Multilingualism and Identities across Contexts: Turkish-speaking Youth in Europe

Conveners: Normann Jørgensen (University of Copenhagen) & Vally Lytra (King’s College London)

Recent developments in social science research, including socio-linguistics, have led to a re-conceptualisation of the relationship between language users’ range of different linguistic material and their identities. Identities and their discursive constructions are not stable entities residing in people’s minds. Instead, they are multiple and shifting, and they are linked to relations of power in society. Identities may vary across contexts and can be negotiated, reframed or contested in unfolding communication. Traditionally sociolinguistic research has studied multilingualism focussing on code-choice and code-switching as key linguistic means in identity negotiations. Recent studies on multilingualism, however, have examined not only code-switching but also a range of other linguistic practices, such as the use of linguistic material from varieties which the speakers only command rudimentarily, new linguistic and diasporic varieties, new linguistic strategies and new identity narratives. This has led to an increased interest in new combinations of features as used particularly by young speakers in urban, late modern environments. Insights from such work have revealed that young people use whatever linguistic resources they have at their disposal to speak, write and do identity work. This line of research has revealed a complex relationship between the young people’s multilingual oral and written performances and identities in operation. It has also highlighted the centrality of language-focused work on identities in order to (a) illuminate the ways in which situated meaning making shapes and is shaped by broader macro categories (e.g. ethnicity, social class, gender, religious affiliations) and (b) foreground similarities and differences in identity work across contexts (e.g. social, political, historical, institutional, spatio-temporal), within countries (e.g. youth of Turkish and Moroccan descent in the Netherlands) and between countries (UK, the Netherlands, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Norway).

Our workshop aims at contributing towards (a) and (b) above by focusing on multilingualism and identities across contexts with special reference to Turkish-speaking youth in Europe. Turkish-speaking youth has recently received increasing attention (see for instance Creese et al 2006; Keim 2002, Dirim & Auer 2004, Hinnenkamp 2000, Issa 2005; Lytra 2003, Jørgensen 2003; Wright & Kurtöglu-Hooton 2006). The purpose of this workshop is to bring together researchers working on Turkish-speaking youth across Europe drawing on existing networks such as the TINWE (Turkish in Western Europe) network but also expanding these networks to include, for instance, researchers from the UK and Greece. Drawing on a wide range of analytical frameworks from sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and new literacy studies and methodologies (both qualitative and quantitative approaches), the papers will bring to the fore the young people’s diverse multilingual repertoires and practices that they use in order to negotiate self- and other-identity positionings and affiliations associated with ethnicity, gender, techno-popular culture, and so on. In the process, we hope to show ways we can advance or problematize notions such as “Turkishness”, “Turkish-speaking communities” and hyphenated (e.g. British-Turkish, Danish-Turkish) identities as well as concepts such as “multilingualism” or “polylingualism”. The investigation of Turkish-speaking youth across contexts, within and between countries will also provide productive points of entry into identity work in comparative perspective.
Workshop format: 3-hour workshop in which 4 times 2 X 10 minute papers followed by 10 minutes discussant comments leading to a 15 minute discussion with the audience.

The papers will be published in advance in the Copenhagen Studies in Bilingualism vol. 45. Available from early March 2008. For a copy pls contact <sta@hum.ku.dk>

Selected references:


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