

Commentary on Copp Mökkonen Dissertation

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1. Introduction

The summary of Alicia Copp Mökkonen's dissertation presents a timely phenomenon that has received increasing interest in the last twenty years (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1996; Duff, 2012), namely that of language socialization in the classroom. The ethnographic perspective adopted by Copp Mökkonen shows the rise of qualitative methods in applied linguistics (Dörnyei, 2007; Duff, 2008; Paltridge and Phakiti, 2010; Talmy and Richards, 2011) and, consequently, in the analysis of classroom discourse (Rampton *et al.* 2002).

As raised in this thesis, early socialization studies analysed the appropriate use of language by young children. At present, wider approaches are followed that include the acquisition and development of children's interactional, cultural and ideological knowledge. Copp Mökkonen's work adopts this recent perspective by pointing to an under-researched issue, namely that of the socialization process in the EFL classroom. As indicated by the author, the goal of this study is to examine socialization processes as these relate to language choice in the classroom. More specifically, Copp Mökkonen deals with class membership, that is, how students negotiate social positions in the classroom, and the effect of the adoption of the English monolingual norm.

Results indicate how code choice enables students to assume authority and build asymmetrical relationships, being English use and knowledge a pre-requisite for social promotion within the group. Interestingly, findings also consider the negative reaction and resistance to the imposed monolingual norm. According to the author, this last aspect has not been addressed in previous research (Evaldsson and Cekaite, 2010) and a

deeper and more comprehensive focus on this issue might be required in order to truly account for classroom socialization processes.

In addition to participants' positive and negative reactions to the above-quoted monolingual norm, this dissertation examines membership acknowledgement and voice construction within the classroom socialization process. For this last issue, the author draws on the experiences of individual immigrant students over time to show that socialization processes are complex and dynamic.

2. Discussion

Tackling individual immigrant students' experiences and negative reactions to a specific classroom linguistic policy sheds new light to the field of language socialization. In our view, the author could best contribute to open new research avenues by following this multilingual perspective in future publications in which her rich data may be further exploited. Issues like the presence of all (Bengali, Italian, French, Finnish, English) immigrant children's languages in classroom discourse and their role in promoting membership could be addressed. Previous studies have exclusively focused on immigrant students who did not share any of the school languages (Cots and Espelt, 2012). Interestingly, those studies dealt with the resources and opportunities that the school provided for the students' development of their communicative competence and for their construction of identity. We believe that this aspect could be further examined in Copp Mokönnen's work as she also deals with voices of multilingual immigrant students (see results related to achievement of voice section 4.4 of the summary).

As argued by Ochs and Schieffelin (2011), a central aspect of language socialization studies refers to the extent to which environmental features, culturally informed persons and artifacts promote children's participation in communicative acts. In our opinion, the

presence of more than one language in the group and the perceived status of those languages may be seen as environmental factors, and the multilingual teacher can be considered a culturally informed entity with artifacts to foster his/her young learners' communicative competence.

It is through participation in communicative acts that young learners' identity is build. Following Norton (2000), this thesis deals with identity as a social phenomenon that arises from learners' interaction. All language learning is hereby understood as a social process that takes place in specific sociocultural and institutional settings (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). Nevertheless, the complex negotiation of identity on the part of multilingual speakers may be best developed by taking into account Creese's claims (2013) on the issue. According to this author, there exist certain dangers in viewing identity as agency and as reproduced in social structures. There is a "threat for multilingual people too easily defined around static definitions of culture, nation and language. This negatively positions multilingual young children in schools in ways that can have harmful consequences for them" (Creese, 2013: 3847). According to Denos *et al.* (2009) specific teachers' and children's attitudes may be elicited once a child has been ranked and assigned identity (i.e. immigrant learners). We find an example in Copp Mökkonen's study that refers to the case of Lucille who is assigned the role of "language policeman". Identities once assumed or assigned are difficult to change. In fact, we find Lucille's reluctance to use Finnish in a different extract analyzed in this dissertation where the teacher asks her to help her parents read a note in Finnish (see pages 66-67). It seems that the prevalence of the monolingual identity assigned to Lucille as "language policeman" goes beyond the classroom although she is a multilingual speaker of French, Finnish and English.

The use of more than one language in the classroom is also linked to the construct of identity. As reported by existing research (Cots and Nussbaum, 2008; Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 2005), bilingual learners make use of their verbal repertoire in the classroom to signal out their own identity. In these cases, code-switching does not refer to lack or deficient linguistic knowledge. It rather illustrates bilingual and multilingual behavior in communicative practices which could further be analyzed from the perspective of translanguaging.

According to García and Sylvan (2011), translanguaging refers to those complex discursive practices of bilinguals that illustrate not only how children speak but also how, and most importantly, who they are (Creese and Blackledge, 2010; García and Sylvan, 2011). Some studies have now been conducted that consider translanguaging as a normal practice in EFL classrooms. Nussbaum and Cots (2011) present evidence of the use and variety of roles assigned to three languages, namely those of Catalan, Spanish and English in the EFL classroom. The authors analyze classroom discourse and code switching as a resource for specific social and institutional practices.

More recently, Corcoll (2013) acknowledges the benefits of letting students use their languages in the EFL classroom, and thus, promote translanguaging. A comparison between the adoption of translanguaging, on the one hand, and the English monolingual norm presented in Copp Mökkonen's dissertation, on the other, would be highly interesting and the pedagogical implications deriving from such contrast might be crucial is ascertaining the best pedagogical framework for multilingual language learning and teaching .

3. Conclusion

As a conclusion, we may say that the interest of Copp Mökkonen's work lies in the perspective adopted and theoretical framework followed, namely that of language socialization. We need more studies on classroom discourse that go beyond the actual linguistic analysis of students' production and teachers' feedback. Yet, a combination of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic perspectives may best account for what actually takes place in the classroom. In addition, we believe that it is of utmost importance (i) to acknowledge the multilingual background of learners, and (ii) to do so from a dynamic perspective (Jessner, 2008). Multilingual practices may best illustrate ways in which identities are negotiated and constructed in institutional settings like that of the school.

According to Kulick and Schieffelin (2004) language socialization studies should meet three criteria: (i) they should be ethnographic in design, (ii) longitudinal in perspective and (iii) deal with linguistic and cultural practices overtime and across contexts. We believe that this dissertation meets these three criteria as the author presents an ethnographic study of classroom discourse showing a variety of tasks and interlocutors across eighteen months.

Congratulations to Copp Mökkonen for this great piece of research which will no doubt have implications for the field of language socialization in general and classroom discourse in particular.

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