



WORKSHOP ABSTRACT

Education and language as socio-cultural capital in contexts of migration

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Abstract: This workshop centers on education and language in contexts of migration and forced displacement and questions whether and how language features as socio-cultural capital. The rhetoric and policies of many nation-states vis-à-vis migrants promote language-learning as a path to self-sufficiency and social mobility. However, scholarship demonstrates that the transformation of a new language into linguistic capital is not straightforward. Following Bourdieu (1977), language needs to be understood as bound to the speaker's position in a social structure. Language is worth what the speakers are worth in terms of their respective capitals of authority. Where one language dominates the market, it becomes the norm against which the price of other modes of expression are valued.

Based on this notion of language as capital, we are interested in language-learning as a practice of attempted capital acquisition in migratory contexts. This might involve learning the official language in a country of (temporary) settlement, but also strengthening skills in one's heritage language, or studying an additional language. While migrants' learning of dominant languages in destination countries is often politically debated, mastering of heritage languages provides migrants with linguistic capital that is recognized and valued among family, kin and solidarity networks.

We are interested in papers that focus on questions including:

- How do migrants learn the hierarchy of different languages as they socialize into a new country? What role do educational institutions play?
- How do migrants resist and/or subvert differential valuation of language use?
- Who mediates access to linguistic capital? How does this mediation work in the cases of adults and children?
- How do language testing and certification shape access to linguistic capital?
- How does the labor market condition the use of linguistic capital?

We particularly welcome presentations based on ethnographic research that has been conducted in the Global South.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Monday, September 23, 2024 | Slot 4 | Room 4

Akshita Rawat: Locating the Role of Language as Capital in Schools in Delhi, India

Asli Ikizoglu Erensu: Linking language-learning to social capital: lessons from the schooling of Syrian children in Turkey

Viktoria Adler: The visible difference: accent. An ethnographic study on belonging of a relatively privileged Colombian migrant woman living in Melbourne, Australia.

Magdalena Suerbaum: Promoting literacy in Classical Arabic in displacement: Syrian parents' investment in children's language acquisition in Turkey

Ildikó Zakariás: Central and Eastern European Teachers in German Language Training for Migrants in Austria

SESSION PAPERS

Locating the Role of Language as Capital in Schools in Delhi, India

Akshita Rawat

This paper aims to understand the role of language as a form of capital in schools in Delhi, India by locating the role of local language (Hindi), mother tongue (regional languages) and English in teaching-learning practices. It is based on an ethnographic study in a government-run (public) school attended by children of migrants from Northern India.

In a multilingual society like India, there exists a hierarchy of languages based on educational, political and constitutional status. While some languages are devalued as languages of the disadvantaged, others, particularly English has attained linguistic hegemony due to socio-historical reasons. The educational system institutionalises and reinforces language hierarchy and inequality. However, acquiring English is propounded by social justice movements in India as instrumental in eradicating caste and class barriers, making it a form of attainable capital for the oppressed sections, and aiding their social mobility.

The possession of English or any other language does not alone vest students with 'power'. As Bourdieu notes, value and power are dependent on the conditions set by the structures and authorities of social fields, the rules of exchange and the extent of agency and exercise of power by those in the field that ensures the recognition of the students' habitus.

Within this contextual background, this paper uses ethnographic data to analyse the role of local, mother tongue, and English languages in schools. It examines how students'

socioeconomic background shapes teachers' perceptions, teaching-learning practices and assumptions about their language abilities. The data highlights the use of local bilingualism in classrooms, the challenges of acquiring English as cultural capital for migrant students, and the use of local language to “decode” the English language. It further uses Bourdieu to highlight the possibilities of contesting and reshaping exchange rules in schools. by recognising one’s capital and gaining the cultural capital of English.

Linking language-learning to social capital: lessons from the schooling of Syrian children in Turkey

Asli Ikizoglu Erensu

Migrant and refugee integration policies operate under the assumption that acquisition of host country language will build newcomers’ human capital as well as social capital. Accordingly, the increase in human capital will move them out of economic marginalization, while the increase in social capital, in the sense of gaining access to more and varied social networks, will also help promote social cohesion. Contrary to these expectations, several studies have revealed how language-learning does not automatically translate into either economic or social mobility, since the value of a language continues to depend on the speaker’s existing social location. In Turkey, where a large Syrian population resides under temporary protection, teaching of Turkish has become an educational policy priority both in accordance with the UN Refugee Agency’s refugee education policy and with the support of European Union funding. Based on longitudinal research with a cohort of primary school students, who have attended special adaptation classes in the 3rd grade because they had not acquired sufficient Turkish skills during the first two grades, this presentation will highlight two findings: (1) Rather than language-learning increasing social capital, the link between language-learning and social capital works in the opposite direction. That is, it is the children with already higher social capital who are able to learn the language. (2) Schools act as sites which hamper the building of social capital, instead of facilitating it. These findings will be illustrated by examining the following: (i) Syrian students' relations with parents as well as siblings and other relatives, (ii) relations with Syrian peers, (iii) relations with the ethnic community, (iv) relations with the school community, including Turkish peers, teachers and administrators.

The visible difference: accent. An ethnographic study on belonging of a relatively privileged Colombian migrant woman living in Melbourne, Australia.

Viktoria Adler

In this paper I will trace the experiences of Gabriela, a Colombian-born woman who identifies as white and upper class in her country of origin and who lives in Melbourne, Australia. I focus on the ways in which she makes sense of her Latin American/Spanish accent in relation to her position within Australian society. This paper is based on an ethnographic study of relatively privileged Colombian-born women living in Melbourne, Australia, using life story interviews and participant observation. To understand her experiences, I draw on the concept of visible difference (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2007). In Australia, accent functions as a marker of difference. Through her narrative, Gabriela connects her personal experience to the broader context of Australian racialized relations

and narrates her understanding of her own social position within the country's racialized hierarchy while embodying the white and upper calls habitus she was born into. As her story demonstrates, accent cannot be considered in isolation. It intersects with other markers of difference such as attire, skin and hair colour and so on. Gabriela occupies an ambiguous position within Australia's racial hierarchy. She is not as racialized as others (i.e. Chinese, Indian, Vietnamese, Sudanese or Aboriginal), but she is also not as 'white' as those who are classified as 'really' white and/or 'really' Australian in contemporary Australia. In her life story she uses her visible difference 'accent' to make sense of her position within Australian society, a position that is influenced by her multiple and ambiguous social locations.

Promoting literacy in Classical Arabic in displacement: Syrian parents' investment in children's language acquisition in Turkey

Magdalena Suerbaum

This presentation centers on the efforts of Syrian parents residing in Istanbul to support their children's literacy in Fusha (Classical Arabic). While Turkish language acquisition plays a significant role in Syrian parents' educational objectives for their children and a local version of the Syrian-Arabic dialect is the dominant language of communication in most families, giving children literacy in Fusha features as a crucial aspect of Syrian parents' childrearing practices. Fusha is the language of writing, education and administration in most countries of the Arab world, as well as the language of Islam and pan-Arab nationalism. Yet, Fusha holds complex, ambivalent position, prestige and status in Syria, Turkey and in the Arab world.

For many Syrian parents, Fusha is linked to the children's Muslim and Arab identity. It is also considered a specific form of capital: some Syrian parents believe, for instance, that children's literacy in Fusha supports the development of a strong personality. Syrian parents use various strategies to enhance their children's exposure to, knowledge of and literacy in Fusha. Some children participate in regular online lessons with reputable teachers residing in countries of the Arab world; others study with an Arabic teacher in their neighbourhood or attend classes in the local mosque. Ultimately, this presentation proposes that education in Fusha be considered a form of capital that Syrian parents prioritise and value in order to develop their children's identities in manifold ways, and puts this in perspective by reflecting on Fusha as a language with ambivalent status in Syria, in Turkey and in the region more broadly. Ethnographic data on which this presentation is based was collected during seven months of fieldwork in 2022/2023 in Istanbul as part of a research project revolving around childrearing practices, educational choices, and intergenerational knowledge transmission among Syrian families in displacement.

Central and Eastern European Teachers in German Language Training for Migrants in Austria

Ilidkó Zakariás

Language has gained increasing importance in immigration policies in Western European states, with a new model of citizenship, the *ius linguarum* (Fejes, 2019; Fortier, 2022), at its core. Accordingly, command of the (national) languages of host states

operates both as a resource and as an ideological framework, legitimating the reproduction of inequalities among various migrant and non-migrant groups. We analyse the implications of such processes in the context of state-subsidised language teaching for refugees and migrants in Austria.

Specifically, we aim to explore the position of (German) language teachers, many of whom arrive from Central and Eastern European countries (including EU members and third states), who enter the field of adult language teaching in Austria seeking a living and career prospects that they cannot find in the significantly underpaid educational sectors of CEE states. We explore how the arrival of CEE language teachers into these difficult and precarious jobs is embedded into historical processes linking the CEE region to former political and economic power centres. Second, we show how legal, administrative, and symbolic processes (i.e. the language ideology of native speakerism) construct CEE citizens as second-order teachers in the field of migrant education in Austria. Our presentation, based on ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative interviews, highlights nuanced ways in which historically, economically, and politically embedded language geographies contribute to the reproduction of hierarchies of membership, inclusion, and exclusion in present-day immigration societies.