

# Ideologies and practices of multilingualism in bureaucratic and legal advice encounters<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*The increasing growth of foreign immigration to Spain has changed the communicative reality of various types of institutions. Civil servants, doctors, teachers, social workers and all sorts of service providers face new communicative challenges in their daily professional practice. The changing face and voice of their clientele calls into question habitualised forms of service delivery based on the homogeneity of practices and world-views (Moyer and Martín Rojo 2007). In this paper, we undertake a comparative study of the multilingual practices observed in two service contexts dealing with transnational migrants in Barcelona: a state legalisation office and a free legal advice service offered by a non-profit organisation. We use various types of interactional, observational and textual data. Our theoretical standpoint is that of critical sociolinguistics (Blommaert 2003; Heller 2007). We problematise the role of language in social life and try to shed light on the ways in which linguistic practices are deeply implicated in processes of stratification and social exclusion. The analysis of our data shows that, in spite of their different social missions and grounding ideologies, the two institutions examined reproduce hegemonic stances towards service communication which problematise multilingualism and ignore the exclusionary effects that overlooking communication-related matters have for certain groups of migrants. Both organisations assume Spanish to be the normal, logical and natural language of communication and neglect the need for more fluid and unproblematizing forms of multilingual practice.*

**KEYWORDS:** MULTILINGUALISM, SERVICE ENCOUNTERS, MIGRATION, INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION, GLOBALISATION, NGO

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## 1 Introduction

In this paper, we address the role of language in new multicultural institutional and public service contexts that started emerging in southern European societies at the beginning of the twenty-first century as a result of mobility and migration. Such is the case in Spain, for example, where mass arrival of transnational migrants<sup>2</sup> started only a decade ago. Civil servants, doctors, teachers, social workers and all sorts of service providers face new communicative challenges in their daily professional practice. The changing face and voice of their clientele calls into question habitualised forms of service delivery based on the homogeneity of practices and worldviews (Moyer and Martín Rojo 2007); it also forces institutions to rethink how best to serve an increasingly diverse population in ways which are not only efficient but also fair and equitable.

To understand the social processes that are taking place and the role of language in them, we focus our sociolinguistic lenses on the study of two multilingual sites which are central to the migrant experience: a state legalisation office and a free legal advice service, both located in the Barcelona area. These two contexts are, in some ways opposite, and in some other ways, complementary and even overlapping.

The free legal advice service, provided by a migrant support organisation (henceforth MSO), informs migrants face-to-face about the different bureaucratic procedures connected with their legal status and submits applications for some of the procedures (mainly card renewal applications) on their behalf. The state immigration office, in turn, offers succinct information on requirements for gaining legal status and on other types of residence-related procedures (both face-to-face and on the phone), and handles different types of petitions (work permits, card renewals, family reunions, etc.) submitted by individual migrants themselves or through support organisations like the MSO. Both institutions deal with the same population type (undocumented and documented migrants), but while the declared objective of the MSO is for accurate information to reach all migrants, the immigration office is concerned with gatekeeping and information control (Codó 2008). Thus, the MSO, as opposed to the government office, tries to fill in the legal information gaps that migrants may have and accompanies them through the different bureaucratic processes. In this paper, we will try to elucidate whether or not the differences in these institutions' social goals and relationship to the population they deal with play out in different approaches to the satisfaction of their users' multilingual language needs.

This study focuses on intercultural face-to-face encounters in both institutions, where rather complex information gets transmitted on the spot through verbal and non-verbal means.<sup>3</sup> However, our objective here is not to undertake

a purely interactional analysis of situated talk. Rather, we want to understand how the socio-institutional order which frames these interactions, with its ideologies of clienthood, migration and multilingualism, helps explain some of the phenomena observable in face-to-face service talk. Since our focus is institutional, we shall mainly refer in this paper to the role of institutional actors in service interactions. The communication skills of these 'language workers' (Boutet 2001) together with their expert and insider knowledge play a vital role in securing the success of the process of information transmission. Thus, communication, interaction and language-related matters are at the centre of the analysis. But is this also true for the institutions investigated? Is multilingual language competence on the part of information providers a concern? Do these organisations have language policy guidelines for service provision? If not, why not? How do they account for their service provision practices? What are the effects and consequences of their language practices?

This paper is organised as follows. In the first section, we provide the main theoretical concepts which inform our understanding of language, multilingualism and social organisation. After that, we describe in more detail the two sites investigated and the data collected for this paper. The ensuing section of data analysis provides answers to the research questions formulated above. First, we focus on the institutional order and the treatment accorded to communication issues and multilingualism. Second, we examine situated linguistic practices in service encounters and individual servers' perspectives on communication. Third, we discuss language ideologies at the two sites. At the end of this paper, we draw some conclusions about the way in which multilingualism is perceived, conceptualised and treated in the two institutions and make some suggestions for changing perspectives and improving service practices.

## 2 Theoretical approach

We approach the study of multilingualism and linguistic heterogeneity in institutional contexts from a critical perspective. We draw on the work carried out over the last decade in the field of sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology and critical discourse analysis (Blommaert 2003, 2005a, 2005b; Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck 2005; Heller 1999, 2003, 2007; Jacquemet 2005; Maryns 2005, 2006; Sarangi and Roberts 1999; and Sarangi and Slembrouck 1996, among others). Because of the nature of the data presented, this study belongs to the field known as 'sociolinguistics of mobility' or 'sociolinguistics of globalisation' (Blommaert 2003), which tries to account for the link between globalisation-related language phenomena and new forms of social stratification.

In line with the above, we believe that language plays a fundamental part in the organisation of social life, and thus, in the creation of opportunities

for inclusion or exclusion of individuals and social groups. In other words, linguistic practice is a powerful means of exercising power in and through occasions of social categorisation. Categorisation is about the construction of sociolinguistic boundaries which work to include and exclude people and thus enable or hinder their access to valuable socioeconomic resources. These processes are even more visible when what is at stake is bilingual/multilingual language use (Heller 2001). Because of the key role of language in 'social structuration' (Giddens 1984), one of our fundamental endeavours is to understand the 'political economy of language' (Bourdieu 1991), that is, to get a grasp on both who produces linguistic resources and controls their distribution and value, as well as who benefits from it all and with what consequences for them and others.

We think of multilingualism as both theory and practice (Heller 2007): that is, on the one hand, as a set of ideas, conceptualisations and discourses about languages and social groups, and on the other, as forms of practice which are hybrid, multivalent and changing. In analysing the management of language in multiethnic and intercultural encounters, it is necessary to examine each of these two dimensions of multilingualism separately first and then the multiple ways in which they intertwine and bear on each other.

Another important theoretical standpoint is the global-local axis. In the encounters presented here, global language resources get embedded in local sociolinguistic regimes (i.e. local ideologies of language and society which materialise in specific linguistic choices and forms of institutional practice). The spatial dimension thus plays a key role in defining the affordances of multilingual language resources, which, depending on the requirements and reception potential of the context, may capacitate or incapacitate speakers to act. A case in point is provided by 'valuable' global linguistic resources, like international *linguae francae*, which may get devalued in certain institutional spaces because of the rejection of the specific varieties spoken by migrants or the implementation of forms of service which do not cater to the communicative needs of foreign service seekers (Codó, Dooly, Garrido, Moyer and Ruiz 2006). Such linguistic tensions, which are not new, are perceived to have gained prominence as a result of globalisation processes and the diasporic and migration-related mobility of individuals around the globe (Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck 2005).

### 3 Context description and data

The data we examine in this paper is ethnographic, interactional and textual. It comes from two bureaucratic-administrative sites and was collected during different years. Below is a brief description of each site.

### 3.1 The state immigration office

The data from the immigration office was gathered on the occasion of a one-shot legalisation campaign which took place in Spain in the year 2000 (for more information see Codó 2008). The immigration office, located in the city of Barcelona, Catalonia was in charge of receiving and processing applications for legalisation from individuals from outside the EU. The study focused on communication at the information desk of this office, where clients were given the opportunity of enquiring about the progress of their applications. The largest client group was that of North African applicants (40%), followed by South Asian applicants (32%). Other groups were significantly smaller (e.g. Latin Americans were third, making up only 7% of clients).

The data collected comprised ethnographic notes, audiorecorded face-to-face information encounters, interviews and textual materials produced by the institution, like information leaflets, application forms, etc.

The information desk was staffed by four temporarily-appointed local servers: Juan, Miquel, Ramon and Teresa.<sup>4</sup> Three of them, namely Juan, Miquel and Ramon, were in charge of answering migrants' questions about the administrative status of their applications. Teresa, in turn, took care of receiving new documents filed by applicants to strengthen their cases. The four employees served migrants behind a long wooden counter, sitting or standing next to each other. While Juan, Miquel and often Ramon sat on a chair to be able to check migrants' applications in the computer, Teresa liked to stand as she needed to consult with back office staff regularly.

As regards language abilities, all four officials were Catalan/Spanish bilinguals, though Miquel and Ramon more Catalan than Spanish dominant, Teresa more Spanish than Catalan dominant and Juan's abilities in Catalan being restricted to understanding this language. With respect to foreign languages, Juan and Miquel spoke Russian<sup>5</sup> and Arabic<sup>6</sup> respectively, as both had been hired as interpreters of those languages. In addition, Miquel could communicate quite fluently in English, though his pronunciation was heavily influenced by his two first languages, and his range of structures and vocabulary was rather limited. As for Teresa and Ramon, their knowledge of English was extremely limited, especially in the case of Teresa. However, she could communicate in native-like French.

### 3.2 The legal services at the MSO

The second set of data was collected in 2008 from a nonprofit organization which provides different services for migrants in a post-industrial town in the outskirts of Barcelona, Catalonia. The data collected comprises ethnographic

notes, interviews with Maria, Elena and Ismail, the three legal advisors, and Astrid, the MSO coordinator, as well as textual materials produced both by the MSO and by the public administrations that fund it, such as information leaflets, application forms and documents for internal use.

The MSO is mainly funded by the town hall and partly relies on volunteers for many tasks. It functions as an umbrella organization for different nonprofit organizations which contribute services and professionals to it (see Garrido and Moyer 2008 for more information). Its main activity is the provision of face-to-face specialist advice on immigration laws in Spain, although it also provides a number of other services like refugee and asylum seeker social and legal support, a free social advice service, a job insertion programme, a housing programme for homeless migrants (see Moyer this volume), a CV-creation service, psychological support, etc.

The legal advice service is open to both locals and foreigners, though the main clientele is socioeconomic migrants. The MSO has a large Latin American user population in addition to smaller populations of Moroccans and sub-Saharan users. In this paper, we have focused on three legal information desks housed under MSO. The three services are free of charge and deal with cases related to foreigners' legal status in Spain.

The first legal advice counter studied is locally offered by the MSO and has been run by the same full time advisor (Ismail) since 1994. This is the main legal information service at the MSO and it complements that of 'first reception' ('primera acollida'), which is staffed by Maria and deals with minor cases such as residence card renewals or general legal information. The third advisor studied works only part-time at the MSO and deals with the same type of specialist cases as Ismail, so the users are directed to either office.

Ismail is a Senegalese advisor who is a key member of the African community and runs a local call shop ('locutorio') in the vicinity of the MSO. He acquired Wolof, Pula, Sose and French in Senegal but he also learnt Arabic, English, Spanish and Catalan as a result of his transnational trajectory. Ismail speaks a hybrid Wolof-French code at home and mainly Spanish at work. This advisor is in contact with the government office in Barcelona since he is in charge of personally presenting renewal documents on behalf of users and of organizing family reunion appointments in Barcelona among other tasks.

Maria, the second full-time legal advisor, is a Catalan woman in her late twenties. She holds a degree in social work and started off as a part-time volunteer at the MSO reception to be promoted to full-time advisor three years ago. She is a Spanish/Catalan bilingual who is Catalan dominant and who has some basic knowledge of English. The office staffed by Maria is a walk-in

daily ‘first reception’ service that provides general information about common legal procedures such as residence card renewals or applications for residency (and work) permits for ‘exceptional circumstances’. Complex legal cases are transferred to Ismail’s specialist legal service if necessary.

Elena is a legal advisor in an organisation specialising in providing legal information to foreign workers. It was created in 1986 as a branch of one of the two main Spanish trade unions. In collaboration with local and regional administrations, this organisation currently has 46 such information offices all over Catalonia. In the case of the MSO, this information service is completely integrated within it. In fact, the trade union logo does not appear anywhere either in the physical space of the MSO or on the appointment slips migrants are given to see Elena. Despite the trade union’s requirement that servers inform their users about the trade union and how to become a member (Bertran i Bruguera 2007:154), this advisor does not make any references to the trade union in encounters, even when openly asked about the funding of the service. Elena is a local woman in her late twenties who has a degree in sociology and has worked for the trade union for over three years. She is a bilingual Spanish/Catalan speaker who is Spanish dominant and who has some elementary knowledge of English.

As mentioned above, Ismail and Elena collaborate as they provide the same services to users and also work together with ‘first reception’ legal services and social workers on site. However, access to all the services housed under the MSO are controlled by Davinia, a monolingual Spanish Latin American receptionist. At the reception, users are given appointments for specific services according to (her evaluation of) their demands. For users, the reception is the first point of contact with the MSO both as an institution and as a physical space. Even on the day of their appointment, users should report to reception before they are allowed to access a second, liminal space – the waiting area, where they have to wait until they are called by a server and shown into another more private and central space – an office. This space distribution and the gatekeeping procedures link the MSO as an institution to other private contexts (lawyers) and institutional ones (medical services, government office). As a result,

This identification generates some difficulties in understanding the role of the legal advice office for foreigners (...), which is assumed to be another department of the administrative apparatus which foreign people are in contact with in the Spanish state.<sup>7</sup> (Bertran i Bruguera 2007:139)

We shall see below what effects this identification has on some of the linguistic practices deployed at the MSO.

## 4 Data analysis

### 4.1 The peripheral status of communication-related matters

The two institutions investigated have a similar approach to communication. This is despite their notable differences in aims and social function. By and large, both institutions seem oblivious to the complexities of the process of information provision and take for granted the ability of service providers to interact successfully with a highly heterogeneous clientele.

Face-to-face communication issues are rarely explicitly addressed in staff meetings and seminars by managers in either context. Yet, in both contexts, front-line information providers experience interactional trouble on a routine basis. The institutional take on this situation is either to downplay or simply ignore these communication difficulties. Faced with the lack of interest of the institution they work for, individual servers devise their own ways of dealing with the difficulties they encounter. However, these interactional remedies are rarely shared among colleagues either formally or informally. In our view, this is because of the peripheral status accorded to communication matters within the institutional order. What is missing in both sites is an understanding of the centrality of communication in verbal information provision encounters and a general institutional concern for these issues.

On the basis of our ethnographic and interactional material, we have identified some of the reasons for this institutional neglect. At the government office, it is connected with the general indifference of the managerial staff towards the daily realities of front-line servers. We can attribute this indifference to two factors. On the one hand, it is due to the lack of institutional concern about the quality of the legal information provided to migrants, which is not surprising given the gatekeeping mission of this bureaucracy (Codó 2008). On the other, it is related to the traditional understanding in Spanish bureaucracies that a good civil servant is someone who does not trouble managers with his/her work difficulties (Nieto 1996). The following excerpt illustrates precisely that point. Miquel, one of the office's information providers, and Eva (RES) were discussing the disrespectful behaviour of one of his colleagues, which had even motivated written complaints by migrant service seekers. Miquel's comment in turn 2 indexes both the managers' lack of interest in their work but also, most probably, the fact that bureaucrats' everyday difficulties do not get transmitted to the supervisory staff (note here the ambiguity of the verb *enterar* in Catalan, which may mean 'not get to know' and/or 'not be told').



**Excerpt (1)**

- 1 RES: i els jefes no li diuen res?  
*and how come the managers don't tell him off?*
- 2 MIQ: els jefes no s'enteren del que passa aquí!  
*the managers have no idea what's going on here!*

At the MSO, the ideological reasons are quite different, though with similar practical consequences as regards the backgrounding of communication. It must be conceded that the position adopted by this institution and by the government office is not infrequent in Spain; it reflects the peripheral status that, traditionally, communication matters have been accorded in Spanish institutional domains. However, we want to claim here that this alone does not account for the peripheral role attached to communication at the MSO. There are more profound ideological reasons for downplaying face-to-face interactional difficulties. The first one has to do with the positioning of this institution as a pro-migrant organisation. To focus on issues related to communication would amount to problematising migrants and that is something which, ideologically, this institution does not want to do; in fact, the MSO wants to construct itself as a key actor in the pro-migrant local scene. Secondly, centring on communication matters would also imply questioning the institution's implicit language policy in a way that probably this non-governmental organisation (NGO) is not prepared to assume, as it would have profound implications regarding different organisational matters, like staff employment criteria.

The backgrounding of the complexities of intercultural encounters parallels the way multilingualism is constructed as exceptional by both institutions. How can this be so if we consider the diverse migrant clientele they daily serve? The reason lies in the fact that Spanish is constructed as the default language of communication. In both sites, there is the unquestioned assumption that Spanish should be the common language of interaction, and thus, the expectation that migrants should be able to communicate in Spanish. At the immigration bureaucracy, this assumption is not surprising, given that it functions as a gatekeeping agency of the Spanish nation-state and is thus vested in protecting the capitals (Bourdieu 1991) of the autochthonous population (Codó 2008). In that setting migrants are subject to a continuous process of evaluation and have to prove their adequacy and moral worth to front-line civil servants. Speaking good Spanish not only is seen as an irrefutable proof of migrants' goodwill, but is also perceived as proof of having fulfilled the requirements for receiving legal status (e.g. one requirement is that migrants be in the country for a year more

or less: speaking Spanish is taken as evidence of this). Again, in spite of the very different social position and orientation towards migrants of the MSO as compared to the government office, the ideological stance which places Spanish at the centre of face-to-face institutional communication goes unquestioned; it is in fact highly naturalised, as we can see in excerpt (2), which comes from an interview with Maria, the first reception legal advisor.

### Excerpt (2)

1 RES: però clar malgrat això clar la majoria d'assessoraments o almenys els que he vist són en castellà.

*but in spite of this the majority of encounters or at least the ones I have observed are in Spanish.*

2 MAR: sí sí sí afortunadament [=laughs].  
yes yes yes fortunately [=laughs].

[...]

3 RES: quan vénen a l'MSO ja saben que serà en castellà o s'ho diuen entre ells o?

*when they come to the MSO do they know that it'll be in Spanish or do they tell one another or?*

4 MAR: els que els que acaben d'arribar normalment venen allí perquè coneixen algú llavors normalment si van a algun servei i demanen algo i els adrecen a l'MSO els hi faran en castellà segurament <potser algú> [>].

*those those that have just arrived they usually come [sic] there because they know someone and so normally if they go to some service and request something and they are referred to the MSO they will most probably be served in Spanish <maybe someone> [>].*

5 RES: <de l'ajuntament> [<] vols dir o així?  
'<at the town council> [<] do you mean?'

6 MAR: sí de l'ajuntament o d'algun ambulatori o d'algun lloc jo crec que normalment els hi parlen en castellà.

*yes at the town council or at some outpatients' clinic or somewhere like that I think they usually speak to them in Spanish.*

[...]

7 MAR [...] però normalment clar jo m'imagino que ja tenen e::l el fet interioritzat no -? de que és un [/] de qué és un lloc tot i que hagi algú que no sé si ho saben o no tots que és africà la major part de la gent és d'aquí per tant l'idioma que utilitzarà segurament serà el castellà no: i que molts cops no no no necessàriament coneixen la gent que l'atendrà coneixerà l'anglès o el francès [...].

*[...] but basically I guess that they have it internalised right -? that this is a [/] that this is a place where although there*

*is someone who but I don't know if they all know it is an African person the majority of people are from here and thus the language that they will be using will be Spanish and that in many cases they don't know the people that will serve them will not necessarily know English or French [...].*

Maria explains how she in fact expects migrants to have been previously socialised into knowing that Spanish is *the* language of communication with local institutional actors in Catalan service settings (turn 7). In sections 4.3.1. and 4.3.3., we shall discuss the role and use of Catalan to communicate with migrants in the two institutions examined.

## 4.2 The exceptionality of multilingualism

The taken-for-granted necessary competence in Spanish of migrants explains the exceptional construction of multilingualism at both sites. This exceptionality is evidenced by the employment requirements of both institutions. By and large, competence in foreign languages is not a central skill ordinary members of staff are asked to have. That does not mean that there are no employees who can speak foreign languages. Both at the immigration office and at the MSO there are some who do. However, they tend to be a minority. This explains why, at both sites, there is a member of staff who is constructed by the institution and his colleagues as 'the multilingual employee'.

At the immigration office, the multilingual employees are those who have been hired as interpreters.<sup>8</sup> At that site, the most multilingual of them all is Miquel, who was recruited as an interpreter of Arabic but spends most of his time actually speaking English to South Asian (mostly Pakistani) information seekers. The rest of the employees are not expected to be able to speak/understand languages other than the two local ones (i.e. Spanish and Catalan).<sup>9</sup> This does not exclude the possibility that 'ordinary' members of staff or non-interpreters may in practice need to employ foreign languages to communicate with migrant service seekers. However, at a conceptual level, speaking foreign languages is not part of these workers' duties as defined by the institution. Evidence for this claim is provided by the fact that bureaucrats were not required to know foreign languages when they were employed, nor were they told that they would need to speak languages other than the two local ones to carry out their work duties. As a result, the servers do not consider it part of their obligations to use foreign languages in service communication.

Yet these servers are often faced with the practical need to know at least some English. Some of them voice their unhappiness at having to do so and feel deceived by the institution. Others refuse to use English unless absolutely necessary (even when they do speak it), and on the occasions when they use

it, they switch back to Spanish at the earliest opportunity. Those individuals, we have claimed, feel legitimised to deploy such practices by the ideological stance of the institution on language issues.

At the MSO, in turn, the multilingual server is Ismail, the Senegalese legal advisor who speaks up to seven languages. In an interview with Astrid, the MSO coordinator, upon being asked about whether her employees speak any foreign languages, she first responds to the question in general ('some do, others don't') and immediately after mentions Ismail's wide linguistic repertoire as being very useful (turns 5 and 7). The fact that Astrid topicalises Ismail's competences right away shows the extent to which this employee is constructed as the multilingual model in this social space.

### Excerpt (3)

- 1 COO: vale # les persones que treballen a MSO parlen alguna llengua estrangera -? # algunes sí i d'altres no.  
*ok # do the people who work at MSO speak any foreign languages -? # some do and some don't.*
- 2 RES: aham.
- 3 COO: tenim un col·laborador senegalès.  
*we have a Senegalese collaborator.*  
 [COO is referring to Ismail, the legal advisor.]
- 4 RES: ah sí.  
*oh yeah.*
- 5 COO: +^que parla el francès l'anglès el castellà l'àrab i al- # algunes llengües ehh- africanes.  
*+^who speaks French English Spanish Arabic and so- # some ehh African languages.*
- 6 RES: <sí> [<].  
*<yes> [<].*
- 7 COO: <doncs> [>] va molt bé.  
*<so> [>] it is very convenient.*
- 8 Res: i tant!  
*of course!*

Another index of Ismail's position as *the* multilingual employee who may solve all sorts of language-related difficulties is provided by Elena, another of the legal advisors. In excerpt (4) from our fieldnotes, she confirms what the procedure is in case of linguistic trouble with migrant service seekers who cannot speak either of the two local languages:

**Excerpt (4)**

Finally, I ask Elena what happens if a newly-arrived person who can't speak any Spanish or Catalan comes to the MSO. She looks a bit puzzled, as if she doesn't know what the protocol is for these cases, and she tells me that Ismail speaks foreign languages, so they would probably ask Ismail to speak to the user. I find this a bit lame because Ismail may not be available or he might not speak any of the user's languages. (Trade Union legal advice service, 7 February 2008)

Apart from Ismail and Miquel, as we said, the rest of the employees in both contexts have limited foreign language skills. This is not surprising, as it is in keeping with low foreign language standards in Catalonia (Codó 2008).<sup>10</sup> Elena, the trade union legal advisor, admits to speaking 'inglés chapurreao' ('broken English'), and Teresa and Robert, from the state immigration office claim to speak English 'poc, poc, molt poc' ('little, little, very little'). It is true that Teresa, for example has near-native competence in French resulting from a period of residence abroad, but finding this skill in an employee is the product of chance rather than the result of the institution's concern with providing a multilingual service.

Another element which indexes the construction of multilingualism in both contexts as exceptional is the fact that the organisation of service provision does not seem to be driven by language considerations. In other words, clients are assigned to one server or the other independent of the language repertoires of either individual. We understand that there are organisational factors (i.e. need for expediency, large numbers of individuals waiting to be served every day, availability of advisors on specific days, etc.) which explain why language competence considerations do not play a more central role in the distribution of work. However, it is the combination of the institution's backgrounding of the complexities of communication, the playing down of the need for more language-skilled employees and the lack of attention paid to servers' individual linguistic capabilities that seem especially inadequate. In terms of work organisation, the lack of a language policy entails that the limited foreign language resources that exist are not taken advantage of, to the detriment of information seekers and also to the detriment of information providers, who often feel frustrated by their inability to communicate with interlocutors. In light of such not infrequent difficulties, the efficiency and expediency value of certain organisational arrangements may get questioned. From the point of view of the users, access to accurate information and the right to receive quality service may be jeopardised by the assignment of users with low competence in Spanish

to advisors who cannot explain legal procedures in a shared foreign language and who might not be good communicators even in Spanish.

All in all, the multilingual provision of information and services seems to be the result of ad hoc circumstances and tokenistic multilingual initiatives rather than a global institutional approach on multilingualism. It is true that both institutions incorporate different forms of multilingualism in order to give their multilingual user population (some) access to the services and information provided. However, as pointed out, most multilingual practices are restricted to specific servers and to specific modes. For instance, given the lack of foreign language skills among servers, both institutions rely on the development of written multilingual materials in order to deal with disfluencies in communication derived from predominantly monolingual oral practices. These written materials comprise information sheets, application forms for legal procedures and advice leaflets.

Despite the institutional preference for written multilingualism, investment in producing such texts is tokenistic and inconsistent. In the case of the 2000 legalisation process, for example, multilingualism appears in leaflets and application forms but disappears in other documents, like the 'expone' form which migrants submitting extra documentation (a common procedure) had to fill in; this form was only produced in Spanish. In turn, the MSO does not invest in translating services for information forms and posters due to its tight budget, so they have to rely on unpaid translators or native speakers to produce them. The number of languages available and the quality of the translations actually depend on the resources available and sometimes volunteer work.

Hence, multilingualism is constructed by these institutions as a matter of good will, a sort of practical concession to migrants (with, of course, different degrees of ideological adherence to it depending on the institution), and not as one of these organisations' constitutive characteristics.

### 4.3 Situated linguistic practice

#### 4.3.1 *Spanish as a pre-requisite*

We pointed out earlier that Spanish is a sort of lingua franca for all practical purposes in both services. The unquestioned role of Spanish in service practice indexes the widespread ideological assumption that to live in Spain, it is necessary to speak Spanish. Failure to do so leads to inferences being drawn not about language learning but about migrants' character and moral

worth (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). It is significant, though, that, in a bilingual community, the role of the other local language, that is, Catalan, is practically null in frontstage service communication at either organisation. At the immigration office, for example, Catalan does fulfil a function as the habitual language of communication among the serving team (Codó 2008) but is never used by servers to address clients, even when used by the clients themselves. This is in line with what Pujolar (2007) calls the ‘commonsensical sociolinguistic comportment’, that is, the naturalised idea that in Catalonia, foreigners are addressed in Spanish. These patterns of language choice are not socially harmless, as they have important implications for the recreation of traditional ethnolinguistic and class boundaries in Catalonia (Sabaté i Dalmau 2007), and the consequential restriction of migrants’ access to important material resources. As regards the use of Catalan at the MSO, more will be said about it in the following section in connection with the views expressed in an interview by Ismail, one of the MSO’s legal advisors.

The taken for granted status accorded to Spanish vis-à-vis not only Catalan but also other languages, either migrants’ languages or transnational *linguae francae*, is not inclusive but exclusive, as lack of competence in Spanish becomes a linguistic barrier for migrants to access, for example, the free legal advice service provided by the migrant support organisation. What happens in such cases? This question takes us back to Elena’s (the trade union advisor) puzzled looks (excerpt (4)) when she is asked what happens when a newly-arrived person who cannot speak any local languages goes to the MSO. She is so surprised because the case simply does not seem to exist. In her words, it would not make sense for these people to seek her service. The implications, logically, are that certain groups of people, aware of this implicit language requirement, do not even turn up at Elena’s office.

#### Excerpt (5)

I also ask her if these users are likely to use Trade Union services and she tells me that these people ‘ya no se dirigen al sindicato porque seria absurdo’ [‘they wouldn’t come to the Trade Union, it would be absurd’] since they wouldn’t understand each other. (Trade Union legal advice service, 7 January 2008)

Given the potential for exclusion that these language practices entail (as the researcher points out in her fieldnotes provided as excerpt (4)), the MSO coordinator is quick to dismiss any such conclusion (turns 13 and 15).

## Excerpt (6)

- 1 COO: e:m # ave a conversation in English?
- 5 COO: bueno # mínima eh?  
well # minimal right?
- 6 RES: mm.
- 7 COO: ehh # uffff # mmm # una conversa no diria.  
ehh # uff # mmm # maybe not a conversation.
- 8 RES: un intercanvi d'informació <potser> [<]?  
an information exchange <maybe> [<]?
- 9 COO: <sí:> [>] sí sí #un mínim eh -? un mínim  
# quan realment ja és qüestió de d'explicar tràmits etcetera # jo  
crec <que:> [<]  
<ye:s> [>] yes yes # a minimum right -? a  
minimum # if they really have to explain legal procedures etcet-  
era # then I think <tha:t> [<]
- 10 RES: <mm> [>].  
<mm> [>].
- 11 COO: a a aquest nivell no arriba tothom que treballa aquí.  
not everyone who works here gets to to that level.
- 12 RES: vale.  
ok.
- 13 COO: però bueno # una cosa que t'he d'explicar quan realment veiem que  
no ens entenem amb la persona.  
but well # one thing I have to tell you is that when we really  
feel that we don't reach understanding with a person.
- 14 RES: aham.
- 15 COO: doncs intentem que una altra persona de l'MSO que sí domina  
l'idioma intervingui.  
then we try to have another person from the MSO who masters the  
language intervene.
- 16 RES: ah.  
right.
- 17 COO: o si és una persona per exemple amb els xinesos.  
or if it's a person like with the Chinese community.
- 18 RES: <sí> [<].  
<yes> [<].
- 19 COO: <si> [>] només parlen xinès # doncs nosaltres podem ehh fer  
servir un servei de traductors.  
if> [>] they only speak Chinese # then we can ehhh use an inter-  
preting service.
- 20 RES: <aham> [<].
- 21 COO: <del> [>] de la del consell comarcal.  
<from> [>] from the from the county council.
- 22 RES: i és un servei per telèfon o vénen aquí?



*and is it a service over the phone or do they come here?*

23 COO: +^ no # vénen # però bueno clar hem de quedar un dia eh -? # perquè nosaltres fem la sol·licitud d'un traductor d'un intèrpret.

*+^ no # they come here # but well of course we have to make an appointment okay -? # because we apply for a translator or an interpreter.*

24 RES: sí.  
yes.

25 COO: i doncs quedem un dia perquè vingui i així podem <parlar> [<].  
*and then we arrange for the interpreter to come one day and then we can <talk> [<].*

26 RES: <clar> [>].  
<sure> [>].

The fact that Astrid anticipates the researcher's question/comments and makes it explicit that incomprehension situations are tackled by different means (an MSO colleague or a translator service) is indexical of her worry about the exclusionary effects of the institutions' practices. However, not much seems to be done to question the central role of Spanish in legal advice encounters at this MSO.

Information seekers seem in general aware of the fact that the default language is Spanish. They infer this unspoken institutional language requirement by comparison with similar service contexts, but also, locally, through the presence at the MSO of a monolingual Spanish gatekeeper at reception. This is the person that migrants first encounter when they arrive at the MSO and the one who organises appointments with the two specialist advisors and gives turn numbers for the walk-in legal service. The receptionist is not a good communicator and experiences repeated comprehension difficulties. She feels uncomfortable about the situation and frequently complains about users' limited linguistic competence in Spanish and how hard it is to achieve mutual understanding. In fact, she equates not speaking Spanish with not speaking at all ('X no habla', 'X doesn't speak') similarly to what happens at the immigration office. In addition to this monolingual institutional face presented by the receptionist, the requisite for local language competence is also explicitly articulated by her when users lacking it demand access to legal services at the MSO.

### Excerpt (7)

Davinia [the receptionist] calls Elena because there is a Pakistani user who wants to collect his appointment at the gobierno civil [government office] to apply for *arraigo*. Elena decides to go down to reception to give it to him personally as the appointment is soon and she wants him to be able to ask her questions. When Elena comes back, Davinia rings again to tell Elena that this user doesn't understand anything about the *trámite*

[procedure] and that she has given him an appointment with her 'porque no se entera mucho el pobre' ['because he doesn't understand much, poor thing']. Davinia has asked him to bring a friend who can speak Spanish to the appointment. [Trade union legal advice service, 14 February 2008]

In the excerpt (7), the receptionist explicitly asks a user with a low competence in Spanish to bring someone who is more competent to his appointment with the trade union advisor, which foregrounds the implicit Spanish language requirement. Strikingly, bureaucrats at the government office also insist on Spanish competence and make similar demands on their users, as Hussain, a Pakistani migrant applying for legalisation explains in turns 3, 5 and 7:

### Excerpt (8)

- 1 RES: vale -. y si tú no entiendes algo que te dicen -, eh # por ejemplo qué haces preguntas -? o:: <mira no> [>] entiendo me lo puedes repetir o me lo puedes explicar o no?  
*okay -. and if you don't understand something they tell you -, uh # for example what do you do do you ask -? or <please I don't> [>] understand could you repeat that or could you explain or you don't?*
- 2 HUS: <no porque> [<].  
*<no because> [<].*
- 3 HUS: no porque cuando así preguntas ell dicen por ellos tráelo una persona lo que sabe hablar -. por ello lo que esta gente <que está ahí> [>].  
*no because when you ask the[y] say bring a person that can speak -. it's them the people <that are there> [>].*
- 4 RES: *<ah sí::> [<]?  
<really> [<]?*
- 5 HUS: sí -. es circas circas lo que hay circas mira si hay alguien que sabe hablar -, y llamas ellos.  
*yes -. it's near near that's near see if there is anybody who can speak -, and call them.*
- 6 RES: ah pero ellos no te lo explican.  
*oh but they do not explain it to you.*
- 7 HUS: sí -. si no hay nada no te dicen -. te dicen oyes habla su idioma hablas español dicen que ah vale no sabe nada viene para aquí -. no sé para qué vienes -.vale pero esa persona si xxx vayas -. no hacemos nada.  
*yes -. if there is nothing they don't say -. they say listen speak your language speak Spanish they say oh okay you know nothing you come here -. I don't know what you come for -. okay but this person if xxx go -. we do nothing.*

This requirement for Spanish competence is reflected in the users' linguistic practices observed in the three legal advice offices. By and large, users are either Spanish native speakers from Latin America or (highly) competent in Spanish. This widespread competence in Spanish among legal advice service users contrasts with the demography of the town where the MSO is located.<sup>11</sup>

Given the circumstances and the explicit institutional encouragement, those users who are not competent in Spanish often rely on 'ad-hoc interpreters' (Bührig and Meyer 2004), that is, distant relatives or neighbourhood-based bilinguals to access both the legal advice service and the government office. However, in the case of Ismail, who is a highly multilingual legal advisor, these interpreters are not always needed. In fact, he claims to often share a language with service users who come accompanied by an interpreter. This makes his/her presence unnecessary (more will be said about Ismail's perspectives on service communication in the following section). It is significant that migrants, unaware of Ismail's language skills, perceive the need to take a more language-skilled person with them to be able to understand the MSO free legal advisor.

#### 4.3.2 *Different views of service communication*

We mentioned previously that institutional ideologies about communication are not necessarily mapped onto actual interactional practices in situated encounters. Instead, these ideologies stem out of and are used to construct the positions of these institutions in the social arena. In this section, we discuss the views that service providers in the two contexts have of the communication process. In the following section, we shall discuss how these views translate into service practices and what consequences these practices have for the migrants being served.

In spite of the general institutional indifference towards front-line communication phenomena, successful interaction seems to be an issue for most servers in both contexts as they experience difficulties in their everyday 'language work' (Boutet 2001). The pre-requisite to speak Spanish, which we discussed above, does not ensure the successful transmission of information since there are other factors that may complicate the achievement of intercomprehension: lack of knowledge of administrative procedures, the use of bureaucratic jargon, the routinisation of some service providers' responses, the decontextualisation and extreme simplification of the information provided, and so on. A key factor is whether servers' are invested in the achievement of mutual understanding or not, which is clearly different in the two organisations studied.

At the immigration office, bureaucrats take an overt problematising stance towards communication with their users. This is part of a general mistrust of migrant clients and is in many cases used to legitimise the oversimplification

of information they undertake. The officials' oblivion to the complexity of communication develops into frustration in their everyday service practice. The situation evolves into a vicious circle: frustration feeds into routinisation and extreme simplification, and these features of service providers' talk, in turn, complicate communication even further. The excerpt (9) illustrates this process.

### Excerpt (9)

- 1 AGE: www.  
 2 MIQ: www.  
 3 MIQ: wait three more weeks -, .  
 4 EN1: this week [=! softly]?  
 5 EN2: this week [=! softly].  
 @Situation: MIQ continues checking  
 6 RES: alguns posen una cara de resignació!  
*some of them look so resigned!*  
 7 MIQ: aquest està en proposta de concessió però si em poso a explicar-  
 ho i no m'entenen <#> [>] i em fot una ràbia i: !  
*this one is about to be granted but if I start explaining and  
 they don't follow and it makes me so angry a::nd!*  
 8 RES: <[=! laughs]> [<].  
 9 MIQ: i aquest també!  
*and this one the same!*  
 10 RES: +^ això vol dir que d'aquí tres setmanes estaran resolts [?].  
*this means that in three weeks' time a final decision will have  
 been made.*  
 11 MIQ: no suposo que ja se'ls ho ha dit perquè ja ho posa.  
*no I think they have been told already because it says so.*

So profound is service seekers' frustration that they sometimes react in an aggressive, even violent manner (see comment in excerpt (10) addressed to the researcher):

### Excerpt (10)

- 1 MIQ: si em pots ajudar perquè jo ja els fotria una patada a tots.  
*if you can help me out because I would already kick them in the  
 ass.*

While the particular public server featured in the two excerpts above feels powerless and angry at 'not being understood,' other staff members may take advantage of the situation and use service seekers' lack of understanding in a strategic way, i.e. as the means to exert social control over their interlocutors'

conduct (in this case to reduce the number of applications from acquaintances or relatives a person takes for checking). This is what Ramon, another of the public officials observed, claims to do (see excerpt (11)).

### Excerpt (11)

1 RAM: quan com no t'entenen veuen que et poses borde i diuen ah pues dona-me'n un.

*when they don't understand you they realise that you become stroppy and then say ah ok then give me one.*

This angry context results in the officials' indifference towards the achievement of mutual understanding and the overt problematisation of communication with migrant clients. In their service provision, bureaucrats do not take into account the users' linguistic needs and social face, but are concerned with the exercise of power and control. As a consequence, migrants' access to vital legal information is severely constrained by officials' inadequate information routines.

At the MSO, by contrast, most servers do not generally problematise or topicalise communication issues that *do* arise in their daily tasks. As we claimed before, throughout our fieldwork, we have gradually become aware of a general positivation of migrant users which precludes any sort of problematising stance on intercultural communication at the MSO. For example, in the meeting we had at the beginning of our fieldwork with staff members including the coordinator, we asked them whether there were any specific language or communication issues that they wanted us to study. Our idea was to get to know their views and incorporate their agendas into our research objectives. We got no answers. In the following example, Maria, one of the legal advisors, claims that communication disfluencies are informally talked about with colleagues through 'anecdotes' which present them as exceptions to fluid communication with users.

### Excerpt (12)

1 RES: o sigui # aquest tema de la comunicació per exemple és un tema o de les llengües com vulguis és un tema per exemple que parlem entre vosaltres no a l'MSO o entre la gent que feu assessorament # no # amb la Davinia o amb l'Ismail o amb l'Elena és un tema que parlem jo que que surti o no jo què sé.

*then # this topic of communication for example is it a topic or of languages if you prefer is it a topic for instance that you talk about among yourselves or not at the MSO or among the people who give advice # right # with Davinia or with Ismail or with Elena is it a topic that you talk I that or that arises or not or I don't know.*

- 2 MAR: sí # però molts cops surt més com a anècdota <eh? en plan de>[>]  
*yes # but many times it arises more as an anecdote <right? in the form of> [>]*
- 3 RES: <ah # en plan anècdota> [<]!  
 <ah # in the form of an anecdote> [<]!
- 4 RES: ah # bueno la Davinia sí que explica moltes anècdotes d'aquestes  
 [=laughs]!  
 ah # well Davinia does tell many anecdotes of this sort  
 [=laughs]!

Whenever communication difficulties are topicalised, Maria, like most of the institutional actors at the NGO, reduces the achievement of successful communication to having Spanish as a shared language. Thus, communication disfluencies are mostly constructed as mere language problems. Language problems are easy to remove (they will disappear by learning the language). Thus, according to such an understanding, if the language is mastered, miscommunication will not occur. Maria makes this view clear in excerpt (13), which is of course a naïve simplification of a very complex picture, but which is in line with the NGO's positivising stance.

### Excerpt (13)

- 1 RES: o sigui, que tu ho vincules al tema de la llengua no -? que hi  
 hagi una bona comunicació està relacionat amb la competència  
 lingüística [en castellà].  
*right so for you it has to do with the language doesn't it  
 -? smooth communication is related to language competence [in  
 Spanish].*
- 2 MAR: sí sí totalment.  
*yes yes no doubt.*
- 3 RES: vale.  
*okay.*

Likewise, in other parts of the interview, Maria claims that when Spanish is shared – as with Latin Americans – the only communication difficulties that exist are due to lexical dissimilarities among different varieties of Spanish, which she claims to solve by learning the specific words employed by her interlocutors.

By contrast, Ismail, the NGO Senegalese legal advisor, has a wider perspective which consists in downplaying the role of language competence in the construction of successful interaction. Ismail claims that language is not a problem in his service encounters since he draws on 'human communication', patience and presumably on his own experience as a migrant in order to negotiate meanings with users who do not share any languages with him and speak little Spanish. According to Ismail, 'nos podemos comunicar sin idioma ni nada' ('we can

communicate without a language or anything') and 'lo del idioma no funciona tanto' ('language is not that important').<sup>12</sup>

Ismail's view of the lack of centrality of language in communication might be linked to the fact that he is a very competent multilingual speaker and that, as a migrant himself, he shares a lot of tacit background information with the users he serves. He does not feel linguistically deficient and is an effective communicator, which situates him beyond the problematisation of linguistic differences.

Ismail's unproblematising attitude with respect to language competence and understanding is paralleled by his explicit construction of his legal advice service as an unproblematic multilingual space. This conceptualization is extended to the MSO as an institution and set against Catalan mainstream bilingual society.

#### Excerpt (14)

- 1 ISM: a ver # umm # porque yo creo que: mm # no no es un problema para nosotros.  
*let's see # umm # because I think tha:t mm # it's not not a problem for us.*
- 2 RES: aham.
- 3 COO: no es un problema # a ver el tema del catalán quizá a veces te preocupa # de que: nosotros # e: estamos haciendo aquí un trabajo dentro de Catalunya un trabajo que # casi todo # se hace en castellano u en otro idiomas que no son: cooficiales de España.  
*it's not a problem # see the topic of Catalan sometimes worries you # that we # we are carrying out a task within Catalonia a task that # almost everything # is done in Spanish or in other languages which are not coofficial in Spain.*
- 4 RES: ah ha-ha.
- 5 ISM: claro # entonces # e:hh # cuando: mm # cuando sales de este ámbito y entonces.  
*of course # then # e:hh # whe:n mm # when you get out of this field and then*
- 6 RES: aham.
- 7 ISM: ya ves que: # en ese # en el en el otro mundo.  
*you see tha:t # in that # in the in the other world.*
- 8 RES: [=!giggles].
- 9 ISM: pues funciona de otra manera distinta no?  
*it works in a different way doesn't it?*
- 10 RES: [=!giggles]
- 11 RES: o sea que hay dos mundos paralelos.  
*so there are two parallel worlds.*

12 ISM: cla:ro # porque aquí estamos en un mundo pues que: hablamos en castella:no en francés en ga- en árabe en nosequé nosécuantos.

*of cou:rse # because here we are in a world then tha:t we speak in Spa:nish in French in ga- in Arabic in so on and so forth.*

13 RES: mm.

14 ISM: y en fuera pue:s la gente se están matando porque tienen que hablar castellano y los otros dicen que tienen que hablar en catalán # es decir que nosotros #1 estamos fuera de: de ese mundo no?

*and outside the:n people are killing each other because they have to speak Spanish and the others say that they have to speak Catalan # in other words we #1 are outside that world aren't we?*

In the preceding excerpt, the MSO is presented as a space characterised by the dominance of Spanish over Catalan, which is completely absent in service encounters with migrants (even for Catalan-dominant service providers), and by everyday working use of foreign languages like French or Arabic. However, we believe that Ismail's representation of practices is a binary oversimplification between problematic bilingualism in Catalan society and unproblematic multilingualism at the NGO. In the example, Ismail presents all the languages spoken at the same level (as a list) and does not question the dominance of Spanish over the other linguistic codes. With his everyday practices, he contributes to the dominant position of Spanish and to the hierarchy of languages at the MSO, just as do the other workers. Besides, he voices a concern for the Catalan language which is, to us, a politically correct rhetoric, given his everyday practices.

The multilingualism that Ismail describes in excerpt (14) is initially constructed as unproblematic, but it may not be so, as he himself admits that he is worried about the absence of Catalan in the MSO since they are an institution working in Catalonia (turn 3). In fact, the MSO is relegated to a different 'world' from that of Catalan bilingual society, which is problematised through the struggle between Catalan and Spanish speakers. Note that this distinction in practices between MSO and Catalan society is constructed in terms of separate sociolinguistic spaces, namely, inside and outside the institution. Nevertheless, such a clear-cut spatial dichotomy is too simplistic since MSO belongs to and is influenced by mainstream Catalan society. In fact, its steering committee is made up of highly influential members of the Catalan-dominant local middle and upper-middle class. Most of MSO funding comes from the town hall, with which MSO works closely. As a consequence, MSO constructs an institutional Catalan frontstage image which is congruent with mainstream linguistic hierarchies. Since Catalan is the language of public institutions in Catalonia, many of the documents and leaflets produced by this umbrella organization are multilingual but where Catalan is always visible, set in bigger typescript and placed first in the ordering of languages. This frontstage image that foregrounds



Catalan does not correspond, as we have shown, to actual language practices in service exchanges. The following poster about welcome sessions for newcomers organised regularly by MSO in different neighbourhoods of the city illustrates the points we have just made.

Excerpt (15)

**sessions d'acollida**

Sesiones de acogida  
Newcomers welcome sessions  
Sessions d'accueil  
Luntang jiyaarang bengoolu  
قاعة استقبال  
欢迎会议

**SERVEIS QUE T'OFEREIX LA CIUTAT**  
Servicis que te ofereix la ciutat. Services offered in the city. Services que la ville t'offre  
Siloolu saatee be minilu feeyandila i ma برتليج وسامعك على التعريف بدمتلك. 市町民課的服務

**VIES DE REGULARITZACIÓ**  
Vias de regularización. Procedures for the regularization. Voies de régularisation  
Kayiti satorang siloolu طرق الحصول على الإقامة. 办理合法身份的途径

**Centre Cívic de**  
DIJOUS JUEVES THURSDAYS JEUDI ARAMISSO الخميس 星期四  
15 DE FEBRER 13 DE SETEMBRE  
A les 19 h

**Centre Cívic de**  
DIJOUS JUEVES THURSDAYS JEUDI ARAMISSO الخميس 星期四  
22 DE FEBRER 27 DE SETEMBRE  
A les 19 h

**Centre Cívic de**  
DIJOUS JUEVES THURSDAYS JEUDI ARAMISSO الخميس 星期四  
29 DE MARÇ 4 D'OCTUBRE  
A les 19 h

**Centre Cívic de**  
DIJOUS JUEVES THURSDAYS JEUDI ARAMISSO الخميس 星期四  
12 D'ABRIL 18 D'OCTUBRE  
A les 19 h

**Centre Cívic de**  
DIJOUS JUEVES THURSDAYS JEUDI ARAMISSO الخميس 星期四  
26 D'ABRIL 8 DE NOVEMBRE  
A les 19 h

**Centre Cívic de**  
DIJOUS JUEVES THURSDAYS JEUDI ARAMISSO الخميس 星期四  
3 DE MAIG 17 DE MAIG 22 DE NOVEMBRE  
A les 19 h

**Centre Cívic de**  
DIJOUS JUEVES THURSDAYS JEUDI ARAMISSO الخميس 星期四  
15 DE MARÇ 7 DE JUNY 13 DE DESEMBRE  
A les 19 h

Aquestes sessions et permetran conèixer la teua ciutat i els recursos i serveis que et poden ser útils per regularitzar la teua situació administrativa: reagrupaments familiars, autoritzacions de treball per als reagrupats i altres vies de regularització.  
Estas sesiones te permitirán conocer tu ciudad y los recursos y servicios que te pueden ser útiles para regularizar tu situación administrativa: reagrupamientos familiares, autorizaciones de trabajo para los reagrupados y otras vías de regularización.  
These sessions will help you to become acquainted with your city as well as with its resources and services that may be useful to you to regularize your administrative situation: family reunification, work permit for the reunified family members and other procedures for the regularization.  
Ces sessions te permettront de connaître ta ville, les ressources et services qui peuvent t'être utiles pour régulariser ta situation administrative: regroupement familial, autorisation de travail pour les regroupés et autres voies de régularisation.

Ning bengoolu be a binola le iye saatee long aning a la sota feengoolu aning a la soola jaaroni dalala minulu be i anifala fo i se kayiti soto i la jing siyou lo ming keta dimbayang naatoolu ti, dimbayang naatoolu fanaing na dokarang siloolu soto Aso ti, oning kayiti soto siloolu doolu ti

هذا الترتيب وسامعك على التعريف بدمتلك والحصول على مساعدة للحصول على الإقامة و إدارية مثلا التجمع العائلي و رخصة عمل للتجمع العائلي و طرق اخرى للحصول على الإقامة  
这一些会议能让你认识您的城市、它的资源、如何办理合法身份的途径、家庭团聚、工作许可证和其他合法身份。

Organització: Hè col·labora:

Diputació Barcelona xarxa de municipis  
Generalitat de Catalunya Secretaria d'Immigració  
Ministerio de Trabajo e Igualdad Social

Figure 1: Poster of welcome sessions for newcomers

### 4.3.3 *Contrasting service practices*

We argued earlier that the two institutions examined have widely different social functions, and that that is what may explain the different take of their representatives on service communication. Now we shall explore how the servers' approaches to information provision in these contexts are translated into specific types of practices. In the state immigration office, the verbal mode is the only institutionally sanctioned vehicle to transmit information to users. Bureaucrats refuse to write down information for their users or to accept written requests for information. This excludes those clients who do not speak Spanish fluently and to a lesser extent, English and French. Besides, the refusal to write information safeguards institutional interests since verbal responses are ephemeral and noncommittal for the officials (see Codó 2008 for specific instances of this practice).

At the MSO, by contrast, there is a great deal of multimodal interaction which facilitates the transmission of complex legal information. All legal advisors explain the relevant legal procedures verbally in interaction with written and visual documents that users will take away with them. MSO legal advisors often highlight the required documents with felt-tip pens on the official information sheets, make personalised lists of documentation needed, provide relevant contact details for agencies with maps and even fill in application forms for their users if they don't know how to do it. As a result, the MSO facilitates the temporal and spatial dislocation of information for further consultation or clarification beyond the institution.

The service encounters at the state agency are also characterised by an extreme routinisation of communication, relying on key words and minimal interaction. This contrasts with the reformulation of legal terms and lengthy encounters at the MSO. On the one hand, state bureaucrats follow a fixed service routine, a sort of pre-established script for all clients. To inform clients about the status of their applications, they resort to a set of key words such as 'falta' ('missing') or 'trámite' ('in progress') without furnishing any further details. The interactional onus is on the enquirers to find out additional information since bureaucrats keep the interaction to a minimum. As a result, the exchanges are non-informative and extremely short, often consisting of a few turns only. On the other hand, legal advice encounters are much more informative and notably longer, lasting an average of 20–30 minutes. MSO advisors act as a kind of legal interpreter for their users since they paraphrase and rephrase legal terms as much as needed in order to facilitate comprehension. Besides, legal advisors provide many details about procedures and foresee potential difficulties that users may encounter.

In a nutshell, we are dealing with two institutions which have different social goals and ideologies of service, which translate into contrasting information provision practices. As a state bureaucracy, the immigration office adheres

to the traditional view of equality of treatment for all clients, regardless of the highly diverse clientele they attend to. This non-differentiation is meant to ensure equality but, given the dominant position of Spanish, it actually leads to the exclusion of those clients who do not understand and/or speak the language. Although ideologically the NGO inclines towards a politics of differentiation and tries to adjust its information provision practices to the specific needs of its users, in practice, it also relies on Spanish as a *lingua franca* for everyone, which works to the detriment of the users who are less competent in Spanish. This NGO is currently caught between the traditional non-differentiation approach, captured by the dominance of Spanish, and emerging approaches that recognise difference. However, to truly adhere to a politics of difference, it would need to take language issues more seriously than it does now, and incorporate multilingualism into official policies and procedures, and as an everyday aspect of service communication. For this to happen, both the NGO and the state office would need to become aware of (and try to overcome) the ideologies of language which are prevalent in both social spaces and which shape communication in very concrete (and often exclusionary) ways.

#### 4.4 Linguistic ideologies

In the previous sections, we discussed the servers' views of the nature of their face-to-face interactions with clients and their conceptualisation of their professional spaces as problematic or unproblematic from the point of view of multilingualism and communication. In this section, we examine a number of conceptions of language and language use that inform discourses and practices in both contexts and that, in most cases, are presented as natural and unavoidable, that is, highly ideological.

One of these conceptions is the need for languages to be kept separate, that is, the rejection of forms of code-switching and mixing. The example below comes from the state immigration office. Apart from the linguistic ideology of language separateness, this excerpt illustrates a point made in section 4.3.2. in connection with the fact that some communication difficulties are not caused by language competence itself but by clients' lack of familiarity with bureaucratic-administrative processes. Faced with communication asynchronies, actors tend to problematise what is immediately accessible to them. As a result, language skills often become their object of scrutiny. There is no doubt that for a lay actor like the client in excerpt (16) (ENQ) it is easier to problematise language competencies than the way in which his lay knowledge and talk are being converted into a bureaucratic case, for this would require in-depth knowledge of the institutional arena and close monitoring of the turns at talk, all outside the grasp of this individual.

**Excerpt (16)**

- 1 ENQ: but look look this falta.  
but look look this missing.
- 2 MIQ: <falta sí> [>].  
missing yes.
- 3 ENQ: <understand> [<] ?
- 4 ENQ: falta hm okay <no> [>] falta no okay # you understand -? but this  
my name # finito # finish.  
missing hm okay no missing no okay # you understand -? but this  
my name finished # finish.
- 5 MIQ: <oka::y> [<] ?
- 6 MIQ: I don't understand.
- 7 ENQ: you what is the English you speak xxx ?
- 8 MIQ: I speak English you don't speak English!
- 9 ENQ: yes.
- 10 MIQ: my name no finito!
- 11 ENQ: +^ yes finish.
- 12 MIQ: finish what -? # finish ?
- 13 ENQ: yes this immigration #2 finish> [>1] but <you understand> [>2] ?
- 14 MIQ: <no> [<1].

With respect to the linguistic ideology referred to above, Miquel, the public official, presents a code-switched sentence (turn 10) as evidence that his interlocutor 'does not speak English'. According to Miquel, being competent in English entails being able to separate it completely from other linguistic codes. In his view, code-mixing and hybridity amount to absolute lack of competence. Miquel's statement must have at least astonished his interlocutor, since mixing and switching are everyday currency in the 'Outer Circle' where English is used alongside a number of linguistic codes (Kachru 1990) and also in the inner circle, that is, among migrants residing in the UK and the US. It is clear, then, that Miquel's perception of competence is laden with views about the purity of languages and the separateness of linguistic codes.

A practical index of this ideological view is what is referred to in Codó (2008:258) as 'the rather uncreative use of code-switching' at the immigration office. That is, by and large, officials tend to stick to the monolingual norm, whereby only one language of interaction is used at a time. They produce frequent inter-turn but very few intra-turn switches (that is of course if we exclude the insertion of some key lexical items in Spanish). By contrast, their interlocutors sometimes employ up to three languages in their turns to get their message across. One reason to explain interactants' divergent practices as regards code-switching may be that clients have a bigger investment in successful communication than

officials do and thus are more prone to mobilise all their linguistic resources to make themselves understood. However, this alone falls short of providing a complete explanation for this phenomenon. Long-standing linguistic ideologies and/or speakers' different linguistic 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1991) may be responsible for the exclusion of certain practices.

As regards MSO, most of the institutional actors tend to stick to a single language of interaction. As we said, multilingual practices are very limited. So, there are anyway not many chances for code-switching to occur. Ismail, the server that is constructed as 'the multilingual' employee, is practically the only one who in fact switches between languages habitually. However, he rejects this linguistic practice as wrong and inadequate. Interestingly, he phrases his negative evaluation of his own practices in aesthetic terms (turn 7).

### Excerpt (17)

- 1 ISM: casi todos lo hacemos # mal hecho pero mira.  
*almost everyone does it # it's wrong but anyway.*
- 2 RES: por qué mal hecho? [=!paper noise]  
*why wrong? [=!paper noise]*
- 3 ISM: bueno # porque: uff mm [=!staples sound] normalmente es hablarlo  
o no hablarlo pero mezclar dos:+...  
*well # because: uff mmm [=!staples sound] it is a matter of  
speaking it or not speaking it but mixing two:+...*
- 4 RES: aham.
- 5 ISM: do:s idiomas mm yo creo que no: +...  
*two: languages mm I don't think that +...*
- 6 RES: aham.
- 7 ISM: no no queda bonito no?  
*does not sound nice right?*

Another powerful linguistic ideology is that which concerns international *linguae francae*, in particular English. At the immigration office, this language is spoken mostly by South Asian migrants who seek precise information about the status of their applications for legal status. In spite of the typically low competence levels among the office staff, South Asians service seekers are habitually constructed as having limited skills and even as trying to deceive public servers by pretending to speak English while in fact they do not (Codó 2006). It is true that competence levels vary among the South Asian migrant population, with some clients speaking extremely fluent English while others being barely able to articulate a few words. However, it is no less true that the general dismissal of their English language skills is inaccurate and unfair; it also overlooks the fact that, often, mutual comprehension is complicated by officials' strong Spanish/Catalan accents in English, their limited understanding capacities, their lack of

familiarity with Indian English varieties and in general, their limited abilities to rephrase an idea, find synonyms, and in general, contextualise their talk. As Bremer, Roberts, Vasseur, Simonot and Broeder (1996) show, this skill is fundamental for successful communication with low competence speakers in foreign language communication.

The question then arises of why migrants' competencies are so (easily) dismissed. The answer, we claim, is ideological and has to do with the perception that English is not a language 'owned' by Indians or Pakistanis, but by Americans, Britons, Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders (Blommaert 2003). In addition, on a local level, knowledge of English is a form of capital associated with the upper and middle classes and therefore not a type of skill migrants from developing countries can be imagined to have (Unamuno and Codó 2007).

At the MSO, by way of contrast, we have observed no such ideological positioning by any of the legal advisors. Instead of being devalued as in many institutional sites (Blommaert 2003; Maryns 2006; Codó 2008), outer-circle varieties of English and French are highly valued as *linguae francae* to facilitate communication with users whose competence in Spanish is low. This valuation of the English and French spoken by users responds to the institutional positivisation of migrants. In fact, the MSO acknowledges that migrant users *do* own global linguistic resources that are very prestigious in the local sociolinguistic regime. Nevertheless, the actual use of these international languages is restricted to some institutional notices, such as timetables on the gate, legal information leaflets produced by the public administrations and specific servers who are not always readily available and whose linguistic competence is limited. Given the scarce multilingual resources available at the MSO, the use of English or French in face-to-face encounters is limited to those users who cannot communicate in Spanish, usually in their initial period of residence, and whose case is urgent. That is why such cases are more frequent in social services (Garrido 2010) than in legal advice offices.

This NGO implements a type of multilingualism which exclusively incorporates those most prestigious foreign languages in the local and the global sociolinguistic markets: English and French. Such a restricted construction of multilingualism reproduces the postcolonial sociolinguistic regime, which foregrounds the so-called 'white' European languages while 'black' African languages (Kaplan 1998) are backgrounded. As a result, migrant users' multilingual repertoires are reduced to the dichotomy Anglophones/Francophones as far as the MSO is concerned (see Garrido and Codó 2009). This results in the institutional silencing of African indigenous languages that are widely spoken in the town (such as Wolof, Djola or Amazigh). The MSO constructs migrants as postcolonial subjects who can speak European

languages and therefore problematises those users who do not speak either English or French. This suggests that the MSO regards global languages as a pre-requisite for transnational migration and for social integration in Europe. Users who speak 'global' languages are preferred over those who just speak 'local' languages: not only because of purely instrumental reasons but also because the former are categorised as more cosmopolitan, civilised and Westernised than the latter.

## 5 Conclusions

In this paper, we have tried to sketch out the linguistic picture of two institutions which serve a multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural population in present-day Catalonia. We have approached the examination of how they go about doing their job from the perspective of how they position themselves towards communication and multilingualism in their discourses and practices. Strikingly, in spite of their different social functions, we have found that, in many ways, the two institutions seem to view language practices from the same standpoint, a standpoint which is not inclusive but exclusive and which does not place language issues at the centre of their understanding of the work they do.

In the case of the state immigration office, this attitude is not surprising, though it is obviously unacceptable. One of the purposes of this institution is to socialise migrants into becoming adequate Spanish (not Catalan) citizens. Hence, they have an investment in underlining the key role of Spanish as the language to be mastered. In our 'politically-correct' times, efforts are made to project a multilingual image for this institution, but as we have pointed out, these efforts are limited and inconsistent; multilingualism is not assumed to be an accepted part of this institution's way of working and foreign language skills are still viewed as something exceptional to be demanded of immigration officials.

The case of the MSO is even more alarming. We have to acknowledge that this is an institution doing highly valuable work in providing resources for migrants to incorporate themselves into Catalan society. We can also not ignore the praiseworthy commitment of most of their employees and volunteers; these are people who believe and work for social justice and a fairer world. Yet we observe that, in many ways, the MSO as an institution seems to be reproducing hegemonic stances towards communication, language use and multilingualism. These are stances which construct the prominent position of Spanish as inevitable, neglect the need for more fluid forms of multilingual practice and ignore the exclusionary effects that overlooking communication and language-related matters have for certain groups of migrants.

It is true that funding resources are limited and that there are structural constraints that curb possibilities for action. However, there are things that can be done with the human resources currently available; yet they require institutional investment in the centrality of language. One option could be providing specific language training for employees, but there are more general measures that could easily be taken: discussing communication-related issues in staff meetings and seminars and promoting more awareness about language use are only some of them.

As we have seen, institutional policies and servers' practices are trapped in the hegemonic language ideological frame that reinforces the centrality of Spanish and the peripheral (and ideologically marginal) status of other linguistic codes. It seems to us that institutional policies should work towards the decentring of Spanish, and the acceptance and construction of multilingualism as unexceptional and everyday. Multilingualism has to be understood not as the juxtaposition of two linguistic codes, or the orderly alternation of one and the other, but as the possibly simultaneous mobilisation of language resources of various sorts with the goal of facilitating communication. In that sense, institutions should promote the effective (not testimonial) incorporation of international languages such as English, Arabic or French, but also of regional languages such as Mandinka or Punjabi. But above all, they should set as their number one priority the deproblematism of those migrant users that have limited or no competence in Spanish. This requires a major ideological shift which, however difficult, seems essential at this stage.

### Appendix: transcription conventions

The conversations analysed in this paper have been transcribed following the procedures established in the *LIDES Coding Manual* (LIPPS Group 2000). When the main tier is not in English, a free English translation is provided on a dependent tier (%tra) located just below. Another dependent tier used is %com, which provides the researcher's comments on the main tier. Other conventions employed are presented below:

+^	quick uptake or latching
+...	trailing off
xxx	unintelligible material
www	untranscribed material because of confidentiality issues or irrelevance
##	longer pause (shorter than 1 sec)
#1	length of pause in seconds
-?	Intra-turn rising contour
[=! text]	paralinguistics, prosody, background activity
:	lengthened vowel



[>]	overlap follows
[<]	overlap precedes
<>	scope symbols
[?]	best guess

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### Notes

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- 2 In this paper, we prefer to use the term 'migrant' rather than 'immigrant' for various reasons. Firstly, 'migrant' indexes an individual/social process of geographical mobility which is not complete and may continue in the future. Our fieldwork with migrants confirms that, in many cases, Spain is not a final destination but an intermediate one, depending on job opportunities, chances of obtaining a work permit, social support networks, etc. Secondly, as Goytisolo and Nair (2000) point out, the concept of 'immigrant' is ethnocentric, in that we view 'immigrants' from our perspective, that is as individuals who are coming to 'our' country. The term 'migrant' is more neutral in that respect.

- 3 In spite of the importance of non-verbal resources for conveying meaning in these encounters, the audio-recorded nature of the data excludes the possibility of carrying out a systematic analysis of non-verbal communication.
- 4 The names of all the individuals mentioned throughout this paper have been changed.
- 5 Juan's competence in Russian must have been native or near native; from what Eva Codó was able to gather, he had been brought up in Russia.
- 6 Miquel's level of Arabic was quite advanced, taking into account that he had obtained a first degree in Arabic from a Catalan University and had then spent two years teaching Spanish at a university in Iraq. His main difficulty, however, was with Moroccan Arabic, which he was not familiar with.
- 7 This quote is a translation from the original, written in Catalan, which is provided below.

Aquesta identificació genera algunes dificultats de comprensió sobre el paper de l'oficina de l'assessorament legal per a estrangers (...), que és equiparada a un departament més de l'entramat administratiu en què estan en contacte les persones estrangeres a l'estat espanyol (Bertran i Bruguera 2007:139).

- 8 Eva Codó's own observations at other offices connected with the Spanish immigration services in Barcelona confirm this claim.
- 9 It seems to us that Catalan is not a requirement to work for immigration services either, as the control of migration flows is a state matter, and thus, is organised by the Spanish Ministry of the Interior and not by the Catalan Autonomous Government. However, some passive knowledge of Catalan may be necessary for the workers at this particular office, as this is a service situated in a bilingual community.
- 10 According to a recent survey published on 24 September 2009 by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Community, on the occasion of the European Day of Languages, Spain came third in the rank of European countries having the highest percentages of adults aged 25 to 64 who declare to speak no foreign languages (47%). Only Portugal (51%) and Hungary (75%) had higher rates. Retrieved on 9 October 2009 from [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_PUBLIC/3-24092009-AP/EN/3-24092009-AP-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-24092009-AP/EN/3-24092009-AP-EN.PDF)
- 11 According to the town's 2008 census, the seven largest migrant groups in the town in descending order are Bolivians, Moroccans, Ecuadoreans, Rumanians, Colombians, Chinese and Gambians.
- 12 Taken out of context Ismail's sentence is rather ambiguous. The gloss provided is a free translation of what this expression means in the context in which it was produced.

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