MOTHER TONGUE AND INTERCULTURAL VALORIZATION: EUROPE AND ITS MIGRANT YOUTH

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Preface

by Francesco Grande, Jan Jaap de Ruiter & Massimiliano Spotti

The official bodies of the European Union show a high level of interest in themes that are linked to linguistic and cultural diversity, and within that to the valorization of migrants' mother tongues and of their identities. Europe and its life-long learning program raise questions on the approach that educational systems should adopt when confronted with immigrant minority pupils and their languages. Is it a valid response to organize Arabic classes outside the curriculum in order to celebrate pupils' own linguistic and cultural heritage? Or should Europe as a whole espouse the approach perpetrated by some of its nation-states that have focused on the integration of immigrant minority groups solely through the means of the national/official language? Are there any other possible pathways that provide alternative solutions that go beyond this dichotomy of inclusion versus exclusion?

In Western Europe – take the Netherlands as a case in point – the presence of both western and non-western migrants is a phenomenon that dates back to the 1960s and 1970s. Although subject of heated debate and of extensive policing, the intercultural dialogue between migrants and host society has resulted to integration being achieved solely through the learning of Dutch. Southern Europe, instead – take Italy as a case in point – has been confronted with strong migration flows in the 1980s and 1990s and still tries to set up an intercultural dialogue that proposes integration as a joint effort between migrants and mainstream society. Finally, also countries belonging to the former "Eastern block", for instance Romania, have been forced to

come to grips with the consequences of emigration, migration, reintegration and inclusion of their territorial minority groups.

It is against this background that PLUSVALOR – a project financed within the Programme of Life-Long Learning of the European Commission (project number 144368-2008-IT-KA2-KA2MP) – has brought together scientific and non-governmental organizations from Italy, the Netherlands, Hungary and Romania to investigate practices and share possible pathways for the valorization of migrants' own roots and intercultural dialogue. In doing so, the project has striven to enhance the following goals: to work toward the valorization of immigrants' mother tongues in the primary, secondary and continuing education sectors, to develop intercultural dialogue between majority and historically marginalized minority groups, and to improve existing didactic approaches to teaching immigrant minority languages as well as host country's language in preparation to migration.

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1. The looming dangers of classroom multilingualism

by Massimiliano Spotti

1. Introduction

Cultural and linguistic diversity in the Netherlands have been object of heated public and political debates for decades with increased attention being paid to the need for integration, more recently addressed as "participation", of immigrant minority group members within mainstream Dutch society. This integration is sold as something to be achieved through the mean of Dutch alone (Extra and Spotti, 2009). The complex patterns of multilingualism and the identities brought by immigrants and by their offspring have also not spared Dutch education. Primary education is one of the institutionalized environments in which monoglot policing has taken place. That is, it is one of the institutional environments in which policy has enabled Dutch language to move from being side kicked by immigrant minority languages to be the only language of curricular instruction (Kroon and Spotti, 2011). This situation, however, is in sharp contrast with the findings of ethnographic research that reconstruct a discontinuity between monoglot language policy set up in education and heteroglot language repertoires brought along by immigrant minority pupils (cf. Bezemer, 2003; Spotti, 2006). Using the above as backdrop, this chapter focuses on the construction of immigrant minority pupils' identities in a regular multicultural primary school classroom in the Netherlands. It presents two ethnographic data sets. The first data set (1) features the evaluative discourse of a primary school teacher and it focuses on how, this class teacher indexes pupils' identities on an axis of (linguistic) disorder versus order on the basis of an attributed, yet untapped, monolingual

upbringing that is seen as the norm for achieving good school results. The second data set (2) features the evaluative discourse of Moroccan girls of both Berber (see also Chapter 6 of this Volume) and Arabic origin. Although Dutch language is a given in their lives – the identity belongings of these girls result strongly anchored on the axis of *purity* versus *impurity* established on the basis of their Berber language proficiency. The chapter concludes by proposing a revisited understanding of multilingualism that aims to pay justice to the complexity of pupils' own sociolinguistic repertoires and identity performances.

The central concepts that this chapter draws upon are those of modernist language ideologies, indexicality, and identity. The three together make up for a viable pathway for the study of identity construction.

2. Modernist language ideologies, identities and indexicality

Modernist language ideologies are belief systems that serve nation-states and their institutional ramifications – such as education – in setting up and perpetrating national order (Baumann and Briggs, 2003; see also Silverstein's work on a culture of monoglot standard 1996). Modernist language ideologies present languages as artefactualized objects that have a name, e.g., Dutch, Turkish, Arabic, etc., and whose speakers have a clearly definable ethnolinguistic identity, i.e., "I am a speaker of language X and therefore I am a member of group Y". As a consequence of the task of well keeping of the national order, these ideologies revolve around two tenets: (1) the establishment of a standard for language behavior that is common to all inhabitants of a nation-state and (2) the rejection of hybridity and ambivalence in any form of linguistic behavior. The rejection of hybridity is embedded in the search – whether in writing or in pronunciation – for a "standard" (see Agha, 2003, for a comprehensive explanation of the emergence of Received Pronunciation of English (RP) as product of charactereological discourses). The standard is presented as the norm and, as such, it is sold as the uncorrupted variety of the official/national language and often associated with the righteous moral value of its users. Last, given that languages are

understood as finite entities bound to syntactical rules and grammars, the "appropriate" usage in education holds deep consequences for pupils' own identity construction as the "good" pupil versus the "sloppy speller". The link between one's use of the standard variety of the official language in education and the construction of one's identity within a socio-cultural space leads us to the second concept, that of indexicality.

Any bits of language that someone uses have an ideological load in that, in addition to their referential meaning, these bits carry either pragmatic or social meaning (i.e., they have "indexicality"). In other words, any bits of a language that one uses are subject to meta-pragmatic evaluations, that is, value judgments, against the standard/norm. These evaluations can be embedded in people's discourse when talking about someone's language use and are drawn on grounds of (often implicit) shared complexities of indexicality within a given centering institution. For instance, an accent can be evaluated as "funny" because it is index of being far away from the authorized standard accent that is instead index of prestige and that constructs the identity of its user as "well schooled" (see Jie Dong, 2009, pp. 72-73 for the case of Putonghua spoken by pupils from the countryside in a Beijing multicultural school classroom). Any act of language use, in turn, involves identity work and indexicality points to the grassroots displays of "groupness". Further, it means that every utterance, although it may not overtly touch upon identities' matters, is a semiotic act of identity performance. This leads us to the third and final concept employed here, that of identity.

Space constrains do not allow for a complete review of the concept of identity (see Block, 2006; Jie Dong, 2009; Spotti, 2007). For the present purpose, it should suffice to pin down three things. First, identity is not something that someone possesses. Rather, it is something that someone constructs through his/her semiotic performances within a space of socialization. Second, identity is not monolithic. Instead, it consists of a series of performative acts that someone puts in place according to the socialization space (s)he occupies. Third, identities are inhabited as well as ascribed. Inhabited identities refer to self-performed identities through which people claim allegiance to a group. At the opposite end, ascribed identities are attributed to someone by others on the basis of evaluative criteria that make one

either well or ill fitting for a socially circumscribed category, e.g., the good neighbor, the bad student, the college beauty, the nerd.

But so how do modernist language ideologies, indexicalities and identities work together? Borrowing from Bakhtin (1981, p. 293), in any stratified urban society, the language varieties that are often associated with the identities of different groups are not as straightforward as modernist language ideologies would have us to believe. These varieties are, in fact, indexes of diverse, often conflicting, symbolic meanings of social, cultural and ethnic belonging. More simply put, the bits of language that someone uses are not only a means for the direct expression of someone's intentions but they are also objects that index identity belonging both in one's own eyes (inhabited identity) and in the eyes of others (ascribed identity). Language(s) and their words therefore carry an ideological load (see Rampton, 2005, p. 75) because they are subject to the values at play at the time and in the space in which they are uttered (Blommaert, 2005, pp. 222-223). It is according to the centering institution that someone is either part of or tries to gain access to, that identity is constructed as that of a "good" or a "bad" member. This is done on the basis of either how successfully, or else, (s)he manages to embrace the complexity of indexicalities present within that specific socialization space. The meta-pragmatic evaluations that construct one's identities come from either the respect or trespass of situated language norms. These, in turn, revolve around the central values of the centering institution where bits of language have been deployed. Take an international and integration classroom as a case in point. The lack of one's use of the standard Latin script when learning standard Dutch while mapping graphemes onto phonemes leads to one's orthographic skills being evaluated as "sloppy". One's literacy skills to be (mis)recognized as "faulty" and therefore one's identity to be defined as that of an "illiterate" pupil (see Blommaert, Creve and Willaert, 2006).

3. The present study

The study was part of a larger interpretive ethnographic inquiry on identity construction in a Dutch and Flemish multicultural primary school classroom. This inquiry aimed understanding how immigrant minority pupils' identities are constructed in the discourse authored by policy documents, school staff members, pupils as well as in classroom interactions. The data corpus consists of field notes, long-open ended interviews with staff members, focused group discussions with the pupils and audio recordings of classroom interactions.

Approximately 55 hours of classroom interactions were observed and audio-taped. The observer never sought to actively participate in classroom interactions. A long open-ended interview (McCracken, 1988) was conducted with the classroom teacher after a week of visit in the classroom and another 3 interviews were conducted either to elucidate the teacher's evaluative discourse (indicated here with S02) further or to gather the retrospective view of the teacher on taped classroom episodes. Central to the analysis here, are also the focused-groups discussions carried out with the pupils (here indicated with GD01). The groups were based on the quantity of contact that pupils had with each other. The discussions turned out to be friendly chats where pupils could express their views on topics that emerged from the questionnaires and from the field notes drawn during the observation period. All discussions took place in the afternoon, mainly in the schools' staff room and lasted between 30 to 45 minutes for each group. The discussions were all audio-taped and the pupils were made aware that the audiotape recorder was on as the group "chat" started. The content of the discussion touched upon various topics. Starting from the pupils' knowledge of their parental patterns of migration, the discussion preceded to the exploration of pupils' own understanding of their identity belongings. As in the interviews with staff members, my position in all the discussions was limited to give their prompts and ask them to either expand on the former or to clarify their statements. I showed my curiosity in what they had to say and tried to limit, when needed, the intervention of the more talkative ones so to allow each group member to chip in.

As for classroom interactions, a pool of the recordings was selected and transcribed from the synopsis drawn out of the field notes and

audio-tapes. These were thought to have the potential of being elected as incidents that shed light on how identities of immigrant minority pupils are constructed in interaction and contribute to construct «a description so that others may see what members of a social group need to know, understand, interpret, and produce to participate in appropriate ways» (Green and Bloome, 1997, p. 186). The transcriptions of the audio-taped recordings are in English and they report the Dutch text underneath in italic. These transcriptions – which use (…) for a pause, (-) for an abrupt stop, [:] for emphasis, [xx] for inaudible fragment, and [text MS] for a comment – were combined together with the field notes gathered during the observation time to which followed a tentative analysis and interpretation along the line of the "key incident approach" (Erickson, 1986; Kroon and Sturm, 2000). As Erickson (1986, p. 108) points out, in trying to give substance to the connotation of the term "key":

> A key event is key in that the researcher assumes intuitively that the event chosen has the potential to make explicit a theoretical "loading". A key event is key in that it brings to awareness latent, intuitive judgments the analyst has already made about salient patterns in the data. Once brought to awareness, these judgments can be reflected upon critically.

The reviewing of the pool of incidents initially selected on the basis of the researcher's intuitive assumptions has given way to a first tentative analysis that was then either dropped or taken further in a more coherent and deeper analysis and interpretation of the incident at hand. An incident selected as "key" therefore resulted in the reconstruction of the "tacit knowledge" (cf. Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p. 176; Polanyi, 1989) that underlies a classroom event dealing either explicitly or else with identity construction.

3.1 The school, the classroom and the pupils

The data that I present here were collected in the school year 2004/2005 at St. Joseph Catholic Primary, a regular multicultural primary school in Duivenberg, a medium-sized city of approximately 200,000 inhabitants in the South of the Netherlands. At that time, the

school had a high concentration of immigrant minority pupils and an exclusively Dutch speaking teaching staff. On February 15th 2005, Form 8a at St. Joseph Catholic Primary amounted to eighteen pupils in total, eight boys and ten girls. The age of the pupils ranged from eleven to thirteen years due to some pupils repeating one or more school years. None of the pupils had entered Form 8a during the ongoing school year; thirteen of them had attended St. Joseph Catholic Primary since Form 1. All pupils reported to be of immigrant minority background. Following the school register, all pupils but one had been assigned an educational weight of 1.90 – they are all registered as pupils being in need of additional educational support as a consequence of their parents' low educational and socio-economic background (the "norm" for educational weight being 1.0). The exception is Walid, who has an educational weight of 1.0 and whose parents who were both born in Morocco, are highly educated. All pupils reported to speak a language other than or alongside Dutch at home. Concerning the country of birth of the pupils, thirteen out of the eighteen pupils were born in the Netherlands. Out of the remaining five pupils, three were born in the Dutch Antilles, one in Bosnia-Herzegovina and one in Morocco. Half of Form 8a came from the Moroccan immigrant community and of these pupils only Walid and Khalid were born to parents of Moroccan Arabic background while the rest was born to Berber parents. Among the latter, Hajar – born in the Netherlands to a father of Arabic background and a mother of Berber background – understands and speaks Berber. However her network of classroom friendships claims to address her mostly in Moroccan Arabic, Affifa was the only pupil born to a second-generation Moroccan Arabic father and a first-generation Moroccan Arabic mother. In order to gather information on the home languages present in the classrooms under investigation, all pupils have been asked by their class teacher to fill in a home language survey (cf. Broeder and Extra, 1998). Tab. 1 reports the home languages, gender and names of the pupils as gathered from the home language survey carried out in this class. All names of the pupils are fictive.

Tab. 1 - Gender, names and home languages of the pupils in Form 8a

Boys	*Girls*	*Home language(s)*
Khalid		Dutch and Arabic
Sofian	Samira; Lemnja; Siham	Dutch and Berber
	Rhonda	Dutch and Papiamentu
Roble		Dutch and Somali
Cemal	Özlem	Dutch and Turkish
Walid; Zakariya	Hajar; Affifa	Dutch, Arabic and Berber
	Leyla	Dutch, Bosnian and Croatian
Joshwa		Dutch, Papiamentu and English
Osman	Meryem	Dutch, Turkish and Arabic
	Micheline	Dutch, Papiamentu, English and Spanish

The data gathered from Form 8a home language survey are not in agreement with the annotations made in the class register by the Form 8a class teacher. She, in fact, relied on her own "well-educated guess" about pupils' (supposed yet untapped) ethnic affiliation and home languages as well as on the information contained in the pupils' enrollment forms. The gender, names and home languages of the pupils as they stood in the class register are reported in Tab. 2.

The class register does not report any information on Hajar, Khalid and Sofian. It also indicates that Osman, born in the Netherlands to Turkish parents, and Affifa – born in the Netherlands to a second-generation Moroccan father and a first-generation Moroccan mother – only have Dutch as their home language. Further, while the home language survey indicates Berber as one of the home languages for eight pupils of Form 8a, in the class register the home language of these pupils is given under the umbrella term "Moroccan". The class register also does not report the use of any language other than Turkish for the pupils coming from the Turkish group. In the home language survey, though, Arabic is also mentioned by half of the pupils with a Turkish background who attend Qu'ran classes in the weekend.

Tab. 2 - Gender, names and home language(s) of the pupils following Form 8a register

Boys	*Girls*	*Home language(s)*
Osman	Affifa	Dutch
Walid; Zakariya	Samira; Lemnja; Siham	Dutch and Moroccan
	Leyla	Dutch and Bosnian
Joshwa	Rhonda	Dutch and Papiamentu
Roble		Dutch and Somali
Cemal	Meryem; Özlem	Dutch and Turkish
	Micheline	Dutch, Papiamentu and English

4. Majority about minorities

Miss Sanne, the class teacher of Form 8a, is 23 years old. She was born in Duivenberg to Dutch native parents, she holds Dutch nationality and she has lived in Duivenberg all her life. Sanne was brought up in a multicultural neighborhood. In Sanne's view «there is simply nothing special about foreign people they are just, you know, they live here too» (S03: 57) and she believes that her way of thinking about foreigners has been strongly influenced by her upbringing where she learned that «we live here all (…) we live in the Netherlands and we have to do it all together with each other […]» (S03: 59). In recalling her primary school experience that started in 1986, she states there were indeed a few children from immigrant minority groups in her class, but not so many as at St. Joseph, and that they could all just get on with each other. Miss Sanne's statement «I have not a single Dutch child in my class» is used as an explanation for why her pupils perform worse than those pupils at other schools in Duivenberg. The lack of parental qualifications and these parents being non-native Dutch are at the basis of Miss Sanne's own reasoning in order to explain St. Joseph's extra investment in Dutch language with a particular focus on vocabulary. We now move further in the analysis of Miss Sanne's evaluative discourse and we encounter the cases of two pupils, i.e., Mohammed and Leyla, whose language attributions marked the opposite ends of the ascriptive category "immigrant minority pupil".

4.1 Mohammed

Miss Sanne starts with Mohammed, a thirteen-year-old Somali child who was in Miss Sanne's class during the previous school year. At that time, Mohammed had been in the Netherlands since he was eight years old and «he was fluent in the Somali language» (S02: 314). However, in Sanne's discourse, proficiency in the Somali language turned out to be detrimental to Mohammed's Dutch language development because:

Sanne:	So he had (…) when he was eight so he had to learn a second language *Dus die heeft (…) toen ie acht was heeft ie dus een tweede taal moeten leren*
Max:	(hmm)
Sanne:	and the Somali language has a different sentence structure (…) *en Somalische taal heeft een andere zinsopbouw (…)*
Max:	(hmm)
Sanne:	than the Dutch language so he always spoke in twisted sentences. *dan de Nederlandse taal dus hij sprak altijd in kromme zinnen*
Max:	(hmm)

(S02: 316-321)

At the age of eight, Mohammed was already fluent in his Somali – his mother tongue – and he had to learn Dutch as a second language. As Miss Sanne reports in the coordinate phrase that follows (318), the Somali language has a different sentence structure to Dutch. This has led Mohammed to use Somali's syntax in Dutch and to always speak "in twisted sentences", i.e., abnormal sentences compared to standard Dutch or, at least, the local variety of Dutch spoken in the city where the school is located. Mohammed's difficulties in speaking Dutch "properly" are found in the syntactical interference hypothesis where the second language learner inappropriately transfers structures of his first language to the second. Though, Miss Sanne adds:

Sanne:	And if you get it also at home, because that mother, she, of course, was also having problems with that [Dutch language: MS] herself

	En als je dat ook van thuis uit, want die moeder, die was, natuurlijk, daar ook mee aan het stoeien
Max:	(hmm)
Sanne:	and that father too, he also spoke hardly any Dutch. *en die vader ook die sprak ook nauwelijks Nederlands*
Max:	(hmm)
Sanne:	so he could not hear it properly from home either so he (…) yes he used let's say the Dutch language with the structure *Dus hij kon het ook niet van thuis uit goed aanhoren dus hij (…) ja hij gebruikte zeg maar de Nederlandse taal met de opbouw*
Max:	(hmm)
Sanne:	from the Somali language. *vanuit de Somalische taal.*

(S02: 323-329)

Mohammed not only uses "twisted sentences" in Dutch because his language use is based on the structure of Somali, a language that has SOV-order in its main clause in comparison with Dutch SVO-order (cf. Saeed, 1999). Also, as introduced by the causative conjunction "so", both Mohammed's parents are responsible for the syntactical interference among Somali and Dutch. The father, in fact, spoke no Dutch and the mother also "suffered" from Somali sentence structure in her use of Dutch. The parental lack of Dutch proficiency has consequences for Mohammed's identity as the lack of Dutch in the home is indexical of a pupil with a language disadvantage.

4.2 Leyla

Miss Sanne's discourse dealt also with Leyla, an eleven-year old girl born in Bosnia- Herzegovina to Bosnian parents who came to the Netherlands when she was three years old. Miss Sanne explains:

Sanne:	Leyla she is also (…) let's see she has lived here ever since she was three or so, therefore also still really very young when she already a new language (…) look and small children can pick up a (…) another language really easily that is simply, yeah, scientifically proven. *Leyla die is ook (…) even kijken die woont hier al sinds dat ze drie is of zo dus ook nog heel erg jong dat ze al een nieuwe taal*