

PANEL: LA ETNOGRAFÍA SOCIOLINGÜÍSTICA: ENFOQUE Y RESULTADOS

PANEL 2: La etnografía sociolingüística: resultados

Using interview data to explore the co-construction of adult students' identities

Emilee Moore

Departament de didàctica de la llengua, la literatura i les ciències
socials, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. España.

Emilee.Moore@campus.uab.cat

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Resumen/ Abstract

En este trabajo etnográfico se exploran datos recogidas en un contexto de aprendizaje de catalán con adultos en un pueblo en la periferia de Barcelona. Se trata de una población formada por personas inmigradas a Cataluña en dos olas migratorias distintas: la de los años 60, proveniente del estado español, y la actual, originaria de fuera de Europa. Los datos incluyen grabaciones de aula, entrevistas a profesores y alumnos, y observaciones etnográficas. En la presente comunicación, se examinan los procesos a través de los cuales los participantes construyen identidades durante la interacción así como las representaciones sobre la lengua y el aprendizaje. Su objetivo es mostrar cómo los participantes dan sentido a sus experiencias de aprendizaje del catalán, buscando una relación en las formas y resultados de aprendizaje en el aula.

Palabras clave / Keywords: sociolinguistic ethnographic approach, triangulation, Consorci per la Normalització Lingüística, identity, language learning.

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1. Introduction

According to the statistics, despite the successes of the process of Catalan normalisation that has taken place since democracy in Spain, a significant part of the population in Catalonia is still unable to communicate in that language. In the Vallès Occidental *comarca* where the study discussed in this paper was carried out, reported knowledge of Catalan is below the average for Catalonia (71.32% of the population reports knowing how to speak Catalan, compared with 74.5% in Catalonia as a whole). Age, place of birth and gender are significant variables in this regard.

In the case of persons born in other parts of Spain, who have not received schooling in Catalan and who came to Catalan in the 60s and 70s, only about 60% know how to speak Catalan in Catalonia as a whole. In the case of adults born abroad, only about 20% of the population between 25 and 49 can speak the language. Both in the Vallès Occidental and in all of Catalonia, men report knowing how to speak Catalan more often than women (Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya, 2001).

Concerned with such data, the author of this paper carried out ethnographic research with a group of adult Catalan learners. These students were attending in 2005-2006 a basic level Catalan course run by the *Consorti per a la Normalització Lingüística*. The *Consorti* depends on the *Secretària de Política Lingüística* of the *Generalitat de Catalunya* and is in charge of carrying out part of the initiatives for normalisation of Catalan.

The town, La Llagosta, where the classes were held, was an extremely interesting research context as it has been a recipient of migratory flows since the second half of last century. That is, both of people coming from other regions of Spain in the 60s and 70s and more recently of immigrants from abroad. This fact was reflected in the composition of the classes.

In this paper, primarily interview data is drawn on in order to explore the processes through which participants construct a positive image of themselves in talk-in-interaction and the relationship between such situated identities and the representations that are made of language learning in the interview situation.

2. The study

a. The participants

The participants in this research were students undertaking the Basic 3 level of Catalan in a course run by the *Consorti per a la Normalització Lingüística* in La Llagosta, their teacher and the researcher. In total, there were 14 students – 4 men and 10 women – who came and went during the course of the research. Three students in their thirties – one female and 1 male – were born in South America and one female student in her thirties was born in France. The rest – 7 female and three male students – were middle-aged and born in other regions of Spain, including Aragon, Andalusia,

Galicia and Castilla y Leon and had mostly come to Catalonia in the 60s and 70s. The four students who were born abroad had university education. The Spanish-



born students had lower levels of education than their foreign-born peers. The students lived in La Llagosta or in nearby towns.

The teacher was born in Catalonia to parents who had migrated from Extremadura in southern Spain. She was married to a Catalan-born man whose grandparents came from Aragon. The teacher was in her late thirties and also lived in the Vallès Oriental

comarca.

The researcher was Australian-born and in her mid-twenties. She was undertaking PhD studies at the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* and resided in Barcelona. She taught English as a Second Language as a profession and at the time of research was studying intermediate level Catalan at the *Consorti per la Normalització Lingüística* in Barcelona.

b. Data collection

This study adopted a sociolinguistic ethnographic approach (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972; Duranti, 1997) in which the researcher acted as a participant-observer and in which the variety of data collected permitted triangulation. This is a technique in which the elements under analysis come from “different sources of data, all of which are relevant to understanding what happens in the classroom when looked at as a sociocultural setting” (Cotts & Nussbaum, 1999, p.175). This qualitative, holistic approach was selected as it provided the tools to discover the didactic proposal, the classroom life and the context in which the participants interact in depth.

The initial period of research spanned over a period of four months – the duration of the course – from the beginning of October, 2005 to the end of January, 2006. The researcher acted as participant observer, attending classes as recording many of them. In total, eleven classes lasting 1.5 hours each were recorded using a digital voice recorder (16.5 hours).

Apart from the observation and recording of classroom interaction, 3 semidirected interviews were conducted with two students and the teacher at the community centre. After the conclusion of the course, contact and discussions of the initial results we maintained with the teacher. Approximately one year after the conclusion of the course, in March 2007, contact was re-established with 3 students in order to carry out further interviews, which were conducted in the interviewee’s homes or over coffee in a bar.

Being able to interview students required prior negotiation, both about the purpose of the interviews and about the language to be used. When the researcher requested permission, in Spanish, from students to interview them, many asked whether the interview would be in Catalan. They seemed to identify the interview situation as a ‘class situation’ and the researcher someone related to the academic context, requiring they spoke Catalan.

The students’ preoccupation with which language would be used in the interview led to a certain resistance to participate. This was perhaps due to their lack of confidence in their competence in Catalan, and perhaps because the use of Catalan, the language of the institution, would reflect a distance between the researcher and themselves and position the researcher as someone tied to the institution. They were maybe unwilling to share personal information and give their opinion about the classes to someone linked to

the *Consortci*. When the students were assured that the interview would be in Spanish, they seemed happy to assist. The choice of Spanish identified the interview situation as non-institutional.

Apart from this interactional data, a field journal was kept over the period of research, in which notes were kept about observations made both in and out of the classes. Outside of the class, the researcher had the opportunity to interact with many of the students, as they tended to go to a café together after class to have a coffee and talk.

This allowed the researcher to obtain a deeper understanding of the students and to interact with them ‘off school grounds’. With the teacher, there were opportunities before and after class to converse, moments which also provided important data. None of these interactions could be recorded with the voice recorder, and in this sense the field journal provides a rich source of reference data.

In addition to the above, text sources were collected to complement and assist the comprehension of natural and elicited interactional data. These sources included the *Programa de Llengua Catalana: Nivell Basic* published by the *Secretaria de Política Lingüística*, which sets out the linguistic aims of the courses facilitated by the *Consortci*, the text book, *Bàsic 3*, and the handouts used in the classes observed.

3. Identities and language learning

Block (2007) identifies seven types of identity which have been discussed in academic literature on language learning: racial, ethnic, national, migrant, gender, social class and language. In terms of how such identities are constructed, he points to the importance of discourse. Block defines discourses as ‘identity kits’ or ways of being in the world which integrate how to speak, act, values, beliefs, attitudes, gestures, glances, body positions, how to dress, etc. so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) ideas about language and language use are therefore extremely relevant. Bakhtin (1981) argues that when individual expresses themselves, their language and use of that language are not entirely their own. Rather, individual expression is the product of dialogue between others, their voices and already existent meanings, the individual self, one’s language and language use. The individual who expresses herself is at the crossroad between the ideological systems of community beliefs and norms and the linguistic system. This concept of language as dialogic is termed heteroglossia.

According to Bakhtin (1981, pp. 293-294): “The word in language is always half someone else’s. It becomes one’s own word only when the speaker populates it with their own intentions, their own accent, when they appropriate the word, adapting it to their own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language...but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s concrete contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one’s own.” Students, therefore, appropriate social discourses, or the voices of others, and make them their own in the process of constructing their identities in interaction with others and the learning

environment. As argued by Norton (2001, p. 165): “when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world”.

Unamuno and Nussbaum (2004, p. 9) explored the construction of identities in classroom interaction between primary school aged children. These authors claim that identities are neither stable nor a priori, but are created and recreated during interaction between participants. They argue that: “És durant la interacció que es poden fer evidents algunes característiques intrínseques de les persones (la seva edat, la seva classe social, el seu origen lingüístic o geogràfic, el seu sexe, etc.) a través de categoritzacions explícites o implícites”. Such comments echo those of Norton & Toohey (2002, p. 116) who claim that: “identity is not...static and one-dimensional but...multiple, changing and a site of struggle”. The work by Goffman (1981) on ‘footing’ therefore zares similarities with the other work presented here. Goffman (1981, p. 28) defines footing as: ‘alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance’. Speakers change their footing as they take consequential stances toward the other participants in a conversation and the talk in progress. As argued by (Goodwin & Goowin, 2004), speakers produce talk, and in this talk construct identities, for different kinds of hearers, in a contantly changing contextual configuration.

The work of Bonny Norton in particular is interesting for my own research as she has dealt in depth with groups of adult migrant language learners and with the relationship between identity and investment in language learning. In Norton’s (2000) research with five immigrant women in the Canadian context, she uses diary studies, interviews and questionnaires to explore the relationship between language learners and the larger social world. She asks how gender, race, class and ethnicity were central to learners’ subjective experiences and how such experiences were related to their investment in language learning.

In her conclusions, Norton (2000) argues that identity is a site of constant struggle and change for language learners, who, although positioned in particular discourses, may resist them or even establish counter discourses which position them more positively. Furthermore, such a conception of identities as dynamic and often contradictory in Norton’s (2000) work was closely linked with learner’s desires and efforts to learn English as a second language.

Villanueva (2002) also claims that the way in which learners see the world and themselves in the world influences how they see their capabilities as learners. Norton & Toohey (2002, p. 122) claim that in the academic research there is an increasing interest in linking (post-structuralist conceptions of) identity with the notion of investment, which they define as “the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their sometimes ambivalent desire to learn and practice it”.

4. The co-construction of identities and representations of learning in interview

a. Notes on the use of interview data

The principles of conversation analysis (Sacks, 1972; 1992) are particularly useful in regard to the study of naturally occurring speech such as interviews and classroom interaction. The aim of CA, according to Coulon (1995), is to research the



methods through which individuals make sense of and carry out day to day actions through language; it seeks to discover the methods by which participants in talk produce a sense of social order *in* interaction.

In this paper, primarily interview data will be used in order to explore how participants make sense of who they are and their possibilities as learners of Catalan as a second language. In choosing to analyse interview data, I am not ignoring Silverman's (2000, p. 34) argument that: "If we are interested in what goes on in the classroom...shouldn't we observe what people do there instead of asking them what they think about it? Is how we talk about schooling directly related to what happens in schooling?". Instead, I am interested in the interactional processes that take place in interviews as one form of communicative event, and in a later analysis (in my forthcoming thesis) I aim to explore their relationship with the forms and results of classroom learning.

Conversational Analysis allows us to envisage interviews as communicative events in which the interviewee and interviewer jointly construct a public version of the world. Such a construction includes the joint negotiation of all communicative practices, such as positionings and points of view, which are organised sequentially (both at the level of the interview and in relation to previous events). The presence of the interviewer is, therefore, a constitutive element of the interaction and not a variable to be controlled in a positivist sense (Mondada, 2001).

In the interview situation, interviewees are often cautious of presenting a positive self-image for the sake of the researcher and the recorder. Silverman (1993) argues that such interactional phenomena should not be treated as a problem but rather as an element of enquiry and that interview data should be treated as co-constructed narratives rather than as distortions of the truth for the sake of saving face. In this analysis, I respond to this call in seeking to understand how the presence of the interviewer is an essential element to understanding the positionings and self-images presented by the interviewees. These are related to how they make sense of their abilities as language learners in the interview situation.

Similar comments are made by Codó (forthcoming). She claims that one of the 'problems' many researchers fear they will encounter with interview data is 'untrue' responses from interviewees, who may be concerned with giving the researcher what she wants, not feel comfortable giving their real opinion, or want to project a particular image of themselves. However, as Codó (forthcoming) succinctly responds to such concerns: "researchers should be aware that there is no external 'truth' to be sought, and that people's knowledge and opinions are always constructed in the course of situated communicative events".

b. Data Analysis

When the ethnographer eventually carries out interviews with the participants in their research, they have often, as is the case here, spent already many hours with those people and conversed 'off the record' about who they are and what they are doing.

Before exploring the interview data, therefore, it is interesting to observe a séquence from the first day of class in which the teacher (RDS) introduced the researcher (RCH). I argue that the interviewees' responses in the interviews were

somewhat of a response to the positioning that took place in this moment in the classroom.

Fragment 1

223. RDS: molt bé\| doncs us heu presentat\| ah-\| [revises the class list] oish\| falta molta gent-\| després he de fer· una ullada si tinc per baix pul·lulant sense saber\| i ara em falta presentar a ella\ <3>
224. JRA: sí\ <1>
225. RDS: ella no és alumne eh\| és d'Austràlia\| tú la coneixes ja\| ah\| ella vé de xx\| ella és d'Austràlia i també estudia català\| però a més a més estudia a la universitat\| i si ens vols explicar tú una miqueta\|
226. RCH: em\| estic fent una mica de projecte\| sobre els_ l'aprenentatge del català dels adults\| m'interessa perquè jo a Austràlia treballa amb adults\| sóc professora\| i estic aquí amb la gravadora si no us importa\| però [laughs] res no\|
227. RDS: molt bé\|
228. AGL: parla molt bé eh\|
229. RDS: sí\|
230. RCH: [laughs]
231. RDS: ella fa 4 anys que· està estudiant eh\| parla molt bé\|
232. SX: xxx
233. RDS: ella està estu_ està fent com una immersió\| estudiant\| té parella lingüística\| va a classe\| ve aquí\| va a la universitat\| la universitat és tot en català\| no té més més_
234. RCH: no tinc remei\|
235. RDS: més remei\|
236. GRA: és de naturalitat també\| està xx
237. RDS: a veure sí\| si ella hauria arribat d'Austràlia i hagués treballat_ hagués anat a treballar a una fàbrica de La Llagosta\| doncs hm_
238. GRA: no hauria_
239. RDS: en aquelles 4 anys no hauria après català\|
240. ESA: clar\|
241. RDS: enteneu\| davant una_ té unes circumstàncies que_ que no és un_ que no tingueu x doncs\|
242. LSA: cadascú\|
243. RDS: és el que ha trobat\|

Prior to this introduction, the students had each introduced themselves to the teacher and their peers. In turn 225, Remedios, the teacher, explains that the researcher was not a student. She continues to explain that she was a person from Australia and that she was also studying Catalan and undertaking university studies in Catalonia. She then invites the researcher to explain her reasons for attending the classroom, which the researcher does, in Catalan, in turn 226, explaining that she is an English teacher who works with adult students in Australia. In turn 227 the teacher's "molt bé" closes the sequence, however Angela's comment in the following turn that "parla molt bé eh" recasts the focus to the topic of the researcher's competence in Catalan.

It is interesting to note the conversation that follows about the reasons for the researcher's competence in Catalan. In turn 231, Remedios explains that the researcher has been studying Catalan for 4 years. In turn 233 the teacher explains that she also participates in other communicative activities which allow her to learn Catalan through "immersion", such as going to Catalan classes, going to the university, going to the classes she is researching and having a language partner as part of the *Voluntaris per a*

la Llengua program organised by the Catalan government's Secretaria de Política Lingüística. The researcher confirms the teacher's arguments in turn 234 by claiming "no tinc remei" (which the teacher corrects with "més remei" in turn 235!).

Following this, in turn 236, Gloria (GRA) claims that "és de naturalitat també", which the teacher hesitantly agrees with in the following turn. However, in the following turns the teacher offers a further argument, not so much based on "natural" or biological reasons for the researcher's ease at learning Catalan, but rather on her greater access to opportunities. In turns 237-243 she explains, with 'scaffolding' from Gloria, Elisa (ESA) and Luisa (LSA) that if the researcher had gone to work in a factory (as was the case of the majority of the middle-aged, Spanish-born students) she would not have learned Catalan in that time (also the case of these students).

In the interviews situation, therefore, the researcher was not only the interviewer, but also a fellow Catalan learner, who, to the knowledge of the students, was in the intermediate level at the time of the study at a centre run by the Consorci de Barcelona. I would like to argue that this fact was at play in the interview situation, and students were concerned with saving face in the presence of the interviewer (a university educated foreigner who had reached competence in Catalan in a relatively short time).

The following fragment from the interview with Victoria (VCT), for example, begins with the researcher asking her what she would like to be able to do in Catalan that she couldn't currently do. Victoria was in her late 40s and had come to Catalonia from Jaén in Andalusia at the age of 14. At this same age, she left her studies and since then she had worked in factories, as a cook and as a cleaner, and had two children and two grandchildren.

Fragment 2

- 244 . RCH: sí sí sí\ y qué es lo que quieres aprender?
 245 . VCT: yo estoy_| =en catalán=/
 246 . RCH: =¿qué es lo= que quieres poder hacer en catalán que ahora no puedes hacer en catalán?
 247 . VCT: ah\ yo solamente con poderlo hablar y_ y no correctamente porque yo creo que correctamente no lo voy a saber hablar nunca\
 248 . RCH: ah hah\
 249 . VCT: pero solamente expresarme-|
 250 . RCH: sí\
 251 . VCT: un poco en catalán-|
 252 . RCH: sí\
 253 . VCT: yo que sé\ tampoco una conver_ y si pudiera/ encantado\ igual como te estoy hablando en castellano-|
 254 . RCH: claro\
 255 . VCT: si yo pudiera hablar en catalán-| pero es que yo lo veo difícil\ yo lo veo difícil porque_ o sea\ lo veo difícil\
 256 . RCH: sí sí sí\
 257 . VCT: el catalán lo veo difícil\
 258 . RCH: sí\
 259 . VCT: y ahora mi memoria tampoco la tengo-|



275. RCH: sí/
276. RSA: {(@)sí\| por lo menos hablo un poquito y me distraigo con otra gente}-| que también va bien\|
277. RCH: sí sí\| y ¿cómo es para ti volver a clase después de =tantos= años?|
278. RSA: =bien=\\| sí me gusta\| pero claro\| eh mi pensamiento es todo en castellano\| no/
279. RCH: hm-\|
280. RSA: y entonces claro me cuesta porque llevo muchos años aquí pero no he tenido la oportunidad ni de estudiar-|
281. RCH: hm hm\|
282. RSA: ni ni ni de aprender\| pero claro si yo hubiese tenido más estudios tampoco te costaría tanto\| no/
283. RCH: hm hm\|

In turn 122 Rosa explains that she decided to enrol in Catalan the previous year, to which the researcher responds by asking how the classes were. Rosa responds that they were “bien” and the researcher’s rising intonation in turn 125 and Rosa’s laughing in turn 126 suggests that neither is quite convinced by Rosa’s “bien” in turn 124. Rosa justifies the response by pointing out that at least the classes distract her a little and she speaks with other people.

A new sequence is initiated in turn 127 as the researcher asks Rosa how it is for her to return to class after so many years. The researcher therefore introduces the topic of studies or recent studies into the conversation. Rosa appropriates this discourse in turns 128, 130 and 132, claiming that her thinking is all in Spanish and that she has not had the opportunity previously to undertake studies. Rosa’s “pero claro” in turn 132 suggests a counter-argument, which she articulates as: “si yo hubiese tenido más estudios tampoco te costaría tanto”. Her choice of pronouns here is interesting, especially her choice of the second person object pronoun in “tampoco *te* costaría tanto”.

Gloria is a middle-aged student who arrived in Catalonia from the Spanish province of Soria as a young child. She finished her primary school studies and later studied to be a secretary, although she worked as a cleaner in a factory. She had three children and had recently got divorced. She was also looking after her aged parents at the time of the research, although she herself suffered a medical condition for which she was receiving treatment. In the following fragment, Gloria had been giving her opinion of the course and explains that she stopped going to classes in the end as they stopped offering them in La Llagosta.

Fragment 4

284. GRA: no claro que no no no no\| pero por lo demás bien\| por lo demás muy bien\| yo al menos/ lástima de que no· el tercer año ya no se hizo porque lo_ lo quitaron\| tenias que ir a los ah los pueblos de· de al lado y yo tanto tiempo no puedo perder\|
285. RCH: hm hm por qué no?|
286. GRA: pues porque· yo trabajo\| tengo mi casa· madrugo mucho· y· pierdes mucho tiempo las cosas como son\|



287. RCH: ya ya ya|\n288. GRA: entonces· uno también tiene que descansar|\n289. RCH: ya| por supuesto|\n290. GRA: y no es lo mismo ya de cuando eres muy jovencilla cuando vas haciendo una edad· y·|\n55. RCH: aha|\n56. GRA: es que no es lo mismo|

At the end of turn 55, she explains that she could not dedicate so much time to studying Catalan. The researcher prompts her to continue, in turn 56, by asking her why not. This interrogative seems to have been interpreted as questioning the truth in Gloria's claim that she has not got enough time. Gloria, in turns 57 and 59 argues her case, rejecting the discourse introduced by the researcher, pointing out to the researcher that she works, gets up very early, and has to take care of her house as well as needing time for herself to rest. The researcher, realising that her question may have been interpreted in a way she had not intended, assents in turns 58 and 60. In turn 61, Gloria presents a very interesting argument, claiming that “no es lo mismo ya cuando eres muy jovencilla”, which would seem to be a direct reference to the fact that things are easier for researcher and/or the younger classmates when it comes to learning Catalan. The researcher and the younger classmates presumably do not have the same family responsibilities as does Gloria and their different levels of inversion in learning the language must be understood from their different identity positions.

Later on in the same interview, Gloria had been explaining that she went to class to have a good time, not necessarily to learn everything exactly as the teacher taught it.

Fragment 5

291. RCH: {(@) te lo pasabas bien}|\n292. GRA: yo sí| hombre yo no iba para· para aburrirme no| para aburrirme no pierdo el tiempo| y para cogértelo todo al pie de la letra quiero decir cuando como eres chiquitín· no hay·_ no| no porque entonces para eso no voy|| claro| a ver ahora mismamente no tienes la capacidad por ejemplo yo que hace muchos años que no· estudias ni nada no tengo la facilidad que tu que estás_ que sigues estudiando por ejemplo| o otra persona que sigue estudiando continuamente no/

Gloria again points to the differences between herself and the researcher in defending her approach to learning Catalan based on having a good time and not learning everything “a pie de la letra *como cuando eres chiquitín*”. She explains this stance toward learning by pointing again, in turn 137, to her different capabilities or facility “que tu que sigues estudiando”, referring to the researcher, “o otra persona que sigue estudiando”, most likely in reference to the other young foreign students in the class who had university educations.

One of these young, foreign, university-educated students was Alex. He was born in Peru, and had arrived in Catalonia 4 years prior to the study. He had worked as a dentist in his country of origin, and at the time of the study was going through the process of having his qualifications recognised in order to work. For the time being, he was working as an assistant in a dental clinic, and had previously worked in odd jobs. In

turn 59 of the following fragment from the interview with Alex, the researcher asked him what he thought of the class group:

Fragment 6

293. RCH: y el grupo/| qué te parece el grupo?|
 294. ALX: hm pues es_ es un grupo de_ de gente mayor no/| gente que_| no es un grupo universitario no/|
 295. RCH: claro\|
 296. ALX: es un grupo de gente mayor y_| y bueno pues hm como que el grupo no hace que te exijas mucho\|
 297. RCH: vale\|
 298. ALX: no me exijo mucho\| debería exigirme más\|
 299. RCH: vale vale\|

In turn 60, Alex responds to the question by stating that it is a group of older people, not a group of university educated people. His “no” with rising intonation at the end of this turn suggests he is seeking empathy with the researcher. That is, although he does not make his opinion of the group explicit at this point, he expects the researcher, who shares a university background with him, will understand the implicit meaning in his utterance. The researcher’s “claro” in turn 61 affirms this affiliation. Alex continues in turns 62 and 64 to argue that the fact that his peers do not have the same educational background as him means he does not push himself as much to learn. That is, he distances himself from the group and blames the group for him not investing more in learning Catalan. Interestingly, Alex was one of only two students who stopped attending classes, although he did sit the final exam.

These fragments demonstrate how in giving meaning to their learning experiences, the participants in this research make certain aspects of their identities relevant in the interview situation and how these relate to how they see their capabilities as language learners. Interviewees construct recognised public versions of themselves in the socially and culturally configured situation that is an interview. The interviewer is an integral part of the interaction and their own interactionally constructed identities must be taken into consideration in order to understanding the joint meanings created in interviews.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, interview data has been drawn on to explore how participants make sense of who they are and their possibilities as learners of Catalan as a second language in relation to the interviewer and their peers. This exploration is part of a larger research aim which is concerned with the forms and results of classroom learning and place of gender, race, class, age and ethnicity in learner’s experiences.

Silverman (2000) argues that the analysis of classroom data is the only way to understand what goes on in the process of learning in a context such as the one that I study, and I agree completely with this comment. However, I also believe that this



micro-analysis of interview data provides an interesting perspective on how students understand the language learning and of how identities are socially constructed in interaction, be it in the classroom, on the street, at work or in research interviews. As this exploration has attempted to demonstrate, in the interview situation there is a constant negotiation of participants' identities, both of the researched and the researcher. If we carry out interviews seeking truth or facts in the positivist sense, then we may consider the dynamic nature of identities a problem. However, if we set out with an understanding that identities, knowledge and opinions are always constructed in interaction then interviews provide a rich data source for exploration of such processes.

Following from this, this exploration has revealed the importance of taking a critical stance in the analysis of interview data. Often, as this brief analysis has put into evidence, comments made the interviewee are in fact responses to categories introduced by the interviewer, and not the other way around. Rather than ignoring this fact, it is interesting to explore how participants appropriate, reject or produce counter-discourses in the joint construction of a public version of themselves, their learning experiences and the world.

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