Material-discursive changes: posthuman methodologies to (re)conceptualize postgraduate encounters in/with/through language

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Abstract

This paper aims to demonstrate how posthuman research methodologies foster change in analytical thinking strategies to encourage new understandings of academic literacy. It details data and insights from a recent PhD study exploring postgraduate students undergoing transformational entanglements of becomings with 'academic language'. By presenting fragments of interviews with postgraduate students sites of contradictions and assumed expectations of communicative competence are explored. This is analysed by overlaying several thoughts on top of Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts major and minor language, desire, and the pre-personal. Posthuman methodologies are used to re-think 'the problem' of academic language, unsettling longstanding 'deficit model' understandings of academic literacy. Exploring possibilities of the 'more than' in and of language creates generative spaces for new possibilities in analytical processes. Thus, I unsettle my own thinking practices by re-turning to the data to offer multiple diffracted readings for alternative ideas about the role of language in postgraduate learners' becomings.

Keywords: academic literacy, affect, Deleuze, posthuman methodologies, diffraction

Introduction

"Why can't they just say it in a simpler way?!", is a commonly asked question from postgraduate Education students contending with the academic language of their studies. Faced with new terminologies and concepts, learners often speak of a significant 'leap up' of vocabulary used on their undergraduate degree upon beginning masters (MA) level learning. Anecdotal evidence of this phenomenon prompted a 3-year PhD study that set out to explore academic language encounters and their effect on postgraduate learners' academic becomings (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013; Stagoll, 2005). This paper reports on data and insights from that PhD study, the empirical data for which was gathered on a UK taught Education postgraduate MA programme. Typically, full-time taught social science masters programmes in the UK are 1 year courses, and introduce students to concepts, arguments, theories and literatures relating to the field, wherein they develop critical understandings through coursework-based assignments. The course featured comprised a mixture of taught elements with self-directed study, over four individual modules of teaching (in the 1st and 2nd term) with the final module dedicated to students conducting their own research project to write a dissertation (over the 3rd and 4th term). MA programmes of this kind generally attract a range of students from diverse backgrounds, comprising a mixture of students who have recently completed undergraduate degrees and those who are returning to education after some time. Participants in the study had joined the MA from various routes – some having completed their undergraduate degree the previous summer, and others coming back to education after a significant time working in professional settings. Interestingly, all students involved described a sense of the 'leap up' in language regardless of their prior educational experience.

The PhD study focused on exploring the entangled material-discursive elements involved in students' academic becomings, and drew on Taylor and Harris-Evans (2018) to challenge traditional epistemologies that consider change in/of learning as an upward trajectory of 'betterment'. This paper details aspects of the PhD study that explored students' language encounters, while specifically addressing the concept of change by focusing on transformative possibilities of posthuman methodologies. I attend to this by exploring changes in both my own analysis processes, and the potential changes wrought by language events in the learner's becomings. The paper offers a demonstrable example of diffraction (Barad, 2007) as a means to map and disrupt a thought process when coupled with Deleuzo-Guattarian theoretical concepts. In doing so, I arrive at a reconceptualization of how an assumption stemming from students' expectations upon themselves might work as an 'assuming desire' (cf. Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Kuby & Gutshall Rucker, 2015) within a learning event, explained in detail below. The intention here is to illustrate possibilities of how posthuman methodologies can foster change in conceptual positions and analysis, to enable new/alternative thinking in well-established fields. I aim to explore how the changes made to my analytical approach to the data gave way to different perspectives of the role of language in postgraduate learner's becomings. My intention is twofold: I address change through my strategy for analysing data in considering new possibilities for

thinking about language, and through the learners' potential changes as postgraduate students.

It could be argued that change is a vital element of Deleuzian ontology. Though a perhaps more generalized concept of simply not being the same anymore, 'change' is intrinsic to becoming through the process and possibilities of transformation. To change is to modify, to alter, to *make new*. It is the process through which something becomes different to what it was, out of which something else may be produced. However, change is also unsettling – charged with the forceful intensity of the new it is as yet unfixed and full of potentialities, it is an immanent process. Change therefore, in its broadest sense, may be considered as a foundation for transcendental empiricism (Deleuze, 1990/2015). Where there is no change there is a stoppage, stratified boundaries forming in the stillness. Transcendental empiricism (and thus change) removes the stoppages caused by settling into "order, coherence, certainty, and clarity" (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 1082), and allows us to unsettle into a virtual potential, opening up spaces for creation of thought – it makes us *produce* ideas.Theoretical frameworks based on systems of structural thinking that aim to make meaning from the depths of phenomena dominate educational and social research (Colebrook, 2017; St. Pierre, 2016, 2019), and traditionally that which is based in language (MacLure, 2009). However, in their fixation with order (and their general problematization of disorder), such frameworks restrict what is possible to think and limit variation of thought. In accepting this dominant paradigm's methodologies as 'the right way to do it' (St. Pierre, 2019; St. Pierre, Jackson & Mazzei, 2016), we become ensnared by previous ideas that circle on representation and meaning, that cannot move outside of themselves. As an alternative, posthuman methodologies can help us undertake the "project of breaking with *doxa*" (Deleuze, 2014, p. 177, original emphasis). To crack open the 'known', and enable new potentialities to emerge from the fissures, offers possibilities for (re)thinking "in the way a crowbar in a willing hand envelops an energy of prying" (Massumi, 2013, p. xiii).

Academic literacies in higher education

Research into academic literacies in higher education (HE) is well-established, with much of the key literature focussing on socio-cultural/linguistc issues of power and agency within the academy (e.g. Bernstein, 1990; Gee, 2015; Hymes, 1972; Ivanic, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998, 1999; Street, 2009). Studies that have been situated in discourse analysis conventions often examine the 'the problem' of academic language by searching depths to find meaning, positioning learners within a socio-cultural, learner-deficit view of communicative competency (e.g. Henderson & Hirst, 2007; Holschuh, 2019; Lea & Stierer, 2000; Lea & Street, 2006; McKay & Devlin, 2014; Murry & Nallaya, 2016; Robinson-Pant & Street, 2012). The theoretical framework of such research is based in critical pedagogy's understanding of issues of student agency, and seeks to empower students as individual subjects within power structures. However, whilst this paper does not seek to detract from the significance of such work (or the general claims of critical pedagogic research), it breaks with it in order to explore language as de-centred from purely human subjects, creating potentialities for material-discursive perspectives to emerge. Sitting outside of socio-linguistic epistemologies of language comprehension and arborescent (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013)

views of learning, I favour an altogether messier ontological understanding of language, learning and their relationship within becomings.

There is a growing community of researchers using posthuman methodologies to explore language that the study reported in this paper draws from (e.g. Gutshall Rucker & Kuby, 2020; Kuby, 2019; Kuby & Gutshall Rucker, 2015; Kuby, Spector & Johnson Thiel, 2018; MacLure, 2009; Masny, 2012; Mazzei, 2013; Martín-Bylund, 2017, 2018; Toohey, Smythe, Dagenais & Forte, 2020; Song, 2020). These literatures broadly focus on examining the material more-than of language and communication, often in compulsory education and early childhood contexts. The study aligns to these works in seeking to trouble longstanding conceptualisations of academic literacy concerned with depth and meaning, in order to problematise taken for granted 'knowns' in this broader field. My intention was to unsettle my approach to thinking about academic language, using methodological tools that support the generation of potentially new thought in these areas. As outlined below, the methodology facilitated a different approach to both the data collection and analysis to more dominant practices, by being receptive to the 'more-than' of language in the learning assemblage and drawing on literature in similar areas highlighted above. Considering the material-discursive (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) elements of language in education led to alternative views regarding the potential of it acting as a force within the learning event, and further implications for learners' resultant becomings. This theoretical focus arranged learning processes and academic language events as an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013; Colman, 2005) of diverse yet interconnected elements.

The paper contributes to the community of scholars utilising posthuman and Deleuzian methodologies to explore learning and language (e.g. Coleman & Ringrose, 2013; Cole, 2012; Gale, 2007; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Lenz Taguchi, 2012; Semetsky & Masny, 2013; St. Pierre, 2004; Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018). However, the foci of academic language and postgraduate education are perhaps currently understudied here. This study therefore draws on and adds to discussions about the role of language in transformations/becomings (e.g. Kuby, Spector & Johnson Thiel, 2018; Gutshall Rucker & Kuby, 2020; Martín-Bylund, 2017, 2018; Toohey, et al., 2020), whilst also attending to the potential gap in literature regarding academic language and postgraduate learning specifically.

Methodology

The material for this paper draws on a taught postgraduate Education course in one university in the North West of England, between 2016-2019. As researcher, I observed the classroom events of 17 lessons, and conducted 13 interviews with participants over a one-year period. However, adopting a posthuman methodology, the boundaries of what was considered to be data broadened – in that I was not bound to considering only explicitly spoken or written language. Also, I too was implicated in the data as part of the study assemblage[1], through thoughts that emerged from interviews and field notes – which were re-turned to multiple times for diffractive readings, as detailed later. To manage the volume of potential data sites, the following questions

provided focused provocations for thought during the study:

What types of communication do students studying at masters level encounter in the classroom, and how can I explore their response to these language events?

- What affects can language in the masters classroom produce, and how might these contribute to students' academic becomings, or the shaping of a potential sense of self in learning encounters?

- How can access to learning at masters level be explored through classroom language use, and what are some of the less anticipated contributing factors involved?

- How can non-traditional research methodologies be utilised to create novel or alternative thought in exploring language encounters and events in a masters classroom setting?

Whilst not explicitly stated, what will be demonstrated in the data readings below is how I was provoked into considering transformation (both in terms of the students' becomings and my own analysis strategy in producing new thoughts) through these questions. This is understood in the sense explained above, by connecting Delezuian becoming and transformation in conceptualising change and newness of thought/being.

The inquiry was set primarily within the MA classroom, thus placing it outside of the 'norms' of the academic literacies field, often exploring broader socio-cultural sites to understand power dynamics in the academy. To further the potential for alternative ideas to emerge, the methodology was devised by plugging-in Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts (e.g. Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013) into the posthuman thinking tool of diffraction (e.g. Barad, 2007; Lenz Taguchi, 2012). Diffraction, explained by Barad (2007), is the process of reading "insights through one another" (p. 25). By using this concept as a tool for thinking about thought processes, researchers may begin to unfold new potentialities of data. Explaining the process of diffraction, Barad (2007) uses the image of two stones being dropped into water: the first stone is dropped and causes waves that disrupt the surface. Dropping the second stone creates more waves that interfere with the first stone's; these together then create relational effects, and thus new patterns. Diffraction is about mapping the effects of the different waves (Haraway, 1992), going beyond merely identifying that new patterns have been formed.

As Magnusson (2020) explains, diffractive readings of data are nomadic (in a Deleuzian sense) as they allow thought to wander. This consequently causes researchers and readers to view the analysis of data (and the data in and of itself) to be in a constant state of movement, unable to settle on a final answer. Though I offer thoughts about the data below, these too may well be re-turned (Barad, 2015) to for further reconceptualization, demonstrated by my diffractions from earlier thinking with the data. Explored further below, students expressing feeling a certain 'expectation' around language at postgraduate level learning was a significant area of data in the study. However, I re-turned to thinking about this many times, each one placing new thoughts on top of one another to be read through once more. I attempt to demonstrate my analytical process

and the changes in my understanding caused by these diffractions. I map out these changes to show the movements between more discourse-based representational ideas, to posthuman alternatives, establishing how diffracting these with other data and Delezuo-Guattarian concepts can suggest possibilities in the transformations of students' becomings through/with/in language.

This methodology helped move the study toward a more postqualitative (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013) working/thinking process, and avoid the rehashing of old theory with new words as cautioned by Mazzei and McCoy (2010). They explain that the challenge here "is to experiment with the idea that thinking with Deleuze is not merely to 'use' select metaphors...and to illustrate these metaphors with examples from data, but to think with Deleuzian concepts in a way that might produce previously unthought questions, practices, and knowledge" (2010, p. 504). I am aware that this point might raise the question of why the study did not just solely use Deleuzian concepts, such as cartography. The answer lies in the possibilities for analytical processes that diffraction offers. Essentially, the study used the Baradian concept of diffraction as a methodological tool to generate thoughts, and Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts as a framework to hang the ideas on. Similarly to Murris and Bozalek (2019), I too sought to put "Deleuze and Barad in conversation with each other diffractively" (p. 880). Whilst there are arguments against the suitability of a Deleuzian and Baradian conceptual merging (e.g. Hein, 2016), there is a growing body of empirical literature that counters this (e.g. Lenz Taguchi, 2012; Murris & Bozalek, 2019; Stenliden, Martín-Bylund, & Reimers, 2018). The recognition of this relationality lies in the connections between Deleuze's transcendental empiricism and ontology of immanence, and Barad's onto-epistemological knowing-in-being, as also explored by Murris and Bozalek (2019) in response to Hein (2016). In both of these philosophies, 'newness' in thought is key in moving away from the dangers and stoppages in representational thinking, and is also recognised as the driving force of becoming.

My interest was to explore the possibilities for alternative ways of thinking about longstanding issues, by challenging my strategy for analytical thought. To do this, I created a map of my thoughts that began with my initial/preconceived ideas about the events in the data. These initial thoughts centred on more normative conceptions of academic literacies (e.g. the 'hidden features' Street (2009) describes, and power/agency imbalances within the academy). However, these understandings did not go far enough to help me explore the vast assemblage of intra-actions when I began reading the data. By not focusing on the socio-cultural factors involved in issues of academic language, attention was instead given to the diverse assemblage of material-discursive elements present in classroom language encounters. What this gave the study was the ability to explore the material implications in the language-based data; so as to remove the impetus of explaining what the language meant, and instead give focus to exploring how it *worked* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013).

Demonstrating diffractions*:* Reading the data as transformations in/through/with language

The example below explores the transformative possibilities of posthuman methodologies in analytical thinking processes, and reconceptualisations of students' language encounters made possible through this. Alternative notions of the function of language in academic becomings were possible through untangling the workings of events in the data that may have otherwise been discounted in more traditional approaches to language-based research (MacLure, 2009), such as contradictions and assumptions made by learners within the study.

Whilst it is accepted that the difficulty of content and concepts is amplified between undergraduate and postgraduate courses, questions about the level of learners' communicative competency were highlighted in the study. Participating students repeatedly referred to an 'expectation' upon them (e.g. demonstrated explicitly in Serena's data fragment below) – that they needed to both understand and use academic language without instruction, even at the beginning of the course. Lecturers never stated that students must use 'academic' language, and in none of the observations did students ask about the type of language they needed to use in their assignments. Additionally, it was rare that any students asked for clarification of a term used in class or within text. Interestingly, when asked in interviews, students could not qualify the origin of their feelings of the expectation other than saying they felt they were expected to know purely because they were now masters students. The data fragments below illustrate some of these instances. Within many of the post-paradigms, it is generally accepted that data is always partial, incomplete, and that multiple truths in the reading of it abound. Therefore, there are many ways of understanding what may be happening in the data. For example, one way of understanding these fragments could be to ask whether preconceptions held by the lecturers could be passed on to students through concepts that take for granted the level of students' communicative competencies. However, my intention in this paper is to show how my thinking moved away from precisely these kinds of ideas to suggest different functions of language in learning events.

In what follows, there are four main thoughts that are read through one another and work together to produce alternative thinking patterns. Similarly, to Bodén (2015), I offer an initial discourse analysis-based reading that focuses on meaning, and then move to another analytical strategy – consisting of three parts – that builds on posthumanist concepts. These thoughts emerged from, and were further provoked by, plugging into a selection of four data fragments and Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts. In this, I offer an example of how diffracting thoughts with concepts created moments of change in how I could think about language events within the data.

> Fragment 1.a:
> *Lin transcript*
>> Lin: …Maybe, it's because we're supposed to know in the masters degree//at the masters level we're supposed to know what we are//you know what they are {laughs} saying in that language…but yeah, for my personal reason I

couldn't catch up//I mean I couldn't [understand straight away] so I had to catch up…

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Lin transcript

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Fragment 1.b:

Karl, Haleema & Ella interview transcript

> Haleema: I don't know if it's just being on a masters course, or whether it's umm//cause it feels to me like this is a big change from psychology even though it probably isn't but//or maybe I'm just overreacting, but to me at the moment I feel like the lectures are not…they're not what I expected them to be, they're not as umm…it's like…there's times when I feel like, 'ok, the lecturers could say it in a much simpler way' {laughs} it's kind of annoying cause at masters level you should//you should be able to follow whatever they're saying

Fragment 1.c:

Karl, Haleema & Ella interview transcript

> H: …and I don't know why, you know sometimes I think 'what is it that they expect of us?' because like…I come from this university so I've actually been spoon-fed {laugh} for the major of my undergrad and now…I always want to know like 'what do you expect from us, is there a specific way of doing things?'

Fragment 1.d:

Serena interview transcript

> Interviewer: so what do you think would happen if you didn't use 'jargon',
> if you didn't put it in your//[essays]
> Serena: I think if I used more of it I'd get higher scores
> Interviewer: why?
> Serena: Because there's an expectation that you are going to use it

A first reading focusing on discourses and meaning

In the initial reading of this data, my thoughts followed a line considered normative to a traditional discourse analysis lens. A critical discourse analysis perspective (Fairclough, 2015) might suggest that these data offer evidence of students' lack of agency in the power dynamics in the academy, which is where my earliest thoughts about language in postgraduate teaching and learning

concentrated. Similarly to the deficit model discussed above, these thoughts focused on systemic power within the academy and assumptions placed on students' communicative competency (e.g. Crozier, et al., 2008; Fairclough, 2015; Street, 2009). They fixed on problematising three potential expectations, that learners could; understand the language enough to access the content; could amalgamate this into their own vocabulary, enough at least to utilise it for assessments; and that they do this without any formal instruction. Had I followed this pattern of thinking, I may have coded the data to evidence these claims. However, as I became more immersed in the events of the data, something jarred about these ideas. By this, I certainly do not mean to imply that there are no issues with power within academic institutions; however, the patterns in the data fragments shifted when overlaid and considered rhizomatically. Through the gaps in one fragment, other pieces of data layered beneath glowed (MacLure, 2010) leading to alternative possibilities.

Thus, I began to feel uncomfortable with the limits of traditional methodological tools such as coding, principally in how data is often cleaned for analysis (MacLure, 2009). An example of this type of data takes the form of a contradiction that lead to the unfolding of an assumption. The contradiction was formed in an almost negative space as it was not explicitly stated but implied. It could easily have been represented with a deeper meaning or overlooked altogether. Had I discounted this contradiction, cleaning it from the data, I would have missed a pivotal event that ruptured a significant change in my analytical process. Although there are certain academic expectations upon students (such as attending classes on taught programmes, and submitting assessments), in this specific context I questioned whether communicative competency was perhaps not one held by lecturers. Viewing the fragments together with the thoughts they provoked, the image of the thought reversed, forcing the question of whether the assumption of this expectation was actually coming from the learners *themselves.*

In the fragments, Serena, Lin and Haleema discuss their perceptions of language they deem as 'academic' (or "jargon", fragment 1.d). All three participants speak of some sense of expectation around their encounters with academic language either explicitly, like Serena stating she feels that "there's an expectation" on her to use academic language in her assignments, or more implicitly, as Haleema and Lin state "at masters level, you should be able to know what they're saying", that "[you're] supposed to know…what they're saying in the language". These utterances shift when diffracted though the insights pertaining to the context of the interviews: that these interviews happened independently of one another, at the beginning of the course. These fragments are particularly interesting when read through the understanding of the multiplicities these students brought to the learning assemblage: all of whom had come from backgrounds outside of Education, adding further complexity to the function of their expectations. These students spoke of a sense that they "should" understand terminological language, despite not encountering it before. Reading these thoughts through one another prompted questions around how these events may be working within the students' academic becomings. If these expectations originated from the students' own assumptions, what were they doing in/to their learning events, and how might they offer new insights for thinking about language in becomings?

A second reading through Delezuo-Guattarian concepts

I now move on to demonstrate how posthuman methodologies altered my analytical thinking processes to explore new ideas about the data, and the role of language therein. These insights together form an understanding of the potential functions of 'academic' language different to the socio-cultural, competence-based one detailed above. I offer three diffracted readings of the data using the Delezuo-Guattarian concepts: major and minor language, desire, and the prepersonal.

Major and minor language

Exploring potential functions in/of language within these events, I plugged my initial thoughts into relevant Delezuo-Guattarian concepts. Language functions paradoxically in its inseparability to becoming, as it is both the setter of boundaries and categories, and the means through which limitlessness proliferates (Deleuze, 1990/2015). Abstracting this dual role of language, Deleuze and Guattari offer the concept of major and minor language (1987/2013). These different functions of language work together as the State and the nomad – each constituting the other symbiotically.

Working as the State, major language sets limits and establishes territories, or lines of articulation, within an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013). This idea is presented in Serena's views (1.d) about the use of "jargon" in exchange for higher marks on assignments. Here there is a clear delineation of the (perceived) role of language at postgraduate level learning – distinguishing dominant boundaries within which students expect to work. In tandem opposition however, minor language, works nomadically as a molecular force to rupture deterritorialisations and break away from these boundaries. Lecercle (2002) clarifies the mechanics involved in this form of becoming through language, illustrating that:

> [language] can also be said to be in a state of constant, because constitutive, flux, so that becoming is not an effect, to be judged by its results, from the vantage point of the end of a long-term process, but the very life, the very nature of language (p. 66).

Reconsidering the data fragments thusly, students' claims of expectations of the academic language they encountered might be driving a nomadic movement within the learning assemblage. I questioned the function of Lin stating that she needed to "catch up" (rather than 'learn') because "at the masters level we're supposed to know" (1.a). This altered reading led to considering possibilities within students' assumed expectations and whether they could be working to fuel a type of minor becoming in the learning assemblage. In considering the above relationship between assumptions about academic language, and the potential for nomadic movements in students' approach to it, my thinking moved to cyclical affects between assumptions within language and the resulting effect in students' encounters. In this rotating motion, the assumption that "there's an expectation" (1.d) that "you should know" (1.b) became an intensity of forces permeating language events within the learning assemblage. This lead to the thought of a potential minor response produced through the undulation between academic

language encounters and the forces within the expressions of assumed expectations. Was the minor becoming happening in these events one of the academic language (or at least the students' approach to it) itself? Did the motions of force between assumptions and language encounters create a stream of movement, pushing the learning assemblage into new becomings? If so, was this movement causing a rupturing, compelling students to deterritorialise away from the boundaries set by the language used in the classroom, reconfiguring academic language in their own terms? Essentially, were these melding arrangements of events and forces leading learners to thresholds of possibility (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), thus reterritorializing in new places of language understanding, furthering their becomings?

Diffracting the data, thoughts, and concepts together drew attention to connections that had not been apparent in my initial reading of the events. MacLure (2010) explains this retrospective process "since you cannot recognise an example right at the point of its emergence" (p. 282). Barad's (2007) diffraction uses Haraway's process of exploring where the "*effects* of difference appear" (1992, p. 300, original emphasis) to function as a tool for thinking. How we might then respond to these effects is where the new patterns of thought can emerge to propose alternative ideas. In attempting to attend to this therefore, I sought to map the effects of the difference in the data where learners' spoke of academic language expectations and the apparent lack of such expectation from lecturers (whether in class, tutorials, or through feedback on assignments). Doing so lead to the generation of the idea that an *assumption* was created, having forceful momentum within the learning assemblage. Diffracting this thought through notion of function within Delezuo-Guattarian theory, I then plugged into the concept of desire.

Desire
For Deleuze and Guattari, desire is the current of forces and intensities flowing through becomings. They explain that "an assemblage does not exist…without the desires that constitute it as much as it constitutes them" (1987/2013, p. 465). Desire is not a lack of something craved, but the force that exponentially furthers becoming. Diffracting my thoughts through this concept, I considered whether learners' assumptions might operate within a Deleuzo-Guattarian understanding of desire, thus altering its function in the learning process. This is not caused by students desiring to understand unknown language, such as in the sense of lack or deficit. Rather, desire is understood as an affective force that abounds within/through/from language, the encounters of which fuel learning assemblages through intensities caused by assumptions learners' place on themselves. When Haleema expresses the frustration "at masters level…you should be able to follow whatever they're saying" (fragment 1.b), what might be seen here is an overspill of intensity. The "should" in this utterance belies the function of desire in these events – why *should* a learner already be able to understand language they have not encountered before? Diffracting this question through previous thoughts and the concept of desire changed my thinking again. The role of desire in classroom-based language events led to surprising new ideas about the process of learning at postgraduate level. Now the desire within the assumption, or 'assuming desire', could be seen as a force keeping the learners studying, despite the level of difficulty felt by

the language they encountered. 'Assuming desire' suggests limitless possibilities within the learning assemblage of these students' becomings: the 'should' harbouring manifold potentialities. The thought followed that, by assuming an expected level on their understanding of academic language, learners continually reconfigured their approach to it thereby simultaneously propelling change within their becomings. However, desire within a Deleuzian framework is prepersonal – the understanding of which leads to my third diffracted reading.

The prepersonal

As a prepersonal entity, desire exists as an always-already plane of continually affecting and effecting interacting forces. Colebrook (2002) explains that:

> What is originally desired, Deleuze and Guattari insist, is not the personal maternal object but a prepersonal 'germinal influx of intensity'…Desire begins not as the desire for some object by some person—rather, there is a flow of life…which produces bodies and organisms. So, before there are any subjects who desire, there is the production of desire. (p. 100)

Understanding desire as prepersonal shifted my understanding to change once more. As I overlaid concepts, data and my thoughts of assumptions and expectations, I questioned if the continuous riot of forces between students' aspirations and their perceived difficulty of academic language was acting as the mechanism of a constant making and unmaking though language. Deleuze explains that, "the event is coextensive with becoming, and becoming is itself coextensive with language" (1990/2015, p. 9). Desire is the fuel of becoming: thus, the empirical volition of stratification creates a becoming embedded in language.

Following possibilities of recurrent collisions in students' intensifying expectations about language abilities, assumptions took on the role as a desiring force within the learning assemblage. However, if assumptions could now be considered as a force of desire flowing through classroom events, then my understanding of the status of assumptions had to shift so that the assumptions could be considered as pre-existing the individuals involved. Rather than the learners placing assumptions on themselves, as proposed above, the thought changed to give rise to the possibilities of learners being *placed within the assumption* through the empirical forces of classroom events that they enter into assemblage with.

It could now be suggested that assumptions in this context do not originate from individuals as a view that is personally held. Instead, assumptions pervade the learning assemblage prepersonally, creating a desiring force affecting students and lecturers into movements through intensities produced in classroom language events. When Haleema utters "and I don't know why, you know sometimes I think 'what is it that they expect of us?'… 'is there a specific way of doing things?'" (1.c) are we perhaps seeing glimmers of this assumption that she is in assemblage with? She alludes to sensing different expectations to her previous degree but, as in previous examples, this is not substantiated with an explicit expectation. Rather, this intensity manifests as a rhetorical

question about an assumed state that she finds herself within. Therefore, understanding the 'assuming desire' in the events of learners encountering language they feel they should understand but do not, propels movements within the assemblage and leads to transformation in becoming. Kuby and Gutshall Rucker (2015) describe this type of desire as "a force, a becoming, a coming together of flows and intensities" (p. 315). The process of this re-formation works to produce newness in the learning assemblage's territories.

Implications

This paper aimed to explore two implications of change possible within posthuman methodologies. Firstly, as a demonstrable example of how such analytical strategies could contribute to changes in conceptions of language encounters in learning, shifting language from a competence to a force of desire. And secondly, by recognising the affective force assumptions and expectations might have in transformational functions for postgraduate learners in HE. As such, this paper explores immanent processes of change in learning events and potentialities for becomings wrought therein. Suggesting reconceptualisations of language-based data furthers possibilities of the more-than in/of language, contributing to emerging generative spaces (e.g. Kuby, Spector & Johnson Thiel, 2018; Toohey, et al., 2020) for new thinking in the field. New understandings around learners' perceptions of language they encounter may help educators better support students' academic becomings, and how ideas such as 'assuming desire' might contribute to this. This insight is made possible by the application of posthuman methodology's ability to focus on data often overlooked in more traditional discourse-based frameworks (i.e. the contradiction leading to the unfolding of the assumption). Essentially, this paper is an attempt to illustrate how posthuman methodologies can generate transformative analytical approaches to reconceptualise well-established 'problems' in academic literacy. As discussed by Stenliden, Martín-Bylund, and Reimers (2018), posthuman research practices offer us the opportunities for "producing data differently [unsettling] taken-for-granted assumptions and positions in education and make possible for hitherto silenced or subsumed agents to become visible" (p. 25). The data reading above makes clear how analytical strategies for generative thought creates sites for new understandings. By re-turning to thoughts and concepts diffractively, we may unsettle the patterns of thought that we have previously settled into, allowing different ideas to nomadically traverse to alternative spaces (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/2013; Magnusson, 2020). As such, the possibilities afforded in posthuman reconceptualisations of the role of language in learning as more than a competence, alter understandings of forces such as 'assuming desire' and its potential significance in learners' becomings. This could allow educators further insight into forces and intensities in language encounters, potentially opening up ways that we may be responsive to this as a function of learning processes.

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[1] Throughout the PhD thesis, I referred to the work as the 'study assemblage'. An assemblage being an arrangement of connecting yet diverse elements that work in a symbiotic process of production (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013), is how consider the research: a collection of events, encounters, thoughts, and questions relating to one another to create ideas.