

Contesting ‘Language’ as ‘Heritage’: Negotiation of Identities in Late Modernity

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In this paper we question key terms which appear frequently in discussions of language teaching and learning: ‘language’ and ‘heritage’. The paper draws on empirical data from one of four linked case studies in a larger project funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), ‘Investigating Multilingualism in Complementary Schools in Four Communities’ (RES-000-23-1180). In our analysis we argue that the relationships between ‘language’ and ‘heritage’, far from being straightforward, are complex in the way they play out in classroom interactions. The data raise a number of questions in our attempts to understand how the linguistic practices of students and teachers in Bengali schools are used to negotiate young people’s multilingual and multicultural identities. First, participants articulate attitudes and values which raise questions about what constitutes ‘language’. Second, participants express views and attitudes, and perform interactional practices, which raise questions about what constitutes ‘heritage’. Our analysis finds that multilingual young people in complementary school classrooms use linguistic resources in sophisticated and creative ways to negotiate subject positions which appear to contest and subvert schools’ attempts to impose upon them ‘heritage’ identities (Creese, A., A. Bhatt, N. Bhojani, and P. Martin. 2006. ‘Multicultural, heritage and learner identities in complementary schools,’ *Language and Education* 20/1: 23–44).

INTRODUCTION

This paper reports part of a research project which investigates how the linguistic practices of students and teachers in Bengali schools in the United Kingdom are used to negotiate young people’s identities. The analysis of data presented here raises questions in two areas. First, participants appeared to differ from each other in their views of what constitutes (a) language, and what ‘counts’ as (a) language. Second, we are led by our participants to consider the relationships between ‘language’ and ‘heritage’, and the role of teaching and learning language(s) in the reproduction of that ‘heritage’. The complexity and sophistication

of the young people's responses to the teaching and learning of 'language(s)' led us to question by what means 'the legacy of history is appropriated' (Bourdieu 2000: 151). Is 'heritage' straightforwardly reproduced where the learner is born to linguistic, social, and environmental norms which are typical of urban late modernity, whereas the 'heritage' was associated with rural poverty? These questions about social reproduction for young people in the United Kingdom raise broader questions about what constitutes '(a) language', and what counts as 'heritage' in late modernity. Before discussing the data, we reflect theoretically on these questions relating to 'language' and 'heritage'.

'LANGUAGE'

Heller (2007) proposes four sets of concepts in the critical analysis of languages in society. First, she argues that rather than treating notions of 'community', 'identity', and 'language' as though they were natural phenomena, they should be understood as social constructs. Specific or single categorizations therefore cannot be attached to an individual based on their 'ethnicity', or 'language'. Second, Heller refers to the work of Giddens (1984) to consider language as a set of resources which are socially distributed, but not necessarily evenly. The third set of concepts holds that this uneven distribution of resources is the product of political and economic processes, enabling us to ask questions about what linguistic resources are assigned what value, and with what consequences (Gumperz 1982). The final set of concepts considers the discourses which inscribe value (or its lack) to particular linguistic forms and practices. In summary, Heller views language(s) as:

sets of resources called into play by social actors, under social and historical conditions which both constrain and make possible the social reproduction of existing conventions and relations, as well as the production of new ones. (Heller 2007: 15)

What Heller calls 'the messiness of actual usage' (2007: 13) can only be understood in relation to histories, power, and social organization. Conversely, structural analysis must include accounts of actual linguistic practices, which at times may differ from those we might expect.

Our multilingual participants' beliefs, attitudes, and practices in relation to 'language' resonated with Garcia's (2007: xii) account that languages are not hermetically sealed units. The linguistic practices of Garcia's students in New York bore very little relation to the 'standard English' of school texts or the 'standard Spanish' that was supposed to be linked to their 'identity'. Rather, our data suggest, in line with the recent proposition of Makoni and Pennycook (2007), that the notion of languages as separate, discrete entities, and 'countable institutions' (2007: 2) is a social construct. Bourdieu (1991) proposed that:

language is itself a social artefact invented at the cost of a decisive indifference to differences which reproduces on the level of

the region the arbitrary imposition of a unique norm. (Bourdieu 1991: 287)

Makoni and Pennycook argue for a critical historical account which demonstrates that, through the process of classification and naming, languages were 'invented' (2007: 1). They add that, in direct relation with the invention of languages, 'an ideology of languages as separate and enumerable categories was also created' (2007: 2). Makoni and Pennycook point in particular to the naming of languages such as 'Bengali' and 'Assamese' as the construction of 'new objects' (2007: 10). Thus languages cannot be viewed as discrete, bounded, impermeable, autonomous systems. Our research participants, all at first glance of the same 'ethnic' and 'linguistic' group, not only disagreed with each other about what constituted a 'language', they also disagreed with each other about where a 'language' began and ended, and about the value that could be assigned to a particular set of linguistic resources. Makoni and Pennycook propose that such 'local knowledge' is crucial to our understanding of language:

We are arguing for an understanding of the relationships between what people believe about their language (or other people's languages), the situated forms of talk they deploy, and the material effects—social, economic, environmental—of such views and use. (Makoni and Pennycook 2007: 22)

This interrelationship between what people believe about language and languages, and the way they access and make use of linguistic resources, provides a further focus to our analysis.

If languages are invented, and languages and identities are socially constructed, we nevertheless need to account for the fact that at least some language users, at least some of the time, hold passionate beliefs about the importance and significance of a particular language to their sense of 'identity'. It is now well established in contemporary sociolinguistics (Harris 2006; Rampton 2006) that one 'language' does not straightforwardly index one subject position, and that speakers use linguistic resources in complex, sophisticated ways to perform a range of subject positions, sometimes simultaneously. However, whilst accepting this, May (2001, 2005: 330) argues that 'historically associated languages continue often to hold considerable purchase for members of particular cultural or ethnic groups in their identity claims'. For some of the people we spoke to in the course of our research, a 'language' held powerful connotations in terms of their sense of belonging and selfhood. It is evident from our data that for some people, in some circumstances, 'particular languages clearly *are* . . . important and constitutive factor of their individual, and at times, collective identities' (May 2005: 330). In the context of research on 'heritage' language education, it is almost a truism that learning the 'heritage' language 'plays a critical role in the process of children's identity formation' (Nicholls 2005: 164). Whilst it is certainly an oversimplification to treat certain languages as 'symbols' or 'carriers' of 'identity', we are obliged

to take account of what people believe about their languages, to listen to how they make use of their available linguistic resources, and to consider the effects of their language use—even where we believe these ‘languages’ to be inventions.

‘HERITAGE’

Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) proposed that all teaching implicitly presupposes a body of knowledge, skills, and modes of expression which constitute the heritage of the cultivated classes. In our classroom observations and recordings, and in our participants’ statements in interviews, there was a clear sense that the teaching of ‘language’ was inexorably intertwined with the teaching of ‘heritage’. Many of our participants used the term ‘culture’ to refer to those elements of Bengali/Bangladeshi life and history which they wished to transmit through complementary schooling. In our analysis we interpret this as ‘heritage’, distinguishing ‘heritage’ from ‘culture’. Whereas ‘heritage’ refers to elements of past experience which a group deliberately sets out to preserve and pass on to the next generation, ‘culture’ is ‘reproduced and emerges in people’s activity together—it exists in the processes and resources involved in situated, dialogical, sense-making’ (Rampton 2006: 20).

In recent times the scope of definitions of ‘heritage’ has broadened considerably from concern for the preservation of buildings and historical sites to include historical areas, towns, environments, social factors, and ‘intangible heritage’ (Ahmad 2006: 299; Smith 2006: 54). UNESCO’s *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* defines ‘intangible cultural heritage’ as:

The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals, recognise as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environments, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. (UNESCO 2003: Article 2:2)

Patrick (2007) points out that appeals for the protection of forms of ‘intangible heritage’ have played an important role in campaigns for language rights. Whether we are dealing with traditional definitions of ‘tangible’ or ‘intangible’ heritage, we are engaging with sets of values and meanings, including emotion, memory, and shared knowledge (Smith 2006). ‘Heritage’ describes sets of shared values and collective memories that are ‘constructed as a ‘birthright’ and are expressed in distinct languages and through other cultural performances’ (Peckham 2003: 1). Pearson and Sullivan (2007: 208) suggest that heritage resources may have a ‘special value to minority groups in the

community', who have a particular interest in their own history. Regardless of the 'management' of heritage resources, subordinate groups 'often choose to mobilise a "strategic essentialism" as a political tool' (Stanton 2005: 416). From our participants we heard at times that certain sets of linguistic resources were believed to function as threads of association with historic contexts. Sets of resources often come to represent abstract notions such as sense of place, community, or belonging (Smith 2004). 'Heritage' can be thought of as the preservation of a potential loss (Peckham 2003: 1), 'anything that someone wishes to conserve or to collect, and to pass on to future generations' (Howard 2003: 6). Bourdieu and Passeron (1979: 25) suggest that 'inheritance always implies the danger of squandering the heritage'. However, it cannot be assumed that the preservation and transmission of 'heritage' is straightforward. Simply the process of 'passing on' resources will alter them. Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996: 92) argue that there is rarely a simple relationship between a group of people and 'heritage' resources: 'The same piece of heritage can be interpreted and received by different groups in quite different ways'.

Rather than being a static entity, 'heritage' is a 'process or performance that is concerned with the production and negotiation of cultural identity, individual and collective memory, and social and cultural values' (Smith 2007: 2). Heritage as a process of meaning-making may 'help us bind ourselves, or may see us become bound to, national or a range of sub-national collectives or communities' (Smith 2006: 66) as particular resources come to act as powerful symbols of, or mnemonics for, the past (Lipe 2007). Smith (2006: 3) proposes that the idea of 'heritage' is 'used to construct, reconstruct, and negotiate a range of identities and social and cultural values and meanings in the present'. She argues that 'heritage' is a set of practices involved in the construction and regulation of values, a discourse about negotiation, about using the past, and collective and individual memories, to negotiate new ways of being and to perform identities. People engage with 'heritage', appropriate it, and contest it (Harvey 2007). 'Heritage' may become a site at which identities are contested rather than imposed unproblematically. That is, those who seek to preserve and pass on certain sets of resources may find that the next generation either rejects imposed subject positions, contests the validity or significance of resources, or appropriates them for other purposes.

For Bourdieu 'heritage' is reproduced through 'class' and 'education', in the reproduction of 'distinction', 'an unacquired merit which justifies unmerited attainment, namely heritage' (Bourdieu and Darbel 1991: 110). Bourdieu (1993: 299) argues that in education there is an assumption of a community of values between pupil and teacher which occurs where the system 'is dealing with its own heirs to conceal its real function, namely, that of confirming and consequently legitimizing the right of the heirs to the cultural inheritance'. He further argues that:

Only when the heritage has taken over the inheritor can the inheritor take over the heritage. And this appropriation of the

inheritor by the heritage, the precondition for the appropriation of the heritage by the inheritor (which has nothing inevitable about it), takes place under the combined effect of the conditionings inscribed in the position of inheritor and the pedagogic action of his predecessors, themselves possessed possessors. (Bourdieu 2000: 152)

In our data the teaching and learning of 'heritage' or 'community' languages (Hornberger 2005) act as sites at which 'heritage' values may be transmitted, accepted, contested, subverted, appropriated, and otherwise negotiated. These are sites for the negotiation of identities, for the acquisition and performance of sets of linguistic resources which are called into play by social actors under very particular social and historical conditions (Wiley 2005, 2007). These conditions may both constrain and make possible the reproduction of existing conventions and relations, as well as the production of new ones (Heller 2007).

METHODS

The research project consisted of four interlocking case studies with two researchers working in two complementary schools in each of four communities. The case studies focused on Gujarati schools in Leicester, Turkish schools in London, Cantonese and Mandarin schools in Manchester, and Bengali schools in Birmingham. The present paper focuses on data collected in and around the Bengali schools in Birmingham. Complementary schools, also known as 'supplementary schools', 'heritage language schools', or 'community language schools', provide language teaching for young people in a non-statutory setting. Bengali complementary schools in Birmingham are managed and run by local community groups on a voluntary basis, usually in hired or borrowed spaces, with few resources. They cater for children between 4 and 16 years of age, and operate mainly in the evenings and at weekends. The students' families had migrated from the Sylhet region of Bangladesh. One of the specific aims of the research project was to investigate how the linguistic practices of students and teachers in complementary schools are used to negotiate young people's multilingual and multicultural identities. Each case study identified two complementary schools in which to observe, record, and interview participants. The classes ran for between two and three hours, either in the evening or at the week-end. After four weeks observing in classrooms using a 'team field notes' approach, two key participant children were identified in each school. In the Bengali schools the key participant children were all 10 years old. These children were audio-recorded during the observed classes, and also for 30 minutes before coming to the class and after leaving class. Stakeholders in the schools were interviewed, including teachers and administrators, and the key participant children and their parents. In all we collected 192 hours of audio-recorded interactional data, wrote 168 sets of field notes, made 16 hours of video-recordings, and interviewed 66 key stakeholders.

A more detailed account of the methods used to collect documentary and home-based data are outlined in Creese *et al.* (2008).

‘LOCAL KNOWLEDGE’ ABOUT ‘LANGUAGE’ AND ‘HERITAGE’

The founder and administrator of one of the two schools (school A) made a forceful and emotional statement following an interview question which queried the rationale for teaching Bengali to children in Birmingham:

ei bhaashar jonno 1952 te amaar theke dosh haath dure Barkat, Salam maara jae < because of this language in 1952 ten yards away from me Barkat and Salam were killed > **1952 te** <in 1952> *I was also a student in year 10. From Sylhet to Dhaka was 230 miles we marched there Sylhet to Dhaka 230 miles with slogans. We want our mother language it is a raashro bhasha* <state language >. *How I will forget about my mother language? My brothers gave their life for this language. I will never forget it while I'm alive.* (administrator interview)¹

Throughout the paper we are mindful of Pavlenko's (2007: 176) argument that interview or narrative data can not be treated as 'truth' or 'reality itself'. Rather, in line with Pavlenko, we are 'sensitive to the fact that speakers use linguistic and narrative resources to present themselves as particular kinds of individuals' (2007: 177). We constantly saw individual participants positioning themselves in relation to the 'ethnic, linguistic, and cultural loyalties' (2007: 177) which they chose to emphasize. For the school administrator the 'mother language' was a vital symbol of the founding of the Bangladeshi nation. More than 50 years earlier he had witnessed the incident in which the 'language martyrs' were killed while demonstrating against the imposition of Urdu as the national language by West Pakistan, and these events seemed to have informed his view that British-born children of Bangladeshi heritage should learn and maintain the Bengali language. The historic incident which marks the Bangladeshi calendar as 'Ekushey February', continues to be celebrated as a key moment in the collective memory of the Bangladeshi nation, and in the Bangladeshi community in UK (Gard'ner 2004). One of the senior teachers in the same school argued that learning Bengali was associated with maintaining a knowledge of Bangladeshi 'roots': '*We may have become British Bangladeshi or British Indians but we don't have fair skin and we cannot mix with them. We have our own roots and to know about our roots we must know our language*'. For both of these Bangladeshi-born men, teaching and learning Bengali was an important means of reproducing their 'heritage' in the next generation.

Many of the students' parents agreed. One mother typically told us that it was important that her children should be able to speak Bengali because:

Bengali is our mother land, where we come from; really we come from Bangladesh. Even if you are born in this country it doesn't matter, we need to know our mother language first. (parent interview)

Asked why it was important to learn the language of the 'mother land', she said 'you need to know your side of the story, where your parents come from, you've got to know both from this country and the other one'. For her learning the 'mother language' was closely associated with learning about the 'mother land', and both represented her 'side of the story'. We heard an explicit rationale from administrators, teachers, and parents that a key aim of the school was for the children to learn Bengali because knowledge of the national language carried features of Bangladeshi/Bengali 'heritage'.

TEACHING 'LANGUAGE' AND 'HERITAGE'

The rationale of the schools was put into practice in the classroom through a pedagogy which frequently introduced 'heritage' content in the context of teaching Bengali. Here 'heritage' included narratives of national belonging, and the introduction of national symbols of Bangladesh.

In the first example the teacher (T) engages with historical events in the making of the Bangladeshi nation:

- T: **Bangladesher teen taa national day aache, jaatio dibosh**
 <Bangladesh has three national days, national events>
National day not national anthem
- S: *independence day*
- T: **etaa Banglae ki bolbe shaadhinota dibosh**
 <in Bangla it is **shaadhinota dibosh**>
Ekushey February shohid dibosh
 <21st February is **shohid dibosh**>
aage bolo Ekushey February shohid dibosh
 <first say 21st February is **shohid dibosh**>
- S: **ekushey February shohid dibosh**
- T: **er pore aashlo shaadhinota dibosh**
 <after that comes **shaadhinotaa dibosh**>
independence day, independence day is not Bangla, it is English.
Banglae holo <in Bangla it is> **shaadhinota dibosh**
- S: **chaabbish-e March** <26th March>
- T: **shaadhinota dibosh**
- S: **chaabbish-e March** <26th March>
- T: *lastly nine months we fought against Pakistani collaborator*
- S: *language day*
- T: *language day holo ekushey February. Chaabbish March independence day. Sholoi December, after nine months bijoy dibosh* <victory day>
Pakistani occupied army ke aamraa surrender korchhi.
 <we made the occupied forces of Pakistan surrender their arms>
Al Badr against our independent war ke aamraa chutaaisi

- < we chased them out > *How many national days in Bangladesh?*
- S: *three*
- T: **Bangladesher jaatio dibosh koiti?**
<how many national days in Bangladesh?>
- S: **teen ti** <three>
- T: **Shaadhinota dibosh ebong bijoy dibosh chilo** 1971. **Bhasha dibosh chilo** 1952. **Aar bhaasha dibosh kon din chilo** 52. **Tokhon amraa choto** <independence day and victory day was in 1971. Language day was in 1952. Language day was 52 when we were young>
- Inshaallah eta** *every day* **jodi aamraa** *every day* **discuss kori taahole bhaalo** <by the grace of God it is good if we discuss this every day>
- (classroom recording)

The curriculum content here is strongly nationalistic, and appears to have the aim of instilling in the young language learners an understanding of key dates and events in the making of the Bangladeshi nation. The student (S) seems to have some pre-existing knowledge of the historical context, although she is rather tentative in volunteering this. Here the teacher moves comfortably between Bengali and English, translanguaging within and between sentences, and making his final statement in the common Islamic expression 'Inshallah', derived from Arabic, together with Bengali and English.

A second common feature of teaching 'heritage' in the Bengali complementary school classrooms was the introduction of national symbols associated with Bangladesh. In a typical example, the teacher asked a child to draw the English and Bangladeshi national flags on the whiteboard. After playing the Bangladeshi national anthem on his mobile telephone, the teacher continued:

- T: **Ei. Eitaai aamaader jaatio shongheet othobaa national anthem. Ekhon aamaader Bangladesher ko-e ektaa jinish aache jaatio bol-e.**
<This, this is our national song or national anthem. Now, we have a few things in Bangladesh which are our national symbols>
- jaatio shongheet** <national anthem> **jaatio kobi** <national poet>, **jaatio ful** <national flower> **baa jaatio**, *baa national fol* <or national, or national fruit> **baa national paakhi** <or national bird> **Bangladesher jaatio ful ki?** <What is the national flower of Bangladesh?>
- Ss: [no response]
- T: *water lily, water lily, water lily Bangla, water lily, shapla.*
Etaa aamaader jaatio ful <**shapla**. This is our national flower>
- (classroom recording)

Here the process of teaching Bengali is intimately interwoven with the process of teaching symbolic representations of Bangladesh, as knowledge of the national/cultural symbols, like knowledge of the Bengali language, comes to represent Bengali 'heritage'.

'LOCAL KNOWLEDGE' CONTESTING 'LANGUAGE' AND 'HERITAGE'

Despite these powerful discourses and practices which evidenced the teaching of 'heritage' through the teaching of 'language', the notion that the discourses and practices of the Bengali schools were homogeneous in their ideological orientation to 'language' and 'heritage' was not borne out in the data. Rather, what people believed about their language (or other people's languages), and the situated forms of talk they deployed, revealed divergent and contested views about the value and status of particular linguistic resources.

Bengali is the language of education and literacy in Bangladesh, and is characterized by diglossia. The two standard varieties of Bangla are *Sadhu Bhasha* and *Cholit Bhasha* and regional varieties include Sylheti, from the north-east of Bangladesh. Sylheti is the variety spoken by the vast majority of Bangladeshi immigrants to Britain. Sylheti is often regarded as a modification of standard Bengali which is not intelligible to the people of other districts in Bangladesh (Hamid 2007). Chalmers (1996: 6–7) observes that Bengali and Sylheti are 'near enough mutually unintelligible'. Chalmers does acknowledge that Sylheti and Bengali are very closely related and speakers of one language or dialect are often exposed to the other, even though they may not speak them. Whilst Bengali is the literate language of Bangladesh, Sylheti is a vernacular variety.

When we interviewed the administrators and teachers in the schools they spoke emphatically about the need for children to learn the standard variety. This was frequently held to be oppositional to Sylheti. One of the school administrators was emphatic that Bengali was '*completely different*' from Sylheti, and that Sylheti should not be allowed to '*contaminate*' the standard form. He was concerned that Sylheti forms were beginning to appear in the spelling and grammar of Bengali newspapers in the UK, introducing '*thousands of spelling mistakes—Bengali newspapers I have seen in many places the spelling was wrong, sentence construction was wrong*'. For the administrator non-Standard resources were '*contaminating the language*'. He made this point about the necessity for children to learn Standard Bengali:

I am always in favour of preserving languages and all these things. But it doesn't mean that this should contaminate other languages and give this more priority than the proper one. We have to preserve the proper one first, and at the same time we have to encourage them to you know, use their dialect. But we shouldn't make any compromise between these two.
(administrator interview)

This was a strongly articulated argument in the data. The administrator of the other school stated that:

'Bhasha to bolle Bangla bhasha bolte hobe Sylheti kono bhasha naa'

<When you talk about language it means Bengali. Sylheti is not a language >

(school administrator interview)

For several respondents 'Bengali' constituted a more highly valued set of linguistic resources than 'Sylheti', and was regarded as the 'proper' language. Pujolar (2007: 78), referring to a different socio-historical context, makes the point that language policy may operate to foster knowledge of some languages, 'but delegitimise or ignore other languages and other forms of multilingual competence and performance'. Patrick (2007: 127) similarly finds that in arguing in support of a particular language, 'speakers can be locked into fixed or essentialised notions of identity, "authenticity" and place, which provide no recognition of mobile, postcolonial speakers'. It was clear that for some of our respondents not all linguistic resources were equally valued, and while some sets of linguistic resources were considered to be 'a language', others were not. In this sense there was a constant re-invention of 'language' on the part of some participants.

Those who spoke 'Sylheti' were often criticized by 'more educated' people who spoke 'Bengali'. They were characterized by the administrator of one of the schools as members of the 'scheduled', or 'untouchable' caste: people without rights or resources in the Indian sub-continent:

Publicraa ki dibe amar aapne especially bujhben amader desher je shob lok aashche ora kon category lok aashchilo, mostly from scheduled caste, gorib, dukhi krishokra aashchilo. oder maa baba o lekha pora interested naa oder chele meye raa o pora lekha interested naa. Oraa baidhitamolok school jete hoe primary school sholo bochor porjonto jete hoe, ei jonne school jaai.

<What will the public contribute? You [the researcher, Shahela Hamid] especially will understand what type of people came from our country. They belonged to the category of scheduled caste, they are the poor, the deprived, farmers. Their parents were not interested in education nor are the children interested. They go to school because it's compulsory >

(school administrator interview)

Here the Sylheti speakers are referred to as the 'scheduled caste'. Regarded as the least educated group in society, with no resources of any kind, they are the lowest of the low (Borooah 2005; Kijima 2006; Borooah *et al.* 2007). Here linguistic features were viewed as reflecting and expressing broader social images of people. Irvine and Gal (2000: 37) suggest that 'participants' ideologies about language locate linguistic phenomena as part of, and evidence for, what they believe to be systematic behavioural, aesthetic, affective, and moral contrasts among the social groups indexed'. One of the teachers argued that children should learn Bengali for '*moral reasons*'. Irvine and Gal propose that a semiotic process of *iconization* occurs, in which linguistic features that index

social groups appear to be iconic representations of them, as if a linguistic feature depicted or displayed a social group's inherent nature or essence. Bourdieu and Darbel (1991: 112) argue that some more powerful groups provide 'an essentialist representation of the division of their society into barbarians and civilized people'. Here the fact of speaking 'Sylheti', rather than 'Bengali', appeared to index the Sylheti group in particularly negative terms, despite the relative similarities between the 'Bengali' and 'Sylheti' sets of linguistic resources.

Whilst some speakers in our study considered 'Sylheti' to be quite different from 'Bengali', others regarded the two sets of resources as indistinguishable. As we have seen, there were several instances of participants commenting on the differences between Sylheti and Bengali in terms of social status and value, but not everyone agreed about the extent to which these sets of linguistic resources were distinct. While the administrator of one of the schools argued that Bengali and Sylheti were '*completely different*', a student's mother said they were '*thoraa different*' <a little different>, while other parents also held this view, saying they were '*little bit different thaake*' <only> and even '*the same*'. Here there was clear disagreement about the nature and extent of the differences between the sets of linguistic resources used by the students' parents at home, and the literate version of the language taught in the complementary school classrooms. That is, there was disagreement about the permeability of the languages. These differences of perception were likely to be ideological. Those who argued that the 'languages' were completely different from each other were speakers of the prestige language, unwilling to allow the lower status language to contaminate their linguistic resources. Those who argued that the 'languages' were almost the same as each other were speakers of Sylheti, which was held to index the lower status, less educated group.

On many occasions the research participants interactionally evidenced their awareness of differences (perhaps mainly in status and value) between 'Sylheti' and 'Bengali'. There was also an awareness of Bengali as the higher-status language on the part of teachers ('*I talk posh Bengali, and the children can't understand me*'), students, administrators, and parents. The following example was recorded at the dinner table in the family home of one of the students:

- Mother: khitaa hoise? Tanvir, khaibaani saatni?
<what is the matter? Tanvir, would you like some relish?>
- Father: aaro khoto din thaakbo
<how many more days is that [voice recorder] going be with you?>
- Student: aaro *four weeks*
<four more weeks>
- Father: ()
- Student: *No they said any. If you talk all English...*
- Father: **ginni, oh ginni** [calling his wife using a Bengali term of endearment]

- Mother: **ji, hain go daakso** kheno <yes, dear why are you calling me?>
Tumaar baabaa shuddho bhasha bolen
 <your father is speaking the standard language>
- Father: **paan dibaa** <can I have some paan>
aapne aamaar biyaaai kemne <how are you my relation?>
 (home recording)

Here the Sylheti-speaking parents play the roles of Bengali speakers, adopting the airs and graces which they see as characteristic of the Bengali-speaking group. The terms of endearment used here (**'ginni', 'hain go'**) are forms of parody (Bakhtin 1973, 1984, 1986), exaggerations beyond common usage, as speakers of Bengali are mocked in discourse which represents an inflated sophistication. This brief interaction is situated in a whole hinterland of language ideological beliefs and practices, as the couple acknowledge differences between Bengali and Sylheti as sets of linguistic resources, and the conditions which differentially provide and constrain access to linguistic resources. In parodic discourse the parents introduce into their own voices the exaggerated voice of the Bengali speaker, and that voice clashes with its host, as 'Discourse becomes an arena of battle between the two voices' (Bakhtin 1994: 106). Here the impromptu role-play light-heartedly, but not half-heartedly, 'parodies another's socially typical...manner of seeing, thinking, and speaking' (Bakhtin 1994: 106).

In this section we have seen that for some of our participants, some sets of linguistic resources were very considerably privileged above other, similar sets of linguistic resources. While linguistic resources which were described as 'Standard', or 'proper', or 'real', or 'book' Bengali had come to represent the 'heritage' of the Bangladeshi nation, sets of resources described as 'Sylheti' had come to be associated with the uneducated poor, who were held to be uninterested in schooling, and unmotivated. However, we also saw that these distinctions were contested by others, who denied that clear differences existed, and at times made fun of the assumption that these differences were constitutive of differences in social status. That is, our participants represented disagreements about what constituted (a) language, and about the ideological links between speakers and the sets of linguistic resources which they called into play.

NEGOTIATING 'LANGUAGE' AND 'HERITAGE'

The contested nature of the ideological links between sets of linguistic resources and their assumed associations was frequently made visible in the interactional data recorded in the classroom. Here teaching of 'heritage' and 'language' became sites at which identities were negotiated in discourse (Blackledge and Pavlenko 2001; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). Here 'negotiation of identities' is understood as 'an interplay between reflective positioning, that is self-representation, and interactive positioning, whereby

others attempt to position or reposition particular individuals or groups' (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). Negotiations here take place interactionally where particular subject positionings are contested. Negotiable identities refer to all identity options which can be contested and resisted by particular individuals and groups, although of course not all identity positions are equally negotiable. How much room for resistance to particular positioning individuals may have depends on each individual situation, the social and linguistic resources available to participants, and the balance of power relations which sets the boundaries for particular identity options.

In the following example a new teacher to the class is perhaps not acquainted with the usual norms and expectations of linguistic behaviour in the classroom:

- S1: *miss why can't we just go home?*
 T: *Bangla-e maato etaa Bangla class < speak in Bengali this is Bengali class > khaali English maato to etaa Bangla class khene < if you speak in English only then why is this the Bengali class? >*
 S2: *miss you can choose*
 S1: *I know English*
 S2: *why?*
 T: *because tumi Bangali < because you are Bengali >*
 S2: *my aunty chose it. She speaks English all the time.*

(classroom recording)

In this interaction the teacher argues that the language of the classroom should be Bengali, proposing a model of learning which is at odds with the children's usual experience. One of the students (S1) argues that it should be possible to choose which language to speak in a particular context, and is backed up by her friend (S2). When S2 asks why it is necessary to speak Bengali in class, the teacher says '*because tumi Bangali*'. In this English and Bengali phrase the ideology of the school is summed up in the most succinct terms. Bengali should be spoken, and should be learned, argues the teacher, because the children *are* Bengali (here 'Bangla' refers to the Bengali language, while 'Bangali' refers to Bengali national and/or ethnic belonging). Ironically, the teacher uses Sylheti to make her point about speaking Bengali. S2 contests the teacher's point, and in doing so contests the ideology of the school. Reiterating her argument that it should be possible to choose which language to speak, she cites her '*aunty*', who has chosen to predominantly speak English. The student's '*aunty*', herself of Bangladeshi heritage, is offered as an example of someone who has resisted the notion of 'one-language-equals-one ethnicity/culture'. For S2 language choice is flexible. For the school, in this example at least, language learning is tied to ethnic and national belonging, and is inflexible.

We saw many examples in the classroom of students resisting teachers' attempts to teach them Bengali. In more than one example students mocked their teachers' pronunciation of English words. Here, though, the children

challenge the teacher's pronunciation of the name of a new child when she arrives at school:

- S1: *She is coming through the front door*
 T: Jaara
 S1: [correcting teacher's pronunciation] Zahra
 T: **Tumaader aamaake shikhaate hobe naa** <you all don't have to teach me>
Ektu chintaa korbaa aamaader theke onaara boishko <you should think that he is much older than us>
 S1: *Okay, look Aleha, how do you spell Zahra?*
 S2: *Z-a-h-r-a. In school we call her Zahra, in school we call her Zahra.*
 (classroom recording)

Here S1 corrects the teacher's pronunciation. The different pronunciations of the name are significant: in Bangladesh /z/ is pronounced as /j/, so the teacher is not pronouncing the name 'Jara' incorrectly, but is pronouncing it just as it would be in Bangladesh. The pronunciation of the name which the children use in school is an anglicized version, pronouncing the /z/. The students contest the 'Bangladeshi' ('Sylheti' and/or 'Bengali') pronunciation of the child's name, and insist on the anglicized version. Here the students appear to use the teacher's pronunciation of the Bangladeshi name as an opportunity to negotiate a subject position away from the imposed 'heritage' identity, and to use available linguistic resources in subtle, nuanced ways to occupy a position which is oppositional to ideologies which rely on the 'purity' of the Bengali language.

The students' complex and sophisticated response to the complementary schools' 'heritage' positioning of them was also evident in interviews. In this excerpt two students were talking to the researchers about a drama activity, based on a story of new arrivals from Bangladesh. In talking to the researcher (R) they described this group as 'freshies' (cf. Martin *et al.* 2004):

- R: *What do you mean 'freshie', what does that mean?*
 S1: *freshie as in a newcomer*
 R: *is that bad to say to somebody?*
 S1: *yea it's kind of like a blaze but it's also a word to describe a new person coming from a different place.*
 S2: *it's not a good thing.*
 S1: *it's kind of both..if you say it as in trying to tease somebody, 'freshie', and we say it as in erm trying to say erm, as in they're newcomers and they come from a different country for the first time*
 R: *could you tell if someone was 'freshie'?*
 S2: *well from Bangladesh it's not always their skin colour, it's sometimes how they talk...*
 R: *how do you talk 'freshie'?*

- S1: *it's kind of like they don't know that much English.*
 S2: *they might just show off in their language but if you ask them a question in English they just... .*
 S1: *they're like 'what', 'what', you know*
 S2: *they say strange words in their language and if you ask them a question in English they just say 'what' in their language.*

(student interview, School B)

The students negotiate their identity in opposition to that of the newly arrived children, repeatedly referring to *'their'* language, which they see as different from the language they speak themselves. Here *'what' 'what'* is spoken with an intonation which suggests some confusion on the part of the newly-arrived group. Although the students speak the same language as the new arrivals in daily interactions with their parents, they nevertheless indicate that *'how they talk'* is one of the defining ways in which the *'freshies'* are different from them.

The students' linguistic repertoires were wide-ranging. In addition to making use of linguistic resources of English, Sylheti, and Bengali, they watched Hindi films, read the Qur'an in Arabic, and listened to popular contemporary music in varieties of American English, and also Indian and Bengali pop music. For some, listening to contemporary American music and watching DVDs was an important part of the way they viewed themselves. In the following example two siblings were asked what sort of Hindi songs they like:

- S1: *I like Bhangra*
 R1: *really?*
 S1: *I like Bhangra with rap*
 R2: *oh they have all kinds of crossover Bhangra music now don't they*
 S1: *I like rap like Fifty Cent I mean*
 R2: *do you like Eminem?*
 S1: *yes he's all right*
 R1: *so is that OK? I mean rap and all that is all right?*
 S2: *erm yea*
 R: *your dad doesn't...?*
 S2: *he doesn't really erm if it's in front of him he will shout but erm if we stopped it it's all right.*
 S1: *rap anyway I don't hear rap at home I might just hear it a bit cos I hear it from my friend's dad in his cars and everything because*
 R1: *is your friend Pakistani or Indian?*
 S1: *English (..) I mean Bengali*

(student interview)

Here ten-year-old S1 associates himself with firstly Bhangra, then *'Bhangra with rap'*, and finally *'rap like Fifty Cent'*. This appears to represent a negotiation of an increasingly risky, or perhaps sophisticated, subject position.

Whereas listening to Bhangra music may be regarded as relatively mainstream and conservative, *'Bhangra with rap'* moves towards an increasingly American pop culture position, and *'rap like Fifty Cent'* is likely to represent a *'Gansta Rap'* identity. S1 is happy to be associated with *'my friend's dad'*, and the researcher assumes that his friend must be of Pakistani or Indian heritage, as it may be surprising for a good Bangladeshi to listen to this kind of music. In the final utterance in this excerpt, S1's pause between *'English'* and *'I mean Bengali'* may suggest that nationality, ethnicity, and even language are not the salient categories for him at this moment—rather, he is more interested in positioning himself as a cool, sophisticated consumer of contemporary, transnational music.

In this section we have seen that students and teachers at times used the complementary school classroom as a space in which to negotiate identities. These negotiations were often focused on beliefs, attitudes and values relating to language(s), and played out in sophisticated deployment of linguistic resources (see also Harris 2006). We have also seen that for these students the *'heritage'* identities which the schools set out to reproduce were often contested in subtle, sophisticated ways, as the students called into play sets of linguistic resources which positioned them as somewhat different from the imposed *'heritage'* identities of the institution.

DISCUSSION

What, then, can we say about negotiations which constitute, and are constituted by, the values, attitudes, beliefs, and practices of *'language'* in and around these Bengali complementary schools? It is essential to any analysis that *'the messiness of actual usage'* (Heller 2007: 13) should be understood in relation to histories, power, and social organization. In the course of our research we heard strongly articulated views, from parents and teachers, that Bengali should be taught as a mandatory part of the mainstream school curriculum. In the US context Wiley (2007: 254) refers to *'the crisis of monolingualist ideology'*, which proposes that English alone is of value in society. In British political, media, and other discourses a powerful ideology similarly proposes that minority languages other than English are a negative force in society. Languages which originate in the Indian sub-continent in particular come to be *'racialized'* in the discourses of elite groups in UK, and associated with social segregation, family breakdown, and even terrorism (Blackledge 2005, 2006, forthcoming 2009). To some extent at least, the complementary schools are *'safe spaces'* (Creese and Martin 2006: 2) in which young people are able to practise and extend their linguistic repertoires. In doing so they are *'contesting the historical inequalities that have seen minority languages, and their speakers, relegated to the social and political margins'* (May 2007: 26).

However, the process of teaching *'heritage'* through *'language'* is complex. First, for our participants the notion of what constitutes a *'language'* is disputed. For some of the social actors concerned, one set of linguistic resources

('Bengali') is heavily endowed with symbolic associations, and becomes a 'social artefact, invented at the cost of a decisive indifference to differences' (Bourdieu 1991: 287). This 'Standard' set of resources is regarded by some as that which should be 'preserved' and kept free from 'contamination'. This particular set of resources accrues symbolic capital as it is perceived by some social agents as intrinsically superior to some other sets of linguistic resources (Bourdieu 1998: 47), and is 'invented' as a 'language' which is reified and immutable. The discourse of the school administrators in particular proposes that the 'language' should be transmitted to the next generation in its pure and natural form. However, this clear distinction between Standard and non-Standard sets of linguistic resources ('Bengali' and 'Sylheti') did not attract universal consensus. While the case for the purity of the 'Standard' was often argued in institutional discourse, other social actors, especially the parents of the students, and the students themselves, contested this view. Furthermore, we saw that some linguistic features came to be iconic representations of their speakers, as if a linguistic feature displayed the Sylheti group's inherent nature. The fact of using certain sets of resources ('Sylheti'), rather than others ('Bengali'), appeared to index these speakers in particularly negative terms, despite the relative similarities of the two sets of linguistic resources. We saw that the parents of one child mocked the 'Standard' resources, and the ideological beliefs which were perceived as accompanying their speakers. In doing so they acknowledged the relations of power at work in the uneven distribution of resources, and the discourses which inscribe value (or its lack) to particular linguistic forms and practices.

Second, we saw that the teaching of 'heritage identities' (Creese *et al.* 2006), through nationalist and historical content, was at times contested and subverted by students, in interactions which became sites for the negotiation of identities. We saw examples of language teachers teaching language through 'heritage' content with messages which were deeply rooted in Bangladeshi nationalism, invoking features of the collective memory of the nation. Also, we saw the repeated teaching of tangible and less tangible symbols of Bangladeshi heritage, from the national flag and national anthem to symbols such as the national flower, national fish, and national bird. Billig (1995: 174) argues that 'nationalism' is produced and reproduced in 'daily, unmindful reminders of nationhood in the contemporary, established nation-state', through everyday, 'banal utterances'. These 'self-evidences' are those apparently common-sense misrecognitions which constantly construct and reinforce ideologies (Bourdieu 2000: 181). For the Bangladeshi-heritage group in our study, however, their nationalism was not produced and reproduced in everyday discourses in wider society. Perhaps in the face of the everyday 'flagging' of British/English nationalism, their approach to teaching their 'heritage' was explicit and often direct. The teachers appeared to impose on the students identities which were associated with Bangladesh and its history. Like the

institutional 'language' ideology, 'heritage' ideology was reified and naturalized. However, the students did not always accept the static, essentialized version of 'heritage' which the school was teaching. Howard (2003: 6) propose that 'things actually inherited do not become heritage until they are recognised as such'. That is, while the teachers and administrators of the schools believed that teaching 'language' and 'heritage' was a means of reproducing 'Bengali' identity in the next generation, the imposition of such identities was often contested and re-negotiated by the students. Their apparent rejection of some 'heritage' symbols, their challenge of their teachers' insistence on the use of 'Bengali' in the classroom, and their insistence on the anglicized pronunciation of a Bengali name, all became instances of students negotiating subject positions which contested those imposed by the institution.

In the schools there was a perceived institutional need to fill what some teachers and administrators called the 'cultural gap' which had been created between the students and their parents. One of the teachers said of the students:

to oraa <they are > *British born, so they need to know Bangladesh, where their parents were born in Bangladesh, what is Bangladesh, where is Bangladesh... so many of them never express own self from own self [that] they are Bangladeshi, they always think, they always think they are British. Their mind perform, mind create that they are British.*

(teacher interview)

This teacher was just one of several who argued that the students lacked something in their knowledge and understanding of Bangladesh, and in their sense of themselves as 'Bangladeshis'. Bourdieu proposed that:

The history objectified in instruments, monuments, works, techniques etc. can become activated and active history only if it is taken in hand by agents who, because of their previous *investments*, are inclined to be *interested* in it and endowed with the aptitudes needed to reactivate it. (Bourdieu 2000: 151 *emphasis in original*)

It was this very endowment of aptitudes, this activation of history, which appeared to be the *raison d'être* of the Bengali complementary schools. For the teachers, the process of teaching 'language', and teaching 'heritage', had the potential to invest their students with the aptitudes they required to inherit their heritage, because 'only when the heritage has taken over the inheritor can the inheritor take over the heritage' (Bourdieu 2000: 152).

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have raised questions in relation to understandings of 'language' and 'heritage'. The beliefs and practices of the participants raised a

number of questions in our attempts to understand how the language use of students and teachers in Bengali schools in one city in the UK was used to negotiate multilingual and multicultural identities. First, participants articulated attitudes and values which raised questions about what constitutes 'language'. For some (a) 'language' should be preserved and kept free from the contamination of other sets of linguistic resources. For others there was no distinction in practice between resources ideologically framed as legitimate and illegitimate. Second, participants expressed views and attitudes, and performed interactional practices, which raised questions about what constitutes 'heritage'. While teachers and administrators of the schools believed that teaching 'language' and 'heritage' was a means of reproducing 'Bengali'/'Bangladeshi' identity in the next generation, the imposition of such identities was often contested and re-negotiated by the students, as classroom interactions became sites where students occupied subject positions which were at odds with those imposed by the institutions. These young people were discursively negotiating paths for themselves which were in some ways contrary to the ideologies of the complementary schools, where teachers and administrators held the view that they ought to learn Bengali because to do so was a practice which carried with it knowledge of Bangladeshi history, nationalism, and identity. The young people's attitudes to their languages, and their multilingual practices, constituted a sophisticated response to their place in the world, as they negotiated subject positions which took them on a path through language ideological worlds constructed by others. The young people were flexible and adaptable in response to their environment, as they negotiated identities which were more complex and sophisticated than the 'heritage' positions ascribed to them institutionally.

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NOTE

1 Throughout the article we adopt the following transcription conventions:

plain font:	Sylheti
bold font:	Bengali
italic font:	English
<u>bold font underlined:</u>	other language (e.g. Arabic, Hindi)
<plain font enclosed>	translation into English
()	speech inaudible

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