

# Bilingual Identities in Question: Social Identity Construction in a Dutch Islamic Primary Classroom<sup>i</sup>

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## 1 Introduction

This paper investigates the discursive practices of young pupil-informants from Immigrant Minority background (henceforth I. M.) and it focuses on how they perceive their patterns of ethnicity and language use as constructing their social identity<sup>1</sup> within the structure of Dutch primary schooling<sup>ii</sup>. The paper reports on the data collected in a primary upper junior Islamic classroom in the Netherlands where culturally and linguistically heterogeneous pupils are taught by a monolingual Dutch teacher. The paper addresses the question whether these pupils perceive themselves as a permanent and integral part of the host nation or as part of a permanent kind of cultural and linguistic ‘other’.

The paper builds on the work of Hall (1996) using concepts advanced by Zimmerman (1998) and Bammer (1994). Thus proposing an understanding of the nature of pupils’ social-identity construction in institutional settings (e.g. the learning environment) in relation to an anti-essentialist conceptualisation of ethnicity and language use presenting the two not as fixed entities but in continuous change. The pupils self-reported experiences show how the construction of new patterns of ethnicity are intertwined in a process of legitimisation among family and school structures demonstrating a form of mixed affiliation to the ‘host country and its cultural habits’ and their parental home. Further, building on the concept of language legitimisation (Heller, 1996), the paper argues that these pupil-informants demonstrate agency in manipulating their language use both in the home and in the school environment. The Dutch language becomes a marker of social achievement in respect of their parents, while I. M. languages, even though regarded as languages with a lower status on the language market, help these pupils in contesting the monolingual norm present in school. Consequently, the emerging patterns allow us to pose new questions that may help informing educators in conceptualising their ‘bilingual learners’ in culturally and linguistically heterogeneous learning environments.

In the following sections, I firstly give an explanation of the theoretical framework underpinning this project, followed by an outline of the primary Dutch educational debate in respect to I. M. pupils’ achievement levels compared to their monolingual counterparts. Further the methodology accounting for setting, informants profiles and tools, is presented. A large selection of the data corpus is then given, based on the grounded analysis and interpretation of the categories emerging from the raw data (Cf. Hayes, 2000 for a detailed explanation). I conclude by bringing together a framework, stemming from UK based (socio) linguistic research carried out in the context of TESOL<sup>2</sup> practice, that may offer ways for educators to deal with questions of how to redefine the ‘bilingual learner’ in the primary learning environment.

## 2 Overview of the Dutch primary education debate

The official discourse employed by Dutch primary education portrays pupils from I. M. background, their home languages and the teaching of these languages, through a ‘*jargon of minorities*’ (Cf. Extra & Gorter: 2001 for a cross-national review). Such jargon constructs these pupils as a separate cultural and linguistic group under a complex and multifaceted nomenclature such as: ‘allochtone leerlingen’<sup>iii</sup>, ‘Cumi-leerlingen’<sup>iv</sup> or ‘1.9 leerlingen’<sup>v</sup> (CBS, 2002: 137-140). As the report ‘Allochtonen in Nederland 1999’ asserts (CBS, 2000), despite positive developments: ‘minorities are still quite far behind as far as education goes’ (Ibid: 1). Furthermore, the report states that the average

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the model advanced by Tajfel (1974).

<sup>2</sup> TESOL: Teaching of English as a Second Language.

attainment levels of young people from the minorities is lower than their ‘Dutch’ counterparts, pointing to the ongoing process of migration for results that fall lower than average. Further, the report illustrates that at the end of primary school the performance results of Turkish, Moroccan and Antillean minority members lie two school years behind that of their Dutch counterparts for Dutch language and one year behind for Mathematics. It could be summarised that in the Netherlands, the current configuration of primary education goals and practices for pupils with an I. M. background relies on two main implicit assumptions:

1. that I. M. pupils are bilingual, having an ethnic minority language spoken in the household while at school they are learning and using Dutch;
2. that there is an abstracted notion of an ‘idealised native speaker’ of the Dutch language with which ethnic minority members are compared and from which at times they are excluded (Cf. Backus, 2002).

Further, findings from Dutch based ethnographic research - aimed at investigating primary educators’ practice and thought informing their teaching in front of a culturally and linguistically heterogeneous classroom (Gogolin & Kroon, 2000; Bezemer, 2003) – seem to support the two points made above. On the one hand, these studies call for more research on the way in which I. M. pupils actively construct their patterns of ethnicity and language use in the primary multicultural learning environment (Cf. Stephens, 1995). On the other, they try to stimulate Dutch primary educators to move beyond a designation of I. M. pupils’ social identities based on ethnic categorisation (Cf. Koole, 1999) that can result particularly misleading in multi-ethnic urban areas like the multicultural Islamic primary school chosen for this research.

### *2.1 Identity in education: who needs it?*

Why, though, should primary educators worry about the role of ethnic identity and language use in the construction of the social identity of their I. M. background pupils? Firstly, as highlighted by Freire (1998), the importance of the identity of both educators and learners in the context of educational practice is clear, given that identity in multicultural learning environments is ‘a product of tension-filled relationships between what we inherit and what we acquire’ (Ibid. 70). Secondly, language is often cited as a major component in the construction of ethnic identity (Cf. Fishman, 1977). However, as shown by Smolicz (1992), it has to be acknowledged that for some minority groups (e.g. Italian migrants in Australia) language is to a higher degree a core value of their ethnic identity than for other groups (e.g. Dutch migrants in Australia).

Definition of ethnicity and language use result at the basis of the two problems that appear at the core of primary educators’ conception of their I. M. pupils. As De Vos (1995) states:

“Where languages have transcended national frontiers as have English, French and Spanish [*and Dutch: MS*], ethnicity is not necessarily broadened to include all speakers of the language (...)” (Ibid. 23).

Hence corroborating the view that, in conditions of migration, there is an implicit idea of a ‘native speaker’ of a language (e.g. Dutch) to whom children from I. M. background are compared with. Secondly, that educators have an understanding of ethnicity and language use based on the adherence of a pupil to a single language and ethnic group (Spotti, forthcoming). Running the risk of categorising the social agent as bound to fixed ethnic and linguistic boundaries, resulting in a ‘socio-linguistic automata’ (Giles, 1977).

Recent developments in cultural theory, drawn from British cultural studies, may help overcoming this form of categorisation. Bhabha (1994) - in a theoretical treatment - gives insight into the ways in which particular ethnic groups come to be constructed as others. Gilroy (1987), instead, identifies the role played by ethnic absolutism through a perspective that views nations as culturally homogeneous ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1991). Further, Hall (1996) suggests that I. M. group members – as my pupil-informants - are not simple inheritors of fixed identities, cultures and linguistic practices. Rather, they are engaged in a continual collective and individual process of negotiating these elements,

thereby constantly constructing 'new ethnicities'. In relation to the focus of this article, the anti-essentialist standpoint adopted finds support in 'sensitizing concepts' that help investigating identity construction in the learning environment. These are the concept of identities 'brought along' and 'brought about' (Cf. Zimmerman, 1998) and the concept of 'displacement' (Cf. Bammer, 1994). Whereby the first presents identity as the product of the intertwined nature of the discourse practices internally generated from the pupils' home (e.g. brought along) with those that are then externally derived from the structure of schooling (e.g. brought about). While the second conceptualises identity as marked by 'the peculiar geography of post-modern identity' (Ibid. xii); where boundaries of national and ethnic belonging are challenged by migration phenomena, making it difficult to pinpoint where one's sense of social identity affiliation falls.

### **3 Methods**

#### *3.1 Setting*

The reason for selecting an Islamic multicultural primary classroom falls on the current Dutch debate over the educational validity of Islamic schooling. Aarsen & Jansma (1992) – report that the general impression gathered from more liberal Islamic schools is that they do not differ much from non-Islamic educational institutions. Driessen (2001) shows that it is not entirely clear to what extent Islamic schools differ from other schools in the Netherlands, except for denomination. In terms of improving achievement levels, well being and self-confidence among students, there are hardly any differences between pupils at Islamic schools and schools attended exclusively by I. M. pupils (Ibid.).

'Mdrasa Islamic Primary<sup>vi</sup> was built in 1995. This school is built in a large square of green in the middle of a residential area surrounded by food stores and restaurants selling non-western European products. On the other hand, a good part of the neighbourhood is inhabited by Dutch monolinguals. Classrooms and school offices are housed in pre-fabricated bungalows and according to the school's deputy head, the school body is working toward getting a new school site due to the forecasted increase in pupils' number. Following the information given by the school director, during the school year 1999-2000, 255 pupils had been regularly enrolled. The Somali group was the largest with 110 pupils, followed by the Turkish (70 pupils) and the Moroccan (40 pupils). The remaining 35 children were classified as 'others'. Further, 'Mdrasa Islamic Primary has been labelled as a G.O.A.<sup>vii</sup> school, implying receipt of extra financial help from the local municipality. The school teaching body as well as the head and the deputy head are speakers of Dutch only. The three teachers working in the field of I. M. language teaching and the one working for Dutch as a Second Language are respectively Somali, Moroccan, Turkish and Surinamese ethnic minority members.

Pupils are divided into ten clusters and the school has opted to create pedagogically and didactically heterogeneous groups such as the classroom in this research, which included Forms 6, 7 and 8. In the classroom, pupils are grouped in gender clusters as no mixing between the two sexes is allowed by Islamic rules. The four groups are located around the teachers desk with the female gender cluster spread over three tables, two tables of three girls and one of five girls. The male gender clusters, instead, were divided in two. Children were grouped according to their overall ability levels. Those groups assessed to be the weakest in achievement were at the opposite side of the teachers' table, the weak female cluster group on the left and the weak male cluster group on the right. For Language Teaching and Mathematics, Form 6 children worked with Form 5 in a different classroom while Forms 7 and 8 (for a total of 13 children) stayed in this one.

#### *3.2 Respondents profile*

Forms 6,7 and 8 consist of 18 pupils in total: 7 boys and 11 girls. Pupils' age ranges from 9 years old to 13 years old. Such a wide range is due to some children repeating the year. All the children report to use at least another language as well as or in place of Dutch in their households while only one pupil reported to be trilingual. Out of the 18 children, 8 reported to be born in the Netherlands, 6 in Somalia, 2 in Iraq, 1 in Turkey from Kurdish parents and 1 in Italy from Somali parents. No exogenous marriages were reported among pupils' families. All pupils have been schooled throughout their schooling career in the Netherlands – even though not always in this school. Only one female pupil is

neither born nor schooled in the Netherlands, this because she came with her parents from Iraq only two years ago.

### 3.3 Tools

In order to gather pupils' discourse on ethnicity and language use, I decided to employ overlapping methods of data collection. Firstly, a home language survey was carried out to identify the (socio)linguistic repertoire of the classroom (Cf. Broeder & Extra, 1999). Further, an 'ethno-cultural vitality' questionnaire followed by a written project and focused group interviews<sup>viii</sup> were employed in order to 'dig' deeper into the informants' conceptualisation of their own patterns of ethnicity and language use. Even though running the risk of being labelled as eclectic, the advantage of these three tools is that they allow overcoming the problem of working with relatively young pupil-informants. As Davies argues (1982) - children may present different accounts of events to different individuals, including the researcher, based on their understanding of what statements would be acceptable to that particular individual. With the exception of inconsistencies, that were then solved through short follow up interviews, these children's accounts hold as a '[...] form a mosaic of explanations and reasons rather than mutually exclusive accounts' (Ibid. 58). That is to say that the point of applying these three methods together, it is to supplement and to form an internal validity check on the other data sources – providing a different context for the elicitation of information.

While questionnaires and written projects were carried out at the beginning of every school day, interviews took place outside the classroom on two afternoons. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to one hour for each group and none of the children opted out. The language of the interview was mainly Dutch even though switching to the English language was employed occasionally. In that case, one of the pupils offered to act as a translator for the rest of the group. Both structure and content of the interview were left open-ended, using those concepts that emerged from the questionnaire and written project (e.g. belonging to a certain culture; using an international language) as a starting point for discussion with the pupils.

The groups were controlled for informants' pattern of migration (i.e. whether or not the informant was born in the Netherlands) and for schooling career (i.e. whether or not schooled in the Netherlands). The reason for controlling the groups only for these two factors is given by the intercultural relationships that pupils of Forms 6,7 and 8 are faced with on a daily basis; thus avoiding the risk of impinging *a-priori* categories on the pupils. Further, the routes and roots of migration of these children have different motivations and drives that brought them to the Netherlands. Therefore, it was thought to be important to draw a line between the differences in these children's 'type' and 'pattern' of migration through the grouping criteria employed.

Here follows the analysis and interpretation of those categories that emerge from the children's responses. These concern, firstly a sense of affiliation (or lack thereof) to an 'idealised' home country. Secondly, the patterns of affiliation that these children present in respect to the Dutch language both in the school and home environments and to their respective I. M. languages. Excerpts, in English, are taken from the three data sources. The research is indicated with [M], while the pupils' names are indicated with their code, name and gender.

## 4 Defining and belonging to one's 'own land'

The first concept emerging from Forms 6,7 and 8 data corpus deals with the pupil-informants affiliation to an 'own land'. The discussion, is located within a framework that sees the pupil-informants as active social agents in the shaping of their lives and in the formation and maintenance of their ethnic identities in the learning environment (Cf. James, 1993). Pupils were asked to reflect on their affiliation, if any, to a place or a country. As a result, pupils' responses converge to a sense of belonging to their parental country and to its cultural habits that distinguish them from the other member of the classroom and from their teacher. However, this affiliation does not remain so clear-cut throughout. Rather, there is a pervading sense of dialogic negotiation between the sense of belonging internally generated by these pupils at home and externally derived from the discourse practices of having migrated to and being schooled in the 'host country'.

#### 4.1 Ayse

For instance, Ayse - born in Turkey to Kurdish parents who moved to the Netherlands 10 days after her birth - explains:

[Ay]: “ [...] of course I am for my ‘own land’ [Turkey: *MS*] because I was born there and that is my country” (Questionnaire: 015, female).

The initial appeal to the right conferred by a form of ‘*ius solis*’ positions Ayse’s social identity as part of an ‘imagined’ Turkish community because born on Turkish soil (Cf. Anderson, 1991). However, as my questioning goes further, Ayse’s positioning of social identity seems not so clear-cut anymore. In fact, Ayse states:

[Ay]: “I feel myself Dutch when I am outside with my friends and at school. I feel Turkish when at home and with my parents” (Questionnaire: *Ibid.*).

The statement above hampers the clear cut feeling of belonging that she presented in the first place. Whereby, following Zimmerman’s identity theory (Crf.), such positioning seems to be determined by both an identity ‘brought along’ from the home environment and an identity ‘brought about’ in the classroom as well as in society at large. Significantly, this act of positioning and legitimising oneself in two cultures is also a characteristic of other children’s discourse in this classroom and it overlaps with work carried out in the British educational context in regard to new definitions of belonging to the British nation (Kushari Dyson, 1994: 178).

#### 4.2 Hulya

Another girl, Hulya, born in the Netherlands from Turkish parents, shows in her discourse practices how migration has affected a large chunk of her family, as she states:

[Hu]: “I live here and my aunt does too, and also my oldest cousin lives here. My grandma lives in France and my other six uncles live also in France. And the rest of my family lives in Rotterdam, Turkey, Germany, The Hague” (Written Project: 06, female).

Her family is scattered around in different places across Europe and the Netherlands, therefore without a specific place to be regarded as the ‘own land’. Further when asked to explain her sense of belonging, Hulya asserts:

[Hu]: “I am Dutch because I speak good Dutch” (Questionnaire, *Ibid.*)

Whereby speaking the language of the ‘host’ community well, confers her the right to claim to be Dutch. Hulya’s statement indicates a key dimension of the legitimacy attached to both the Dutch language and the level of proficiency achieved in that language (i.e. speaking it ‘good’). Following her discourse, both these elements become essential qualifiers for being regarded as ‘Dutch’. Further in the group interview, she confirms this view by stating:

[M]: “Ok (...) and what do you think that other people think when you speak Dutch ?”

[Hu]: “Depending on how you speak, it tells whether one is a foreigner or not” (Interview, *Ibid.*)

The position expressed by Hulya’s discourse comes to overlap with Pierce’s work (1995) where - by drawing on data collected from the longitudinal study of language learning experiences of immigrant women in Canada – she shows the relevance of language in gaining or being denied access to certain social networks. Pointing out that it is through language and its performance, as for the case of Hulya, that learners construct their identity and their positioning within groups of belonging. On the other hand

- as for Ayse – Hulya’s perception of her ethnic belonging is not as clear-cut as it seems in the first place. In fact, through an adversative clause, Hulya states:

[Hu]: “[B]ut I am a Turk” (Interview, Ibid.).

And further, when referring to her own ethnic positioning in the class, she states:

[Hu]: “I am Turkish and they are Somali or Arabic” (Questionnaire, Ibid.)

Even though born in the Netherlands, Hulya conveys in her discourse a form of ethno-allegiance to an ‘imagined’ Turkish community. This feeling of belonging is taken further through a much stronger assertion in regard to the other pupils of Forms 6,7 and 8.

### 4.3 Davud

Along this line, another pupil-informant elaborated on the concept of ‘own land’ during the focused group discussion. Davud, who - alike Ayse - is born in the Netherlands to Turkish parents, states:

[Dav]: “I feel Dutch because I was born here (...)” (Questionnaire: 014, male).

And further:

[Dav]: “(...) and because I can get along with Dutch children” (Interview, Ibid.).

Davud’s statement anticipates a form of acceptance that he seeks and achieves by being part of a network of Dutch children, positioning his social identity *a-priori* outside the group. On the other hand, in his reply to the question ‘If the Netherlands was to play a match against the country where your parents come from, who would you support?’, he answers:

[Dav]: “[M]y ‘own land’ because I want it to be heard at the highest level” (Questionnaire, Ibid.).

Also, in defining his ethnic affiliation in comparison with the other pupil-informants of Forms 6,7 and 8 - Davud states:

[Dav]: ‘ (...) further in this class we are all Muslims besides Miss [*Pascal*le: MS]’ (Interview, Ibid.)

On the contrary, within Forms 6,7 and 8, he states:

[Dav]: “I am not good at language [*Dutch*: MS] because at home I do not speak Dutch” (Written Project, Ibid.)

The pivotal point here – stemming from the mixed messages gathered from Davud’s discourse - is that he bears cultural symbols attached to his religious practices as well as a language – that he claims some form of acquaintance with – that do count in constructing his social identity in the classroom. On the other hand, Davud uptakes the social positioning of the ‘non-proficient Dutch language speaker’ caused by not speaking the Dutch language at home. It appears therefore that those affiliation Davud brings along to the classroom, seem less valuable given that within the learning environment he addresses himself as a ‘Muslim child’ who is ‘not good at language’. This contrast may anticipate that his affiliation to cultural practices and a language other than Dutch are less valuable in the classroom than speaking ‘good Dutch language’.

#### 4.4 *Mohammad*

More examples, pointing to a dialogic form of ethnic affiliation emerge from Mohammad's discourse. Mohammad is a self-reported trilingual boy, born on Italian soil to Somali parents who then moved to the Netherlands when he was one year old. When asked about his feelings of belonging to a 'own land', Mohammad replies:

[Mo]: "For Somalia because that is my country" (Questionnaire, Ibid.)

Even though born in Italy from Somali parents, Mohammad appeals to the right of 'ius sanguinis' so to construct his social identity, posing Somalia as his own 'own land'. This is taken further by how Mohammad maintains such social identity in the learning environment, stating:

[M]: "Do you feel different at all from the others in this class?"

[Mo]: "Yes, because I have a Somali culture and they do not" (Interview, Ibid.)

In his discourse, Mohammad expresses that one belongs to and 'owns' a certain culture. Further, in his discourse, he makes explicit what underlies his feeling of bearing upon those Somali cultural habits he claims to own in his previous statements. As he asserts:

[Mo]: "(...) as you move from your own country, you come to another country, you keep on being of the land that you truly are from, you don't change because you live here. You keep simply to where you have come from." (Interview, Ibid.)

As it appears to emerge from his statements, belonging can be regarded as a form of 'suture' among his two worlds. In the case of Mohammad's, for instance, he was not born in Somalia and has never lived there. However his discourse still presents a vivid link to Somalia by stating that 'you simply keep to where you have come from'. Further, he states:

[Mo]: "(...) [A]lthough you are here, you belong still to where you came from, here you still are a sort of guest, it is not your own home. I mean it is because you live here, but it does not become your own country, (...)" (Interview, Ibid.).

Such affiliation with the Somali community and the Somali nation appear timeless: 'although you are here, you belong *still* to where you came from, here you *still* are a sort of guest'. Further, his sense of belonging expresses a strong sense of ethno-cultural allegiance: 'you don't change because you live here. You keep simply to where you have come from'. Following this interpretation, Mohammad's discourse practices could be elected as an instance of what Gilroy (1987) describes as:

"[F]orms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identification outside the national time/space, in order to live inside with a 'difference' " (Ibid. 287)

## 5 Summary

From the data gathered - even though cautiously taken - some of my pupils informants are able to conceptualise a form of social identity that is strongly marked by being raised between two cultures. As De Vos (1995: 18) suggests: 'an ethnic group is a self-perceived inclusion of those who hold in common a set of traditions not shared by others with whom they are in contact'.

As emerging from the data collected, these children feel to be part of the Dutch nation - through speaking the Dutch language and being born in the Netherlands. On the contrary, however, they also hold 'elements' of their social identity that they 'bring along' from the home environment and from their family routes of migration. At times, however, these forms of ethno-cultural identification become challenged by what is regarded as valuable in the community of practice (i.e. the classroom) and in society at large. This interpretation suggests that, at least for these pupils taken into account, there are

instances of continuous negotiation across national and/or ethnic 'borders'. Whereby, the first are generally based on the right conferred by being born in a certain place, while the second ones are based on a form of symbolic affiliation to the 'imagined' country of origin and/or home language. Consequently showing that these pupils' discourse practices do not include a static concept of culture but rather switching between the two 'socio-cultural' spaces that they inhabit.

To this regard the concept of displacement seems to be relevant to the interpretation seem to be relevant to the interpretation of the data corpus (Cf. Bammer). Displacement may derive from war or from socio-economic reasons (e.g. family re-joining together, etc.) as for the case of my informants' parents. On the contrary, these children seem neither to follow the patterns and condition of migration of their parents nor as asserted by Kaplan (1996) to replace a national identification for another. Rather, they construct a dialogue between the migration phenomenon and the one of national belonging, giving way to a definition of identity '(...) understood as the outcome of a number of mediations that weave together multiple locations and histories' (Ibid. 19). The link with a country - where these informants have never lived or were not born into - appears to present these pupils' social identities as 'creolised'. Where, as Hannerz (1987) states, there is strain between received meanings on the one hand and personal experiences on the other, and where diverse perspectives confront one another. To this respect these pupils social-identity can perhaps never be completely worked out as stable, coherent systems. Rather, they are forever cultural 'work in progress' (Ibid. 550).

In the following section, the focus of this paper shifts on the pupils' agency in the process of language legitimisation both in the classroom and at home. From the data gathered the legitimacy of Dutch language is not only present in the learning environment but also in the family, with both younger siblings and parents. Secondly, the legitimacy of the I. M. languages is contested given the limited status that my informants attach to their home languages and the cognitive limitations that they report

## **6 Legitimising linguistic practices**

The second category emerging from my pupil-informants data corpus addresses the legitimisation of language practices both within and outside the classroom. In relation to the I. M. groups present in Forms 6, 7 & 8, migration study literature reveals that there is a generation shift for group image that is common to both the 'second generation' Turkish and Moroccan minority groups (Vermeulen & Phenninx: 2000). This, however, can not be said for the Somali group given the lack of cross-generational research and its more recent migration history here in the Netherlands.

Following Ellemers et al. (1999), this shift consists of 'second generation' members appearing to be striving toward what he terms the 'creation of a new existence'. He suggests that the frustrations regarding the failure of the first generation immigrants to succeed in Dutch society have been – in some cases – translated into 'creative attempts to improve positions and obtain status in the future' (Ibid. 198). Among these attempts, there is not only an orientation toward more middle class values but also an increased contact, use and attainment in the Dutch language. On the other hand, as Ogan (2001) points out, these 'new' goals and values are still strongly mingled with the traditions of the culture of origin (e.g. Turkish culture). Consequently, these traditions interconnect 'in the shape of a relatively continuous spectrum of interacting meanings and meaningful forms' (Ibid. 7) along which the various contributing historical sources of a culture are differentially visible and active.

In the following section, I report on my pupil-informants factual and reflexive statements concerning the legitimacy of Dutch language and of their I. M. languages. The data anticipate the Dutch language as used by my pupil-informants so to negotiate relationships with younger siblings and show how it constitutes a marker of social distinctiveness compared with older family members. This shows that the Dutch language contributes to form 'in' and 'out' group memberships as well as challenging parental authority. On the other hand, discourse practices dealing with I. M. languages show that while home languages are regarded as languages with a lower prestige on the 'language market', they are paradoxically used to contest institutional authority.

## 6.1 *Negotiating authority through language repertoires*

The Dutch language plays a key role in legitimising the construction of pupils' social identity within the classroom. As Mazloum states:

[Maz]: "At school I speak Dutch with Miss, with the children that come from other countries" (Questionnaire: 016, female).

Further, Ayse states:

[Ay]: "In class, we speak only Dutch" (Questionnaire: 015, female).

And Amel states:

[M]: "so what's it like to be in this classroom?"

[Am]: "in this class, it feels that I can use only one language" (Interview: 010, male)

These quotes, representative of the view of my 18 informants', recognise the legitimacy and need for the Dutch language as the language of the classroom. It emerges therefore that my pupil-informants are aware of the legitimacy of the Dutch language in order to function within the learning environment. This could be either because Dutch is elected as a lingua franca among the pupils and toward their monolingual teacher. On the other hand, school sites offer a space for the informants to contest the 'dominance' of Dutch. For instance, to the question of what language/s you use in school, Sameyra reports:

[Sam]: "Arabic in the playground with my friends" (Questionnaire: 06, female)

To the same question, Ibrahim states:

[Ibr]: "Somali when I get angry and I have to shout at someone in the playground" (Questionnaire: 04, male)

Discursive practices of this kind show the informants' agency in finding spaces where to construct their 'identity strategies' (Manço, 1999). Whereby informants employ linguistic exchanges with their peers according to the social structures they are confronted with. Such negotiation of language practices also takes also place in the family environment where a large part of Forms 6,7 and 8 pupils report to use the Dutch language when engaged in linguistic exchanges with their younger siblings.

## 6.2 *Dutch with younger siblings*

Several motivations emerge from the data gathered informing the role and the choice of the Dutch language as a code for verbal exchanges with their younger siblings. For instance, in response to which language she likes the most, Nebi states:

[Ne]: "Dutch because it is the language that is good for the children" (Questionnaire: 011, female)

Hence showing a perception of the positive value attached to the Dutch language as beneficial for child rearing. Further, as reported by Ibrahim, the Dutch language is used jointly with the home language (e.g. Somali):

[Ibr]: "[...] I speak Dutch with my little sisters and little brothers but at times I speak Arabic to them" (Written Project: 04, male)

However, he states:

[Am] “[...] when my little sisters can not say something in Somali then she can say it in Dutch”  
(Written Project: 010, male)

Hence, showing that the cognitive limitations in I. M. languages play a key role in legitimising the use of the Dutch language. In relation to the focus of this article, these pupils’ choice to speak Dutch with younger siblings, their reported contacts with Dutch peer networks and the use of Dutch in the classroom – all constitute key factors corroborating a sense of in-group cohesion with the ‘host community’. To this respect, Appel (1984) shows that such attitude toward the Dutch language is a key socio-cultural factor for the development of language proficiency and for inclusion within the practices of the host community. Such legitimisation of linguistic practices has also been recognised by Bhabha where the social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective ‘results in a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural [*and linguistic*: MS] hybridities (...)’ (1994: 63).

### 6.3 *The Dutch language as a marker of difference*

Further, for the majority of my pupil-informants, speaking the Dutch language is regarded as a marker of achievement in respect to older family members. For instance, Ayse states:

[Ay]: “As I speak Dutch they [*her parents*: MS] are happy to hear it” (Questionnaire: O15, female). Once asked to give more reflexive answers to the question if they perceive any difference to their family members, Hulya states:

[Hul]: “I can speak better Dutch than my older brother.” (Interview: 06, female)

While Menekse reports:

[M]: “How do you differ from your family?”

[Men]: “They don’t speak good Dutch.” (Interview: 017, female)

Further when talking about the language she employs with her mother she states:

[Men]: “(...) and with my mother, she helped me with my homework once, but she can’t speak very good Dutch, like I do” (Interview, *Ibid.*)

During the focused group discussion, the Dutch language not only emerges as a marker of difference from elderly family members. It also embeds a form of ‘resistance’ informants may employ so to challenge parental authority. When asked what languages she speaks with her family, Menekse states:

[Men]: “Well, my father can speak very good Dutch, and then I think as he can speak really good Dutch, I can maybe speak a better Dutch than him (...)” (Interview, *Ibid.*)

While Hulya states:

[Hu]: “[*I speak*: MS] Dutch sometimes so to make sure that mum can not understand (...) for the fun of it (...)” (Questionnaire: 06, female)

It emerges that contesting parental authority through Dutch language does not only happen when the Dutch language skills of parents are poor but also when the parent is reported to be highly proficient in Dutch - as for the case of Menekse’s father. On the other hand, the resistance to parental authority emerges through the use of the Dutch language by making sure that ‘mum can not understand’. Even though the majority of my informants report an overall confidence in the use of the Dutch language for their daily linguistic exchanges, all these pupils have a linguistic repertoire that counts for at least one

language other than Dutch at home. To the purpose of this article, therefore, the investigation of pupils' linguistic practices and values attached to their I. M. languages may lead to uncover patterns of social identity construction.

## 7 Pupils with a home language other than Dutch

Significantly, as emerged from the classroom language survey, the vast majority of Forms 6,7 and 8 pupils claim practices in their home languages. For instance, to the question what languages she speaks at home, Fatima states:

[Fa]: “Yes, we speak only Somali to each other” (Questionnaire: 03, female)

While Hulya reports:

[Hu]: “[*I speak*: MS] Turkish with my grandmother and grandfather and with my parents too” (Written Project: 06, female)

The same goes for Oz, stating:

[Oz]: “We always speak Turkish at home” (Questionnaire: 012, male)

On the contrary, the vast majority of the pupil-informants in this study did not express a positive form of attachment to their home languages. Rather, many claimed cognitive and attitudinal impediments that come to challenge the discursive and legitimisation practices in the home language. For instance, to the question what language is the least liked, Fatima states:

[Fa]: “Somali because it is a bit difficult” (Questionnaire: 03, female).

For then explaining the problem encountered when speaking Somali language with her mother:

[Fa]: “Sometime my mother wants to know what time it is, as I can not say it well in Somali then I tell her mixed” (Written Project: 03, female).

The same goes for Ibrahim, a pupil with Somali parents, asserting to prefer:

[Ibr]: “Dutch because I can not write well in Somali” (Questionnaire: 05, female)

Along this line of thought, Mazloun – whose reported home language is Arabic - prefers :

[Maz]: “Dutch as I can not make very good sentences and write in Arabic” (Written Project: 016, female)

This view is embraced also by Hulya, who states:

[Hu]: “I don't like Turkish 'cause I can not speak good Turkish” (Written Project, Ibid.)

And, who prefers:

[Hu]: “Dutch because I can write it better” (Questionnaire, Ibid.)

Such weak affiliation to the home language is not only instanced through limitations in proficiency but also by the value attached to the home language on the linguistic market. For instance, when asked what language he likes the least, Oz states:

[Oz]: “Turkish because I do not need it that often” (Questionnaire: 012, male)

The same goes for Zahara, who states:

[Za]: “Somali because it is not important” (Questionnaire: 09, female)

It results that most of Forms 6,7 and 8 pupils report to be most ‘linguistically’ comfortable and confident with the Dutch language, they simultaneously retain a weaker but continuing sense of relationship with one or more I. M. languages (e.g. Turkish, Somali, Kurdish) within the family environment. Such relationship appears, in most cases, as suffering from cognitive limitations as well as being diminished by the limited value associated by these pupil-informants to their home languages. However, for the focus of this article, pupil-informants discursive practices become particularly interesting when my informant claims that the home language is a marking feature of belonging to a specific ethnic group. For instance, in her questionnaire response, Menekse pointed out that: ‘I am Turkish but I was born here [*in the Netherlands*: MS]’. Given her reply, I took her response further during the group interview, trying to tease apart what she meant by ‘being Turkish’ and whether it had anything to do with her I. M. language. The discussion reads as follows:

- (1) [M]: “Ok, but when you speak to other people, do you say that you are Turkish or that you are Dutch or both?”
- (2) [Men]: “Turkish”
- (3) [M]: “Turkish? But you were not born in Turkey, were you?”
- (4) [Men]: “No”
- (5) [M]: “I see, so why?”
- (6) [Men]: “because it is my first language” (Interview: 06, female)

Menekse’s statements echo Rampton’s concept of language ‘allegiance’ (1990) and illustrate Gumperz’s interpretation of the symbolic distinction between ‘groups of belonging’ made explicit through the choice of codes (1982). Although the Turkish language emerges as key to Menekse’s ‘allegiance’ to the Turkish ethnic-group, in the previous discussion, Dutch language practices marked a form of difference in respect to her family members. It can be advanced therefore that Menekse indicates a continuous shift in affiliation instanced through contrastive discursive practices standing to symbolise her cultural ‘scattered belongings’ (Ifekwunigwe, 1999). These, at times, bring Menekse to identify herself with the Turkish ethnic group through language affiliation criteria (e.g. her first language). At others instead, her discourse practices point toward a sense of ‘out’-group belonging by emphasising the difference between her and her family due to language practices in Dutch.

## 7.1 Summary

Findings of this kind – although taken cautiously - point to these pupils’ attachment to the I. M. languages in the family environment, even though challenged by limitations at the level of performance making this attachment more or less vivid. While the vast majority of these pupil-informants claimed a receptive understanding of their home languages, almost none claimed an equivalent level of proficiency for speaking and writing. On the other hand, allegiance with one’s home language - or as Menekse names it ‘the first language’ – is challenged by the high level of legitimisation that my informants attach to the Dutch language both at home and school. The set of data reported here therefore identifies ethno-linguistic elements that are both residual of a previous migrant cultural tradition and of a new emergent one. For instance Oz reports that in the home environment they speak always Turkish. On the other hand, such ethno-cultural affiliation to his home language is replaced by the value attached, on the language market, to the Dutch language. It can be anticipated that this

condition of ‘ethno-linguistic hyphenation’ points in the direction of a ‘conflict’ between the Dutch language and the language spoken at home. As Williams (1977) states, this condition counts for:

“(…) [C]ertain experiences, meanings and values which can not be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social of some previous social and cultural institution or formation.” (Ibid. 122)

For the case of my research informants, they may well be operating, as far as their language use is concerned, in an environment involving doubly dominant, residual and emergent elements. For instance, they recognise the value of the Dutch language but they also retain a weaker but constant affiliation with the linguistic practices in their I. M. languages.

## 8 Conclusion

The question behind this paper is whether these pupils perceive themselves as a permanent and integral part of the host nation or as part of a permanent kind of cultural and linguistic ‘other’. Given the evidence reported here we can not know the extent to which the phenomena investigated are transitory or part of a longer-term reconstruction of ethnicity and language use. However, as anticipated in my analysis and interpretation, the multicultural urban classroom reality of Forms 6, 7 and 8 at ‘Mdrasa Islamic Primary presents an ethnic and linguistic complexity of its own. In this regard, Rampton (1990) offers a feasible framework that may give ways forward in raising educators’ awareness of those issues at play in linguistically and culturally complex multicultural learning environments. This framework suggests that:

“[L]anguage education [is seen] as a social activity in which efforts are made to manage continuity, change and the relationship between social groups” (Ibid. 100)

Social identity markers such as ‘native speaker’ and ‘speaker of mother tongue X’ are replaced with notions of: ‘language expertise’, ‘language affiliation’ and ‘language inheritance’. While – as illustrated in Section 8.0 - ‘language expertise’ refers to how proficient a pupil may be in each of the languages posited in his/her linguistic repertoire. The second term - as for the case of Menekse or Oz – focuses instead on the attachment or identification (or lack there of) that pupils may feel for these language/s. Regardless of whether or not a pupil belong to the social group to which a given language is often associated. The third refers to the ways in which individuals claim expertise in a language/s, even though not strictly linked to their ethnic group membership (Cf. Rampton, 1990). This challenges the concept that belonging to an ethnic group automatically entails language inheritance.

Although, this analysis is not intended to suggest that the assumptions of educators teaching in multicultural learning environments are not valid - as some of these assumptions may be appropriate to the ethno-cultural repertoire of some pupils – it does challenge fixed concepts of ethnicity and native speaker-hood. This may lead to a pedagogic approach that can help educators move beyond a fixed conceptualisation of their ‘bilingual learners’.

## End notes

<sup>i</sup> I wish to thank the Babylon Research Center Writing Group for reading the previous drafts of this article and for their insightful comments.

<sup>ii</sup> This investigation is part of a doctoral project carried out at the Dept. of English and Comparative Literatures, Goldsmiths College, University of London.

<sup>iii</sup> Alloctonen leerlingen: a pupil who has at least one of his/her parents born in a foreign country.

<sup>iv</sup> Cumi – leerlingen: These are children whose parents should be included in the target group of the integration policy for ethnic minority members or who come from a non-English speaking country outside Europe with the exception of Indonesia.

<sup>v</sup> 1.9 leerling: pupil with father, mother or carer that has an education at VBO level and that also has as the parent with the primary source of income in the position of unskilled worker or who has no steady income. Further who has one of his parents who should be included in the target group of the integration policy for ethnic minority members or who come from a non-English speaking country outside Europe with the exception of Indonesia.

<sup>vi</sup> Both school and pupils' names have been modified for data protection purposes.

<sup>vii</sup> G.O.A: Gemeentelijk Onderwijsachterstandenbeleid. Municipalities (usually cities only) draw up a plan for facing educational disadvantages within the 'Landelijk Beleidskader Gemeentelijk Onderwijsachterstandenbeleid' (LBK-GOA), a national framework renewed every 4 years.

<sup>viii</sup> Research tools were discussed with Babylon Research Center (Tilburg University) and with Dr. M. Inghilleri (Goldsmiths College, University of London).

<sup>ix</sup> Excerpts have been translated from Dutch into English by the Language Centrum (Tilburg University). In the excerpts the researcher is indicated with [M], while pupils' names are indicated with their initials (e.g. [Ay]) followed by data source, code and gender at the end of the quote.

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# **ISB4: Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism**

edited by James Cohen, Kara T. McAlister,  
Kellie Rolstad, and Jeff MacSwan

**Cascadilla Press   Somerville, MA   2005**

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ISBN 978-1-57473-210-8 CD-ROM  
ISBN 978-1-57473-107-1 library binding (5-volume set)

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