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## **Categories and social meanings: An analysis of international students' language practices in an international school**

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### **Abstract**

Bilingual educational programmes in recent years received criticism from translanguaging or superdiversity scholars. These programmes follow either the subtractive or the additive models of bilingual education (García 2009), in both of which the languages are considered as separate systems. This distinction is considered as “inadequate to describe linguistic diversity” (García 2009: 142) and masks the real diversity of difference by focusing only on languages. Thinking in terms of plurilingualism and multiculturalism “might contribute to a continuation of thinking in terms of us-versus-them, essentializing cultural or ethnic differences” (Geldof 2018: 45). The present study argues that a critical ethnographic sociolinguistic approach provides a more relevant analysis of children’s language practices. From this critical perspective, speaking is highlighted instead of languages and considered as action in which the linguistic resources carry social meaning (Blommaert–Rampton 2011). This paper introduces the findings of an ethnographic fieldwork set in an international summer school where linguistic and ethnic diversity is a commonplace, although a strict English-only language policy applies in order to achieve the school’s pedagogical goals. The aim of the research has been to find out how students from various cultural background are dealing with ethnical and linguistic diversity and to analyse how the processes of normalisation (Geldof 2018) among students and teachers create values and categories accepted as norms by the group. By analysing the emerging social values and categories within the group, this paper focuses on how internal factors such as emotions, attitudes and identity contribute to the language choices of the students.

**Keywords:** critical sociolinguistics, identity, enregisterment, voice, linguistic diversity

### **Introduction**

Language choice is determined by various factors such as institutional and/or personal expectations, ideologies, internal and external agents that all influence the chosen method of communication. At a school where students’ life is regulated by different rules and policies, language options might be seen as being defined by the institution and being independent from personal choices. For example, a school can regulate the language choice of its students by applying different language policies, such as bilingual education where the different educational programmes determine what languages can be used in which areas/times of the school. However, the actual language use comes alive by the students’ and teachers’ linguistic practices in the classroom.

Applying a critical sociolinguistic lens, it is claimed in the present paper that language choice can shape social identity and vice versa and that identity is substantially determined by concrete communicative practices, which are bound by the ideologies, attitudes and knowledge of the speakers. In this view, identity is not granted by assumed social factors, but it is constructed by conscious choices of people. To underpin these statements, I will analyse the data of a sociolinguistic ethnographic fieldwork from a summer school of an international school. The

terms *critical*, *sociolinguistic* and *ethnographic* are used in this study as in Heller and her colleagues' work: *critical* refers to questions of how social processes have consequences for a group of people, *sociolinguistic* means the investigations into how language matters – for example socially; and *ethnographic* makes reference to the “situatedness” of a research – the exploration of how things work and why (Heller et al. 2018: 2). In the analysis, I will focus on how external and internal factors have an impact on the language choice of students and to what extent these choices shape their identities, influence their perception of *me/us* versus *them* and how this local process of becoming a group creates categories, norms, and social meanings. After a short theoretical overview and discussing methodological issues, I present the setting of the fieldwork. To summarize the findings, I will end this paper with a discussion of the analysis based on a critical sociolinguistic approach.

### **Negotiating social identity**

Social psychology studies focus on questions of self and identity. As stated by Erik Erikson (2004), a person's identity goes through stages of development, so he claims that identity changes over time. The term *social identity* can be linked to Henri Tajfel (1981) according to whom social identity refers to a people's sense of who they are based on their group. Pataki (1988) argues that in approaches such as Tajfel's concept, identity is regarded as a configuration that occurred in the course of primary socialization. This configuration can be re-structured again and again but must also retain the internal hierarchy throughout the process (Pataki 1988: 359). In his approach, he distinguishes between personal and social identity, which both are part of the cognitive system. Personal identity refers to the person as individual with a unique character. Social identity “represents what it has in common with others, what it shares with others” (Pataki 1988: 358). In his approach, identity is not considered as a set of stable attributes, but it is “capable of altering and improving” (Pataki 1988: 358) and the change happens due to the relation of the two types of identity as “the experience of personal identity is based on the development of social identity” (Pataki 1988: 358).

Interactional sociolinguists draw on the theoretical findings of social psychology. The term *social identity* is maintained, however, the role of language becomes highlighted.

According to Gumperz and Gumperz-Cook (1982), identity and language use are interconnected. They argue that social identity and ethnicity are mainly established and maintained through language. In the interactions, social meanings are created. Gumperz refers to context as a mental model of which the physical, psychological, institutional backgrounds and the knowledge of the speaker are all part. In this case, context is not a given aspect of the interaction, but it is an actively established social act and it is created by the speakers during the interaction (Gumperz–Gumperz-Cook 1982). Different roles of the speaker (for example social identity) play an important part of contextualization.

Similarly, to Gumperz's view, Heller (1982) also believes that language and ethnicity are related. She claims that language choices “indicate social relationships based on shared or unshared group memberships” (1982 :5). However, in their study, Jette G. Hansen and Jun Liu expressed criticism that it is against the dynamic nature of social identity to let an individual's behaviour be arranged into groups. They argue that “social identity is individual, and develops a hypothesis of social identity that categorizes an individual's behaviour into groups, and the groups into determined categories, denies the individual and dynamic nature of social identity” (Hansen–Liu 1997: 571).

In the present paper, I argue without denying the individual and dynamic nature of social identity that factors such as emotions, attitudes and identity contribute to language choices. In line with Evans (2015), I understand that identity is “at its most particular and personal in

interactive social situations, such as work, school and family, where individuals actively negotiate their multiple identities or subjectivities as they move within and between different linguistic contexts, lexicogrammars and discourses” (Evans 2015: 34).

In this study, school as one of the interactive social situations is the chosen setting to examine how social meaning is created within a group of children, how their identities are shaped by their language choices and by their social relationships. In agreement with Hansen and Liu (1997), it is also emphasized in the present study that presupposed categories do not necessarily match the dynamically emerging groupings of a class at school. The present research focuses on the above-mentioned theoretical points; its aim is to interrogate how social meaning and context is created by the group members, how language choices indicate social relationships based on memberships and to explore how the identity of a person is actual and adapted to and emerging from a concrete situation. Next, I will discuss what research methods were chosen to carry out the research.

### **Research methods**

The observed school is an international summer school where linguistic and ethnic diversity is commonplace, although a strict English-only language policy applies in order to achieve the school’s pedagogical goals. The aim of the research is to find out how students from various cultural backgrounds are dealing with ethnical and linguistic diversity at school and to analyse how the processes of normalisation (Geldof 2018) among students and teachers create values accepted as norms by the group.

As quoted above, Hansen and Liu pointed out that in social psychological theory, the categorization of individual behaviour into groups denies the dynamic nature of social identity (Hansen–Liu 1997: 571). Besides the theoretical concerns, they continue their argument with a criticism of methodological issues by stating that “No matter how detailed and carefully undertaken, one-time research cannot be adequate to study social identity, as social identity is often context bound” (Hansen–Liu 1997: 573).

Taking their reasoning into consideration, I have turned to critical sociolinguistic research methods (Heller et al. 2018). This not only helps me interpret social identity as a dynamic phenomenon but by applying a critical sociolinguistics lens, I also consider research as “a fundamentally social experience” (2018:8): critical sociolinguistic research is based on ethnographic methods for it is “about examining social practice **as it unfolds**, while it happens” (2018: 8 – highlighted in the original text). This means that, on one hand, social practice is taken as a dynamic process, and on the other, that there are no predefined categories applied in the research and instead, the existing norms and values of the observed group of people are traced.

In the present research, I observed the students’ group by participant observation, as well as interviewing the teachers and students of the group and looking at the school’s pedagogical programme. Next, I will delineate the main theoretical points of critical sociolinguistics and then the setting of the ethnographic fieldwork will be presented.

### **Critical sociolinguistics**

Similarly to Gumperz’s concept of contextualization, critical sociolinguistics also emphasize the significance of context in the process of meaning making and the active role speakers play in this process. In this approach, the speaker’s perspective becomes important, so the focus from languages moves onto the notion of linguistic repertoire. As Busch states, “basically, already contained in Gumperz’s concept of the repertoire is the realization that speech style not only refers indexically to social categories but that it can also be employed by speakers as a

means of moving beyond normative and constraining categorizations” (2012: 3). The indexicality of social categories becomes shared by a group of people in the process of enregisterment. The concept of enregisterment, described by Agha, means the “processes whereby distinct forms of speech come to be socially recognized (or enregistered) as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of language users” (Agha 2005: 38).

Gal (2018 [2016]) explains that language ideologies are semiotic processes, which define how we interpret different signs. In other words, they create a framing by emphasizing the differences and similarities of certain meta-signs, for example regarding social roles (Gal (2018 [2016])). As seen in this explanation, differences and similarities mutually determine one another. Similarities of a way of speaking can be defined in contrast to the differences of others. Furthermore, the contrasting characteristics of ways of speaking are becoming an index or label to different categories. Certain characteristics have become more important to speakers according to which they create their own categories that index certain social meanings (e.g. types of persons, places or situations) – Gal (2018 [2016])). In this approach, speakers not only perceive these characteristics and the indexed social meanings but they seek during the process of meaning making the way these two can come together. In order to find such relations, they might omit signs that do not fit into their cultural models their ideologies form (Gal 2018 [2016])). As claimed by Agha (2005), processes of enregisterment are encounters of voices (or characterological figures and personae). The concept of voice relies on Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of voice and persona. Voice is linked to the individual, while persona is an imagined type of person, which can be characterized by certain ways of speaking and the social meanings of these indices. This imagined persona comprises the perspective of the speakers, as the knowledge, emotions, attitudes, values and language ideologies of the speakers all influence how they perceive the differences and similarities of ways of speaking. Agha emphasizes that enregisterment is more than only an encounter of voices, for the process means “encounters in which individuals establish alignment with voices indexed by speech and thus with social types of persons, real or imagined, whose voices they take them to be” (Agha 2005: 38). This concept builds on Gumperz’s idea that social meaning is constructed during the interaction of speakers. However, in the critical sociolinguistic approach, the dynamism of this process is more accentuated: ideological distinctions not only become value laden, but it is the speakers who develop the social meanings by the process of enregisterment; in addition, they are actively involved in giving framing to the meta-signs that they choose and make them become characteristics of ways of speaking. Therefore, the differences that play role in symbolization of identity is the creation of the speakers.

In other words, a group of people, for example students who form a class in a summer school for a certain period of time, form their own categories based on their values and ideologies that are valid in this particular group.

### **The ISOP**

The International School of Paphos is situated on the Mediterranean island, Cyprus, at the intersection of Europe, Africa and Asia. The official languages of Cyprus are Greek and Turkish, but English is also widely accepted to be used in public spaces. There are two main reasons to explain why English is such a popular language on the island. First, the island had been an English colony, and there is still a remarkable number of Brits who live permanently in Cyprus. Second, Cyprus is a popular tourist destination. Approximately 20% of the population is non-Cypriot; immigrants come mostly from countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. In the last decade, the number of Chinese immigrants has also grown rapidly. The language of instruction in Cyprus’ schools is Greek;

however, private schools with other languages of instruction are also available. The majority of them are international schools that follow the English national curriculum, and the language of instruction is English.

The International School of Paphos follows both the English National Curriculum and the requirements of the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture. Because of the high number of students who are non-native speakers of English, a structured immersion type programme is applied. This means that the language of teaching is still English, but there are booster classes or individual programmes of study based on the children's specific needs, which help foreign children develop their English skills.

The International School of Paphos is a well-known, both nationally and internationally recognized international school founded in 1987. The school is proud of its cultural diversity, they accept students from Cyprus, the United Kingdom, Russian-speaking countries, China and over 20 other European and non-European countries. As they state,

The International School of Paphos strives to create an educational environment that is inclusive and in which every member of staff, every student and every family, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender, is equally valued (The International School of Paphos 2019).

### **The summer school**

The International School of Paphos provides a Summer School for children aged 4-18. It runs annually for five weeks during the summer months. The aim of the Summer School is to allow children to learn in a fun, exciting and challenging environment. Students can take part in a range of activities (for example Arts, Crafts, English Conversation, Reading, Writing, Role Play, Information Technology, Physical Education such as swimming, water polo, football, basketball, volleyball, rounders, handball, tennis, karate and hockey) under the supervision of qualified teaching staff ("Summer School" 2019).

### **The group**

Students of the Summer School are arranged into age groups, which are marked by colours. The oldest children go to the Blue group (to keep the anonymity of the students, the colour of the group has been changed), the one in which I was invited to carry out my fieldwork.

In the summer of 2019, there were approximately 42 students in the age range of 14 to 18 in the Blue group. The precise number varied from week to week since students could be registered for summer school not only for all the 5 weeks but for individual weeks as well. The students were from Cyprus, England, Vietnam, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Hungary and Poland. There were a high number of children who attended ISOP during the previous academic year, and there were children who had regularly come to this summer school for years. These children came to summer school not only to learn English, but also to spend time with their friends. The majority of children, however, arrived only for the summer school.

Susan, one of the teachers in the Blue group described the group as follows: (I=interviewer, S=Susan, the teacher of the group – all names mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms)

*I: Could you describe the group you had for summer school this year?*

*S: This summer school was quite diverse. We had a mix of languages, which is nice. We had a smaller first language English... we only had two children whose first language is English in the group. And many of them speak fluent English that come to this school. Although that lot was less this year. So they are probably representative by 20-25% I*

*think. Then we had a strong Chinese group that grew in size over the 5 weeks. And the Russian speaking countries.... A lot of them come to our school anyway, but they gravitate towards the visiting English rather than the native English of their School friends. And then we had Vietnamese children who never formed a language group. They quite happily integrated.*

## **Analysis**

### **Establishing the programme of the group**

The students had English classes every day. The teachers planned the activities carefully in order to achieve the pedagogical goals of the school, which “is to allow children to learn in a fun, exciting and challenging environment.” This needed careful planning due to the very different needs of the children: the majority of the foreign children come to summer school to spend five weeks in an English-speaking environment and to improve their language skills. They spoke English at various levels from beginner to advanced level. Then there were the students who had excellent command of English and came to summer school to spend time with their friends.

This is how Susan encounters the planning phase of teaching in the Blue group:

*I: How did you plan the summer school programme? What principle did you follow?*

*S: I tried projects, stuff to incorporate different aspects of English. ... regardless whether that's their first language or not. We looked at things that were going to interest them. This year we gave them a music festival to present. So there were all different cross-curricular activities. But really the main focus was to get them comfortable in their facts so that they could present it with confidence. Then we also do lots of challenges because that's what currently works with teenagers. Teenagers like to prank each other. There's Maths, there's Logic, there's some Music, chopsticks, which just tips the balance [e.g. the balance for non-native speakers, so that they could take an active part in the challenges and could win points as well].*

The planning was based on the pedagogical aims of the summer school (e.g. planning interesting and challenging activities), and the synthesis of the group, regarding the peculiarity of their age and the level of their English. We can gather from Susan's words that the main criteria for establishing categories for English proficiency was whether the student was a native or non-native speaker of English. The measurement for the improvement of students' English skills was along the terms *confidence* and feeling *comfortable* to present facts in English in front of others. We can conclude that the external factors for students' language choices are first the expectations of the parents who send their children to summer school in order to learn English. Next, is the school's English-only policy which is based on the language ideology that language can be learnt through different activities conducted in English. However, placing English as the exclusive language of instruction at the school and as a desirable goal to achieve in order to become more successful in life might create differences between native and non-native speakers of the group: those, who speak English, can be considered successful in contrast to the others who do not speak English that well. This is what Susan reflected on when saying “*chopsticks, which just tips the balance.*” Namely, the Chinese students who formed the majority of the Blue group were non-native speakers of English with very different levels of proficiency in English. The teachers thoughtfully planned activities in which the Chinese students' group had more chance to succeed. One of the tasks of the challenge games was with chopsticks; students had to collect little balls by picking them out of a container using

chopsticks. Using chopsticks for Chinese students is very easy, while for other students this activity was indeed challenging.

On the other hand, to counteract, cultural diversity is mediated as valuable attributes by the school for it is stated as the aim of the school: to create an inclusive environment “*in which every member of staff, every student and every family, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender, is equally valued*”<sup>1</sup> and also by the teachers, as Susan said in the interview:

*“This summer school was quite diverse. We had a mix of languages, which is nice.”*

These lines suggest that the knowledge of multiple languages is seen as a positive personal quality.

These points are in alignment with the concept that the way people perceive others is substantially determined by concrete communicative practices, which are bound by the ideologies, attitudes and knowledge of the speakers. The values of knowing English and multiple languages are established through communicative practices, that is, through the school’s policy and what the teachers convey to others. These practices are based on the language ideologies of the school and of the teachers concerning language learning.

### **Creating groups for the projects**

As Susan mentioned in the interview, they planned projects for the children. Project-based learning is a student-centred pedagogy in which students are given tasks, problems and they learn about a subject by working together. Project activities usually are realized in group work. At the beginning, the two teachers of the Blue group, Susan and Christie created five project groups. They started with icebreaker activities that did not need language, so that the children could get to know each other regardless of their knowledge of English. Then, for the first project, the teachers split the students into five groups mixing equally different nationalities, characters and personalities. The reason behind this decision was that the teachers wanted “*to make students get to know each other, to make new friends, to expand their knowledge and to see different things*” (quoted from Christie’s interview). Nevertheless, as they recounted, it did not work out. The reason Christie mentioned was the students that were already students of the school wanted to spend time with their friends at summer school and therefore did not accept the other students they did not know in their groups.

The following excerpt from the interview with Christie shows how the groups were finally reformed (I=Interviewer, Ch=Christie)

I: ... *but it didn’t work out. So what did you do?*

Ch: *No, it didn’t. ... We let them choose who they wanted to be with.*

I: ... *and how did they choose?*

Ch: *Mostly based on nationality... and language, basically. The Russians were together, the Chinese were together... It worked. I think it worked.*

The children’s social choices overwrote the teachers’ will. Students created their own groups based on their own choices of whom they wanted to work with. Coincidentally, the children’s choices could be labelled using categories such as gender, language and nationality, as described by Susan:

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<sup>1</sup> quoted from <http://www.paphosinternationalschool.com/en/home-page/about> (29.12.2019).

*“There was the Chinese boys’ group, and that of the Chinese girls’, there was a Russian speaking group and two other groups which could be called the International School’s representatives”.*

However, the reason behind their choices was not nationality but friendships. Although, the result of their grouping created two categories within the Blue group: the “insiders” and the “outsiders”. The insiders’ category was established along the highlighted differences that mattered to the children, namely whether the children were also students of the school or they came only for summer school and whether they were fluent speakers of English. We can see that the insiders’ category is not based on nationality, it is a “mixed group” as the teachers called them; throughout the academic years of the school, the children formed friendships regardless of nationality. The outsiders, in contrast, were only familiar with others who shared the same nationality, culture or language and they formed groups together: Chinese girls, Chinese boys and the Russians. This is in alignment with Gal’s concept discussed above about how the speakers are actively involved in contrasting characteristics of ways of speaking that become an index (label) to different categories. For the students in this group, the ability of speaking English was one of the contrasting characteristics. As Christie stated in the interview:

*I: “What do you think the groups think of each other? Do they feel different?”*

*Ch: [speaking about the International School group] “Yes, for two reasons. Because they know how to speak English. That’s one. The second is because they are part of the school. They are already part of the school. They feel more comfortable here. They have been here for years.”*

Interestingly, the Russian group called themselves “the Russian group” while the others just referred to themselves by their group names they created (Each group found a name for themselves that was used for the project and for the challenges). According to Susan, the Russians would not mix with other students voluntarily, they were happy in their group. For them, the emphasized characteristic that was in contrast with others was whether someone was a Russian speaker or not. The following example shows how the name “The Russian group” became a social category in the Blue group. During a morning session, three students from the International School’s group were working on their poster and they needed scissors. They asked for it from five boys from the Chinese boys’ group sitting at the table next to them. One of the Chinese boys stood up and threw a pair of scissors to the table of the three students. They were frightened because the scissors could have hit them. They started laughing and teasing each other for being frightened. They made up a silly story about the Chinese boys attacking them by throwing different objects at them, when they added: “*And then the Russians join in*” (quoted from the fieldwork notes). According to Blackledge and Creese, these social categories are stereotypes, resources “for both social commentary and convivial communication. But they are stereotypes filled with tension, indexical of cultural practices” (Blackledge–Creese 2018: 105). In the example, the boys started teasing each other because they were startled by the unexpected behaviour of the Chinese boy. Then they realized that the boy did not intend to do any harm, so they also turned the story into a joke. Here, the reason for the unexpected behaviour was the cultural and linguistic difference between the two groups. They did not understand each other; they did not realize first that the Chinese boy wanted to prank them and the boy could not tell them it was only a joke. This example also shows that these categories and social meanings – and as Gumperz and Gumperz-Cook (1982) argued: social identity and ethnicity – are mainly established and maintained through language, in the interactions. “The Russians” category in this situation made reference to the cultural and linguistic differences of the children, and to the different behaviour and customs of the children with different backgrounds.



### **Students who did not fit into the established categories**

There were some students who did not fit into this grouping: there was Edvin from Hungary who had been a student of the school for years. Then, his family moved back to Hungary and he came back every summer to keep up with his old friends. For him, English was not a native language, yet he joined the group of the International School's representatives. When talking with Christie in the interview, I asked her about Edvin, the Hungarian boy. She did not understand who I was talking about because I referred to him as "the Hungarian boy." By joining the International School Children's group, Christie automatically assumed that he was an English boy. Edvin's choice of which group he joined contributed to the formation of his social identity to be referred to as an English student. As Agha stated, "The register is itself a form of semiotic capital that advances certain rights and privileges. And to be able to speak the register is to be able to perform an image of social personhood as one's own image" (Agha 2005: 55).

Besides Edvin's choice of which group he joined, the fact that he spoke exactly like the others from the International School's group also contributed to Christie's misunderstanding.

Another student was Celine, a Russian girl who had come to summer school for years and then she became a student of the International School the previous year. The teachers made a reference to her as a "shy girl who is yet to become confident to speak in English". Even so, this year, she chose to be part of the International School's Representatives group instead of the Russian group as she had done before. In contrast to Celine, Petra, another Russian girl who had been a student of the school for many years and for whom English was not a problem, chose to join the Russian group. Behind their choices, there were social reasons irrelevant to language; they chose different friends to be with. Yet their choices determined their language use. While working on the project, the children in the Russian group, who could not speak English very well, needed some help, usually in the form of translation. That is why in the Russian group one was more exposed to Russian language while in the International School's group, to English. Celine, who chose the International School's group, was the only Russian-speaking student, so as a result of her choice, she surrounded herself with students with whom she could only speak in English and completely excluded Russian from her working environment. Susan drew my attention to the flexibility and dynamic nature of their choices:

*I: And there was one Russian girl who, despite being Russian, did not choose the Russians [referring to Celine].*

*S: She is a new starter of the International School. Interestingly enough, last year she was one of 'the Russians' if you like and this year, now, she started at school in September. She has changed and became one of the International group and she mixes with both groups. She is allowed in and out and both groups are very accepting in that. Maybe next year I don't know but this year she has made strong friendships within her new school and I think it was important to her to maintain those rather than to turn away from them for five weeks and then expect to be friends again in September. This is how I think it happened. She is quite a sensitive girl, that would perhaps be the reason for wanting to do that.*

According to Susan's story, this year, Celine chose the group of children with whom she spent the school year and not the Russian children whom she knew from summer school. However, she has friends in both groups. That is why, by mixing in both groups, she can adapt her alignment according to what suits her better. Just like in Edvin's case, she is also "able to speak

the register and able to perform an image of social personhood as one's own image" (Agha 2005: 55), hence she is familiar with both groups' habits, language and behaviour.

### Conclusion

The above discussed cases reveal how a group formed its own values and norms and how external and internal factors determined the group members' language choices. These categories were created by the students themselves, that is why these could be valid for them (instead of the ones established by their teachers). After the categories had been established, the process of enregisterment started to take place: students perceived the differences in the Blue group, they emphasized certain characteristics that became the base of the contrast between them and others such as native, non-native, and Russian. Then, along these characteristics, members of the Blue group (both students and teachers) started to add different labels, social meanings, such as "student of the International School", "English", "social", "reserved" who do not mix with others, etc. An important finding of the fieldwork is that the social identity someone creates can be shaped in a dynamic way, adapting to the actual situation, as Celine's example shows. It also became clear, that the reason for the students' choices were not only determined by external factors (in fact, the teachers' grouping did not work out), but were also based on personal and social reasons. This way, the findings of the presented fieldwork reconfirms the critique worded by Hansen and Liu:

Although the contribution of interactional sociolinguists to the study of social identity is undeniable, as language is a strong ethnic marker and the manifestation of a specific culture, one might wonder whether language as the only focus of study will narrow the scope of research on social identity and thus weaken the overall perspectives of multiple factors interacting to form one's social identity (Hansen–Liu 1997: 572)

However, the lens of critical sociolinguistics broadens the notion of *language* into *linguaging* emphasized as an action that incorporates semiotic signs besides language, as well. Additionally, following Gal's (2018 [2016]) argument detailed above, this approach gives the role to the speakers who decide which signs become distinctive characteristics of certain qualities and values and based on this process they build their identities. The logical consequence of this is that identity is malleable and manageable and is adapted to each situation when speakers are involved.

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