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# Exploring refugee children's bilingualism through multimodal identity texts

Student: Morali Fani
Hellenic Open University,
std510661@ac.eap.gr

Supervisor Professor: Dr. Manoli Peggy (Polyxeni)
Hellenic Open University, University of Patras
pmanoli@upatras.gr

#### Research aims

- ✓ To explore refugee students' sociolinguistic profiles
- ✓ To examine how refugee students perceive their multilingualism through multimodal identity texts

#### **Research context**

- ✓ In a camp of Northern Greece, in the context of non-formal education
- ✓ Seven refugee students aged 7-12 years old
- ✓ Five refugee parents aged 28-46 years old

#### The Greek context

- Considering the refugee crisis in 2015, the European countries experienced an influx of migrants/refugees ⇒ highly multilingual and multicultural societies
- According to Migration Data Portal, approximately 119, 7 refugees/migrants are living in Greece including 19,000 children (Migration Data Portal, 2022)
- Five the large number of refugee children originating mainly from Afghanistan, Syria and Pakistan, European educational systems have been called to address the issue by ensuring refugee/migrant children access to education and their integration in schools and host societies (Koehler & Schneider, 2019; UNHCR & UNICEF, 2019)
- Education is compulsory for refugee/migrant children regardless of their legal status (AIDA Report, 2019)
- ▶ Both formal (e.g., Reception Classes, Reception Facilities for Refugee Education) and informal educational settings were established in order to meet refugee/migrant students' educational needs (Ziomas et al., 2017)
- However, the Greek public school has been criticized for neglecting refugee/migrant students' multilingualism and silencing their home languages (Fotiadou et al., 2022; Gkaintartzi et al, 2015)
- The various linguistic repertoires disrupt hegemonic notions and challenge monolingual and monoglossic ideologies opening up space for individuals to engage in flexible bi/multilingualism where all languages are needed to make meaning (Creese & Blackledge, 2010)

#### Translanguaging in multilingual contexts

- □ There is growing evidence that suppressing students' language and culture and adopting monolingual instructional approaches is not always effective (Cummins, 2007; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Garcia & Sylvan, 2011)
- In multilingual contexts, students often use translanguaging ⇒ a process whereby multilingual speakers use all their linguistic repertoires and semiotic modes as an integrated communication system in order to make and negotiate meaning (Garcia & Otheguy, 2020; Wei & Lin, 2019) and maximize their learning (Hornberger, 2005) ⇒
- ☐ Translanguaging
- creates space for learners to draw on their whole communicative repertoires
- eliminates the power of distinct languages
- affirms speakers' identities and
- makes the whole procedure highly multimodal

#### Visual methodologies

- In an era of digitalization and globalization, multimodality entails that the learner should negotiate meaning via different modes of communication, such as visual, audio, gestural, tactile, written, oral and spatial modes ⇒ individuals active agents of the meaning- making process (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009)
- Over the last decades, semiotics has gained researchers' interest in further understanding the processes involved in classroom interactions, learning and meaning-making through students' artifacts (Ntelioglou, 2011) ⇒ as semiotic resources that produce social and cultural meanings (Soares et al., 2021)
- A growing body of research focuses on visual methodologies to explore individuals' linguistic repertoires, competencies, practices and identities ⇒ enable participants to depict their own understandings of multilingualism through activating all their linguistic and multimodal resources (Chik & Melo-Pfeifer, 2020; Tsokalidou, 2016)
- □ Drawings, particularly, have proved to be an optimal way to deepen our understanding of how children perceive themselves of being multilingual (Castellotti & Moore, 2002, 2009; Kalaja & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2018)
- According to Melo-Pfeifer (2015) "children's visual narratives about their multilingual resources must be seen as complex 'semiotic landscapes', as they represent patterns of experiences and feelings about those experiences in a specific context marked by cultural and social discourses on multilingualism" (p.198)

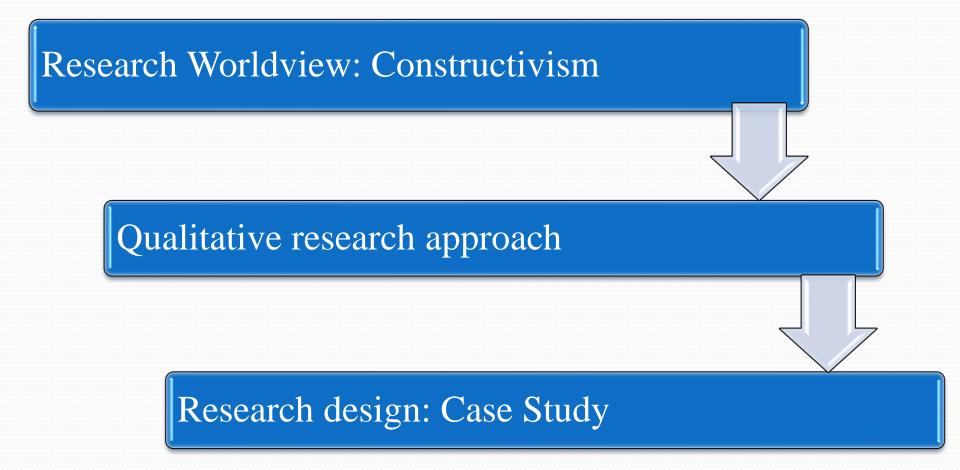
#### **Identity texts**

- □ Identity texts ⇒ powerful tools that can take any "written, spoken, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations of multimodal forms" (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 3) and
- help students relate their past experiences to the new reality
- express their thoughts, needs, skills and strengths
- construct and affirm their multiple identities and
- help teachers map their students' sociolinguistic profile to create conditions for maximum identity investment and language learning (Cummins & Early, 2011; Gkaintartzi & Tsokalidou, 2011; Tsokalidou, 2016)
- Students through their creative work "represent expressions of identity, projection of identity into new social spheres, and re-creation of identity as a result of feedback from and dialogue with multiple audiences" (Cummins et al., 2015, p.557) building bridges between cultures and languages
- Relevant research on mapping young refugee/migrant students' sociolinguistic profiles indicated that identity texts were effective tools to empower students to become aware of their multilingual competencies and linguistic repertoires and develop their cognitive skills (Gkaintartzi et al., 2020; Gatsi & Delhaye, 2015; Gatsi and Gogonas, 2021; Moore & Castellotti, 2011) as well as helping teachers understand their multi-faceted identities, attitudes, experiences, needs and strengths (Vitsou, 2020)
- Simultaneously, a similar line of research has been conducted in the context of adult education indicating positive outcomes (Skourtou et al., 2021; Tsokalidou et al., 2021)
- ☐ The use of relevant practices, such as translanguaging and multimodality, is highly important to map students' sociolinguistic profile and promote multilingualism, though there is rather limited research

## Language portraits

- Another form of graphic representation are the language portraits that were mainly developed by Krumm and Jenkins (2001) and Busch, Aziza and Tjoutuku (2006) and bring to the surface students' multilingual repertoires, enable participants to represent their multilingual identities creatively switching from visual to oral form and encourage them to critically think the ways they configure the relationships between different languages (Busch, 2012, 2017, 2018; Krumm, 2013).
- □ Language portraits in applied linguistics allow researchers to explore individuals' lived experiences and gain insight into their linguistic practices that are informed by ideologies and attitudes towards languages (Busch, 2018)
- □ Visual representations accompanied by interviews or narratives provide speakers an overview of how they conceive and represent their linguistic experiences and repertoires (Busch, 2012) or as Soares et al. (2021) note that speakers "... have alternative ways of articulating their experiences creating an interpretative story of their embodied languages, and therefore providing new resources for thinking about identity and subjectivity as embodied and relational" (p. 25).
- □ Additionally, the multimodal approach of these visual methodologies allows participants to navigate among a range of modalities affording them, thus, with more options for expressing their linguistic realities

### Research Methodology I



#### **Research Methodology II**

#### **Research Tools**

- ☐ Semi-structured interviews with the children & their parents
- Interview guide: consisted of open- ended questions
- Questions addressing the issues of children's language choices and practices
- Children's identity texts
- Children's language portraits

#### **Data collection and analysis**

- 12 interviews were conducted at the participants' residences
- □ 7 identity texts and
- 7 language portraits were produced
- Data analyzed using thematic analysis and descriptive coding (Braun & Clarke, 2012)

### **Participants**

#### 7 refugee children

- ✓ Age: from 7-12
- ✓ All attend courses in the formal and non-formal education
- ✓ Students' countries of origin: 5 from Syria & 2 from Iraq
- Students' spoken languages:
- i. L1 consisted mainly of both Kurdish and Arabic
- ii. Three of them Turkish & Sorani
- iii. All of them had knowledge of some basic Greek
- iv. Most of them developed some basic communication skills in English and only one student knew some basic German.

#### 5 parents

- ✓ Age: from 28-46
- ✓ Limited educational background
- Parents' countries of origin: 4 from Syria & 1 from Iraq
- Parents' spoken languages:
- L1 consisted of Kurdish & Arabic
- ii. Two of them had knowledge of Turkish and Sorani

#### Results from the interview process with the children

**Regarding their home languages**, all children were bi/multilingual who had acquired basic linguistic competence in the language of the host country. All the young participants had Arabic and Kurdish as their L1 and had developed oral language skills in Greek. In addition, three of them spoke also Turkish and two of them Sorani.

"I speak Arabic, Kurdish, Yezidi...It is the same as Kurdish, Greek, Turkish really Turkish, Suri-Kurdish ...how many languages did I say? ... I have more Arabic of Iraq, Arabic ... Arabic of Syria ... and a little English I know" (Student 1)

"I know six languages. English a little and German a little...Greek a little too. Turkish, Arabic and Kurdish very well" (Student 2)

- > All children highlighted the importance of learning Greek, which was grounded on two reasons:
- i. the need for communication
- ii. and integration into the host society

"I want to learn Greek because I have my friends here. Because dad wants me to speak Greek and I want to speak Greek to go to school and talk to all the children" (Student 3)

"When I go to school I speak Greek with my friends or for hospital, my mum says come to help me, you will be the interpreter. And for me, yes it is important because I can communicate at school and help my mum communicate" (Student 1)

#### **Children's view on multilingualism:**

- i. positive attitude towards multilingualism
- ii. and their aspiration to expand their linguistic resources by learning one or two European languages that represent their future country of destination

# Results from the interview process with the parents

- Regarding parents' bi/multilingualism, all of them use Arabic and Kurdish as their L1 and three of them have linguistic competence in Turkish. Additionally, two parents speak Sorani, one participant has acquired basic communicative skills in Greek and another one has some basic skills in English.
  - "My first language is Kurdish but I also speak Arabic, Sorani and Turkish" (father 1)
  - "Sorani, Kurdish, Arabic and Greek. My mother tongue is Sorani" (mother 1)
- Concerning parents' views on their children's multilingualism, they clarified how young participants had deployed or intent to deploy their linguistic skills in various languages in order to accommodate their communication in their new settings
  - "Shervan didn't know Arabic. He learnt Arabic in the camp in order to speak to the other children from the camp" (mother 2)
  - "I would like my children to learn English and German as we will soon leave the country" (father 2)
- Parents' views towards multilingualism: they all acknowledge the value of multilingualism as means for their children's school progress and their future professional development
  - "I think that learning a new language can offer new knowledge and can help someone to find a job or progress at school" (father, 1)
  - Specifically, participants' interest in foreign language learning focuses on two European languages, English and German as they are deemed necessary for their future relocation
- ➤ All parents highlighted the importance of acquiring the language of the host country not only for communicative reasons but for reasons of integration into the host society

### Results from identity texts I

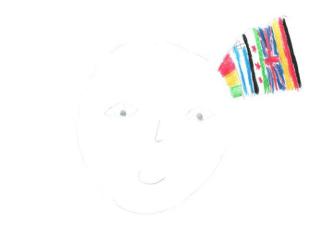
Based on children's drawings, **two main perceptions** of the relationship between the languages were identified

- i. the **first** pattern revealed that:
- ✓ 3 children depicted themselves integrating different languages that belong to the same repertoire
- ✓ languages were clearly defined
- the identification of the discrete linguistic resources was made through the association with a specific flag
- their linguistic entities seemed to be integrated in a common space

# Results from identity texts II







### Results from identity texts III

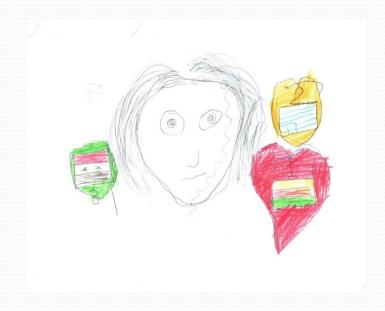
- II. In the **second** pattern, 3 children portrayed themselves speaking clearly separated and defined different languages ⇒
- ✓ the sum of different, distinct languages was made clear
- ✓ languages were kept separate and numbered
- multilingual identity perceived as "the sum of several monolinguals" (Melo-Pfeifer, 2017, p. 50)

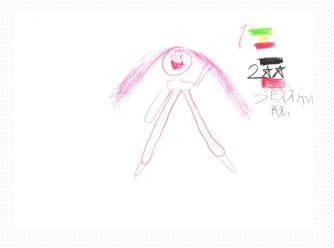
#### Conclusively, all children

- ✓ perceived and expressed their multilingualism through the use of national flags in order to represent their distinctive languages and cultures and
- ✓ depicted themselves disposing several languages either as an integrated communication system or as speaking distinct languages

## Results from identity texts IV







## Results from language portraits

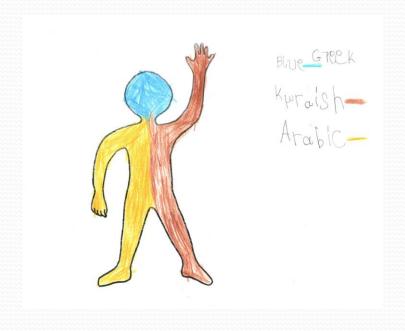
**Two main** patterns emerged in terms of language placement on the silhouette:

- language knowledge and
- personal attachment

# Results from language portraits I: Personal Attachment

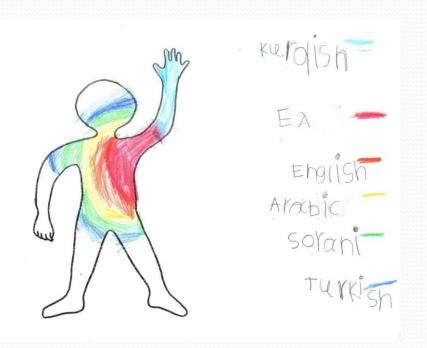
□ The findings of the study demonstrated that most refugee students' first language was represented on the body trunk to the head, while other languages were traced on the periphery ⇒ indicated that they placed the languages to which they felt more attached on the upper or central parts of the silhouettes, such as their L1, while they placed those that they felt less attachment on the lower or peripheral parts

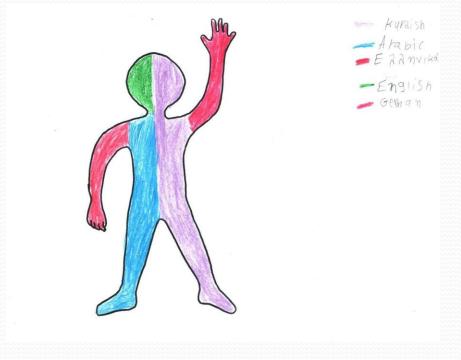




# Results from language portraits I: Personal Attachment

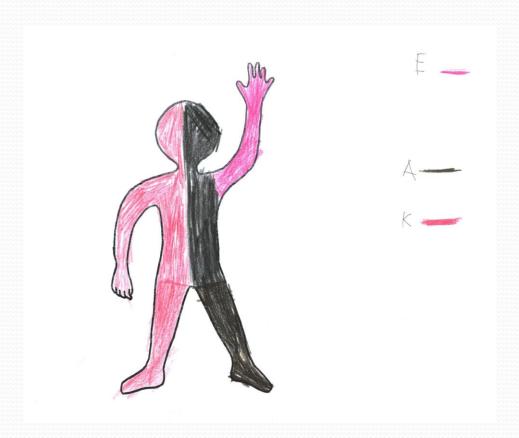
• The specific placement of L1 on upper parts of the silhouettes semiotically denotes emotional intensity with strong affective resonance, while the placement of other languages, such as Greek, on the periphery indicates less emotional attachment but positive feelings associating it with instrumental uses, such as school attendance and social inclusion.





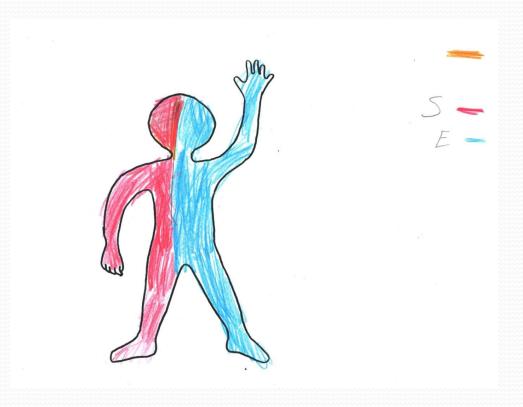
### Results from language portraits II: Language Knowledge

■ Most of them followed the same pattern of conceiving "language knowledge as quantity and language knowledge as strength" (Coffey, 2015, p. 506), where first languages were ascribed most space in the centre of the body silhouette



## Results from language portraits II: Language Knowledge

• The analysis of language portraits revealed language placement on the silhouettes according to language knowledge that was perceived and expressed as quantity (Busch, 2021; Dressler, 2015)



### Results from language portraits III

☐ However, **two language portraits** were different from the rest:

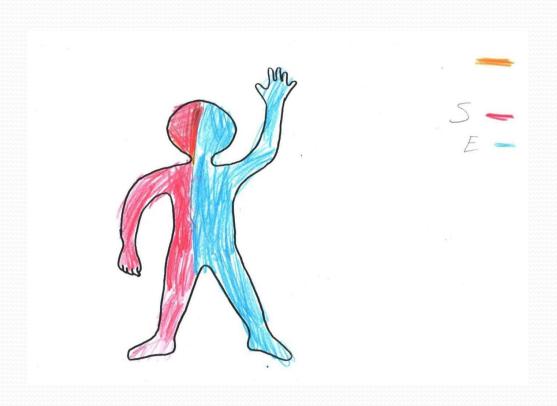
i. the first one included flags on the silhouette to depict student respective linguistic resources following a top-down structure indicating the degree of the language proficiency; St6 chose to depict her multilingual self through the use of separate national flags indicating, thus, a connection between languages and

nations



### Results from language portraits III

• Another student encompassed only two main languages -Sorani and Greek-despite her multilingual resources, choosing to render, thus, the rest elements of her linguistic repertoire invisible (Muller, 2022; Yilmaz, 2022).



#### Discussion

- The findings of the study indicated that students' multilingual resources were represented by the sum of distinct languages → Melo-Pfeifer (2015; 2017) that evinced "the dominance of more traditional representations of plurilingual resources as the sum of features from several clearly separated languages" (p. 41).
- □ In the given study, despite the limited number of participants, it is clearly noticed that older children tend to represent their linguistic entities integrated in a common space, whereas younger children have the tendency to depict themselves as using distinct languages located in separated places ⇒ has not been verified by relevant research
- Concerning the findings of the body language portraits, refugee students' first language was represented on the body trunk to the head, while other languages were traced on the periphery → relevant studies (Coffey, 2015; Dressler, 2015; Soares et al., 2021) demonstrating that children's first language was placed on the head or the body trunk
- Each of the children's multimodal texts was unique and interesting in terms of representing their embodied multilingualism affected by their personal itineraries and reflecting, thus, their autobiographical accounts of language learning experience ⇒ Learning is, after all, a semiotically mediated procedure (Kress, 2013)
- Given the increasing number of refugee/migrant students in European formal educational system, this line of research is useful, as it paves the way for the implementation of multilingual education where all languages are valued and respected, while learning is facilitated, when learners rely on their whole linguistic repertoire to make meaning and communicate ⇒ Such a shift is necessary, especially for states that adopt a monolingual policy and silence refugee/migrant students' home languages, such as Greece

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# End of presentation! Thank you all for your attention