

“We can speak we do it our way”: Linguistic ideologies in Catalan adolescents’ language biography raps

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Abstract

The article reports on workshops aimed at developing students’ plurilingual repertoires through language biography raps as opportunities for self-reflexivity and social critique. The workshops are part of a larger socio-educational project targeting adolescent school dropout. The audio-visual products of the workshops – raps produced by adolescents in their English, intertwined with other linguistic resources in their repertoires – are analysed for local processes of identity production and linguistic ideologies. The analysis suggests that Hip Hop, as a popular, non-institutionalised culture, allows for counter-narratives of teenagers’ plurilingualism and their everyday language experiences. The students’ raps interrogate linguistic ideologies in education as detached from popular culture and their local, urban communities. By and large, the students’ linguistic performances are non-standard, playful and linguistically fluid, contrary to the norm in mainstream educational contexts. The Hip Hop based intervention thus provided a space for transgression from traditional notions of language education compatible with Critical Hip Hop Language Pedagogies (CHHLP) and pedagogies of plurilingualism.

Keywords: Critical Hip Hop Language Pedagogies, language ideologies, youth identities, Catalonia, plurilingualism, adolescents.

1. Introduction

The goal of this article is to analyse the audio-visual products of language biography workshops – raps produced by adolescents in their English, intertwined with other resources making up their repertoires– in order to explore adolescents’ linguistic ideologies and local processes of identity production (Pennycook, 2007). It is organised as follows. We begin in this introduction with a brief overview of the sociolinguistic context of Catalonia, and of the general status of language learning among Catalan youth (note that we refer to Catalan youth generically, to denote the school-aged population in Catalonia, while recognising the enormous social, economic, linguistic and cultural diversity in this population). We continue, still in the introduction, by presenting the Hip Hop workshops we conduct each summer, before situating these workshops within the Hip Hop scene in Catalonia more generally. In section two, we propose a theoretical justification for our critical plurilingual, Hip Hop pedagogical approach. After that, in section three, we introduce the workshops and the research data in more depth, before turning in section four to an analysis of the linguistic ideologies and processes of identity production emerging from some of the raps. The article concludes with a brief discussion of our tentative findings.

1.1. A brief sociolinguistic overview

Catalonia is an officially bilingual (Catalan and Spanish) and *de facto* multilingual region in Northeast Spain, bordering France. This multilingualism is the result of demographic movements into the region since last century: from different Spanish regions between the 1930s and 1970s; tourism since the 1960s; transnational migration in the past 15 years; and university exchange programs. Within this multilingual scenario, the Catalan language is constructed socially and politically as Catalonia’s ‘own’ or ‘proper’ language - *vis à vis* Spanish - through an ideology of authenticity (Gal & Woolard, 2001; Woolard, 2008). However, it is further constructed as

neutral, public and accessible to everyone regardless of language background - what Gal & Woolard (2001) and Woolard (2008) refer to as an ideology of anonymity - and thus as the language of social cohesion within a context of diversity (Pujolar, 2010). Catalan is the language of 'normal' use in public institutions, including all levels of schooling; thus, in pre-tertiary education it is the vehicular language, in a bilingual immersion approach, for the majority of the curriculum.

In this educational model, students' Spanish competence is ensured; in fact, the results of the Spanish government's most recent General Diagnostic Evaluation tests from 2010 show that the scores obtained in linguistic competence in Spanish by second year high school students are about at Spanish average and above some Spanish 'monolingual' regions. Furthermore, in urban areas, Spanish remains the majority language and main language of social interaction amongst students from all origins. As Cots and Nussbaum (2008) report, many students associate non-academic contexts at schools with speaking Spanish; a situation that is more pronounced in geographic areas with higher numbers of families who identify as mother tongue Spanish speakers or families of immigrant origin.

Finally, it must be noted that public school children in Catalonia begin their compulsory English studies quite early, at the age of 6, and continue them throughout their primary and secondary education. Despite this, it is no secret that students in Catalonia (and in Spain) have lagged behind in foreign language learning, with a predominance of prescriptive teaching and high dependence on private sector language academies - out of reach for many - for obtaining proficiency. Foreign language teaching, like language teaching in general, has often promoted

parallel monolingualisms (Heller, 1999), rather than more dynamic plurilingualisms (Nussbaum, 2013) or translanguaging (García & Li Wei, 2014). Despite institutional and methodological developments (e.g. lifelong learning initiatives for teachers, teaching innovation through the inclusion of digital technologies, integrated approaches), Catalonia still lags below the Europe 2020 targets for foreign language learning. Most concerning is the correlation between academic results in English and low socioeconomic status (European Commission, 2013; Consell Superior d'Avaluació del Sistema Educatiu, 2008). Although we do not align with neoliberal understandings of plurilingualism inherent to certain official European discourses (Flores, 2013), it is in legitimising linguistic repertoires of adolescents that transcend curricular norms that our workshops aim to make a small difference.

1.2. Campus Ítaca and the “English” workshops

In this broader context, our article focuses on workshops run within a socio-educational programme called Campus Ítaca, based at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain). The students are about 15 years old, from schools within the Barcelona province, and going into their final year of compulsory secondary education. They have been identified by their teachers as having academic potential, although they might not continue their education into pre-university and university studies for an array of reasons. These include general adolescent disaffection for schooling, as well as processes of social alienation from higher education. That is, many of the students come from family backgrounds in which university studies might not be an obvious or a realistic option (e.g. they would be first generation university students, or are students for whom university would not be financially viable without the support of scholarships).

Campus Ítaca aims to stimulate these adolescents to continue to non-compulsory education. The highlight of the program is a two-week (per cohort) summer school with university teachers in which students participate in workshops, projects, debates, sports, field trips and other activities on and beyond campus, although participating students are tracked through their studies and onto university, and are able to opt for scholarships to help them attend higher education on top of the financial assistance already provided by the government. Apart from promoting the academic success of the teenager participants, Campus Ítaca also aims to promote Catalan as a vehicle for group cohesion and social inclusion, since many of them come from Spanish-dominant environments. In 2013 and 2014, when the data presented in this paper was collected, the programme accepted a total of 440 and 432 students respectively, who all produced raps like the ones we analyse in this article, and of whom only 5 % and 3.3% were “immigrants” from outside the Spanish state according to the organisers. This figure is well below the average of roughly 13% for the entire school-aged population in Catalonia. However as the selection of pupils to attend Campus Ítaca depends on each school, we do not have access to information that might clarify the reasons for the disparity. It is also important to note that only students without Spanish citizenship are considered “immigrants”, while many more have recent family histories of migration or adoption, leading to a more multicultural and multilingual student cohort than the figures suggest.

Within this framework, the two authors created and run two-hour “English language” workshops for groups of 24 students at a time inspired by critical plurilingual and Hip Hop pedagogies (see

section 2 below)¹. One of the authors (Garrido) is a critical sociolinguist who has been in contact with the local Hip Hop scene since the late 1990s, and has an avid interest in the pedagogical affordances of Hip Hop. The other (Moore) approaches plurilingual practices in learning contexts from an interdisciplinary perspective, with a particular interest in critical plurilingual/translanguaging approaches to language education, while Hip-Hop is something she approaches as more of an outsider.

In planning these workshops, the guiding objectives were to break away from what could be considered mainstream, school English learning and to engage students with language learning through self-reflexivity about plurilingualism and social critique. Our choice of rap as an element of Hip Hop was grounded in its affordance for limitless (Alim, 2011) communicative practices; that is, translanguaging (which includes but go beyond standard, monolingual language uses) was encouraged as resources for task completion. As one group of participants told the class in their rap, “we can speak we do it our way”; this being a powerful message about the expressive potential of their repertoire that we have included in the title of this article. Our choice of Hip Hop was further based on its potentially critical nature. Both of these features - limitlessness and criticality - marked a discontinuity with traditional language teaching in Catalan high schools. Hip Hop is also a familiar element of Catalan youth culture, an issue to which we turn in the following section.

Reflecting further on our positionality in planning and delivering these workshops, we were representatives of a public university – not of the students’ high schools – and our mission was to

¹ We initially designed and implemented together with Xavier Oliva in 2013 and 2014. Júlia Llompart implemented the workshops with us in the 2014 edition. We want to thank both for their contributions.

encourage them to continue studying. We did this through rap and by valuing the students' entire communicative repertoires (i.e. beyond school languages and varieties), thus constructing an ideological contrast with traditional schooling. In this regard, we consider ourselves and the workshops to be an ideological combat zone in the sense that we departed from an institutional space meant for learning English and sought to break away from monolingual ideologies, linguistic hierarchies and traditional school genres. In terms of Hip Hop, we were not trying to indoctrinate students into the culture, but to use it as a means of expression that has connotations of critique. Listening to, producing and performing rap is central to the workshop and is not simply an attractive vehicle to teach hegemonic, curricular contents to teenagers. We do not see ourselves as Hip Hop activists, but rather as people who use their institutional position to question hegemonic discourses on school multilingualism and construct linguistically hybrid and plural alternatives. In this regard, our use of Hip Hop is not unlike that of Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) and others who have brought Hip Hop into more traditional learning spaces to engage teens through elements of urban youth culture, thus expanding the limits of classrooms and curricula.

1.3. The relevance of Hip Hop for Catalan youth

Hip Hop as a movement entered Spain through the North American military base of Torrejón de Ardoz in the 1980s (see El Chojín and Reyes, 2010 for history) and created a local vibrant underground scene formed by artists who in many cases had transnational trajectories. The developing underground Hip Hop scene in Catalonia, along with other burgeoning communities in Zaragoza and Sevilla during the 1990s, looked to Madrid as a cultural referent, as well as to the USA (El País, 2013). The Barcelona community was and remains Spanish-speaking, with few

emcees rapping in Catalan. The Catalan scene thus differed from the one in Québec, dominated by the minority French language (Sarkar and Allen, 2007). El Disop revolutionised the scene with his Catalan single “jo no sóc polac jo sóc català” (1999) and recently, At-versaris has emerged as the visible face of Catalan-language rap among lesser-known groups.

In Barcelona, Hip Hop is now a minority youth movement that attracts diverse teenagers who have more access to global influences than the largely autochthonous “old school” of the 1990s. As shown by Corona and Kelsall (this volume), recent immigrants in Barcelona (especially Latin Americans and Africans) have engaged in Hip Hop style and artistic forms to take ownership of their ethnicised identities in Barcelona. It should be noted that ethnicity and race historically have not been defining factors of the Catalan Hip Hop scene, unlike in the United States (see Cutler, 2014). Most Hip Hop heads from the 1990s and early 2000s were locally born and White with few exceptions. In the new generations, however, the links between Hip Hop and ethnicity might be changing (see also section 4.1 below), paralleling other contexts (e.g. African immigrants in Canada), where youth contest racialisation by investing in Hip Hop identities (Alim, 2011).

The participants in Campus Ítaca are familiar with Hip Hop culture but have different degrees of knowledge and engagement with the movement. Like Barrett (2011, p. 48), we do not claim that students are “crazy about Hip Hop” since they interact with and perceive the movement in different ways. In each workshop, we find a few Hip Hop artists (usually not of migrant-descent), but Catalan students are generally familiar with commercial and mixed forms of rap and Hip Hop dress styles. In any case, they mostly identify Hip Hop as a culture of social resistance and critique, which uses transgressive and creative language for self-expression.

2. Theoretical Framework: Plurilingual Hip Hop Pedagogies

The goal of our rap workshop is to promote transgressive, plurilingual uses and to help our adolescent participants reflect on their language biographies and social realities within a context of linguistic diversity. Our objective builds on and expands the broader promotion of Catalan in the Campus Ítaca programme (see above). We conceptualise our pedagogic intervention within the broad framework of critical plurilingual/translanguaging pedagogies (García & Li Wei, 2014; Nussbaum, 2013) and within Critical Hip Hop Language Pedagogies or CHHLP (Alim, 2007). Rap music is central to the activity and not simply used as a “lure” to teach other curricular canons or standards without reflection (an approach criticised in Petchauer 2009, Alim 2011). Students listen to and produce critical plurilingual rap with global English tropes and a blend of fluid, translanguaging resources.

The focus of this paper is on the situated meaning of students’ productions and not on literacy *per se*, unlike many other studies on the pedagogical value of Hip Hop as a vernacular literacy practice (see Sánchez, 2010). Here, we analyse different discourses and understandings of language, language contact and speakers in contemporary Catalonia among adolescents socialised in linguistically diverse schools and social surroundings. The analytical concept is that of *language ideologies*, which Woolard defines as “representations, whether explicit or implicit, which construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world” (1998, p.3). State institutions such as schools develop “linguistic regimes” (Kroskrity, 2000, p.3); that is to say, specific forms of linguistic regimentation that determine which languages are legitimised and required, by whom and in which spaces, and that our workshop aims to contest.

Hip Hop has become relevant in the field of education and educational research in the past decade to understand language, identity and learning (see Petchauer, 2009 for a review). Our contribution fits in Petchauer's strand on "Hip Hop-based education", namely studies that use Hip Hop, especially rap songs and lyrics, as curricular and pedagogical resources with a goal to enhance critical language awareness and plurilingualism. It draws on Critical Hip Hop Language Pedagogies that "view the school as a primary site of language ideological combat, and begin with efforts to uncover and understand the complex and conflicting language ideologies within particular educational institutions" (Alim, 2007, p. 164). In *Campus Ítaca*, we aim to reflect upon Catalan public schools, where participants come from, as a key site for the construction, legitimation and imposition of a vision of multilingualism as bounded, separate monolingual standards. According to Alim (2007), "One of the goals of CHHLPs is to uncover both the official, articulated language ideologies of the school, and the unofficial, unarticulated language ideologies of teachers and students" (p. 164) which might be at odds and which might coincide.

Hip Hop challenges norms of language, literacy, identity and ownership through plurilingual, intertextual productions that shape and perform localised identities among youth (Androtsopolous, 2009; Pennycook, 2007, p. 150). Contrary to global homogenising accounts of Hip Hop Culture, we view it as a localised social practice that (re)produces and transforms global practices as local expressions of identity and knowledge. Hip Hop refashions "languages" and identities (Alim and Pennycook, 2007), so an analysis of Catalan students' rap productions will bring to the fore (new) dynamics and visions of language use and identity in this context. As one of the five elements of Hip Hop, rapping allows students to critically assess school monolingual

ideologies and to subvert them through non-standard, linguistically fluid lyrics. Therefore, CHHLPs aim “to make the invisible visible” in terms of language practices and to examine the ways in which well-meaning educators attempt to silence non-school languages in public space (Alim, 2011).

The language biography rap workshop subverts the “English language” slot in Campus Ítaca’s curriculum to engage in terms of discursive content and linguistic form. Content-wise, Hip Hop is a storytelling medium for expressing one’s point of view and connect to those with similar experiences and learn from those of others. Hip Hop as a global movement of social resistance offers a counter-narrative that can help students in crafting their identities as individuals and as students with respect to others, i.e. hearers and other workshop participants (Leigh Kelly 2013, Pennycook 1994). At the same time, political resistance in Hip Hop is necessarily partial because it coexists in tension with hegemonic discourses and reification of the status quo in certain Hip Hop trends. In our analysis, students’ voices might challenge and/or uphold mainstream ideologies of language transmitted through education in the light of their own sociopolitical positioning as plurilingual speakers.

Concerning linguistic form, the poetics of rap opens up a space for subverting standard language norms with non-standard, creative plurilingual resources. In language biography raps, voices are socially situated and come “from somewhere”, effacing the ideologies of anonymity that lend legitimacy to public standard languages (Gal and Woolard, 2001). Based on Alim’s comparison of Standard English as “limited” and Black Language as “limitless” (2011), ‘native speaker’ standard and monolingualist ideologies of English at Catalan schools might explain a sometimes

prescriptive approach affording limited forms of language and literacy. It should be recognised, though, that a great many schools have implemented innovative projects based on strongly communicative approaches (e.g. content and language integrated learning, telecollaborative language learning, project based language learning) in recent years. Our workshop, contributing to such innovative practices, aims to promote creative artistic production in rapping. We depart from the premise that Hip Hop linguistic diversity is a socially and pedagogically valuable expansion, rather than a limitation (Alim and Pennycook, 2007, p. 92).

Returning to Campus Ítaca's broader goal of participants' academic success, and linked to the framework of CHHLP, this workshop is grounded on a desire for social change and looks at the school where cultural, linguistic and social capitals are in constant struggle (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). No knowledge, no pedagogy and no language is ever neutral. We need to interrogate the social, economic, cultural and political conditions for English language learning in Catalonia as an obligatory subject based on (especially British) standard language and literature at odds with students' consumption of English-language popular culture.

The main features that characterise our critical pedagogical intervention, within the broader framework of Campus Ítaca, are the following (based on Stovall, 2006, p. 588 and Barrett, 2001, p. 49). First of all, it is situated in the experiences of the students. Students' real life experiences and worldviews are legitimised and form the basis of this Campus Ítaca workshop. Language biography work approaches daily life as a subject matter through the critical lens offered by Hip Hop. Secondly, the workshop calls for critical dialogue since students are apprenticed in a learning community where they become active contributors to the process of writing and

performing a rap with new meanings and ideas. Thirdly, we aim to give voice to students given that, as we have seen, Hip Hop allows for raising concerns and even criticisms of Catalan society and school culture. Students whose plurilingual repertoires are backgrounded at school and those Hip Hop artists in the margins of school culture are made visible and made intellectual leaders in our classroom.

3. The workshops and the data

These workshops were compulsory for all the participants in Campus Ítaca, which may have implications regarding their attitude towards English used as a vehicular language. From a methodological perspective, the 2-hour workshops, held with 24 students at a time in a university computer lab, follow a typical task-based sequence². After engagement with a radio-friendly video clip that shows elements of Hip Hop culture, we listen to hip-hop tracks, most including several languages and varieties that students have to identify, with a focus not on delimiting boundaries between varieties but on the fluidity, hybridity and comprehensibility of expressive repertoires. The songs (see Discography) were chosen by the teacher-facilitators, and not the students, as this is a one-time workshop, and include a representation of geographical areas, female emcees and translanguaging. Following this, we draw on the participants' funds of knowledge (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005) to talk about the US origins and global expansion of Hip Hop culture with explicit reference to language, especially African American English.

Following this, in preparing the students for the task of writing and performing their language biography raps in groups, we play them a video in which the different facilitators perform our

² The workshop materials are available for use by other educators at: <http://hiphopitaca.wikispaces.com/>

own rap. The rap begins in the first lines with “We are multilingual, tryin’ to be original”, which is relevant to the analysis of the students’ raps in the following section. We present our collective rap as an imperfect model for their task, positioning ourselves on equal footing with teenagers. In hindsight, however, it must be critically noted that our own rap is in non-standard but monolingual English, representative of our own timidity to stray too far from the institutional idea of the “English” workshop at the time of its conception. We then use that rap as a focal point for talking about the theme of the raps we are asking for, introducing some guiding ideas, and the variety of English appropriate to the genre: typical Hip hop expressions and non-standard forms (e.g. yo yo, check it out, c’mon, ‘cuz). Furthermore, we provide the students with some instrumental tracks from which to work (taken from the songs that we open the workshops with), and encourage them to recall the raps from the beginning of the workshop - that included several languages and varieties – and to use their entire plurilingual repertoires in constructing meaning and to not be inhibited by the constraints of standard school English. The bulk of this task sequence focuses on the students’ creative process and performance of their rap about their experiences and views on language; students discuss, write, practice and perform their language biography raps in groups of four. Often, facilitators perform with the less forthcoming young rappers at the end of the sessions.

From an action research perspective, we have adopted an interpretive and sociohistorical approach to discourses in the raps that students produced informed by our participation as teachers-researchers. The data used for our analysis includes field notes taken after listening in on the conversations taking place around the production of the raps, photographs of the final written raps, and video recordings of the final performances in front of the group made by one of the

adults (i.e. workshop facilitator, group mentors) in the room (approx. 1 minute). The intensity of the workshops severely limits the possibilities of gathering a more in-depth ethnographic understanding of the participants and their process towards task completion. Thus, it is impossible for us to make claims, for example, about individual students' backgrounds or how students they identify with the different languages they know, beyond what they tell us in their raps.

4. Analysis

Based on the guiding concept of language *ideologies* (Woolard, 1998), we present here an analysis of four raps that represent different discursive themes and understandings of language, language contact and speakers in contemporary Catalonia emerging from our explorations of the corpus and our lived experiences as facilitators of the workshops more generally. In total, over two years we collected 132 raps (photographs and video recordings, 84 in 2013 and 48 in 2014) produced by 528 students working in their groups of 4 (336 students in 2013 and 192 in 2014). Two of the raps we present in this section are from 2013, and two are from 2014. In presenting the data, transcriptions are provided besides images of the students' written work to improve readability. Although the multimodal transcription and fine-grained analysis of the students' oral performance is beyond the scope of this article, such performative data has been referred to throughout the interpretative process and is alluded to in the discussion when relevant.

4.1. Performing plurilingualism

In presenting the task to the students, as facilitators we encourage them to “play” with their plurilingual repertoires in meaning making processes. The raps in the corpus reveal that while

some students reproduce standard varieties of their languages, most display at least timid alignment with non-standard and fluid uses. More specifically, they incorporate the vernacular English of rap that is presented to them in the workshop and at least familiar to most though youth popular culture beyond schools. They also include other non-standard varieties of English (e.g. playful ‘learner’ English), Catalan and Spanish (in particular ‘Latino’ Spanish). Such ‘doing being Latino’ by a priori ‘non-Latino’ students through crossing (Rampton, 1995) makes visible their understanding of Hip Hop as an ethnicised cultural production in their generation (see Section 1.3 above). Corona (2012, with Kelsall this volume) describes *Latino crossing* (2012, p. 226) as a type of Latino stylisation in Barcelona that is connected, among other elements of youth culture, to rap and reggaeton. He claims that such Latino stylisation and rap/reggaeton are difficult to separate and that this combination is connected to rebelliousness and resistance to school culture (see Corona, this volume).

Furthermore, some groups timidly perform other languages available in their repertoire, thereby validating otherwise hidden plurilingual resources as legitimate for constructing meaning through Hip Hop. The following rap from 2013 is one such example³. The rap starts out by drawing primarily on the stylistic devices introduced by the workshop facilitators, although the teens also incorporate Hip Hop resources from their own repertoire (e.g. “the flow”). The students then go on to define themselves as multilingual (line 7), thereby appropriating the first line of the facilitators’ rap in their own, before displaying this multilingualism (or plurilingualism) in their solo turns by translanguaging amongst other language varieties they know: standard French (line 10), a language that one of the boys has learnt at school, (romanised) Urdu (line 13), a language that one of the girls has learnt at home, non-standard Catalan (line 15) and Spanish (line 18). It is

³ In all Figures, the transcription of the lyrics in students’ raps respects the spelling and writing in the original texts.

worth noting that when the rap was performed in front of the class, the girl that rapped about speaking Urdu did it so quietly that she is hardly audible in the recording; however, the limited ethnographic data we have means we are unable to draw any conclusions from this fact.

1. Check it, yo, we are
2. appear, let's go.
3. Yo, yo, dance on the floor
4. let's go, open the door.
5. and you see the best rappers
6. representing the flow
7. We're multilinguals
8. and we speak french
9. c'mon dance
10. salut qu'est-ce que vous faites ?
(greetings what are you doing)
11. yo, yo
12. we speak urdu too
13. Nash tum karte ho"
(Nash [name] have you done that)
14. We speak Catalan too
15. Ei tio, el meu rap et flipa a tu
(hey man, my rap will make you flip out)
16. And the last one, the
17. Spanish
18. ola k ace, rapeando en la clase
(hi what are you doing, rapping in the class)

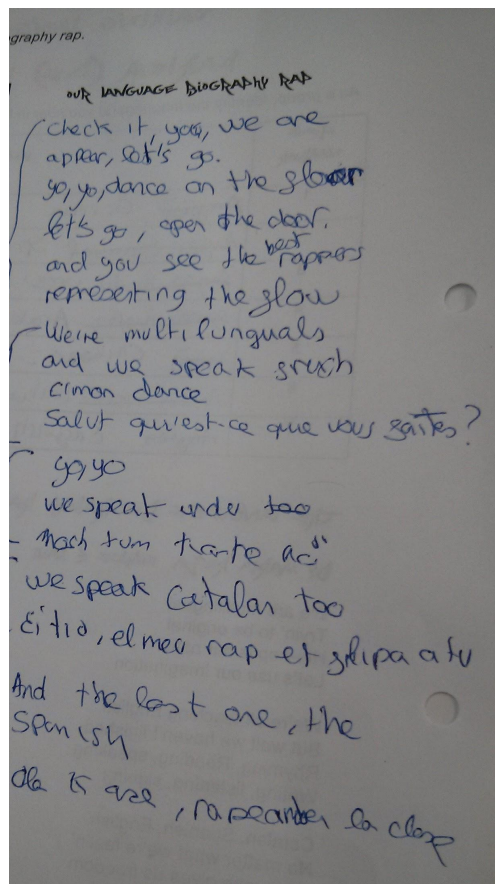


Figure 1. The local production of identity through translanguaging

The final verses are of much interest to our research. The non-standard, youth variety of Catalan used in line 15, performed by one of the boys, suggests that the addressee of this braggadocio is constructed as male, in keeping with Hip Hop as a highly masculinised domain. The rap

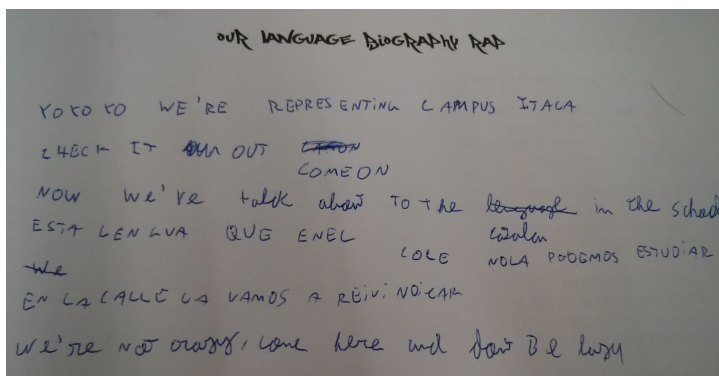
concludes in line 18 with a collective line both written in ‘Latino’ Spanish with non-standard orthography and later rapped with a ‘Latino’ accent by the entire group of boys and girls. In the last line, pronunciation traits construct a “Latino” voice through the indexicality of using /s/ instead of /θ/ in Peninsular Spanish (e.g. Corona, 2012; Márquez Reiter and Martín Rojo, 2014). Unlike in other studies, lexis does not form part of the partial stylisation in the example above.

Thus, through their work, the students display how they progressively embrace and later perform hybridity as a resource for completing the task at hand and for the situated construction of identities.

4.2. Language combat

In order to contextualise the next rap from 2014, and many others like it in our corpus, it is necessary to expand on the allusion in the introduction to recent attacks from the Spanish legal institutions and government towards Catalonia and the Catalan language. Coinciding with different moves towards the independence of Catalonia, the Spanish government in power since 2011 has undergone a reform of the Spanish education law (the so-called ‘Ley Wert’ or ‘Wert Law’ in reference to the education minister), which also affects Catalonia. One of the changes brought about by this law (passed in May 2013) and meeting heavy opposition is that co-official languages in territories such as Catalonia are degraded from their former curricular status as core subjects to become ‘optional specialisations’. Furthermore, the law establishes that parents have a right to request education in Spanish as the vehicular language in all of Spain, a fact that defies the current linguistic model in Catalonia. These overlapping socio-political dynamics help understand what we conceptualise as language combat in this analysis, illustrated by the

rap in Figure 2; following Alim (2007, p.97) we define this as: “cultural tension, or cultural combat, that such students engage in as they form their linguistic identities in creative and often unexpected (by teachers) ways”.



1. YO YO YO WE'RE REPRESENTING CAMPUS ITACA
2. CHECK IT OUT COME ON
3. Now we're talk about to the ~~language~~ Catalan in the school
4. ESTA LENGUA QUE EN EL COLE NO LA PODEMOS ESTUDIAR
(THIS LANGUAGE THAT IN THE SCHOOL WE CAN'T STUDY)
5. EN LA CALLE LA VAMOS A REIVINDICAR
(IN THE STREET WE'RE GOING TO DEFEND IT)
6. We're not crazy, come here and don't be lazy

Figure 2. Reclaiming Catalan through Spanish rhymes in a tense political climate

Like the previous one, this rap begins in lines 1 and 2 with the students' appropriation of the linguistic resources introduced by the workshop facilitators. The students continue to set the theme of their rap: “the ~~language~~ Catalan in the school”. The students' repair in their written work is interesting; they later present a defence of multilingualism not in abstract, but in terms of the Catalan language, yet their repair is evidence of in-group controversy also revealed in the

conversations to which the facilitator tuned in. Speaking Spanish, one of the members of the group suggested that rather than talk about “language”, they use their rap to present a critique on the “Wert Law”. His peer reacts to this suggestion by telling him that he is an “independentista” (meaning “independence supporter”), a categorisation that often carries negative connotations when used by non-supporters of sovereignty and that has particularly been criminalised in unionist press. The first student, also speaking Spanish, reacts something like this (as noted down by the facilitator in haste during the workshop): “No tiene nada que ver. Simplemente que cuando buscas trabajo si tienes dos lenguas es mejor que una” (That has nothing to do with it. It’s simply that when you look for work, if you have two languages it’s better than one).

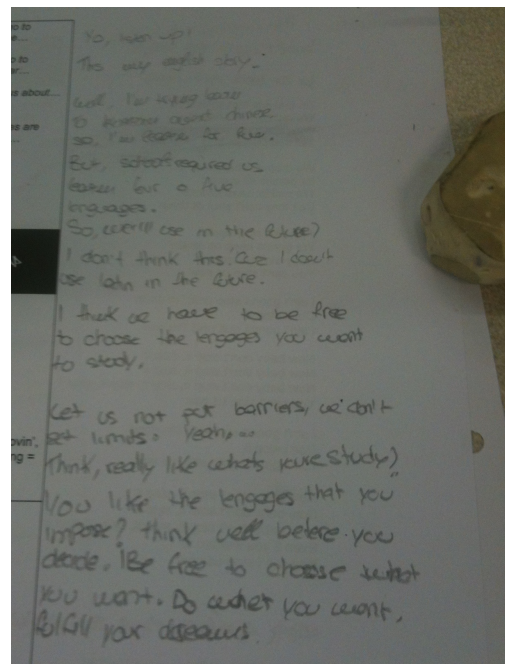
The first student goes on to write the following lines of the rap that make the combat explicit, in Spanish (and in capital letters) after checking with the facilitator that it was alright to use that language: “ESTA LENGUA QUE EN EL COLE NO LA PODEMOS ESTUDIAR / EN LA CALLE LA VAMOS A REIVINDICAR”. In reaction to this, the second student points out a potential contradiction between what her peer is fighting for (Catalan) and the language he does it in (Spanish). She asks him: “¿No tendría que ser en catalán si reivindicas el catalán?” (Shouldn’t it be in Catalan if you are defending Catalan?). The first student judiciously tells her: “No, mejor en castellano, así se entiende que no tenemos ningún problema con castellano, solo que queremos también el catalán.” (No, better in Spanish, that way it’s understood that we don’t have any problem with Spanish, only that we also want Catalan). Through this language combat, the student constructs an argument for a linguistic identity that was unexpected for his peer (and for the facilitator), but which resonates with Woolard’s (2008) observations of a detachment of the Catalan language from ethnic identity as a *conditio sine qua non* for its public expression, linked

to the processes of standardisation and ideological anonymisation discussed in the introduction to this paper.

4.3. Learning school languages

This rap from 2013 (see Figure 3), like many others in our corpus, takes a critical stance towards foreign language learning at secondary school from the viewpoint of an experienced emcee. This girl decided to work on her lyrics solo because the other members of her group “do not know how to rap” and only accepted to collaborate with them to put their ideas together into a single text at the end. She showed a good command of the rhythm and went with the flow in her performance, unlike less familiarised students, but she focused on the message rather than Hip Hop tropes and English rhymes because she usually raps in Spanish. Despite the possibility of fluid practices, she raps in English only.

1. Yo, listen up
2. This my english story:
3. Well, I'm trying learn
4. to Korean and Chinese
5. so, I'm learn for fun.
6. But, school required us
7. learn four or five
8. languages.
9. So, we'll use in the future?
10. I don't think this 'cuz I don't
11. use latin in the future.
12. I think we have to be free
13. to choose the languages you want
14. to study.
15. Let us not put barriers, we don't
16. set/get limits. Yeah...
17. Think, really like whats youre study?
18. You like the languages that you



19. impose? Think well before you
20. decide. ¡Be free to choose what
21. you want. Do what you want.
22. fulfil your dreams

Figure 3. Constructing the plurilingual self as a reflexive project.

The crosscutting theme of this rap is a contrast between learning (foreign) languages within the school curriculum and for personal choice outside school. She starts off with the languages that she is trying to learn “for fun”: Korean and Chinese (lines 4-5). The student told the facilitator that she engaged in self-learning through webpage materials mainly motivated by leisure activities. Then, she counterposes “learning for fun” (line 5) with learning “four or five” school-required languages (lines 6-7), whose actual use “in the future” (line 9) she calls into question. Her contrasting of languages learnt for fun in the present and those learned for use “in the future” seems to echo a “commonsensical” discourse in Catalan (Flors Mas, 2013) and Spanish schools (Pérez-Milans and Patiño, 2013) that learning foreign languages, and especially English, will be useful for future employment and transnational ventures. Local discourses and educational policies are intertextual with those in Europe; in the Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001), for example, motivation for foreign language teaching and learning is linked, among other aspects, to “domains of relevance in relation to future utility” (p. 45), with utility often being understood in terms of employment opportunities and transnational mobility. We encounter both appropriation and questioning of this discourse about the instrumental use of foreign languages for labour insertion, transnational exchanges and education in other raps in our corpus.

This young rapper seems to contradict this widespread discourse in education contexts with a dead language studied as an optional subject in Catalonia: Latin. She cries for freedom to choose the languages that you “want” - repeated throughout the rap- “to study” (line 17), mostly for her personal pleasure, while she presents the language curriculum as an imposition (line 19) on students.

Interestingly, this emcee addresses the rest of her Campus Ítaca classmates directly, and secondary education students implicitly, to be agentive to make their own decisions regarding their preferences for language learning. However, she does not refer to the institutional constraints and learning conditions in secondary schools, linked to socio-political and economic developments. On the surface, this text seems to align with “conscious rap” owing to its overt criticism of school languages (Newman, 2007). However, a close analysis shows that the young rapper does not want to change schools but rather the students’ perspectives on language learning. In other words, she favours individual over collective responsibility, which according to Newman (2007) is an element of late capitalist, if not conservative, thought. Following Newman’s framework, it might be claimed therefore that she does not call for a collective rebellion stemming from a political analysis, as conscious rap would have it, but in fact calls for personal agency to create their own future instead of being victims of their social positioning. However, it is also possible that social relations and processes might be expressed and construed in different ways in our context than in that discussed by Newman, thus we are cautious of making any essentialist claims.

This language biography rap is oriented towards the future in her present choices, including learning Korean and Chinese “for fun”, rather than towards the past as tends to be the case in biographical stories. Her language biography rap resonates with Giddens’ narrative of the self (1991) as a “reflexive project”, for which the individual is solely responsible for making choices among an open range of possibilities. In her “story”, plurilingualism fits into the future-oriented construction of a personal project through a conscious choice among different languages, instead of forming part of a government policy that defines instrumental knowledge as part of school curricula. To this student, language learning forms part of her “lifestyle”, as decisions taken and courses of action under certain institutional conditions and constraints, which in this case involve a more or less deliberate rejection of widely diffused knowledge (Giddens, 1991, p. 6).

4.4. “American” Hip Hop style

The following rap from 2014 was created by two males who were Hip Hop receptors (not artists) and called themselves “the Javis”, and two girls who were only familiar with radio-friendly, commercial rap. The Javis were really participative in the pre-task activities and showed great knowledge about US rap. Our language biography rap allowed them to perform what they probably perceived as “real” Hip Hop style, which they located in African American English and the USA, through non-standard English with Hip Hop tokens and several cultural references to “original” Hip Hop.

1. West sider, East side.
2. Gonna kick ya ass
3. mother fucker

4. We can speak French OK
5. But grammar ~~sucks~~ is the worst
6. 'cuz there are lots of accents
7. that gonna break ya neck.

8. we learn English in music and video games
9. like 50 cent, NBA 2K13
10. but no ~~by~~ on our 'cuz it's
11. boring, yeah.

12. We wantna to learn ~~African~~ Afroamerican
13. 'cuz the most gangsta rap
14. comes from da ~~people~~ african people
15. who come to America.

16. Representing Campus Ítaca
17. yeah, yeah...

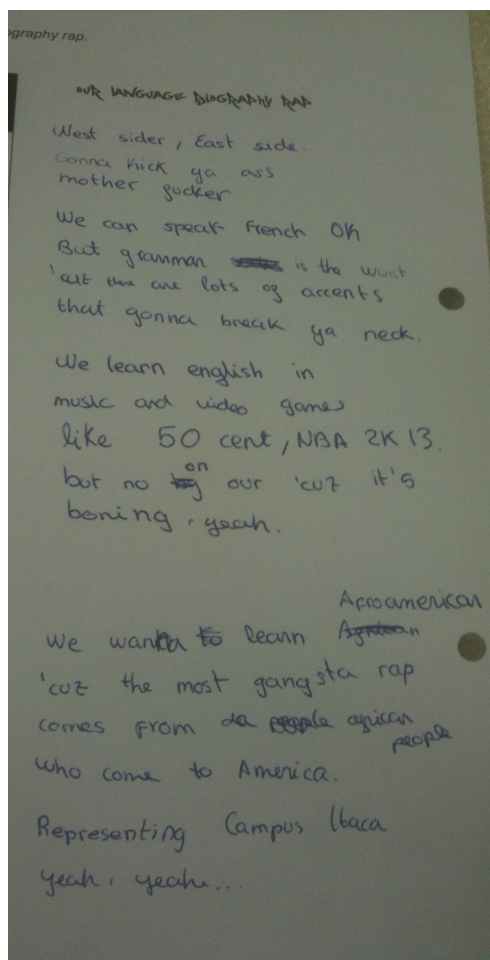


Figure 4. Performing Hip Hop style though non-standard tokens

Regarding form, this rap is entirely in English even though the facilitator told them that they could “play” with other languages. The group employs non-standard spelling forms reminiscent of oral language, i.e. “ya” for your, “da” for the, “wanna” for want to and “‘cuz” for because, which are typical of rap lyrics and colloquial language more largely. What is striking is that they only took the last two from the model provided (see section 3 above) and they provided the other non-standard forms, which they must have learned outside this context and probably through their engagement with popular music. It is probable that they learned the non-standard spellings

from written rather than oral sources (e.g. online lyrics or subtitled video clips), which they could also access from the computers in the classroom. In addition, they engage in slurs for the imagined audience, namely “kick ya ass mother fucker”⁴ (lines 2-3) and “break ya neck”⁵ (line 7), which are pervasive in braggadocio (see Williams & Stroud, 2014) especially in gangsta rap. This shows that the Javis are familiar with this type of rap - which in fact they explicitly name as a cultural referent - whose lyrics are connected to thug life, violence and hardships in inner cities with social problems. “Break ya neck” is used negatively to evaluate French, rather than positively as in many Hip Hop tracks like Busta Rhymes’ *Classic*, meaning “dance using a lot of neck and shoulders” according to the Urban Dictionary. It is also interesting to note their self-repair that replaces “sucks” for “is the worst” in line 5, which standardises their language in this rap, contrary to what they do elsewhere and in another self-repair in line 12. As mentioned above, the process of transforming text to oral performance is no doubt a phenomenon worthy of more in-depth conceptualisation and analytical treatment in future work on this corpus.

The crosscutting theme in this rap partly overlaps with the previous one (see 4.3) since it deals with English language learning through popular culture, i.e. outside school, especially in connection to North American Hip Hop. During the task, the Javis discussed *Classic Hip Hop* from the “golden 1990s” with the teacher-facilitator, who was surprised that they greatly admired gangsta rappers like Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. who had been shot before they were born, in 1996 and 1997 respectively. In fact, they start their rap with “East side, West side” in a clear reference to the rivalries in North American Hip Hop during the late 1990s and without

⁴ According to the Urban Dictionary, the phrase “Ima kick yo ass, mutha fucka” is often used in African American English when a person is annoyed.

⁵ This is the title of a classic Busta Rhymes track released in 2001.

taking a position as outsiders belonging to a different generation and geopolitical area. In their product, we also find a reference to New York rapper 50 Cent (line 9), which we consider radio-friendly, commercial rap with which most students - and probably the two girls in this group- are familiar. Besides, they make reference to NBA basketball (line 9), which tends to be associated with Hip Hop culture and America, but which also has local relevance.

It is worth pointing out that they differentiate between “English” in their second verse, which they are learning through popular culture, and “Afroamerican” (line 12) in their third verse, which they want to learn because it is the variety used by the “african people who come to America” in “gangsta rap”. However, we should point out that these students are not exposed to (much) African American English in their everyday lives and thus they do not use any distinctive forms from this variety; rather they mobilise the colloquial forms of English in their repertoires. They also claim to learn English through music (like 50 Cent) and video games (NBA 2K13) but “no on our [school] ‘cuz it’s boring, yeah” (lines 10-11). All this devalues the (British) English standard and grammar-based learning approach in Catalan schools, which tends to disregard vernacular forms and popular culture that adolescents engage in outside school. Like the previous rap analysed, this text points towards the discontinuities between English language exposure and learning between the school curriculum and the broader cultural practices that they participate in, with a preference for the latter.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this discussion, we will briefly outline some preliminary findings intertwining linguistic ideologies about plurilingualism and emergent, situated identities in the students’ language

biography raps. The examples analysed above allow us to show a range of identity performances in connection to plurilingualism, to Hip Hop and to school language teaching.

Although the dominance of standard school languages is reproduced by young rappers, they also playfully incorporate non-institutional varieties of these- namely Spanish, Catalan and English- and timidly use other languages in their rhymes, such as Urdu (see section 4.1), Arabic, Tagalog and Russian (in other raps). In our corpus, adolescents construct plurilingual identities which are *performed* in different languages in their repertoires (as in section 4.1.) or which are reflexively constructed as a future project in their biographies (as in section 4.3.). Regarding form, we find some examples where students play with language and perform their plurilingual repertoires, for example with Hip Hop style tokens, the performance of “masculine” and “Latino” Spanish (as in section 4.1) and colloquial English (as in section 4.4) as indexes of what they perceive as “real” Hip Hop from their social and geographical location. Many students, regardless of their participation in Hip Hop culture, seem to identify rap with linguistic practices which are transgressive of and go beyond standard school languages.

As far as content is concerned, many raps in our corpus engage with the idea of learning languages for “the future” for labour market insertion, especially English and German, or for personal projects related to travelling and popular culture. In connection to plurilingualism, another recurrent theme in raps is the changing, contested basis for linguistic authority of Catalan as a minoritised language that is used as vehicular language in education. The vast majority of adolescents identify as bilingual Spanish/Catalan students and conversations about the social role of these languages were common in the workgroups. However, only some participants adopt a

politicised stance to “reivindicar” (defend) Catalan as a vehicular language at schools, as in the example we saw in section 4.2.

Among the four examples analysed here, the second rap (section 4.2), following Newman’s (2007) terminology, would be the only politicised one seeking collective responsibility, while others (e.g. section 4.3), would speak from an individual perspective. Unlike the rest, the rap on language defence aligns with the political message of “conscious Hip Hop” rather than commercial or “hard-core” rap reproducing a capitalist ethos (see Newman, 2007). By and large, young participants were more familiarised with the latter style, which often engages in “bragging” about one’s “sexual exploits, physical attractiveness, accumulation of money, how much ‘swagger’ (coolness) s/he has and how linguistically skilled s/he is” (Williams and Stroud, 2014, p.5). This stance is timidly found in the first rap analysed (section 4.1.), “ei tio el meu rap et flipa a tu” (hey man, my rap will make you flip out), and exploited in the last one (section 4.4.), where “the Javis” and the girls in their group show plurilingual talent and their understanding of “real” Hip Hop through an approximation to (North) American Hip Hop style.

Regarding language teaching at secondary school, rappers in sections 4.3. and 4.4. above seem to perform a demotivated student identity that they contrast with informal language learning outside school, in particular through music, Hip Hop and videogames in the latter. In our corpus, participants timidly reject formal teaching of school languages - Catalan, Spanish and (British) English - in secondary education in favour of non-institutionalised contexts of use and learning. Many students, such as we have seen in 4.3, call for choice in terms of the languages they are expected to learn, thereby questioning the neoliberal logic that has made English compulsory.

These examples from our corpus are a window onto tensions between contradictory language ideologies between this non-traditional education context, Campus Ítaca, and public secondary schools, on the one hand, and between Hip Hop limitless language and dominant language practices, on the other. In particular, our analyses touch upon the following main issues. Firstly, it shows the juxtaposition of global Hip Hop tokens in English and local plurilingual, fluid practices in language biography raps. Secondly, it interrogates what constitutes “real” Hip Hop style linguistically from a localized perspective. Third, the adolescents adopt a voice as plurilingual speakers and particularly as English speakers/learners in their raps. Fourth, their plurilingual raps provide evidence for the changing bases of linguistic authority between Spanish and Catalan and in some cases, language activism for Catalan. Last, we attest an agentic construction of a reflexive plurilingual identity vis-à-vis top-down implementation of educational and linguistic policies. This analysis points to the (potential) gap between school ideologies and students’ raps: How much resistance and how much compliance is there with mainstream ideologies?

As socially-committed researchers, our next challenge is how to expand Critical Hip Hop Language Pedagogies - which are also intrinsically plurilingual - from this non-traditional space, limited to a small percentage of secondary education students, to schooling as an institution. In this direction, we are participating in teacher conferences and workshops to link with practitioners who already use or express an interest in integrating Hip Hop in the classroom. We will also shortly embark on ethnographic fieldwork in Catalan schools which will allow us to gain ethnographic depth regarding Hip Hop, plurilingualism and learning in adolescents’ lives and, hopefully, to create and implement a more comprehensive Hip Hop workshop with them.

However, ultimately, we see the methodological embedding of engagement between local Hip Hop heads, schoolteachers, teacher trainees, adolescent students and academic researchers as the way forward for our own research as well as for other research on Hip Hop and Education seeking to further bridge learning spaces. While all of the articles in this special issue include novel research collaborations of some sort (e.g. between researchers and educational institutions, researchers and emcees, researchers, teachers and students), we believe there is still a need to engage further in authentic rap and knowledge production at all stages of research with all possible stakeholders.

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