experienced both methods of teaching paid greater attention to their in-person experiences, until I specifically asked them about online university. Conversations regarding online learning were often brief and aligned with the experiences that participants had already disclosed, but there were some notable differences between in-person and online university. As presented under RQ1, participants described how their language during online classes felt more stilted and that they “over-enunciated” in order to be understood. The students felt that their way of speaking may be different at online university because of the logistics of having to communicate via a computer, where one’s audio can be disrupted.

An online university experience that Joyce also depicted was the collision of the home environment with the language that she typically reserved for academia. Joyce explained, “If my family overheard me in my tutorials like my sister would make a comment oh like why are you talking like that” and “I think like at home the difference is I became more self-conscious about how I was speaking because I knew that my family don’t interact with me in those kinds of environments”. This captured a moment in which online university (and specifically being in the home space to attend university) affected the participant’s perception of her language. The four other

interviewees did not depict such experiences but Joyce's narrative here remains worthy of exploration, and is discussed in the next chapter.

Likewise, Olivette found that her environment, as a consequence of online learning, changed her university experience; but this was in a different way to Joyce. Olivette remained in college during the Covid-19 lockdowns and her sense of self developed in regards to her understanding of whom she could relate to. Having the shared experience of college during lockdown prompted groups that were previously segregated to come together; Olivette explained, "We've missed out on so much time so everyone's like more willing and like happy to just be friends with everyone and just like make the most of it". Moreover, she expressed her initial belief that she could not interact naturally with the "West London like Middle-class White people" that dominated her college, but that the university environment during Covid-19 and online teaching allowed unexpected friendships to develop. Olivette explained, "I think to begin with I was like unsure. But like as I've got to know people better, I feel quite comfortable to just be myself around anyone".

The data supports the view that the students' experiences are not monolithic but, equally, that there are particular experiences which are shared even if they actualise in different ways for different participants. All participants perceived a difference between their language at university compared to at home, and it is clear how the university setting influenced how they viewed their language whilst at Oxford. The participants' perception that particular university staff expected Oxford members to speak in an academic manner, alongside comments made to those who used language in a dissimilar way, contributed to the students' differing ways of speaking at university compared to at home. Simultaneously, it transpired that Black communities at Oxford have influenced some of the participants' language, which in turn affected their sense of self. Finally, numerous similarities between in-person and online university findings emerged, but there were also noteworthy differences that were specific to the environment at Oxford during Covid-19. The next chapter will highlight the wider implications of the results.

5. Discussion

The results displayed in Chapter 4 are explored in depth in this chapter. The first three sections will address the four research questions (RQ1 and RQ2 are discussed together because the themes investigated relate to both); the final section concerns the limitations of the study, strategies to circumvent such limits, and ideas for future research.

5.1 Language

The data presented in this study highlights how the university setting is central to understanding how the participants perceived their use of language at Oxford. The participants believed that if they spoke in a way that differed from the expectations of certain members of the university, then the content of what they were saying, alongside their intelligence, would be judged. Subsequently, all participants developed a way of speaking specific for academic and/or social spaces at Oxford.

Whilst some participants, like Olivette, explained how they found overcoming this linguistic barrier difficult, Joyce viewed this aspect of the environment as a part of academia that most Oxford students had to accept. Nevertheless, Joyce also explained (likewise to Olivette and Amina) that there were some students who always spoke in a way that she associated with academia. Similarly, Irene explained that wealthy private school students naturally conformed to the expectations enforced at the university compared to most Black students, who could not be entirely themselves. The fact that for some, their natural way of speaking equated to Oxford's academic expectations reinforces Foucault's (1982) proposition that privilege and power can be enacted through language, and that such processes have become entirely normalised in society. There is a way of speaking that has been deemed appropriate by certain people within institutions like Oxford, and thus such norms become a measure by which everyone else is judged. Consequently, certain groups benefit from this accepted social reality. As a result of historical oppression, the academic language that we now perceive to be appropriate and acceptable was enforced by upper class, White, heterosexual cisgendered English men, and continues to benefit individuals who intersect these categories.

The way that four participants felt that members of the university would doubt their intelligence if they spoke in their most natural way reinforces this issue. The participants' fear of judgement, here, suggests that ingrained in our society is the perception that certain ways of speaking are associated with different levels of intelligence. Like many social issues, race intersects with this phenomenon (Dougherty et al., 2017), which the participants seem to be aware of. (For example, P01 assumed that others would doubt her intelligence because she is Black). The pejorative image of Black women being indolent and stupid is prevalent in history and became intertwined with the stereotype of Black women as 'Jezebel-type' characters (Freeman, 2019; Mgadmi, 2009).⁸ The fact that Black womanhood is tied up with such negative perceptions perhaps explains why the participants' language changed upon arriving at Oxford. If they spoke in a way that was perceived to be 'Black', then their peers may associate them with other 'Black' expectations, which are frequently damaging. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggest that, because Black people were historically compressed into a one-dimensional state, Western perspective often views the actions of one Black person to represent the practices of all Black people (especially when such actions are adverse). This notion explicitly arose in Irene's interview, where she explained, "I can't quit. Because if I quit then I'm the Black girl that left Oxford".

Certainly, the manner in which Irene depicted how the university setting influenced her language is significant. Irene stated "I tend to pitch my voice up, um, I'm not doing it now". Irene explained that she conversed in her natural tone of voice with individuals that she was deeply comfortable with. Prior to our interview, we had only exchanged a few emails regarding participant consent. Firstly, this provides support for my decision to research a group of individuals with whom I identify; by being a Black British woman, Irene felt comfortable to speak in her most natural pitch with me. Equally, this suggests that race and/or gender play a significant role in how immediately comfortable Irene felt around a person. This demonstrates how speech

⁸ The Jezebel archetype is rooted in slavery and was used to distinguish Black women as aggressive and promiscuous and was central to excusing the various sexual assaults recounted by enslaved Black women (Collins, 2002).

communities can be linked by race and that racial identity and language are intertwined. Even though Irene suggested that she did not raise her pitch of voice in the company of close (non-Black) friends, these same friends made comments on the fact that Irene spoke differently with her Black friends. It seems that Irene still changed the way that she spoke with Black people and individuals who she felt comfortable around. Does this difference actualise because she felt that Black people accepted her with her lower-pitched voice? Does she employ it as a mechanism for fitting in? It appears that Irene waited until she was comfortable before she could speak in her normal pitch of voice with non-Black people. When questioned as to why she raised her pitch of voice, Irene said, “It made no sense to do it, but it was just it felt natural to do” because “Oxford as a space. Doesn’t. It’s not a space for diversity”. The way in which Irene raised the pitch of her voice also aligns with the experiences expressed by Grehoua (2020), as explained in section 2.7.

Irene continued to explain that she raised her pitch of voice in the company of students and staff that she “deemed Oxford”. Given that she adopted her natural pitch with fellow Black students also suggests that she perceived them to not be the epitome of the ‘Oxford person’, which aligned with Irene’s statement that “Oxford wasn’t made for Black people”. Irene displayed an awareness of the historical reality whereby members of the Black community were excluded from such academic institutions. Perhaps this perception adds to why Irene raised her pitch of voice within non-Black university spaces. Irene’s belief that the university does not promote diversity alongside a desire to fit in is possibly the reason for her altered voice. Black women are frequently stereotyped as being loud and aggressive (Kilgore et al., 2020) and, given that (as perceived by Irene) Oxford was not intended for Black individuals, she perhaps felt a pressure to distance herself from Blackness in order to distance herself from the societal expectations of what being Black means. This relates to the instances of stereotype threat explained in section 2.7. If a person flouts an ingrained stereotype, such as Black women speaking in a certain way, then others may be less likely to associate them with other negative archetypes, which include Black women being masculine, unintelligent, and imperious (Reid, 1989; Ashley, 2014). In Anglophone areas of the Western world, higher-pitched voices are associated with

notions of femininity (Feinberg et al., 2005), so by raising her pitch, Irene detached herself from pejorative stereotypes about Black women, which can overlap with perceived masculine tropes (Veissière, S. P. L., 2018). Students in the US-based studies discussed in Chapter 2 also reported changing their language to dissociate from the negative stereotypes surrounding Black communities (Shaves & Moore, 2014; Taylor, 2015; Holliday & Squires, 2020).

Similarly to Irene, Inez expressed that she felt she must conform to White groups, and Amina depicted being more deliberate when she spoke in social and academic spaces at Oxford. American students in Taylor's (2015) study also described feeling a pressure to conform to White groups in order to be accepted at university. Through the participants sharing their stories, we begin to unravel how social truths are at play in keeping certain groups marked. Indeed, the participants widely discussed how other students were also judged because of their language. Four of the five interviewees confirmed the mockery experienced by British Northern-accented Oxford students. Joyce explained that she realised a greater number of students were from Northern regions than she initially thought, because she perceived many of them to have Southern accents, which Joyce hypothesised to be as a result of their educational backgrounds. Inez acts as an example of this, as she depicted how her admission into private school coincided with her Mancunian accent becoming diluted. This reinforces how the perceptions we have attached to certain ways of speaking maintain the existing status quo. If critical pedagogy were operationalised into British education, we could reflect on how linguistic prejudice is being kept alive by educational systems. The way in which certain educational institutions temper Northern accents continues to perpetuate the perception that Northern-accented people do not belong in elite academic environments and therefore feeds into the stereotype that Northerners are uneducated, lower-class people (Jost et al., 2005).

Moreover, it was not only Northern accents that the participants perceived to be a point of linguistic judgement at Oxford. The students expressed how Londoners were treated differently because of how they spoke. P01 and P03 disclosed that members of the university spoke differently to them because they attempted to mirror their use of

London vocabulary or slang, and P1705 described an instance where tutors had commented on the ‘unofficial’, ‘incorrect’ grammar produced by her London friend. Similarly to British Northern dialects and accents, MLE is often perceived as inappropriate for academic environments (Goldbeck, 2018)⁹. Especially in the case of MLE, it is clear how race intertwines with this. This sociolect of English is explicitly associated with ethnic minority groups (as explained in section 2.6.) and regarding this way of speaking as inherently incorrect further emphasises how perceptions of language are used to marginalise certain racially marked groups. This perception somewhat relates to the pejorative stereotypes attached to AAVE, which the students in Holliday and Squires’ (2020) study described.

Perhaps this belief that MLE is improper and associated with ethnic minorities, alongside negative stereotypes of the way that Black women speak, explains why Joyce received comments from “mostly White” people regarding the fact that she was “well spoken”. Joyce stated:

“People would like always comment. Oh, you’re so well spoken, and I was like OK, well why’s he saying that? Are you saying that because it’s surprising, are you saying it just as like a passing comment? [...] Like what what makes me well spoken and like are you going to treat me differently because of it?”

In supporting Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) hypothesis that White groups historically view Black people as a singular collective, the assumption that Black British individuals speak MLE, and therefore speak in a ‘grammatically incorrect’ way, is widespread. Therefore, the fact that Joyce as a Black British woman spoke in a way that was perceived as “well spoken” was surprising to some. Given that certain members of the university idealise a particular version of language, participants who did display MLE features felt a need to neglect such language at Oxford, perhaps in fear of attracting negative stereotypes surrounding Black women, and to avoid possibly being treated differently in consequence. Similarly to addressing the stereotypes associated with

⁹ Whilst the participants often perceived this way of speaking as “slang” or more specifically “London slang”, it can be inferred that they were referring to MLE because the examples they provided of such “slang” align with MLE linguistic features.

Northern accents, the implementation of critical pedagogy into education could acknowledge the negative perceptions of MLE. Students who use MLE could be involved in building mutually beneficial methods of communication between themselves and teachers, and teachers could reflect on how they respond to the way that students express themselves.

It must be reiterated how the interviewees frequently personified the university. This personification was often used to allude to omnipresent higher-up figures at the university whose actions prevented Oxford University from presenting itself as progressive. Whilst the students did address the nuances present between different students and staff, it seems that only negative experiences contributed to their personification of the university. For example, Amina discussed how “they” refused to remove the Rhodes statue, however many staff members have refuted this decision.¹⁰ It seemed that participants perceived negative realities the most appropriate for personifying Oxford. This perhaps captures the fact that it is not exactly clear who specifically at the university makes such bureaucratic decisions. Irene described her belief that “a teacher can't change the system of the school by just being a teacher who teaches one subject, in the same way a tutor cannot change the system. The head of a department cannot change the Oxford system”. This suggests that whilst students acknowledge the positive actions of individual tutors and students, other members of the university, alongside institutional systems, continue to contribute to the perception of Oxford as lacking diversity and perpetuating colonialism (Lion, 2017; Nylander, 2017; Johnson, 2020; Shaw, 2021).

Essentially, it is clear how the university setting is directly linked to the way in which the participants perceived their language at Oxford. Throughout the students' contributions, they have emphasised how the university setting lacks diversity of accent and language; those who fall outside of the parameters of what is demarcated as the 'norm' are subsequently 'marked'. Indeed, it is important to question whether, and if so how, such experiences interfered with the participants' sense of self. This will be discussed in the next section.

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-57422751>.

5. 2. Identity

Selfhood is a crucial part of human life, and a person's linguistic community is integral to this because it is in the gaze of their speech community that they develop their identity and understand how it is that they want to (and do not want to) express themselves (Zahavi, 2005). Such notions of selfhood and language are present in the data. Both Amina and Olivette described feeling disconcerted when they recognised the posh intonations that permeated their language whilst at Oxford; they felt that the identities they desired to have did not align with that way of speaking. This supports that language is a carrier of identity because it is through language that we can present ideas about ourselves and articulate who we are, both via the content of what we say but also through the way that we speak, and clearly the level of 'poshness' the students perceived themselves to display was not reflective of the person that they wished themselves to be.

Both interviewees attributed their newfound poshness to being at Oxford. The fact that identity is interlinked with how others perceive you and how you relate yourself to wider communities (Buckingham, 2008) underlines why both participants did not want others, based on their 'posh' manner of articulation, to perceive them as posh and thus attach them to in-group members of perceived-to-be-posh groups. It is possible that the participants did not want to be linked to such groups because they did not associate a posh way of speaking with their respective regional identities, which they perceived to be contributors to their strong sense of self. Perhaps this captures a moment whereby the students had entered a new speech community which seems to conflict with the speech communities that the individuals were raised in. By attempting to reject the linguistic practices of their new speech communities, perhaps the participants wanted to avoid feeling disconnected from the other communities that they related to, which is an experience depicted by Baez (2002) (see section 2.2.).

Alternatively, perhaps because British society typically associates the concept of posh with middle/upper class White individuals (Ayling, 2015; Preece, 2009), as Black

women, the participants did not want to be perceived in this way or felt that it was not their place to be 'posh'. This perspective supports Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) theory that cultural oppositional frameworks involved Black communities distancing themselves from traits that were often aligned with Whiteness. Equally, because such narratives are so deeply embedded within British society, the participants could also see posh as a term reserved solely for middle/upper class White people and therefore feel that such a word is unsuitable to describe them (even if they display characteristics that are stereotypically associated with 'poshness').

Similarly to Olivette and Amina, Joyce also experienced feeling distant from a perception that had been associated with her way of speaking. Whilst it was poshness for Olivette and Amina, it was a notion of Whiteness for Joyce. Joyce described her difficult experience of being told by Black peers that she spoke 'White'. The women in Taylor's (2015) study reported similar instances where others had claimed that they did not sound Black. Joyce explained how such remarks were challenging to accept because she is "fully Black". Here, the participant's use of the word "fully" to imply that she is Black encapsulates numerous ideas about race. First, it reinforces ideas presented in Chapter 2 regarding the fact that identity is linked to heritage, and that language is integral to this process (Joseph, 2016). Moreover, this showed how Joyce perceived her closeness to Blackness to be based on her racial heritage, but this is contrasted with her peer's comments, which supports the idea that becoming Black is a social process, and therefore only partially related to DNA (Alim, 2016). These remarks suggested that, despite being biologically of 'Black' (African) descent, through the way that you act and speak you could be rejected by your Black peers. The fact that Joyce depicted such instances as "difficult" because she "love[s] to claim [her] identity" showed how she felt that such a label did not align with the self she intended to present to others. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggest that because of societal ideologies used to maintain power relations, Joyce's manner of speaking enabled her admission into an institution like Oxford. Indeed, it would be interesting to explore how many Black students at Oxford have received comments about sounding 'White'. As perceived by the participants, 'Oxford University' values a certain way of speaking which is historically conflated with ideas of Whiteness; therefore, by 'talking White'

Joyce presents herself as a palatable Black woman that White groups can accept. The fact that the university rewards individuals for using language in this way adds to Black students' "burden of acting White", as termed by Fordham and Ogbu (1986: 203).

Whilst there are glimpses of Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) hypothesis throughout this study, Joyce highlighted that she did not feel she was 'acting White', nor felt that her way of talking was an inherent portrayal of Whiteness. Through this we can acknowledge that whilst a collective Black identity might be recognised, young Black British women are pushing the boundaries of what it means to be Black. High academic achievement and a societally-perceived well-spoken accent may not have been incorporated into ideas of Blackness when diaspora cultures emerged, but it has been 35 years since Fordham and Ogbu (1986) published their paper. Black communities need to focus on expanding their own ideas of what it means to be Black and not ridicule those who do not conform to archetypal stereotypes that were born out of a place of oppression (Thurston, 2012). Indeed whilst these participants disclosed such experiences regarding language and selfhood, they still perceived themselves to have (and displayed to me) a strong sense of self.

Furthermore, despite Inez's moments of exclusion at Oxford, she also emphasised how Black communities within the university affected her language and, in consequence, her identity. Inez expressed her belief that Black people need to be raised in Black communities so that they understand that they don't need to conform to White groups, and she described being more confident in herself since being in the company of more Black people while at Oxford. This relates to the process of racialisation explored in the literature review, which discusses the notion that individuals learn how to *be* Black during primary socialisation (Alim, 2016). As a result of the history surrounding the conception of race, Black people existing in the direct gaze of Whiteness have an awareness of the fact that others may define them by their Blackness and recognise them as marked (Bucholtz, 2001). One's Blackness cannot be ignored. Subsequently, Black people may find it difficult to establish a strong sense of self if they do not feel personally connected to their racial/ethnic identity, which is described by Inez. By being raised in a Black environment, Black children learn how to

be Black, both in relation to how to define their Blackness but also in learning how to define themselves outside of being Black and recognising that this is not the only feature that distinguishes them. Language is important in the process of racialisation because, as previously discussed, language allows a person to articulate themselves to the world and carry their racial identity (Joseph, 2016). Inez perceived herself to gain a deeper sense of independence once she had been in an environment where Black people spoke in a way that she felt did not conform to White groups. Therefore, the way in which her sense of self was affected by her language use at Oxford was different to the other interviewees.

Ultimately, the university setting has affected the participants' sense of self through the language that they have adopted since arriving at Oxford. The ways in which the students have experienced this is extensive and the way in which this has manifested during online university is explored in the next section.

5.3. Online University

As explained previously, other than Inez who had only attended classes online, the interviewees did not discuss their online experiences without being explicitly questioned. However, there is still data worth exploring. Joyce described feeling self-conscious about her family overhearing how she spoke during online tutorials, which further provides an insight into the role of language in a person's identity. Joyce had a way of speaking that she reserved for academic settings and therefore it contrasted with the language she used at home. By attending university online and living at home, these two aspects of Joyce's life collided and subsequently interfered with her home self. This emphasises how individuals use language to perform a version of their identity, and showed Joyce's awareness that others used the language that she produced as an indicator of who she was. The way that Joyce spoke during her online tutorials clashed with the version of Joyce that her family were familiar with, which explains why Joyce's sister questioned how she spoke during online university tutorials. Firstly, this experience framed the similarities between in-person and online university; Joyce felt she had to employ an academic manner of speaking in both environments. Equally, this showed a contrast between the two methods of teaching,

because learning online allowed for this collision between the home and the university space.

Contrastingly, Olivette remained in college to attend her online classes and experienced the joining of two different social spaces. Olivette described how the atmosphere between friendship groups in college had shifted during online university and because of Covid-19. The participant depicted how there were fewer students in college during lockdown and people who were hitherto segregated became friends, and these friendships have been maintained since the lifting of lockdown regulations. Olivette explained that she had become friends with White middle-class West London students whom she had previously avoided (and they her), and that she now felt comfortable to exist and speak in a way that was natural to her in their company. This experience, which is unique to online university, contributed to Olivette's sense of self because it is through understanding how we identify and relate to others that we develop the self (Zahavi, 2005). According to Buckingham (2008), shared experiences between people are necessary for building one's sense of self, and online university clearly presented a moment of joint understanding between these groups of students who previously did not relate to one another. Therefore, it is apparent how online university provided the participants with experiences that differed from in-person university.

5.4. Limitations

Firstly, the findings from this study cannot be generalised beyond those participants who took part. Given that this study focused on the perceptions of the students, it would be misleading to attempt to broaden the results to wider groups of Black British women in higher education. Furthermore, the reliability of semi-structured interviews is debated. According to May (2011), interviews allow us to understand how participants perceive reality and therefore do not explain a version of reality that is external from the interviewees themselves. Additionally, people are entirely subjective, unreliable beings and something they express in one moment may be articulated in a different way in another moment, and therefore what a person says during an interview may differ to how they actually feel about something (Taylor et al.,

2016). For example, at the beginning of their interviews, Inez, Joyce, and Amina perceived their way of speaking to have remained the same whilst at university and then proceeded to illustrate all the instances in which their use of language had altered since arriving at Oxford. Simultaneously, the findings rely on the participants' ability to articulate their (sub)conscious language choices and way(s) of speaking which they may hitherto have been unaware of. Moreover, Pavlenko (2007) argues that the process of interview coding allows data to be lost; a heightened focus on the transcripts means that the participants' body language, tone of voice, intonation, and what is left unsaid is neglected in analysis.

Despite these limitations, interviews continue to be widely viewed as an advantageous method for investigating how individuals perceive reality and remain an important feature of qualitative studies (Talmy, 2010; Taylor et al., 2016). Given that this study focuses on the participants' perceptions and emphasises the vast nature of the experiences of Black British students, it was never intended that this research be generalised. Indeed, this study is important in introducing this topic into British academia and encouraging further exploration of the language experiences of this demographic. Future research addressing this matter with a larger group of Black British female students would be valuable; as well as Black British female students at different educational institutions where comparisons could be drawn. A longitudinal study that captures how the perceptions of these students develop over their time in higher education would also be beneficial. Researchers could also investigate this subject in relation to other groups, such as researching the experiences of other ethnic minority groups, or perhaps of British Northern students at Southerner-dominated institutions. Essentially, the scope for additional research is broad, and it is necessary to continue to explore such areas in order to acknowledge the experiences of marginalised groups and subsequently promote diversity within higher education, and society as a whole. This leads on to the final chapter, which concludes this research.

6. Conclusion

This research investigated the linguistic experiences of Black British female students at the University of Oxford. This topic is unique in its contribution to Black Feminist

Thought and because of its under-researched status within British academia. This study aimed to present the varied experiences of academically high-achieving Black British women and counteract research which often emphasises the academic under-achievement of Black communities.

The participants' perspectives capture how the university environment has played a role in how they perceived their use of language at Oxford. The way in which the university setting manifested itself in their language was broad. For some students, remarks from tutors and peers, alongside societal expectations about the traditions of Oxford, encouraged these women to increase how 'posh' they sounded, to raise the pitch of their voice, and to negate their use of 'London slang'. Instances where students switched their language and behaviour as a result of stereotype threat compares to the American studies presented in section 2.7., and highlights how historical narratives continue to impact these women. These stories also provide a further insight into how language enacts relations of power, and the way in which institutions perpetuate this. Simultaneously, there were findings that differed from other research which include how some of the students' language was influenced as a result of the Black communities at the university, despite Oxford being a PWI.

The way in which participants perceived language as playing a role in their sense of self was significant. Through the way the participants used language to perform their identity, they presented the speech communities to which they perceived themselves to belong. The feeling some students shared when they spoke in a way that differed from their sense of self was interesting and can be further explored in future research.

Race was equally prevalent in the participants' perceptions of their language—relating their Blackness to London, home, community, and alienation. Participants also perceived dominant communities to present constraining definitions of Blackness. However, Black people have also contributed to attaching one-dimensional characteristics to Black identities. In-group members play an equally important role in redefining Blackness; as this study highlights, the experiences of Black people are broad and so to continue to reinforce narrow ideas about what it means to be Black is

to neglect and exclude numerous Black individuals who define their Blackness in other ways.

Indeed, the way that the students discussed the influence of people within the university and repeatedly personified Oxford University as a reactionary force highlights a necessity for the implementation of a critical pedagogy framework within the university. Whilst the students acknowledged the individual differences of tutors, solely negative actions contributed to their personification of the university. I believe that the colonial history of Oxford that remains present today, and the expectations of Oxford as conservative and non-progressive, alongside student experiences of racism, have added to the participants' negative personification of Oxford as this entity that reinforces certain language expectations and places an invisible pressure on students to conform to 'their' norms. Through critical pedagogy, university curriculums could not only reflect on their role within colonialism and other historical moments of marginalisation, but also address how certain modern standards continue to oppress a plethora of different groups. Both the oppressors and the oppressed could analyse how they fit into this system of hierarchies and address the privileges they experience from their own intersectionality. For example, even though the participants have experienced racialised and gendered disadvantage, some benefit from middle/upper class privilege and/or British Southern accent privilege.

The range of findings capture the truly vast linguistic experiences of the participants and highlight how, despite feeling a pressure to codeswitch or change, they are resilient in their ability to sustain high-level academic achievements. Equally, the way the majority of participants displayed a strong sense of self is promising and hopefully encourages other Black British women to apply to such elite institutions. Ultimately, the experiences of these students are invaluable to our understanding of how Black British women navigate a PWI. Certainly, this study highlights the need for additional academic research into the subjective knowledge of Black women, and encourages further exploration of the narratives of ethnic minorities within higher education.

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1

CUREC approval (received via email).

CUREC Ref: ED-CIA-21-184

Hamish Chalmers <hamish.chalmers@education.ox.ac.uk>

Tue 23/03/2021 11:50

Compliance and Data Collection Microsoft TeamsV1-1.docx;

Dear (researcher's name),

Title: Race, Gender, & Language on campus: Black British Female students' experiences of language at a predominantly White, elite university in the UK

Ref: ED-CIA-21-184

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted.

If your research involves participants whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question (this includes those under 18 and vulnerable adults), then it is advisable to read the following NSPCC professional reporting requirements for cases of suspected abuse

<http://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/information-service/factsheet-child-abuse-reporting-requirements-professionals.pdf>

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application you should submit details to research.office@education.ox.ac.uk for consideration.

As you have said that you will use Teams to record your interviews, I have attached a document describing how you need to go about requesting permission to do this.

Good luck with your research study. Best wishes

1052061

Hamish Chalmers

Member of the DREC

p.s. Can I just congratulate you and your supervisor on such a thorough and complete submission. It is always a pleasure to receive an application that covers everything so thoroughly and completely - including the time you took to combine the documents into one form. This is so helpful. Thank you.

Appendix 2

Advertisement for study posted on the ACS Facebook group.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
University of Oxford
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford
OX2 6PY



Researcher's name

Researcher's name@education.ox.ac.uk

Race, Gender, & Language on campus: Black British Female students' experiences of language at a predominantly White, elite university in the UK

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC): (ED-CIA-21-184)

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR MSc RESEARCH

This research focuses on how Black British female undergraduate students perceive their use of language at the University of Oxford, and how this perhaps intertwines with their identity. This study aims to answer in what ways, if any, these students perceive the university setting to influence their language use and language choices, and how they perceive their sense of selfhood to be affected by their language use in this particular academic environment. This project will also explore how Black British female undergraduate students' perception of language use and identity may differ between in-person university and online learning.

I am looking for healthy volunteers who are female undergraduates at the University of Oxford and who identify as Black or Black/Mixed. Volunteers must also identify English as their first language and use English as the dominant form of communication at their home (away from university).

You are invited to participate in an online survey which should take about 10 minutes of your time. Participation is entirely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. If you are interested in having a follow up interview (to last approximately 45-60minutes) please leave your email address at the end of the survey.

If you are interested but would like more information please contact (**researcher's name**) at researcher's name@education.ox.ac.uk. There is no obligation to take part.

Thank you!

Appendix 3

Detailed survey ethics participant information sheet (presented to survey participants before they proceeded to the main survey).

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
University of Oxford
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford
OX2 6PY



Researcher's name

Researcher's name@education.ox.ac.uk

Race, Gender, & Language on campus: Black British Female students' experiences of language at a predominantly White, elite university in the UK

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC): (ED-CIA-21-184)

General information

This research focuses on how Black British female undergraduate students perceive their use of language at the University of Oxford, and how this perhaps intertwines with their identity. This study aims to answer in what ways, if any, these students perceive the university setting to influence their language use and language choices, and how they perceive their sense of selfhood to be affected by their language use in this particular academic environment. This project will also explore how Black British female undergraduate students' perception of language use and identity may differ between in-person university and online learning.

We appreciate your interest in participating in this online survey. You have been invited to participate if you are a native English female undergraduate at the University of Oxford who identifies as Black or Black/Mixed. Please read through this information before agreeing to participate.

You may ask any questions before deciding to take part by contacting the researcher (details below).

The Principal Researcher is (**researcher's name**), who is attached to the Department of Education at the University of Oxford. This project is being completed under the supervision of (**researcher's supervisor's name**).

In the following survey, participants will be asked to answer questions that provide a preliminary insight into how participants perceive their use of language and linguistic experiences at the University of Oxford. This should take approximately 10 minutes. There is no obligation to participate and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. This data is needed so that the researcher can gather information about how Black British female undergraduates at the University of Oxford perceive their use of language, and whether this academic setting interferes with their perception of their linguistic experiences. The survey data will also allow a representative sample of opinions to be gathered in the interviews; survey participants who are interested in being interviewed can leave their email address at the end of the survey. Interviews will last approximately 45-60 minutes.

Do I have to take part?

No. Please note that participation is voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you may withdraw at any point for any reason before submitting your answers by closing the browser.

All questions are optional.

How will my data be used?

If you complete the online survey only and do not wish to be interviewed, and therefore do not provide your email address, then no data will be collected that could identify you.

If you are interested in being interviewed and provide your email address this data will be stored. However, we will take all reasonable measures to ensure that data remains confidential.

The responses you provide will be stored in a password-protected electronic file and may be used in academic publications (you will remain pseudonymised). Identifiable information will be destroyed as soon as it is no longer required for the research. Research data (including consent records) will be stored for three years after publication or public release.

Who will have access to my data?

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the study. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

The data you provide may be shared with **(researcher's supervisor's name)**, the researcher's academic supervisor.

We would also like your permission to use the data in future studies, and to share data with other researchers (e.g. in online databases). Data will be de-identified before it is shared with other researchers or results are made public.

This questionnaire will be written up for an MSc degree.

Who has reviewed this study?

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee (reference no.)

Who do I contact if I have a concern or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please speak to **(researcher's name)**, researcher's name@education.ox.ac.uk, or their supervisor, and we will do our best to answer your query. We will acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how it will be dealt with. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible:

Social Sciences & Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD

Please note that you may only participate in this survey if you are 18 years of age or over.

☐ I certify that I am 18 years of age or over

If you have read the information above and agree to participate with the understanding that the data (including any personal data) you submit will be processed accordingly, please check the relevant box below to get started.

☐ Yes, I agree to take part

Appendix 4

Online survey.

1. Do you identify as Black or Black/Mixed?
 - Yes
 - No
2. Are you an undergraduate student at the University of Oxford?
 - Yes
 - No
3. How old are you?
4. What year did you start your undergraduate degree?
5. Which year of your undergraduate degree are you currently in?
6. Are you the first person in your family to go to university?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say
7. Have you ever received a means tested bursary whilst at university?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say
8. What is the occupation of the principal earner in your family?
9. What is your household income?
 - Under £20,000
 - £20,001-40,000
 - £40,001-60,000
 - £60,001-80,000
 - £80,001-100,000
 - £100,001 & over
 - Prefer not to say
10. In your opinion, when people hear you speak (e.g. on the phone), do you think they assign you to an ethnic group? (Please explain your answer)
11. Since starting university, have you only had online teaching?
 - Yes
 - No

[If yes, the following questions were divided into in-person and online university, if no, then the following questions were in relation to online university only]

The answers you provide are really valuable, and there is no right or wrong response. Please give as much detail as you feel you have time for.

12. Think about the way you speak at university and the way you speak at home. Are these ways of speaking...
 - The same
 - Mainly the same
 - A bit different
 - Very different

Please explain the reason for your choice(s) (whether you speak the same or differently)

13. Think about the way in which people at the university speak to you. Do you think they speak...

- The exact same way to you as they do to others
- Mainly the same way to you as they do to others
- A bit differently to you as they do to others
- Very differently to you as they do to others

Please explain the reason for your choice(s) (whether you think people speak the same or differently to you)

14. I expect to be judged at university by the way I speak

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- I don't have a view on this

Please explain the reason for your choice(s) (whether you expect to be judged or not)

15. I expect others to be judged at university by the way they speak

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- I don't have a view on this

Please explain the reason for your choice(s) (whether you expect others to be judged or not)

16. During your university experience(s), has anyone from the university ever made remarks about the way you speak or the language that you use?

- Yes
- No

17. If you think you might be interested in taking part in an interview please leave your email below (by giving your email you are not committing to anything at this stage)

Appendix 5

Interview participant information sheet.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
University of Oxford
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford
OX2 6PY



Researcher's name

Researcher's name@education.ox.ac.uk

Race, Gender, & Language on campus: Black British Female students' experiences of language at a predominantly White, elite university in the UK

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC): (ED-CIA-21-184)

1. Why is this research being conducted?

This research focuses on how Black British female undergraduate students perceive their use of language at the University of Oxford, and how this perhaps intertwines with their identity. This study aims to answer in what ways, if any, these students perceive the university setting to influence their language use and language choices, and how they perceive their sense of selfhood to be affected by their language use in this particular academic environment. This project will also explore how Black British female undergraduate students' perception of language use and identity may differ between in-person and online university learning.

2. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to participate if you are a British female undergraduate at the University of Oxford who identifies as Black or Black/Mixed and speaks English as a first language. You also provided your email at end of the online survey which indicated you were interested in taking part in an interview. I am contacting you now to see whether you are still willing to take part in this interview.

3. Do I have to take part?

No. Please note that your participation is entirely voluntary. You can ask questions about the research before deciding whether or not to take part. If you do agree to take part, you may withdraw yourself from the study at any point, without giving a reason, and without any negative consequences, simply by informing me of this decision. The deadline by which you can withdraw any information you have contributed to the research is 13th July 2021, before my thesis will be finalized and then submitted.

4. What will happen if I take part in the research?

You will be invited to attend one online interview via Teams. We can talk through the study procedures and this will give you the opportunity to ask any questions. If you are still happy to take part, I will ask you to complete an electronic consent form and email it back to me.

If you are happy to take part in the research, you will be interviewed during a single session online via Teams. The interview session should take approximately 30-45 minutes. You can also ask to pause or stop the interview at any time.

With your consent, I would like to audio record the interview because I will need to transcribe

the interview responses of all participants. By taking an audio recording of the interview I will be able to remain focused during the interview and then transcribe it accurately afterwards. Through the transcription, I will code participant answers in order to analyse the data. Consequently, I will be able to accurately articulate your opinions and draw true conclusions from the interview.

5. Are there any potential risks in taking part?

The following risks are involved in taking part: breach of confidentiality. To reduce any potential risks, data will be stored on the researcher's password-protected laptop and backed up to my folder on the University's password-protected OneDrive. Furthermore, all personal data will be pseudonymised, meaning that your real name will not appear alongside any of the data you have provided. Your email address will be gathered from the main dataset and stored separately in an excel file on the researcher's password-protected laptop, backed up to the University's password-protected OneDrive. Your email address will be removed from the main dataset so that your responses cannot be identified as yours.

6. Are there any benefits in taking part?

There are no direct benefits in taking part in this research. However, if you do volunteer to take part in the interview I hope you find the conversation interesting. Also, you would be contributing to our understanding of under-researched groups within the British academic sphere.

7. Expenses and payments

There will be no payment for taking part in this study.

8. What happens to the data provided?

The information you provide during the study is the research data. Any research data from which you can be identified (your email address, and the audio recording of the interview) is known as personal data. Personal data will be stored on the researcher's password protected laptop and backed up to the University's password protected OneDrive. Other research data (which includes your consent form) will be stored for at least 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research.

As the researcher, I will have access to the research data, and it may also be shared with my supervisor (in pseudonymised form) as necessary to support my analysis. Responsible members of the University of Oxford may be given access to pseudonymised data for monitoring and/or audit of the research, after which point it will be permanently and securely deleted.

I would like your permission to use direct quotes from you in any research outputs. A pseudonym will be used rather than your real name. In the interests of open science, I would also like your permission to use anonymised data in future studies, and to share data with other researchers (e.g. in online databases). All personal information that could identify you will be removed or changed before information is shared with other researchers or results are made public.

9. Will the research be published?

The research will form the basis of my MSc Dissertation in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition at University of Oxford Department of Education. It may also be published in subsequent academic journal articles or conference presentations.

The University of Oxford is committed to the dissemination of its research for the benefit of

society and the economy and, in support of this commitment, has established an online archive of research materials. This archive includes digital copies of student theses successfully submitted as part of a University of Oxford postgraduate degree programme. Holding the archive online gives easy access for researchers to the full text of freely available theses, thereby increasing the likely impact and use of that research.

For Masters students, on successful submission of the thesis, it may be deposited both in print and online in the University archives to facilitate its use in future research. If so, the thesis will be openly accessible.

10. Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through Oxford University Department of Education's Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC).

11. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the study or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please contact (**researcher's name**), researcher'sname@education.ox.ac.uk, or (**researcher's supervisor's name**), and we will do our best to answer your query. We will acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how it will be dealt with. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) at Oxford University Department of Education, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford, OX2 6PY; Email: research.office@education.ox.ac.uk. He will aim to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

12. Data Protection

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the study. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that is performed in the public interest. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/compliance/gdpr/individualrights/>.

13. Further information and Contact Details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

Researcher's name

Researcher'sname@education.ox.ac.uk

Appendix 6

Interview participant written consent form.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
University of Oxford
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford
OX2 6PY
01865 274024
general.enquiries@education.ox.ac.uk



Researcher's name

Researcher'sname@education.ox.ac.uk
MSc Student
Oxford University telephone number: 01865 270000

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC): (ED-CIA-21-184)

Race, Gender, & Language on campus: Black British Female students' experiences of language at a predominantly White, elite university in the UK

Purpose of Study: This research focuses on how Black British female undergraduate students perceive their use of language at the University of Oxford, and how this perhaps intertwines with their identity. This study aims to answer in what ways, if any, these students perceive the university setting to influence their language use and language choices, and how they perceive their sense of selfhood to be affected by their language use in this particular academic environment. This project will also explore how Black British female undergraduate students' perception of language use and identity may differ between in-person university and online learning.

Please put your **initials** in each box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or penalty.	
3. I understand that research data collected during the study may be looked at by authorised people outside the research team, in line with Oxford University's role as the Data Controller. I give permission for these individuals to access my data.	
4. I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.	
5. I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	
6. I understand how this research will be written up and published.	
7. I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	

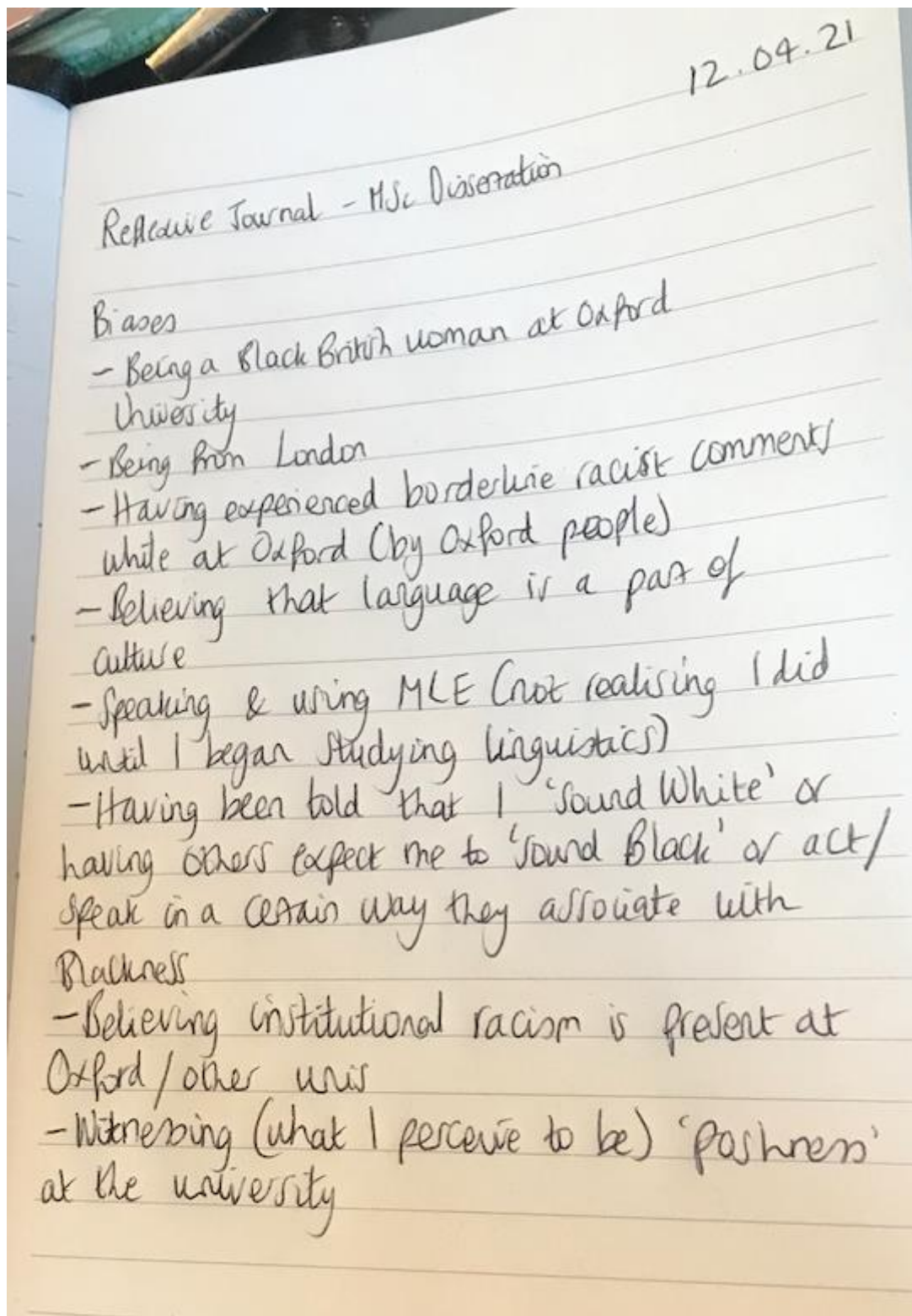
8. I consent to being audio recorded.	
9. I understand how audio recordings will be used in research outputs.	
10. I agree to the use of directed quotes, attributed to a pseudonymised name.	
11. I agree to take part in the study.	
12. I agree for research data collected in this study to be given to researchers, including those working outside of the UK and the EU, to be used in other research studies. I understand that any data that leave the research group will be anonymised so that I cannot be identified.	

_____ dd / mm / yyyy _____
 Name of Participant Date Signature

_____ dd/mm/yyyy _____
 Researcher's name Date Signature

Appendix 7

Reflexive journal.



Appendix 8

Coding framework.

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Participant No.</i>	<i>Prototypical example</i>
Language	Speaking does not change at Oxford	Participants believe that their way of speaking has not changed whilst at Oxford university	P50498	I don't think I've had to like necessarily change anything about the way I've spoken [whilst at Oxford university].
	Speaking changes at Oxford	Participants believe that their way of speaking has changed whilst at Oxford university	P150599	I guess that's what happens when you stay in a place for a long time. You were, you like acclimatise to what you hear.
	Situational language: social spaces at Oxford	Participants explain that they use specific language for social spaces at Oxford university	P50998	I would say I have to maybe be a bit more intentional about speaking the way I normally do [when talking in social spaces in college].
	Situational language: academic spaces at Oxford	Participants explain that they use specific language for academic spaces at Oxford university	P50498	I think for me it's always been a formal academic language rather than trying to change who I am like.

	Language differences between home and Oxford	Participants highlight a difference between the language they use at home and the language they use at Oxford university	P50498	Like knowing what vocab-like 'cause my friends at home would understand more than my friends at uni would.
	Subconscious language change	Participants explain that when they change their language use/way of speaking it is subconscious	P211097	I think I do it without thinking now, so it's kind of hard to tell.
	Way(s) of speaking is subconscious	Participants explain that their general way of speaking is subconscious	P50498	Like I don't think that there's nothing about it [her way of talking] that's conscious.
	Language present at Oxford	Participants describe the language they hear/experience at Oxford university	P50998	People [at Oxford university] in general were like. A bit more, uhm. I dunno had a bit more like a finesse telephone voice than I was used to.
	Fitting in and language at Oxford	Participants discuss fitting in at Oxford in relation to their use of language and/or the language they hear at Oxford university	P180665	In the beginning I found it really hard. I didn't really enjoy it because I just don't naturally think that way, and I don't naturally speak that way.
	Spoken to differently to others	Participants perceive people to speak to them differently	P04	People tend to assume my background and

		compared to how these people speak to others		upbringing based on things like my hair so I feel like I'm sometimes spoken to differently.
	Judgements on language	Participants discuss themselves or others being judged because of the way they speak/language they use	P03	People underestimate my class and intelligence if I talk normal.
	Language in society	Participants discuss their general perception of the function of language within society	P50498	I would say there are definitely like accents that are looked down upon in terms of like intelligence or I think it's kind of like to, like quite ingrained classism in the UK to be honest.
	Language and London	Participants associate language with London and/or a London way of sounding	P211097	I think it would have been different if I was in London I think my accent would definitely be different.
	Language and Londoners at Oxford	Participants discuss using certain language with Oxford university students specifically from London	P180665	I feel like the friends that I've made are mostly from London so kind of the language that I would use with my ACS friends they would also use,

				colloquialisms and like slang and things like that similar slang.
	Regional language	Participants discuss regional accents/language/discourse	P180665	Like regional discourse is different across the UK.
	Speaking changes at school	Participants explain that their way of speaking changed whilst at school (primary and/or secondary)	P50498	When I was in primary school and I would say a word slightly differently to everyone else [...] And then I was sort of like, oh, I need to change the way that I say it to say it like they do.
	Language comments by school	People at school made comments on the participants' language/way of speaking	P211097	Then I just moved to this posh school, I remember there were certain things that I'd say and people be like "ohhh why you saying it like that?"
	Language comments by Oxford friends	The participants' friends at Oxford university have made comments on the participants' language/way of speaking	P180665	Even my friends, they'll be like oh, like in Oxford, they'll say, oh, you sound so Essex.
	Language comments by Black people	Black people have made comments on the participants' language/way of speaking	P50498	There's always the classic oh like you, you talk white kind of thing and and that can kind of like be difficult

				because obviously I I'm like I'm fully Black.
	Language comments by home	People at home (incl family & friends) have made comments on the participants' language/way of speaking	P211097	Like my mum would say that I have a posh accent.
	Language and home	Participants discuss their language/way of speaking in relation to the language/way of speaking of people at home (incl family & friends)	P180665	Actually, no, I don't think I do speak similarly to them [her family], and I think my brother doesn't really like the fact that we're from Essex.
Oxford University	Oxford students	Participants describe the demographic of students at Oxford university	P180665	I feel like most of the people who became friends straight away already kind of knew each other cause they're all from the same kind of like area in West London and knew similar people.
	Friendships at Oxford	Participants discuss their friendship groups/situations with friends at Oxford university	P180665	So like coming to Oxford I actually have now so many actual Black friends who are my age that I didn't have when I was growing up.

	Poshness at Oxford	Participants discuss the concept of poshness & the presence of poshness at Oxford university	P180665	But here just because everyone else is soo posh and like it just makes it seem like everything that I do is like 100 times more.
	Issues fitting in at Oxford	Participants describe having issues fitting in to life at Oxford university	P211097	It was kind of just like not feeling like I fit in.
	Personal expectations of Oxford	Participants discuss their own expectations of Oxford university prior to arriving	P50498	I think like people couldn't have sort of normal conversations. Everything would be elevated, elaborate language. Things like that.
	Others' perceptions of Oxford	Participants discuss other people's (people who are not members of the university) perceptions of Oxford university	P150599	People don't see the flaws. Because they only see like if they only see like you excel, they assume that it's because of Oxford and they don't see you struggling.
	Negative perception of Oxford	Participants display a negative perception of Oxford university	P150599	As an educational system Oxford has many flaws, and it's only the students that feel it's flaws.
	Positive perception of Oxford	Participants display a positive perception of	P150599	That's not it by any means sort of a blanket

		Oxford university		statement for all tutors. I've had some really great tutors who were incredibly understanding.
	Neutral perception of Oxford	Participants display a neutral perception of Oxford university	P150599	When I talk about Oxford, it's very much from a place of like I could have gone anywhere. Oxford for me wasn't like the be all and end all. I didn't have to go to Oxford.
	Perception of typical Oxford person	Participants discuss the perceived idea of a "typical Oxford person" who attends Oxford university	P50498	I think there's always the classic everyone here is going to. I don't think posh is the right word, but I think like speak really intellectually.
	Socioeconomic Status (SES)	Participants discuss socioeconomic status in relation to fellow students at Oxford university	P50998	It sounds really weird, as if like my friendships are based on like I don't know like socioeconomic status, but I dunno. It does change like it does kind of change someone's like outlook or like day to day life quite a lot.
	Northern/Southern accent divide at Oxford	Participants discuss the presence of a divide	P180665	Some of my friends are northern and and they

		between Oxford students with Northern compared to Southern English accents		feel like in Oxford everyone is from the south and everyone is expected to sound like posh and southern 'cause they just assume everyone from the south is posh and they also associate southern accents with poshness.
The Black Experience	Want to make Black friends at Oxford	Participants describe wanting to make Black friends at Oxford university	P50998	I didn't really consider like how important it would be until I went to, uh, there was like an offer holder day for ACS and I just had like such a good time and then realised that like this was not proportionate of like who would be in Oxford if I was in a room usually. Like I was like, OK, I don't wanna like miss out on this.
	Issues fitting in at school	Participants discuss having issues fitting in at school (primary and/or secondary)	P211097	I didn't have that many like friends who were of a similar culture, like most

				of my friends were Asian.
	Issues fitting in at ACS	Participants discuss having issues fitting in at AfroCaribbean society at Oxford university	P150599	I was like OK so I don't fit in here [ACS]. That's fine, I'll just find somewhere I do fit in.
	Relating to Black people	Participants describe feeling that they relate to Black people	P211097	If I was speaking to someone else who was Black and then they were all or just like hear in the media or whatever and then be like "ohh they actually know that too" cause I'm just so used to like not talking about it outside of my family.
	Not relating to Black people	Participants describe feeling that they do not relate to Black people	P211097	I'm used to being the only Black person, but then when there are some kind of like oh. I don't know. I'm so like different to them.
	Sense of Black community	Participants describe the presence of a Black community/feeling at home with Black people	P50498	When I am around Black people I always sort of feel like ah right I'm at home, kind of thing.
	Black experience at Oxford	Participants discuss what it's like to be Black at Oxford university	P150599	I mean Oxford wasn't made for Black people [...] We have an entire society

				just so that every Black person can know each other.
	Racist experiences at Oxford	Participants describe racist encounters they have had at Oxford university	P50998	I had a conversation with him in which he was just like saying racist stuff about people from Lesotho.
	Blackness and language	Participants discuss the idea of a Black way of speaking/sounding/language used by Black people	P02	Yes, I think my voice sound quite 'Black', because of the pitch and tone.
	Whiteness and language	Participants discuss the existence of a White way of speaking/sounding/language used by White people	P03	Definitely, unless I put on my White voice.
	ACS environment	Participants describe the environment (the people/the atmosphere) at AfroCaribbean society at Oxford university	P50498	Very like London, London like inner city London I would say I would say even like ethnically there are some divides like usually there's a quite big like Nigerian presence in the ACS.
	Positive experience of ACS	Participants describe positive experiences that they have had at AfroCaribbean society at	P50998	There's like I think a level of like comfort, I don't know if that's the right word, but like yeah, like a

		Oxford university		level of ease that's not necessarily like I'm close with everyone there, but I can be comfortable with a lot of people there.
	Negative experience of ACS	Participants describe negative experiences that they have had at AfroCaribbean society at Oxford university	P150599	I found ACS to be a bit sort of insular.
	Black stereotypes	Participants discuss the stereotypes associated with Black people	P50498	I would say there is sort of kind of like, uh, quite loud, like uses a lot of slang. Whatever it is, all of these kind of tropes that you see passed around.
	One type of Black person represented in media	Participants perceive the media to only represent one type of Black person	P50498	It sort of comes back to like how Black people are portrayed in popular culture and like how we're portrayed in movies, TV shows like the types of music that we make or are considered to make historically kind of ties in to create this one type of person.
	Blackness and London	Participants discuss	P180665	There are so many more

		Blackness and Black identities to be tied to London		Black people in London.
	Non-Black students' perception of Black communities at Oxford	Participants describe non-Black Oxford university students' perceptions of Black student communities at Oxford university	P150599	There were just a lot of sort of really strange assumptions being made about me as a person because I was Black like oh obviously you went to this event, or obviously you're friends with these people.
Identity	Strong sense of self	Participants display a strong sense of self	P180665	I feel like I'm now pretty sure of myself so I don't feel it [her sense of self] changes that much depending on who I'm with.
	Lack sense of self	Participants appear to lack a sense of self	P211097	It was like a a very white area. Not many Muslims so I feel I kind of lost that-those parts of my identity and like I think I just stopped, kind of. Not caring.
	Race as a part of identity	Participants identify race as a component of their	P50998	You express your Black identity in essentially the

		identity		same way that you express yourself.
	Religion as a part of identity	Participants identify religion as a component of their identity	P50998	Faith is a big part of my life, so I've always kind of been going to church.
	Regional identity	Participants identify the region they are from (in the UK) as a component of their identity	P180665	I feel like being from Essex plays a really big part of my identity too.
	Heritage as a part of identity	Participants identify their heritage as a component of their identity	P180665	I would say being Nigerian plays a really big part in my identity [...] And I do think as well like as well like being from Essex [...] and I think being a woman as well, and the way that like when we move through the world, I think plays a big part as well.
	Gender as a part of identity	Participants identify gender/being a woman as a component of their identity	P180665	I think being a woman as well, and the way that like when we move through the world, I think plays a big part as well.
	Personality as a part of identity	Participants identify their personality as a component of their identity	P150599	I was a Weeb as a child and like learn Korean in my spare time and watch

				K dramas. UM. And that's kind of where my interests lie.
	Multiple selves	Participants describe having multiple selves e.g. the home self, the academic self, the public self	P211097	I think I'm so used to just having like different. Selves. Like my home self and then the self that I present to everybody else, so I think if I met more Black people I'd be a bit more comfortable with my home self.
	Multiple selves and language	Participants describe how language plays a role in their construction of their different selves	P150599	I tried to, especially in tutorials with that specific tutor, manage my academic appearance through the way I spoke.
	Language and identity	Participants describe how language plays a role in their identity	P50498	I would say not necessarily my accent, but I would say like back to the vocabulary thing [is part of her identity].
	Black identity	Participants describe how they express their Blackness in their identity/what they think makes up Black identity	P50998	Looking after your hair and knowing how to look after it is like obviously, is what people see, so it's in some ways superficial. But it's also like more

				meaningful than that, because not knowing how to look after your hair and like not making informed choices about it, uhm. Is like I guess is a product of like not knowing your identity.
	Identity exploration	Participants discuss how they have/are exploring their identity and what it means to be themselves	P50998	It's something that I'm like trying to work on all the time [...] like learning more about my Black identity and exploring that is something that I'm kind of always doing.
	ACS prompting identity exploration	Participants discuss how AfroCaribbean society at Oxford university has encouraged their exploration of their identity	P50998	In some ways, like a space like that [ACS] can be a bit intimidating to me or definitely could be at the time at that time, and because like I don't know I was very much still like trying to like, Uh, explore like what my Black identity meant.
	Consolidated their identity at Oxford	Participants describe how being at Oxford university has consolidated their	P50498	I think it's [Oxford university] just kind of solidified and like made

		identity and sense of self		me more confident and comfortable in who I am.
	Negative experiences at Oxford consolidated their identity	Participants specifically describe how negative experiences at Oxford university have consolidated their identity and sense of self	P50998	It's a little bit negative, but like there are some things about Oxford specifically, like the fact that they won't take down Cecil Rhodes. Uhm, that mean that you can't really ignore like you can't ignore institutional racism at Oxford [...] Explore my Black identity often is like it's quite sad, but often it is like motivated by like negative energy from the other side.
Covid-19	Covid positively affecting friendships	Participants describe how Covid has positively affected their friendships/ability to make friends	P180665	I think I don't know if it's that because of Covid like not everyone was here and we've missed out on so much time so everyone's like more willing and like happy to just be friends with everyone and just like make the most of it.

	Covid negatively affecting friendships	Participants describe how Covid has negatively affected their friendships/ability to make friends	P211097	Yeah, definitely feel like the lack of in person stuff like say actual lectures, like seeing other people there would have been a lot nice and being able to just like see more people outside of college. who I feel like. It's yeah, it's definitely been a lot harder to try and branch out of college.
	Online learning affecting language	Participants discuss how their use of language has been affected by online learning environments	P50998	I was probably speaking like a bit more RP than usual, because like over like a if there's a few people on the call and like people can't hear you Uhm, I would be like over enunciating words quite a lot.
	Negative online learning experience	Participants specifically describe their online learning experience as negative	P180665	Doing it all online I find it much more difficult to concentrate and like be present like 'cause I get so distracted by like just things in my room or whatever I'm doing [...]

				I've found it much more difficult doing uni online.
	Language comments by home related to online learning	Participants describe how their home (incl family & friends) have made comments on the language they use during online classes	P50498	If my family over heard me in my tutorials like my sister would make a comment oh like why are you talking like that in your tutorials.
	Covid and lack of welfare	Participants discuss the lack of welfare provided by Oxford university during Covid-19	P150599	And, at the same time, the welfare team isn't checking in on anybody. To be like, hey this is happening the world, we hope you're doing OK, that wasn't happening.
	Covid and BLM	Participants discuss their experience(s) of Oxford university during the Black Lives Matter protests during the first wave of Covid-19	P150599	It wasn't so much Covid, but more so the Black Lives Matter movement that came about last year. That. Made it. Abundantly clear that there were quite a few people in Oxford who. Did not care. About your well being beyond your academic achievement.