

Deskilling and delanguaging African migrants in Barcelona: Pathways of labour market incorporation and the value of ‘global’ English

Maria Rosa Garrido & Eva Codó

Abstract

This article analyses the labour and social trajectories of seven multilingual and well-educated young men from Africa in the Barcelona area (Catalonia, Spain) over a five-year period. Our data consists of life history interviews combined with ethnographic observations in a settlement NGO. We adopt a critical sociolinguistic perspective on language and mobility which underlines the time-space dimension of migrants’ emplacement (Glick-Schiller and Çağlar, 2013) and understands the value of global languages in relation to socioeconomic and linguistic normativity regimes (Niño-Murcia, 2003). Our findings suggest that English does not play a role in the local emplacement of these migrants, with the exceptions of the dwindling NGO sector and tourism in Barcelona. However, it indexes their transnational flows, connections and orientations. We argue that the ‘ideologies of integration’ of the NGOs examined background migrants’ global language capitals while funneling them into the non-qualified labour market. These agencies draw on tabula-rasa discourses which delanguage, and more generally, deskill migrants. In the current crisis, they have adopted new discourses of migration as a learning opportunity to gain experience, make contacts and learn skills. In the absence of paid work, voluntary labour is construed as intensive language practice and an opportunity to expand migrants’ networks.

Keywords: English as a global resource, skilled migration, settlement NGOs, labour insertion, ideologies of migrant integration.

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1. Introduction

This paper examines the life, settlement and professional trajectories of a group of seven skilled and high-skilled African migrants residing in the Barcelona metropolitan area (Spain). We take the practical and discursive value of their language capitals, and in particular of English, as a point of departure to understand broader processes of deskilling in the host society. In this ethnographic piece of research, we adopt a historicizing and a processual approach, which not only situates and understands social processes and the global and local forces which shape them in their historical, political and economic contexts, but which also captures their ongoing transformation in time and space.

We aim to contribute to a better understanding of the processes of social and/or economic incorporation to Spain of a lesser-known group of migrant citizens, namely those from Africa. We want to distinguish between social and economic insertion to problematise the assumption of “economic integration as a prerequisite for other types of inclusion” (Creese and Wiebe, 2009, p.2). In adopting continent of origin as a category, we do not assume homogeneity in cultural, linguistic or socio-economic backgrounds. In fact, this paper illustrates the diversity of motivations, migration routes and experiences of the seven individuals followed. The “selection” of our informants was, rather, linked to their participation in the language classes organised by an NGO settlement agency which we started to investigate ethnographically in 2007. The continental lens, however, allows us to transcend the traditional divide in the literature between sub-Saharan Africans and those coming from North Africa. This dichotomous categorisation foregrounds race, but obscures many points of contact between the two groups, such as cultural capital and religious practices, and has the effect of erasing important differences of class and educational levels within ethnic groups, which a focus on continental origin allow us to retain.

Following Glick-Schiller and Çağlar (2013), we adopt the concept of migrant *emplacement* to understand individual processes of incorporation with a structural and locational approach which includes an examination of global and local economic circumstances, technologies of citizenship and public discourses. To do so, we need to foreground the role of civil society organisations as agents of governmentality, and the ways in which African migrants' pathways intersect and intertwine with the work of those

local agencies. Our theoretical perspective combines the notion of emplacement with an approach to language in globalisation along the lines of the *sociolinguistics of mobility*, as outlined by Blommaert (2010), which situates space and time at the centre of the analysis. These ideas are closely linked to Niño-Murcia's (2003) plea for *spatialising* accounts of the affordances of English in specific linguistic and economic regimes.

This paper is organised as follows. First, the main features of current migration trends to Spain are outlined. Second, the key theoretical concepts employed are explained. Third, our ethnographic methods are described, and some key contextual information is presented. Fourth, we examine the transnational trajectories of our informants and the role that English has played in them, with a special emphasis on their discourses about the language. Fifth, we zoom in on these migrants' insertion processes, both social and economic. Finally, we discuss the implications of this piece of research for ethnographies of English, insertion pathways and globalisation processes.

2. Migration into Spain: Legal, economic and discursive considerations

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the countries in southern Europe, which had been long-time exporters of migrants, started to receive migrants from different parts of the world. In fact, the first Immigration Law in Spain dates back only to 1985. African migration, especially from Morocco, was numerically important in the early period. In fact, Spain took over from France as primary destination for Moroccans in the 1990s (de Haas, 2007). However, since the 2000s, there has been a process of increased "Latin Americanisation" of the migrant population (Hierro, 2013).

Traditionally, African migrants crossed the 14-km Strait of Gibraltar, which separates Europe from Africa, to arrive in Spain. They travelled either on small fishing boats (*pateras*) chartered by smugglers, hidden in vans and trucks (like two of our informants) or carrying false documentation. This included both North Africans and Sub-Saharan in transit to Europe. Stricter police surveillance in the Strait, coupled with increased political pressure on Morocco to tighten border controls (Finotelli, 2007), has lately resulted in a shift in migration routes. In particular, citizens from sub-Saharan states have increasingly travelled to the ports of Mauritania and Senegal, where makeshift boats (*cayucos*) depart periodically for the Canary Islands. Sinatti (2008) shows how transnational Senegalese circuits, and especially African Muslims, imagine Barcelona as a central node, as captured in the rallying cry of "Barça ou Barzakh" (Barcelona or the afterlife). In fact, one of our

informants (Jah) told us about the weight of these circulating imaginaries in his decision to migrate to Barcelona.

By and large, migration policies in Spain have focused on the control of migrant flows rather than on implementing rational and effective mechanisms for regulating the entry of foreign populations. The labour demands of a booming economy in the early years of the 21st century and the existence of a large-sized informal sector spurred many individuals to migrate to Spain without proper authorisation. The Spanish state resorted periodically to mass legalisation processes to grant resident status to the large pool of informal economy workers (see Codó 2008). Amnesties have been, in fact, the most common way of obtaining legal status in Spain over the last two decades, where the foreign population grew from 1% in 1990 to 12% in 2009. These have “*de facto* converted Spain into an immigrant friendly country” (Rodríguez-Planas, 2012, p. 4).

The philosophy of Spanish immigration policies has been to gear migrants towards those segments of the labour market (typically, low-skilled and low wage) for which there is no availability of native-born workers (Mendoza, 2000). Those sectors are agriculture; construction; caregiving, cleaning and domestic service; and low-skilled jobs in the hospitality industry. Policies and public discourses have, thus, helped develop an imaginary of migrants in Spain as non-qualified workers. This imaginary, we claim, devalues their human capitals and constrains the pathways of labour incorporation which are presented as “possible” to them even by institutions like NGOs and settlement bodies which aim to facilitate their economic insertion. Because of Spain’s short experience as a recipient society, studies begin to appear now that examine the downward mobility and deskilling processes to which migrant workers are subject (e.g. Rodríguez-Planas, 2012).

3. English, migrant emplacement and a sociolinguistics of mobility

This paper draws heavily on the notion of *emplacement* by Glick-Schiller and Çağlar (2013). Emplacement draws attention to the embeddedness of migrants’ trajectories of mobility and practices of settlement in multiple and heterogeneous networks of social relations. These networks may be local, translocal or transnational in nature, and they shape migrants’ opportunities for action, such as the labour market insertion which is the focus of this paper. Emplacement foregrounds the importance of the conjunction of time and space in understanding migrants’ trajectories. This entails the adoption of a historical perspective which places locality (understood as territorial, political and socio-discursive

space) at the centre of the analysis. What this boils down to is an ethnographic perspective which takes account of the systemic and institutional constraints within which migrants must act, but which understands these constraints as being in constant evolution as shaped by local, national and global forces.

The perspective adopted in this paper is in line with recent pleas for a *sociolinguistics of mobility* (Blommaert, 2010) which assumes temporariness, instability and movement to be the defining features of current processes of social organisation. While populations are more mobile than ever, and the composition of societies – whether in core or peripheral countries (Han, 2013) – is subject to processes of increased diversification, mobility is also a major structuring factor. As Blommaert (2010) argues, not all forms of mobility are equally possible, smooth or successful, because they are shaped by unequal global power relations. Different types of flows are regulated by different types of language and citizenship regimes. Thus, movements from the ‘core’ to the ‘periphery’ of the world system are characterised by the importance of international linguistic resources such as global English. By contrast, movement from peripheral areas to the centre is heavily defined by modernist nation-state ideologies which emphasise ‘national’ language learning as a pre-requisite for social participation. This observation leads Blommaert to assert the importance of locality in the organisation of people’s frames of meaning and everyday experiences.

Mobility is the rule, but that does not preclude locality from being a powerful frame for the organisation of meanings. Locality and mobility coexist and whenever we observe patterns of mobility we have to examine the local environments in which they occur. (Blommaert, 2010, p.22)

These ideas link up nicely with our approach to global English. We follow Niño-Murcia (2003:139) in calling to question “the overgeneralised globalist analysis”, which “projects the world English phenomenon as if it were a unitary universal, audible from one speaking position”. Like her, we argue for a *spatialised* appraisal of the value of English in specific normativity regimes, an approach which takes into account the social indexicalities of the code and the ways in which these indexicalities enter into conflict with the position migrants are imagined to occupy socially. Similarly, we draw on Bourdieu’s idea of English as embodied cultural capital (Creese and Wiebe, 2009), where speaking the language, even normatively, is not enough. One must have the “right” accent and other forms of cultural and bodily dispositions to be considered a legitimate speaker of it (Codó, 2012).

Finally, this paper aims to nuance the role of states in transnational migration flows and connections. Despite the rhetoric of globalisation undermining the power and influence of states, ethnographic case studies demonstrate that this is not true (Han, 2013). Yet, in line with Sassen (1998), we believe there is a need to understand the changing role of states in immigration policy. We take ‘policy’ to be not just the legal framework regulating the entry and stay of foreigners but also the micro-policies through which the governmentality of populations is enforced (Inda, 2006). We claim that, under neoliberal conditions, the state has retreated from the direct regulation of populations which is now in the hands of ‘subsidiary’ civil society organisations (see Codó, 2013; Garrido, 2010).

4. Informants and ethnographic context

The ethnographic, textual and life history data that we analyse come from long-term ethnographic engagement (2007- 2012) with migrant settlement NGOs. In this chapter, we have focused on the trajectories of seven African young men who in 2007 and 2008 were users of an NGO located in a postindustrial city in the Barcelona metropolitan area (Catalonia, Spain). This post-industrial city of over 200,000 inhabitants and with 12% foreign nationals (Idescat 2012)¹, is a central node in these people’s trajectories since many have settled there for a long period of time. The closing of manufacturing companies has resulted in the growing tertiarisation of the local economy that now rests on retail and wholesale trade, financial institutions and the remnants of the textile and metallurgy industries. There is a vibrant civil society, which comprises 10 pro-migrant associations and over 50 ethnolinguistic, regional and national migrant associations. African associations (i.e. “Maghribian” and “sub-Saharan” ones) account for 40% of them.

The main fieldworker – a local woman in her twenties who speaks English and French – met the informants in the language classes that were organised within a residential project for homeless migrants (see Garrido 2010) and has maintained contact over time with all except one. The ethnographic fieldwork and interaction with these seven people has varied in intensity over time owing to the challenges posed by people’s geographical mobilities and work commitments including our own. Nevertheless, we have decided to include all of them because each trajectory sheds light on a different type of socioeconomic incorporation and contributes key discourses and narratives to our analysis.

Our informants come from Morocco and West African nation-states.² The two brothers, Massin (mid thirties) and Said (late twenties), are from an Amazigh village in South East Morocco, and both hold degrees from the University of Fes. The Anglophone university graduates in our group are Agbor and Ebrima. Agbor (mid thirties) studied a Law degree in Yaoundé (Cameroon) and Ebrima (early thirties) is a Gambian Jola³ who studied IT in Southern England. Jasseh (early thirties) is a Fula from rural Gambia who obtained his A-levels in an English-medium high school in Banjul. Jah (late twenties) is an Ivorian Dyula who was granted refugee status in the Spanish state and holds an IT degree from Senegal. Abdoulaye (late thirties) comes from Burkina Faso where he completed secondary education in French. Upon arrival, these informants spoke between three and five languages each, which comprise Ejagham, Jula, Mòoré, Mandinka, Soninke, Wolof, Pulaar, Jola-Fonyi, Tamazight and Moroccan Arabic, alongside English and/or French. We have chosen this group of seven men because they have elite multilingual repertoires acquired through African educational systems, apart from the wide range of indigenous languages above, and they share an investment in education and training in the host society. Our definition of “skilled migrants” corresponds to secondary and tertiary educational levels in countries where education is considered (upper)middle-class capital that buys access to languages like English and French. Their ages range from the mid-twenties to the mid-thirties. Their heterogeneity in social backgrounds, geographical origins, linguistic repertoires and transnational experiences challenges *methodological nationalism* (Beck, 2004), which categorises informants in seemingly homogeneous nation-state groups. Our data wants to showcase the diversity among “African” men who have different experiences and worldviews as far as migration and languages are concerned, even in the case of the two Amazigh brothers, Massin and Said.

The Spanish and Catalan language classes where we first met our informants were organised by a NGO run by members of the local middle classes. Apart from advocacy campaigns, this organisation provides a number of services for migrants, such as free immigration advice, a CV-writing support desk, etc. It is an umbrella type of agency, staffed by members of different subsidiary organisations. In common with the vast majority of Spanish NGOs, this umbrella body financially depends on the local administration (Gómez Gil, 2005). Under the recent Catalan Migrant Reception Law (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2010), local municipalities have a regulatory role over migrant-support initiatives. One of this NGO’s schemes was a three-month residential

project for undocumented homeless migrants aimed at their socioeconomic insertion. Most of our informants participated in it. This specific project, although formally under the auspices of the umbrella body, was run by a local association of Catholic inspiration which actually belongs to a broader, transnational organisation. This association has recently started a small expansion of the project with their own funds (it now offers private housing in flats where some of our informants live). It is an association dedicated to the social reinsertion of people through communal living and recycling work which allows them to organise local welfare projects like this expansion of the residential project.

These NGOs (both the umbrella one and the local branch of the transnational association) are intermediary institutions of migration which actively participate in the neoliberal governmentality of migrants on behalf of the nation-state. Our previous research findings show that both regard these African people as dependent, infantilised Others in need of human warmth, moral education and social control. This materialises in the regimentation of space, time and behaviour through evaluative rules which are collectively learned and enforced in the Catalan and Spanish classes (Garrido, 2010). These organisations' integration discourses place the responsibility on the migrants to learn Catalan and Spanish as vehicular languages for their own "re-socialisation" and as central skills to become self-sufficient selves.

5. Transnational trajectories and the role of global English

The modernist discourses and practices of the social organisations to which migrants turn for support contrast sharply with their transnational and cross-border trajectories across Africa (and sometimes Europe). In fact, in many cases individual mobilities are crucially enabled by high proficiency in English or French. These languages act as "technologies of citizenship" (Han, 2013), that is, as screening mechanisms for tough visa application processes. Agbor's case illustrates the value of English and French for transnational mobility previous to arriving in Spain. An English Common Law Graduate from Cameroon, Agbor explains that standard European language skills are essential to be successful in highly restrictive visa application procedures at European embassies in Africa, where "only 3 out of 120 visas are granted every day" (informal interview 22-04-2009). Given his linguistic background, Spain was not Agbor's preferred country of destination. Thanks to his normative French, acquired through his tertiary education in

Cameroon, he was granted a visa to France. He travelled to Paris, and from there, explored the possibility of settling in the UK through a visit to London, but decided to go back to Paris. French and English were thus essential languages for him, both to be able to migrate legally from Cameroon and to try to insert himself in his preferred European destinations. The social and economic difficulties he faced in France coupled with an expiring tourist visa made him decide to try his luck in Spain, as he was told that obtaining legal papers to stay in the country would “only” take him three years. Yet he faced the difficulty of not knowing any Spanish.

Ebrima’s trajectory follows a similar path. He is an IT Graduate from Gambia with extensive transnational experience. Having learnt standard English at school in Gambia, he got a 2-year student visa to the UK under a Commonwealth-supported scheme, where he got a diploma in software applications. Back in Gambia, he applied and was granted a tourist visa for France, as in the case of Agbor. He arrived in Paris via Brussels, stayed there for one week, and then moved to Spain. According to his narrative, this decision was shaped by rumours that “Spanish people are friendly. If you don’t create a problem, ok. A lot of people sin papeles (without papers)” (interview 13-10-2008). This confirms a view of Spain as a “migrant-friendly” society, which we heard voiced in previous ethnographic fieldwork (Codó, 2008) and which is also mentioned in the literature (Rodríguez-Planas, 2012). In Ebrima’s discourse, shaped by the indexicalities of the language in Gambia, English is equated with smartness, education and improved socioeconomic status. The difficulties of making himself understood upon his arrival in Barcelona, where, reportedly, he was only able to communicate to a Chinese young man, came as a shocking surprise to him.

Unlike Ebrima or Agbor, Abdoulaye, from Burkina Faso, did not learn English at school or university, nor is he fluent in English. However, he shares with the previous two informants an appreciation for the international value of English which, in his case, came later in life, and was linked to transnational business connections with Asia. For a period of his life, he frequently travelled to Hong-Kong to buy furniture which was then sold in Burkina Faso. However, this entrepreneurial initiative did not last long because trips were expensive and he could not mobilise enough money to finance his projects. Spain was not Abdoulaye’s first destination (as in the previous two stories), nor was Europe for that matter. Abdoulaye’s plan was to travel to the US, but his business contacts got him a visa to Germany.⁴ There he heard that his employer’s brother lived in a Catalan city close to the French border and he travelled there. Once there, he realised that “things were

different but I could not reverse”, moved to Barcelona and later got to the post-industrial city where we met him. His “dream” of migrating to the US is still in his mind, and so is English, to the extent that, when he manages to secure a stable job, he says he wants to continue learning English. This new mobility, though, he views as dependent on getting married to a Spanish woman to get “papers”. His stay in Spain is thus presented as a necessary step to be able to reach his desired destination. However, his life plans are not to settle down permanently in the US, but to earn enough money to go back to Burkina Faso and set up a business.

As we have seen, English has been and might be pivotal in Agbor’s, Ebrima’s and Abdoulaye’s transnational trajectories. This may explain why the three informants share a highly positive discourse about English, as a valuable linguistic resource to possess, although, as we shall see, at the moment none of them is able to capitalise on it. English belongs either to their past or to their future, but not to their present. The same applies to other informants, like Massin and Said, the two Amazigh brothers from the Moroccan Sahara, who share similar positivising views about global English. Both learnt English for three years at university in Morocco. Massin even claims to have always been interested in English – even to have wanted to graduate in English – although he ended up completing a degree in law. Like Abdoulaye, both place a lot of importance on English language learning, although they do not seem to have further migration plans in mind.

One of them, i.e. Massin, has even taken English courses at a Catalan community college for two years. His learning and use of the language is deeply implicated in transnational flows. Massin wants to take advantage of the transnational connections of the local branch of the association where he lives to travel to the UK and practice the language. He also uses English for his online pro-Amazigh activism in social networks, which intersects with his coordination and voluntary work in the local Amazigh association. In the case of these two brothers, English also seems to satisfy the need to ideologically transcend the oppressive colonial past indexed by French (el-Bakhouti, 2011).⁵ In their discourse, the value of English is expressed in generic terms. They appropriate the circulating discourse of English as connecting individuals to the world, and accordingly, claim that English allows them to communicate with people from all over and thus “*et pot obrir al món*” (it can open you to the world).

Finally, we would like to explore the ideas and practices of English that Jah engages in. He is an Ivorian Dyula who was granted refugee status in the Spanish state and has married a local woman with whom he has a son. Jah learnt English at a Senegalese

Francophone university where he graduated in IT. His discourse about English is less generic than that of Massin and Said. Unlike them, at the time when we interviewed him, Jah claimed to use English with Gambians, a Portuguese acquaintance, and with tourists and English-speaking foreigners (from the UK and Canada, he says) that he would meet at night clubs. For him, English is not a resource whose communicative value is taken for granted and which exists in the abstract. English actually connects him to a variety of people, among whom visitors and young people like himself, not just from Africa but from all over. This is the case with Maria Rosa, with whom he engages in shared global cultural practices when listening to hip-hop tunes before the interview. Jah draws on English to step out of ethnicised categorisations of African migrants, and constructs a “cosmopolitan” subjectivity for himself as someone who enjoys meeting people from all over and conversing with them in the hypercentral language of globalisation. Interestingly, in the same conversational event, Jah admits that English has no value for him in the labour market, and his emphasis is put on the need for him to learn Catalan. The only exception to the generalised appreciative discourse towards English is Jasseh’s, from Gambia. He does not place any value on his Gambian A-levels or his English language skills as we shall discuss below.

All in all, the worth that English holds for the majority of our informants – whether in their home countries, for transnational mobility or for inter-group communication purposes – contrasts with the little or no role that this language plays in their daily lives. How is it that in Spain, a society obsessed with the economic impact of its population’s lack of English language skills, the linguistic resources of these skilled migrants are not considered? The answer lies, we claim, in the process of practical and ideological deskilling to which these individuals are subject (of which delanguaging is but a facet). This process is attributable to the segmented and to a large extent racialised nature of the Spanish labour market but also, crucially, to the role that social organisations play in ignoring or devaluing these migrants’ capitals and to their ideologies of integration, which are founded on the central role of local language learning. The aim of the following section is to dissect in detail the avenues for labour market incorporation that are open to skilled African migrants in Catalonia/Spain, the role that English and other languages play in them and their consequences.

6. Labour insertion pathways for African migrants

The transnational trajectories of these seven informants, as well as their emplacement in this Catalan city, have been shaped by nation-state immigration policies, the economic context, the nature of the labour market, and the ideologies and practices of local civil society institutions, particularly the umbrella NGO mentioned. In this section, we examine ethnographic and life history narrative data to understand how these migrants' labour insertion pathways intersect with their multilingual repertoires and circulating language ideologies.

In the last five or six years, these informants have only engaged in manual work or unprestigious caregiving jobs which do not require higher education skills from their countries of origin. All of them are overeducated for their entry-level or voluntary jobs. The informants have appropriated, to a large extent, the discourses of language, migration and labour that circulate in civil society organisations. This is no surprise, as the local NGOs have been central for their employment pathways, be it through the provision of vocational training and language courses or through the social networking of migrants to find local employers. Besides, some informants have become volunteers in local NGOs to gain experience and practice language skills owing to the lack of jobs in the city.

6.1. What language skills? Paid work in the local economy

Securing a paid job in the local marketplace has become increasingly difficult with the Spanish economic crisis, especially for foreign-born workers and among the young (57.2% of unemployed youth in April 2013).⁶ In this section, we are going to zoom in on the trajectories of three skilled migrants, namely Agbor, Abdoulaye and Jasseh. They are all overeducated for their positions. Their labour emplacements exemplify distinct commodified values for the two official languages and the international lingua francas English and French.

Our first case study is Agbor, whose uncommon labour trajectory shows that English may have an economic value in certain geographical spaces and economic niches in Catalonia. When he arrived in Barcelona from France in 2007, he was able to find unskilled work in the construction industry thanks to the economic boom. The fact that he worked in a "tourist area", namely the Barceloneta district in Barcelona, meant that he could use English at work and for social relations there. Agbor says that English was useful to him to make friends and to find jobs in this district, which is "like another country" where English is the lingua franca. He opposes it to the experience of going back to "Spain" after work where nobody speaks English.

Excerpt 1: Interview with Agbor, 16-12-2011.

Insert TABLE 1 here

After some temporary and informal jobs in other construction sites, where he struggled with Spanish, Agbor became homeless in Barcelona. In late 2007, we met him when he was a participant in the residential project for homeless migrants and in early 2008 he was transferred to council flats paid by the same transnational association running the project. He invested in Spanish and Catalan language courses at the umbrella NGO. When the weekend “social worker” (as the post was labelled) in the residential project quit, he occupied his position, which allowed him to live at the shelter with the participants all week and involved housekeeping tasks at the weekend, mainly preparing meals and enforcing rules on participants. This unskilled job in fact requires English and French as lingua francas to communicate with the African participants. His predecessor, who spoke fluent Arabic and French, attended English language lessons paid by the association in order to communicate with English-speaking residents effectively. Agbor’s language skills were considered an added value which went unremunerated as in many low-paid jobs in the NGO sector (Allan, 2013).

Agbor used his international lingua francas in the nongovernmental settlement services for newly-arrived migrants from May 2008 to December 2011, when the project closed down owing to lack of funding. During this period, he attended Catalan language courses at the state official agency and interacted with the local association members on a daily basis since he lived on site. In our recent ethnography (2011-12), he had become a social and language mediator between the local association members and the African participants in this residential project. After being unemployed for a few months in this post-industrial city, he found a waitering job in a bar located in Barcelona, where he moved in mid 2012. There he occasionally uses English and French with foreign tourists. Our second case study is Abdoulaye’s, which illustrates a typical labour trajectory for (de)skilled migrants that foregrounds the two local languages, Spanish and Catalan.⁷ This young man from Burkina Faso has lived with an elderly working priest who is a friend of the local association members for over three years. While he was unemployed, Abdoulaye heavily invested in vocational training and language courses offered by several local NGOs and the Catalan language teaching agency. His rationale is that “it is difficult to work without speaking the language”, namely Catalan and Spanish (interview 29-12-11).

In the excerpt below, we can see not only how he links local language learning to job opportunities, but also how his “effort” to learn the local language becomes an index of his personal and moral worth.

Excerpt 2: Interview with Abdoulaye, 29-12-2011.

El professor parlava amb mi i estava molt content # estava molt orgullós de veure que jo m’espavilava molt en català # i: som amics fins avui # em va dir Abdoulaye si si surt alguna feina te trucaré de seguida # i la gent veia l’esforç que fèiem nosaltres per parlar aquesta idioma.

The teacher talked to me and he was very happy # he was very proud to see that I got by easily in Catalan # and we have friends until now # he told me Abdoulaye if if any job comes up I will phone you immediately # and people could see the effort that we were making to speak this language.

His training at NGOs has actually shaped his labour trajectory in the domestic service sector. Abdoulaye took a caregiving course aimed at migrant populations, especially women, at the local *Caritas* that got him two jobs as a caregiver for elderly men. This is a feminised and language-intensive job. In his interview, he extensively refers to the affective nature of building rapport with the men and the necessary oral skills in both local languages, which should cater to the family’s habitual language.

The third work trajectory we examine is that of Jasseh’s, which is very similar to that of the other participants in our long-term ethnography. He has only had odd paid jobs in the informal economy, such as painting or warehouse maintenance, and a one-month substitution for Agbor when he travelled to Cameroon in 2011. These opportunities grow out of the social networks surrounding the NGO in which he has actively participated for over four years. He has lived in the council flats paid by the association for three years and has volunteered as a kitchen assistant in the shelter for two and a half years. As a volunteer, he has been socialised into a feminised affective space where he has learned the Paraguayan cook’s Spanish intonation, verb tenses for the past and “sweet talk” like calling all women, including Maria Rosa, “*cariño*” (sweetie). The cook tells him that “*ya hablas paraguayo*” (you already speak Paraguayan) and some volunteers tell the fieldworker that he fits perfectly well among the women (fieldnotes 15-02-2012). His social network has moved from the African men who participate in the local Senegambian *Associació Africana* (African Association) to a much more heterogeneous network where Spanish is the lingua franca according to our observations.

In exchange for his voluntary work, the association pays him 40 €/week which he uses to buy food to not completely depend on this association (interview 22-12-11). So far, he has failed to find a full-time job in the primary market due to the global crisis and the

city's local economy. Only recently has he been given a part-time job at a local grocery store whose owner is a senior volunteer for the association. He has taken courses on cuisine in civil society organisations and has local experience in hospitality. His CV with language skills in English, Spanish and Catalan does not open doors in a post-industrial city where hospitality is not a major industry. However, his job search in Barcelona has been fruitless.

6.2. Voluntary work, ideologies of integration and discourses of learning

Jasseh's trajectory illustrates that voluntary labour is central for these men's social emplacement in the city, and occasionally also, for their labour insertion. As a matter of fact, all the participants except Agbor, who worked for an NGO, have been volunteers in some civil society body, either associations they have helped to found (Jah and Massin);⁸ local pro-migrant NGOs like *Creu Roja* (Red Cross), the umbrella body and *Caritas* (Massin and Ebrima); or the local association that runs the housing project (Jasseh, Massin and Abdoulaye). Jasseh, like a number of other participants, entered the residential project thanks to the local *Associació Africana* that brings together people of Senegambian origin.

Initially, voluntary work was construed as a temporary opportunity to gain local work experience and improve competence in the two official languages (i.e. Spanish and Catalan). Although all informants have held legal work permits since 2011, the current crisis has prevented them from being able to capitalise on their voluntary work. A case in point is Ebrima, who despite his IT qualifications has never had a paid job in Catalonia, although he has extensively volunteered since 2009. Voluntary work has thus become a social rather than a labour insertion strategy. As the housing project manager says, this volunteering scheme "has stretched over time because those who have papers should not be doing this they should be in a (paid) job, but this has allowed them to get to know each other better and this is positive" (interview, 23-03-12). These NGO/local social networks satisfy some of the affective and material requirements of these individuals, such as socialising and food/housing needs.

The informants as well as NGO actors justify voluntary work with discursive links to modernist ideologies of integration which place learning local language(s) at the heart of migrants' emplacement. In these local 'mediating' institutions, the modernist ideologies of language involve *ideological erasure* (Irvine and Gal 2000) of the informants' multilingual repertoires, which get reduced to their competences in Spanish and/or

Catalan and in their postcolonial languages (English and/or French). It must be noted, however, that the use of English or French is not fully accepted; in fact, it is only tolerated temporarily as a means to ease communication with newly arrived migrants, who usually cannot speak either of the two local languages. The reasons are both ideological and practical, as there are very few institutional servers who can speak English or French fluently (see Garrido 2010). As a result, most informants appropriate integration-through-language discourses and try to use Spanish instead of English as a lingua franca. In his interview, Jasseh says that he speaks English with Ghanaian participants, but they usually change to Spanish and tell him that “you have to learn” (22-12-11). Agbor is the marked exception who challenges this language ideology as in the instance narrated below:

Excerpt 3: Fieldnotes, NGO’s social office, 20-02-2009.

In the office, Agbor and I chit chat in English within Alex’s [social worker] reach. When Alex comes back, he asks me to get myself [Maria Rosa] a chair which is not too big (joking about the space). David goes on with the visit- he tells Agbor’s friend that he needs to go to an *alberg* [public shelter] in BCN. While Alex is organising his photocopies, Agbor keeps talking to me in English. Alex then asks me why we speak English and I reply that we’ve always spoken English ever since we met. He says that we should speak Spanish because Agbor needs to practise Spanish and laughs. Agbor, in turn, jokingly replies “¿y por qué no catalán?” [and why not Catalan?] and laughs too. Alex says that Catalan is fine too. Agbor does not take this comment seriously as he continues to address me in English throughout the encounter.

His trajectory as a language worker in the local association confers him some legitimacy which allows him to speak English publically. Unlike Jasseh, Agbor has constructed an identity as an English speaker in the local association and informally speaks English to some members like Massin (fieldnotes 19-01-12).

Under the increasingly deteriorating economic conditions, what do these informants understand by labour insertion? In the face of the lack of paid employment, the local association and the migrant informants, especially Massin, have articulated new discourses about language, migration and labour. The emergent narrative emphasises learning and knowledge -rather than traditional economic gain through employment- as the benefit for migrants of their transnational mobilities. In this framework, doing volunteer work is presented as a learning opportunity which allows migrants to gain local work experience, meet new people and become familiar with new “ideas”. In a public event where the local association participates, Massin criticises the fact that most migrants’ only goal in the host society is material accumulation. These possessions then become symbols of migrants’ economic betterment when they go home for the summer

break. However, this hides, according to him, the appalling life conditions under which many live (their “suffering”). Instead, he proposes “working for an alternative migration” where migrants’ encounters with the host society opens them up to new ideas of global social justice and social change.

Excerpt 4: Fieldnotes, 21-01-2012.

When he was in Morocco, he saw that those who lived in Europe built houses, bought a car and showed a material wealth which actually hid 11 months of suffering in Europe. He says that all these hide their social class, and in my view, work as symbolic tokens. Massin proposes an alternative migration based on IDEAS, in his words: "idees de canvi per lluitar contra els motius de la immigració" (ideas of change to fight against the motives for immigration).

These discourses have started to sink in among the migrants who live in council flats paid by the association and who dedicate most of their time to volunteering for the association. Institutional meetings to follow up these people’s job search and social well-being have articulated alternative discourses to justify their migration trajectories, which have not turned out as expected. Massin tells those who seek material gains that “he has not come here just to make money but to learn, to adopt ideas that he can later apply in his country” (fieldnotes 21-02-12). The institutional actors and some skilled migrants like Massin or Jasseh remark the importance of education and training in Europe over manual labour. The idea of voluntary return and/or cooperation projects now emerges as a transnational way out of their under- and unemployment. Agbor, for instance, started his own common initiative group in his native city to grow bananas in a cooperative. He lives transnationally as he devotes part of his earnings to finance this project and his journeys to Cameroon.

6.3. Deskilling and delanguaging discourses

The emphasis on integration through language and voluntary labour as pathways of local emplacement bank on “tabula rasa discourses” that largely categorise African men as unskilled, inexperienced and language-less labour. The lack of transferability of foreign qualifications, elite multilingual repertoires and work experience result in processes of declassing across geographical spaces. To a large extent, it is the migrant-support NGOs investigated which unconsciously effect these processes with their users, of which our informants are a small sample, on behalf of the nation-state apparatus whose immigration laws categorise migrants as manual labour (there is no points system in Spain, unlike in other countries). For example, the housing project studied offers a labour orientation

service which directs users to local industrial areas. However, these areas, which have been dwindling since the 1980s, have now received a second blow and are making workers redundant. The CV writing service ideologically erases multilingual repertoires and previous work experiences in Africa, and as a consequence, these migrants are directed to domestic service and hospitality regardless of their skills.

During our recent ethnography of the local association, Maria Rosa was asked to participate in a labour insertion project for the migrants who lived in the council flats and remained unemployed. She interviewed them and rewrote their CVs together. Her goal was to visibilise the migrants' multilingual repertoires and skills so that they could find a more skilled job in a different industry or geographical space. To our surprise, the informants had internalised the tabula rasa discourses and said that they wanted to be cleaners, agricultural workers or labourers. A case in point is Jasseh. They rewrote his CV in Catalan and he did not mention his A-levels in an English-medium school. When Jasseh and Maria Rosa went for a job search together, most bars and restaurants in the city turned him down because of the crisis or discriminated against him openly (fieldnotes 22-02-12). Over coffee, he mentioned his high school education in English and they decided to translate his CV into English and include his A-levels. Jasseh distributed CVs in the tourist areas in Barcelona where English has a value in hospitality services for tourists. He could not find a job because he reported back that he did not fit the profile as companies preferred "African Americans" over Africans like him. The researcher's attempt to visibilise their personal projects and skills was not very successful among NGO members, who reported her valorisations as "Maria Rosa says that Jasseh can speak English very well" (22-02-12).

Jasseh's disregard for his own educational achievements and language skills shows that he has appropriated the circulating tabula rasa discourses in spite of his initial motivation to come to Europe in order to continue his education (interview 22-12-11). Other informants like Agbor and Abdoulaye say that migrating to Europe was "a big mistake" because they have had to start from scratch and learn new languages. They haven't been able to continue their labour trajectories because they have been ideologically erased. In Agbor's words,

Excerpt 5: Interview with Agbor, 16-12-2011.

I had a process of life, life was in the process y'know in Cameroon, so when I travel I came to Spain it's just like starting the whole thing back, new culture new language new people instead of going ahead when I was back home I had to go back to studying all the way.

Even those informants who have a positive view of their migration trajectories, like the two Moroccan brothers, concur in the integration discourses that place the onus on the newcomer to re-socialise into new forms of knowledge and social practices through official languages. Massin's "alternative view of migration" discussed above in fact adheres to *tabula rasa* discourses since transnational migrants have to take advantage of their migration as a learning process that will allow them to help develop their areas of origin.

7. Discussion and conclusions

Our findings confirm that migration is, generally, a process of declassing and downward socio-economic and professional mobility, and that this happens most acutely in the case of migrants who possess skilled human capital, such as tertiary educational qualifications and highly valued language skills like English. The labour trajectories of the seven African men we followed ethnographically over a period of five years nuance celebratory discourses about global English as a faceless, democratising *lingua franca* that facilitates employment and upward social mobility. In actual fact, these migrants' own geographical mobilities from Africa to Spain entail survival employment, underemployment, or most frequently, unemployment in a nation-state, at the periphery of the world's core, whose "economic miracle" was precisely founded on the unceasing arrival of non-qualified foreign workers. Accordingly, in the country's imaginary, migrants are construed following *tabula-rasa* discourses as lacking in many aspects (training, health habits, nourishment, etc.) and thus, not as possible possessors of valuable (upper)middle-class capitals, such as English. Because of the class indexicalities of this language in Spain, even our informants with normative, standard English are not perceived to be legitimate speakers of the language. These circulating ideas permeate the social body and result in highly stratifying discourses and practices even by institutions such as NGOs with strong pro-migrant advocacy commitments. The highly multilingual language repertoires, educational qualifications and skills of these migrants become invisible. Our analysis has shown that global English is linked to transnational connections and flows which enter into tension with local emplacement processes, discursively constructed through and around the modernist ideologies of integration-through-language.

Among our informants, English facilitates sociopolitical activism across borders, transnational labour insertion and future mobilities to English-speaking countries.

Massin's investment in English stems from the quintessential global practice of online activism. His anti-French ideologies coupled with his desire to reach a wider audience motivated his decision to learn English. In turn, Agbor finances and coordinates an agricultural cooperative in his region of origin thanks to his paid job in Barcelona. His transnational development project requires English and Spanish for paperwork and frequent mobilities, as well as the local languages spoken at both ends. Abdoulaye adheres to modernist views of language and mobility since he wants to learn English in order to migrate to the United States of America. These three case studies challenge the traditional concept of labour insertion since, for these individuals, labour insertion is not limited to paid work in a linguistically unified marketplace corresponding to the nation-state of residence.

In the current recession, these men's emplacement has been constrained due to the debilitated migrant networks in this city, the budget cuts in local NGOs and the severely-affected economic sectors which used to employ newcomers. Prior to the crisis, transnational migrants found employment in construction, caregiving or hospitality even with low competences in local languages. Some (very few) could also get employment in businesses run by Africans, where, apart from Catalan and Spanish, other languages spoken in Africa were valuable. The recession has also hit African entrepreneurs (a very small minority in this city) hard; currently, the value of these other languages, including African varieties of English, for migrants' labour insertion is practically null.

Since 2008, the lack of jobs in the formal and informal economies has foregrounded new discourses of learning that justify voluntary work in NGOs and educational opportunities, especially vocational training and Catalan language courses. The local association initially constructed the participants as economic migrants whose goal was to obtain paid jobs but gradually moved to learning discourses that divorced migration from labour. The new discourses regard transnational mobility as a learning opportunity to gain experience, make contacts and learn skills, especially languages, to help develop their areas of origin through transnational projects or voluntary return. However, they still draw on *tabula-rasa* discourses which also legitimated the types of unskilled employment that African migrants got regardless of their educational levels. Yet, despite all that, it is true that the NGO sector has become key for these Africans to develop social networks in the city. These networks include middle-class people who might become gatekeepers not only for work opportunities but also for material resources like books, food or even shelter. Many informants have actually obtained some paid jobs through their voluntary labour and

educational training contacts. By contrast, English does not play a role for economic or labour insertion in this officially-bilingual city and only circulates as a lingua franca through (some) migrant networks.

This article sheds light on a number of hot issues in the field of language and migration studies today. First, it illuminates a double process of decapitalisation, both of individual migrants and of their home countries. While for African societies, the departure of human capital is skill draining, for the individuals concerned, like Agbor, migrating entails “starting all over”, a dehumanizing and humiliating experience many of them would like to undo. Second, this piece of research foregrounds the need to undertake sociolinguistic analyses of language capitals, in this case English, as inseparable from speaking bodies emplaced in specific ideological and political regimes which are shaped by and in turn shape unequal global relations of power. In that sense, it would be interesting to contrast labour insertion processes in Catalonia/Spain of other groups of migrants with English as language capital, but with different histories of migration and employment in the local context (like, for example, the Filipinos). A close look at the role and value of English for Filipinos’ labour insertion taking into account the similarities between them and the migrants analysed in this article (post-secondary educational qualifications and employment in some similar economic niches) and their differences (gender composition and residential patterns) would undoubtedly provide us with new insights into the relationship between “global” English, skilled migration and labour insertion processes, with a special focus on gender issues.

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Notes

¹ Source: Foreign population by locality (*Població estrangera per municipi*) at <http://www.idescat.cat/poblacioestrangera/>

² All the names of informants that appear in this article are pseudonyms.

³ The ethnic labels used in this article are emic categories in our ethnography that shaped relationships among the African informants in the NGO studied as well as within the transnational circuits which the postindustrial city is part of.

⁴ It is indicative of the restrictiveness of the Spanish immigration policies that the three migrants mentioned so far got legal entry to the EU through other member states, not Spain. This also points towards the fact that Spain is often not the country of first choice for many migrants, but the place where they end up staying after work experiences in other countries.

⁵ In fact, Massin refuses to speak French even though he acquired this language at secondary school in Morocco.

⁶ Source: Economically Active Population Survey in Spain (*Encuesta de Población Activa -EPA*) at <http://www.ine.es>

⁷ We do not dwell on the different value of Catalan and Spanish for these migrants' labour/social insertion, partly because it goes beyond the focal point of this article, partly because it is a complex issue that would merit detailed explaining. By and large, we could say that Catalan is more valued for local insertion processes tied to the social network of sympathisers, volunteers and association members (middle-class and largely Catalan-speaking), while Spanish is more valued in Barcelona and outside of association circles in the city examined. For a more thorough analysis, see Codó (forthcoming).

⁸ These are a refugee rights association and a cultural and development Amazigh association respectively.

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