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CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

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Educating for Europe: are we guilty of creating 2nd class citizens?

Melinda Dooly

Facultat de Ciències de l'Educació; Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain)

Paco: [...] and I'm agree with her when she said that some students it depends of the country or where they come from eh they adapt easily or with more difficulty

[...]

Paco: I think for example_ I think for example in Arabian people in people_ students from Morocco_ I never met one or two good students from Morocco

Research rationale

The above quote is just one example of the types of categorisations or understandings which were manifested in research carried out on pre-service and in-service teachers' attitudes towards linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom. Using a qualitative approach informed by discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967; Sacks, 1972), and conversation analysis (Heritage, 1984), this research examined how cultural and social 'otherness' was constituted in talks between pre-service teachers and in-service teachers in Catalonia, Spain, and how these categorisations were put to use in their discourse. The study consisted of three different subject groups: two pre-service teacher groups (n = 41; n = 10) and one group of in-service teachers (n = 10). By analysing their discourse, the research focused on how teachers in a foreign language classroom 'made sense of their world' (Crotty, 1998; Gubrium & Holstein, 2000), thus highlighting the way they understood the structure and order of the situation they were discussing. In this particular case the topic was diversity within the classroom.

Due to the prominent role of foreign language teachers in Catalonia as cultural mediators in schools - where classes on culture, citizenship and European identity are not usually part of the curriculum - it is highly relevant to know how these teachers categorise the identities of their students. More to the point, in a situation where everyone involved could logically be categorised as 'foreign' or 'non-native' in relation to the language being taught, are *all* the students thus categorised? Or is the categorisation of 'foreigner' limited to non-Catalan speakers? This begs the question of whether negative attitudes towards diversity are linked to other preconceptions, such as stereotyping of languages and a belief in 'old Europe' student profiles, i.e. a belief in homogenous, ethically monolithic classrooms. This is all the more relevant for foreign language teachers because they are in the position to help educate students for the 'new Europe,' since English is becoming a *lingua franca* for the European community. English teachers can help provide their students with greater access to opportunities as European citizens, especially if the language is seen as a vehicle of communication. However, language teachers must teach without implicitly valuing certain languages or identities higher than others, otherwise they are marginalising sizable groups of students,

and in effect contributing to social diversity rather than contributing to equally accessible citizenship opportunities.

Research has shown that teachers' ways of constructing their understanding of students can have a direct effect on their academic success (Wright, 1985). According to Rogers (1991) over 400 studies had been reported between the early 1980s and 1991 and almost all of them found evidence that teachers' expectations were directly related to students' behaviour and achievement. Exactly how and why this effect occurs is not so clear. 'The self-fulfilling prophecy in all its several forms is not omnipresent in the classroom; what is omnipresent is its *potential* omnipresence' (Leigh, 1977, p 323). Thus this research was interested in analysing the construction of such attitudes rather than focusing on whether it occurs or not.

This is why Harvey Sacks' (1972) Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) was chosen as the means of analysis of the teachers' talk. MCA begins with the premise that discourse is an interactional event, involving members who draw upon their cultural and social knowledge in order to construct meaning. Within this social construction of meaning categories, there are some categories which are very powerful devices within our society and which will influence the organisation of how individuals are seen and categorised. In fact, they can be so powerful that they may seem 'natural' and 'exclusive.' This is not to say that these categories are 'universal' nor does it mean that they are idealised abstractions. It means that the features of these categories are more salient (recognisable) for the dialogue participants. This produces mutually recognisable categorisations which are considered 'common-sensical' because they involve a conceptualisation of a shared 'stock of common-sense knowledge' (Schutz, 1962). As Derek Edwards puts it, 'approaches to categories and categorisation are closely linked to notions of cultural knowledge' (1997, p.250). If a teacher holds ambiguous categorisations about different identities, this ambiguity, or in some cases, negativity, may be transmitted to the students.

Discourse analysis: physical features as a categorisation of ethnicity

Note: The research involved the analysis of approximately 25 hours of transcripts. This paper offers limited examples of the actual research. In the examples given, the groups were recorded while doing tasks involving pictures of different students from Catalonian schools. The names of the participants have been changed.

The fact that a member invokes a categorisation device is important to discourse analysis because it means that the speaker wishes to establish the relevancy of the category and expects the listener to respond to it. In the following dialogue, Marlene establishes the relevancy of skin, hair and eye colouring as a categorisation device for 'ethnicity' and Paula 'orients' herself to that categorisation:

Marlene: perhaps because the blacks here in Spain is not so usual.

[...]

Marlene: XX France are for example black people is very common in France

[...]

Paula: and it's very strange because people from Denmark are blond blue eyes and she's like like yeah X was really easy to know.

Marlene has introduced the construction of meaning of 'ethnicity' as involving skin colour and that allows Paula to respond in a way that indicates that she accepts Marlene's orientation. Paula then indicates that other categorisations of ethnicity might be established according to physical characteristics as well, ('people from Denmark are blond blue eyes'). In fact, there were numerous episodes throughout the transcripts in which the dialogue participants attributed physical traits as part of the categorisation of 'ethnicity', based on the assumption that physical traits such as skin colour, hair, eyes relate other members of the same category of ethnicity (often referred to as nationality by the dialogue participants). In most of the cases of categorisation of 'ethnicity', the category contained attributes such as 'the colours of the skin, the dress, the eyes.'

Ana: he looks XXX

Lori: yes eh French Spanish and Catalan

[...]

Melissa: how did you know?

[...]

Mary: for the dress

[...]

Ana: the colours_

Mary: yeah the colours of the skin

In some cases, the 'ethnicity' device is broadened to include mother tongue as one of the features, thus creating a 'naturalised' association between ethnicity, language and physical appearance.

Maria: he looks like Korean no? I don't know

Ana: mm

Maria: XX Japanese or_ and mm he has little competences on English

Other dialogue members express hesitation about the saliency of physical looks as a feature of the categorisation device 'ethnicity' and yet the social interaction of the conversation itself seems to break down any reluctance. In the following excerpt Claudia expresses surprise at how she came to her categorisations, as if she is questioning the very construction of meaning she has helped make. However, the affirmation given by Sandra encourages Claudia to continue her categorisation; in fact she introduces a new categorisation device into the discussion - 'immigrants'. Like the 'ethnicity' category, 'immigrants' are also categorised according to 'looks.'

Claudia: I think that I decided which languages they speak because of their of the_ how they look?

Sandra: yes

Claudia: yeah so_ but I think they are all_
 Sandra: XX
 Claudia: immigrants.
 Sandra: mm

Interestingly, despite the fact that it is unclear whether Sandra is agreeing to the explanation given by Claudia about her actions (categorising according to looks) or whether she is agreeing to the categorisation itself, Claudia seems to interpret Sandra's affirmation as an acceptance of the categorisation she has invoked.

It can be argued here that the reason Claudia interprets Sandra's 'yes' as an affirmation of the categorisation is because of their shared knowledge of educational discourse. As pre-service teachers, both are aware of the social environment of European schools and therefore the immediate categorisation of 'immigrant' for someone who looks 'different' is commonsensical. The dialogue demonstrates that categorisations are clearly oriented against a backdrop of personal and social normative knowledge and assumptions, just as in the next dialogue the in-service teacher creates her categorisation on her own previous experience of students.

Chris: I thi_ I thought that it_ they was from Morocco | XXX
 Alba: Morocco
 Chris: because yes they look like the children we have in the school and we see every day so they look like people from Morocco

In the next extract, the categorisation of ethnicity is extended to contain socio-cultural features.

Lisa: eh do you know something about Romanian people or_
 [...]
 Agnes: only they |||
 [whispers]
 Lisa: do you have a previous opinion that they are all robbers?

In this extract, Lisa repeats what Agnes has said in a low voice in reference to Romanian people, 'that they are all robbers'. The categorisation embodies an assumption that the Romanians, being a heterogeneous ethnic group, are naturally inclined to steal. The orientation of the assumption is that the category 'Romanian' contains attributes of 'criminal, dishonest, untrustworthy'. In fact, this is an interesting exchange – Agnes indicates an assumption she holds about Romanian people but seems to recognise that it is not 'politically correct' to do so; therefore she mumbles it. Lisa then asks her if she has a 'previous opinion' about Romanian people being robbers: Agnes does not continue with the topic in the dialogue, because she has recognised that Lisa does not agree with her categorisation.

In the following extract, Tom deploys ethnicity as a categorisation which includes socio-cultural traits and then associates these traits with language learning abilities and abilities for adaptation, according to ethnic origin. Because Tom does not recognise that

official 'academic' language is more difficult to learn than 'social' language, he associates this 'deficiency' as a socio-category feature of the category of 'immigrant'.

Tom: I think they learn more language in the street than in the school | and I'm agree with her when she said that some students it depends of the country or where they come from eh they adapt easily or with more difficulty

[...]

ISI: I think for example_ I think for example in Arabian people in people_ students from Morocco_ I never met one or two good students from Morocco

[...]

ISI: for example I never met an Arabian student with a good level | never

Sara: I have students from Morocco and they are good students

Tom: yes?

Tom insists that he has never met a 'good' Moroccan student. Again, this is an example of how he includes socio-cultural traits in order to link 'skills' to ethnic characterisations. The features of his categorisation of 'good level' are never clarified. Considering that the social context is a dialogue between in-service language teachers, the desired 'good level' could refer to language or classroom behaviour. It would seem that in this case this deficiency is a reason for categorising diversity as 'problematic.' In fact, there were several examples where the teachers categorised and attributed different academic abilities according to ethnic origins, as is exemplified in the following extract:

Sara: I think it also depends on the country the children comes from because for example a children who comes from eh an European country it's easy to adapt because they XXX the_

Ana: so the problem is not the language | it's the culture?

In this next dialogue, Susana draws on her own social and professional experience to attribute Arabic origins with certain 'anti-social' tendencies. In this case, her observation is that they tend to speak in Arabic when amongst themselves and don't use Catalan in social situations. By positioning Arabic and Catalan in opposition to each other, Susana is clearly placing hierarchical value on the two languages. In other words, Catalan speakers can use their mother tongue in school and it is not sanctioned, but Arabic speakers should not use their mother tongues, even as a social language amongst other Arabic speakers. The implication of the sentence 'try to use their mother tongue' is that the Arabic students do it furtively, even though they have been warned not to do so.

Susana: I observe_ I I say that in a playground on different times if they are_ for example two are XXX and they are friend they speak Arab

Carolina: mm

Susana: more times yes XXX don't know speak in Catalan but X apart from sisters and brothers they try to to use their mother tongue.

The recorded dialogues display the participants' expertise as language teachers in the topics, as well as the saliency the topics have for them. The topics fit into the local context because everyone involved understands the rather technical jargon introduced. In the next extract, the participants are discussing their experiences of, and displaying their knowledge of, language learning. Various descriptions regarding the category 'language learner' have emerged and in many cases, they are attributed to a particular ethnicity or culture. In Sacks' terminology, these are 'category-bound activities' (1972) and are therefore activities which are commonsensically associated with certain membership categories.

Julia: that make easier to learn another another tongue
 Teresa: yes yes
 Carol: yes Croatian I don't know Croatian if X language have got a lot of var_ phonetical variations_
 [...]
 Julia: your mind it's open | your mind your_ it's your ear it's open to_ so you've done eh listen XX XXX and I I remember that Spanish people English people have_ sometimes have more difficulties that XX_

Here is another example of similar categorisations:

Tina: I think people from the East Europe European East European countries_
 [...]
 Loli: XXX really fast a language | Catalan Spanish I mean they really get the_
 Suzy: yes?
 Tina: the language X the difficult thing is when they are Chinese or_ especially Chinese I suppose
 Suzy: I never have a student from those countries | I don't know | I'm sure they get language they_ quicker than the others.

In all of the examples above, the discourse participants use culturally and socially emblematic categories of 'ethnicity' in such a way that the students whose physical features were most salient to them were positioned as the 'other'. It is important to note that the category itself ('other') is not bound to an intrinsically fixed symbolic meaning the teachers associated with different students from different backgrounds, and was therefore not fixed to just one ethnic group. In this way, 'otherness' was constructed within the social context of the language classroom and was most applicable to students who 'seemed' to be immigrants.

Finally, as stated earlier in the introduction, the English as a Foreign Language classroom (EFL) is one of the few situations in which the non-native speaker can be on equal grounds with the rest of the students and supposedly has access to an opportunity offered to all European citizens - language learning. However, the presupposition of the dialogue participants seems to be that these are homogeneous groups of students who have no real need for EFL, despite the earlier claim that some of the ethnic groups were quick language learners. This contradictory positioning is illustrated in the following extract.

- Kim: eh yes more than in English because at this moment they don't need real English because they XXX
- Paul: when will they get the English then? XXX
- Kim: no yes yes XXX when you as a teacher_ a new student just arrived from Morocco and he only speaks Arabian_ why do you have to teach him some English structure if they can't communicate with you in any language? it's very difficult
- Lynn: the theory say that eh they use the_
- Kim: yes I understand the theory_
- Bill: and these these students in Morocco they never eh_
- Kim: hear English
- Bill: hear English | they they learn French as a second language
- SAR: French | and the situation is worse with Chinese people

This implicit exclusion can have tragic consequences. It is greatly limiting these students' opportunities in areas where foreign language certifications are a prerequisite (not just the ability to speak a foreign language, which all of these students already have); areas such as university, skilled job market, politics, etc. This is in spite the fact that language learning (not acquisition) is considered to be not only a right, but a necessity for all European citizens. Unless of course, you are a second-class citizen.

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