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Title: “*My language...I don’t know how to talk about it*”: children’s views on language diversity in primary schools in France and England

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Abstract:

This article investigates the ways in which children from immigrant backgrounds viewed the place of “other” languages in primary schools in France and England. France and England are often presented as opposites in terms of their educational systems and approaches to diversity. This shapes different conceptualisations of the place of other languages in school. However, the study reported in this paper shows that despite contrasting approaches to difference in each school, children from immigrant backgrounds in both countries perceived school as monolingual and monocultural spaces. As such, children viewed their other (home) languages as undesirable or illicit in school. This article draws on findings from a cross-national ethnographic study which investigated the experiences of 10 and 11 year old children of immigrants in two primary schools, one in France and one in England. It is premised on the need to hear the voices of young children from immigrant-backgrounds, often under-represented in research about language and education. This encouraged the use of interviews as the central method of data collection, in order to explore children’s

own perceptions. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing a flexible framework for children to express themselves, and discussions were in great part children-led. Building on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1972), this article shows how in both schools, children had to negotiate the symbolic domination of a single legitimate language, which positioned their other languages as inferior, undesirable and in some cases, illicit. Findings in this paper contribute insights into the complex debates around language diversity, multilingualism and intercultural communication in schools in France and England.

Cet article s'intéresse à la manière dont les enfants issus de l'immigration perçoivent la place d'autres langues à l'école primaire, en France et en Angleterre. La France et l'Angleterre sont souvent présentées comme des pôles opposés en termes de système éducatif et de gestion de la diversité. Cela conduit à des contrastes marqués, non seulement dans la construction conceptuelle de la différence mais aussi dans la place des « autres » langues (d'origine) à l'école. L'étude présentée dans cet article montre que, en dépit de ces approches drastiquement opposées, du point de vue des enfants dans chaque pays l'école s'avère être un espace monolingue et monoculturel. Cette impression s'accompagne d'une perception de leurs langues d'origine (« autres ») comme indésirable et illégitime dans l'espace formel de l'école. Cet article se fonde sur une étude ethnographique comparative portant sur les expériences scolaires d'enfants de 10-11 ans issus de l'immigration dans deux écoles primaires, l'une située en France, l'autre en Angleterre. L'intention de l'étude était de donner voix au chapitre aux interprétations des enfants issus de l'immigration, souvent sous-représentées dans les études sur les langues et l'école. Ce travail repose sur des entretiens avec les enfants participants. Cette méthode d'enquête fut sélectionnée pour que les perceptions des enfants, telles que formulées par eux-mêmes, puissent être prises en compte. Des entretiens semi-directifs furent conduits pour permettre plus de flexibilité et ainsi aider les enfants à s'exprimer à leur manière. S'appuyant sur les travaux de Pierre Bourdieu, en particulier la Théorie de la Pratique (1972), cet article dévoile la manière dont les enfants, de chaque côté de la Manche, doivent faire face à la domination symbolique d'une seule langue légitime, qui dévalorise leur autre langue (d'origine) en la plaçant en position d'infériorité, la rendant indésirable, voire même illicite. Cet article apporte un éclairage nouveau sur la diversité linguistique, le multilinguisme et la communication interculturelle à l'école, en France et en Angleterre.

Introduction

This article examines the way children from immigrant backgrounds viewed the place of their other (home) languages in primary schools in France and England. In recent years, within a context of increased moral panic around the ‘immigrant Other’, increased linguistic diversity has been portrayed as a challenge for France and England rather than new opportunities for multilingualism and interculturality. The role of school has been central to these debates, often presented as responsible for ensuring “successful” integration by equipping future citizens with the necessary linguistic and cultural tools to participate fully in society (HCI, 2011; DfE, 2013; Morgan, 2015).

In the UK, alarmist titles in tabloid media have participated in creating a negative framing around the increase of linguistic diversity in schools. English as an Additional Language (EAL) children have been portrayed as “swamping” English schools, draining school resources, and changing the “British character” of schools, all of which is deemed damaging for “English” pupils (Robertson, 2016). Through these media representations, echoed in policy discourse, a negative narrative has emerged which draws associations between children not speaking English in school and wider fractures in society. David Cameron’s warning in 2016 that not learning English contained a risk of extremism when he introduced a £20 million fund to support English learning, particularly targeted at Muslim women, is a prime example of this negative discourse around linguistic diversity (Mason and Sherwood, 2016).

Similarly in France, where, since 1992, the French Constitution states that French is legally the *only* language of the Republic, children speaking French as a foreign language (*Français Langue Étrangère*) are viewed as a challenge to successful integration in schools. In worse cases, speaking a language other than French is associated to anti-social behaviour. A strong example of this is offered by the Bénisti report ‘*On preventing delinquency*’ which suggested that mothers of ethnic minority children should be forced to speak only French to their children in order to prevent delinquency (Bénisti, 2004). Similarly, the introduction of Arabic as a foreign language in French primary schools in June 2016 was met with strong resistance and accused of fostering communitarism and islamisation whilst challenging the integration of young children in society (Genevard, 2016). These British and French examples show the

ways in which language, which has emerged as a new category of difference in European societies, intersects with other categories of difference such as religion, to construct negative narratives of Otherness (Welply, 2010; 2015; 2017).

Despite this increasing association of language and Otherness in media and policy discourse, few studies with children from immigrant backgrounds have focused on linguistic diversity. A limited number of studies have criticised the monolingual nature of educational systems in France and England for their exclusionary mechanisms and for not recognising the value of linguistic diversity (Blackledge 2001; Lorcerie, 2011). In both countries, research shows how the language needs of pupils are often not met by teachers who feel unprepared for dealing adequately with the complexity of linguistic diversity in the classroom (Young, 2014; Mallows, 2012). The lack of specialised training and policy guidance are cited as reasons for these difficulties (Arnot, Schneider and Welply, 2016).

In both France and England, there is still a tendency to view linguistic minorities in schools in terms of language ‘deficit’ in which speaking another language is viewed as limiting children’s literacy skills and cognitive development (Michael-Luna, 2013; Agacinski et al., 2015). In England, this negative portrayal is reinforced by an emerging statistical narrative, which indicates lower attainment levels for EAL children in England (Strand et al, 2015). In France, a recent government commissioned study also points to “delays in language acquisition” as an explanatory factor for lower attainment levels for children from immigrant backgrounds (Cusset et al, 2015). In both cases, these conclusions overlook the diversity hidden behind general categories such as EAL or FLE. Recent work has highlighted the multiple ways in which immigrant children negotiate language in schools and how this impacts on social integration and intercultural communication (Arnot et al, 2016; Welply, 2015). This raises questions about the complexities that arise from multiple languages in the classroom, and the ways in which children from immigrant backgrounds navigate the challenges of linguistic diversity within traditionally monolingual school systems. In order to understand this complexity of linguistic diversity in schools, there is a need to listen to the views of the children themselves. This article addresses these issues by examining the ways in which children from immigrant backgrounds viewed the place of their other (home) languages in French and English primary schools.

Linguistic diversity and institutional values: Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

The theoretical underpinnings of this article draw on Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1972, 1982, 1991) in particular the concepts of *symbolic power*, *legitimation* and *misrecognition* to help analyse children's views on the place of other/home languages in school.

In his work *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), Bourdieu argues that in society there is one implicitly acknowledged *legitimate* form of language and culture, which is part of a national unifying ideology. *Legitimate* contains the idea of *implicit* norms within an institutional space, which validate certain forms of practices and invalidate others (Bourdieu, 1972). This implicit legitimisation acts as a form of symbolic domination, inscribed in the daily activities of institutions (van Zanten, 2005). In particular, schools are the privileged site of "socialisation and legitimation in modern societies" and play a central role in "the symbolic reproduction of the social order" (van Zanten, 2005:672). The legitimation of culture and language can only exist through a dual process: *symbolic domination* through the *recognition*, by dominant groups or agents, of the sole legitimacy of certain cultural, social and linguistic norms (capital); and a process of *institutionalised misrecognition* in which the dominated agents, who do not possess the *legitimate* cultural, social and linguistic norms (capital) come to believe and misrecognise the idea that there is only one legitimate language and culture (Bourdieu, 1991). This process of misrecognition in turn participates in the exclusion and marginalisation of those who do not possess legitimate forms of cultural or linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1972; Heller, 1996). These concepts are powerful tools for developing an understanding of the way in which school operates in relation to linguistic differences and the ways in which monolingualism becomes the dominant norm (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 1996; Blackledge, 2001; Esch, 2010).

Bourdieu's work helps show how representations of differences and Otherness are shaped by unequal power relations through the symbolic domination of minorities by the majority. This symbolic domination, through the legitimation of dominant norms, maintains minorities in their difference, constructed as inferior and thus less legitimate. However, this symbolic domination and unequal situation between dominants and

dominated groups or individuals is not homogenous across all social spaces and contexts. Bourdieu's concept of *field* shows how different social spaces are shaped by different power struggles, which can lead to different legitimised values in different fields (Bourdieu, 1982). Symbolic norms and values will differ across different circumstances and social spaces and in some contexts can be opposed, contested or even reversed. Thus what is constructed as "difference" or "Otherness" might make sense in some contexts and not in others (Lorcerie, 2011).

This article focuses on children's views of other languages in a particular *field*: formal school spaces. The term space here, underpinned by Bourdieu's concept of *field*, is inscribed in both material and symbolic meanings. Formal school spaces include the classroom, places of whole-school gatherings such as halls, as well as interactions with adults (school staff) in school, inside and outside the classroom. It is opposed to informal school spaces, which include the playground and 'in-between' spaces (Lucey and Reay, 2000).

In this study, Bourdieu's work offered a thorough conceptual lens to help understand processes of implicit and tacit domination by legitimate cultural and linguistic norms within the formal spaces of each school, and the way these norms were perceived, understood and negotiated by children from immigrant backgrounds. As such, it allowed the analysis to examine both the role of the institution and of individuals in the way linguistic difference was negotiated in school.

The research

Findings presented in this article draw on an ethnographic study, which explored the experiences of 10 and 11- year old children from immigrant backgrounds in two primary schools, one in France and one in England.

The two schools were located in socially disadvantaged urban areas of average-size towns, which included a significant proportion of immigrant families. Research focused on two classes at the upper end of Primary school (*Year 6 in the English case, CM2 in the French case*). Both classes included children from a range of linguistic backgrounds. Participants in the study fell under the category "second-generation"

immigrant. Their parents had experienced migration but they were born in France and England. They were all proficient in the dominant national language (French or English) and spoke another language at home with their families. In the French class, 11 children from immigrant backgrounds participated in the study. This included 6 girls (1 Hmong, 1 Laotian, 1 Indian, 1 Moroccan, 1 Algerian background and 1 Turkish/French) and 5 boys (1 Hmong, 1 Hmong/French, 1 Laotian/Chinese, 1 Algerian, 1 French Reunion/Cambodian)ⁱ. In the English class, 7 children from immigrant backgrounds participated in the study. This included 5 girls (3 Bangladeshi, 1 Russian, 1 part Italian) and 2 boys (1 Bangladeshi, 1 Portuguese). Children were all from similar socially disadvantaged backgrounds, with parents' occupation falling mainly within a working class category or unemployed (e.g.: agricultural and factory worker, lorry driver, cleaner, school cook, waiter, nursery worker, electrician).

The researcher spent six months in the French school and four months in the English school, following children's full timetable. This ethnographic approach, with prolonged periods of time in schools, was chosen to help develop a more in-depth understanding and explore the complexity and contradictions of children's views and experiences (Handwerker, 2006). Methods of data collection were developed to privilege children's voices throughout the research. Group interviews were the preferred research method, as they allowed interaction between children and encouraged talk (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). Interviews were first mixed-gendered and then single-gendered. These different groups were initially designed to identify possible gender differences in interactions between children and in the way they experienced linguistic differences in school. However gender differences did not emerge in any significant way between the different groups. Findings presented in this article thus do not draw on a gendered perspective, although the gender of each participant is presented for information. Shorter individual interviews were subsequently carried out once children were more at ease with the researcher. The choice of three sets of interviews was guided by the desire to explore different themes with the children.

The first interview focused on more general discussions about school, which allowed children to become familiar and comfortable with the interview process and gave them the space to raise issues around linguistic and religious difference without being prompted. The second interview focused more specifically on linguistic difference, and was structured around games and drawings, which allowed the children

to express themselves in a variety of ways. Individual interviews focused on children's experiences inside and outside school, family influences and experiences of other school spaces (e.g. complementary language or religious schools). Interview schedules attempted to retain as loose a structure as possible to allow themes to emerge from discussion with the children.

This article recognises the multiple processes of co-construction of meaning that took place between children and between the researcher and children during the different sets of interviews. Group interviews led to discussions on the place of difference that were at times contested and debated between children, whilst individual interviews allowed children to touch upon more personal interpretations of the place of linguistic and religious difference in school. The findings presented in this article are underpinned by this recognition of the co-constructed nature of children's views that emerged during the interview process. As all children were fluent in the dominant language of the school, interviews were carried out in English or French. However, it was also made clear to the children that they could use other languages if they wished. In practice, children did use words from the other languages they spoke, to help them illustrate certain points during interviews. This included words in Arabic for participants in the French case and in Sylheti for participants in the English case.

Given the young age of the children involved in the study, particular attention was given to ethical issues (Hill, 2005). In order to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity for all participants, names and identifying details have been changed. Children were also made aware of the implications of sharing information with a group and discussions were monitored to avoid tensions that might upset children (Lewis, 1992). Language and concepts were made age appropriate for children to encourage understanding and participation in the research. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in their original language (English or French). Words in other languages (mainly Arabic and Sylheti) were also kept in their original form to highlight multilingual strategies used by the children, with translations provided along side. Transcripts were analysed thematically in the original language to stay closer to the words of the participants, using a qualitative software package (*NVivo*). Relevant extracts from the French data were translated into English after analysis, to include in this paper. This article draws on the themes related to children's views of the place and use of other languages in school.

Language diversity in the French and English schools

France and England offer interesting contexts to investigate the linguistic experiences of children from immigrant backgrounds from a cross-national perspective. The two countries present strongly diverging philosophies of integration, which underpin contrasting approaches to linguistic differences in society (Bertossi, 2011; Meer, Sala Pala, Modood & Simon, 2009:413). These contrasting values play a role in shaping the way linguistic, cultural or religious differences are approached by teachers and the way difference is conceptualised in the classroom (Raveaud, 2006). French schools promote an “indifference to differences” approach, which “seeks to educate its future citizens by abstracting them from their cultural, including religious, particularities” (Meer et al., 2009:213; van Zanten, 2000). In contrast, English schools promote inclusion based on the recognition and celebration of ethnic, religious and linguistic differences at school (Modood & Salt, 2011). Although these approaches to differences in school are strongly debated within each country, and are to some extent adapted locally they still underpin the approaches to linguistic diversity in each school system (Lorcerie, 2011; Gillborn, 2008; van Zanten, 2001).

This was the case for the two schools in this study. Both schools’ approaches to linguistic difference reflected the wider value orientations of the countries’ philosophies of integration. The English school promoted a multilingual ethos, supported in practice by a *bilingual coordinator* who provided guidance for teachers and support for bilingual learners to access the curriculum. This ethos was reinforced through a range of multilingual displays across the school. The bilingual coordinator insisted on the importance of shifting staff’s perceptions from a “deficit” model of language diversity to viewing bilingualism as an asset (individual interview). In contrast, practices in the French school were based on the republican principle of “indifference to differences”. During interviews and classroom observations, teachers indicated they had limited knowledge of children’s linguistic backgrounds, and the dominant view was that French was the only legitimate language of the school. Speaking other languages was strongly discouraged in the classroom.

Children's views

This article argues that despite contrasting values, models of integration and approaches to difference, in both cases children from immigrant backgrounds experienced school as monocultural and monolingual spaces in which their home languages did not have a legitimate status. These views built on the idea of a single legitimate language in each school system, underpinned by the implicit idea of a hierarchy between languages. These perceptions constructed other languages as undesirable and in some cases, illicit.

These views were articulated differently between the French and the English school. In the French school, children perceived the school's monolingualism as a formal and institutionalised principle. In contrast, in the English school, children understood their school's monolingualism as an implicit expectation without formally defined rules.

French school: formalised monolingualism

In the French school, although there were no official rules about not speaking other languages, teachers' understanding of the place of other languages in schools was underpinned by the idea that 'the language of the Republic is French'. Children's views reflected this unitary conception of French as the only acceptable language in school. These perceptions built on republican principles and notions of national identity and citizenship, as illustrated by Kenny and Iheb's comments below.

(1) Kenny: The rule is to speak French, it's not...because they imagine, they will think that they are swear words and everything. (Kenny, 11 year-old boy Chinese-Laotian background, group interview)

(2) Imed: Yeah, before we used to say...but they tell us 'Here we are in a French school so we speak in French' (Imed, 10 year-old boy, Algerian background, group interview)

In other cases, these views build on a generalised negative construction of Otherness rather than republican principles, as shown in the Farida's comment below.

Interviewer: And teachers what do they think about it? [about speaking other languages in school]

Farida: They don't care

Interviewer: Really?

Farida: Well yes. Except that we must not speak Moroccan.

Interviewer: Ah they don't want you to?

Farida: Well, it's...I don't know why, we must not speak Moroccan. Well not speak Arabic, well other languages

Interviewer: Ah ok, they don't want you to speak other languages?

Farida: No, no one must. That's it.

(Farida, 10 year-old girl, Moroccan background, individual interview)

Most often, the reasons given for this interdiction built on a view of other languages as illicit in school. This is illustrated by Kenny's comment above about using swear words, and reinforced by Clara's comment about using Arabic swear words, below.

Interviewer: (...) But would you like to be speak 'hindou'ⁱⁱⁱ [Indian] in the classroom, if their was... err...

Clara: yes...err... I would like to...but sometimes the teachers they don't want us to speak hindou because sometimes we can say bad words [swear words] for example I can say to Ewen 'yeah Sarah is a 'ramallah' [donkey in Arabic] ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

(Clara, 11 year-old girl, Indian background, individual interview)

The comments above show that, in children's perceptions, this interdiction of other languages in school was more associated with Arabic than other languages generally. This shows the existence of a hierarchy of languages, in which some languages were constructed as less desirable than others in formal school spaces.

This view of other languages as not desirable in formal school spaces was also premised on the understanding of a clear separation between the public and private spheres in the French school. This is illustrated in the following conversation with Marine about using her 'Hmong name' in school:

Marine: Me too Pemong [her Hmong name] they say to me "when you were little, you were not called Lili-Pemong and everything?" " This happens all the time. For me I do not really like to say it and everything...yeah

Interviewer: why?

Marine: Because....I don't know...it's not French...at school and everything, so I prefer when I am with my aunts, or with my family and everything, it's better.

(Marine, 11 year-old girl, Hmong background, group interview)

Marine's comment above draws a clear distinction between school and family and insists on the way cultural and linguistic differences are excluded from the public school sphere. The fact that Marine's first name 'Lili-Pemong' is not French is constructed as undesirable in the French school context. In this comment, Marine insists on the need to present 'Frenchness' in school.

Language Otherness as illegitimate

Children's perceptions of the place of other languages in the classroom showed the symbolic domination of French as the single legitimate language and culture, which defined formal school spaces as monolingual. This single legitimacy positioned other languages as illegitimate or undesirable in the public school sphere. In addition, the non-mastery of the legitimate French language and culture participated in children viewing themselves as illegitimate, non-civilised or non-citizens.

Farida's comment below, illustrates the delegitimising process that operated through the school's monolingual norms.

(Response to question: 'how would you describe yourself as a pupil?')

Farida: Me 'wild' I don't know how to speak French...sometimes I say nonsense

Interviewer (smiles): You don't know how to speak French?

Farida: Sometimes, I can't say some words.../[to Britney] shut up you! I'm vulgar!

(Farida, 10 year-old girl, Moroccan background, group interview)

Farida's comment positions herself at a distance from French language ('*I don't know how to speak French*'), associated with speaking nonsense ('*I say nonsense*'), not finding words ('*I can't say some words*) and rudeness ('*I'm vulgar*'). These perceptions construct her use of language as illegitimate in formal school spaces. Farida also

considers that not possessing the legitimate French register and speaking an ‘illegitimate’ form of French positions her as ‘anti-school’ and uncivilised, as expressed by the way she self-defines herself as a pupil, (*‘me wild’, sauvage*), which is antinomic to the school expectations of being a good citizen, based on respect.

The notion of *‘wild’ (sauvage)* echoes the ‘uncivilised’ discourse about immigrants in the periphery of towns, which articulates a ‘rhetoric of disgust’ (Skeggs, 2005), and on postcolonial discourse such as the French Third Republic ‘civilising mission’, which builds on a dichotomous view between ‘Them’ (uncivilised) and ‘Us’ (legitimate citizens) (Deltombe & Rigouste, 2005).

In Farida’s view, not possessing forms of legitimate French acted as an exclusionary process. Farida’s view shows the symbolic domination of legitimate norms in the institution, and the way these norms are *misrecognised* by those who are dominated or *delegitimised* by not possessing legitimate forms of languages. This tacit belief is internalised by Farida who then positions herself as not fitting in with dominant school values through her self-definition as *‘wild’ (sauvage)*. This process of delegitimation was also reflected in children’s understanding that teachers did not want them to speak other languages, in particular Arabic, because teachers thought they might use swear words, as in Clara’s comment earlier. This construction reflects the symbolic domination of French as the sole legitimate language in school, which constructs other languages (in this case Arabic) as illegitimate, ‘unworthy’ and undesirable in formal school spaces (Youdell, 2006).

This negative association between Arabic and the use of insults or more illicit forms of speech can be explained by looking at both youth culture and language in urban fringe areas and in wider media representations. Arabic words are integrated in forms of urban youth speech (*langage des cités*) (Bautier, 2001). This *langage des cités* is often interpreted as the expression of a counter-culture and rejection of authority (Baillet, 2001). Moreover, children’s sociability in urban fringe areas integrates the use of insults (*joutes verbales*) (Dannequin, 1997; van Zanten, 2000) in different languages, drawing in particular on Arabic and Roma words (Begag, 1997). This hierarchy of undesirable languages also reflects wider negative perceptions of Arabs in the public discourse and the media (Deltombe & Rigouste, 2005) and thus contributes to the

construction of an ‘undesirable Other’, which carries an implicit hierarchy of Otherness (Youdell, 2006). Finally, it is inscribed in unequal power relations, which draw not only on postcolonial memories and imagery (Lorcerie, 2011) but also on social division, as the illegitimate other also reflects a non-conformity of children from socially-disadvantaged families and areas with ‘middle-class’ values^{iv}.

This negative view of Arabic was also linked to the place of religion in school, as shown in Farida’s comment from an individual interview:

Farida: We are not allowed to...how to say it? To speak in Arabic or religion, it must not come to school. Because I don’t know...apparently it can attract problems

Interviewer: Oh really is that why?

Farida: Apparently...

(Farida, 10 year-old girl, Moroccan background, individual interview)

Farida’s comment above associated the interdiction of religion in school with the interdiction to speak Arabic. This reflects wider common perceptions, which conflate Islam with an Arab identity (Lapeyronnie, 2005). It also echoes debates around the place of Islam and the French *laïc* (secular) schools in which Islam is constructed as the new Other (Lorcerie, 2011). As such, Farida’s comments are inscribed within a more discriminatory dimension of the debate around *laïcité*, which views Islam and Arabic as undesirable in school because of their incompatibility with republican principles (Meer et al., 2009).

Finally, Farida’s self-definition as *sauvage* (wild) carried the idea of not fitting in to the legitimate ‘citizen’ role associated with being a pupil in the French school. This view is echoed in the exchange below in which children voice the idea that not speaking French could exclude people from participating in society.

Ewen: Nationality is most important because afterwards we can’t vote in the elections.

(Ewen, 10, Cambodian-Reunion background, group interview)

Kenny: It’s nationality and language. Because if you want to vote one day, you will not speak Laotian... you will not speak a foreign language.

(Kenny, 11 year-old boy, Chinese-Laotian background, group interview)

The comments by Ewen and Kenny above make links between French language, republican values and being a citizen. Moreover, Kenny's comment suggests that in order to be a French citizen (through voting) one must not speak a language other than French. This emphasises the idea that French is the only language that allows integration and belonging to society, as a citizen. However, this view of French as the sole legitimate language that allows belonging in society only held within a bounded national framework. It was mitigated by children's perceptions of English as a high-resource language (Blommaert, 2011). English was accorded curricular legitimacy because it was taught in school and was associated to high status and belonging in an imagined global society.

Whilst Arabic was perceived as more illicit or subversive by children, and English was given a higher status as a global resource, other languages, such as Hmong or Laotian, were hardly mentioned and remained invisible in children's perceptions. This is shown in Kenny's comments who expressed feelings of unease or discomfort about speaking about Laotian with teachers, below:

Interviewer: And with teachers, do you speak about Laos, about your language, Laotian?

Kenny: No, last year with Mme Gonzales we made a flag

Interviewer: and did you like it? Do you like speaking about it in school? [silence and shakes head]

Kenny: It embarrasses me a bit

Interviewer: It embarrasses you? Why?

Kenny: Because Laotian I don't really know how to speak about it

(Kenny, 11 year-old boy, Laotian-Chinese background, individual interview)

The idea of 'not knowing how' (*je sais pas trop*) raises questions about the role of school in relation to linguistic differences. The 'indifference to differences' approach in the French school meant that children did not develop the means to talk about Otherness in formal school spaces. This silence surrounding other (home) languages and the lack of interaction around other languages with teachers created a discursive

void for children. This conferred a taboo dimension to Otherness in the formal school spaces, in which there was no legitimate institutional or discursive space to talk about differences. This taboo participated in silencing children about home languages in school. As argued by Hymes (1974:a), “there is a fundamental difference...between what is not said because there is no occasion to say it, and what is not said because one has not and does not find a way to say it”. Kenny’s comments illustrates how this symbolically imposed silence at an institutional level impacts negatively on the way the children negotiate linguistic differences as part of their identity in school, by creating a distance between Otherness and formal school spaces. This silencing power highlights the forms of symbolic violence that monolingualism could take in the French school (Bourdieu, 1991; Blackledge, 2001; Blommaert, 2005).

English case: uncertainty around monolingualism

More surprisingly, despite the strong multilingual ethos of the English school, children also viewed formal school spaces as monolingual and monocultural. The multilingual ethos and policies of the school did not appear to be clearly understood by children. Their views portrayed school as exclusionary of other languages, which was similar to the views of children from the French school, only less formalised.

In some cases, children thought they were not allowed to speak a language other than English in school. Like the children in the French school, children in the English school felt that speaking other languages was not encouraged in school because of the possibility of speaking negatively about others or using swear words without being understood (Welply, 2017). However, this did not carry the same sense of a formalised interdiction that existed in the French school. Rather, children seemed uncertain about the expectations associated with language and thought it was dependent on the teacher’s choice. This is illustrated by Saalima’s comment below.

Interviewer: Do you ever speak Bengali at school?

Saalima: At school? Yeah half the time

Interviewer: And are you allowed to?

Saalima: I’m not sure. They didn’t make a rule about that either.

Interviewer: So there is no rule?

Saalima: But they still go yeah “Make sure you always speak English,” but then, half the time they don’t mind.

(Saalima, 11 year-old girl, Bangladeshi background, individual interview)

Saalima’s comment showed a misunderstanding of the multilingual ethos of the school. This was echoed by Taahira’s comments who felt that speaking Bengali in school was only legitimate if it was private.

Interviewer: So can you speak Bengali with each other sometimes?

Taahira: Well sometimes... if it’s private.

Interviewer: If it’s private?

Jade: Some teachers don’t allow it

Chloe: because you don’t know what you are saying.

(Taahira, 10 year-old girl, Bangladeshi background, group interview)

Taahira’s comment relegates the use of other languages - here Bengali- to private matters, and thus operates a separation between the English public sphere of the school and the private sphere, in which other languages can be spoken.

In her comment below, Saalima also operates a separation between what is personal and what belongs to the public sphere of school by drawing a distinction between work and personality in teacher’s views, insisting on the idea that teachers are only interested in work.

Clarissa: They [teachers] are really not interested in what...what languages you speak.

Interviewer: (...) And are the teachers interested in you?

Saalima: I don’t think so.

Clarissa: I don’t think so.

Saalima: I think they just talk, they just only study about your literacy and your reading.

(...)

Saalima: But I think they don’t care about the personality

(Saalima, 11 year-old girl, Bangladeshi background, group interview)

This view suggests that there were few exchanges between teachers and children about their other languages and cultures. It draws a divide between the public realm of work and personal dimensions which are excluded from formal school spaces. This division of spheres acts as an exclusionary system that does not encourage children to articulate other languages in formal school spaces. This supports the views, widespread in the literature, that school operates a distancing between children and their home language and culture, through the symbolic domination of only one legitimate language (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 1996; Blackledge, 2001; Esch, 2010; Blommaert, 2011).

Finally, Saalima's comment also reflects an implicit monolingual norm, which can be interpreted as a form of symbolic domination. She answers 'They just only study about your literacy and your reading' to the question of whether teachers are interested in the other languages that children speak. This comment could be interpreted as a tacit belief that other languages do not fit in to 'literacy' and 'reading', which implicitly delegitimises other languages as illiterate and positions them in a lower status to the dominant English language. This positions other languages along a deficit model, in which literacy is defined solely as school literacy, and other forms of literacy children might have in their other (home) languages are negated (Blackledge, 2000; Street, 1993; Esch 2010; Blommaert, 2011). In Saalima's view, contrasting other languages and personality with literacy and reading can be interpreted as adhering to the implicit view that literacy is only what is defined in school terms, and that other forms of literacy in other languages are dismissed in school. Her internalisation of this view, in turn, is a form of *institutionalised misrecognition* (Bourdieu, 1991:153) which develop from an "ideology of implicit homogenisation" and in which "those who are subject to the 'symbolic violence' of monoglot standardisation" appear to adhere to this form of symbolic domination (Blackledge, 2001: 298). Saalima's view is underpinned by an implicit hierarchy of languages, in which non-standard forms of literacy in other languages were ignored (Blommaert, 2011). As a result, children tended to downplay their proficiency in their home language because it did not correspond to the school norms of literacy. This *misrecognition* of a hierarchy of languages is illustrated in Akhil's comments who, when asked whether it was important for him to speak the other languages he had mentioned, insisted on French and German because he had to learn them in school, and only mentioned Bengali afterwards.

Interviewer: Ok, and...is it important for you to speak all of these different languages?

Akhil: Well, it's important for me to speak French and German because I have to learn those in school.

Interviewer: Yeah, OK

Akhil: It's only English and Bengali; Bengali is ah... the one I actually speak all the time.

(Akhil, 10 year-old boy, Bangladeshi background, individual interview)

Children's comments showed that they perceived school as monolingual and monocultural rather than a place of celebration of cultural and linguistic diversity. Whilst this discrepancy between the school's stated aims and children's perceptions might at first appear surprising, it also raises the question of the scope of the school's multilingual ethos and whether it extends beyond a tokenistic approach. English schools have been criticised for being ethnocentric and monocultural, and "structurally White" (Gillborn, 2006), and for carrying an implicit monolingual ideology (Blackledge, 2001; Rampton, 2006). In relation to this, the concept of 'doublethink' (Cummins, 2000:242; Blackledge, 2001; Gillborn, 2008) can help explain this process. Doublethink is defined as a gap between a professed "liberal, tolerant ideology which accepts diversity and distances itself from an authoritarian approach to the education of linguistic-minority students" (Blackledge, 2001:242) and a more implicit ideology which is monolingual and monocultural, and only offers 'tokenistic' recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom (Gillborn, 2008). This implicit ideology constructs English as the only legitimate and desirable language in the formal school, symbolically dominant of other languages which are in turn constructed as less desirable (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 1996; Blackledge, 2001; Youdell, 2006). In this study, children's views of other languages as being undesirable in formal school spaces could reflect this process of doublethink. It suggests that the professed multilingual ethos was not integrated in children's perceptions and their views reflected the more tacit monolingual norms of the school.

However, there were exceptions to this. In the English school, the hierarchy of languages was declined in a different way to the French case. Whilst in the French school, this hierarchy built on the idea of a single legitimate language in school and society, this hierarchy was less clear-cut in the English school. Children in the English

case *misrecognised* English as the sole legitimate language in the official English school. However in the English school children's understanding of school was not based on a unitary conception in the same sense as the French '*Ecole*'. Thus children's representation of school built on multiple spaces, which included the official English school and alternative schooling experiences, such as *Q'ranic* or community schools'. Children were thus able to legitimise other languages by referring to multiple school spaces.

This was the case for Anna, a girl of Russian background, who viewed having teaching assistants in another language as a way to establish connections with her home culture and feel a sense of connection.

Anna: I really like the fact that there are more Polish teachers...there is Miss Ava and Miss Archid.

Interviewer: so what do you like about having Polish teachers at school?

Anna: well, they understand you, and it's like, sometimes different countries have different personalities?

(Anna, 10 year-old girl, Russian Background, individual interview)

This was also the case for all four Muslim children who participated in the study and viewed religion as closely intertwined with language. One recurrent aspect was that Muslim children spontaneously brought up religion and Religious Education (RE) in response to questions about other languages. Religion played a particular function in the way they articulated other languages in school. It was the one space in school where they could establish some legitimacy for the other languages they spoke. Religious Education functioned as the legitimate sphere in which they could express Otherness in formal school spaces. The comments made below by Akhil illustrates this point.

Interviewer: Some of you speak other languages. Do you ever talk about it with teachers?

Akhil: Yeah, I remember in Year 2, in R.E. we learnt about Islam.

Interviewer: Okay, so did you talk about it then?

Akhil: Yeah, I talked about it. I nearly know all the Koran.

(Akhil, 10 year-old boy, Bangladeshi background, group interview)

Saalima also spoke about religion in relation to language and focused on R.E. as the legitimate sphere in which to talk about differences in school.

Saalima: (...) when we was in Year Five Miss Warrington did...err... (...) She did, err.... she wanted people who spoke Bengali to talk to her class about what Bengali, mean, like Muslims, Bengali, stuff like that, so me and Taahira and Nabeela we all made this like speech paper. (...)So we wrote it on a piece of paper and then when we did it we had a Koran, and we showed them a praying mat and special clothes. (...) And then we were talking about, most of the things we were talking about was Arab...err....about the Koran (...) and a couple of weeks later they went to a mosque and they invited me and Taahira and Nabeela to go, as well.

(Saalima, 11 year-old girl, Bangadeshi background, group interview)

This association of religion with language raises several points which could be interpreted as an attempt to confer curricular and institutional legitimacy for children's other languages in formal school spaces. This is illustrated by the comment of Nabeela, a girl of Bangladeshi background: "They wanted us to say things about Bengali, like our religion, Islamic and so we told them that we read books and stuff", which associates Bengali with a more literate dimension, giving the language more legitimacy in formal school spaces. It also opens up new spaces for intercultural communication, where children get to talk about their other language and their religion to teacher and peers.

Conclusion

In both the French and English schools, despite contrasting approaches to linguistic diversity, children felt that their other (home) languages did not have a legitimate place in formal school spaces. This was justified as a formal, institutionalised principle in the French school, associated to citizenship and belonging, whereas it was surrounded by more uncertainty in the English school, with the view that it was an informal choice, at the discretion of teachers. In both schools, however, children's views revealed a hierarchy of languages, in which some languages were deemed more legitimate, and thus more desirable, than others in school. This built on representations of literacy, and

notions of global resources (foreign languages taught in school were given curricular legitimacy and held a higher symbolic global status than home languages). This hierarchy, however, was articulated in different ways in each school. In the English school, it was less explicit and less exclusionary than in the French case, as children could re-assert the legitimacy of their home languages through reference to specific curriculum areas (Religious Education), alternative (community) school spaces and specific bilingual assistants. Finally, in both schools, there was a latent unease felt by children from immigrant backgrounds in talking about their other languages within formal school spaces. This reticence in speaking about other language is indicative of the symbolic domination of monolingualism in each school, in which a single language (English or French) is *recognised* and *misrecognised* as legitimate in formal school spaces.

This raises several points. Firstly, this article has shown the tension between underlying monolingualism in school and the linguistic diversity of children, who are often caught in a “double bind” (Esch, 2010) in which the only way to position themselves as legitimate pupils is to distance themselves from their home languages in school. Secondly, children’s experience of their other languages in school is most often marked by absence and silence. Absence of intercultural communication between teachers and children around languages in formal school spaces, absence of words to talk about, absence of curricular legitimacy, absence of status. Blommaert stresses the importance of taking absence of talk into account, as it can reveal ‘patterns of allocation of power symbols and instruments, and thus an investigation into basic patterns of privilege and disenfranchisement in societies’ (2005:61).

In the same vein, Lewis insists on the importance of incorporating ‘child silence’ as much as ‘child voice’ in the research process (Lewis, 2010). However, this silence carries different meanings in the different contexts of each school. In the French school, children’s silence in relation to language differences in formal school spaces reflected the institutional silence around differences and the discursive void it created, as shown in Kenny’s difficulty to know *how* to talk about Laotian. In the English school, children’s silence was more surprising as it stood in contrast to the multilingual ethos of the school, which celebrated diversity by making it visible (through, for example, multilingual signs) and heard (by encouraging children to talk about

differences). As such, this silence revealed the more implicit monolingualism of the school.

Thirdly, this article highlights the importance of critically reflecting on the mechanisms at play in educational systems that remain, by and large, monolingual. Bourdieu's concepts of legitimation and misrecognition offered powerful theoretical tools to look at implicit forms of domination and Othering around language diversity in school. Despite contrasting approaches to language difference in schools, the symbolic domination of one language over others presents a challenge to creating inclusive intercultural and multilingual environments. This calls for examining both explicit and implicit attitudes towards linguistic diversity, in order to fully embrace the affordances and possibilities they offer for school. There is a need to recognise the complexity of linguistic diversity in school and the way language can operate as a category of difference and Othering. Finally, children's agency needs to be recognised in the process, the ways in which they negotiate language difference across different school spaces and how they find areas of legitimation. This can help develop intercultural pedagogies in school that are more inclusive of language diversity and challenge implicit hierarchies and forms of discrimination.

Integrating, to some extent, multiple forms of literacy and oracy in the classroom, which would recognise and value children's skills in their home languages could help address the tensions between the official legitimate language of school and children's other languages. Beyond the academic and cognitive benefits of encouraging bilingualism for these children, this has strong implications in terms of identity and belonging, especially for children from second or third generations of immigrants. This would help overcome feelings of distance or estrangement from children's home languages and transcend the tension between legitimate and illegitimate language. Such changes would benefit all children, multilingual and monolingual.

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Notes

ⁱ These categories correspond to children's self-identification.

ⁱⁱ The term 'hindou' was the way Clara self-defined and is thus used to mirror her own speech.

ⁱⁱⁱ Reference to the word '*kmāra*', meaning donkey in Arabic, which was mispronounced by children in the French case as '*ramallah*'

^{iv} The term 'class' here is used in inverted commas because of the different social constructions of class in France and England.

^v The four children presented here, Nabeela, Saalima, Taahira, Akhil went to *Q'ranic* schools and had tuition in Bengali. Anna went to Russian school on Saturday.