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Motherhood in migration: A focus on family language planning

Ana Souza *

UCL, Institute of Education, University College London, 20 Bedford Way, London, England WC1H 0AL, United Kingdom

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SYNOPSIS

Over 50% of the Brazilians abroad are women, a proportion which appears to be even higher if we consider the number of mothers whose children attend Brazilian Portuguese language lessons in complementary schools in London. There are schools in which the majority of the mothers are Brazilian migrants married to fathers of different nationalities, thus the relevance of the role these women play in the maintenance of their language. This article explores how their linguistic and cultural identities are affected upon migration and how their sense of identity impacts on their family language planning. I argue that language seems to be essential to the maintenance of group identity in the case of these Brazilian mothers and that their success in passing their language on to their children affects their sense of motherhood. I highlight however that both mothers and fathers should participate equally in family language planning.

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Introduction

The rise in international female migrants and the gendered aspect of migration became the foci of research in the mid-80s (Takeda, 2012). It was around the same time that Brazil, traditionally a host country to international migration, started to produce a significant number of emigrants due to its population's search for work opportunities abroad. According to the Brazilian 2010 census, 54% of their nationals living abroad were women (IBGE, 2011a). Since then, a number of studies on gender have been conducted with this group (e.g. de Oliveira Assis, 2014; Evans, Tonhati, & Souza, 2013).

Many of these studies on Brazilian female international migrants have focused on issues of race and the labour market. This article contributes to the discussions on gender, and in particular motherhood, by adding a sociolinguistic perspective on the experiences of these migrants. It aims to explore the links between identity (i.e. the positions occupied by individuals in social contexts) and language planning (i.e. the choices made about language use, such as which language is to be used with whom, where and when) from the perspective of a group of Brazilian mothers who are raising their children in London. It draws on data from my doctoral study and addresses the implications of migratory flows for mothering[1] by asking the following questions: How are the linguistic and cultural identities of a group of Brazilian mothers affected by migration to the UK? What is the impact of these mothers' sense of identity on their family language planning?

Social psychology and poststructuralism constitute the theoretical background to this article, which is presented in two parts. Firstly, the linguistic and the cultural identities of the participant mothers are examined. Secondly, links are made between these identities and the participants' language planning. The analysis is situated within the family domain and centres on issues of motherhood and family language planning (i.e. the choices made by parents in relation to what language to use, when and to whom in raising their children). To conclude, I argue that language choice seems to be essential to these mothers in maintaining their sense of group identity as much as in having a positive sense of motherhood. Therefore, the importance of research on the intergenerational transmission of language to ensure that migrant mothers have positive feelings of motherhood is highlighted, as is the relevance of acknowledging the fathers' role in family language planning and practices.

* Flat 15 Spruce Court, Popes Lane, London W5 4AZ, United Kingdom.

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Literature review

Language as an identity marker

The concept of identity adopted here reflects a combination of contributions from both social psychology and poststructuralism. Tajfel's (1978) Theory of Social Identity argues that members of different minority groups relate to the host society in three possible ways: by trying to assume characteristics of the local norms, by rejecting the local norms or by retaining some of their own characteristics and acquiring some of the local group. Despite being criticized for presenting a static and fixed view of identity (Rudmin, 2003), the Theory of Social Identity is relevant to the data being considered in this article for two reasons. Firstly, it highlights the effect that coming into contact with the "other" has on identities. It is by meeting the "other" that individuals make comparisons between their groups and those of others, which results in awareness of their differences and similarities, leading to the construction of their own social identities (Tajfel, 1978). Secondly, the Theory of Social Identity emphasizes the emotional significance of identity to individuals. In fact, Tajfel (1981) presents social identity as being the result of the knowledge of membership together with the emotional significance linked to this membership. Ethnicity (i.e. group cultural characteristics, Hutchinson & Smith, 1996), gender and language are among the aspects that may be considered fundamental to defining the identity of a group. However, the significance of the different aspects may vary from group to group.

Language, for example, has been reported to be highly important in maintaining a sense of identity for some groups, but may not be central for others. The possible (lack of) link between language and identity has been further explored by poststructuralist researchers, such as Bonny Norton. Norton (2000) researched second language acquisition with a group of immigrant women in Canada and observed that high levels of motivation were not readily translated into good levels of language learning. This observation led her to develop the concept of "investment", i.e. a notion which assumes that individuals are motivated to learn a language because it will enable them to have more symbolic and material resources, and thus, more cultural capital to negotiate their identities in society. Furthermore, investment is a construct that conceives of the speaker, in this case a language learner, as having a complex identity which changes across time and space and which is reproduced in social interaction. In this way, a person's identity must always be understood in relational terms, i.e. individuals have more or less power of negotiation depending on the situation in which they find themselves and on the people with whom they interact (Norton, 2013). In sum, identity, from a poststructuralist perspective, is a process of negotiating social relations in specific social contexts, and thus, relates to socially constructed categories.

In cultural studies, Ang (2001) points out that the redefinition of one's social identity is a process commonly faced by migrants in consequence of having entered a new social context. This position reflects both the social psychological view that identities become salient when one encounters the "other" and the poststructuralist view that identities are always in the making. An illustration of this is the description that one of the mothers, Durvalina, gives of her experience of migration as the feeling of being a replanted tree whose roots were once in Brazil. A similar metaphor was used by Tu Wei-ming (1994 in Ang, 2001: 45) in his collection *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today*. However, Ang (2001) considers the metaphor of the living tree naïve in describing the decentralization of cultural China from geopolitical China. In her view, the metaphor reinforces the dependency of the "new branches of the tree" (cultural China) on its "roots" (geopolitical China), which is contradictory to the idea of decentralization.

The metaphor used by Durvalina, however, differs slightly from the one used by Tu Wei-ming (op.cit.). Here she refers to a tree which grew and formed its solid trunk through roots which were fed and made strong in Brazil. The tree, together with its roots, has been replanted in England. It is in England that it changes and develops new branches. Clearly there is a dependence of the periphery on the centre. However, the centre is not *there* (the place of origin) anymore. The centre is a result of the interaction between the roots which were made strong *there* and the soil *here* (the hosting place) that enables the tree to stay alive and continue to grow. In other words, the metaphor of a "replanted tree" refers to the notion of "hybridity", i.e. the appearance of new identities which result from the mix of other identities (Bhabha, 1994).

This interaction between *there* and *here* is experienced by all the Brazilian mothers being reported. Therefore, this article explores the *there–here* interaction that leads these Brazilian mothers to develop a sense of being "replanted trees" and examines how this new sense of identity impacts on the language planning they adopt for their families.

Family language planning

Family is one of the domains in which language management and negotiation take place, a recognition which has led to family language policy (FLP) as a new area of research within language planning and policy (LPP) (Li Wei, 2012). FLP is situated within a micro perspective of LPP and has been defined as "a deliberate attempt at practising a particular language use pattern and particular literacy practices within home domains and among family members" (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009: 352). Many of the studies on FLP, however, focus primarily on mothers: an example being King & Fogle's (2006) study on how decisions about language use with children are made. Although the participants in this study are generally referred to as families and parents, 87.5% of them are mothers. In other words, mothers appear here as the parent who tends to take the responsibility for their children's acquisition of language, as generally assumed and expected by society. In fact, King & Fogle argue that social pressure plays an important role in decisions about FLP. In their study of families in the USA who are trying to raise their children in two languages (i.e. English and Spanish), both public discourse and personal networks are considered sources of social pressure on FLP. In addition, the analysis shows that, before decisions are made about FLP, these two sources are considered against personal experiences of language learning, be it a second language (i.e. the official language of a country which is learned by migrants), a foreign language (i.e. the official language of a country which is learned by individuals who live in another country) or a heritage language (i.e. passed down by parents of migrant backgrounds and also commonly referred to as community language). In the case of the Brazilian mothers

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