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Multilingual Practices in Identity Construction: Virtual Communities of Immigrants to Quebec

Abstract

For people living the dramatic biographic change of a migration process, online communities turn out to be very important as they can meet other migrants online and exchange their experiences. Within these Communities of Practice (Wenger 1998, henceforth CoP), individuals not only share practices – in our case, the practice of becoming and being a migrant, of doing migration – but at the same time they share opinions and orientations, their social, cultural and/or linguistic features, values and experiences. In doing this, they jointly (re)construct new migrant identities and become part of a community in which the practices of migration are the main focus of communication.

This is also the case in virtual communities of immigrants to Quebec. Our corpus consists of (mainly) francophone and hispanophone weblogs. In this article, we consider identity as fragmented and multifold, dynamic and actively negotiated by means of communicative practices. The focus of the current article is placed on different multilingual practices, including the use of different varieties of one language. By making use of all the linguistic resources available to them and which they feel to be able to claim as their 'own', members of the different CoP index to each other their feeling of having multiple identities.

Keywords: blogging, communities of practice, identity, language, migration, Quebec.

Introduction

Following the tradition of cultural and social theory of identity, we consider identity as fragmented and multifold, dynamic and actively negotiated between inter-actors by means of communicative practices. This also becomes obvious in the online contributions to different Communities of Practice (Wenger 1998) in which members join to help each other in the process of migration. In this analysis, we focus on multilingual practices within the context of transnational migration, since actors recur to all the linguistic resources open to them, both of their original language variety as well as to those spoken in the target region, Quebec.

After shortly explaining our concept of identity construction, we consider the important role played by the joint construction of new identities. We illustrate our ideas by using examples taken from a corpus of (mainly) francophone and hispanophone blogs published on the Internet. Migrants and potential migrants join public groups that focus on the migration to Quebec and try to help their members to get a permanent residence permit in this Canadian, predominantly French-speaking province.

1.1 Social Construction of Identities and Communication

This corpus analysis forms part of a broader research project that deals with the impact of communication in social media on the identity construction of migrants – coming from hispanophone and francophone countries – to Quebec. [1]

As many studies in the context of social and cultural theory have shown, social identities can no longer be conceptualized as given and static, homogeneous and stable entities. With Ivanič and many others, [2] we consider identity as dynamic, multi-faceted and fragmented.

The plural word 'identities' [...] captures the idea of people identifying simultaneously with a variety of social groups. One or more of these identities may be foregrounded at different times; they are sometimes contradictory, sometimes interrelated: people's diverse identities constitute the richness and the dilemmas of their sense of self. (Ivanic 1998, 10f.)

The different aspects of identity (age, gender, profession, membership in particular ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic groups, etc.) interact in different ways in the different parts of our social lives. Individuals are thus constantly constructing and reconstructing their identities, performing a lifelong construction process.

Cultural and social theories of identity have in common that they assume both individual and collective identities to be multiple rather than single, to be dynamic

rather than static and to be volatile rather than consistent. In addition, they propose that identity is something that we do, rather than something that we are. (van Zoonen 44)

'Doing identity' almost invariably involves communicating with other people, as stressed by Habermas in his important work on identity construction. He emphasizes the importance of the other for the development of a concept of oneself:

Die reflexive Lebenserfahrung, die die Kontinuität der Lebensgeschichte durch ein kumulatives Sich-selber-Verstehen als eine Staffel autobiographischer Deutungen herstellt, muß sich immer schon im Medium der Verständigung mit anderen Subjekten bewegen. Mich selbst verstehe ich allein in jener ‚Sphäre von Gemeinsamkeit‘, in der ich gleichzeitig den Anderen in dessen Objektivationen verstehe; denn unser beider Lebensäußerungen artikulieren sich in derselben, für uns intersubjektiv verbindlichen Sprache. (Habermas 197) [3]

Similarly, Goffman (1959) defines social interaction as the interactive performance of identity. In this view, identity construction is above all the negotiation of roles and images in the context of different domains of social practices. Depending on the perspective of observation, identity and the public image of the same person might differ, although in most instances individuals seek to present themselves in a way they perceive as 'authentic'. [4]

This aspect of interactive performance will become particularly important in our analyses of online identities. For in social media interaction, the display of identity is certainly a primordial motivation for the different activities carried out in the CoP (cf. Locher / Watts 2005, Bedijs / Held / Maaß 2014).

1.2 Participation in Migrants' Web 2.0 Communities of Practice

In virtual communicative networks, people meet and communicate without sharing the same place. For people living the dramatic biographic change of a migration process, these features of online communities turn out to be very precious, as they can meet other migrants online and exchange their experiences, often in the form of narratives. Within these Communities of Practice (Wenger 1998, henceforth CoP), individuals not only share practices – in our case, the practice of becoming and being a migrant, of doing migration – but at the same time they share opinions and orientations, their social, cultural and/or linguistic features, values and experiences. In doing this, they jointly (re)construct new migrant identities and become part of a community in which the practices of migration are the main focus of communication.

According to Schmidt (2006), interactants in weblogs base their social relationship within the virtual network upon three forms of participation: the expression of feelings of belonging to the

community, the information flow between the participants, and the social support they give to each other. [5] We have shown elsewhere (Frank-Job / Kluge 2012; Kluge 2011, 2013, 2014a, b) that this is true as well for the weblogs centered on migration to Quebec: the online communities of migrants that we studied in this project share information about all kinds of technical and organizational aspects of their project, and they help each other to successfully accomplish the different steps that need to be taken during the migration process.

But perhaps the most important reason for migrants to participate in the CoP is that they can construct a new identity as migrants by communicating with other migrants and prospective migrants. In some cases, this occurs even in a proactive manner, before the migration itself. Blogging or participating in online groups is in itself a self-presenting practice. In going online with the migration topic, people define themselves overtly as migrants and show their disposition to discuss topics related to the migration process. The collective identity of the CoP emerges by sharing the same experiences and telling each other about the emotions that go along with these experiences. Thus, the strangers who meet on the Internet do not feel like strangers anymore and become community members in communicating about the same life experiences.

2. Multilingual Constructions of Identity

Within the process of identity construction in CoPs of migrants, language and language use play an important role. In online communities, the semiotic resources of multimodal, embodied face-to-face communication are reduced to the very symbolic virtual space of the computer screen. The semiotic fields that are normally used for face-to-face interaction – e.g., shared situation, the intimacy of direct view and physical contact – are not available in this case. Thus, the communicated message itself comes to the fore with its own features, graphic as well as special iconic features of written language that deliberately deviate from standard orthography, together with all kinds of additional symbols, photos, and videos, etc.

Among all these communicative resources, the different languages available to the community play an eminent role in this process of identity negotiation. Linguistic belonging constitutes one of the most salient properties of identity (Le Page / Tabouret-Keller 1985). This is even more the case for the migrants who are going to leave their original linguistic community in favor of a new one. In this “problematic situation,” migrants become highly aware of the linguistic features both of their native as well as the new language or variety. In making explicit some of the most salient features of the languages, migrants make use of all iconic and graphic resources accessible to them in order to

render linguistic characteristics of pronunciation or other symbols of linguistic belonging. [6] In doing so, they also create new emblems for linguistic belonging.

Like for any person, language and linguistic belonging constitute salient properties for the migrants, be it their native language of origin or Quebec French as their new language of everyday life.

As we will see, in the migrants online communities, there are multiple language constellations that have to be considered. Most migrants will want to accommodate linguistically to their new place of residence in order to fit in. However, the different identities that migrants have are foregrounded in different moments of their migrant lives, leading to different choices according to the situation and the targeted interaction partners, online as well as offline. On the Internet, the language and specific features of the linguistic practices of the communities they want to belong to are therefore used as emblems for the communities. At the same time, some groups of migrants adhere to their original linguistic community. In order to show this aspect of their identity, they use the same technique and make emblematic use of linguistic features of their language(s) of origin.

But the emblematic use of linguistic features constitutes only one of several linguistic and communicative strategies. Very often, migrants demonstrate in their online interactions different kinds of multilingual practices, thereby constituting a new type of community that lives in a cultural and linguistic space between two or more cultures and languages.

3. Strategies of Multilingual Identity Construction

In the second part of our contribution, we study examples of identity strategies of migrants' online communities that deal with several varieties of language or several languages. Our aim is to show how migrants make use of all linguistic resources at their disposal and how this 'being multilingual' is essential for their identity construction as a migrant.

In the act of self-presenting oneself as a (prospective) migrant, language plays an important role:

- First of all, one has to mention the multilingual practice itself that takes place in the online communities' verbal communication;
- Secondly, language is discussed and reflected upon in many contributions, in constructing categorizations around the concept of language, and in evaluating linguistic practices as correct or wrong, as nice or ugly, as likeable or displeasing.
- Thirdly, the aforementioned use of linguistic features as emblems of membership in a particular CoP comes into play.

To be sure, these strategies in themselves are open to all linguistic products on the Internet, and are not necessarily linked to the use of more than one variety by a member of the CoP. The important point here is that by using more than one variety, members are able to express different partial identities.

In the following we will present examples of these uses of multilingual practices for identity purposes. We arrange our examples according to the language of origin of the respective groups of migrants, but all groups make use of the same strategies.

4. Francophone Migrants

At first glance, it would seem that there is an important difference between the linguistic repertoires open to francophone and hispanophone migrants, if talking in terms of languages: hispanophone immigrants will have to adapt to either English or French as an everyday language (but in most cases choose French, the preferred language of the province of Quebec), while francophone immigrants, whether they have access to an additional language or not, will simply go on expressing themselves in French. However, even in the case of francophone immigrants, the situation is more complex if we consider Quebec French as a very distinct variety within the pluricentric language French (see, for example Pöll 2005, 2008). The increasing awareness that more and more sections of the *francophonie* are developing their own norms, and that gradually speakers of varieties outside France are losing the feeling of inferiority to Metropolitan speakers of French (Pöll 2005, 2008, Kircher 2012) is not lost on the francophone immigrants. This situation turns out to be problematic for immigrants, but also offers a promise: the migrants' access to different semiotic resources enables them to choose different varieties to index different identity choices.

Among the francophone migrants to Quebec, we find at least three different groups of immigrants: Metropolitan French migrants (France), francophone migrants originally from a country that has French as an official language (e.g., Belgium, Switzerland) and migrants from former French colonies who speak French or a French-based creole (e.g., Algeria, Morocco, Haiti). [7]

For Metropolitan French migrants to Quebec, the practice of Quebec French and its contrast to their own linguistic behavior provokes a deep reflection on the social effects of language use in interaction.

In this case, the linguistic situation is that of a contrast between two varieties of the same language. Differences can be found at all levels, but are especially obvious in pronunciation and in

idiomatic expressions. For the French immigrants, largely ignorant of the Quebec variety, the linguistic differences between Quebec and Metropolitan French come unexpectedly and are perceived within the context of intercultural discrimination:

- (1) “In fact, visitors to Canada who did not learn Canadian French first, often find that Canadians consider Metropolitan French to be quite pompous.” [8]

Whereas the Metropolitan French way of speaking still remains the preferred variety for formal situations in Quebec, persons speaking Metropolitan French in the context of communicative intimacy are often treated as ‘maudits français’ (the ‘damned French’) in Quebec, since Quebec French is expected in these contexts (Kircher 2012). French migrants have to face this negative attitude towards their way of speaking when they use it in informal situations. In reaction to this, French immigrants usually try to give up their accent as soon as possible and to accommodate their French by including typically Canadian expressions. At the same time, however, the feeling of discrimination leads them to explicitly reflect upon the interdependencies between linguistic practice and social identity.

A good example is the blog ‘Maudit Français. Les aventures d'un immigré français au Québec’ (www.mauditfrancais.com). [9] Already in its very URL designation, the author of the blog shows his awareness of the unpopularity of Metropolitan French in Quebec. The linguistic discrimination and the study of his own linguistic behavior are the main topics on his weblog.

Three years after his immigration to Quebec, the author of this blog analyzes the changes in his own linguistic behavior:

- (2) “Je suis par exemple surpris d'observer des modifications dans les structures de base de mon langage, comme utiliser l'expression ‘par exemple’ à la place de ‘par contre’. Encore plus troublant, j'ai remarqué que depuis quelques temps, j'ai tendance à prononcer ‘toute’ le mot ‘tout’ sans qu'une liaison ou un féminin ne le requière. Il serait néanmoins illusoire de penser que mes québécoismes me permettent de tromper plus de deux nano-secondes un pur laine sur mes origines. Ils sont juste suffisants pour que mes compatriotes se gaussent de l'accent et des expressions étranges que j'ai prises, ou pire, me soupçonnent de les utiliser ostensiblement par pur snobisme.” [10]

Translation: “On the contrary [11] I am surprised to notice changes in the very basic structures of my language, as for example I now use the expression ‘par exemple’ instead of ‘au contraire’. Even more bewildering, I noticed that some time ago I started to pronounce the word ‘tout’ like ‘toute’ when no liaison or female form requires it. Nevertheless, it would be illusory to think that my Quebecisms would allow me to mislead an authentic Quebecois for more than two nano-seconds about my origins. They are just sufficient to make my fellow countrymen make fun of my accent and the strange expressions that I have

adopted. Worse, they might make them suspect that I use them out of pure snobbism.”

In his reflection of his own phonetic and semantic accommodation (e.g., pronunciation of final consonants; use of *par exemple* in its Canadian acceptation) he reflects on his ongoing shift to a Quebecois identity. But at the same time, he notices that his way of pronouncing French, for native Quebecois, still remains marked as Metropolitan French, while his former French countrymen would not immediately recognize him as ‘one of their own’. In his reactions – as well as in the reactions of the commentators to his blog, the Community of Practice composed mainly of French living in Quebec – he defines his own identity as that of a former Metropolitan French living now in Quebec, not as a Quebecois. One of his last posts dating from December 2013, more than ten years after his migration to Quebec, comments on a journal article “Guide pour éviter d’être un ‘maudit français’ ” (Guide to Avoid Being a ‘Maudit Français’). This post is headed “Guide pour être un maudit têteux” (Guide to Being a Maudit Bullhead). [12]

In the posts of the blogger ‘Maudit Français’, the Quebecois part of his identity is linguistically indicated with typical Quebec French expressions and a spelling that imitates typical Quebec pronunciation. These salient features of Quebec French are regularly used by migrants to symbolize their acquaintance with the linguistic singularities of Quebec French, and in doing so, to symbolize their (partial) Quebecois identity. We can speak here of an emblematic use of linguistic features (Trudgill 1986) for identity purposes.

Emblematic use of salient features of linguistic varieties can also be found in the blog written by the blogger Cymico in his blog of the same name. Very shortly after the migration of his family from France to Quebec, he begins to use the Quebecois pronunciation “icitte” of the adverb “ici” to show his accommodation to Quebec French. It seems that *icitte* is used more or less consciously as an index (Eckert 2008) for the construction of a new identity as migrant, to show to others that he consciously wants to adapt to his new country and its linguistic customs. In this context, it is interesting that he uses the spelling “icitte” far more often during the first period of time of his immigration to Quebec (the first token of *icitte* is posted 15 days after the family’s arrival in Quebec) than later on. [13]

Another salient feature of Quebec French is the use of the expression *ma blonde* instead of *ma copine* (“my girlfriend”). Nearly all blogs of migrants to Quebec make an emblematic use of this expression. As in the case of *icitte*, the author of the blog “Cymico Overblog” starts to use this expression only a month after his arrival in Quebec:

(3) “elle a son mot à dire ma blonde quand même !!! ” [14]

Translation: “my girl-friend has a say in this as well!!”

Furthermore, emblematic and iconic uses of multilingual practices are not restricted to lexical elements. To express phonetic differences in pronunciation between the variety of origin and Quebec French, many recur to nonstandard orthography. [15] For example, the internet platform *Volcreole.com* unites people originally from the French Antilles. Most of them live in France, but some of them also in the US or in Canada; they meet regularly in the platform’s chat rooms and forums. Their use of icons and emblematic expressions for self presentation and for the negotiation of migrants' identity shows a double orientation of identity: the linguistic and iconic symbols show identity elements from Creole as well as from Quebec and Metropolitan French. See, for example, the first post of a new user, phenix972, who presents himself to the community:

(4)

[phenix972](#)

Enregistrement




Genre: Homme

Inscrit le: 11 Mai 2005

Sujets: 2

Messages: 11

Localisation: Canada

 Espace de présentation: Sujet du message: Je suis de [Madinina](#) et je vis a québec salut a tous Posté le: 11 Mai 2005 02:24

Salut a tous je suis nouveau, je vis au quebec depuis un ans et je voudrais discuter partager mes idees et mes experiences alors n'esitez pas a m'ecrire

In the symbol of his signature, Phenix 972 uses an individual version of the Quebec flag and introduces himself in the topic of his message: "Je suis de Madinina et je vis a quebec salut a tous" ("I come from Martinique and I live in Quebec, hello to all of you"), already mentioning his two ‘places of belonging’ as the most important categories in the context of the internet platform *Volcreole*. [16]

In his initial post, phenix 972 also makes emblematic use of the aforementioned Quebecois expression *ma blonde*: "une blonde comme on dirait ici" (a girlfriend, as one would say over here) explaining this use for those of the readers who not yet immigrated and therefore are not familiar with Quebec French. The last word of his post, “trankil”, is written with "k", an emblematic letter used typically for Creole languages: [17]

- (5) "je me suis intégré tres vite, les gens ont tous été sympatique sans exception. Cela c'est passé tellement vite, je suis ici depuis a peu prés un an et j'ai l'impression d'etre arrivé hier; je me sui fait des amis, une copine (ou une blonde comme on dirait ici) et puis tout ce passe tranquil." [18]

Translation: "I have integrated myself very quickly, people have all been very kind to me without exception. Everything happened so fast, I have been here for about a year and I have the impression that I arrived just yesterday. I have made some friends, I have a girlfriend (*copine*) (or girlfriend (*blonde*) as you would say here), and now everything is rolling smoothly."

In the commentaries to this post, the members of the Creole community play with the different languages and their typical writing conventions: here, the Quebec French variety is phonetically integrated in a typical Creole orthographic system:

- sélu l'kébékoué 🇧🇪
😊
- (6) bienvenue 🙌
- Alors, sa kay'? 🙌

The Quebec French pronunciation is represented by its most salient phonetic feature, the pronunciation of the ending of "Quebecouais" /uɛ/. Creole is represented by its most salient graphical difference compared to French writing, the letter "k" and a nearly 1:1 grapheme-phoneme correspondence writing system: "alors sa kay?" is Creole from the Antilles and means in French "alors ça va?" ("So, are you okay?").

As a first result for the francophone migrants' part of our corpus, we can say that for all migrants to Quebec using blogs or forums, the multilingual practices seem to allow them to represent their multi-faceted identities on their way of migration. Most linguistic features indicate their belonging to the culture of origin, but at the same time, they incorporate linguistically salient elements of the culture they want to adopt by immigration. By means of emblematic use of these features they display their accommodation to new identity aspects.

5. Hispanophone Migrants

Compared with the francophone migrants' situation, the hispanophone migrants to Quebec have to negotiate a more jarring linguistic transition: they need to learn French (and English) to obtain enough points to secure a permanent residence permit in the Canadian immigration system. For the successful ones, their day-to-day life in Quebec – outside the home and meetings with hispanophone friends – will invariably be led in French and English. [19] In their online communication, however, almost all of them express themselves primarily in Spanish, at least in their contributions to the migrant CoPs investigated in this project. In the following, we will trace migrants' multilingual practices according to these three languages (Spanish, French, English, in this order), as they play an important role as emblems used in the construction of a migrant identity and for different aspects of the latter.

In a few cases, some bloggers write a more or less identical blog in French or English that can be accessed via interlinking. The original version, however, seems to be the Spanish blog in each case, as is attested by the richer vocabulary and more detailed description of entries. One blogging couple explicitly acknowledges that the intention of the French blog is to practice the language and to prove to potential employers their proficiency in French. One blogger occasionally uses Guaraní, an indigenous language of Paraguay with official status in the country, thereby enabling herself to express her Paraguayan identity and reaching out to other Paraguayan immigrants. Unlike in the case of the francophone immigrants, who seem to be less united, the Latin American bloggers show a strong degree of linking among each other; many bloggers of our corpus also contribute to other persons' blogs as commentators. On the other hand, there is only a weak link to franco- and anglophone blogs.

The emerging hispanophone blogosphere shows tendencies to organize along national lines, with national and regional identities persisting, for example, in the name of their blogs and forums, e.g. the blog and Facebook group *Venezolanos al Quebec* ("Venezuelans to Quebec"). A very fitting description of the intermingling of both country of origin and adopted country can be found in the blog *Colnada-Canombia*, written by a Colombian couple. This emblematic use of their national identity shows the importance of the national affiliation to the country of origin (in comparison to other blogs without this orientation, e.g. *Mi vida en otro lado* ["My life somewhere else"]).

On the other hand, Latin American immigrants are faced with the superposed categorization as *Latino* by the host society that does not distinguish clearly between immigrants from different Latin American countries. This categorization is taken up and accepted by many immigrants, relating it to the concept of *hermandad latinoamericana* (Latin American brotherhood). Here, the Spanish

language proves to be important as a unifying factor (see Kluge 2014a for a more elaborate discussion of 'becoming a latino').

Concerning intralingual variation in the blogosphere of the *bloggeros latino-canadienses*, members of the different CoP in many cases use their own national variety in a somewhat neutralized way. This is especially true of the lexical choices. People also show an awareness of other readers' varieties and anticipate that communication problems could arise. One common strategy is to explicitly identify a potentially 'problematic' lexical item as part of one's own national or regional variety (e.g., *como decimos en México* "as we use to say in Mexico"). Similar to example (5), where a francophone migrant used a similar expression (*comme on dit ici* "as we say here") to introduce a Quebec French expression, we witness how hispanophone migrants show awareness of the pluricentric nature of Spanish, their L1. The contact to other hispanophone immigrants who are speakers of other varieties undoubtedly will have helped migrants to realize the complexity of Spanish varieties.

Furthermore, at least among readers who know each other well from previous 'meetings' in the blogosphere, some mild teasing and joking about the different varieties can be observed. In the following example (analyzed in more detail in Kluge 2014a), two regular visitors to the blog *leo-jajajajaja* (written by an Uruguayan couple) tease each other about the word 'boludeces' (crap, nonsense).

(7) Nr. 5: El 22

[...] Ahora pregunto amigo Hector Torres, desde cuando se dice en Mexico "boludeces"? ja, ja, ja vamos todavia con la globalizacion. Saludos.

(16 de septiembre de 2008 13:46)

Nr. 6: Hector Torres

Es que en Mexico decimos "pendejadas", pero como no me van a entender por eso hablo "argentino", jajajajajaja

Saludos.

(16 de septiembre de 2008 14:28) [20]

Nr. 5 El 22

Translation: [...] And now I ask my friend Hector Torres, since when do they say 'crap' in Mexico? Ha ha ha, still with the topic of globalization. Greetings.

(September 16, 2008; 13:46)

Nr. 6 Hector Torres

It's just that in Mexico we usually say 'nonsense', but since you wouldn't have understood me otherwise, I speak 'Argentinian', ha ha ha ha ha

Greetings.

(September 16, 2008, 14:28)

The word 'boludeces' is very common in the Río de la Plata Region, but not in Mexico, the country of origin of commentator Hector Torres. Hector had used 'boludeces' in a previous comment (Nr. 2), taking up the Leo's self-categorization of his blog entry as 'boludeces'. The reader El 22, who is of Argentine origin and also a regular visitor to Leo's blog, notices Hector's 'unidiomatic' use and mockingly questions him about this use. Hector then stresses in his next comment that he is using the word in order to be understood by the Argentinians in this blog. This example shows very well how a mild banter can enhance in-group cohesion, as it is a sign of trust that the members of the CoP put in each other.

Another topic concerning the use of Spanish is the constant reflection of advantages and disadvantages of transmission of Spanish to small children, so that they do not lose part of their heritage. In the case of some migrants, this preoccupation also encloses the wish to retain an indigenous language at least as a family language (e.g. Guaraní in case of Paraguayan immigrant Volar). Since many migrants arrived in Quebec with their spouses and often also with small children, this topic is very important to many, and examples abound of small narratives of migrants' children and their proficiency (or lack thereof) of Spanish.

For several reasons, the constant reflection on the possibilities of retaining Spanish is important in the blogs, all relating to migrants' identity construction: first of all, Spanish as the original L1 is the language most bloggers will feel most at ease with, and they cherish the possibility to express themselves freely among persons who have had the same experiences. Spanish, therefore, has an important ingroup-building function among immigrants from Latin American countries and enhances cohesion among members of the CoP. And finally, one has to be aware that most blogs will be read not only by other migrants or people interested in migration, but also by friends and family members of the blogger, who want to know about their life after migration. By showing how important Spanish is to them, the bloggers can stress that despite many biographic changes, they are 'basically still the same' as before, marking their context continuity with their 'previous self' by deciding to blog in Spanish (a blog entirely written in French or English, on the other hand, would most likely be interpreted as result of the decision to leave everything behind and start an entirely new life, in which previous acquaintances would play a less important role).

6. Multilingual Practices: Quebec French / *français québécois* / 'quebecua'

Despite presenting themselves mainly in Spanish, depiction of French and English, as the official languages of Canada, also plays an important part of presenting oneself as a successful migrant in the blogs. As all migrants and potential migrants know and remind each other constantly, the ability to adapt easily into Quebecois society crucially depends on obtaining a good job, and to reach that goal, language skills in French, and to a lesser degree in English, are paramount. This begins even before migration, since a good knowledge of French is essential in order to be granted a permanent residence permit.

Most migrants are aware that the French spoken in Quebec differs greatly from the French learned in language schools before and during the application process. They are not as aware of the complex relation between Quebec French and the dominant metropolitan variety of French as the francophone immigrants are, but they primarily see it as an obstacle that has to be overcome (most emblematically, in the many narratives of the interview during the selection process, where they are forced to speak French to a Quebec government official).

In the following example, the Argentine-born blogger MeliSer shows an acute awareness of the distinct variety of Quebec French as a non-dominant variety of pluricentric French (in the sense coined by Clyne 1992). She compares Metropolitan and Quebec French with the relation found between peninsular and Argentine Spanish.

(8) Vive la francophonie! [...] No se habla francés. Se habla quebecois.

El quebecois vendría a ser al francés lo que el castellano que se habla en Buenos Aires, al castellano de Castilla. Algo por el estilo.

Imagínese que usted no nació en un hogar hispanoparlante, y decidió estudiar español durante varios años y en su libro de texto figuraban frases como "Buenos días, señor." [...]. Y un día, para practicar el español que aprendió durante años y aprovechando que el peso está barato se va de viaje a Buenos Aires y se encuentra con gente que en lugar de estas frases le dice "Qué hacé chabón" [...], y además dicen "sho" en vez de "yo", "shuvia" y "cashe" en vez de "lluvia" y "calle" respectivamente, y pronuncian la S y la Z de la misma manera.

Bueno, eso nos pasa a nosotros cuando estudiamos francés de Francia y nos venimos a vivir a Québec. Esta gente dice *moé* en vez de *moi*, *toé*, en vez de *toi*, *chui* en vez de *je suis* y *po* en vez de *pas*. [...] [21]

Long live the Francophonie (the French-speaking world)! [...] They don't speak French. They speak quebecois (Quebec French).

Translation: Quebecois is to French what the Spanish spoken in Buenos Aires is to the Spanish spoken in Castile. More or less.

Imagine that you were not born in a Spanish-speaking family, and decided to study Spanish for several years and in your textbook were sentences like “Good afternoon, Sir.” [...] And one day, to practice the Spanish you’ve been learning for years and profiting from the excellent exchange rate you travel to Buenos Aires and the people you meet don’t say the sentence you learned, but instead they tell you “How’s it, dear” [...], and they also say “sho” (I) instead of “yo”, “shuvia” (rain) and “cashe” (street) instead of “lluvia” and “calle”, and they pronounce s and z the same way.

Well, that is what is happening to us who are studying the French of France and then come to Quebec. People here say *moé* (me) instead of *moi*, *toé* (you) instead of *toi*, *chui* (I am) instead of *je suis* and *po* (negation particle) instead of *pas*. [...]

Reflections like these help in the identity construction of the blogger as a person with good language skills and acute observation, but they also enable MeliSer to fill out her role as a long-time member of the CoP who takes up the task to prepare newcomers for this culture shock, in a similar way that she had previously been informed by other members in the CoP. MeliSer draws a lot of positive comments for this blog post, adding to her identity construction as a knowledgeable, intelligent and thoughtful person. For example, another blogger, “Venezolano a Quebec”, comments:

(9) Nr. 4: Venezolano a Quebec:

Eres lo máximo Melinita.

En cuanto a mí: estoy frito ... ostie la merde de la vierge !!!

(viernes, marzo 31, 2006: 4:33:00 PM) [22]

Translation: You’re the best, Melinita.

As for me: I’m done in ... host (ostie) the shit (la merde) of the Virgin (de la vierge)

Note how “Venezolano a Quebec” shows his awareness of Quebec French by using swear words (*sacres*), notably the very Quebec *ostie* (Drescher 2002, 2004). At the time of writing his comment, he was still living in Venezuela and waiting for his visa. Even so, displaying his awareness of distinctly Quebec linguistic features shows the seriousness of his intention to migrate to Quebec and facilitates the formation of a new identity as a migrant to Quebec.

The hispanophone migrants, especially in the blogs, report a large variety of anecdotes and short narratives on the topic of language difficulties. It is important to note that most of these stories are

situated in the first months upon arrival to Quebec and told in retrospect, sometimes several years after the actual incident took place. Doing so, a migrant can reveal his or her initial ignorance of Quebec French, but mitigate the resulting threat to one's own face, since the reported incident took place in the past and the migrant has succeeded in overcoming the reported difficulties. A good example for this can be found in a blog entry that MeliSer published on the second anniversary of their arrival in Quebec:

(10) miércoles, mayo 03, 2006

Dos años Dos

[...] Pasamos los primeros días haciendo trámites, tratando de entender de qué se trataba ese pseudolenguaje llamado “québécois”, preguntándonos si la decisión que habíamos tomado era la correcta, recorriendo la ciudad, etc.

Las primeras semanas comíamos básicamente lo que los mozos querían servirnos. No había forma de que entendiéramos que nos estaban preguntando si queríamos pan blanco o pan negro: la respuesta que obtenían de nuestras bocas era siempre la misma “oui”. Entonces decidían ellos qué pan era mejor para nosotros, y nosotros aceptábamos lo que nos daban, jurando por lo bajo “Algún día voy a lograr pedir el sándwich que realmente quiero, EXACTAMENTE como lo quiero” (sobre todo en subway).

Tratábamos de no hablar en inglés –hecho que hubiera simplificado todas las interacciones– pero queríamos adaptarnos, empaparnos de quebécois al precio que fuere (el precio de una comida, generalmente).

Cuenta la leyenda que Sebas fue todo contento a un Tim Hortons a pedir un *ragout de boeuf*, y en vez del ragout le sirvieron un succulento sándwich de huevo (*oeuf*). [23]

Translation: Two years two

[...] We spent the first day running errands, trying to understand what this pseudolanguage called ‘quebécois’ is all about, and we did ask ourselves if the decision we had taken was the right one.

The first weeks we basically ate what the waiters were willing to serve us. We had no way to understand when they asked us if we wanted white bread or whole-wheat bread: they would always get the same answers out of our mouth: ‘oui’ (=yes). They would decide for us which bread was the better one, and we accepted whatever they would give us, vowing to ourselves ‘one day I will succeed in getting the sandwich I really want, exactly the way I want it to be (especially at Subway). [24]

We tried not to speak English – a fact that would have simplified all transactions – but we wanted to adapt, immerse ourselves into quebécois whatever the cost (generally, the cost of a meal).

Legend has it that Sebas went to a Tim Hortons to ask for a beef ragout (*ragôut de boeuf*), and instead of the ragout they served him a rich egg sandwich (*oeuf*).

As the comments once again attest, the majority of those of her readers who have migrated themselves can relate very well to the reported incident; for potential migrants this reflection is a caution to take language immersion seriously and to expect (minor) difficulties.

Use of French becomes more habitual after migration, as reported in bloggers' narratives of life in Quebec. In example (11), Colombian immigrant Burzum (of the blog *Colnada-Canombia*) retells how he received a phone call while on the bus shortly after arriving. He did not understand much of what was said, but enough to realize that he was being invited to a job interview.

(11) [...] BZZZZZ.....BZZZZZZZZZZ.....BZZZZZZZZZZZ (a ver imaginación POR FAVOR!!!! Es la vibración del celu!)

YO: Oui, alo?

VOZ : M. Burzum? (a ver ...imaginación POR FAVOR!!!! Obviamente la persona sabia mi nombre!)

YO: Oui, c'est moi à l'appareil....

VOZ: M. Burzum, mon nom est Km ?????yen , j travaille pour Rif C H????? on v...chr...lle....car... reçu tr...Rsumé...intesnt....pour la position qu'on cherch...on aimrai..vous rncntre...le plus tôt possbl si vs et enchr à l rchrch....est-ce que vs est enchr n chrch d l'emploi

YO: ehhh, mmmm.....a veeerrrrrrr....bueeeeno....si claro..

(de aquí en adelante mis palabras en español para facilitar la comprensión...pero como dije antes todo transcurrió en francés). [...] [25]

Translation: [...] DRRR DRRR DRRR ... (ok, imagination please! It's the vibrations of a cell phone!

Me: Yes, hello?

Voice: Mr. Burzum (ok, imagination please! Obviously the person knew my name!)

Me: Yes that's me...

Voice: Mr. Burzum, my name is Km????yen, I work for Rif C H???? we ca... you 'cause ... receivedur applic... inter..ting ... for the position that we off ... we would lik ... meet you ... as soon as possib if you are sti search ... are you stll look... for job

Me: eeehhh, mmmm ... let's seeeeeeee ... weeeeeelll ... yes of course ...

(from here on my text in Spanish to facilitate the comprehension ... but like I said before, the conversation was held in French) [...]

The blogger Burzum here tries to depict his initial incomprehension of the telephone conversation by use of abbreviations to mimic the strain of communication in a foreign language, taking place on the cellphone with a lot of background noise. His manipulation of the graphic code of French is very emblematic and shows well the awkwardness of communication, and the blogger's panic to understand the telephone conversation. The degree to which he succeeds in depicting this situation shows that the blogger must have a very good command of French after all.

7. Awareness of English and of Multilingual Practices in Immigrant Montreal

As is well known, Quebec is the only officially French-speaking province in Canada, despite its important English-speaking minority, especially in Montreal, which is a destination of choice for many Latin American migrants. So it is not a surprise that English is mentioned by many bloggers, too.

In the following blog post, again by MeliSer, the blogger comments on the many things she keeps losing since she has arrived in Canada. She begins by enlisting many small items necessary in the Canadian climate such as umbrellas, mittens, scarves, hoods and sunglasses, before coming to language. She also notices interferences from French and English finding their way into her Spanish:

(12) Que cosa...

Desde que vivo en Canadá no dejo de perder mi/s:

[...]

f- **Español.** Bueh, aca exagero también (viva la autocensura) no es que lo "pierda" [...] pero lo "enriquezco" con afrancesamientos/inglesamientos tales como "*bookeaste la reservación?*" "*tengo que renovar mi prescripción en la farmacia*" "*esa película viene de salir*" "*tengo que encontrar la buena persona para preguntarle eso*" "*tengo un bicho que me esta hovereando en la cara*" "*estoy estockeando (de stalkear) un blog*" "*estuvimos hangingouteando con ...*"...

y mas,

y mas,

y masssssssssss.

MeLoser" [26]

Translation: “How strange ...

Since I’ve been living in Canada, I keep losing

[...]

f – **Spanish.** Tehee, here I am exaggerating again (long live the self-censure), I don’t really ‘lose’ it, but I ‘enrich’ it with Frenchisms/Anglicisms such as ‘did you book the reservation?’, ‘I have to renew my prescription in the pharmacy’, ‘this film has just come out’, ‘I have to find the good / right person to ask this’, ‘I have a thing that is hovering in my face’, ‘I am stalking a blog’, ‘we were hanging out with’ ...

and more,

and more,

aaaaaaand more.

MeLoser”

Similar to the case of Gallicisms in the Spanish of migrants, English influence is attested by this blogger and interpreted as a sign that she is losing her Spanish for lack of use. The “Frenchisms/Anglicisms” that MeliSer gives as examples are hard to translate and show how the very structure of Spanish can be adapted to these new lexical items found useful in day-to-day life. They often involve use of Spanish gerundial forms based on adapted anglicisms (*estoy estockeando* – I am stalking, *estuvimos hangingouteando* – we were hanging out) and phraseologisms that turn out to be ‘false friends’ (*la buena persona* – *the right person*, *renew a prescription* – *renuvelar una prescripción*). Again, the degree of English interferences and simultaneous loss of fluency in Spanish is a double-edged sword for migrants’ identity construction. On the one hand, it shows the degree of successful integration into Quebec / Canadian society. On the other hand, it signals to friends and family at home that the importance of that person’s pre-migration biography is fading, which could be interpreted negatively.

8. Conclusion

Multilingual practices in online communities play an important role within the process of interactive identity negotiation and construction. They are used to express the culturally and linguistically composite identities of the migrants as we have seen in our examples, and they are the reflection of new linguistic values migrants have to face in the immigration process: of migrants identity as Metropolitan-French-Quebecois / Creole-Francophone-Quebecois / Argentine-Latino-Quebecois; Linguistic features and linguistic practices serve as emblems or the assimilation to the new

Québécois identity, but also for the wish to preserve their Creole, French, or Argentine culture and language.

All these uses of multilingual practices show that migrants are very sensitive to language and language use. They develop a highly reflexive attitude to linguistic practice and therefore, language practices and language evaluations seem to be good examples of the dynamics of social practices between local identities and transnationalization processes.

With respect to the transnationalization processes, we can say as a first result of our research that migrants do not behave as transnationally as we may think. Nearly all groups of migrants tend to seek for a migrant group identity that helps them to preserve their original culture and language. In any case, language practices and language evaluations are a good example of the dynamics of social practices between local identities and transnationalization processes.

Endnotes

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cf. http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/%28en%29/cias/entangled_americas/ Last access 04.22.14.

[2] The research on cultural, social and linguistic aspects of identity has constantly increased in the last decades. For a recent overview cf. Jörissen et al (2007) and Eickelpasch & Rademacher 2010 – cf. also the Open Access Journal "Identity in the Information Society" (Springer): <http://link.springer.com/journal/12394>.

[3] Translation: "Reflexive life experience, which brings about the continuity of life history through cumulative understanding of oneself as a stack of autobiographical interpretations, must always already be moving in the medium of mutual understanding with other subjects. I understand myself only in the "sphere of what is common" in which I simultaneously understand the other in his objectifications. For our two expressions of life are articulated in the same language, which for us has intersubjectively binding validity." (Translation: Jeremy J. Shapiro 1971, 156)

[4] Goffman (1959); cf. Kluge (2005) for instances where this is not possible.

[5] For a deeper analysis of these three aspects see Frank-Job/Kluge 2012, Kluge 2011, 2013, 2014a, b.

[6] Cf. Trudgill (1972) for the role of saliency. Furthermore, emblematic uses can be seen as a display, an indexical feature (Eckert 2008), even more so in the blogs, where bloggers supposedly have more time to compose their entries before publishing them, than in forums and Facebook groups with more spontaneous comments.

[7] The distinction between the different groups can sometimes be hard to make: some francophone immigrants apparently experienced a chain migration. Being born in Algeria and Morocco, and probably growing up as bilinguals in Arabic and French, at some point in their lives they then migrated to France, and from there to Quebec. This also explains the differences in numbers provided by Canadian and Quebec immigration statistics: while Quebec relies on country of birth, Canada counts immigrants from last country of residence.

[8] Dutch visitor to Quebec, cited at <http://learn-canadian-french.language101.com/how-to/big-differences>

[9] In January 2014, this blog changed its layout; at the same time, it lost its subheading "the adventures of a French immigrant to Quebec."

[10] www.mauditfrancais.com/node/40.

[11] The Metropolitan French expression *par contre* is equivalent to Quebec French *par exemple*, which translates into "for example" in English. All translations of examples are by Barbara Frank-Job and Bettina Kluge.

[12] <http://www.mauditfrancais.com/node/420>; last access 04.03.14.

[13] <http://cymico.over-blog.com>. In the years 2005-2006 we find 28 *ici* and 7 *icitte*, in the years 2007-2010 we find 13 *ici*, but no use of *icitte* at all. However, one must also distinguish between discourse deictic and spatial deictic use of the adverb: when referring to the blog, Cymico prefers *ici*, when referring to Quebec, he uses *icitte*. Most latter uses of *ici* have a discourse deictic function and refer to the blog or some previous posts.

[14] <http://cymico.over-blog.com>, post 21 janvier 2006 6 21 /01 /2006 17:54. In this case, the use of *ma blonde* does not match with the Quebecois conventions as it designates the wife of the author, not his girlfriend.

[15] Note that this use of graphemic features does not correspond to the meanwhile well-established non orthographic spellings of the so-called internet language (cf. Crystal 2001).

[16] Two of the fleur-de-Lys are replaced by the symbol that forms part of the symbol for the software 'Java', making perhaps an allusion to the New Media used in the CoP.

[17] The use of the letter 'k' in French is also seen very often in Chats and SMS and thus symbolizes at the same time a sort of globalized internet use of written French.

[18] <http://www.volcreole.com/forum/sujet-19064.html>; post of May 11, 2005 19:10.

[19] Many bloggers stress that a good command of both French and English is obligatory for those who choose Montreal as their destination.

[20] <http://leo-jajajajaja.blogspot.com> – *La tele me quema la capocha. Estoy quedando l@c@* (14.9.2008)

[21] <http://mividaenotrolado.blogspot.com/2006/03/vive-la-francophonie.html>

[22] <http://mividaenotrolado.blogspot.com/2006/03/vive-la-francophonie.html>

[23] http://mividaenotrolado.blogspot.de/2006_05_01_archive.html

[24] Subway is a sandwich retailer where clients can order their sandwich out of a variety of choices.

[25] <http://colnada-canombia.blogspot.de>, *Mi primera cita a entrevista*, 1.7.2009.

[26] http://mividaenotrolado.blogspot.de/2007_05_01_archive.html

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