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Title: Alliances, oppositions, and the nature of ephemeral identities in ethnically diversified Basque education

Abstract: This study is part of a broader ethnographically-based research project analyzing interethnic student interactions in the Basque education system. It focuses on the nature of interethnic student alliances and oppositions within Basque education, which act as identity producers. The research methods include documentary analysis, participant observation, 36 semi-structured interviews, and four focus groups. Results indicate that students who had a migrant background allied to oppose learning Basque. Alliances were often transitory and constituted ephemeral identities that were dissolved after such opposition took place. This paper points to the constitutive momentum that leads to the creation of transitory alliances and its discussion contributes to the theory of identity, in line with the results of the case study.

Keywords: ephemeral identity, alliance, opposition, Basque education, interethnic interaction

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Introduction

The present globalized world seems to be an uncomfortable place for issues related to local identities. The current trend towards liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000) tends to strip traditional concepts of identity from their transcendent meaning, usually linked to the ethno-symbolic dimension of our societies (McCrone, 1998). Indeed, in our contemporary age, the relationship between the individual and society is changing as concepts of identity and individuality become more hybrid and less axiomatic (Young, 1995). In any case, identity is also a project that requires the individual to engage in a constant, and increasingly controversial, tracing of standardized parameters (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Ramarajan, 2014; Stryker & Stryker, 2016).

Identity has been broadly studied in recent decades, however its polysemic nature resists definition (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Ramarajan, 2014). Identity, as a theoretical category, is an empty vessel liable to be filled with almost any human value or symbol, which can also be constructed in terms of opposition and conflict (cf. Bowman, 2001, 2003; Berg, 2010; Simmons, Lewis & Larson, 2011; Koefoed & Simonsen, 2012; Sterzuk, 2015), or alliances (Evans-Pritchard, 1997; Wimmer 2008, 2013).

Our aim in this paper is to analyze students' interactions with their peers and teachers and demonstrate how the behavior of secondary students who have a migrant background, aged 12-16, masks rhetorics of identity by strategically

targeting and opposing *Euskara,* or the Basque language. This study shares some characteristics with the Catalan case, as collected by Codó and Patiño-Santos (2014), where students of migrant background in Catalonia fail to employ Catalan, the reinforced language at school. The present study is part of a broader investigation that took place in the Basque Country in an ethnically diversified secondary school that we will call Udabia (to protect the confidentiality of the research participants the names used throughout this work are pseudonyms), where both Spanish and Basque are languages of instruction (Pérez-Izaguirre, 2018, 2019). The hypothesis we propose in this work is that students who have a migrant background perform their own identity through alliances and oppositions in relation to the learning of Basque.

Theoretical framework: Identity and language in alliance and opposition

From a socio-educational perspective, identity encompasses negotiated, multi-dimensional and flexible elements within the Selves of distinct individuals and groups, which are influenced by a variety of socio-structural elements and individual responses (cf. Dubet, 2010; Erikson, 1989, 2000; Jenkins, 2008; Mead, 1982; Miles, 2014; Ramarajan, 2014; Wimmer, 2008, 2013). Some authors propose that identity is constructed through a game of sameness and opposition, usually in relation to distinct ethnic markers. According to Bowman (2003):

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> The 'inside' of identity formation is not only shaped by but also grounded on the 'outside' of the perceived antagonism of an *Other* that poses a substantial challenge to essentialist conceptions of the various modalities of communal identities (p. 37 original emphasis).

The community or group can reinforce its own identity by perceiving or interpreting the existence of an *Other* who threatens its own *status quo*. This threat can be understood as a potential loss of power or autonomy that the members of the group are not ready to accept. Clastres (1994, p. 157) points out that the inside of an ethnic group, which could also be defined as the *Us,* is antagonistically constructed against the *Other.*

This type of reactive construction of the *Us* in opposition to a threatening or challenging *Other* can be seen across very different contexts, such as dualistic political discourses, armed conflicts or even education centers (García, Larrañaga, Berasategi & Azurmendi, 2017; Lapresta, 2014; Levin and Nolan, 2014; Martínez, 1999; Martínez, 2014; Norton, 2013; Sterzuk, 2015; Weber, 2009). Opposition does not mean violence and violence does not mean physical violence, thus reactive and transitory identities can be manifested in various ways and situations (Schmidt & Schroder, 2001). The construction of identity and the antagonism that activates it can also be grounded in different life conditions or vital personal experiences (Bowman, 2001, p. 35).

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Despite the fact that reactivity and violence, whether real or imagined, can entail opposition, they can also give rise to the emergence of diverse alliances. Unification has usually been understood as a way to organize a preventive strategy against a shared threat, which can, for a limited duration, create defensive solidarities. Radical disruptions of previous modes of life and the articulation of strategies of opposition can result in the recognition of new solidarities and therefore in the constitution of new transitory identities built on the basis of ethnic, stylistic, or linguistic elements that bring about new forms of collective organization (Evans-Pritchard, 1997; Hebdige, 1993; McClancy, 2007; Wimmer, 2008, 2013).

Language is one of the most powerful means of cultural control, as it provides the terms by which reality may be constituted and provides the names by which the world is known. By naming things people can take control of them, and therefore the action of naming itself can also become a tool of opposition, rejection and subversion (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2006). Language is especially important for immigrants, as they have to learn and socialize in a host society's language. In a study conducted in a secondary school in Catalonia, Codó and Patiño-Santos (2014) analyze the language practices of students with a migrant background and discover they fail to employ Catalan in classroom interaction. The authors conclude that teachers accommodate to these linguistic practices and have low academic demands for migrant students, which leads them to categorize the school as "different."

In another study, Canagarajah (2004) refers to the identities enacted by ethnic minorities in multilingual contexts when they oppose learning the vehicular language at school as 'subversive identities' created as a way to maintain their own identity. Migrant students who transgress in this way, find themselves at a disadvantage in relation to mainstream society, as they do not master the institutional language. This creates a context of opposition to imagined cultural and linguistic *elimination* (Hage, 1995) or *neutralization*, as Kachru (1990) explains, when he refers to the influence of a hegemonic language over subaltern ones. The multiplicity of relations in educational environments could be therefore understood as the consequence of the linguistic interactions by distinct actors involved in the process(Ashcroft et al., 2001, p. 280). The analysis of the processes by which the aforementioned alliances and oppositions are articulated in ethnically diversified schools are of key relevance to this article.

The ethnographic context

The Basque Country is located in southern Europe and is officially divided into two states: France and Spain. This study took place in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC), a region in southern Basque Country, which is partially politically and administratively dependent on Spain. The history of the Basque Country is complex in terms of ethnicity and language, and the Basque

language can be an identity marker (Urla, 2012). In this context, Basque can work as a scaffolding on which to build a national community, however it is not always exclusionary. From the end of the 1930s until the end of the 1970s the teaching of Basque was forbidden, and only in the 1980s was its instruction officially recognized (Gurruchaga, 1985; Martínez, 1999). Nowadays, Basque and Spanish are co-official languages in the BAC, but Basque is in a situation of diglossia in comparison to Spanish (Leonet, Cenoz, & Gorter, 2017). The process of Basque schooling is mainly made through standard Basque, a variety that was introduced half a century ago with the aim of normalizing the language. Urla and her colleagues (2018) have analyzed the process of normalization of standard Basque in the BAC and concluded that it is still weak in most areas in the BAC, especially among new speakers.

It is worth mentioning that the linguistic distance between Basque and Spanish is such that there is a lack of intelligibility between them. Whereas Spanish is a Latin language, Basque is pre-Indo-European with different grammar, syntax and vocabulary. Since the 1980s, due to local governments' Basque language revitalization efforts, it is compulsory to learn Basque from the very first stages of schooling in the BAC (Roman, 2015). As a result, most youngsters in the Basque Country can speak or at least understand some Basque, but its use in daily life has not notably expanded.

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Despite the fact that Basque is a minority language in the BAC, Basque identity can be still linked to the Basque language, and in the education system Basque is presented as an important and valuable element that maintains and protects Basque identity (Cenoz, 2009; Echeverria, 2003; Martínez, 1999; Martínez, 2014; Roman, 2015).

Udabia, the school where this fieldwork took place, is located in a working class town with a high immigrant population where Basque is not regularly spoken in day-to-day life. Basque in this area was often perceived as compulsory for gaining social status in certain public and private institutions but not necessary in family or most public life. Therefore, immigrants to this area often perceive Basque as unnecessary for their daily life. Students at Udabia, both with local and migrant background, used Spanish in their daily and school life, while only local students used Basque when communicating with teachers. One of the reasons for this linguistic difference can be found in the structure of the education system. Basque compulsory education divides students into three linguistic models that are organized in terms of their level of language instruction in either Basque or Spanish. In model D instruction is in Basque and Spanish is studied as a subject, in model B instruction is both in Basque and Spanish, and in model A instruction is in Spanish and Basque is studied as a subject. In line with the Basque Government's language revitalization efforts, local students usually choose model D as model A tends to disappear (Roman, 2015). By contrast, in geographical areas inhabited by a high proportion of

immigrant students, these students tend to enroll in models B or A (if it is still offered), as Spanish instruction is higher (Luna, 2014). This leads to an ethnic division inside schools, as most local students share their classroom with their local peers, while migrant students tend to be concentrated in classrooms composed of students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, which share three main characteristics: they are of migrant origin, they show low academic achievement and lack proficiency in Basque (Department of Education of the Basque Country, 2016).

Methods

This is an ethnographic study from an educational perspective. Ethnography in this context refers to a systematic research method proposed to collect data about subjects who relate to each other in a particular setting (Erickson, 1984, 2010; Hammersley, 2010). The data presented in the following sections was obtained during a twelve-month period of intensive fieldwork carried out in a Basque secondary school. The fieldwork was divided into four stages, each corresponding to a different stage of the research process. The techniques used for data collection differed at each stage:

- First stage: In spring 2015 first contact was made with Udabia, a secondary public school that had a high percentage, 37%, of foreign national students. The school was chosen because it shared key

characteristics with the 62 Basque public schools where over 20% of the studentship were foreign nationals in the 2015/2016 school year (Department of Education, 2016; Fernández de Argániz, 2016; Fernández Vallejo, 2016; Goikoetxea, 2016; Luna, 2014; Save the Children, 2016). At this stage, informal meetings and interviews were conducted with the Principal and some teachers.

- Second stage: In the fall of 2015, intensive participant observation was carried out. Participant observation took place in a classroom composed of a majority of immigrant students at the 2nd Certificate of Secondary Education level (CSE, corresponding to 8th Grade in the US and Year 9 in the UK). This classroom was chosen as groups composed of a majority of immigrant students tended to engage in greater conflict with teachers and had a lower level of academic achievement. Beginning in early 2016, 36 in-depth interviews were conducted both with teachers and students. Students were asked about their interactions inside and outside school.
- Third stage: In spring 2016, four focus groups were conducted with students of diverse ethnic backgrounds. These were proposed as one-to-two hour conversations to deepen the intersubjective understanding of their interactions that had not been explored up to that point (Morgan and Hoffman, 2010). Particularly enriching to this analysis were the dialogic conversations during these focus groups, as pupils were able to reflect on

their own actions and relations, and therefore to understand how these affected them.

- Fourth stage: During the summer of 2016 analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti 6.0 software. The recorded data and the ethnographers' diary were codified, which indicated that students' interactions could be classified into opposing or allying interactions. The sub-categories comprised the different kinds of oppositions and alliances that had been observed and narrated.

Sample

In Udabia there were three classrooms in the 2nd CSE level divided in terms of their level in Basque: a model B with a very low Basque instruction, a model B with a higher Basque instruction, and a model D. In this work, we will focus on the classroom attended by a higher proportion of immigrant students. This classroom attended model B with very low instruction in Basque and was composed of 20 students, of whom the majority were immigrants and could barely speak Basque. More precisely, this class, which we will designate as 2G, was composed of three local students affiliated with some of the different ethnocultural groups within the Basque Country, i.e. two of them were ethnically Roma . There was also another student of Spanish origin, and the rest were Bulgarian (1), Portuguese (1) and Latinx (13) pupils. The Latinx designation in this paper is made according to how subjects self-defined. These students came

from different cultures and countries such as Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Nicaragua and Colombia, but referred to themselves as Latinx instead of Latin-American in an intentional endeavor to verbalize a specific ethnic category (nationally diverse but culturally akin). Finally, a student from Liberia also attended 2G for a short time. Most of these students' parents worked in low paid jobs and could not speak Basque.

Table 1

Origin of the students (N=20)

Origin of the students	**n**
Bulgaria	1
Portugal	1
Bolivia	1
Ecuador	7
Peru	1
Nicaragua	3
Colombia	1
Liberia	1
BAC	1
Spain (other than the BAC)	1
Roma	2

Source: Self-created for the purposes of this research according to the data provided by the school.

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In terms 2G's schooling, the three local and two of the migrant students had always been educated in the BAC and the remainder had attended Basque schools since they were nine or older. They had all always been enrolled in model B.

Teachers held diverse views on each of the 2nd CSE groups, although in general, 2G students were described as the most disruptive and transgressive. They constantly challenged teachers' authority and their academic achievement was very low in all subjects. Although such defying behavior was observed in all classes, lessons instructed in Basque were especially noteworthy because migrant students bluntly refused learning it. This was the main complaint from teachers, as they felt they could not complete one of their main tasks: teach in Basque, the minority language fostered by the Basque Government and local society. Most often they felt obliged to switch to Spanish to be able to conduct their lessons, which in most cases generated frustration among them. Hence, they usually ended up prioritizing content over language except during Basque lessons, where teachers had to constantly fight against such negative attitude towards the language. Some teachers complained that these students' families did not support Basque learning. Communication between these two parties was often insufficient, according to teachers.

Results

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In this section we will present the results of the fieldwork, organized by the types of interactions that involved 2G students. As mentioned in the introduction, this paper focuses on students' interactions with their peers and teachers. The types of interactions recorded, in line with the participant observation, interviews, and focus group conducted, included the following: students' alliances, students' oppositions, and students' alliances based on opposition.

Students' alliances: ethnicity, friendship, and language

Students in 2G often united according to an ethnic criterion both inside and outside school. More precisely, pupils tended to gather with their co-ethnics and often claimed these students were their friends. These co-ethnic unions were observable in their spatial distribution. Latinx pupils banded together while the local students were separated into Roma and non-Roma. The rest of the students in 2G tended to be on their own. During interviews students confirmed that they usually preferred to spend time with their co-ethnics, both during school hours and in their free time.

Ethnographic examples are provided by Jennifer, a Roma student, and Perla and Ana, both Nicaraguan students. Jennifer explained how in school she tended to be friends with the people who shared her interests outside school:

> Jennifer: My friends attend other classes at school; they're my cousins, my friends [...]. Look, we take part in some activities a

> girl organizes only for Roma people. In these activities we dance. I also take part in the chorus of the evangelical church, which is attended by many people: many Roma people.

Jennifer talks about a dance class specifically aimed at the young Roma population and the Mass of the Evangelical Church, which is attended by a high percentage of the Roma population. These activities foster internal Roma cohesion, but do not promote interethnic relations. Indeed, the Roma students at Udabia tended towards intraethnic relationships both inside and outside school.

The second example refers to another co-ethnic friendship, in this case between Perla and Ana, both Nicaraguan students. In contrast to Jennifer, these students attended the same class and interacted both inside and outside of school hours. During a focus group, these students explained that they were best friends. Lara, a Spanish student in their class, intervened in the conversation and expressed her lack of understanding of Perla's and Ana's way of communicating, even though the three of them speak Spanish.

> Interviewer: Why do you have such a good relationship, Ana and Perla?
>
> Perla: Because…we play with the musicality of language.
>
> Ana: We understand each other (Ana smiles at Perla).

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> Lara: But… I don't understand. Sometimes they start (to talk) with a 'hi' and they end up speaking about… [...] God knows what about. I mean, I just don't understand them.
>
> Ana: But Perla and I do (understand each other).

As both Perla and Ana are Nicaraguan, they used the same expressions, vocabulary, and linguistic specificities that were difficult for the rest of the Spanish-speaking community in their environment to understand, including the wider Latin American community. In this interaction the meaning of 'understanding each other' is not only linguistic, but also refers to friendship and how friends understand each other through language, tone, musicality, and body language, especially during adolescence. Perla and Ana were always physically close to each other and their body language indicated a high level of complicity. When they were part of a larger group of friends – usually comprised of only Latina girls – they whispered to each other, which sometimes angered the other girls.

Both of these examples show the importance of co-ethnicity and friendship as an allying element, but the second example introduces language into the equation. Indeed, language was the third element associated with student alliances. In 2G the formation of alliances always occurred in Spanish, even during Basque lessons.

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Students' opposition: language, authority, and ethnicity

The most notable opposition by migrant students was related to Basque learning and was directed at teachers. Although students challenged other school rules in other subjects, in Basque lesson this resistance was most notable. 2G students perceived Basque as neither often used in their community nor much spoken at school by other students. Teachers were the only people who, both inside and outside the classroom, spoke Basque. Teachers also occupied the position of power in their classrooms and 2G students tended to challenge their authority, particularly when they tried to conduct a lesson in Basque.

One of the most often repeated explanations provided by students during the interviews when asked about Basque learning, was that Basque was not useful in their lives and they preferred to study English or French at school. In their opinion, Basque could only be used in the Basque Country, while English and French were recognized worldwide. Students were reasonably reserved when sharing their views with the interviewer, but much more challenging when communicating with teachers. In the BAC the educational linguistic models seek a minimum Basque proficiency, however 2G's migrant students opposed this stricture.

Most teachers in Udabia who taught Basque had a clear position on the fostering of the Basque language. The transmission of Basque was in many cases understood by teachers as a way to maintain Basque identity. Indeed, most

educators felt teaching Basque was their most important duty as teachers in the Basque Country. For instance, one teacher explained the following during an interview:

> Matilde: We at least have to teach in Basque during Basque lessons, don't we? But students question Basque teaching; they tell you 'I've never heard Basque here, right? Basque is not spoken' […] But you're here, you have two official languages and you have to learn Basque at school! You have to learn it! Take it as a new opportunity to see the world, but don't oppose it! [Basque and Spanish]

In this interview, Matilde remarked on the importance of teaching in Basque, as it is a minority language that requires protection. During the interview she showed frustration when she explained how migrant students in her class questioned learning Basque. As she described in the interview, teachers often encountered statements by students such as, '¡qué pereza (aprender euskera)!' [Spanish] *I can't be bothered to learn Basque*, or '¿para qué (aprender euskera)?' [Spanish] *Why bother learning Basque?* This was especially significant when, on the 3rd December 2015, the International Day of the Basque language, one of the researchers took part in an extra-curricular activity with 2G students. In this activity, students went to the centre of the town where the school is located to take part in a group activity with the aim of promoting Basque. It must be noted that the celebration has great symbolic value for many

local people. As aforementioned, most teachers at Udabia understood socializing students in Basque and joining that celebration as part of their duty.

When some of the teachers who did not take part in this activity asked students what they thought about it, some answered, 'El euskera no me importa' [Spanish] *I don't care about Basque*. One teacher even engaged in an acrimonious interaction with some students, as he believed the comment had been disrespectful. Indeed, guided by conversations with some teachers later that day, we can say that they felt offended by this comment. Seven students had their own words repeated back to them, and all responded in one of two ways: a mischievous smile, probably reflecting embarrassment and nervousness, or a careless attitude, a stance that claimed they had been honest about their opinion and did not care about the consequences.

These acrimonious interactions took place continuously between most 2G students and their teachers. For these people Basque had become a powerful ethnic marker: teachers defended and promoted its instruction and use as Basque community members, while most 2G students opposed its learning and use as migrants.

Alliances guided by opposing attitudes

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The data collected indicated that there was another category of alliance that relied on opposition itself. Students who did not share a previous common identity would, in some contexts, form an association through opposing Basque. Indeed, some 2G students, who in other cases would not have united because they were not co-ethnics and did not spend time together, hence, they were not friends, allied to directly or indirectly oppose learning Basque. Of the more than 20 examples collected during the 15 Basque language sessions that were observed between November 2015 and March 2016, we will use two to demonstrate this form of identity negotiation.

In the first of the examples Miguel and Braulio arrived late to their Basque class and did not bring their notebooks. Miguel is Peruvian and Braulio Liberian. They did not consider each other friends and did not interact regularly. Teachers were often desperate when dealing with these students, but for different reasons: Miguel was very passive and worked slowly, whilst Braulio was very disruptive.

In Basque lessons the students' behavior towards each other changed, as Miguel and Braulio united to oppose learning Basque. We designate this phenomenon as ephemeral, as it was an act of differentiation and identification that happened to achieve a specific aim: opposing Basque learning. This would fade under other circumstances. Gurutze, their teacher, usually planned communication-oriented and textbook-based lessons. In this session, Gurutze

was explaining directions in Basque and asked students to complete an exercise directly related to the vocabulary presented. The ethnographer collecting the data offered to help Braulio with his exercise; he performed quite well but made orthographic mistakes such as misspelling 'Ezkerra' [Basque], *left*, as 'Esquerra'. The ethnographer pointed out the mistake, and Braulio answered: 'No me gusta esta lengua (el euskera)' [Spanish] *I don't like Basque.* After this brief interaction Braulio looked at Miguel and, allying, they laughed and looked at the teacher. Their interaction made the rest of the classroom react and the teacher showed frustration. This constitutive moment was related to the ephemeral phenomenon of identity formation as allies in opposition to this specific task. A constitutive momentum is here understood as a moment of identity transformation and reconstruction that ends in the creation of new ephemeral identities.

In this case, the interaction was short but its many constitutive elements deserve analysis. With respect to Braulio, even though he behaved disruptively, he internalized concepts quickly, understanding that when he openly proclaimed his dislike of Basque he hit a sensitive spot for most local people. Miguel's usually passive attitude was transformed in Basque language lessons, where he copied Braulio's disruptive behavior and attempted to involve the whole classroom. They both understood the mischievousness of the interaction; for them, it was a show of rebellion against authority.

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In the second example, we present an interaction where some students resisted participation in the activities Gurutze proposed. When Gurutze tried to engage students in an explanation for Miguel, who had not attended the previous lesson, the following occurred:

> Gurutze: What did we do yesterday? Tell Miguel. [Basque and Spanish]
>
> Ana: We watched (the film) Aupa, Etxebeste. [Spanish and Basque]
>
> Gurutze: Roger, Alejandro, sit properly. [Spanish]
>
> Roger: Do you think I'm doing something wrong? [Spanish]
>
> Gurutze: I am not going to explain it to you, am I…? After the film, what did we do? [Spanish]
>
> (Roger and Alejandro laugh and try to engage the rest of the class. Only after some moments is Gurutze able to regain control of the class)
>
> [...]

Gurutze: Roger, (do) the first exercise: What time is it?

[Basque]

Roger: It's half past ten, half past ten. [Spanish and Basque]

Ana: What? [Spanish]

Gurutze: Alejandro, don't you have your notebook?

[Basque]

Alejandro: Yes [French]

(The rest of the students laugh)

Roger: Very good, dude [Spanish]

Gurutze: Alejandro…

Alejandro: It's ok [French]

(Students laugh again and it takes Gurutze some minutes to regain control of the class)

In this excerpt many associations and oppositions can be observed. First, most of the teacher's interactions are in Basque but the students' answers are not. This indicates that the vehicular language determines the students' interactions, in contrast to interactions by the teacher. Second, the 2G students involved in this interaction, who were all immigrants, did not show appropriate classroom behavior. When the teacher became aware that Roger and Alejandro were slumped and instructed them to sit properly in Spanish, Roger resisted by

answering back and ignoring the command. The switch between Basque and Spanish was a common practice for teachers when they commanded students, accommodating to student demands. A moment later, Roger united with Alejandro, who was not his friend, to laugh at the teacher, involving the rest of the group in their behavior. Both students are Latino but Alejandro is two years older than his colleagues and was absent for many classroom hours. Third, the teacher asked Roger to start an exercise in Basque and Roger answered first in Spanish before continuing in Basque. Ana, who was not paying much attention, asked what they were saying, as apparently she did not understand it. Ana's reaction can be interpreted as a 'show' of a lack of autonomy, rather than a real lack, which constituted an indirect way to oppose speaking Basque by putting up obstacles to advancing the lesson and interrupting the classroom rhythm. Finally, the teacher realized that Alejandro had not even taken out his notebook; when he was asked to Alejandro defied the teacher and answered in French, as a way of showing he would only speak in Basque when he wished to. Roger allied with Alejandro, which encouraged the whole classroom to laugh at the situation, causing further interruption.

After each of these examples, and all the others that were collected, these transitory strategic alliances of opposition debilitated and vanished. In other words, just after these constitutive momentums of identity, the subjects involved would not ally again unless Basque language learning was in play.

Discussion and conclusion

In the case study presented, when Basque learning was not involved most students showed a tendency to unite with their co-ethnic peers. However, during Basque lessons, migrant students allied and opposed an imaginary *Other* (Bowman, 2001, 2003) in this case represented by the Basque language and the teachers conducting these lessons. Often, students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds who did not usually relate to each other, made a silent consensus to unite and oppose Basque. Although these unions were ephemeral, teachers interpreted such interactions as opposition to the Basque community because Basque has a deep ethnic and symbolic relevance (Martínez, 1999).

Migrant students found themselves threatened by the imposition of linguistic rules, such as the compulsory use of Basque; this ethno-symbolic background encouraged some constitutive momentums of opposition. These momentums, performed in opposition to the authority of teachers during Basque lessons, represented instances of empowerment for students that were the result of spontaneous and improvised strategies of alliance. Subversive reactions to Basque language and misbehavior towards authority within school encouraged interethnic alliances and also implied an Us/Others antagonism that enabled reflexive identity formation (Bowman, 2003; Clastres, 1994).

The processes and strategies of opposition to the Basque language presented here can be linked to the specific characteristics of some

countercultures (Hebdige, 1993), including the use of language as a means of subversion (Canagarajah, 2004; Ashcroft et al., 2006). Students' rejection of Basque, which materialized into ephemeral identities and transitory alliances based on the use of Spanish, constitutes a reinforcement of their own identity in opposition to an imagined context of cultural and linguistic *neutralization* (Bowman, 2003; Kachru, 1990).

Such volatile, ephemeral, transitory unions were formed in specific momentums with the sole aim of opposing what migrant students considered a hegemonic linguistic context and vanished once the aim of the alliance had been fulfilled. We propose the concept of ephemeral identities to explain how these strategic alliances operate. These identities could also be described as liquid (Bauman, 2000), and subject to external elements that change according to individual and group interests. These transitory associations were also the result of certain alliances founded on elements related to ethnicity and language. Hence, the proposed hypothesis is confirmed, as migrant students′ identity was articulated in ephemeral alliances and opposition to the learning of Basque. However, this was not a permanent identifying element, but a momentary interaction that brought about an ephemeral identity.

Although this case shares some characteristics with the study conducted in Catalonia by Codó and Patiño-Santos (2014), it is worth mentioning that migrant students in this study did not only fail to employ

Basque, but also opposed its learning. This was the basis for the constitution of ephemeral identities in this case, which was triggered by the aforementioned transitory alliances.

This study contributes to the theory of identity formation by describing how ephemeral interactions can form in relation to ethnic alliances and oppositions. It also analyzes the specific momentums in which these ephemeral identities are created. A limitation of this study is that no further analysis of identity and social class differences between local and migrant students has been carried out. Future research could address whether social class disparities and inequalities are reflected in the behavior of students from different ethnic backgrounds, as well as their constitution of identity in relation to Basque.

Finally, this article provides education practitioners with the understanding necessary to reveal the rhetorical strategies employed by students in instances of misbehavior and attitudinal conflict in contexts of interethnic language teaching, by anticipating and interpreting occasions of opposition and authority. Understanding and addressing such behaviors is fundamental to mitigate the adverse effects on integration and academic achievement such oppositional identity formation entails for migrant students.

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