

LANGUAGE AND DYNAMICS OF IDENTITY AMONG IMMIGRANTS. CHALLENGING PRACTICES OF SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION IN AN INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

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1. Introduction²

The present paper takes language as the locus for the analysis of social categorization of immigrant groups in the setting of a *state immigration office* responsible for granting legal status to foreigners in the province of Barcelona³. This study seeks to shed light on the ways service providers carry out practices of categorization and reproduce the institutional order in service encounters. The ability to communicate and negotiate meaning with officials is a key resource for persons whose lives depend on the outcome of the exchanges that take place. The reality of the encounters analyzed shows that few immigrants possess the linguistic resources necessary to negotiate the detailed information to contest the treatment dispensed to them by officials. Service providers position themselves through their discursive practices as powerful actors. The power asymmetry of officials is sustained in the interactional routines by their control over institutional information and by practices of negative categorization. The object of this research is to undertake a detailed analysis of the interactional routines of the social actors (i.e., service providers and clients) who participate in the service encounters at the State sub-delegation office in order to find out about how verbal practices instantiate a questionable and fundamentally unequal social order where immigrant-clients have much to lose.

This introduction is followed in section two by a brief account of the research site and fieldwork undertaken for the study. A discussion of prototypical bureaucratic discursive practices in the service encounter can be found in section three. Social

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³ This office administers all affairs concerning the legal status of foreigners in Spain. This includes requests for refugee status or family regrouping.

categorization and how it is constructed at the State immigration office is presented in section four. It is argued in section five that the freedom immigrants have to negotiate their identity, the information crucial to their livelihood is highly constrained by the asymmetrical relations of the encounter but also by the negative treatment and categorization. Section six deals with the different role code-switching fulfills for service providers and clients⁴. Code-switching for officials is a way of categorizing individuals and creating separate social spaces for the various actors present in the service encounter. For immigrants, on the other hand, code-switching becomes a valuable resource –not always taken up in the exchanges by service providers– for obtaining information and negotiating the meaning of words. Attempts to contest the institutional order and categorization practices are analyzed in section seven. The conclusions in section eight summarize the way categorization is accomplished in service encounters at the State sub-delegation office. The research and data presented in this paper constitute work in progress by the CIEN research team, which is being carried out in other sites both in the city of Barcelona and Girona.

2. Fieldwork

Encounters in service settings such as the *state immigration office* are a specific site where the interactions that take place are defined by the nature of the services provided. The present research centers on the offer made by the Spanish government at the beginning of the year 2000 to legalize foreigners residing in Spain since June 1999⁵. Eva Codó (2004) carried out the fieldwork and data collection for this study in the city of Barcelona. Immigrants of many nationalities visit the State sub-delegation offices for three main reasons: (a) to find out about the status of their applications for legal residency, (b) to submit first time applications for residency, or (c) to turn in additional documents voluntarily or at the request of the institution. The South Asian population consisting of Indian and Pakistani men between 20 and 40 years of age are the main immigrant group studied even though interactions with other nationals (i.e., from China)

⁴ Several terms are used throughout the paper to refer to the participants in the service encounters analyzed. Service providers are referred to as *institutional representatives* and *officials*. The terms used to refer to immigrants visiting the State office are *clients* or *immigrant clients*.

⁵ For additional information on the slot immigrants fill in the European economy see Sotelo (2002).

are also analyzed in order to discuss processes of categorization of foreigners and how they are constructed by officials.

The linguistic corpus, from which the naturally occurring service interactions presented in this paper are taken, was gathered between April and August 2000. It consists of 20 hours and 18 minutes of tape-recorded verbal exchanges. The corpus contains 348 encounters, involving approximately 417 immigrant service seekers and 5 local bureaucrats. A total of eight languages are employed, namely Catalan, Spanish, English, French, German, Arabic, Punjabi and Italian. To understand the institutional context in which the interactional data is embedded, the study also considers ethnographic information gathered during fieldwork, the researcher's field notes, "backstage" comments by public officials, semi-formal and informal interviews with social actors. The linguistic data is transcribed using the LIDES standard for the transcription and coding of multilingual data developed by the LIPPS group (2000).

3. The context of institutional exchanges

The *State immigration office* in Barcelona is a public administration office that represents the Spanish state in the Autonomous Region of Catalonia. Public Administration offices are generally conceived –at least in an ideal sense– as a state initiative to address and take care of the interests and needs of all citizens residing in the State. The particular office of the *state immigration office* object of this study is in charge of the affairs relating to the legal status of foreigners in Spain. The particular sectors of people to whom the services of this administration office have been targeted are "illegal" immigrants (of all nationalities) applying for legal residence to live and work in Spain. This is the first sort of fixed categorization process that clients to this office experience.

Service providers, namely, the persons who maintain face-to-face interactions with clients must provide a service. The nature of the service is shaped by a political policy decision to offer legal status to all foreigners who fulfill a set of conditions; the most important is the ability to demonstrate their presence in Spain since June 1999. These facts frame the context of the exchanges under study. Emphasis by researchers studying institutional talk (i.e., Goffman, 1959; Sarangi & Roberts 1999; Hall *et al.*,

1999; Sarangi & Coulthard, 2000) is placed on how roles (i.e., service providers and clients) are artful accomplishments of the participants in the interaction. The officials in the interactions studied at the *state immigration office* setting adopt the guise of the role they must enact. This representation is part of the job these officials must perform. As Goffman (1959: 14) notes “social roles require the enactment of rights and rules attached to a given status [...] a social role involves one or more parts and each of the different parts may be presented by the performer on a series of occasions to the same kinds of audiences or to an audience of the same person”. This view of participants acting out, negotiating and maintaining certain roles throughout the interaction is assumed in this study. The present paper not only examines ways in which fixed features of the institutional order described constrain the encounters under analysis, but it also shows how service providers use their power to enforce an interactional order that constrains immigrants’ chances of negotiating an identity or a way of behaving that does not fit service providers’ expectations (Dahl, 1968, Lukes, 1978).

Some of the fixed features present in the service encounters analyzed include an asymmetric relation of power where the service provider controls the interaction at all times. This power is defined by the role the institutional representative adopts but it is reinforced by immigrants’ insufficient knowledge of a shared code for interacting with officials. The fact that immigrants who visit the office are considered illegal by the institution –without the same rights as Spanish citizens– is part of the social order officials exploit to maintain their position of power.

According to Silverman (1999), another important feature of service encounters is its goal-oriented nature. This also applies to the interactions at the *state immigration office*. Interactions in other settings are less defined and they require participants to negotiate a sense of what the exchange is about. On the contrary, the service encounter under study is also shaped by what service the officials can actually offer to their clients. As it turns out in the case of the *state immigration office*, the manner in which the service is offered varies. In part, this variation in the service performance is explained by the dynamic way fixed roles can be represented in face-to-face interactions. A poor service –that is when the service provider is uninformative or outright rude to the client– gives a bad image of the institution and a sense that the

services provided are somehow arbitrary. The main ways officials can provide a good service to clients are: (a) by giving accurate information and ensuring that their interlocutors understand, (b) by accepting missing documents or new applications related to requests for legal residency in Spain, and (c) by not stepping beyond the boundaries of their job. There are specific members of the institutional team in charge of accepting or rejecting documents presented by clients, but service providers often take up this task, which gives them more real power in the eyes of their clients.

The main problem with respect to the service provided by officials centers on the extent to which individual service providers go beyond their assigned job of accepting papers or informing clients on the status of their applications to actually make decisions about which documents to accept. More specifically it has to do with how much information on the computer screen should be disclosed to the client. In spite of ? explicit institutional recommendations on what to say, some clients get more information than others, or it may be the case that a greater amount of time is dedicated by service providers to ensure a client's understanding of the information given. The individual power of the service providers lies with what information to give in the first place.

An additional consideration about institutional talk is that it is associated with a particular way of reasoning or inference making. The interactions analyzed indicate that there is a mismatch between the reasoning of the service provider, what clients understand, and the reasoning clients use to argue for their cases. The limited linguistic skills of most immigrants prevent them from negotiating information, identity or their own view of what is going on with their applications for legal residency. The service provider has the upper hand in the interaction and it is a personal choice whether he/she sees as part of the service to ensure that the client understands the administrative steps involved in the application process.

4. Categorization and its construction at the *state immigration office*

Social categorization following Heller (2001: 213) is a way in which “groups are constructed both in terms of criteria of inclusion and exclusion and in terms of what it means to be a “good” (or prototypical) member of a group”. The ideological

underpinnings of categorizing immigrants rests according to Woolard (1998) on the ideational and conceptual, as well as on the conscious and unconscious representations and beliefs that are assigned to persons requesting the legalization of their status in Spain.

Clients of the immigration office at the *state immigration office* undergo a double process of negative categorization. First, as “immigrant-clients” seeking a particular service, which is specifically set up for foreigners. The construal of the “immigrant client” category is pre-established before the service encounter even takes place. Client categorization is based on suspicion (Sarangi & Slembrouck, 1996) and on the idea that clients are willing to do anything (i.e., cheat) to obtain the papers they need. In the case of clients who are immigrants there is even a more complicated construction of the client category, which necessarily brings in the societal views that service providers bring along with them to the service exchange. “Immigrant-clients” undergo a second kind of categorization, which takes place in situ through the discursive practices carried out by service providers in the interactions. The asymmetric relation of power exercised by service providers in the interaction serves to enforce a particular social order as well as a particular categorization of immigrants.

Categorization is a way humans classify their social reality. When exercised by an individual or group over less powerful individuals or groups, categorization can be a way to reinforce an unjust social order. While the act of categorizing consists in attributing a set of beliefs one holds to other persons, it especially becomes significant when exercised by persons in power because it influences one’s intentions as well as one’s actions, including the way a person communicates with others. Categorization involves generalization and it is a deterministic practice of reifying a set of personal attributes based on beliefs or construals of the world. It leaves little room for individual identity. It is in this sense that when practiced by (the powerful member of an asymmetric group) the member of a powerful group against a member of a weaker group who has something to lose it becomes a detrimental practice. Language in interaction is one of the main spaces where social categorization can be contested but in order to do so immigrants seeking to be legalized must possess several important resources: (a) an understanding of the categorizations being imposed on them, (b) language proficiency in one or both of the native languages Spanish or Catalan to

contest these categorizations, and (c) accurate information on the paper work involved as well as the administrative steps involved in their application for legal residence.

Another important characteristic of categorizing processes is that they decontextualize and depersonalize the individual. A person's beliefs about others are often unconscious and they are usually not expressed explicitly in words. So, if the "immigrant-client" is not aware of how the institutional representative categorizes him/her through their discursive practices they cannot contest these views in the service exchange. Categorization, however, is not always a dynamic creation produced by participants in an interaction but rather it can be the imposition of representations of others not present or of stereotypes based on dress or the color of a person's skin. A person's national origin and background experience in life is ignored when categorizations such as "African", "Sub-Saharan" or "Maghrebi" are applied to them.

Foreign immigrants to Catalonia (and Spain) are constructed as a problem or a threat in different spheres of social life⁶. The role of the media both written and broadcasted in relation to immigration has, on the one hand, represented immigrants as underdogs from a sympathetic point of view. This perspective is reflected in news reports on "illegal" immigrants trying to arrive to Spain by boat from North Africa, and the precarious conditions they are forced to endure. But on the other hand, there is also a more negative side to news reporting, which blames foreigners for the increase in crime, drug traffic, cultural, racial and religious tensions. Official statements by ministers and members of the PP government⁷ as well as local Catalan political leaders only corroborate the negative construction of immigrants. A specific example of this is the declaration by the previous Minister of Interior Mariano Rajoy who informed publicly before the national parliament in Madrid that 40% of all people arrested by the Spanish police were foreigners and that with respect to some crimes that percentage reached 50% of foreigners. An additional statistic provided by minister Rajoy is his

⁶ The threat of immigrants is perceived differently by the Spanish State and by the Autonomous region of Catalonia. In addition to more general negative conceptualizations of immigrant groups (i.e., as liars or criminals) in Catalonia, they are further conceptualized as a danger to Catalan identity not only for reasons of language but also on religious and cultural grounds.

⁷ The Partido Popular (Popular Party) is the majority conservative political party in the Spanish Parliament led by Prime Minister José Maria Aznar. [Editors' note: this party lost the presidential election in 2004].

affirmation that 89% of all preventive prisoners in jail in the months of January and February 2002 were foreigners⁸.

In order to get a better grasp of the ideological representations underlying the self-categorization and categorization of “the other”, information from immigrants and institutional representatives are presented and discussed. An interview carried out by Eva Codó with Hussein, a Pakistani immigrant who has been successful with his application for residency in Spain is considered. This interview sheds light on how Hussein views himself, as well as on his perception about the way the Spanish view him. Hussein decides to emigrate from Lahore in Pakistan. He comes from a middle class family and his search for a better life led him to emigrate. Spain is his third choice after having tried to settle in Holland and Germany. When asked about the sort of work Pakistanis do in Barcelona he responds *las personas de mi país menos robar hacen todos trabajos*, “the people from my country do all sorts of work except stealing”. Hussein reports that the typical jobs held by Pakistani’s are selling flowers at restaurants, distributing butane gas, working in restaurants, car factories, and calling booths or *locutorios*. This is an explicit rejection of the association between immigration and robbery, which as pointed out earlier is a well-established ideology, which makes no distinctions regarding nationality. With respect to immigrants from other countries Hussein makes a point of distinguishing Pakistani’s from other groups. He claims that the Pakistani’s have little to do with the Indian community because of religious and political differences stemming, according to him, from the conflict in Kashmir. This claim along with the one that follows about the way the Spanish view Africans and Latin Americans constitutes an attempt to classify or establish a hierarchy among immigrants of different nationalities. Conflicts from home country are transported to the reception country. When asked whether he thought the Spanish were interested in meeting foreigners, he replies that they are not and adds that people in Spain prefer *gente de África*, “people from Africa” and from Latin America. Hussein points out that *hacen así por ejemplo gente de Asia no hacen tantos bailar no salen de sus países no salen con chicas es otra cosa me entiendes? Pero gente de África también*

⁸ See the report by SOS Racisme (2002). Informe Anual sobre el racismo en el Estado español. Barcelona: Icària. In this report, the use of official statistics by Spanish and Catalan political leaders is criticized for misrepresenting foreigners as criminals.

puede salir cualquieras horas con cualquier chicas me entiendes? Como está acostumbrados así como de aquí. Ellos cuando vienes es mezclados como igual de aquí pero sólo es diferentes colores, “they do things like that but people from Asia don’t dance so much, in their countries they don’t go out with girls, it’s different, do you understand? But people from Africa can go out at any time and with any girl, do you understand? They have the same customs as people here do. When they come here they mix as if they were the same but just a different color”. Hussein suggests that Asian’s are being unfairly categorized in comparison to other immigrant groups who he claims are preferred over Pakistani’s. When the interviewer makes reference to the fact that many Africans are also Moslem, Hussein further distinguishes the way Pakistani’s adhere to Islam as opposed to Africans. He claims that *ellos son el nombre de musulmanes no es musulmanes. Si hay musulmanes pero es el nombre de musulmanes. Ellos no saben,* they only call themselves Moslems, they are not Moslems. There are some who are Moslems but it is just the name. They don’t know anything”. Religious affinity is not a common cultural ground, which serves to unite immigrant groups who are competing for the same jobs and public resources. A key point for Hussein throughout this interview is to define himself as a member of the group of Pakistanis in contrast with other immigrant groups who happen to be Moslems but also with respect to the autochthonous population.

Institutional representatives as one of the main groups of actors in the service exchanges being studied have a contradictory role to assume. They are caught up in a position where they must represent the institution and provide an efficient service and, at the same time, maintain their face in front of the obvious inadequacies and malfunctioning of the administration. This malfunctioning consists primarily in the absence of an efficient practice of informing the public prior to the application process but also during the whole process once applications have been submitted. This absence of information before applicants actually begin the legalization process along with the disorganization regarding the applications already submitted is what led to the long lines of inquirers forming outside the door of the *state immigration office* from early in the morning just to find out about the status of their application. An additional problem with the service offered by the institution is the lack of official translators or cultural mediators to guarantee that the limited information offered in the service exchanges is

being understood. These facts indicate the sort of situation service providers must confront without basic support from the institution. The service administered to clients with whom institutional representatives barely share a few common vocabulary words, in part, shapes the highly constrained and routinized character of the service exchanges that occur at the *state immigration office*.

The disorganization of the institution (Nieto, 1996) puts service providers in a contradictory position where publicly they are expected to cover up for the inadequacies of the organization they represent even though at a personal level they may not agree with the organization. This state of affairs at the State sub-delegation office in Barcelona does not justify the categorization practices directed by institutional representatives in the service encounter. The service providers' job consists in taking in new applications and documents and checking in the computer the status of the papers submitted. Other tasks carried out on the spot such as deciding whether certain documents should be accepted with an application are not the job of the officials attending the clients but it is a role that is tolerated by the institution. The interactional dynamics of the services exchanges are not neutral. Service providers make personal choices (Verschuere, 2000) about what strategies of control and practices of categorization to use among the interactional choices available to them in the service exchange.

The representation service providers hold of "immigrant-clients" they serve can be obtained by looking at the way they talk in service encounters together with the backstage comments made to fellow colleagues and to the researcher. The examples presented are in no way exceptional to the context under study. The actors said them naturally without any sense of embarrassment. They are pieces of language, which emerge from a specific context, and an interaction in which the service provider has the upper hand. The important thing about them is that service providers feel they are entitled to treat clients without due respect. Example 1 and Example 2 contain direct threats to the clients by service providers⁹. The police are members of the institutional team at the *state immigration office* and they are being invoked to restore order to the

⁹ The participants in the interactions are the institutional officials identified by B09, or B10, the immigrant-clients who are identified as the enquirer ENQ, and RES, the researcher who is an active participant in some of the exchanges.

site. In Example 1, clients are categorized by service providers as people who can receive the treatment as they are in no position to contest it. The threat is being uttered to a particular client who keeps coming to the counter when the service provider is attending another client. Such a threat is ambiguous between two possible interpretations. It could be that the police will come to restore the order in the line, or that if the illegal “immigrant-client” does not behave according to the service providers indications he may be arrested for other reasons (i.e., illegal presence in the country) which have nothing to do with staying in line.

Example 1

- 01 *B09: como te vea venir por aquí llamo a la policía.
%tra: if I see you here again I'll call the police.

In addition to the threat of calling upon the police, Example 2 illustrates a previously mentioned categorization that suggests that “immigrant-clients” are likely to falsify their papers in order to get legal residency. As pointed out earlier the decision to accept a client’s papers does not lie with the official at the counter but with officials who do not have access to the public and who are specialist in detecting false documents. B09 in this example, however, takes the role of deciding whether to accept the documents and in the eyes of the client, B09 is perceived as having the immediate power to accept or reject his documents.

Example 2

- 01 *B10: esto esto esto está toca(d)o -. # esto está manipulado -. este ocho no es éste -. # esto si te lo cojo va a ir a la policía -. # este ocho no es este ocho.
%tra: this this this is changed -. # this has been manipulated -. this eight is not like this one -. # this if I take it it'll go to the police -. # this eight is not like this other eight.

Furthermore, the “immigrant-client” is being openly accused of falsifying the document he intends to submit to the official. Service provider B10 is acting for the institution he represents. In this threat the limited chances the client has of obtaining legal residency are implied if he is found to be cheating. The strategy of threatening the “immigrant-client” who has limited linguistic proficiency in Spanish and Catalan restricts the client’s chances of contesting or negotiating the categorization being imposed on him by the service provider.

Example 3 is a backstage comment made to the researcher about the best location for placing the microphone. The view that clients do not have the right to complain about being recorded reflects the idea that these clients do not have the same rights as a Spanish citizen, namely, they cannot protest or cause any trouble or else such actions can be used against them. This is a good example of the institutional control. It exemplifies how the administration exploits the fact that immigrants are illegal in order to enforce a social order where immigrants are non-persons without any rights.

Example 3

[B10 places mike on counter]

- 01 *B10: *si home així se sentirà millor.*
 %tra: listen this way you'll hear it better.
- 02 *RES: *potser algú es pot queixar ,, no ?*
 %tra: somebody may complain ,, don't you think?
- 03 *B10: *tu creus que estan en disposició de queixar-se ?*
 %tra: do you think they are in any position to complain?

Finally, in Example 4, B10 shows disbelief that a given application for residency has been granted. The underlying assumption is that the client was given legal status not because he has the right to it or that he fulfills the legal requirements, but because he happened to be lucky.

Example 4

- 01 *B10: *concedido éste- fíjate has tenido suerte!*
 %tra: this one is granted -. you've been really lucky!

The representation of the immigrant-client in the statements analyzed above not only reflect the personal interactive choices made by individual service providers but they are also examples which represent the general attitude of the entire institutional team.

5. Constraints on the interaction

Individuals jointly create context and negotiate or renegotiate their identity in face-to-face interactions. The way persons mutually present themselves through language, their appearance, and their behavior provide information which is interpreted by participants. The amount of flexibility each participant has to freely present her/himself depends on the situational context as well as the social roles assumed. Interactions between “immigrant-clients” and institutional representatives working for

the *state immigration office* in Barcelona are framed by a relationship of service provider and client. The asymmetry of this relationship shapes the service encounter in very specific ways that have been analyzed in the work of Codó (2004) and Hall *et al.* (1999). The interactions analyzed in this section elicit how immigrants' possibilities to negotiate their position and identity are twice constrained by (a) the asymmetric role the service provider embodies, and by (b) the categorization practices institutional representatives carry out in the service exchanges.

The next example illustrates how categorization by service provider B10 takes the interaction in a given direction shaping ENQ's (a Pakistani man) participation. In this encounter B10 goes beyond making ironic comments. He purposely provokes the enquirer by asking him openly whether his documents are forged. The relatively good command of Spanish enables the enquirer to challenge his interlocutor (see turn 10, and turn 16) and insist on his presentation of reality.

Example 5

- 01 *B10: buenos días dígame.
%tra: good morning how can I help you?
- 02 *ENQ: traigo falta.
%tra: I am bringing my missing [documents].
- 03 → *B10: es lo mismo que éste a que sí!
%tra: it's the same as this one I bet!
- 04 *ENQ: sí.
%tra: yes.
- 05 *B10: lo mismo!
%tra: the same!
- 06 → *B10: todos habéis ido: <#> [>] al mismo médico # al mismo aboga(d)o # os ha cobra(d)o lo mismo con el mismo médico: -, os entró a todos una diarrea de narices o qué?
%tra: you've all been <#> [>] to the same doctor # to the same lawyer # he charged you the same with the same docto::r -, did you all come down with severe diarrhea or what?
- 07 *ENQ: <eh sí > [<] [=! laughing].
%tra: <uh yes> [<] [=! laughing].
- 08 → *ENQ: pero pruebas # esto de:: esto seguro.
%tra: but evidence # this from this insurance.
- 09 → *B10: pero qué trabajáis todos en la misma empresa?
%tra: but do you all work for the same company?
- 10 *ENQ: sí esto de mutua.
%tra: yes this from medical insurance.
- 11 *B10: mutua de la empresa.
%tra: the company's medical insurance.
- 12 *ENQ: para +...
%tra: for +...

- 13 → *B10: no será falso esto?
 %tra: this wouldn't be forged by any chance?
- 14 → *ENQ: no esto no falso no -. # esto original.
 %tra: no this not forged no -. # this original.
- 15 *B10: xxx.
- 16 *B10: ya está pues.
 %tra: alright then done.

The first significant turn is 03. The official claims to be able to predict the enquirer's behavior (note his final "*a que sí!*" [I bet]). The implicature is that all enquirers are liars trying to cheat the procedure by submitting forged documentation. His interlocutor responds with a simple "*yes*", not picking up on the official's implied accusation. The bureaucrat repeats the same strategy but this time the tone of his talk becomes downright offensive (turn 06). The enquirer keeps responding in a calm manner, insisting that his documents are valid (turn 08). Finally, the official voices his suspicions openly (turn 13). He exposes the enquirer by accusing him of presenting false documents. Once again, the enquirer asserts the validity of his papers. The official has no choice but to accept the enquirer's documents. The interaction ends there. One aspect to be pointed out is that the official's provocative behavior is gratuitous. It is not up to him to make decisions on entitlements on the basis of the documentary evidence presented. His job is to take in enquirers' documentation; yet, this does not stop him from asserting his powerful position and trying to exercise social control by repeatedly constructing his interlocutors as morally reprehensible individuals.

Example 6 does not represent a standard service exchange in the Goffman sense where participants represent the social roles they embody. In fact, this example illustrates a mismatch between the goal-oriented expectations of the client and the way the interaction is directed by B10. The client's purpose for visiting the office is being downplayed by the control exercised by B10 over the interaction. The service exchange involves B10 and an enquirer of Chinese origin. In turn 02, the official greets the enquirer so emphatically that the researchers were led to think they knew each other beforehand. When formally asked, the official disconfirmed this assumption. B10 uses a particular intonation with the greeting device "*hola*" (hello) –clearly resembling the intonation one would use when bumping into an acquaintance one has not seen for a long time– and he adds in turn 03 the use of the informal question "*qué hay?*" (what's

up?). The official in these first turns is playing with language conventions and speakers' expectations. A close analysis of subsequent talk reveals how, under the official's conversational flair, hides a ridicule of the enquirer's linguistic abilities, which draws on stereotypical constructions of immigrant identity.

Example 6

- 01 *ENQ: hola.
%tra: hello.
- 02 → *B10: hola:: [=! emphatic]!
%tra: hello:: [=! emphatic]!
- 03 → *B10: qué hay?
%tra: what's up?
- 04 *ENQ: es eh para +...
%tra: it's uh for +...
- 05 → *B10: pala qué -? pala qué?
%tra: fol what -? for what?
- 06 → *ENQ: ma español sólo un poco.
%tra: ma spanish only a little.
- 07 → *B10: poco español -? y cómo te las apañas en el restaurante?
%tra: little spanish -? and how do you manage in the restaurant?
- 08 *ENQ: +^ sí chino xxx.
%tra: +^ yes chinese xxx.
- 09 *B10: uh huh.
- 10 *B10: qué para mí -? qué es para mí -? para mí.
%tra: what for me -? what is for me -? for me.
- 11 *ENQ: ser eh +...
%tra: be uh +...
- 12 → *B10: inglés?
%tra: english?
- 13 *B10: hablas inglés?
%tra: do you speak english?
- 14 *ENQ: español poco.
%tra: spanish little.
- 15 *B10: y inglés?
%tra: and english?
- 16 *ENQ: english is <small> [>] [?].
- 17 *B10: <english> [<].
- 18 → *B10: menos -. habla chino sólo.
%tra: less -. speaks chinese only.
- 19 *B10: www.
- 20 *PEN: www.
- 21 → *B10: qué me traes # chinín?
%tra: what do you bring me little chinese?
- 22 *B10: a:h -! esto vas allí vas allí.
%tra: o:h -! that you have to go there have to go there.
- 23 *ENQ: dónde?
%tra: where?
- 24 *B10: a las mesas # de allí.
%tra: to the tables # there.

[...]

The departure by B10 from a strict service exchange consists in side sequences where ENQ's physical appearance serves as the basis for the categorization, which ensues in turn 5 and turn 7. The set of stereotypes associated generally with all Asians are brought to the interaction, namely, a particular way of pronouncing [r] as [l] and the association of Asians, regardless of their national origin, with working at a Chinese restaurant. In line 04 the enquirer is trying to formulate his service request. He seems to experience some difficulties, which the official makes fun of in line 05. In particular, he mocks his pronunciation of the preposition "*para*" (for). In the official's caricature of the enquirer's linguistic abilities, the enquirer pronounces "*pala*" instead of "*para*"¹⁰. The official seems to be drawing on stereotypes to construct his interlocutor as a non-competent speaker. Contrary to what his colleague B09 does, B10 deviates from the routine sequencing of events rather frequently. Yet, B10's departures do not give enquirers greater chances of participation. Instead, his frequent side sequences enable B10 to make all sorts of offensive remarks about his interlocutors.

In the Example under examination, the official's ridicule of the enquirer's speech forces him to avow that his knowledge of Spanish is limited (see turn 06). In this particular context, confessions of linguistic incompetence are especially face damaging. Client's command of Spanish has a symbolic value in that it is ideologically treated as indexing the immigrant's will to integrate into the recipient community. Since this is an immigration office, what is at stake is precisely whether a given individual should be given the possibility of becoming a regular member of the host society. By exposing the enquirer's linguistic inabilities, B10 undermines whatever positive self-image ENQ may have attempted to present.

Turns 12 to 18 contain another side sequence initiated again by the official, who tries to find out whether his interlocutor speaks English or not. It may seem like a language negotiation sequence, although it is not. The official's command of English was deficient and he was eager to avoid using this language whenever possible. His interest in the enquirer's language competencies may be motivated by the researcher's presence there, as he knew language use was one of the objects of the study. As can be

¹⁰ The researcher did not pick up the [l] sound in the enquirer's productions.

seen in the extract, B10 does not miss the opportunity to expose his interlocutor's inadequacy again: not only does ENQ not speak Spanish but he does not speak English either. As a global language, the use of English can be read as symbolizing the possibility to communicate with individuals from different sociolinguistic backgrounds. The official makes his final statement in turn 18: "*habla chino sólo*" (he speaks Chinese only).

It is important to bring the form of address the official uses in turn 21 to close attention. He employs the word "*chinín*" (little Chinese) to refer to his interlocutor. Apart from the offensiveness of the term, I want to remark on how the enquirer is positioned by his interlocutor. The use of the diminutive form is highly revealing. This form is only used when addressing kids or small pets. By employing it, the official positions his interlocutor in a parent-child relationship, where the enquirer is the weak party who needs to be protected and taught how to behave, how to do things and so on. He assumes a clearly condescending attitude towards his interlocutors. Far from being exceptional, the official's use of diminutive forms when talking about his interlocutors is quite pervasive in his discursive productions.

6. Code-switching in the institutional setting

Code-switching at the *State immigration office* has a different meaning depending on who adopts this communicative strategy. The power service providers have over the interaction allows these actors to use code-choice as a way to exclude immigrants as members of their own group. For the service provider, the actors in the exchanges studied (i.e., immigrants, researchers, colleagues) belong to different social spaces. These spaces reflect the value service providers attach to different languages. This exclusionary practice accomplished by addressing a different language to the different actors or social groups in the service encounter creates a symbolic linguistic barrier between the "immigrant-client" and the service provider (Bourdieu, 1991). Based on ethnographic research carried out by Eva Codó and on interactional evidence that is presented here, it is possible to establish that Catalan is the language of the "in-group" consisting of fellow colleagues and the researcher. Spanish, the language of the State, is the main language adopted by institutional representatives for interacting with

clients in the State sub delegation office. The service provider sometimes takes up code-switching within the interaction when he/she is concerned with negotiating meaning with the client. The code-switching in the interactions has a totally different function than the addressee related code-switching practiced by the service providers with the different actors in the encounter¹¹.

Example 7 illustrates the social spaces constructed by the service provider for the different actors in the service encounter. Official B09 and official B10 in turns 01 and 02 use Catalan with each other. This choice ratifies membership within the service providers group (Stolcke, 1995; Kearney, 1995). Turn 03 is directed to the client and the language used in this case is Spanish which symbolically represents the language of the State. Institutional representatives adopt this language in the service encounters. This choice also signals that EN1 is an outsider to the Catalan world. This exclusionary practice is further reinforced by B09's response in Spanish to EN1's inquiry about the computer in Catalan in turn 04.

Example 7

- 01 *B09: bueno pues a veure si sortim.
%tra: well let's see if we can get out of here.
- 02 *B10: ara a més s'haurà bloquejat i un merder !
%tra: now it's also going to be stuck and we'll be in a mess!
- 03 *B10: se han estropeao!
%tra: they've broken down!
%add: EN1
- 04 → *EN1: i què ha passat ?
%tra: and what's happened?
- 05 *B09: <pues a ver si vuelve> [>] +...
%tra: <let's see if it comes back> [>] +...
- 06 *B10: <los de www> [<] cuándo tocan allí no sé qué aquí se jode.
%tra: <those at www> [<] whenever they touch something there they fuck things here.
%com: street where central office is located

The code-switching practices in Example 7 illustrate the way linguistic boundaries between groups are construed in actual interactions. This example also raises questions which are not addressed in the present paper about the role of Catalan

¹¹ It should be noted that code-switching occurs in interactions where the service provider seeks to ensure mutual understanding in the exchange. In many of the encounters recorded, service providers stick to Spanish without making any attempt to find out about the client's language competences.

at the State sub delegation office where public interactions for the most part are carried out in Spanish.

Example 8 provides further evidence for the use Catalan as a language reserved only for members of the service provider's group. Turn 09 is directed to the researcher and Catalan is the language chosen. Spanish, in contrast, is the language that represents the institution and it is used in the service exchange even though client EN1 seems to be able to communicate best in French (see turns 06, 08 and 12). B09 has a good command of French but he chooses not to use it. This choice reflects the institution's idea of what constitutes a good service. It is apparent in Example 9 that ensuring mutual understanding in the encounter is not always an important concern.

Example 8

- 01 *EN1: 0.
%act: hands B09 a copy of an application form
- 02 *B09: todos todos.
%tra: all of them all of them.
@Situation: B09 checks state of first file in computer
- 03 *B09: pasaporte?
%tra: passport
- 04 *EN1: 0.
%act: hands B09 the passport.
- 05 *B09: a ver #0_10 esto quién lo ha puesto esto?
%tra: let's see who added this?
- 06 *EN1: so no ça www ça **pakistani name**.
%tra: (so no) this this is a pakistani name
%com: name of EN1
- 07 *B09: ya ya.
%tra: yeah, yeah
- 08 *EN1: ici so.
%tra: here no
- 09 *B09: *es diu www llavons aquí ha posat això algú altre # xxx perquè aquí no surt*
%tra: his name is xxx then here someone put this and someone else the other xxx
because he doesn't come out.
%add: RES
- 10 *RES: *a més fa una altra lletra no ?*
%tra: in addition it's a different handwriting
- 11 *B09: a ver.
%tra: let's see.
- 12 *EN1: +^ ça **embassy** ça c'est tout.
%tra: this embassy this is all

Knowledge of community languages (especially Spanish, but also Catalan) is a valuable resource for “immigrant-clients” who visit the State sub-delegation office to inquire about their application and to find out whether the documents they submitted

have been accepted. The institution hardly ever provides an interpreter for immigrants whose linguistic skills in Spanish are limited. As Hussein points out in the interview with Eva Codó in Example 9, service providers do not make much of an attempt to ensure that the information provided is understood. He adds that if a client asks for clarification, the service provider tells him to bring someone along to translate for him and if no one is within the vicinity can translate then the information is not provided. The interviewer in Example 9 inquires whether service providers might write the information down so the client can get someone they know to translate. According to Hussein officials cannot be bothered with writing things down for clients.

Example 9

- 01 *RES: ah hah -. o sea y en general tú crees que # que no te dan mucha información en la oficina.
%tra:
- 02 *HUS: no no -. hasta que no preguntas no te dan nada.
%tra:
- 03 *RES: si no preguntas no te dan nada.
%tra:
- 04 *HUS: si tú preguntas te dan un poquito te dicen ah vale siguientes -. tocan otro turno.
%tra:
- 05 *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?
%tra:
- 06 *HUS: <no porque> [<].
%tra:
- 07 *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> [>].
%tra:
- 08 *RES: <ah sí::> [<]?
%tra:
- 09 *HUS: sí -. es circas circas lo que hay circas mira si hay alguien que sabe hablar -, y llamas ellos.
%tra:
- 10 *RES: ah pero ellos no te lo explican.
%tra:
- 11 *HUS: sí -. si no hay nada no te dicen -. te dicen oyes habla su idiomas 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.
%tra:
- 12 *RES: o sea si no hablas español ellos consideran que que es tu problema no?
%tra:
- 13 *HUS: sí.
%tra:
- 14 *RES: no no se esfuerzan para explicarte +...
%tra:

- 15 *HUS: no no no porque ellos tienen que escribir hija -. que oye si no sabes -, escribes oye toma llévalo hablalo +/.
- %tra:
- 16 *RES: pero ellos quieren escribirlo? a veces no quieren verdad?
- %tra:
- 17 *HUS: sí a veces que no quieren.
- %tra:
- 18 *RES: y por qué no quieren escribirlo?
- %tra:
- 19 *HUS: no sé por qué no -. porque como está cansados -, trabajados hay mucho trabajo mucha faena trabajadores pocos.
- %tra:

Service providers often show little interest in finding out whether their interlocutor understands the language he/she is using. This point is illustrated in Example 10 where the first verbal intervention by B09 in turn 02 is in English. The client follows up the official's turn in English and in turn 10 when ENQ addresses the researcher (who is present) requesting a pen, we discover he has an acceptable knowledge of Spanish.

Example 10

- 01 *ENQ: 0.
- %act: hands application forms over to B09
- 02 → *B09: **only one?**
- 03 *ENQ: **no two - . only <it is not> [>]**
- 04 *B09: **<where is> [<?]**
- 05 *ENQ: **the name is eh:: # <twenty five> [>].**
- 06 *B09: **<bring me> all the papers.**
- 07 *ENQ: +^ **no only paper one.**
- 08 *B09: **only one?**
- 09 *ENQ: **one paper.**
- @Situation: B09 starts checking state of applications
- 10 → *ENQ: **usted bolígrafo o no me entiendes [?]?**
- %tra: you a pen don't you understand me?
- 11 *ENQ: **por favor un boli -? un boli?**
- %tra: please a pen? A pen?
- %add: RES
- 12 *RES: un?
- %tra: a
- 13 *B09: qué?
- %tra: what?
- 14 *RES: boli?
- %tra: pen?
- 15 *ENQ: **boli sí -. # una.**
- %tra: pen yes. a
- 16 *ENQ: **gracias.**
- %tra: thanks

This example shows how ENQ is categorized in linguistic terms at the start of the exchange as a person who knows no Spanish. On other occasions the same official (B09) sticks to Spanish when communicating with clients. Example 11 below illustrates a common practice observed in many other service encounters where the information offered by the service provider is determined by the linguistic skills of the client.

Example 11

- 01 *B09: sí tienes que esperar tres meses como mínimo pero que se lo van a dar # y si no si esto no lo entiendes en trámite espérate tres semanas más.-. entiendes -? está todo bien te lo van a dar pero está en trámite.
 %tra: you have to wait three months minimum but they will give it to you (polite form) and if you don't understand "it's being processed (en trámite)" wait three weeks more. Do you understand? Everything is alright, they're going to give it to you it's being processed.

The client whom B09 addresses in Example 11 has been successful with her application but she has to wait three weeks to be notified. Since B09 is unable to convey this in a language shared with the client he decides upon a strategy of offering information that is less informative as is shown by the use of the ambiguous word *trámite* ("being processed")¹². Example 11 shows that B09 is concerned with establishing mutual understanding but code-switching is not the strategy selected to negotiate the meaning of words.

The form code-switching adopts in the interaction is structurally quite different from the code choice practiced by service providers. The value of code-switching as used by clients and service providers –when the latter accept it as a communicative strategy– is collaborative in a joint attempt to agree upon the meaning of the information being conveyed. For “immigrant-clients” code-switching is an important resource that gives them a chance to negotiate meaning with their interlocutor. It is all about finding a way to participate more freely in interactions that are strictly controlled by the service provider.

¹² In addition to code-switching, there is another interesting communicative strategy involving the use of key lexical items such as “trámite” (i.e., *being processed*) or “falta” (i.e., *missing*). These items emerge as the most frequent words repeated over and over again in practically all the interactions recorded. The meaning of these words is different for client and service provider and no matter how much negotiation and code-switching goes on satisfactory agreement is not reached.

7. The dynamics of contesting categorization

Some service seekers are more articulate in their attempts to expose inconsistencies in the application procedure. We observed how the enquirer in Example 12 tries rather indirectly to find out how new information fits in with previously obtained details. The enquirer in Example 14 below, by contrast, challenges the public official openly about the information offered to him. The categorization examined in example 12 is related to the roles each of the actors (i.e., service providers and clients) in the action must perform.

Example 12

- [...]
- 01 *B09: trámite.
%tra: process.
- 02 *EN1: xxx eh: diferente de xxx somebody telling that falta xxx.
%tra: xxx eh: different from xxx somebody telling that missing xxx.
- 03 *B09: I don't know -. here is trámite only.
- 04 *EN1: uh huh # and then yesterday # I come and give the falta xxx.
- 05 *B09: yesterday?
- 06 *EN1: and then you say that trámite.
- 07 *B09: yes.
- 08 *EN1: +^ I not understand what is the problem -. this is my passport.
- 09 *B09: if you give more things yesterday you have to wait three <four> [>] weeks
10 we have this with the things of yesterday.
- 11 *EN1: <okay okay> [<]
- 12 *EN1: pero yesterday give a man filling [?] computer.
- 13 *B09: yes the computer is not changed.
- 14 *EN1: is it possible to check xxx file to what is the falta.
- 15 *B09: if you give us yesterday you have to wait one month more to have this in
16 the computer.
- 17 *EN1: about eh falta.
- 18 *B09: I don't know.
- 19 *EN1: two day ago my friend www take this here and eh: I don't know who
20 checked it but xxx tell me that xxx there is falta.
- 21 *B09: if you have bring us papers yesterday we don't have your papers with this
22 you have to wait one month.
- 23 *EN1: thank you.

EN1's strategy begins already in line 02. Upon being told that his application is in '*trámite*', he responds by highlighting the different nature of this information with respect to the information he possessed (*falta*). Confronted with this inconsistency, B09 avows lack of knowledge and insists on his initial response. As in the previous example, he resorts to his social role as a mere 'computer checker' to save face. He tells his interlocutor what he knows, that is, what is in the computer. The enquirer goes on to

provide more details about his actions, which turn out to be highly useful for B09. In fact, EN1's turns contained in lines 02, 04 and 06 belong together in that they constitute the service seeker's contextual explanation of the process. This is demonstrated by the way these turns are syntactically constructed –note that both lines 04 and 06 are introduced by means of the phrase '*and then*' indicating more details on some previous narrative are going to be provided. EN1 does not reply to B09's question '*yesterday?*' in line 05, revealing that it is not his interactional priority. So, after being informed that new evidence for his application was needed, EN1 submitted the "falta" documents requested on the previous day but a few days after he is told that his papers are ("en trámite") being processed, EN1 explicitly declares his lack of understanding and demands an explanation (line 08). As would be expected, B09 skips providing an explanation for the divergent pieces of information EN1 claims to have been receiving. Instead, he pursues the theme of the new evidence provided yesterday (lines 09 and 10). This is surely the only information he can disclose; he cannot possibly give EN1 the rational account he expects.

EN1 continues to present his position by repeating that he had given in his new certificates the day before. B09 responds by following his previous line of argument in the sense that a month has to elapse before the new evidence is evaluated. We can see how fragile and unstable his position is: on the one hand, he claims not to know anything about the *falta* issue, yet on the other, he admits that the office is taking in more documents for processing. Along the same lines, he constructs his role in the office as mere 'computer checker', yet he knows that it takes his backstage colleagues up to a month to process new evidence. His position does not stand up under a close examination. The minute-by-minute working of interaction, however, does not allow participants such detailed analysis. Another example of the slippery ground on which the same provider 'stands' is his contribution in line 13, where he states that nothing has changed in the computer since yesterday. This gives EN1 more reasons to challenge the 'reality sponsored by the team', if nothing has changed from one day to the next, how come the information is so blatantly different? This is not the main goal of EN1 as becomes apparent in line 13. He wants to gain access to his file in order to find out about the nature of his problem. The client moves towards a *professional* client role (Sarangi & Slembrouck, 1996) instead of contesting the service provider. He chooses

not to fight over broad issues, such as inconsistencies in information provision, as he initially started out doing as can be observed in lines 02 to 08. EN1 tries to redirect the interaction towards achieving specific details that ensure a positive outcome. The institutional representative ignores his request and repeats his previous line about having to wait for one more month. Although EN1 has not been getting any of the information requested he does not despair and insists on wanting to know about his '*falta*'. Again, B09 replies he does not know by repeating a previous response. EN1 keeps insisting that somebody took his application for checking and was told that the evidence presented was not appropriate. He uses a face-redressive strategy in that he acknowledges he does not know which official gave him this information. So, he is implicitly trying to make it clear that he is not accusing his interlocutor of being arbitrary. B09 does not again pursue the *falta* theme, but repeats that he has to wait for a month to know whether his new certificates have been accepted.

In the excerpt examined, there is total lack of alignment between the public official and the service seeker. Each speaker is pursuing his own agenda, and at no point do these different agendas made to converge. This is because participants have conflicting goals and interests; the official is expected to safeguard the institution by not unveiling details on the procedure, while the enquirer wants the opposite. One could argue that these positions cannot be reconciled, and that B09, as a social actor –and not as an individual speaker– could not act differently. However, what needs to be underscored is a more profound, cross-cutting dimension of institutional discourse, namely the fundamental asymmetry in participant rights and obligations. As we have seen, the institutional representative can afford to repeatedly not provide relevant responses to enquirer's questions because he knows he will not be challenged for that. As Sarangi & Slembrouck (1996) claim, clients are often afraid of stating their rights because they feel that may jeopardize their case.

The enquirer in this encounter is being categorized an "immigrant-client" to whom explicit information need not be provided since he/she is unable to understand it. The service provider makes a point to limit his role by defining his job as computer-checker when in fact; he has more extensive information to offer, as well as, the possibility of ensuring the client's understanding. EN1 rather than highlight the inadequacies of the institutions dedicates his efforts to adopting the role of the

“professional” client that consists in trying to negotiate meaning. All EN1’s attempts to get his concerns addressed are unsuccessful; as we have seen because of the way the public official tightly controls the interaction.

8. Conclusions

The categorization practices that take place in the service encounter meetings at the *State immigration office* are defined by (a) the context, (b) the social roles each participant embodies, (c) the dynamic choices individual service providers make in each interaction. Immigrants are categorized before they even interact with service providers. This categorization (i.e., being an “illegal” immigrant) is fixed in the sense that it is determined by the contextual setting. The service is set up just for foreigners seeking to legalize their legal residence status in Spain. Service providers bring with them to the encounter many prejudices and stereotypes shared by the society at large. Data for some of these categorizations is provided.

Another way visitors to the State sub-delegation office are categorized is in relation to their role. The role as a client who is an immigrant, that is an “immigrant-client” with limited linguistic skills in the community languages. The particular view of immigrants has specific consequences both in terms of the information the official chooses to provide but also in term of the amount of time to dedicate to the negotiation of meaning and ensuring that understanding has taken place.

The third way immigrants are categorized is more dynamic as it results from the circumstances presented by each “immigrant client” in the service encounter. The categorizations relate to language and the expected language practices of immigrants. The assumption that immigrants have limited linguistic skills in the community languages is also a common view. Other sorts of categorization that surface in the service encounter are the immigrant as a cheater or forger of documents, and the immigrant as a non-person lacking the rights assumed for Spanish citizens. Through the detailed analysis of interactions we can begin to understand the way ideas and beliefs translate into concrete linguistic practices that quite often exclude immigrants as members of the community.

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