Multilingual discursive practices and processes of social change in globalizing institutional spaces: a critical ethnographic perspective

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This special issue aims to study multilingualism in relation to contemporary processes of transformation of institutional spaces. Our focus is on the ways in which multilingual communicative practices, institutional logics and wider processes of social change are interwoven in the production of everyday life in contemporary institutions (Heller & Martin-Jones, 2001). By drawing on sociolinguistic ethnographies carried out in different institutional contexts across the world (Spain, the United States and Argentina), the present volume seeks to reflect on how socio-cultural processes of change derived from economic neoliberalization and the increasing mobility of people, ideas and practices around the globe are forcing local institutions to reposition themselves, and redefine their missions and social functions.

We believe multilingualism is a privileged standpoint for the study of those processes, and particularly so in the case of institutional spaces connected to the modern nation-state. As such, they are social spaces historically tied to those socio-economic and political forms of organization built upon the discursive construction and legitimization of a monolingual citizenry, which in turn resulted from the one-state-one-nation-one-culture-one-language ideological framework (Bauman & Briggs, 2003). Thus, the increasing multilingual configuration of late modern societies poses various dilemmas and challenges which need to be empirically traced. Discourse is central to this exploration, both as a locus of analysis of the transformation of practice and as the means through which institutions narrate and legitimize the changes they undergo.

Our contribution to the study of language and institutions continues the work carried out by scholars who have sought to understand communicative practices within multilingual institutional spaces in the contemporary world, whether in the context of

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service encounters in healthcare (Atkinson, 1995; Cicourel, 1992; Fisher & Todd, 1983; Heritage & Maynard, 2006; Mishler, 1984; Moyer, 2011; West, 1984), social work (Hall, Slembrouck & Sarangi, 2006), legal practices (Angermeyer, 2009; Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Cicourel 1968; Levinson 1992), bureaucracies (Sarangi & Slembrouck, 1996), talk at work (Arminen 2005; Holmes, Stubbe & Vine, 1999), job interviews (Campbell & Roberts, 2007), citizen and immigration services (Codó 2008; Jacquemet, 2005; Maryns, 2006), or educational settings (Heller, 1999 [2006]; Heller & Martin-Jones, 2001; Martín Rojo, 2010; Nussbam & Unamuno, 2006; Pérez-Milans, 2013; Rampton, 2006; Blackledge & Creese, 2010).

In particular, this special issue aims to further the "holistic" perspective on the study of communication in institutional settings put forward by Sarangi & Roberts (1999). They argue for the need to carry out thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of talk, text and interaction in order to show how the socio-ideological, the institutional and the interaction orders get mutually constituted and cannot be disentangled analytically. Along similar lines, Heller (2007a) defends the need to empirically follow the web-like trajectories of the different orders (including the linguistic and the moral orders) to comprehend how and why institutional spaces get discursively configured in specific ways. We want to take this ethnographic line of research a step further by placing mobility, multilingualism and contemporary transformations at the centre of the analysis. In so doing, we take over from recent attempts to examine new institutional practices in emerging multicultural contexts under conditions of late modernity (see, for example, Márquez Reiter & Martín Rojo, 2010).

Against this backdrop, our approach intends to provide an innovative angle to the analysis of multilingualism, institutions and social change by taking up and expanding Cicourel's pioneering line of enquiry. Cicourel's work tracked empirically the specific genealogies of what gets constituted as knowledge within the constraints of a given institutional space. He showed that knowledge has socially structuring functions, as it is the means whereby actors locally position themselves and others (Cicourel, 1973, 1980, 1992, 2002; Knorr-Cetina & Cicourel, 1981). We believe Cicourel's perspective can be productively applied to the study of various sites across different regional and national contexts in order to trace trans-local processes of circulation of linguistic and cultural resources across boundaries of nation-states located

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at specific economic and historical junctures and the social inequalities that result from them.

Dorothy Smith's (2005) approach to institutional ethnography is also relevant to our endeavour. Smiths assumes that the local is "an unfinished arena of discovery" (2005: 39), and thus, foregrounds the trans-locality of institutions, which are viewed as intersections or interconnections of different complexes of social relations. Smith's goal is to go beyond what is directly 'observable' in bounded institutional spaces and in the situated experiences of social actors to explicate the articulation of local with trans-local relations and into patterns of social organisation. Given the interconnectedness of contemporary societies, those patterns of social organisation are, increasingly, heterogenous and multilingual.

In addition, our perspective on institutional discourse is grounded on a particular understanding of the very concept of 'institution'. Following Berger & Luckmann (1991), we believe that institutions are products (linguistic, cultural, economic, socio-political and moral) which result of their own trajectories in time and space. Therefore, they cannot be apprehended without a clear understanding of (a) their own genealogy (Heller, 2007) and historicity; and (b) their situatedness in particular socio-political, economic, ideological and cultural regimes. It is our claim that language plays a key role in the 'production' of institutions. In this regard, we align ourselves with socio-constructivist stances which view institutions as being made up of shared habitual practices (Roberts, 2009: 181), that is, stable and enduring features of talk and text assembled through particular activities in social settings. Language and interactional practice construct, or put in other words, they 'do' the institution in dynamic and complex ways (Sarangi & Slembrouck, 1996).

In this volume, however, we go beyond the mere analysis of social actors' production of the institutional frame; we pay attention to the processes whereby those routinized institutional practices (language being partly constitutive of them) get set up, and by tracing the way they are linked across time and space (Giddens, 1984), we observe their long-term, social structuration effects. One way in which linkages can be traced is through the examination of the production, distribution and circulation of resources within and between institutional spaces. The notion of resources is central to our understanding of the structuration work that gets done in and across institutional

spaces. By focusing on resources -understood in a broad sense as material, symbolic, linguistic-semiotic and identity resources- we view institutions as spaces of regimentation, hierarchisation and inequality. Institutions regulate what resources are considered legitimate, but also who can mobilise them and under what circumstances. In multilingual institutional contexts, a great deal of that regulatory work is focused on language as the basis on which processes of social categorisation, and therefore of social inclusion and exclusion, are effected (Heller, 2001).

Because of the key role we accord to language in the study of institutional spaces, we find Monica Heller's notion of institutions as discursive spaces (2007a) particularly illuminating. For her, institutions are spaces where actors engage in a great deal of discursive and ideological production to legitimise the sheer existence of the organisation, its mission and social goals, as well as the identities, and social and moral categories that are constructed and emerge out of institutional processes. In our approach, we place discourse at the centre of our analysis of institutions because we believe discourse to be both at the core of the work that gets produced in institutional contexts, and of the work institutions do to sustain and reproduce themselves.

As is well-known, discursive production tends to be particularly abundant under shifting conditions, such as the multiple transformations that late modern societies are going through. One of the key processes involved in the redefinition of the social function of institutions is the practical and ideological destabilisation of the nation-state (Appadurai, 1996). This process has different facets and institutional consequences. The first one is associated with the challenges to the linguistic and cultural hegemony of the nation-state. Traditionally, the mission of institutions, especially those of the nation-state, has been the production of citizens and the creation of homogeneous social bodies. This is carried out through specific regimes of citizenship centred on the ideological regulation of attitude and practice. Language features prominently among the elements defining citizenship, and is thus, subject to strict institutional regimentation. As Watts (2010) argues, institutions are gatekeepers of the social marketplace, objectifying forms of cultural (and other types of) knowledge which they constitute as adequate and legitimate.

Today, however, the state has lost political sovereignty and economic legitimacy to control the cultural and linguistic resources by which the public space has been

historically constructed in each national context on the basis of a supposedly shared common culture (of which language is seen as a key component). The challenges to the state's political supremacy come from sources of power that are spread over different networks and which result in the constitution of political entities of shared sovereignty (Castells, 2000). This is, for example, the case of a number of international organizations, which have recently passed legislation promoting and legitimizing multilingualism. The very existence of this legislation raises questions about the current validity of states' (constructed) internal monolingualisms. As a consequence, the ability of public institutions to implement the state's nationalizing agendas and policies in connection with language is now weaker than in the past (see Heller, 2011). In recent years, the management of multilingualism has entered the political agenda even in countries that have traditionally ignored the realities of minority groups and linguistic diversity (Codó, Patiño-Santos & Unamuno, 2012).

The changing function of the nation-state and of its institutional apparatus is indexed by the multiple forms of identity-building practices that individuals currently engage in. Multilingual language practices play a relevant role in this ideological reshaping, since the increasing mobility of people makes the ethno-national imagination of homogeneous linguistic communities hard to maintain (Blommaert, 2013). Today, mobility does not require (practically and/or symbolically) a total disconnection from the community of origin, giving rise to profoundly transnational experiences and identities (Appadurai, 1996). Transnational citizens do not only move physically back and forth, but, affectively as well as ideologically, politically and linguistically, they orient to here-and-there (Vertovec, 2009), that is simultaneously to two (or more) different localities, whose practices and indexicalities they reconstitute and change. Processes of identity-building from the bottom-up seem to be breaking away from the state institutions from which they originate, as is the case of the 'cultural communes' based on local community or religious identities, or of new forms of nationalism which are not necessarily oriented to the conformation or consolidation of a sovereign state but to the networking of power-sharing institutions (Castells, 2004).

In contrast to the modern ideological imagination of the "legitimate members" of linguistic communities (i.e. native speakers), people's mobilization of their linguistic resources in contexts traversed by superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007) show how marginal

practices linked to the idea of language as a bounded system tied to a given territory are. The same could be said of the discursive construction of bilingualism as a conflation of two separate monolingualisms (Heller, 2002, 2003, 2007b). Instead, crossing practices in which languages, repertoires and styles are mobilized in unexpected and unbounded ways occupy a central position in people's everyday lives (Pujolar, Fernández & Subirana [2011] use the term new speakers to refer to individuals using languages acquired later in life). This new scenario makes language standardization more and more difficult to be enforced (see Garcia, 2007; Jacquement, 2005; Jørgensen, 2008; Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010, for examples of new sociolinguistic terms, like transidiomaticity, polylingualism, translanguaging and metrolingualism, which are being currently proposed to describe contemporary linguistic practices placed aside the modern ideological framework of the nation-state).

As mentioned above, nation-states are not only destabilized ideologically and linguistically, but also economically and politically. Post-industrial / post-Fordist capitalism has given rise to new organizational structures articulated around the principles of networking and flexibility (Castells, 2000) to pursue the neoliberal logic of enhancing profit-making and minimising costs. This results in the introduction of the logic of accountability in institutional processes and in new articulations between the state and civil society institutions.

This special issue advocates a sociolinguistic analysis of multilingualism in institutional spaces which adopts a trans-national and a historicizing perspective. Grounded on ethnographic methods of data collection and analysis, it seeks to explore meaning-making, interactional participation and social categorization in relation to local-regional-national-international processes of social change tied to the emergence of the new globalized economy. It examines how institutions, as highly ideologicised spaces, internalise and/or adjust to wider socio-economic and cultural changes. It is claimed that all those transformations can only be understood by reference to the specific trajectories of individual institutions (e.g. specific educational establishments) as well as by following the history of certain institutional regimes (i.e. education or the public health care system) in specific national-regional-local contexts.

Due attention is paid to the institutional 'logic' of specific institutional spaces. By definition, institutions are places of selection, and thus, hierarchisation and

exclusion. Relationships of power, regulation and control are formalised in and through institutional spaces, and they are imbued with continuity, expectability and durability. It may thus seem that transformations run counter to the institutional logic. By contrast, here it is claimed that transformations occur and have to be understood within a specific institutional logic or institutional order, which like Foucault's order of discourse, is the framework where subjectivities, rationalities, practices and agencies are situated and can be transformed (Sarangi and Roberts, 1999).

The papers in this volume focus on different institutional processes in relation to different multilingual regional, national and inter-national contexts. They show how traditional nation-state institutional bastions (e.g. the school, the judicial system, universities and training colleges) and non- or para-state institutional actors (i.e. non-governmental organisations) alike have to manage the multiple tensions stemming from the particular historical juncture in which they find themselves, and the reconfiguration of the relationship between the state and other social actors. In the first article, Eva Codó and Maria Rosa Garridoexamine the case of a migrant-support non-governmental organization located in the Barcelona metropolitan area (Spain) and explore the ways in which this institution imagines processes of migrant incorporation Their paper historicises a discursive shift from "integration-through-labour" during the Spanish economic boom to an official "integration-through-language" to gain access to paid employment in the early years of the recession, and recently, with the worsening of the crisis, a paradigm that focuses on language-cum-affective labour to craft relational and moral selves through voluntary work in local NGOs. It also examines how these discursive and practical shifts index the reconfiguration of relations between the state and civil society organizations in an increasingly diversified and multilingual urban context.

The second article, by Virginia Unamuno, analyses the management of multilingualism in a teacher education programme for members of the mocovi, qom and wichi communities in Chaco (Argentina) where tensions connected to the revaluation of linguistic capitals are salient. This paper shows how linguistic ideologies, which are manifested in the resistance of certain actors to the new sociolinguistic and institutional order, are connected to political, social, cultural and economic transformations in Argentina.

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Thirdly, Philipp Sebastian Angermeyer explores the regulation of multilingualism in New York small claims courts, where immigrant court users, but also arbitrators and interpreters show a range of multilingual practices that do not always conform to institutional (state) norms. He focuses on the cases where Spanish is employed and on the ways in which institutional representatives negotiate the conflict between the need for administrative expediency and the ideological loading of non-English practices in the context of charged national discourses over the symbolic value of Spanish in the US.

The fourth article, by Miguel Pérez-Milans and Adriana Patiño-Santos, documents the institutional transformations of language-in-education programmes through the experience of students and teachers at a secondary school in Madrid, in connection with wider socio-economic processes of change in Spain and the European Union. Drawing on a research team's ethnographic revisit, this study reveals a local process of hierarchization of language education programmes (and of its participants), with further implications regarding how individuals collaborated with each other under these institutional conditions.

Finally, Monica Heller offers a commentary on the special issue by framing the contributions in reference to the underlying processes of economic and ideological shift which are shaping the model nation-state under the conditions of the new globalized economy, from the welfare to the neoliberal state, including the resulting tensions and contradictions for the construction and legitimization of multilingualism.

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