Post-national approaches to Cultural Identity:

Italian Academics in London's HE

PhD Candidate in Intercultural Communication

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Theoretical Framework

- ## Interculturality
    - A theoretical paradigm which understands cultural differences as locally constructed performances thanks to individuals who play with language to index fluid affiliations/memberships (Zhu, 2011; Zhu, 2019; Devin & Risager, 2015)

- ## Constructionist Position:
    - CULTURE: It is not a given fact based on ethnicity, race or nationality but is emergent from any small groupings where individuals develop cohesive behaviours (Holliday, 1999)
    - IDENTITY: constructed and not possessed; it is a **process of (self and other) positioning** in interaction and a 'point of suture' between such positionings and social discourses (Hall, 2011: pp. 5-6; Harré & van Langenhave, 1999: p.17);

- ## Cultural Identity
    - A conventionalised cultural construct embracing different layers (age, sex, profession, L1, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation) whose relevance depends on the situation (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005)
    - *"Cultural identity [...] is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being' [...] [Cultural Identities] are the names we give to different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past"* (Hall, 1990: p. 225)
    - It is **situated**, **fluid** and **negotiable** (Zhu, 2019)

European Identity 👥

- It is **hybrid**, **collective** and enhanced by multilingualism (Comanaru, 2014)

- It is created through transnational practices by globally interconnected individuals (Zappettini, 2019)

- It is **post-national** because it is discursively detached from traditionally nationalistic stances (Zappettini, 2015; Zappettini, 2019)

Transnationalism

- *"[…] can […] represent the individual awareness of globalisation that urged members to (re)construct their situatedness in a global society and thus to rethink the relation with the communities to which they imagine they belong"* (Zappettini, 2015: p. 276)

- It is epitomised by Transnational Communities - people on the move - who experience increased interconnectivity and reduced territorial/geographical attachment (Zhu, 2017)

- 'Transnationals' construct Transnational Identities (De Fina & Perrino, 2013; Li & Zhu, 2013; Zhu, 2017), which are **deterritorialised,** constructed through **translanguaging,** and **resist binary contrasts** typical of nationalistic positions

Nationality & Ethnicity Talks (NETs)

- Small talk interactions embedded with stereotypical stances about people's assumed national/ethnic origin. Examples: *Where are you really from?*, *Your English is very good!* (Zhu & Li, 2016)

Why Italians?

- **'Silent Minority'** or **'Invisible Ethnicity'**

  - conceptualisation that reflects the multicultural, super-diverse British society (namely London) where the coexistence of so much diversity may explain the presumed 'invisibility' of European minority groups (Cervi, 1991; Di Salvo, 2015)

- Extensive sociolinguistic literature on Italian diaspora

  - Focus on generational conflicts: *language displacement/shift*; *code-mixing*; *language crossing*; *diglossia* (Haller, 1987; Haller 2014; De Fina, 2007; Giampapa, 2001)

  - Strong ethnic/nationalistic stances: *Italian-ness* (De Fina, 2014; Serra, 2017; Fellin, 2014; Zucchi, 1988)

  - Context/Domain: Family & School environment

- High Migration rates in recent years (Sacco, 2013; Di Salvo & Moreno, 2017)

Scholarship Gaps:

A. **Geographical:** shortage of UK-based studies (Cacciatore & Pepe, 2018; Di Salvo, 2015) – predominance of North American studies

B. **Ontological:** ethnicity as key component (essentialised views)

C. **Contextual:** workplace overlooked (Angouri & Marra, 2011)

Project Design ⚙ 🛠

Research Questions

1) How do Italian academic workers in London position themselves in the workplace?

2) What interactional factors in the workplace influence the way they go about language choice?

3) **What communicative and contextual challenges do they face?**

4) **How do they manage identity work in the everyday workplace?**

Research Methods & Design

- **Qualitative methods**

- Sample: snowball/networking technique through working connections

Methods:
- **Part 1 – unstructured interviews:** to elicit narrative responses and gain insights into identity positionings, linguistic choices and challenges
- **Part 2 – Scenarios:** to frame strategies used to address NETs in the workplace. These are based on stereotypes about Italians: *food & drink obsession*, *hand gesture & body language*

Analysis:

Template Analysis (TA) (King, 2012) is a Thematic Analysis technique. 'A priori' codes are designed as a sample to guide the analytical process. Adjustments are made to what emerges from the data. Meanings and interpretations (**hierarchical codes**) are elaborated cross-case to frame strategies and stances

Participants

Name	Occupation	Year of entering UK	Other Languages Spoken
Alice	Non-academic Officer	2018	Catalan, Spanish
Azzurra	PhD Student	2012	N/A
Chiara	Postdoc	2015	Spanish, Catalan, Dutch
Deborah	Non-academic Officer	2015	French
Jean Claude	PhD Student	2017	N/A
Valeria	Postdoc	2010	German, Spanish, French

Initial Findings

- Most challenges in the academic workplace are either role-related and **cultural/interactional**

- **Multilingualism of colleagues** is highly valued to avoid conflicts as it facilitates identity alignments. Challenging relationships are with monolingual locals: 'Gli Inglesi' (The English)

- High engagement with NETs and stereotypes, which are de-nationalised to attach new functions

- All participants emphasise their transnational identities by claiming their **European-ness** rather than 'Italian-ness'

Key Excerpts*:

Azzurra, PhD Student:

AZZURRA: Okay, in that situation, I would take pride in the fact that Italians are fantastic communicators. Because, this, this with pride. Our hands help. They are never erm misused […] At a training session to learn how to speak better in public, my, my trainer told me, 'use your hands! Because you Italians have got an advantage with this, you know already. You don't have to learn to use them. You know when to use them properly […] if you are at a 20-min conference, use them! Use them a lot! Because they work.' So, this would probably be my approach: a pedagogical one.

Jean Claude, PhD Student:

JEAN CLAUDE: Pseudonym?

RESEARCHER: Yes.

JEAN CLAUDE: Erm, does it have to be Italian?

RESEARCHER: It's up to you

JEAN CLAUDE: mmm I wouldn't be too much creative with this. And considering my European cultural identity, erm not only Italian, I would say Jean Claude […] Just like our beloved Juncker.

Valeria, a Postdoc:

VALERIA: Erm, No, I don't think so much here (current workplace). *Maybe because we are all foreigners. […] Maybe in the other lab, where the majority was English […] It was a different environment in this sense.* I mean, here I have felt so because everyone speaks in Spanish, they speak to me in Spanish. In the other one (workplace) *it was more difficult to settle down because the English are more narrow-minded for me.* They're not so open […] I've never had problems, they're really good people. We got on well with each other, mmm but they were not very expressive. I mean, they took ages to open up. So mmm miscommunication, maybe. Sometimes, when they used to, used to say things, I didn't know whether they were joking or were serious. […] Erm maybe I still see this with the English. Anyway, the problem I always have with the English es que…es que? It's that! I say that in Spanish

RESEARCHER: hehe

VALERIA: It's that hmmm, they're not so direct.

Chiara, Postdoc:

CHIARA: When you stop speaking your mother tongue…you lose some words. Then in everyday life because, the famous familial lexicon, right? And, our family is multicultural in a way […] We are two people from two different countries with two different languages who met in a third country, with another language. Therefore, you are forced to erm relate to the external world. So, simply going to the supermarket to buy veggies, right? Those vegetables will be, it will be written the price zucchini or price courgette or price calabasa or calabasin or […] 'I really like this pomodoro' 'Where are my snuffles?' […] Therefore, some dynamics are created and that word is like that for you. Or Martin (partner) and I greet each other by saying 'Ciao guapo, que tal?'

*PS: More excerpts and/or extra details on the interview data can be provided by the researcher upon request

Preliminary Conclusions

- The participants perform a variety of cultural identities (situational, occupational and disciplinary) by aligning with post-national views and evoking their European-ness. Therefore, nation-hood and ethnicity are irrelevant.

- Stereotypes are accepted but converted into all-inclusive, pedagogical tools that trascend national affiliations (gesture)

- Identity Challenges are primarily disciplinary, with PhD students occupying the most conflictual roles

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS: potential lessons for framing diversity in a professional setting (ACADEMIA) to inform practical training for transnational work teams (ICC studies)

Future Research Developments

PhD/Doctoral Research Project:

▶ Methods:

A. Linguistic Ethnography & Interactional Sociolinguistics

B. Interactional Data: Audio-recordings of work lunches: 1 group of 7 people

C. Semi-structured interviews: 15 to 20 participants

D. Participant observation & Field Notes: translanguaging and conversation topics

▶ Linguistic Foci:

A. Small Talk

B. Indexicality

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Merci!

Thank you!