Performing Bilingualism in Wales & Sweden

How Young People in Bilingual Education Construct their Bilingualism

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Overview

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Performativity Theory 1

Within a poststructuralist paradigm, performativity has become a key concept in understanding the role of language in the dynamic constitution of social categories and their linked identities in terms of repeated and ongoing ‘performances’. (Musk 2006: 19)

Performativity Theory 2

Judith Butler: “A performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names.” (Butler 1993: 13)

Thus bilingualism, like gender, can be claimed to be a category that does not predate the concept; it is produced by means of repeated discursive acts, “which congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural type of being.” (Butler 1990: 33)
Thus bilingualism is to be seen as dynamic bilingualisms-in-practice, which are continually being reshaped, revalued and reconstituted, both through discourses which recontextualise the notion, and through the everyday language practices of bilinguals. (Musk 2006: 113)

Identity

Identity is therefore to be seen as something that arises through social interaction with others rather than something one has.

(c.f. many recent studies on language & identity, e.g. Antaki & Widdicombe 1998, Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou 2003, Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004, Jonsson 2005)

A performative approach views identities as an observable effect of situated social interaction, rather than a manifestation of some pre-existing inner essence. (Musk 2006: 404)

Identity 2

- In interaction, individuals constantly position themselves and others and thereby perform and co-construct multiple (and even contradictory) identities in situ.
- Their acts of identity are to be seen as performative in the sense that the subject is constituted as a dynamic and aggregate effect of performing them.
- Examples of applying performativity theory in multilingual contexts: Mozambique (Stroud 2004), Sweden (Milani 2005, 2006), Wales (Musk 2006), Canada (2006 Sarkar & Winer) and Malta (Grixti 2008)

Discourse & Discourse Analysis

A discourse – “a way of talking about and acting upon the world which both constructs and is constructed by a set of social practices.”
(Candlin & Maley 1997: 202)

Discourse analysis - identifying such discourses, both spoken and in writing, i.e. aggregates of associated discursive features in circulation across different contexts, constituted by particular words, collocations or phrases.

e.g. a ‘commodification discourse’ whereby bilingualism is constituted as marketable and measurable language skills with ‘added value’
(Heller 2003, Musk 2010)
Data

Focus-group discussions

Wales
- 4 video-recorded focus groups (4-6 participants in each)
- from one bilingual secondary school in Wales (17-year-olds)
- 3 groups discuss primarily in Welsh and 1 in English

Sweden
- 6 video-recorded focus groups (3-4 participants in each)
- from one international upper secondary school in Sweden (17-18 year-olds)
- All discuss primarily in English and (to a lesser extent) Swedish

Some Prominent Discourses

- Commodification discourse
- Linguistic diversity discourse
- (Competence discourse)

For Wales only:
- Language rights discourse

Excerpts

1. Rich: do you think you’ll all work with uh english
2. Pause: (.3)
3. Sylar: YES
4. ugh oh: yep
5. Pause: (.3)
6. Sylar: well that’s what mr (green) said right even our math
7. Curryf: (of course)
8. Sylar: teacher told us that
9. Curryf: (hi hi hi hahaha)
10. Sylar: Language LANGUAGE is much more important ((bangs on
desk)) to us than what MATH is for example because
11. Curryf: kom id kom kom come in come come
12. Pause: (.3)
13. Curryf: kr kill ((beckons to student outside))
14. Sylar: the chinese are more ambitious than we are when it comes to
maths
15. Pause: (.2) ((R starts smiling))
16. Curryf: kom r kom ((beckoning))
come come
17. Sylar: so we should focus on language (.2) I’m not kidding
18. Curryf: come
19. Pause: (.2)
20. Sylar: ((I know)
21. Rich: ((I know)
22. Curryf: (come and show you to the camera)
23. Sylar: he said
24. Pause: (.2)
25. Sylar: be; multilingual
anyway it just proves the point that (. .) *language is very important ("Cf static drumming rhythmically on the deck")
30      Curryf: ((continued drumming)) Shuhshuhshuh!
32      Sylar: as the WORLD ("Cf points a finger at his lips to shush Cf")
34      Pause: (.2)
34      Curryf: *I'm sorry ' ("in high pitched voice")
36      Pause: (.3)  ((R moves recorder towards himself and S))
36      Sylar: as the world turns ("moves back recorder but on its end")
37      Curryf: Shuhshuhshuh so
38      Pause: (.4)
39      Curryf: I won't do that. ("lays recorder in original position")
40      Sylar: Language becomes morose (.7) of (.4) at vital part of your life
42      Curryf: of your life
43      Pause: (.2)
44      Sylar: of *your life but of S's till
45      Curryf: ("Cf moves & bangs chair") (x it was very nice) Shuhshuhshuh
46      Pause: (.1)
48      Curryf: Shuhshuhshuh
49      Pause: (.3)
50      Sylar: it is (.) a big part of knowledge when it comes to uh when you want to uh ("Cf points recorder at S's mouth")
52      Pause: (.6)
53      Sylar: apply for jobs (.4) basically

54      Curryf: ((points recorder at own mouth)) That's nice
55      Pause: (.4)  ((Cf returns recorder to S's mouth))
56      Sylar: yeo it is
57      Pause: (.2)
58      Curryf: Shuhshuhshuh (.2) hhh ("puts recorder back down on desk")
59      Pause: (.3)
60      Sylar: got you know
61      Pause: (.5)
62      Curryf: ((whispers into recorder)) "(xxx)"
63      Pause: (.4)
64      Sylar: the world is becoming smaller ("looks at Cf then S shakes his head")
65      and you need to know more an' more languages
66      Pause: (.3)
67      Sylar: nion: yeaa
68      Pause: (.3)
69      Curryf: Shuhshuhshuh S
70      Pause: (.3)
71      Rich: globalization
72      Sylar: WORRY!
73      Curryf: ("(xxx)" wha't ((to C with hands cupped round mouth))
74      Sylar: how you know if
75      Pause: (.9)
76      Sylar: if europeans (.2) choose not to learn english we're
77      Curryf: wha't whatever (I see you) Shuhshuhshuh
78      Sylar: gonna have to not only learn english but also
79      Curryf: "(xxx)"
80      Sylar: german from uh:

88      Amy: ma' fe yu fantasize though bo' ti all gweu f1 'di ca'll (.)
89      Curryf: it's an advantage though that you can say I've had
90      Llunos: gy y gyrfang (.1) *'di ca'1 gyddt yw trwy gyrfang
91      Louise: a ymgyrch ymgyrch
92      Llunos: of Welsh
93      Louise: o fe'i dewynt- pan ti'n myn' am gydd ma'n wne'n goryn
94      Sylar: i
95      Llunos: o fe'i dewynt- pan ti'n myn' am gydd ma'n wne'n goryn
96      Amy: I'm relieved that you go for a job they'll ask
97      Louise: o te'i dewynt- pan ti'n myn' am gydd ma'n wne'n goryn
98      Curryf: an- advantage
99      Louise: i
100     Amy: ma'n bellu bo' fan- yu fantasize it lot o gyddi; (.)
101     Curryf: it can be an advantage for a lot of jobs
102     Llunos: te'i felch bo' f1'n neud; a ymgyrch ymgyrch I mean brilliant pan ti gally rhedw, ie
103     Louise: through the medium of Welsh I mean brilliant when you can say yeah
104     Curryf: yeah I'm glad that I've done
105     Amy: i'm bilingual uh and everything
106     Curryf: yeah

107     Curryf: ((points recorder at own mouth)) Lie on, lie dysm be' f1'n 'sie dweud ti'n
108     Llunos: (.) yeah but yeah this is what I want to say you're
109     Louise: cyfymuedig wedyn gyda dwisiodd ti'
110     Curryf: oh i can't help you i can, say nonsense
111     Louise: i don't want it in English
112     Curryf: I don't want it in English
113     Llunos: only doing it in welsh you've got to be flexible
114     Louise: dain i neud ym gynrâg rai' ti fod yn flexible
115     Curryf: (.)
Conclusions 1

- **Performativity theory** allows us to see social categories, such as bilingualism, as being dynamically produced through aggregates of situated discourse.
- Positioning ourselves and others through discourse results in the production of identities.
- Focussing on commodification discourse, we have shown how bilingualism is constructed as language skills that provide an advantage, a competitive edge.

Conclusions 2

However, the 'added value' is also different in the two contexts:

- In **Sweden**, knowing better English than contemporaries in ordinary schools provides an advantage in the global market place (e.g. in competition with the Chinese).
- In **Wales**, knowing better Welsh than pupils in the neighbouring English-medium school provides an advantage in the local (Welsh) job market. Contestation of the necessity to use English (and use only Welsh) is rejected (language rights discourse).