

Narrative constructions of “successful mobility” by migrant academics in the UK

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Narratives of “successful mobility” by migrant academics

- An examination of the narrated experiences of a group of migrant academics working in a number of institutions of higher education in the UK.
- How successful migrant academics working in three British universities construct their narratives, considering the linguistic building blocks they use to narrate their lived experiences.
- The ways the participants of the study define “successful mobility” when they describe their academic trajectories.
- Connections between the descriptions they offer and the indicators of success in their descriptions.
- Positive evaluation modifiers (e.g., “lucky”, “fortunate”) used to refer to a number of particular aspects of academic life which they consider important (e.g., “teaching positions”, “research grants”)



Why narratives of successful mobility?

- The majority of research studies on narratives of mobility have tended to focus on experiences which were difficult or negative and frustrating (e.g., Blommaert 2009; Solis 2004).
- An interest in somehow redressing the bias presented in the literature by working with participants who had a successful story to tell (Gimenez & Morgan 2020).



Contexts, methods and participants

- Three different kinds of institutions of higher education: a Russell group, a red brick and a new university.
- Narrative inquiry and within that “narrative networks”. The term narrative networks refers to a group of “stories, texts and artefacts collected around the emerging issues in a core narrative” (Gimenez, 2010: 206).
- Two participants from each institutional context at two different stages of their academic careers (one lecturer and one professor).



Participants

Pseudonym/ Gender	Country of origin	Position	University Type
Maria (F)	Mexico	Lecturer	RG
Wei (M)	China	Professor	RG
Leo (M)	Brazil	Lecturer	RB
Paulo (M)	Brazil	Associate Professor	RB
Kara (F)	Germany	Lecturer	NU
Yan (F)	China	Professor	NU

Table 1. The participating migrant academics



Modifiers and aspects of academic life

- From the data, there emerges a list of positive evaluation modifiers **together with** a list of aspects of academic life.
- No statistical significance of the correlations presented here can be claimed.
- But alignment of modifiers with the aspects of academic life they refer to is consistent across the data.
- Top 5 that recur most frequently in the data analysed.



Top 5 modifiers and corresponding aspects

Positive evaluation modifiers (Mod)	Aspect of academic life (Asp)
1. Great	(opportunity to join a) research team, working experience
2. Successful	research team, research (council) bid, doctoral supervisions, promotion
3. Lucky/ lucky enough	(a permanent) teaching position/ lectureship, research grant, external funding
4. Fortunate	(to have a) PhD , (to work at) a good university
5. Influential	Publications , (international) collaborations ,

Table 2. Top 5 modifiers and corresponding aspects



A few quotes...

It was you know a great (**Mod**) opportunity for me to join an —established and very successful (**Mod**) research team (**Asp**)

...and that came with a few successful ...(**Mod**) research bids (**Asp**) we've had

I had spent some time looking for a teaching job (**Asp**) and yeah I was lucky enough (**Mod**) to get it at [name of university]

I belong to the lucky (**Mod**) group of those who landed at some point with a permanent lectureship (**Asp**)



A few quotes...

After that I was extremely fortunate (**Mod**) I mean I finished my PhD (**Asp**) at [name of university] and I had the job there.

...now it even belongs to the better the best group of universities (**Asp**) in the country so I think I'm fortunate (**Mod**) in that sense.

you know I had the funding (**Asp**) available to carry on with my research... indeed very fortunate...(Mod)

a few influential (**Mod**) published papers (**Asp**) that really helped my promotion (**Asp**) to be successful (**Mod**) you see...



Therefore the referents (reconstructed narrative)

Being lucky or fortunate to have the right qualifications (1) like a PhD to land a great lecturing position (2), possibly at a good university (3).....

Fortunate to join a successful research team (4) and to have funding from a few successful bids (5) and a few influential publications (6) to be promoted (7).



The referents...

- could be used by new as well as existing academics to — guide their efforts to get promotion and thus continue their successful trajectories in higher education institutions in the UK.
- could inform Human Resources induction efforts and guidelines for promotion application.
- could form part of appraisal systems and advice given by line managers.



References

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