Investigating language and identity in the (Franco-)Belgian borderland:
The untold story
@SarahFoxen

Feel free to touch!

Prologue
As junior scholars we are told a thesis is 'an original idea.' We develop our idea over three or so years then present it. But how does it develop? And what else happens along the way? I've collected wool from every place I've stayed since starting my PhD. Tracing the thread, this poster tells the untold story: the story of my *research journey*.

Montpellier, France, Dec 2013
Visiting Maury
Tuning my ear in to French again. Can even hear the southern accent. Revisiting key concepts in dialectology & sociolinguistics.

Gloucestershire, Dec 2013
Christmas with the family
Composing my lit review. Reading about Belgian French accents. Behaviour of vowels seem distinct from that in France[1]...

Gloucestershire, Jan 2014
New Year with the family
...Mid vowels /e/ (fum**é**) & /ɛ/ (fum**et**), & /o/ (p**au**me) & /ɔ/ (p**o**mme) remain in Belgium, though merging in France & maybe the Belgian[2] borderland.

York, Jan 2014
MA graduation & visiting Tim
Recalling MA studies, notably how complex the links are between language & identities[3] (e.g. gender, age, class, profession, nationality).

Oxford, Jan 2014
Visiting Rob, Laura & Simon
Thinking about the Belgian borderland & how language & identity might interact. Also, are mid vowels really merging there?

Paris, France, April 2014
ALOES conference
Presenting my MA research about language & the media.[4] Visiting then reviewing[5] *Mundolingua*, a museum of language.

Kiel, Germany, August 2014
Geolinguistics summer school
Introduced to the idea of the border as a 'bastion', disrupting the linguistic continuum.[10] Wondering if it's the case for the Franco-Belgian border.

Gloucestershire, July 2014
Visiting the family
Reading about space & place & how spatial identity may be particularly pertinent in a borderland; it may be marked in language.[7]

Derbyshire, July 2014
Visiting Karen
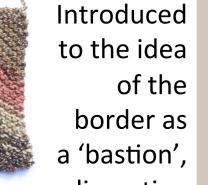Thinking about demographic data I want to gather: sex, age, profession, studies, birthplace, places lived, parents' & partner's origin & profession.

London, Summer 2014
Visiting Rosanagh, Karen & Michael
Reading up on methods for capturing attitudes & beliefs about language. Will request informants annotate a map[8] & rate accents[9] in places.

London, July 2014
Interview at Parliamentary Office of Science & Tech
Explaining my study to non-experts with an example: Scottish people who feel strongly Scottish *sound* more Scottish.[7]

London, Summer 2014
Nicky & Jack's engagement party
Thinking about methodology. I'll collect linguistic & non-linguistic data in the borderland city of Tournai & region of Tournaisis.

Cornwall, April 2014
Easter with the family
Made a mixed media piece[6] visualising factors that may shape linguistic behaviour, language attitudes & perceptions in the Belgian borderland.

Europe, August 2014
Eurolines across Europe
Nowadays we are mobile.[11] Thinking about mobility & need to consider & measure it too. Indexes have been used.[11]

From France, Sept 2014
Parents' summer holiday
Preparing for first visit to the research site. Sorting out the practical stuff like transport & lodgings, & research stuff like networks to engage in, maybe.

Tournai, Belgium, Oct 2014
Pilot study
Visiting the research site for the first time. Speaking to as many people as possible, getting the lie of the land, finding fieldwork digs.

Lille, France, Oct 2014
Visiting a fellow linguist
Crossed the border. Met a PhD student researching Picard, the endangered language of the borderland. Also, Tournai used to be part of France.[12]

Cardiff, Nov 2014
Leading a session at LEDS & visiting Susie & Dan
Leading a discussion on the challenges of ethnographic fieldwork with colleagues. Drew a cartoon[13] as a stimulus.

Birmingham, Dec 2014
Watching the Nutcracker
Getting my methodology in place. Planning word lists & a reading passage containing mid vowel sounds I want to investigate.

Cheltenham, Dec 2014
Grannie's 90th Birthday
Preparing a list of questions to ask informants to elicit conversational style (vernacular) speech. Preparing the written questionnaire.

The Southwest, April 2015
Unpacking & repacking & seeing the girls
Writing up data collection & fieldnotes. Writing a plan for next lot of fieldwork. Packing up the PhD for three months.

Orroir, Belgium, Spring 2015
Escape to Paul & Maggie's
Ethnographic fieldwork is inherently 24/7.[14] Escaping to friends in the north of the region provides a break from that.

Mons, Belgium, March 2015
Visiting with the family
Visiting different parts of Belgium, noticing how they are distinct from Tournai & Tournaisis. There's a notable cultural difference.

Tournai, Jan – April 2015
Fieldwork
Voluntary teaching & engaging with *Royal Football Club Tournai*. Attending & contributing[17] in Picard ateliers & *Vie Feminine*. Interviewing.

Guildford, Jan 2015
En route to Belgium
Making the journey by car across England, then taking the ferry to Dunkirk, then driving through Belgium to Tournai.

Gloucestershire, Dec 2014
Christmas with the family
Reviewing *Language, Borders & Identity*.[15] In sum: borders are diverse but do nevertheless present similarities. There's no taxonomy yet[16].

Exeter, Dec 2014
Farewell to Exeter for a bit
Leaving, having led schools workshops, co-organised public engagement training & an employability seminar, & fundraised for a conference.

London, Summer 2015
Working in Parliament
PhD paused. Drawing on my expertise in linguistics to research a briefing[18] on forensic linguistics & phonetics for MPs & Peers.

Brighton, Summer 2015
Nicky's hen do
Hen do. Otherwise, writing about applications of forensic language analysis in the UK. Started Blogging.[19] Gave a paper on fieldwork & gender.[20]

The Southwest, August 2015
Unpacking & repacking
Getting everything together ready for second phase of fieldwork. Making contact with friends. Preparing for return.

Tournai, Sept – Nov 2015
Fieldwork
Participating in same networks as before. Helping the *Confrérie des Satcheux*.[21] Interviewing more people. Doing background research.

London, Sept 2015
Workshop: feature writing & Visiting Ed
Learning about storytelling & narrative. Thinking about the different stories I can tell about & with my research.

London, Sept 2015
Workshop: research & policy
Underwhelmed by training. So created an image illustrating 'How research gets into Parliament',[22] which spread widely across social media.[23]

London, Oct 2015
Training with the charity Sense about Science
Realised how important evidence is whilst researching forensic language analysis. Became an *Ask for Evidence* ambassador.

London, Feb 2016
Visiting Verena
Analysing vowels. Looking for patterns in word list data: how do mid vowels behave in the Belgian borderland? Are they really merging?

Poltimore, Feb 2016
Giving a talk to the WI
Talking to the ladies about Parliament, forensic language analysis, *Ask for Evidence* & science. Otherwise, extracting data & transcribing word lists.

London, Jan 2016
Meeting at Parliament & visiting Sarah, Jane & Henry
Meeting discussing forensic language analysis with a colleague & MP's researcher. Attended a talk on academia & social media.

Gloucestershire, Dec 2015
Christmas with the family
Writing up fieldnotes & data collection. Putting a plan in place for data analysis. Beginning with impressionistic vowel analysis.

Cardiff, Dec 2015
LEDS seminar & visiting Andy
Thinking about ethnography & how to transform fieldnotes into something 'appropriate' for a thesis. Reflecting on thesis structure.

London, Nov 2015
TECHNE (un)conference
Presenting the Identity Cloud Method.[25] I created this technique to visualise identity whilst thinking about my methods.

Liverpool, Nov 2015
On your TOES! trip
Dreamt up & co-organised a project teaching two Tournaisis U10 football teams English. Ended this with a trip to Everton![24]

Tournaisis, March 2016
Visiting friends
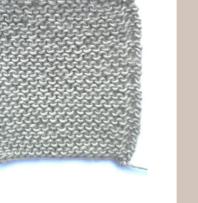Visiting people from networks I participated in during my fieldwork. They became friends. I interviewed quite a few of them for my research.

London, March 2016
Visiting Ahmed
Data's looking exciting! Some people are merging some mid vowels (like in France), yet in some contexts they are maintaining...

London, March 2016
Visiting Kit, Emma, Minnie & Lulu
... traditional Belgian realisations. But why? Next step is to look at demographic, attitudinal & perceptual data to try to understand. It continues...

Epilogue
Ours is a system that values theses, articles & books: it values *research outputs*. It is a system that looks for the impact of *research*. But outputs aren't the whole story; they're the last stages of a *journey*. I've no 'outputs' yet & I've technically[26] had no impact. So does this mean that none of the above is of any value?

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THANK YOU TO LIZ FOXEN FOR CONSIDERABLE KNITTING HELP!

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