

**THE ESF FORWARD LOOK ON  
IMMIGRATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF  
IDENTITIES IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE**

**Workshop 4:**

**Language and Identity  
Prague, June 20 2003**

**Organizers: Ekkehard König, Berlin  
Josef Jarab, Prag  
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**“Immigration and the Construction of Identities in Contemporary Europe”**

**Subtopic 4: “Language and Identity”**

Prague, 20/6/2003

*The organizers of the Forward Look Workshop on Language and Identity,  
Ekkehard König, Freie Universität Berlin  
Volker Gast, Freie Universität Berlin  
would like to thank all participants for their attendance and contributions.*

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## **PROGRAMME of the ESF-WORKSHOP - PRAGUE - 20 / 21 - 06 -2003** **"The cultural and linguistic expression of identity"**

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### **1. Friday, 20-06-2003**

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|------------------|---|
| 2.00 - 2.15 p.m. | Words of Welcome (G. Mirdal, J. Jarab, E. König)  |
| 2.15 - 3.15 p.m. | E. König / V. Gast<br>"Language, Migration and Identity - Some Introductory Notes"  |
| 3.15 - 4.15 p.m. | P. Auer<br>"From collective identities to linguistic acts of identity:<br>how language can index social (incl. ethnic) identity in<br>migratory contexts" |
| 4.15 - 4.30 p.m. | coffee break  |
| 4.30 - 6.30 p.m. | B. Rampton / J. Blommaert<br>"Notes towards an ESF discussion of 'Language, immigration<br>and<br>the construction of identities in contemporary Europe'" |

### **2. Saturday, 21-06-2003**

9.00 - 9.50	A. Peyraube "Language and identity: the Chinese Diaspora in Paris and its integration"
9.50 - 10.50	Georges Lüdi "Plurilingual repertoires and plural identity in migrant communities: problems and opportunities"
10.50 - 11.05	coffee break
11.05 - 12.00	Anne Holmen "Educational aspects of language and identity"
12.00 - 1.00 p.m.	Sabry Hafez "Occidentalism"

- general discussion -

**Ekkehard König/Volker Gast:** "Language, migration, and identity – some introductory notes."

König and Gast opened the workshop with a programmatic overview and addressed some basic issues relevant to language and identity in immigration settings. They discussed issues relating to: (i) language and identity in general, (ii) bilingualism or multilingualism, and (iii) language contact resulting from migration. The central part of their presentation was a simple model which provided a basic characterization of the notion 'collective identity' and the role of language in the construction of identity. It was pointed out that individuals can be characterized by sets of properties (categories, attributes), which may give rise to specific dispositions and modes of categorisation (cf. Bourdieu's 'habitus'). The properties which are most relevant to social interaction include the following: nationality, ethnicity, religion, different aspects of cultural life, social class, origin, sex/gender, and also language. 'Language' is here merely an abbreviation for 'A speaks x as a mother tongue' and 'A speaks x,y,...as foreign languages'. All properties used in the characterisation of the notion 'collective identity' must be assessable in a reasonably objective way. Moreover, these properties can be ranked and thus form a hierarchy.

König and Gast were aware of the “essentialist” nature of their views – which was criticised in the subsequent discussion - and added the following notes of caution:

- The various social attributes have different degrees of accessibility or visibility. Also, the various properties display different degrees of objectivity and categoriality.
- Social attributes cannot be regarded as timeless *possessions* of an individual. Many social categories are constantly changing, subject to permanent updating in discourse and other forms of semiotic interaction, i.e. they are the result of discursive construction through acts of identity.
- The various dimensions characterizing an individual differ in terms of their internal homogeneity, and the question of whether more than one value is possible.

Not all dimensions of collective identity can be seen as the result of a discursive construction of reality, however.

König and Gast argued that such a model together with some general assumptions about implicational or hierarchical relations linking the individual properties allows us to capture and explicate some basic facts about collective identity. The individual dimensions of collective identity are generally assumed to be connected to others by some hierarchical, conditional and bi-conditional relations. First of all, the individual properties are usually ranked on a scale and this ranking may differ in space and through time. In some settings, the dimensions of nationality and ethnicity play a vital role and rank high on the ‘hierarchy of social attributes’, while the dimensions of gender and religion have a subordinate status (nationality > gender > religion). In other settings, the ordering may be different, and gender or religion may be the most central determinants of solidarity patterns and group formation (religion > gender > nationality, e.g. in religious settings). The model outlined here allows us to describe both a situated re-ranking of the relevant attributes, and large-scale historical processes. In Trudgill (2000)<sup>1</sup> it is shown that in Greece and European Turkey language has by now taken the position of religion as the most important determinant of intra-national solidarity patterns. Another relevant example in this context is the idea proposed by Habermas that in multicultural societies it is the constitution that should be ranked highest and thus be regarded as the most important marker of social identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Trudgill, P. (2000). ‘Greece and European Turkey: From religious to linguistic identity’, in Barbour & Carmichael (eds.), *Language and Nationalism in Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Some pairs of social attributes stand in unilateral entailment relations to one another. For example, ancestry unilaterally implies nationality in countries conforming to the *ius sanguinis*: if an individual has a certain ancestry, s/he will also have a certain nationality, while the reverse does not apply (since naturalisation is also a way of obtaining a nationality). In some cases, *bilateral implications* are assumed or postulated. In 19<sup>th</sup> century conceptions of the nation state, a complete overlap of nationality and national languages was aspired: all citizens of a country – and only those citizens – were supposed to speak the national language. Such nationalistic efforts have often given rise to the creation of new language names, usually with the intention to give the language a new (national) identity. In the countries that were once part of Yugoslavia the opposite direction of the implicational relation can be observed: Since Serbia and Croatia are now different countries their languages must also be shown to differ. A bi-conditional relation is often also seen between ‘language’ and ‘culture’. If this is so it is reasonable to assume that cultural knowledge and cultural values are embedded in the structure of a language. Given the role of English as a global language it certainly makes sense to raise the question as to the cultural neutrality of this global English. And, to give one more example, sometimes language plays a central role in religion (for example, Classical Arabic as the language of the Koran has a very central status for the Muslim world).

In the final part of the paper some basic facts about bilingualism and language contact were discussed, with particular reference to the cognitive, social and psychological implications.

### **Peter Auer, “From collective identities to linguistic acts of identity”**

In this talk, Peter Auer argued for a shift from an essentialist perspective on social categories and speech communities towards a situated, constructivist understanding of those categories. It is important to recognize that speech communities and other social groups are not stable and static real-world entities whose existence can be verified empirically. Rather, such categories are theoretical constructs created by researchers in order to make sense of empirical observations, and to generate hypotheses about and generalizations over aspects of social life and social identity. Identity and affiliation with specific social groups is not a timeless property or ‘possession’; it is a social achievement acquired through acts of identity in interaction with other members of a society. Auer pointed out that much of the empirical work that has been done in recent times still sticks to an essentialist point of view. While the necessity of more fine-grained, situated analyses has been widely acknowledged, the actual implementation of this ‘constructivist paradigm’ in the form of empirical studies has yet to be carried out.

Essentialism in sociolinguistics can also be found in certain studies dealing with what Auer calls 'ethnolects'. Ethnolects are new ways of speaking that have emerged in the context of considerably large and vital immigrant communities in urban European societies, and that integrate elements from both the immigrant languages (typically structure and phonology) and the language of the host country (typically vocabulary). For example, in Germany an ethnolect often referred to as 'Kanaksprak' has established itself. Kanaksprak is structurally influenced by immigrant languages (most notably Turkish), and is mainly used by adolescent immigrants, but occasionally also by non-immigrants. It indexes a number of social categories such as age, social class and culture (in particular, it is associated with Rap music). The essentialist view on Kanaksprak, often voiced in public discourse but also within sociolinguistics, regards the mixed nature of the language as a reflex of the hybrid identities of the speakers. This view is clearly simplistic and does not do justice to the complexity of the topic. Also, the use of Kanaksprak (or only elements thereof) is not necessarily motivated by the wish to identify with the corresponding speech community. Auer demonstrated that Kanaksprak may be used with a mocking overtone to create distance, and to *disaffiliate* from the relevant group.

A second issue that needs to be kept in mind when we consider the indexing function of language is that a distinction must be made between the *category indexed* through the use of a given linguistic item on the one hand, and the *affiliation indexed* on the other. Thus Auer demonstrated that in bilingual Turkish-German conversation, Turkish elements may be used not to evoke *Turkish* nationality or ethnicity, but to index *Muslim* identity.

The indexing function of language has to be considered in its interactional setting. Put differently, we might say that it is not a property of the languages or language varieties themselves to have a certain indexing value; these languages certainly do have a certain indexing potential, but their specific communicative value depends on several coordinates of the situations in which they are used.

An essentialist position can also be observed in public discourse about migrant populations and related social issues. Auer noticed that guest workers who immigrated into Germany in the 1960s were first perceived as a *social* class. Since in the course of time, the social boundaries between guest workers and Germans were more and more blurred, ultimately to such an extent as to become unrecognizable, this class was reanalysed as an *ethnic* category (*foreigners* 'Ausländer', i.e. non-Germans). Auer calls this process one of 'ethnification' of

migrant questions. Again, it can be observed that public discourse operates with a very limited inventory of social categories that are conceived of as timeless properties or ‘possessions’, which does not do justice to the increasing degree of social mobility that we have been witnessing over the past decades, and to the fact that groups membership is nowadays a matter of discursive construction rather than fundamental existence.

**Jan Blommaert/Ben Rampton**, “Notes towards an ESF discussion of ‘Language & identity’”

In their paper, Jan Blommaert and Ben Rampton delineated a number of theoretical and methodological foundations which they consider indispensable for a successful accomplishment of the various research tasks on hand. Their starting point was the description of some relevant empirical scenarios from different conceptual levels: the level of individual experience (bilingual education), the level of the nation-state (nation-building in Greece), the level of a transnational diaspora (the Roma) and the level of transnational economies. Against the background of these vignettes, Blommaert and Rampton advance a number of epistemological prerequisites which they consider vital for a study of the relationships between language, identity and migration. These requirements can be summarized in five points: (i) a thorough study of language and identity requires a ‘truly inter-disciplinary’ approach, taking into consideration the various historical, social, cultural, political etc. processes to which language and identity are relevant, and of which they are constitutive elements; (ii) the ontological assumptions of language study need to be reconfigured, e.g. the object of investigation has to be redefined; (iii) analyses dealing with the (spatial, social etc.) distribution of linguistic resources have to be combined with analyses of the situated use of these resources; (iv) sociolinguistic research requires political self-reflection of the researchers involved; and (v) the implications of the relevant findings for Higher Education have to be considered.

### **Towards a socially-constituted linguistics**

The plea for a ‘truly inter-disciplinary’ approach can be understood as an appeal for a continuation of the sociolinguistic practice established by American anthropological linguistics such as is associated with the names of Boas, Sapir, and Hymes. Language should be considered as an integral part of the various socio-cultural dynamics of human interaction. The relevance of a linguistic fact should thus be assessed in terms of its implications for socio-cultural processes in which that fact plays a role.



### **On the ontological assumptions of language study**

Blommaert and Rampton pointed out that many ontological assumptions of contemporary linguistics can be regarded as reflexes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century aspiration for the building of nation states and the associated claims to homogeneity in terms of nationality, language, culture etc. These ideological assumptions have progressively been abandoned over the last 10-20 years, but are still prominent in structuralist and post-structuralist (in the sense of post-Saussurean) linguistics. In order to understand the interaction of linguistic behaviour and personal and social identity, a number of ontological assumptions need to be made clear and partially reconfigured: the study of language needs to be extended from the consideration of language as ‘meaning-in-system’ to the analysis of language as ‘meaning-in-situation’; conversational analyses have to go beyond the description of habits and regularities, taking into consideration the manifold unpredictable and spontaneous coordinates shaping real-world conversational processes (contingency, ambivalence, spectacle; problems of recognition, artful performance, and the management of ignorance); the analysis of texts in a given context (the ‘use value’ of a text) has to be enriched with considerations of the value of texts across contexts (the ‘exchange value’); moreover, the very concept of a ‘speech community’ itself has to be extended, insofar as speech communities should be considered as spontaneously emerging entities (‘communities of practice’) which are based on particular semiotic processes. Blommaert and Rampton related these shifts in the epistemological attitudes of sociolinguistics to historical changes in the conditions of language use themselves (a point taken up from Gumperz): for example, the increase in speakers’ (social, spatial etc.) mobility, the ever increasing complexity of late modern society with various overlapping and partially cross-cutting hierarchical organization patterns requires that we negotiate and re-negotiate our social identities in face to face interaction again and again.

### **On the combination of interpretative and distributional analyses**

Most of the sociolinguistic work that has been done in the past 20 years or so has either been concerned with distributional studies (à la Labov), or with local sense-making procedures (à la Gumperz). Blommaert and Rampton pointed out that for a thorough understanding of questions of language and identity, both dimensions of analysis have to be combined. Speakers draw on a certain repertoire of linguistic resources in order to get a point across, and the distribution of resources across (social, geographic etc.) space needs to be described. This point is particularly important when we want to account for globalization phenomena, many of which are related to an uneven distribution of (linguistic and non-linguistic) resources. But

the specific significance and situated meaning of these resources heavily depends on the circumstances under which they are used, so that local sense-making procedures have to be accounted for, too.

### **Reflexive engagement with political implications**

Given that matters of language and identity will invariably lead to questions of public policy and practical intervention, it is indispensable for the sociolinguist to create an awareness of his/her own socio-political stance. Linguistics deals with language as an historical entity but is itself a historically situated practice. As such, it is confined within certain socio-political circumstances. This can be seen, among other things, when we think of the importance of language names not only for public policy, but also for linguistic studies (grammars, dictionaries etc.). Language study should be concerned with language varieties, not with officially acknowledged languages, which often amounts to dealing with language names.

### **Alain Peyraube „The situation of the Chinese diaspora in Paris.”**

In his talk Alain Peyraube presented a detailed picture of the Chinese (or East Asian) community in Paris, which included census figures, the economic situation, information on different waves of integration and a comprehensive linguistic characterization. A major focus of the talk was on different processes of change observable in the languages spoken by this community and the question whether these changes were due to borrowing. Peyraube discussed *inter alia* changes of word order, the use of a classifier as indefinite article, a generalized use of the passive (beyond the adversative passive) and the increasing use of unstressed pronouns in subject or object position (i.e. less Pro-Drop). All these changes could be seen as due to French influence or, more generally, the Westernization of Chinese, but Peyraube noted that all of these features can also be found in earlier forms of Chinese and thus be seen as a revival of earlier structures. The question whether there are a coherent drift or at least implicational connections behind all these changes does not admit of a simple answer therefore.

In the subsequent discussion various related changes in other immigrant languages (notably Turkish) were discussed).

### **George Lüdi „Plurilingual repertoires and plural identity in migrant communities: Problems and opportunities“**

The starting point of George Lüdi's talk was an attack on the wide-spread prejudice that the monolingual individual is the default case and its implication that in a global community English is the only foreign language to be learnt. On the basis of rich evidence he argued

convincingly for the view that we all have the capacity for learning several languages and that plurilingualism due to migration is just another instance of this capacity. Bilingualism or plurilingualism should, of course, not be seen as perfect competence in several languages. The repertoires in each language may differ with the functional requirements in different communicative networks. The situation in Switzerland with its long tradition of several official languages, of plurilingualism and different functional repertoires of language use was shown to provide an interesting model for the discussion of language, identity and migration in Europe.

In addressing the issue of language and identity, Lüdi distinguished between various types of identity markers (formal phenomena, discourse phenomena and content phenomena). Identity was analysed as a dynamic notion. The system of identity markers is – according to Lüdi – not necessarily coherent and may include both language choice and bilingual speech. The systems of identity markers identified by him were shown to work differently in different parts of Switzerland. A detailed discussion of the meaning of various identity markers concluded the talk.

#### **Anne Holmen, “Educational aspects of language and identity”**

Anne Holmen discussed a number of educational aspects of language and identity. She focused on three points: (i) bilingualism in educational settings, (ii) the inherent normativity of schools, and (iii) schools as arenas for identity building.

#### **Bilingualism in educational settings**

A. Holmen started by making a central distinction between different approaches to the understanding of bilingualism in educational settings: (i) a *deficit view*, in which bilingual children are regarded as underachieving speakers of the majority language, (ii) an *additive view*, which is based on the assumption that bilingual children are proficient in two independent languages (‘double monolingualism’), and (iii) an *integrated view*, according to which bilingual children have knowledge of both two distinct codes and a mixed code (‘integrated bilingualism’). In mainstream schools and public policy, the deficit and additive view of bilingual children are still prevalent, and policy makers, accordingly, aim to improve the proficiency rates of pupils in the majority languages (e.g. Danish) and, though more sporadically, the knowledge of the home language in mother tongue instruction. However, some recent studies have shown that the ‘double monolingualist’ attitude in education may lead not only to academic underachievement, but also to social problems such as

discrimination and marginalisation. Holmen pointed out that many of those problems could be overcome by pursuing a public policy promoting integrated bilingualism, which entails the acceptance of a third, mixed, code alongside the recognized standard languages.

In assessing the status quo of educational policy and considering possible suggestions for improvements, Holmen pointed out that the following questions might be relevant: What are the patterns of bilingual language use in different school systems (double mono-lingualism, integrated bilingualism)? And what are the views pursued in assessment procedures, teacher education, curriculum content etc.? In how far does actual language use match the schools' language ideology? Are languages in general seen as resources or as problems? Is there a difference in language attitudes across settings, e.g. depending on national language policy, school curriculum and the role of schooling ('Bildung'), or historically based attitudes to language variation of any kind? The following areas of practical interest might be investigated in empirical studies: assessment procedures; descriptive studies across contexts feeding teacher education with a broader view of language, comparing different programs (preschool, mother tongue/first language, second language/immersion/submersion); content based language learning; language awareness programs.

### **The inherent normativity of schools**

A second point emphasized by Anne Holmen concerned what she called the 'inherent normativity of schools', which tries to regulate the language and identity issues found in integrated bilingualism. The institutional striving for inter-individual rules and norms which can be measured in specific assessment procedures runs counter the generally acknowledged necessity of basing the educational requirements of each child on his/her individual potential and social, cultural, and linguistic background. In the context of bilingual education, the question arises as to how far normativity may hinder the cognitive and social development of children. The functionality of academic language, literacy, formal language use etc. as well as the very concept of 'communicative competence' itself, are called into question. Issues that need to be addressed in empirical investigations include degrees of proficiency in ethnolects and the role of ethnolects, and standard language(s) in the curriculum and as a medium of instruction.

### **Schools as arenas for identity building**

Schools are not only institutions teaching the syllabus to children, they are also among the most important places of socialization. Quite obviously, the languages spoken in school play an important role in the process of identity building, particularly in the context of bilingual education. To describe the conditions under which every child masters this process of socialization is a difficult task, since the specific social and institutional circumstances under which bilingual education takes place may vary rather dramatically. Holmen suggests that it would be desirable to carry out comparative studies dealing with schools in different language contact situations, with different majority-minority relations, and different colonial histories and (im)migration patterns. She presented some examples of Danish schools in Iceland, Faroe Islands, Greenland, Sydslesvig on the one hand, and the situation found in inner Copenhagen on the other. In Sydslesvig, for example, Danish is highly prestigious so that even L1-speakers of German attend Danish schools, and a similar situation obtains in the other places mentioned above. In this case, the minority language is prestigious. In Copenhagen, on the other hand, the immigrant languages are stigmatized, which leads to completely different patterns in the kind of social interaction that is constitutive of school life.

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### **General Discussion**

The general discussion evolved around the following basic questions and issues:

- Which role does language (competence, langue) and language play in the construction of identities?
- What can linguistics contribute to a characterization of identity?
- Is identity a matter of resources (competence) or of performance?
- What are the major theoretical controversies (e.g. essentialism vs. constructivism)
- What are the consequences of globalization for the research agenda of linguistics and literary criticism?
- What are the implications of our work for policy making, in general, and for education, in particular?
- How much linguistics and how much social science do we need?

### **Possible Projects**

The final part of the project was devoted to formulating a few projects worth pursuing transnationally in the domain under discussion. Here is the list of some of the suggestions made by the participants:

1. Transnational research on ethnolects
2. Comparative studies on language contact and code-switching
3. The interaction between larger and smaller immigrant languages
4. The role of standard languages for immigrant languages
5. How do schools deal with acts of identity?
6. Relevance of different immigration languages for the labour market
7. The public discourse on multilingualism and its role for education
8. Normativity in schools
9. Languages in France in an age of globalization
10. The effects of migration on language usage and language structure
11. Reconstructing a European identity
12. The Roma community in Europe
13. A lingua franca as a culturally neutral medium of communication?
14. Immigrants and transnational communication on the Internet.
15. Language and Ideology
16. The dynamics of categorization
17. How Europe is perceived by others