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Representations of Language among Multilingual Youth in Two Canadian Cities¹

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Abstract: Informed by theoretical discussions of language socialization that consider the relationship between language, social practices, values, power and linguistic markets, this paper reports on findings from a comparative study of the representations of language among multilingual youth living in two Canadian cities, Vancouver and Montreal. The relevance of constructs of language as capital, investment in language learning and discussions of the symbolic value of languages are explored in this analysis of youngsters' discussions about language learning and multilingualism. Employing open-ended interviews of high-school and college students, this research investigated their discourse on multilingualism and the languages in their repertoire. The findings are examined in relation to the educational and language policy contexts specific to each city. It is suggested that representations of language and multilingualism are shaped in relation to local, national and international linguistic markets.

Keywords: multilingualism, linguistic capital, immigration, cities, language practices, language representations

Introduction

Over the past few decades, with dramatic increases in immigration to Canada from an increasingly broad range of countries, the language backgrounds of youth in Canadian cities have become much more diversified than they were in the past (Marmen and Corbeil 1999). Depending on where they settle, the children of immigrants learn English or French, one of Canada's two official languages. They also receive instruction in the other official language through second language programs offered in the school. For many immigrant and second-generation youth, these languages are added to repertoires that already include one or more languages acquired at home, and in some cases, learned through prior schooling in their countries of origin and residence. In the past, research has examined bilingualism among immigrant and second generation youth. As Cenoz and Genesee (1998) indicate, it is only recently that multilingualism has drawn attention and become a focus of study.

We examine here the phenomenon of multilingualism in Canada in relation to demolingistic and policy contexts. Using the term multilingual to refer to speakers of three or more languages, we describe how multilingual youth perceive languages as linguistic capital and attribute value to languages in relation to particular linguistic markets, locally, nationally and internationally. Finally, we consider how these youth describe multilingualism in reference to their identities.

Our discussion draws on the results of a comparative study of the language experiences of multilingual youth residing in Montreal and Vancouver. These two cities were chosen as research sites because they represent quite different contexts of language socialization in Canada. More specifically, in Montreal, Quebec, most immigrant students are schooled in French and receive second language instruction in English until the end of secondary school. French-English bilingualism is an asset for youth in this city when they enter the labour market where it is often a pre-requisite for employment. In contrast, in Vancouver, British Columbia, the dominant language of schooling is English and second language instruction is provided in French up until secondary school. English dominates the labour market in Vancouver and competence in other languages is also an asset but not required for most jobs.

Our work is informed by theoretical discussions of language socialization (Schieffelin & Ochs 1986) that examine the inextricable relationship between language practices, social context and institutions such as schools and families. In our analysis, we draw on Bourdieu's (1977, 1982) notions of field, habitus and linguistic capital and Norton's (2000) discussion of investment in language learning. We argue that the youth in our study view multilingualism as a resource and invest in learning multiple languages as a means of accessing various linguistic markets. Referring to recent work on the transnational perspective adopted by immigrants and migrants (Meintel 1993; Mitchell

2001), we also consider Heller's (2000) discussion of globalization and the value attributed to languages. Citing Deprez (1994) and Woolard (1985), we suggest that language is implicated in the construction of identities and serves to secure group solidarity for multilingual youth.

We begin by elaborating on the above theoretical perspective to explain how it informs our analysis. We then situate the two research sites, Montreal and Vancouver, in terms of their geographic location and the demographics of official bilingualism and multilingualism in Canada. Differences and similarities in the linguistic markets (Bourdieu 1982) and policy frameworks of these two cities are then highlighted to illustrate how the language practices and educational trajectories of multilingual youth are affected by contextual factors. Following this, we outline the methodology of our comparative study and discuss some of the themes emerging from our analysis which include: 1) multilingualism as resource; 2) language status and competition; 3) the symbolic value of languages and; 4) multilingual identity. We call for recognition of young people's insight into linguistic markets and their ability to attribute value to the languages in their repertoires locally, nationally and internationally. We conclude by considering the implications of this research for educational practice and language policy.

Theoretical Framework

Recent research in applied linguistics and language education has built on Schieffelin & Ochs' (1986) definition of language socialization that describes language learning as a process whereby youngsters adopt the social norms and shared meanings of their language groups. Central to this perspective is the interconnection between language, learning, social practices, values, interpersonal relationships and cultural institutions.

More recently, researchers studying the social aspects of language learning have drawn on Bourdieu's (1982, 1983) social reproduction theory that attributes a central place to language in the competitive dynamics of society. Bourdieu's constructs of habitus, field, language capital and linguistic markets allow us to interpret how individuals interact within intersecting social spaces and provide conceptual tools for analysing the role of language within these interactions. Essentially, Bourdieu argues that individuals acquire a habitus, a system of dispositions, practices and representations, mostly learned at home, that enables them to move with greater or lesser ease through different fields of competition (Bourdieu 1983; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). In Bourdieu's writing, fields are described as structured social spaces characterized by discourse and social activity. According to this definition, institutions such as school, family and the workplace can be considered

as fields. Describing language as capital, Bourdieu (1977, 1982) proposes that language is convertible to economic, social and symbolic capital within particular fields.

Expanding on Bourdieu's theory, Carrington and Luke (1997) propose that the habitus is not only constructed at home but also through a lifelong process of language socialization. As well, Lamarre & Rossell Paredes (In Press) add to this discussion by suggesting that different sites play specific roles in the language socialization process as youth move through various friendship networks and from school to the labour market.

Norton (2000) applies Bourdieu's theory to language learning, suggesting that learners invest in additional languages in order to acquire greater symbolic and material resources that enrich their capital. In other words, they imagine that this investment will yield "a return that will give them access to hitherto unattainable resources" (Norton 2000: 10). Dagenais (2001) applies this concept of investment to an analysis of the reasons why immigrant families opt to promote the development of child multilingualism and attribute value to it in reference to national and international market forces.

Although Bourdieu (1977) wrote about language and symbolic power to describe how dominant social groups use language to maintain their economic and social advantages, he did not account for minority groups' interests in acquiring or maintaining languages that have little economic value in local markets. To address this issue, we refer to Deprez (1994) and Woolard (1985) who suggested that people attribute symbolic value, rather than economic value to minority languages. Deprez, for instance, has shown in her research with immigrant families living in Paris, France, that they invest in maintaining a minority language, regardless of its lack of economic importance, because it ensures familial and affective ties with language communities locally and in the country of origin. Similarly, in cities like Montreal and Vancouver, maintaining a heritage/minority language provides membership in minority language communities. In this sense, symbolic value is attributed to a heritage/minority language within particular, community-delimited, linguistic markets.

Furthermore, as Heller (2000) proposes, with increasing trends toward globalization, international market forces are redefining the value of languages, as well as the workings of local marketplaces. Heller argues that these phenomena must be considered in any contemporary analysis of learners' language practices and representations. Along similar lines, Meintel (1993) and Mitchell (2001) have argued that a number of immigrants and second generation youth look beyond the borders of a particular nation state, such as Canada, to adopt a transnational perspective as their frame of reference. This means that maintenance of a heritage/minority language might be perceived as valuable capital within one's local language community as well as within a larger transnational community. For example, by maintaining Spanish, youth may claim membership not only in the Latino communities of Montreal or Vancouver, but also in language communities in their country of

origin and other Spanish-speaking nations. The emergence of a transnational perspective in immigrant and second-generation youth challenges researchers and educators to reconsider the parameters of linguistic markets and the reasons why learners invest in language and education.

Clearly, it appears that Schieffelin & Ochs' (1986) conception of language socialization as a process of adopting the norms and meanings one's language community should be expanded to account for the transnational experiences of those who have contact with several language communities. An expanded understanding of language socialization would articulate how multilingual learners are socialized in overlapping fields of practice and linguistic markets in multiple sites such as the home, community, educational institutions, informal friendship networks and the workplace. Such a perspective would provide more helpful theoretical tools for understanding the complex phenomenon of multilingualism in modern societies. In the next sections, we propose this theoretical stance to consider how multilingual youth living in two different urban linguistic markets shape their language practices and construct their identities.

The Geography and Demographics of Language Knowledge in Montreal and Vancouver

Though Canada became an officially bilingual country in 1969, it is by no means uniformly so. When the actual importance of English and French are considered, Canada can be divided into three linguistic zones: A dominantly English-speaking area; a primarily French-speaking one and; a bilingual belt where the two languages co-exist (Joy 1972, 1992). Within the Canadian population, 83% of residents speak either French or English as a first language and 17% declare a non-official language as "first language spoken and still understood."

Only 17% of the total Canadian population speaks both official languages (Marmen and Corbeil 1999) and the majority of bilinguals live in Canada's "bilingual belt", which includes parts of Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick. The greatest concentration of bilinguals is found in Quebec, the only province where the majority is French speaking but where the importance of English within the labour market is apparent.

Multilingualism in Canada follows the same trend and is nine times higher in Quebec than in other provinces, specifically, 46.8% for Quebec as compared to 5.4% for the rest of Canada (Marmen and Corbeil 1999). Focusing on the two metropolitan census areas of this study, 44% of Montrealers who speak a non-official language are trilingual, declaring knowledge of both English and French; whereas in Vancouver, only 4% of the population answers to this description. These statistics draw attention to the distinct sociolinguistic and sociopolitical contexts of Montreal and Vancouver and their different linguistic markets.

In terms of language dynamics, both cities have undergone dramatic changes in the last few decades. In Quebec, since the late 1960s, considerable effort has gone to improving the status of French. In Montreal, economic and social incentives to communicate in French have increased significantly in a very short period (Levine 1990; Bourhis 2001). Despite the growing need for French in the city, English retains its status as the dominant language for economic and social transactions within North America and Montreal remains the Canadian city where English-French bilingualism is most common.

The linguistic market of Vancouver has changed as well in the last few decades due both to the Federal government's efforts, since the 1960s, to promote official bilingualism and more recently, to an influx of immigrants from Asia and elsewhere. Consequently, Asian languages are second to English in importance in social and economic exchanges in Vancouver and French has a *de facto* status of minority language in social interactions despite its *de jure* status as an official language of the Federal government, equal to English. Thus, in this context, French competence is not necessary for survival but has some potential as linguistic capital for positions in particular domains, most notably within the education system, Federal institutions and Francophone community organizations. Nevertheless, as the statistics indicate, official bilingualism does not have the same value in Vancouver as in Montreal.

With regard to educational contexts more specifically, since 1982 constitutional guarantees protect the rights of official language minorities to schooling in their language everywhere in Canada. Essentially, this means that all provincial governments are obliged to provide a dual school system based on language of instruction. Rights to instruction in an official minority language are hereditary and are acquired through parental claim to this type of schooling. Beyond respecting this constitutional right, provinces have complete jurisdiction over how schooling is organized within their territories. What this means is that immigrant families who speak languages other than French or English are able to use the school system to acquire English-French bilingualism in different ways, depending on their heritage and place of residence in the country. In Vancouver, most immigrant youth are enrolled in English language schools and some in French Immersion programs (offered in the English school system) that provide instruction both in French and English. Others may qualify, under the Constitution, to enroll in Vancouver's French language schools if they or their parents were educated in French prior to arrival in the province. Thus, those children who maintain their family languages and enroll in French schools or French immersion programs can use the school system to become multilingual while living in a city where English dominates public space (Dagenais & Berron 2001; Dagenais & Day 1999).

In Montreal, the situation is quite different and immigrants do not have the same opportunities to use the school system to become multilingual. In 1977, in an effort to reverse the trend of immigrant anglicization, Quebec adopted a language charter known as Bill 101, which made French schools the only option available to new immigrants to the province. This provoked a dramatic and rapid change in enrolment trends and today, over 90% of the immigrant population is enrolled in French schools, as compared to only 11% in 1971 (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec 1997). According to the terms of Quebec's language charter and the Canadian Constitution, English language schools in Quebec are available only to students with a hereditary right to official minority schooling. Moreover, Quebec's Education Act places restrictions on the amount of time allocated to English instruction in French schools. As intended, this eliminates the possibility of a bilingual program in French schools. These restrictions are not imposed on Quebec's English language schools, however, where bilingual and French immersion programs have flourished at the request of English-speaking parents particularly as the need for French competence has increased in the province.

In summary, most families in Montreal cannot use the public school system as a strategy to acquire bilingualism or multilingualism. Interestingly, this does not seem to have affected the growth of bilingualism or multilingualism in the province, which statistics reveal to be higher than in any other province and steadily increasing (Marmen and Corbeil 1999). Nevertheless, language policies play an important role in determining the value of languages and shaping language knowledge within the local linguistic markets of Montreal and Vancouver. Since Ottawa and Quebec adopted language policies aimed at improving the status of French, statistics show that knowledge of this language has increased across the country. Educational policies also determine the educational opportunities available to immigrants and impact on their efforts to build a linguistic repertoire.

The Comparative Study

This study adopts a qualitative form of educational inquiry (LeCompte, Preissle, Tesch, 1993) and specifically, a dual case study approach. We conducted semi-structured individual interviews in Montreal and Vancouver with 22 youth who also provided information on their backgrounds through a closed questionnaire. Snowball sampling was used to identify multilingual students through contacts at their schools and efforts were made to have both sexes represented among the participants. In keeping with case study approaches to research, this project did not aim at producing generalizable results, rather, its objective was to provide a detailed, close-up description of participants' accounts of their daily experiences and their particular contexts.

Interviews explored students' daily language practices in and out of school, their representations of multilingualism and the languages in their repertoire. To gain insight into their identity construction, which we view as complex and multidimensional (Leung, Harris and Rampton, 1997), some interview questions explored their representations of self as multilingual. Each audiotaped interview took place on school grounds and lasted from 60 to 90 minutes. The background information questionnaire took about 20 minutes to administer individually prior to the interview. The qualitative data analysis program NUD*IST was used for storage, coding and analysis procedures.

The following initial questions guided the research:

1. What are the language practices of multilingual youth of immigrant families living in Montreal and Vancouver?
 - a) How did they acquire the languages in their repertoire?
 - b) How do they use these languages in everyday situations?
2. How do students perceive language as capital and how do they describe their languages in relation to linguistic markets?
 - a) What value do they attribute to multilingualism and to the specific languages in their repertoire?
 - b) What are the benefits/drawbacks of multilingualism for them as individuals (in their city, province, country, parents' country of origin, internationally)?
3. How do they identify themselves?
 - a) What are their language affiliations?
 - b) How do they represent themselves as multilinguals?

In Vancouver, 12 high school students between ages 16 and 18 participated in the interviews. They were enrolled in the senior secondary grades of a Francophone program in the provincial Francophone School District of British Columbia (*Le Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique*). In this program, all subjects in the curriculum are taught in French, except for English as a second language instruction, which is introduced as of grade 4. Spanish as an additional language is also offered as an optional subject.

The Francophone school is housed in the building of an English school within a large urban school district in Vancouver. Both schools have a high concentration of students from diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. The English stream of the school offers several other programs, including a French Immersion program. Although the Francophone program is administered separately, students and staff from both schools intermingle in the halls and in extra-curricular activities. In our visits to the school, we heard several languages spoken among students, including French, but English dominated social interactions in public spaces in and around the building.

In Montreal, the students were all between 18 and 20 years old. They were enrolled in an English language college (*Cégep*) situated in a northern suburb of Montreal.² A French language college is within walking distance, but there is little, if any, contact between students from the two institutions. A high proportion of first and second generation Canadians live in the neighbourhood, but it also has an important number of French speakers of French Canadian ancestry. The student population of the English college is highly multicultural and multilingual and a significant number of students are French speaking. On our visits to the college, we observed and listened to students from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds mingling in the halls and cafeterias. English clearly dominated these interactions, but many other languages were used as well, including French.

The Vancouver and Montreal students come from a broad diversity of language origins as is evident in Table 1, presenting background information on the participants.

Table 1. Background Information on the Participants

Site	Number	Gender		Languages
		Male	Female	
Vancouver	12	3	9	Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Lingala, Portuguese, Spanish, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Cambodian, French, English
Montreal	10	6	4	Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Fanti, Italian, Punjabi, Tagalog, French, English

Discussion of Emerging Themes

In the following section, we discuss four themes that emerged from our analysis of the interview transcripts. The first theme, multilingualism as resource, refers to students' perception that their multilingual repertoire enriches them, providing them with an advantage over others. The second theme, language status, suggests that students recognize how context defines the relationship between language, power and social status. The third theme, the symbolic value of languages, underscores that languages are valued not only economically but also for their role in constructing social networks and identity. The final theme, multilingual identity, reveals the complexity of identity construction among the students in our study.

² The educational restraints of Bill 101 do not apply to post-secondary institutions such as *Cégeps*.

Multilingualism as Resource

In both cities, the young people we interviewed describe language as a resource that gives them access to a greater body of knowledge and larger social circles. Several claim that knowledge of multiple languages and cultures enables them to have a better understanding of others. They state that multilingualism provides them with an advantage over unilinguals. One student even explains that she feels badly for the latter because they assume they know everything even though they understand only one language.

Excerpt 1

Il y a toujours des avantages à parler le plus de langues possibles. Les personnes que tu rencontres dans la rue, les différentes coutumes que tu peux apprendre, les différentes choses. . . même la télévision bien sûr et les voyages.

There are always advantages to speaking as many languages as possible. The people that you meet in the street, the different customs that you can learn, the different things... even television of course and travelling. (Vinh, Vancouver)

Excerpt 2

... ils pensent qu'ils savent tout, que c'est le plus important. Mais y a des choses que . . en apprenant, en partageant d'autres langues, c'est plus facile d'apprendre l'anglais, de comprendre les autres langues quoi. Et puis eh, je pense que ça m'aide bien quoi.

... they think they know everything, that it's the most important. But there are things that... in learning, in sharing other languages, it's easier to learn English, to understand other languages what. And so ah, I think that it helps me a lot what. (Sahar, Vancouver)

Excerpt 3

Some people who, they only know French and nothing else. And I'm sad, you know. It's kind of sad because they can't... I think it's a great treasure, like, to have many (languages).

Je me sens mal pour les gens qui parlent juste l'anglais ou le français.

I feel badly for people who speak only English or French. (Sandra, Montreal)

Thus, in keeping with Norton's (2000) research, investment in language learning is associated with an enrichment of social and cultural capital. These multilingual youth clearly believe that their investment has enabled them to acquire more resources and greater advantages than unilinguals. In Montreal, where linguistic cleavage between the English speaking and French speaking communities has a long history, we found that students talk about their multilingualism as a type of passport that allows them to cross traditional linguistic boundaries and move in different networks. For example, they move easily between friendship networks where different languages dominate social interactions.

Language Status and Competition

Most of the students interviewed in Montreal and Vancouver were born outside of Canada. For many, early language socialization in their country of origin took place in situations of diglossia where the language of the home was different from the language of schooling. On arriving in Canada, they already had a complex linguistic repertoire, a heightened sense of the different value of languages and knowledge of the relationship of language to power and social status. In both cities, interviews revealed that participants are keenly sensitive to differences in linguistic markets and aware that a language considered valuable in one market might not be of much value in another. Some students attribute the least value to their own heritage/minority language, particularly in cases where this language is not considered to be international. The interviews suggest that students judge the value of each language in their repertoire with respect to different markets.

Excerpt 4

(languages) are all important in different situations... in different places... so I don't know if one is more important than the others. It's depending on the circumstances. French is important because I live here. If I didn't live here, I don't know if I would have learned French. But because I live here, it's important. (Sandra, Montreal)

Excerpt 5

Intervieweure: Alors, comment te sens-tu envers...le cambodgien, puis le dialecte chinois...?

Tche-Reth: Je m'en fous.

Intervieweure: Tu t'en fous? Mais penses-tu que ce sont des langues utiles?

Tche-Reth: Ben non, on vit au Canada présentement. Mais si on retourne au Cambodge, ce serait utile... c'est juste, il y a pas vraiment beaucoup de personnes cambodgiennes au Canada.

Intervieweure: ...l'anglais est-il important pour toi?

Tche-Reth: Oui, très important parce que c'est la langue officielle du Canada... et le français aussi... c'est aussi la langue officielle du Canada, donc, l'anglais et le français c'est pour ça, c'est important pour moi... c'est juste comme ça.

Interviewer: So, how do you feel about... Cambodian and the Chinese dialect?

Tche-Reth: I couldn't care less.

Interviewer: You couldn't care less? But do you think they are useful languages?

Tche-Reth: Well no, we live in Canada presently. But if we were to return to Cambodia, it would be useful... it's just, there really aren't many Cambodian people in Canada.

Interviewer: Is English important to you?

Tche-Reth: Yes, very important because it's Canada's official language, so English and French, that's why, it's important to me... that's how it is. (Tche-Reth, Vancouver)

The interviews also revealed that multilingual youth can deconstruct what is meant by the importance of a language. As illustrated in the following excerpt, they distinguish between the practical utility of a language and its symbolic relationship to identity:

Excerpt 6

Intervieweure: Si tu avais à mettre sur une échelle l'importance des langues, parmi les trois que tu connais, la première serait?

Raniah: La première que je mettrais?

Intervieweure: Oui, la plus importante.

Raniah: La plus importante ou la plus utile, c'est différent... La plus importante pour moi c'est arabe, français, anglais. La plus utile, c'est anglais, français, arabe.

Interviewer: If you had to put languages in order of importance, of the three you know, the first would be?

Raniah: What I think would be first?

Interviewer: Yes, the most important.

Raniah: The most important or the most useful? It's different... The most important for me are Arabic, French, English. The most useful, it's English, French, Arabic. (Raniah, Vancouver)

A striking finding was that all the Montreal participants consider French to be the most important language within the local context, and yet they view English-French bilingualism as the most valuable capital to acquire and as securing the most advantages. English is accorded the most importance on the international market, as are languages that are spoken in many countries, such as Spanish. Internationally, French is perceived as important, but not as important as Spanish. The importance accorded to French in Montreal, however, reflects a major shift in attitudes over the last decades and reveals to what degree efforts to change the status of French in Quebec have been successful.

Excerpt 7

To be able to work in Montreal, you have to be able to know the two languages. First, I think you need to learn French. And then to learn some English. In Montreal, it's not as important as French. (Jo, Montreal)

Competition between the French and English, situated in a national history of inter-group conflict and political polarization between speakers of these official language communities, is reflected in the participants' discourse. Interestingly, these tensions are more evident in what the youth in Vancouver had to say.

Excerpt 8

Mais les anglophones, ils ont une manière de nous exclure du groupe de l'école... mais je trouve qu'ils sont un peu jaloux parce que nous on a l'avantage de parler notre langue...donc quand ils voient de français ils commencent à dire des choses comme "You people are weird."... Mais ils blaguent, mais je me dis que si eux ils avaient l'avantage de parler le français comme nous on le parle, ils seraient contents, ils feraient "ouais, je parle une autre langue."

Well, Anglophones, they have a way of excluding us from the group at school. . . but I think they are a bit jealous because we have the advantage of speaking our language. . . so when they see French, they start to say things like "You people are weird."... But they're joking, but I say to myself that if they had the advantage of speaking French like we do, they would be happy, they would say: "Ya, I speak another language." (Maria, Vancouver)

Perhaps this reflects the fact that the Vancouver students share their school space with an English high school and are outnumbered by English students within the building. Even though it has housed a Francophone program for years, the building is owned by the English school board and has a long history as an English high school.

Conversely, students enrolled in an English language institution in Montreal who live in the very heart of historic linguistic tensions in Canada, have a very different attitude to the use of French within the institutional setting. Although students claim to use English all the time and insist that the school is an English place, they also agree that using French in an English college is not offensive, since English-French bilingualism is taken for granted among their age group. As one said, "everyone can understand what you are saying."

Recalling Bourdieu's (1982) discussion of language markets, it becomes clear that these multilinguals understand the competitive, dynamic and unequal status of different linguistic capital. As well, they can deconstruct their linguistic repertoires and accord value to specific languages within particular settings. Students are also conscious of their ability to move more easily from one field to another by drawing on different aspects of their linguistic repertoires.

Youth living in Vancouver invest in multilingualism, believing that it provides them with advantages over unilinguals. However, as Dagenais (2003) has indicated elsewhere, this optimism about the advantages of multilingualism does not necessarily correspond to the cruel reality of the Canadian marketplace. Drawing on census data, Pendakur and Pendakur (1997) have demonstrated that those who declare knowledge of two official languages plus a non-official language do not earn more than French-English bilinguals or monolinguals so that knowledge of other languages than French and English "rarely improves labour market outcomes." (p. 27).

In contrast, Montreal youth invested in multilingualism for different reasons. Even though all the Montreal participants refer to having more than one language as advantageous and some see

themselves as active agents – as having an active role -- in developing their multilingualism, much like their Vancouver counterparts, others describe multilingualism more in terms of a consequence of immigrating to a city where two languages are required for economic and social mobility. They seem to view multilingualism as inevitable, as something that is imposed externally rather than strategically sought after.

For example, on the one hand, Sandra, explains how her parents are committed to having their children learn Portuguese and look for every opportunity to improve their children's written and oral skills. She also emphasizes how her parents carefully planned her integration into a French language school and later enrolled her in an intensive English program offered within the same school. All through Sandra's childhood, her parents insisted that learning languages is an opportunity and that multilingualism will bring rewards throughout life. In this family, language learning is definitely treated as an investment. On the other hand, Jo, another Montrealer, seems somewhat less engaged about acquiring a multilingual repertoire. He describes growing up in Ghana, speaking one language at home and learning English at school. He explains how he arrived in Montreal at the age of 15 and "was put" into a special French as-a-second-language program for immigrants. He recounts that he was then "moved" into a regular program in a French language school. At the college level, when he was finally able to exercise his own choice about schooling, he decided on an English language institution. While this enables him to perform well academically, he recognizes that he must improve his French if he wants to stay in Quebec. He also knows that he has to improve his English, which he perceives as the dominant language worldwide. Jo reports no discussion at home about the value of multilingualism and does not appear to have been proactive in acquiring his multilingual repertoire.

The Symbolic Value of Languages

Though all the multilinguals in our research attribute important economic value to English in local, national and international markets, some, like Sahar from Vancouver, indicate that they do not necessarily feel a close attachment to this language and express stronger affiliation with their family language, regardless of its status and economic value.

Excerpt 9

... ma famille parle en persan quoi et je parle en persan. Et puis si j'irai visiter en Iran, il faut que je parle le persan. Et même si ça serait pas utile, c'est nécessaire pour moi, même si pas pour la vie, mais pour moi-même, pour me sentir bien parce que c'est ma langue... Euh, l'anglais c'est plus ou moins la dernière langue que j'ai appris et c'est juste là quoi. Ça va

pas se perdre, c'est partout dans le monde où on le parle... Alors, bon il faut que je le parle pour pouvoir communiquer un jour partout... mais c'est pas important pour moi.

...my family speaks in Persian like and I speak in Persian. And if I were to go visit Iran, I have to speak Persian. And even if it weren't useful, it's necessary for me, even if not for life, but for myself, to feel good because it's my language... Ah, English, it's more or less the last language I learned and it's just there like. It won't get lost, it's spoken everywhere in the world... So, well I have to speak it to be able to communicate one day everywhere... but it's not important to me. (Sahar, Vancouver)

Excerpt 10

Ca sert à communiquer avec la famille, et c'est ça, la langue je trouve que c'est un outil très important pour pouvoir comprendre une culture et pouvoir faire des alliances avec, de où tu viens, des choses comme ça.

It serves to communicate with the family and that's it, language I think is a very important tool to be able to understand a culture and be able to make alliances with, where you come from, things like that. (Sohila, Vancouver)

Excerpt 11

Dans l'avenir, je pense que le français, l'anglais, je vais les prendre pour mon travail, parce que je vais... travailler avec des gens, des patients, avec des clients peut-être si jamais je suis pas médecin, docteur ou infirmière. Et lingala je pense que je vais juste l'utiliser avec ma famille, mes parents.

In the future, I think that English, French, I will take them for work, because I will... work with people, patients, with clients maybe if ever I become a doctor or nurse. And Lingala I think that I will just use it with my family, my parents. (Aminata, Vancouver)

These multilinguals view the family language in terms of securing ties and alliances with their language communities. They report that speaking their family language is often a requirement for acceptance by the family language community. These excerpts lend further support to the work of Deprez (1994), Woolard (1985) and others who highlight the symbolic value people attribute to minority languages and their attachment to them, regardless of their economic value. For the multilingual youth in our research, affiliation with these languages serves to solidify group membership and orients identity construction.

Multilingual Identity

Generally speaking, the young people we interviewed express a positive representation of themselves as multilinguals.

Excerpt 12

Intervieweuse: Comment te sens-tu le fait d'être multilingue, comment tu te sens?

Zita: *Ah, c'est le fun.*

Intervieweuse: *Oui, pourquoi?*

Zita: *Parce que je sais pas, j'ai l'impression d'être mieux instruite que certains (rires). C'est vrai, souvent je me sens un peu supérieur parce que je comprends plusieurs langues et... ouais. Et mes amis disent: "Oh my God, you speak like four langages. " Je trouve ça vraiment comme... c'est bien.*

Interviewer: How do you feel about being multilingual, how do you feel?

Zita: Ah, it's fun.

Interviewer: Yes, why?

Zita: Because I don't know, I have the impression that I am more educated than others (laughter). It's true, often I feel a little superior because I understand many languages and... ya. And my friends say: "Oh my God, you speak like four languages. " I find that really like... it's nice. (Zita, Montreal)

Yet, the following excerpts show how they perceive their identity as complex, even contradictory and ambiguous.

Excerpt 13

You are one person spread four ways, as opposed to one person that's concentrated in one direction... I think I am like an empty space. I don't know... I don't call myself Italian. I don't say I'm Spanish, 'cause I'm both and I realize... I have some characteristics of one and of the other. And of the English culture, since I've grown up... and with the French people and everything. I'm just like one big clay. I'm like you see blue clay and red clay and white clay, you know. I'm just one big ball of clay. No identity to it, not yet at least. They haven't characterized us yet. Maybe put us a name or something. Well, I guess in having many different identities... you produce... you come out as one identity. (Daniel, Montreal)

Excerpt 14

I'm a multilingual person. I'm a multiculturalist. I just feel okay, I learned the languages and I know a little bit about the cultures, that's all I mean. It's not like I know only about Indian culture. I know about other people's cultures. (Meena, Montreal)

Moreover, as the discussion with one Vancouver student reveals, identity is articulated in terms of a transnational frame of reference.

Excerpt 15

J'appartiens à tout le monde. C'est sûr que je suis née au Congo et j'appartiens au Congo d'abord, mais moi-même en tant que personne, je considère que j'appartiens au monde, une citoyenne du monde.

I belong to the whole world. Sure I was born in the Congo first, but me, my self, as a person, I consider that I belong to the world, a citizen of the world. (Frock, Vancouver)

Such a transnational perspective, as Mitchell (2001) suggests, allows immigrants to look beyond citizenship in one particular country. It serves to construct a personal identity that is broader than the boundaries of nationality, ethnicity or language. The multilingual youth in our study describe their identity as multiple, like their linguistic repertoires, which can be drawn upon differently according to context. They strategically appropriate a particular identity in certain situations, thereby securing group solidarity and affiliation, according to their best interests.

For some multilingual youth, however, it appears that an identity has been attributed to them because of their physical attributes. This identity is more narrowly defined in terms of specific national, ethnic and linguistic affiliation.

Excerpt 16

Si ils me demandent mon identité c'est mélangé entre iranien et canadien, parce que quand je dis Canadien, je pense à français, anglais, parce que pour moi c'est quoi être Canadien. Et l'iranien, c'est parce que c'est où je suis née, puis c'est moi, c'est mon physique, c'est mon apparence.

If they ask me my identity it's mixed between Iranian and Canadian, because when I say Canadian, I think of French, English, because, for me, that's what Canadian is. And Iranian, it's because that's where I was born, and it's me, it's my physique, my appearance. (Sohila, Vancouver)

Excerpt 17

Tche-Reth: Mais, chaque fois que je dis ça à quelqu'un que je suis canadien et ils me croient pas, donc, c'est, je, je dis juste que je suis cambodgien, c'est tout.

Intervieweuse: ... ils te croient pas quand tu dis que tu es canadien?

Tche-Reth: Non, il faut leur expliquer, ah! oui, mes parents sont venus ici et puis après je suis né ici.

Intervieweuse: Les gens pensent toujours que tu es né au Cambodge?

Tche-Reth: Ben en Chine, j'ai l'air plus d'un chinois que d'un cambodgien.

Intervieweuse: Comment tu te sens quand ils te disent ça?

Tche-Reth: Je m'en fous vraiment, c'est vraiment pas important pour moi. . . c'est juste parce que si je dis je suis cambodgien, j'ai rien à expliquer. . . . C'est beaucoup plus facile! Ça sauve beaucoup de salive!

Tche-Reth: But, each time I say this to someone that I am Canadian and they don't believe me, so, it's, I, I just say that I am Cambodian, that's all.

Interviewer: . . . they don't believe you when you say you are Canadian?

Tche-Reth: No, I have to explain to them, oh yes, my parents came here and then after I was born here.

Interviewer: People always think you were born in Cambodia?

Tche-Reth: Well in China, I look more Chinese than Cambodian.

Interviewer: How do you feel when they say that?

Tche-Reth: I couldn't care less really, it's really not important for me. . . it's just because if I say I'm Cambodian, I don't have to explain anything. . . . It's a lot easier! I can save my breath! (Tche-Reth, Vancouver)

For these multilinguals, their identity can be experienced in contradictory ways; sometimes it serves as a marker of inclusion and at others it is a marker of exclusion. While they are able to move more easily than unilinguals across boundaries of language, ethnicity and nation, where they belong or who they are is not as easily defined.

Conclusions

Our goal in conducting this study was to document what learning languages means to multilinguals living in two distant Canadian cities with different educational and language policy contexts. We adopted this comparative lens in order to examine more closely how multilingual youth view their language repertoires and practices and to understand how specific linguistic markets influence language practices and working habits.

Our analysis of census data revealed that the language policy in place in a particular context can transform language practice. Federal policies of official bilingualism determine the status of French and English in Federal institutions in Montreal and Vancouver and can be linked to increases in official bilingualism and in bilingual education opportunities in both cities over the last few decades, though to different degrees. Language policy can also shape the educational opportunities available to immigrant families who seek to acquire multilingualism. For example, immigrant youth in Vancouver can become multilingual by maintaining their family language and accessing both French and English instruction through the school system. They can choose French Immersion programs in the English school system or, if eligible under the Constitution, enrol in the French school system where instruction is provided in French and lessons are offered in English as a second language. In Montreal, under Quebec's language charter known as Bill 101, immigrant children must enter French schools unless they can claim a hereditary right to enrol in the English school system.

When we examined what multilingual youth had to say about their understanding of language in these two contexts, we found very similar ways of describing language as a resource, convertible into economic and social capital. Furthermore, students were very aware of linguistic markets other than the dominant local one and were quite able to nuance the value of the languages in their own repertoires in three respects: First, they did so at a more local level, in relation to their smaller heritage/minority language communities, extended family and friendship networks in their cities; second, they referred to their languages in relation to the dominant local language community in their

province, a specific field of competition; and third, thinking globally, they attributed value to their languages within an international market and from a transnational perspective.

This suggests, as Heller (1999) has argued in her ethnographic study of bilingual/multilingual students living in Toronto, that we need to acknowledge the insight youth have into the complexity of linguistic markets. We must recognize that they attribute different values to the languages in their repertoires, values that do not necessarily correspond to those held by their families, teachers or schools. We need to better understand what multilinguals do with the languages they learn throughout their life trajectories. Moreover, we must re-examine the goals of our language programs, which so often fail to take into account the rich language resources of multilingual students, focusing instead on their need to develop proficiency in the dominant language or languages within provincial and national borders.

Not surprisingly, these multilingual youth describe their identity as complex, almost always hybrid and dynamic, allowing them to claim membership within many different networks. Most view this as an advantage in the 21st century. We might wonder whether this optimism will persist and ask: How will their multilingual identity serve them in their life trajectories as they move through different fields? Will it facilitate movement or will they encounter barriers in higher education and the labour force despite their multilingualism? Will their multilingual identity change, and if so, in what way? Finally, we need to carefully consider how language policies aiming at protecting language status, may provide or reduce opportunities for youth to build multilingual repertoires.

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