Artefactual narratives of multilingual identity: Methodological and ethical considerations in researching children

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Chapter 9

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Introduction

Researching multilingualism and identity in the age of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007) requires new theoretical concepts of language and more appropriate methodological tools (Martin-Jones and Martin, 2017; García et al, 2017). Despite the growing body of research into multilingualism, the one domain that has been ignored until recently is the study of objects or physical artefacts that connect our meaning-making to the symbolism of the material world around us. In research with children, material tools offer interesting avenues for investigating early multilingualism through the creative ways in which children communicate. From an ethical perspective, this methodological approach has the potential to position children as knowledgeable and active agents in the research process, thus respecting their insights into their experience of multilingual living.

This chapter presents a study that included artefacts, that is, physical objects and children's multimodal texts, as data collection tools. This study was a PhD thesis that elicited from the participants, thirteen trilingual children living in Paris, their perceptions of identity in multilingual contexts. The overall methodological approach included children and parent interviews, children's writing, drawings and physical objects. This ensemble aimed to give children multiple modes of exploring their emotional and experiential connections to their languages. In this paper, I focus on the methodological and ethical implications of asking children to choose objects to represent their languages. The inclusion of objects added a material dimension to the study and acknowledged the importance of concrete processes in helping children engage with the research process.

I start by outlining my theoretical framework on the methodological and ethical

implications of integrating an artefactual or material perspective when researching children. This is followed by a description of the research design, which includes: an overview of the complex sociolinguistic context of children's emerging multilingualism; a short description of the data collection and analysis; and a detailed discussion of the procedures. The procedures section highlights two main areas; the ethical issues around access and choice in the research process; and the role of the artefacts in facilitating children's narrative on the complexity and dichotomy of living between fixed monolingual and hybrid multilingual spaces. In the discussion I consider the following points: the benefits of including an artefactual component in prompting and validating children's voices on language and identity; the research design, created and initiated by the researcher, versus the children's agency in the process; and children's appropriation of the research tools to construct their own identity narratives.

Theoretical background: Ethical considerations in researching children in multilingual contexts

In the social study of children over the last few decades new theoretical perspectives have emerged that conceptualise the child as 'strong, competent and active' (Clark, 2004: 143). Children are seen as 'social actors' (Qvortrup et al., 1994: 2) and 'experts in their own lives' (Langsted, 1994: 42). This movement, better known as the 'New Sociology of Childhood' (James and Prout, 1997), emphasises the importance of accessing children's views on different aspects of their lives. It promotes the idea of involving, informing, consulting with and listening to children, in a dialogical process of hearing, interpreting and co-constructing meaning around their lived experiences.

Consequently, research with children necessitates a multifaceted approach, which elicits children's unique ways of communicating and reflects their creativity in conveying meaning. It calls for flexible, participatory and inclusive approaches that address children's 'dialectical relationship with other people' (Greig et al., 2007: 45) and break down 'the generational power barrier between adults and children' (Kuchah and Pinter, 2012: 283). Fernqvist (2010: 1310) suggests that an (inter)active approach, offering 'various forms of

communication – words and pictures – increases children's scope for action, which is an ethical demand crucial from the perspective of the sociology of childhood'. Visual methodologies are becoming more prevalent in researching multilingualism as evidenced by Kalaja and Melo-Pfeifer's (2019) recently edited volume. These authors place visual methodologies at the forefront of the 'visual turn' (Kalaja and Pitkänen-Huhta, 2018) in researching multilingualism as lived experience, thus giving the multilingual voice multiple modes of expression.

Besides the traditional verbal, and more recent visual approach, the material culture of multilingualism (Aronin and Ó Laoire, 2013) offers another possible response to the silencing of children's voices. I included a deliberate focus on the materialities of language, that is, the realm of physical items, embracing everyday objects that we use or produce, in order to elicit children's voices of experiencing multilingualism. Not only do these material tools, or artefacts, contribute to the multiple ways children create meaning but they also connect to their individual biographical trajectories (Blommaert and Backus, 2012) by eliciting biographical narratives (Busch, 2017: 46-59). Aronin and Hornsby (2018: 1) describe material culture as 'dynamic, changeable in space, time, form and value thus linking languages with the physical environment where they are used'. In transnational contexts, objects and their inherent significance in a static pre-defined socio-cultural space are displaced and imbued with the meaning that individuals bestow on them. As products of children's creative performance, these artefacts become children's identity texts (Cummins and Early, 2011), representing powerful research tools. They embody the multilingual experience, afford agency and promote the co-construction of meaning in research with children.

Aims of the study

The main aim of the overall study was to uncover children's attitudes, perceptions and interpretations of an emergent multilingual identity. The impetus for choosing language, literacy and identity as a research focus was to obtain a deeper understanding of how children negotiate an identity position in all their languages. The research questions explored the child's perspectives on

developing a multilingual identity across different educational and linguistic contexts. It included the role of the adults (parents, relatives and educators) as well as siblings and friends in nurturing children's multiple literacies and identities. Even though the children and their parents participated in this study, in this chapter I focus on the children's role in the research process.

This chapter explores, in more depth, the methodological and ethical implications of employing an artefactual perspective when researching children. I will analyse the challenges and benefits of this approach in an attempt to show how objects and the creation of multimodal artefactual texts constitute an appropriate vehicle for eliciting children's complex identity narratives. This material approach advances our understanding of children's experiences of living and learning in multilingual contexts and meets ethical requirements in working with children.

The Research Design

The sociolinguistic context

This study was set in France, which is an officially monolingual context with a highly multilingual population. Despite the status of French as the one and only official language of the country (Article 2 of the Constitution, 1958), France is a multilingual society, as stated by former Minister of Education, Jack Lang in 2001: 'contrary to widespread belief, France is not a monolingual country' (Hélot and Young, 2006: 72). Harding-Esch and Riley (2003) wrote that, with a multitude of regional and immigrant languages in the French territory, over 20% of the population is bilingual. This is corroborated by a number of studies: Cerquiglini (1999) identified 26% of French people as being raised by parents speaking other languages; Akinci (2003) found that 53% of the 12 000 primary school participants in his study in Lyon declared using a language other than French at home and 67 languages were identified in these schools; official birth registrations indicated that 27,2% of children born in France in 2010 had at least one parent of foreign origin (Young, 2014). The latest report on the state of language learning (Manes-Bonnisseau and Taylor, 2018) acknowledged that many children in French classrooms have first languages other than French.

However, no concrete measures were stipulated to support children's heritage languages.

Even though there is consensus in France around the concept of multilingualism, formulated by the Council of Europe as the one-mother-tongue-plus-two-foreign-languages policy, it describes a utilitarian view (Garcia, 2015): it focuses on foreign language education policies, is centred on European standard languages, and disregards, and even marginalises immigrant and regional languages. Also, any initiative to recognise children's languages and value their identity as multilinguals in the classroom has been left on the shelves of academia; for example, The Didenheim Language Awareness Project (Hélot and Young, 2002) or *Comparons nos Langues* (Comparing our Languages) (Auger, 2005). These policies pose an ethical challenge as they exclude the numerous languages spoken in the French territory and render invisible the heritage languages and identities of the school population today. As these multilingual voices are silenced, we fail to give due weight to the knowledge and experience of children developing their identity in contradictory, contested and sometimes conflictual spaces.

The Participants

The children in this study, aged five to sixteen, were all living in the Paris region at the time of the data collection. They were first and foremost 'socialized into multilingualism' (Auleear Owodally, 2014: 17- 40) in a tandem of personal multilingual experiences, in monolingual or bilingual educational, and mostly monolingual political contexts, over time and space. The thirteen children represented nine family units, including four siblings pairs with very similar (Oscar-Maru and Anna-Arra; Kiana and Tara; Edwin and Victor) or differing (Melinda and Lily) linguistic journeys. Figure 1 gives an overview of the children's family language situation at the time of the study. The names of the children are pseudonyms in order to meet ethical standards and ensure anonymity. I decided to give the children names, as opposed to participant numbers, in order to give them an identity, and not reduce them to a mere code.

Figure 1: Children's sociolinguistic background.

Pseudonym	Age at time of interview	Place of Birth	Age of arrival in France	Heritage Language(s)		Main home language (s)	Additional language(s)	Foreign Languages at school
				Father's language	Mother's language			
Anna-Arra Oliver-Maru (Twins)	5:11	England	2.5 years old	French	Korean	English	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
Melinda (Lily's half-sister)	7:6	France	Born in France	English	English	English	Italian German	Not mentioned
Victor (Edwin's brother)*	8:6	England	3 years old	Russian	English German	Russian English	French	Chinese
Tala (Kiana's sister)	10:3	France	Born in France	Farsi		French	English	Not mentioned
Kiana (Tala's sister)	11:11	France	Born in France	Farsi		French	English	Not mentioned
Mathieu	11:8	France	Born in France	French	Spanish	Spanish French	English	German
Taku	11:10	France	Born in France	Japanese		Japanese	English French	Spanish
Edwin (Victor's brother)*	12:2	England	7 years old	Russian	English German	Russian English	French	German Chinese

Anaka	13:11	France	Born in France	Bangla		Bangla English	French	German Italian Arabic Korean
Lily (Melinda's half-sister)	14:6	England	6 years old	German Italian	English	German Italian English	French	Spanish
Keiko	14:6	England	7 years old	French	Japanese	Japanese English	English	Japanese
Thalya	16:6	Sri-Lanka	4 years old	Sinhala		Sinhala	English French	German

*Edwin and Viktor's father was a Russophone Ukrainian, so the children identified as Russian-speakers with very little knowledge of Ukrainian.

All of the children had had access to education in their three languages in different educational spaces from the pre-primary years. At the time of the study, they were learning to read and write their three languages in language-specific educational sites:

The mainstream French school. Regardless of the children's time of arrival in France they were all following the age-appropriate French curriculum.

Community-based heritage language programmes (Korean, German, Russian, Farsi, Spanish, Japanese, Bangla and Sinhala). These languages were crucial for maintaining a linguistic relationship with their families, within and across national borders. However, children's access to heritage language education varied the most and depended on the following factors: finding opportunities for real language use in a minority context; procuring material in the language, which was difficult or non-existent in some cases; and the parents' efforts to find and finance an after-school programme. As parents did not expect any support from the national education system, they proactively sought alternative solutions to maintain the children's languages. These efforts entail time, dedication and financial investment and, therefore often exclude children from low SES

backgrounds. The parents in this study were all educated to at least undergraduate level, held positive attitudes towards multilingualism and had the means to invest in their children's language education.

The out-of-school English literacy course. Children's access to English had been more heterogeneous and can be divided into four, often overlapping, experiences: having English as a heritage language (Victor and Edwin; Melinda and Lily); using English as a chosen family/home language (Oliver-Maru and Anna-Arra, Keiko); learning English as a language of instruction in bilingual French-English schools (Mathieu, Taku, Victor and Edwin, Kiana and Tala); and adopting English as an additional language as part of the family's language policy (Kiana and Tala, Anaka, Thalya).

I discovered these children with the desired language and literacy background in the English after-school programme at the British Council (Ibrahim, 2004) in Paris, where they were all developing English literacy in a two-hour-a-week class and where I was the Head of the Bilingual Section. The children in this programme were primarily English/French bilinguals. However, I had learned from a previous survey on the Bilingual Section (Ibrahim, 2010) that 39% of the children were actually tri/multilingual. This was a practical and opportunistic, as well as purposive choice of participants, yet this choice highlighted ethical implications in terms of who is given a voice in research, that is, children from families who could not afford the private after-school tuition fees at the British Council where I worked were automatically excluded from the study. However, my intention was not to identify social inequalities in multilingual contexts but to focus on children who self-reported as trilingual, were learning to be literate in three languages and seemed comfortable within this complex situation. I wanted to discover how they had successfully developed their trilingualism and what helped them to readily identify with their multiple languages.

Data collection

In order to allow children to engage fully in the research process it was imperative to give them appropriate tools to express themselves. I chose both verbal (interviews and writing) and non-verbal (drawing and objects) tools that

were familiar to the child's world of learning and communication. The study also included a parent survey, which aimed to contextualise sociolinguistic information on the parents' background and elicit their attitudes towards multilingualism and developing literacy in three languages.

All of the children were interviewed at different times over a period of nine months in small age-related groups:

- Mathieu, Taku and Anaka – aged 11-13
- Keiko and Thalya – aged 14-16

 or in sibling pairs:

- Oliver-Maru and Anna-Arra – aged 5
- Lily and Melinda – aged 14 and 7
- Victor and Edwin – aged 11 and 7
- Tala and Kiana – aged 9 and 10

Children's selected objects were discussed at the end of the interview. They were also asked to draw a picture or write a text about their perceptions of their own identity in their three languages.

Data analysis

The present study used primarily a content analysis approach which captured the elements children foregrounded as important in constructing a multilingual identity. The artefacts, grouped into eight categories in Figure 2, evoked the children's cultural origins or geographical placement and captured their representations through multisensory activities (food, weather), socio-cultural experiences (school, playground, canteen) and abstract notions (justice). Some objects were language-defined with inscriptions in a language or several languages or non-language-defined, that is, without inscriptions. The latter was not studied in isolation, but rather 'viewed in their interactions with, and interrelations to the multilingual situation' (Aronin, 2018: 25).

Figure 2: Categories of children's chosen objects/artefacts

Cultural objects	Transport	Food	People	Abstract concepts	Monuments	Multi-Literacy	Places
Spanish bull; Camel and Arab figurine; Japanese fan; Persian carpet; Italian musical box; Flags.	Tokyo metro; Double-decker bus; Lada (a car, first built in Russia in 1970).	French baguette; *Pain au raisin* (a raisin pastry); Italian restaurant; *Ras malai* (an Indian dessert); *Zereshk Polo* (an Iranian dish - barberry rice with chicken); Peanut butter.	Mother; English teacher; American father; Friends; Family.	Justice; *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* *(Liberty, Equality, Fraternity).*	Eiffel Tower; Big Ben; Motherland monument in Kiev.	Books; Newspapers; Tablets; Workbooks; DVDs/film; Internet.	Scotland; Ukrainian landscape; Brasserie; WHSmith. (British retailer selling books, news, stationary and convenience items).

Analysis of the choice of, and narrative around the artefacts revealed the contradictions and conflicts that children constantly experienced as they negotiated an identity between 'polarized perspectives' (Ibrahim, 2016: 78-79): fixed (essentialist, national, unique and narrow) and hybrid (multilingual, multilayered, overlapping and complex) positions. Subsequently, I classified the meanings children afforded their artefacts into these two overarching categories to show this constant pull between opposing ways of life.

Procedures

Searching for the children's voices

In this section I present my reflections, from an ethical perspective, on the research process, including selecting, accessing and obtaining consent from multilingual children. I also analyse a limited selection of children's objects and artefactual narratives as they 'illustrate the dynamic, active, negotiated process of generating data with young children' (Crump and Phipps, 2013: 142).

Ethical considerations in the research process

Despite attempts to include the child in every step of the process, the study was heavily biased towards the adult (parent and researcher) in the initial stages. As the children, all under-18, were selected from an out-of-school programme and were in different classes on different days, the logistics of the research project, namely, participation and gaining consent, interview times and dates, were negotiated by email with the parents. Hence, in the process of identifying potential participants, I was confronted with three ethical dilemmas: 1) how to access the children; 2) how to obtain their consent; 3) how to elicit narratives on the abstract concepts of multilingualism and identity.

Selecting multilingual children and negotiating access

In order to identify the trilingual/triliterate children, I analysed the results of a First Day Questionnaire, which we administered in class on the first day of the course. This questionnaire aimed to establish children's linguistic profile, by asking them about other languages they spoke, how and where the children learned these languages, who they spoke the languages with, literacy in the three languages, and their attitudes towards multilingualism. As this questionnaire was completed by the children, it was an opportunity to acknowledge and give weight to their self-reporting on knowledge of reading and writing in their three languages and their attitudes to being trilingual. I identified an initial 29 children, representing 26 families. After liaising with the parents by email for

further details and to negotiate their availability or willingness to participate, I ended up with 13 child participants, aged five to sixteen.

Asking for and giving consent

Accessing the children had to happen via the parents, but giving consent could not exclude the children's voice. I created separate participant information sheets and consent forms for the parents and the children. The information was similar on both documents, that is, participants were reassured of their physical and emotional well-being and were guaranteed confidentiality throughout the process; they were given the choice to withdraw at any time; and I listed the different data collection tools. However, the children's document differed from the adult's form as I tried to adapt both the language and the format. I went even a step further and decided to cater for the age differences in my child participants. I produced two age-specific consent forms for the children (ages 5-8 and 9-16), which varied in language, conceptual difficulty and format. For example, instead of boxes, I added smiley faces (Figure 3), a recognisable visual method, for children aged five to eight to express their agreement to participate in the different data collection procedures. In retrospect, I question the validity and appropriateness of smiley faces as they evoke feelings (*happiness, sadness*) or *likes* and *dislikes*, and are not necessarily indicative of informed decision-making.

Figure 3: Extract of Anna-Arra's completed Consent Form (age 5-8)

My intention was to make the study more accessible to the younger children with limited literacy and render procedures more child-friendly. I wanted to acknowledge the way children interact and make sense of the written word and to give the children a sense of ownership. Inevitably, the language was still too difficult for the younger children and required the support of the parent, which I had anticipated: the parents were asked to read the participation information with the children and decide together. Not only did the form give the parents simpler language to explain the research project to the children, but it created a dialogue about the research process, which started with the parent in the home and continued with the researcher in an attempt to co-construct meaning about identity.

The first completed child consent forms I received were from the twins, who had signed them in their three languages, including the Korean script, a first example of the children making visible their multilingual identity (Ibrahim, 2014). As consent was negotiated at home with the parents, and the initial research information was filtered by the parent, it is difficult to confirm whether this was a spontaneous response from the children or a suggestion or even instruction from the parents. This poses the ethical question of the child's agency versus the role of the parent and home influence in the initial decision to participate. However, as children could not participate without explicit parental consent, I chose not to question this so as not to undermine the children's potential role in the decision-making process. Despite this uncertainty, there was evidence of consent from the child at some level as all of the children's consent forms were returned and signed by them and they engaged actively in the different processes they encountered in the study. I also believe that the parents' likely influence was counteracted by the child-focused tools employed in the study, which I describe below.

The interview: listening to children's voices

The interviews took place at the English school or in the home, depending on which location suited the parents best, as they had to accompany the younger children. They were conducted in groups, with peers, classmates or siblings, in

familiar surroundings, which created a natural and reassuring environment and encouraged the children to communicate openly.

The interviews were recorded and consisted of three main parts. Firstly, I thanked the children for their participation and reiterated the objective of the study. I informed them I was going to ask them questions about learning their languages, how they felt about speaking, reading and writing multiple languages and their identity. I started the interview with a topic the children could grasp immediately and would feel confident discussing: *Which languages do you know and how did you learn them?* This served as a springboard for questions on identity. I nuanced the concept of identity with the younger children by asking them how speaking, reading and writing these languages made them feel about who they were. If I felt children were struggling with a question or concept I would rephrase or move on to another topic to avoid any kind of pressure.

Even though the children were given the choice of expressing themselves in French or in English, or both, all of the children automatically used English in the interview. I believe this is because they associated the research site and the researcher, whom the children knew as the Head of the School, with the English language. These factors established English as the language of the research and children remained in English-mode throughout the study. This could be viewed as an ethical issue as children were not necessarily using their perceived strongest language. However, as a result of their educational access to English they all had excellent skills in English to be able to communicate easily.

Although the choice of English denies the idea of eliciting children's multilingual voices, there was evidence of translingual practices during the interview and in children's multimodal texts. For example, Tala's drawing representing Farsi (Figure 4) included a combination of verbal explanation, drawing, writing and symbols. She drew a Persian carpet and an Iranian chicken dish, barberry rice with chicken. She included the name of the dish in Farsi, written in the Arabic script and transcribed into Latin [*zereshk polo*]*,* within square brackets, for the benefit of the researcher and/or the non-Iranian context of France and the English context of the interview. Her oral narrative included her three languages:

the name of the dish in Farsi, and code-switching between English and French as she searched for the correct word in English for saffron: *Zereshk Polo … it's rice with little red things with … how do you say <safran>? (French pronunciation).*

Figure 4: Tala's drawing representing Farsi
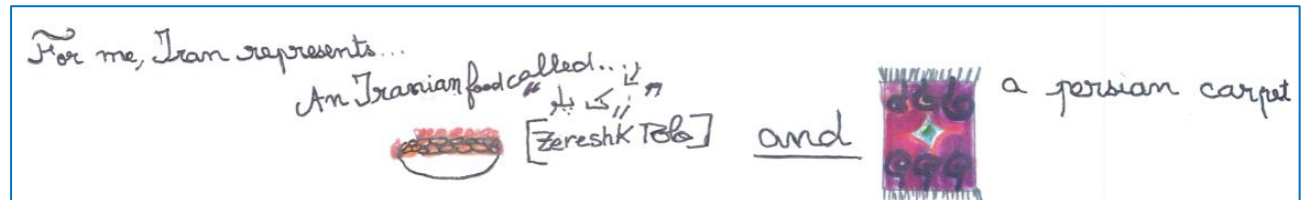
Hence, when code-switching involved the heritage language, the children decided to explain or translate for the sake of the researcher, attesting to children's metalinguistic awareness and expert management of their multilingual resources. In this artefactual space, the children controlled the narrative: they displaced the perceived hegemony of English, switched to multilingual mode and consolidated their linguistic resources to reflect their multilingual identity.

Artefacts, objects and multimodal texts: negotiating identity in fixed and hybrid spaces

When inviting the children to the interview, the parents were reminded to ask the children to choose and bring objects that represented each language. At the end of the interview, the children brought out their objects and were asked to say why they chose those objects and in what way they represented their languages. Seven children brought objects and the other six were encouraged to, or offered to describe them orally and/or made drawings of their objects instead. As the objects were chosen at home it is most likely that some parents helped the children in making their choices. For example, Victor and Edwin mentioned that their mother chose the objects that represented English (books) and Russian (Figure 5): a grey *Lada* and three T-shirts with inscriptions (an image of a Russian cartoon character, *<Cheburashka>;* a well-known personality, Gagarin, written in Latin script; an inscription in Ukrainian in Cyrillic script). Edwin probably found it difficult to find an object as he stated: *I don't really have objects*

that represents…, without terminating the sentence. Despite the parents' potential involvement, the children connected to the objects at a personal level through the narrative around the artefact, as Edwin explains later: *Yeah, but they kinda do associate…*and then the boys proceeded to describe their connection to their language through the objects. For instance, the grey *Lada*, evoked visits to Ukraine and his relationship with his grandfather.

Figure 5: Victor and Edwin's objects representing Russian

The object offered the children an alternative means to express their identity. It was when the children explored their reasons for choosing a particular object to represent each language that intricate identity narratives were generated. For example, Mathieu chose a camel and an Arab figurine (Figure 6), signifiers of the Middle East, to represent English.

> Mathieu: *The Arab because … in Dubai … in the street there are only men dressed like that … and the camel … because when I went in the desert there were camels.*

> Researcher: *So, your link to English is the place … seeing that you brought the camel and the Arab … so your link to English is when you picked up English in Dubai, that's important to you.*

This choice was both surprising and disconcerting and required my deductive skills to understand the connection. Even though Mathieu never mentioned English in his explanation above, he had described his experience in Dubai at the beginning of the interview when he introduced his connection with English: *I learnt English when I went to Dubai from 3 years to 5 years and there I learnt to speak English.* The camel and the Arab figurine were not only symbols of English, but became a sign of his multi-layered and subjective experience of language: he described his link to English through a spatio-temporal journey that started in the Middle East and culminated in his English classes in Paris. When I asked if he felt he had an English identity, Mathieu replied empathically: *I do, because I lived a part of my life in an English country [...] I went to an English school in Dubai and my best friend is still English ... he's like me ... French, English and Spanish.*

Figure 6: Arab figurine and camel – Mathieu's objects representing English

The pictorial representations of the children's objects were multimodal: they included drawings, written words, different scripts and languages as well as symbols (Ibrahim, 2016). My initial intention was to give the younger children

the option of drawing, as they obviously could not engage in writing texts. I expected the younger children to draw and I had asked the teenagers to write. However, as from the age of seven the children chose to mix writing and drawing, and in this way, they created their personal multimodal identity texts. These artefactual texts reflected children's agency and creativity in expressing themselves, as these were spontaneously produced. Away from the immediacy of the interview, where children felt obliged to respond promptly and constantly interact with the researcher, the writing and drawing gave children the space to reflect on their representations of language and identity. From an ethical perspective, these introspective tools allowed children to choose and focus on aspects of their multilingualism and its impact on identity that were not dependent on the researcher's probing questions, thus allowing them to explore and express their own voice.

This voice reflected a constant pull between belonging and non-belonging as is evident from Kiana's two drawings. In Figure 7, Kiana depicted a positive life-long relationship with her languages (the girl is smiling) and included an expanded multilingual repertoire. Figure 8 denotes hesitation and uncertainty (the girl is frowning), as she doubted or questioned who she was.

Figure 7: Kiana's drawing of her future multilingual repertoire

Figure 8: Kiana's drawing of her questioning her identity

The artefactual space afforded children creative ways to present the quest for coherence and synergy, which is epitomised in Melinda's drawing (Figure 9). Melinda had created an imaginary world, called Melinda World, which was mediated by 'Melinda language', an invented language with sounds, a visual written form and translated for the sake of the uninitiated. All of Melinda's experiences and identities existed simultaneously in Melinda World, where she took refuge from the contradictions of her multilingual life and where she could be and experience her fragmented self fully. In this 'third space' she could safely be her multifaceted self and she could '*keep them all',* all her languages and identities. Melinda World/Language did not surface in the interview, so the artefactual component in this study offered her a space to foreground her hybrid living. Her artefact gave shape to her imaginary world and became a potent visible metaphor for her multilingual reality.

Figure 9: Melinda's drawing of Melinda Language.
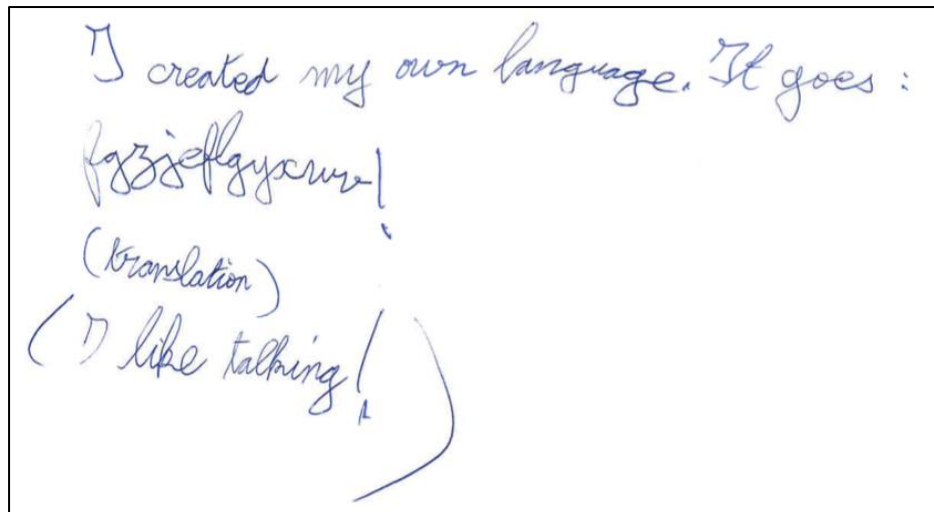
Inviting children to comment on the research process

Flexibility in the interview process, acknowledging a genuine interest in children's expert insights and accepting children's different ways of presenting their objects was key to the success of the project and placed me in the 'humble researcher position' (Crump and Phipps, 2013: 132). Children were active meaning-makers during the interview and asked for clarification which prompted me to repeat or rephrase my questions, especially those related to identity. For example, Victor checked his understanding with the following question: *Do you mean like ... when I think about English, what do I see in my head?*

At the end of the interview I asked the children if they had any further comments or questions. This was another opportunity to give children a more active role in the research process, to encourage them to reflect on the themes generated by the different tools, to engage with the researcher at an equal level and hand over the questioning to them. Keiko identified commonalities between her narrative and Thalya's, her co-interviewee, and expressed surprise at the similarities in their multilingual experiences. The research process itself offered her a space for discovering their shared multilingual identity experiences:

> Keiko: *When I was thinking about the interview I thought ... I'm sure there would be different opinions ... but there is so much in common ... it's really surprising.*

Edwin asked me three questions about my reasons for interviewing the brothers: *Are you going to write an article about this? What about? Are you bilingual?* He expressed his curiosity about the process and forced me to reveal my own multilingualism, making me very much aware of my role as a multilingual researcher. Eventually, he stated: *So, you kinda know what it feels like,* making analogies and connecting his experience to that of the researcher and drawing me into the contested lives of multilinguals.

Discussion: expanding children's multilingual voice

This study placed on centre stage the children, the experts in their lives and validated their perceptions and opinions of multilingualism and identity. Despite a pre-determined research framework, and the parents' roles as gatekeepers, concrete measures were taken for children to take on a more active and informed role (Kuchah and Pinter, Introduction) and make children's multilingual voices heard. From a methodological and ethical perspective, this study gave children a voice by a) acknowledging them as creative storytellers; b) expanding children's discursive repertoires c) via the symbolic space of artefacts (objects and multimodal texts) d) and positioning children as agentive meaning-makers.

Acknowledging children's creative storytelling

To ensure good ethical practice it is important to position children as exercising agency in the research process. This does not negate the role of the adult in a particular research context or in the wider development of children's multilingualism. However, when adjustments are made to acknowledge and enhance the ways children make meaning, the conversation is enriched and deeper knowledge is gained. In this study I made a conscious effort to adapt question formats, introduced multiple multimodal data collection tools and ensured flexible interview processes. The children engaged with and appropriated the tools at their disposal: they may not have chosen or brought the objects, but they created their own; their narrative dislocated these objects from their cultural and political positionings, thus constructing a more personalised story of a lived multilingual identity.

Expanding children's discursive repertoires

The artefactual component of this study, in its physical and pictorial form, created 'new opportunities for story telling' (Fernqvist, 2010: 1310). It expanded the children's repertoire of discursive possibilities and offered them an alternative, concrete and agentive tool for exploring their multilingual identity. Objects offered the children a symbolic space for deconstructing monolithic and fixed representations of language and reconstructing a complex, dynamic and multifaceted multilingual identity. Children used the objects and texts to create links to past memories (Mathieu's English experience in Dubai), present emotions (Kiana's doubts about her identity) and built bridges to an imagined (Norton, 2013) multilingual future (Kiana's expanding language repertoire). Even though this was not a longitudinal study, the children's artefactual narratives embodied the linguistic history of the child in the space of the research study. It respected the 'being' of childhood (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998) as it captured the 'presence' of children's multilingual and transnational living.

The symbolic space of artefacts

Artefacts are not value-free. They already possess a political and cultural narrative with a narrow symbolism and limited interpretative possibilities. For example, most objects were stereotypical representations of a national identity (Fig. 2). Some generated very little in terms of a personal identity narrative, for example, the Spanish bull or the Japanese fan. Other objects gained meaning beyond their narrow, predicable associations in the experiential and narrative space provided in the research process. Taking into account the prompt to bring objects that represent children's three language, it is important to consider the dilemma of interpretation, that is, allowing the object to speak for itself versus eliciting an oral or written explanation or interpretation of the children's choice. In anticipation of this ethical dilemma, I provided a narrative space around the object, which gave children the means to deconstruct the surface-level stereotypes of an object and create a complex story of belonging. These multimodal narratives subverted the conventional symbolism of belonging,

destablised the status quo and empowered children to tell their multilingual identity stories through *their* choices and voices. Ultimately, these symbolic artefacts offered the children additional material tools to negotiate a place in multilingual contexts and provided a lens through which the researcher viewed their world.

Children as agentive meaning-makers

This approach also gave the child the power to mean as opposed to relying on the researcher's bias in relation to the objects and her interpretation of the children's drawings. When we listen carefully to children's narratives, the way multilingual children reclaimed these artefacts reconceptualised children as social actors in their own right. This expanded repertoire included cross-linguistic and transnational representations and created a rich mosaic of narrative possibilities in a fluid and integrated manner. For example, the narrative around Tara's drawing of the Persian carpet, a stereotypical image of Iran, is more revealing of her experience of her mother's Parisian flat and her relationship with her mother than of the established symbolism of Iran: *Yeah … because Iran is … in my mum's house there is just carpets ….* When the children took hold of the research tools, they were able to control the narrative and express their constructions of language and identity.

These unique perspectives help the adult gain new insights, and even challenge the researcher/practitioner's own beliefs and practices. Giving the children a voice in this study broadened the perspective of the researcher: it made me listen more attentively, provided me with a plethora of personal narratives on the complexity of multilingual living and moved the research agenda from an exclusively adult enterprise to a rich and complex personal story.

Conclusion

Our understanding of the multilingual child is enriched when the voice of the child is respected, valued and heard. Hence, we need processes and tools that centre-stage the child's perspective. Children in this study combined verbal, visual and concrete tools to express powerful and imaginative ideas. They were

thus conceived as skilful users of linguistic-semiotic resources which are embedded in the world of the child. This approach acknowledged children's right to be heard (UNCRC, 1989), gave them the means to speak for themselves and thus established the children as active subjects and not passive objects in the research process (Christensen and James, 2008: 1). The result was a rich conversation about growing up multilingual.

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