



Working Papers in

Urban Language & Literacies

Paper **234**

'Our Languages': Sociolinguistics in multilingual participatory ESOL classes

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2018

This paper is based on work undertaken within the *Diasporic Adult Language Socialisation* project at King's, funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

‘Our Languages’: Sociolinguistics in multilingual participatory ESOL classes

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Abstract

Speakers of languages other than English in the UK frequently face barriers to their integration and wellbeing, not because they do not speak the language or are reluctant to learn it (a commonly repeated trope in political and public discourse) but because of hostility to their other languages and because of strongly held – but often erroneous – beliefs about bi/multilingualism both on an individual and a societal level. Yet ESOL programmes rarely explicitly address the language issues which are salient in the lives of linguistic minorities, and their voices are rarely heard on such matters. Drawing on findings from the Diasporic Adult Language Socialisation Project (DALs), an ongoing sociolinguistic investigation into the development of multilingual communicative repertoires in the homes and communities of Sri Lankan Tamils in London, *Our Languages* set out to explore the potential for incorporating sociolinguistic topics into ESOL and to establish a pedagogical approach which was more in tune with students’ linguistic realities and those of their local communities.

1. Introduction

This report provides an account of *Our Languages*, an 8 week course of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) which was inspired by sociolinguistic findings from the Diasporic Adult Language Socialisation (DALs) project at King’s College, London¹. We describe and reflect upon the origins, development and content of the course which we taught at two sites in London in spring 2017. The report is accompanied by a set of materials (forthcoming 2018) for teachers who wish to work with their multilingual students in a similar way.

2. Background

Using interviews, questionnaires, self-recordings and ethnographic fieldwork, the DALs project explored the lives and experiences of different generations of Sri Lankan Tamils (SLTs) who have migrated to the UK, looking in particular at the role of language. One of the main frameworks underpinning the research was ‘language socialisation’. This refers to how linguistic and cultural processes interact together to enable new members of a community or institution to acquire discourse practices from more expert members and to become familiar with the norms, habits and ways of being of that community or institution (see Duranti et al 2012 for an overview). In migration contexts, a language socialisation approach provides a broad, socially grounded lens for exploring how newcomers navigate the challenges of new discourse practices and norms and offers a ‘nuanced account of immigration experiences with its conflicts, frictions

¹ The full name of the original project was: Adult Language Socialization in the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora in London. The project was funded by The Leverhulme Trust (RPG-2015-279).

and resolutions' (Baquedano-Lopez & Figueroa, 2012: 540). The approach also offers us a chance to see that these processes are bi-directional; for example, research has shown that newcomers bring linguistic resources with them which are appreciated and taken up by settled members of the community (e.g. Sharma and Sankaran 2011). The informants in the DALs research provided numerous accounts of these various experiences to create a rich picture of how multilingualism develops in homes and communities shaped by transnational mobilities. Inspired by these accounts, one of the main aims of *Our Languages* was to explore to what extent the language experiences of the Sri Lankan Tamils resembled or resonated with other migrant groups, i.e. the students in our ESOL classes.

3. Sociolinguistics and ESOL

As an area of study, sociolinguistics is concerned with how language reflects, structures and dominates social life. Some of the chief insights from the field have been highly influential in the development of language teaching; for example, the fact that language *form* is contingent on the specific social *context* of language use is one of the key tenets informing Communicative Language teaching (CLT). Thus, although the focus of ESOL teaching is often the development of individual linguistic competence in phonology, morphology and syntax – belying its other roots in cognitive approaches to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) – it is generally accepted that these need to be taught in context, and that students need opportunities in class for contextualised learning and meaningful communication. However, sociolinguistic insights have been used rather selectively in ESOL teaching and although there is a substantial literature on the language and literacy of minority communities and individuals in the UK (e.g. Roberts et al 1992; Zhu Hua 2008; Rampton et al 2007), these knowledge resources are relatively little used in ESOL, so there is often a gap between sociolinguistic insight and practical pedagogy (Cooke & Simpson 2008:152-3). Ideas from ethnographic sociolinguistics such as 'communicative repertoire', for example, point to our ability to draw on different languages or language varieties to communicate in different contexts. Such notions reflect more closely life in the multilingual communities in which the majority of ESOL students live, but despite this they have so far struggled to permeate ESOL policy or classroom practice to any significant degree. Furthermore, as migrants and members of linguistic minorities, ESOL students are not usually included in discussions about the specific language-related issues which affect their lives, nor given the chance to become aware of their consequences. The ethnographic perspective which would enable this is not usually adopted in ESOL teaching. The *Our Languages* project was an initial attempt to fill this gap.

We therefore drew on aspects of sociolinguistic knowledge in two ways. Firstly, we used insights and knowledge from the DALs sociolinguistic ethnography to inform and enrich our discussions with students about the topics which emerged from the data and during the project. These were, among others, the experiences of individuals in our classes with: non-standard language varieties; bi/multilingual language practices; language identities; intergenerational language transmission; multilingual communicative repertoires; language ideologies; language discrimination and the social processes of learning English in the UK. Secondly, in terms of methodology we drew on the principles underlying linguistic ethnography – an approach which stresses the importance of exploring and understanding the particular situational, social and historical circumstances in which language is actually used – to inform and enhance our approach to teaching. It is this design process which we turn to next.

4. Course design and approach

Our Languages set out the following aims:

1. To explore the question: how far do the experiences of other migrant groups resonate with the Sri Lankan Tamil experience revealed in the DALIS data?
2. To explore the possibility of strengthening the relationship between sociolinguistic themes and teaching; to investigate whether and how reflexive explorations of these themes can enhance ESOL pedagogy.
3. To improve students' and teachers' understanding of our own situations, both sociolinguistically and more generally.
4. To explore ways of establishing a pedagogical approach that is more in tune with students' linguistic realities and those of their local communities.

4.1 Participatory ESOL

In our teaching we follow an approach known as 'Participatory ESOL'. Our classes provide a challenging but safe environment for critical discussion which start by exploring the students' own ideas, thoughts and experiences, gradually moving into discussion of ideas drawn from outside; as suggested above this is highly compatible with linguistic ethnography. The design for *Our Languages* was based on a model used for two previous short courses, *Whose Integration?* (Bryers et al 2013) and *The Power of Discussion* (Bryers et al, 2014; Cooke et al 2014). Instead of relying on pre-planned schemes of work, these courses take an over-arching theme but allow the exact shape of the course to emerge from session to session. Sub themes are drawn out and elaborated on through the use of a range of tools, activities and texts². For the teachers, co-teaching and post-session reflection are central, with each lesson being followed up with a review meeting and planning for the next. Courses have four outcomes: (a) the articulation of what students – and teachers – think about a range of social issues, (b) language development for students, (c) action taken by students on some aspect of their lives outside (or inside) the classroom and d) practical models of participatory pedagogy that can be adopted by ESOL teachers elsewhere.

4.2 The two classes

The details of the two classes where *Our Languages* took place are shown in Table 1:

² see e.g. the Reflect materials, Winstanley and Cooke (2015)

Site and type of class	ESOL Level (Skills for Life levels ³)	Number of students	Countries of origin	Other details
College class, Tower Hamlets College, east London.	Level 1	16	Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Morocco, Burundi, China, Italy.	Previous countries of residence: Spain, Italy, Denmark, Ireland
Community class, Henry Cavendish Primary School, Streatham, south London.	Mixed, Entry level 1 – Level 2	Approx. 20	Poland, Indonesia, Philippines, Morocco, Algeria, Gaza, Czech Republic, France, Italy, Spain, Colombia, São Tome, Romania, Pakistan, Bangladesh.	Previous countries of residence: Spain, Germany, France, Portugal, Saudi Arabia

Table 1

4.3 Themes in the Our Languages project

The over-arching theme we worked with was the everyday multilingual language practices of students in our two groups and the issues arising from these. In order to guide our thinking and planning, the research team discussed a series of excerpts taken from the interviews with Sri Lankan Tamils in which some aspect of language use was salient; in this way the course was derived directly from the DALs data and enabled us to explore our first aim, i.e. to see how far the experiences of other migrant groups resonated with the SLT experience. By way of example, here is one of the extracts we listened to in the preparatory stage. Arputha⁴ is talking about how he used to practise his English while working in an off licence in Liverpool:

A: Arputha
LS: the interviewer

A: so I made friends with like mm old people, old ladies come to buy newspaper and (then) that's how i- like
LS: [{chuckles softly}]
A: er learned to {laughs} er learned to speak English
LS: =okay
A: they'll be like er "what's your name?" and er how- the- when I started.. speaking with them that's the thing- I- I- only thing I could like- er only thing I could be able to talk to them "what's your name?", "where you from?", like that. You know.. very.. very basic.=
LS: =so you asked them? Or they asked you?
S: er sometime like if you are friendly and er you get used to them then d- little by little you just like move on to talk to them innit? And then er:: -

³ These correspond to the levels framework used in ESOL in England. Entry level 1 corresponds to A1 on the CEFR. Entry level 3 to around B1, Level 1 to around B2, Level 2 to around C1.

⁴ A pseudonym

LS: Did you feel embarrassed talking initially? Or did you feel.. "ok..(we) got to.. screw up my confidence [and xxx]"

A: [yeah if-] if it is like mm young people.. they might- I might get intimidated so I - I keep- keep my profile quiet. If it's old people, they are really so sweet and kind=

LS: {laughs}

A: =Even if you don't understand them they will say "oh I'm sorry darling, it's my hearing" [{laughs} (I have.. (like that)]

LS: [aww how nice of them]

A: yeah so-

LS: Is that what they used to say?

A: yeah. I- mm..-

LS: was this in- in Liverpool?

A: Yeah is in Liverpool. {laughs}.. umm so during my Christ- er during Christmas time they will come to me and then looking for me "where is that little boy? Where is that little boy?"=

LS: {chuckles softly}

A: =and then give me- like sometime five pounds {laughs}

In this excerpt Arputha draws attention to the impact of different interlocutors on his feelings about speaking English; the 'old ladies' gave him confidence to talk whilst younger people made him feel intimidated. The social aspects of language learning addressed here became a theme in *Our Languages* and this excerpt was used in one of the classes as a springboard for a discussion about what (and who) helps the students speak English in the community, what (and who) hinders it – and why (for more details see 6.4).

Using the DALs data both as a springboard for lesson ideas, and as actual classroom material in the form of listening activities allowed us to create authentic, interesting lessons which were of direct relevance to students' lives. The themes emerging from these discussions provided us with a framework for an 8 week course which was shaped like this:

- Introduction: what is research? Introduction to Sri Lanka, the notion of 'diaspora', language and its relationship to migration.
- Session 1: societal language policies (e.g. mono/bi/multilingualism; language rights; vernaculars and standards); individual linguistic repertoires.
- Session 2: intergenerational issues e.g. the 2nd generation learning their 'heritage' language.
- Session 3: use of languages other than English in public spaces and domains.
- Sessions 4 and 5: attitudes to languages other than English in the UK: convivial multiculturalism, language discrimination and how to respond.
- Session 6: using other languages in the classroom vs. English Only.
- Session 7: what helps and hinders the learning of English.
- Session 8: evaluation.

In the rest of this report we describe how we worked with these themes, what students said about them, which new language emerged, what pedagogic tools and activities were useful for drawing themes out and how we and the students evaluated the course. Because of the emergent nature of the pedagogy, classroom themes were produced in different ways; in some lessons, particularly in the earlier stages, they were drawn directly from the Sri Lankan interviews and proposed by the teachers. In others, however, they arose from the experiences of students divulged during classroom discussions. Some of these – in one class in particular – involved stories of language discrimination faced by students when speaking their languages in public spaces, not a new phenomenon but one which was perhaps exacerbated by the campaigns leading up to the EU referendum in June 2016; the weeks and months after saw a rise in racist

and xenophobic attacks on those speaking languages other than English. Therefore, whilst this theme did not emerge strongly in the DALs data, it was salient in our discussions during *Our Languages*, and formed the basis for several lessons, most notably in sessions 4 and 5.

4.4 A multilingual approach

Our fourth aim was ‘to explore ways of establishing a pedagogical approach that is more in tune with students’ linguistic realities and those of their local communities’. It made little sense to be discussing multilingualism, code-switching and other practices without encouraging students to use their other languages in class. To this end we experimented with ways of incorporating into the lessons the students’ multilingual repertoires – i.e. ‘the collection of ways individuals use language and literacy and other means of communication... to function effectively in the multiple communities in which they participate’ (Rymes 2010: 528) – and their *translanguaging practices* i.e. when people use a broader range from their repertoires ‘with less regard for the socially and politically defined boundaries of named – usually national and state – languages’ (Otheguy et al 2015: 283).

Although there is a growing body of work on multilingual and translanguaging pedagogies, especially in the education of children, there is a dearth of materials or research on this in adult ESOL. Perhaps inevitably then, despite the interest of some teachers in multilingual approaches (Winstanley 2015), many are uncertain about how to develop these. Furthermore, ESOL instruction has traditionally adopted a monolingual approach; on initial teacher training courses such as the CELTA, for example, trainees are generally told to encourage students not to use their other languages, and ‘English Only’ policies in ESOL classrooms and institutions are not uncommon. There are many reasons for the dominance of this monolingual approach: for example, it is argued that in a linguistically diverse class using other languages is disrespectful to the teacher and other students who may not be able to understand. It is also suggested that students should use English exclusively because the lesson offers an important chance to practise for students who may not have many other opportunities. Finally, there is a strong belief common in CLT that learning is most effective when people are immersed in the target language and that therefore a classroom that recreates these conditions will be most effective.

On the other hand there are strong arguments emerging in favour of adopting a multilingual approach in ESOL: firstly, students use other languages to help their learning processes anyway, often drawing on a range of communicative resources to make meaning with each other and to carry out their classroom activities, whether teachers encourage this or not. Recordings of our lessons revealed the extent to which students did this; there are numerous instances in which students are carrying out a task or conducting a discussion in Polish, or Bengali or another language, examples of students using a lingua franca such as Arabic and, as we show in this excerpt, students engaging in multilingual translanguaging.

In the excerpt the students are discussing the question ‘do children learn languages quicker than adults?’ in a small group. The people involved in the activity are:

K: Moroccan, speaks Arabic, French, Spanish, English

R: Algerian, speaks Arabic, Berber, French, English

D: Palestinian, speaks Arabic, English

N: Portuguese speaking woman from São Tome, also speaks Criollo, English

T: Teacher/researcher: speaks English, Spanish

The main focus is on the student K and her attempts to express the idea that children's brains are like sponges. She says this first in a mix of Arabic and English in line 1, receiving a rebuke from R for not speaking English, probably because of the presence of N, the only person in the group who does not speak Arabic (when N is not there, the three Arabic speakers carry out a lot of their business in their shared first language). Another reason for the rebuke is perhaps the proximity of the teacher. She, however, in line with the multilingual stance of the classroom encourages them to use Arabic if they wish (line 5). In lines 15 and 16 K once again says 'the brain is like a sponge' in both Arabic and English. In response to her use of the word 'mind' in English, N joins in, providing the word 'brain'. In line 27 K says to N 'kama spojah' which, to the researcher's ears – and perhaps N's – sounds exactly like 'como esponja' [like a sponge] in Spanish, but could also be, according to our Arabic translator, Moroccan Arabic. As a speaker of both Spanish and Moroccan Arabic, K is presumably aware of this. Either way, as a speaker of Portuguese who understands Spanish – or what sounds like Spanish – N understands this utterance and provides the word 'absorbs' with which they can move on with the co-construction of their response to the question. Whether K's utterance 'como esponja'/'kama spojah' belong to the named language 'Spanish' or the named language 'Arabic' does not, here at least, matter; what matters is that the students are drawing on all their resources to make meaning in English – the language they are hoping to improve – in the most efficient way possible.

1.	K		يشبه الاسبونج [Yishbah Al sponge]	like the: sponge
2.	R	no, speak English		
3.	K		yes, حقت الاسبونج [Hajat Al sponge]	the sponge
4.		Sponge		
5.	T	you can help each other if you don't understand, in Arabic, help each other		
6.		Yes		
7.		OK		
8.		OK		
9.		Yes		
10	R	what do you (.) think for you? What?		
11		because erm		
12	D	because the children is easy to get anythings		
13		because you know mind you know *UNCLEAR*		
14		OK		
15	K		حل (.) العقل بربحا سبوخة [Hal Alaqil Alrabi spojah]	the brain is like a sponge
16			الحل سبونج [Alhal sponge]	the answer [emphatic] is sponge.
17		soft		
18	K		دقيقه (.) والله [Dakika (.) Wallah]	wait a minute (.) swearing by Allah [emphatic]
19		sponge (.) because of		
20		children (.) have (.) minds		
21	N	brain		
22	K	Brain		
23		Brain		
24		Brain		

25		yeah, brain	
26		yes	
27	K		كما سبوخة as a sponge [Kama spojah] [como esponja]
28		as a sponge	
29		as a sponge	
30	N	Yes	
31		yes	
32	N	absorb it	
33		absorb it	
34		Absorb	
35		absorb better (.) It absorb better (.) yes because	
36		it is easier (?)	
37	K	*UNCLEAR* utterance	
38		because	
39	D		the second one شوفي look at the [shofi] second one
40		the mind for children computers	
41		it is the same computers	
42		yes (.) yes	
43		Absorb	
44		they absorb yeah	
45	D	They learn so fast	

Research in other areas of education, i.e. mainstream primary and secondary (see Conteh forthcoming 2018), complementary schools (Creese and Blackledge 2010) and Higher Education (see Madiba forthcoming 2018) have all suggested that, in the contexts they studied, pedagogies which encouraged bi/multilingual students to engage a broader range from their repertoires were more effective for the learning of curriculum content than monolingual ones. These and other scholars subscribe to a belief that learning is enhanced if students are able to do in class what they do with language in their daily lives. Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (2005: 2-3) summarise this stance thus:

The prevailing linguistic ideology in education has long supported the belief that bilinguals control two distinct languages: a native language or vernacular (L1) and a second language (L2), each with its own distinct grammatical system that is kept separate in the mind [...] The code-separation view with its associated mental model of the compartmentalization of linguistic knowledge does not correspond to the facts of bilinguals' everyday communicative experience. [...] If we want to make instructional practice support experience, we need to find ways of examining what it means to live with two [or more] languages.

This principle, i.e. 'making instructional practice support experience', as Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz put it, seemed to us to fit well with the principles of a multilingual participatory pedagogy (Simpson 2015: 201) and was thus a logical approach for us to adopt.

4.5 Teacher stance

The first step we took towards a multilingual ESOL pedagogy was to be explicit about our own attitudes towards the use of other languages in class. Drawing on the work of Ofelia Garcia and colleagues (2017) we adopted a ‘translanguaging stance’, i.e. an attitude based on the belief that a bi/multilingual student has one language repertoire that includes features from different ‘named’ languages, and that facilitating them to use a greater range from their repertoires might assist their learning. As we described in the previous section, we became aware that students were often already using their multilingual resources to jointly carry out tasks and make meaning; by adopting a ‘translanguaging stance’ rather than just ‘allow’ students to draw more broadly on their repertoires we actively encouraged them to do so.

4.6 Multilingual pedagogic activities

Garcia et al (2017) also suggest that teachers adopt a ‘translanguaging design’, i.e. incorporating multilingual practices and activities into lesson plans and schemes of work. In *Our Languages* we introduced certain activities and participation frameworks which encouraged students to use the full range of their language resources. Some of these were as follows:

- Grouping students with classmates who share an expert language or mother tongue and allowing them to do activities first in their language and then in English. This was particularly popular with the Polish students at Henry Cavendish. Most of these students had quite a high level of English but recognised the role of their first language in their learning: ‘we always start a conversation in Polish which is easier for us. Then we translate and help each other with writing and spelling’.
- Pairing lower level students with higher level classmates who speak the same language: at Henry Cavendish, a mixed level class, students tended to do this automatically and thought it was an act of solidarity to do so: as one student commented, ‘we all start from zero’, i.e. it’s our responsibility to help those with a lower level than ourselves.
- Inviting students to choose the group they wished to sit with, either one composed of groups of people who share a language or one which is mixed.
- Working with an interpreter (see section 4.7)
- Asking students to use translation for new words and grammar – not a new idea by any means but one which has fallen out of favour since the demise of grammar-translation approaches to language teaching (see Cook 2010 for a full discussion). This was a good approach for students who did not share a first language with anyone else in the class.
- Writing earlier drafts of composition in students own languages.
- Games and other ludic activities which help students get used to using their first languages in class (see Deller and Rinvolucris 2002 for ideas).

4.7 Sharing a language with teacher or assistant

A bilingual approach to language learning is well documented in North America, particularly in areas of the USA where there are large populations of Spanish speakers (Garcia et al 2017) but less common in the UK where classes are often multilingual. In both classes, however, we had the luxury of teachers sharing languages (Italian at Tower Hamlets and Spanish at Henry Cavendish) with some of the students and at Henry Cavendish one of the researchers was able to work with four Spanish speaking students from Spain, Ecuador, Colombia and Morocco who were near beginners in English. By sitting with these students and translating whole group

discussions the students were able to follow what was being said and as a result the teacher was able to conduct the discussions without isolating the lower level students. We also observed that when these students were able to use Spanish in small group discussions they were able to communicate complex ideas and later, with the help of the teacher, could communicate these ideas in English to the whole group. As one of the students themselves wrote in her evaluation: *me ha gustado mucho poder entenderlo un poco en español y luego se me ha facilitado en inglés*. [I really liked being able to understand a bit more in Spanish – later this helped me to do it in English]. For more reflections on this way of working, see section 6.

5. Our Languages: the course

The following section – the main section of the report – details aspects of the lessons we taught during the course. As well as describing interesting aspects of students' contributions and reactions to the discussions, we consider the impact this way of working had on our teaching and on our understanding of language and language development.

5.1 Multilingual communicative repertoires

In the first lesson we invited students to participate in various activities which encouraged them to explore their multilingual communicative repertoires. Viewing an individual speaker's language resources as a *repertoire* provides an alternative to what many sociolinguists have come to regard as the 'mythical idea of languages which are finished products spoken by a native speaker' (Blommaert and Backus 2011:23). Rather than the conventional understanding of languages as separate and 'named' (as e.g. English, Spanish, Arabic and so on), it is suggested that each individual has a set of fluid language *resources* from which to draw. These resources can range from expert competence in a wide range of genres, registers and styles in a named language to 'specific "bits" of language and literacy variables' (Blommaert 2010: 8). For some migrants these resources combine in repertoires that reflect 'the fragmented and highly diverse life trajectories and environments' (ibid) that can sometimes be experienced during migration. As well as being a more fitting representation of the language patterns of many of our students, we believed that a focus on repertoires was more likely to encourage positive language identities as well as to undermine the powerful ideology that expert competence in a standard variety of a language – whether here in the UK or elsewhere – is the only acceptable benchmark for full participation and citizenship; as Rymes (2010: 528) comments, in a multilingual classroom 'an understanding of how students develop and become aware of their own communicative repertoire – rather than correctness in any homogeneous standard target language – is a relevant goal'. Two of the activities we designed for exploring communicative repertoires are described in the following sections.

5.1.1 Activities for exploring multilingual repertoires

The first activity, carried out at Tower Hamlets College, consisted of students moving around language 'stepping stones'. The names of languages (and varieties of languages) were written onto a stepping stone cut out from paper or card and placed on the floor. Students started the activity by standing on the stepping stone they felt described their 'main language' and then, in response to statements by the teacher, on to other languages they knew. More languages and non-standard varieties were generated on request as the activity proceeded. Initially this activity may have reinforced ideas that 'knowing' a language means high levels of competence in the standard form of a named language. However, students were asked to move to other stones in

response to statements such as ‘a language you can read but not speak’, ‘a language you spoke as a child but have now forgotten’ ‘a language you can get by in on holiday’ ‘a language spoken in your region’ ‘a language you feel an emotional attachment to’ and so on (see the forthcoming materials for more suggestions). We thus encouraged students to consider the concept of ‘knowing’ a language in the broadest terms and to consider non-standard varieties as well as standard national languages. This activity – and the one below – also led to discussions in class about complex, contested terms such as ‘mother tongue’, ‘first language’, ‘dialect’ and ‘variety’ which were added to an ongoing sociolinguistic glossary which grew from lesson to lesson (see forthcoming materials).



Some language stepping stones at Tower Hamlets

The second activity was a language questionnaire. At Henry Cavendish we had asked students at the beginning of the course to share their name and the language they spoke. The activity had been dominated by people claiming competence in one or perhaps two named languages, with little reference to varieties, minority languages or other elements of their repertoires. Therefore, in order to draw their repertoires out more broadly, we asked the students to fill in this chart in groups of three. Like the stepping stone activity this raised awareness for students of the fact that their communicative repertoires were in fact far broader than they had claimed in response to the question ‘what languages do you speak?’, as well as to highlight the ideologies behind the fact that some of them did not even count their first languages as reportable.

Name	Languages I speak well	Languages I speak a bit	Languages in my family	Languages I understand but don't speak	A language I would like to learn

5.1.2 Observations and reflections

As Blommaert (2010:5) argues, ‘complex mobility, associated with superdiversity, causes people’s patterns of language use to become less predictable and significantly more complex’; this claim

was borne out by the striking complexity of the students' multilingual resources in both classes. Some students had well established multilingual identities because they had been born and brought up in multilingual countries; several people from North Africa, for example, were speakers of Berber, Arabic and French and had added English to their repertoires since moving to the UK. These students had experience of speaking a language which had been proscribed (Berber) and of the struggle for language rights for speakers of that language. Many of the Bangladeshi students spoke Sylheti and had experience of unresolved arguments about its status in relation to Bengali; some regarded it as a mutually intelligible dialect whilst others as a separate, albeit inferior 'village' or 'informal' language. These students often also had a working knowledge of other south Asian languages such as Urdu. In line with many of the informants in the DALs Sri Lankan data, lots of students had also lived in other countries before the UK; for example, several had migrated to Spain and Italy from Bangladesh and subsequently to London, whilst others, particularly refugees from places such as Afghanistan, had received asylum first in countries such as Denmark where they had become EU citizens and thus were able to exercise their right to freedom of movement to the UK.

One significant change in the first two lessons was a broadening of the way in which students perceived their language competences. Some who already identified as multilingual found that their repertoires were even wider when they included, for example, knowledge of Hindi song lyrics from Bollywood movies. It was also interesting that during the stepping stones activity, students started to use their repertoires playfully, showing off their skills, something that the teachers had not seen before in ESOL classes. One student sang a song and others found they could talk to each other in a new *lingua franca*.



One of the researchers and two Bangladeshi students discover they share Spanish as a lingua franca

Some students had complex multilingual repertoires but at first recognised only the named national languages they spoke. However, after the stepping stones activity, for example, an Italian student decided to include her regional language, Sardo, which, in a previous discussion, she had labelled as a dialect of Italian.

As a result of these activities, then, students began to talk about their languages in terms of their biographical experiences and to include languages in their repertoires which they had not previously acknowledged. This change appeared to be long-lasting: later in the course, during a round of introductions for a new student at Henry Cavendish, we noted that, unprompted, students included minority languages and regional varieties as well as languages they spoke 'a bit'. Importantly from an educational and social perspective, our focus on language repertoires also appeared to be highly validating for many students. For example, two female domestic workers from Indonesia at Henry Cavendish both had a low opinion of their educational levels and

English language competence; although we considered their speaking and listening to be quite good, they had low levels of literacy and they regarded their English as ‘poor’. At the beginning of *Our Languages* they claimed to speak only ‘Indonesian’. When probed, however, they both in fact spoke two other regional languages as well as some Arabic, with which they were able to communicate with the students from Gaza, Algeria and Morocco. Rymes (2010: 539) comments that ‘when students’ native communicative repertoires are recognized, they begin to see themselves as academically capable’ and indeed after these two students began to publicly acknowledge the range of their language repertoires we noticed a considerable change; they started to be recognised by others in class as competent multilinguals, to view English as part of their complex repertoires and began to participate in class with increased confidence.

5.2 Languages in the home

In session 2 we invited students to describe their language practices in different domains, including the home. During these discussions we noticed a contradiction between the multilingual practices in the home with what some students felt they ought to be doing to help their children acquire their heritage languages. One of the questions which has vexed researchers – and parents – is the question of why some children in bi/multilingual homes attain higher levels of fluency and competence in their heritage language than others. In order to answer this question, researchers have considered a range of factors such as the quality and quantity of interaction between caregivers and children in early socialisation as well as the beliefs and ideologies of the parents in bi/multilingual homes (see King et al 2008 for a full discussion). Agnes He (2012:589) points out that learning a heritage language is unlike other language learning because, by its very definition, learning takes place:

... in multilingual, multicultural, immigrant contexts where the heritage language is in constant competition with the dominant language in the local community. As a result, heritage language learner motivations are derived not merely from pragmatic, instrumental, utilitarian concerns but also from the intrinsic cultural, familial, affective, and aesthetic values of the language.

As many of the students were parents this became one of the most generative themes in our project. They all had numerous anecdotes, opinions and, as He would seem to imply, strong feelings about managing language use and multilingualism within the family. Students had various motivations for wishing their children to be able to speak their languages fluently, e.g. concerns with the maintenance of particular cultural and ethnic identities, practical problems of cross generational communication with grandparents and other family members overseas, and the desire for children to acquire languages – especially Chinese and other global languages – as forms of cultural capital. It became apparent during the discussions, however, that some students felt very unsure about how to manage their children’s languages, and what their multilingualism meant for their education in the UK. This, then, became the basis for deeper exploration, which we describe next.

5.2.1 Activities for exploring language socialisation in the home

To explore language socialisation practices in the home we designed two activities: an adapted recording from the DALs data which worked as a springboard into the discussion and a ‘problem tree’ which we used as a follow up to the recording to further reflect on the issues arising from it. In the recording, a young Sri Lankan Tamil woman suggests that if second

5.2.2 Observations and reflections

It became clear during the problem tree activity that complex migration patterns mean that heritage language maintenance is far from straightforward; in fact the very definitions of ‘heritage language’ or ‘mother tongue maintenance’ were brought into question by some students. One, a woman from Bangladesh whose children were born and raised in Italy, expressed this confusion when she pointed out that in her home there were two ‘mother tongues’ to maintain: ‘My mother tongue is Bengali. My children speak Bengali but they born in Italy, I want them to have Italian too. I’m not sure to pressure them to learn Bengali or Italian.’ Another Bangladeshi mother was worried that her British born son had learned Sylheti – which she termed ‘village language’ and which is widely spoken in Tower Hamlets where they live – as a child but not Bengali and that he might be judged negatively when visiting the capital where her extended family live and where he is to inherit property at some point in the future. Other students were frustrated and disappointed that their children had not acquired their parent’s languages and were shocked at the speed with which their children learned English once they were at school and how quickly English replaced the languages of their infancy.

The response of some students to the problems explored in the tree activity had been to implement a strict ‘minority language only’ policy at home. Particularly strong proponents of this approach were a group of female Polish students at Henry Cavendish, the largest single language group in that class who belonged to a large well-established community with numerous Polish shops, a Polish church and social club, several Saturday schools, a nightclub and a new Polish supermarket on the High Road. All the students were adamant that their children should speak, read and write Polish and were confident in the knowledge that speaking the language at home would not have a negative impact on their children’s English, a view which had been reinforced by the current EAL coordinator at Henry Cavendish who was unwavering in her support for community languages. There was, however, a range of views within the group with regard to how this bilingualism could and should be cultivated and about the conflicting advice they had received in the past from other local primary schools. One of the schools had tried to encourage the Polish children to speak English at all times, even to other Polish children, something that their parents felt was unfeasible and unnecessary. On the other hand, another local school with a large Polish community had been so nurturing of Polish that one of the mothers in the group felt the children should have been pushed to speak English a bit earlier. All in all, despite their strong views on the importance of maintaining Polish in the British born generation, there were rather a lot of tensions and disagreements as to how this might be achieved.

Whilst many students in the two classes supported a policy of ‘mother tongue at home and English outside’ many of them admitted that what happened in reality fell short of their ideal. Most of the many descriptions offered by students of their day to day language practices at home corresponded to sociolinguistic descriptions of code-mixing or the translanguaging we described in section 4. Most reported this as a natural phenomenon which did not in fact cause them high levels of anxiety; for example, a Bangladeshi student, who had lived in Spain and raised her children there commented: ‘sometimes I mix Spanish and Bengali words... when I speak to my son in the morning I always say, *levanta levanta* [get up get up]. I feel comfortable.’ This notion of feeling ‘comfortable’ with mixing two languages was mirrored in other testimonies and provided a sharp contrast with the frustration and guilt felt by some about their children’s heritage language maintenance. These negative feelings seemed to stem from a mismatch between their multilingual children’s language use – they described their children speaking bits and pieces of languages which reflect their family history – and their expectations that they achieve high levels of fluency and competence in their mother tongue; expectations which are of course linked to hegemonic ideas about ‘level’ and competence, a view of languages as named, separate entities, and to a traditional view of bi/multilingualism – sometimes known critically as the ‘parallel

monolingualisms' view (Heller 1999:5) – as being two or more languages with separate linguistic systems.

However, after focusing the attention of students onto alternative ways of viewing their children's language use, i.e. how they are able to code mix and to draw on a range of repertoires – and by giving them time and space to explore their ideas through problem posing and reflective activities – we noticed that some of them started to relax and to feel less anxious and even to shift their beliefs. Although they expressed frustration and disappointment that their children struggled with their other languages, they also seemed to begin to accept that they may never achieve high levels of fluency, especially given the constraints on their children's time. Some agreed that this may not necessarily even matter for good relations with older relatives overseas, as long as their children knew how to behave according to the behavioural norms – of e.g. politeness – of their parents' place of birth. Students also said later that it was useful for them to realise that there is a debate about these issues among experts in the field, and that there is no prescriptive right or wrong when it comes to their British born children learning heritage languages. Rather than feeling they had failed if their children don't reach a high level of competence some students began to see that they in fact they possess complex communicative repertoires well suited to the multilingual urban environments they live in; to judge these against hegemonic ideologies of bilingualism as standard language parallel monolingualisms can in fact be seen as a form of symbolic violence suffered by our students and their families.

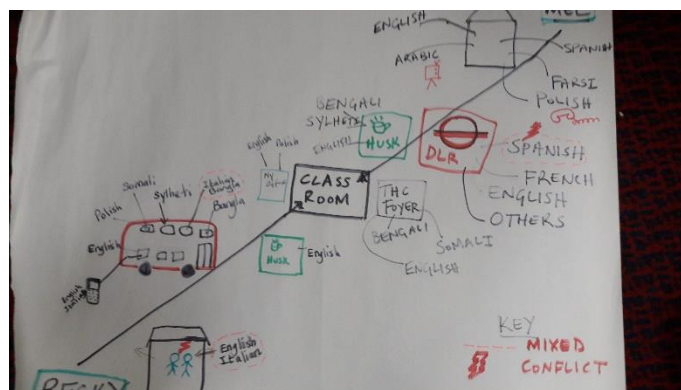
5.3 Languages in the community

In session 3 we moved on to explore students' day to day language use and practices outside of the home. In our experience as researchers and teacher trainers, in the ESOL classroom students' other language resources are not usually explored or discussed in depth. Although they are often asked where they use English outside the classroom, students are rarely asked to talk about other aspects of their repertoires, thus reinforcing the dominant view that English has more importance, status and prestige. Simpson and Bradley (2017:6) suggest that this view is misguided: 'in a superdiverse inner-city', they comment, 'multiple language use and fluid multilingualism... is the norm, rather than the exception, and English is used as just part of a heavily multilingual repertoire'. By omitting talk about other language practices, ESOL thus risks reinforcing a false image of monolingualism as a norm which does not reflect the realities of many parts of multilingual Britain. We wished to create the time and space for students to discuss how they deployed their language resources in their normal daily activities; this gave us an insight into how language diversity is experienced in their local communities and the ideologies and beliefs held by students with regards to multilingual practices. From a political point of view we felt this work was especially important in the current climate in which multilingualism is frequently perceived and talked about as a problem to be solved and in which speakers of other languages are vulnerable to acts of language discrimination.

5.3.1 Activities for exploring language diversity in the community

To explore language use in different domains in the local community, we used a mapping activity and a 'spectrum line'. The mapping activity tracked students' 'language journeys' from home – including activities prior to leaving the house – to arriving at their ESOL class. After discussing a model drawn by us (see below), students drew maps which indicated which languages they had spoken, heard, written or read at different points along their journeys. We also encouraged students to indicate when the boundaries of languages were more fluid and where language

mixing occurred and to identify any moments of difficulty or conflict which arose around language in the course of their journeys.



Example of a language map

The spectrum line activity consists of an imaginary line in the classroom with either end representing extremes of a spectrum of opinion or experience. We used this to explore further the sociolinguistic notion of domains, in particular the use of students' own languages and the levels of comfort they felt using those languages in particular places. The domains we explored included: home, college, the classroom, public transport, places of worship, the clinic/GP, the children's school, the shops, work. The answer to the question 'how comfortable do you feel speaking your own languages in these domains' was frequently 'it depends', i.e. on the language repertoires of those present in the domain. One woman from Bangladesh reported speaking mainly Bengali in the shop where she is employed because the clients are exclusively from that community. An Italian man working in a West End store mentioned that his management were happy for him to use Italian in order to serve tourists from Italy, unlike other jobs he had had in which the use of languages other than English had been frowned upon. Others spoke their languages in certain domains if they happened to have, say, a health practitioner with a shared language. Although there were tendencies towards particular languages to be dominant in certain places – Bengali and Sylheti in the shops and restaurants of Tower Hamlets for example – many of the domains the students moved between seemed to be rather superdiverse spaces where English is frequently used as a *lingua franca*; a student from Burundi, for example, described her church where she was able to speak her language, Kiwundi, on occasions but more often than not used English with speakers of other African languages.

5.3.2 Observation and reflections

The language maps and spectrum line produced quite a lot of metalinguistic talk about language practices and sociolinguistic concepts, i.e. students described what they did with language and how they felt about it. The tone of the discussions was often celebratory and as well as discussing the themes, students clearly enjoyed recounting anecdotes about their repertoires, language mixing and other phenomena in the home and beyond. Blackledge and Creese (2010:110) suggest that students often use such opportunities in class as a style resource for identity performance to peers, and indeed, some of our students enjoyed showing off their repertoires, frequently engaging in language play such as, for example, trying to get their classmates to pronounce difficult sounds and words. However, these instances of positive performance of multilingual identities were not the only feature of these activities; students also described more problematic experiences ranging from embarrassment to speaking English in certain circumstances to extremely negative experiences of linguistic discrimination. In order to

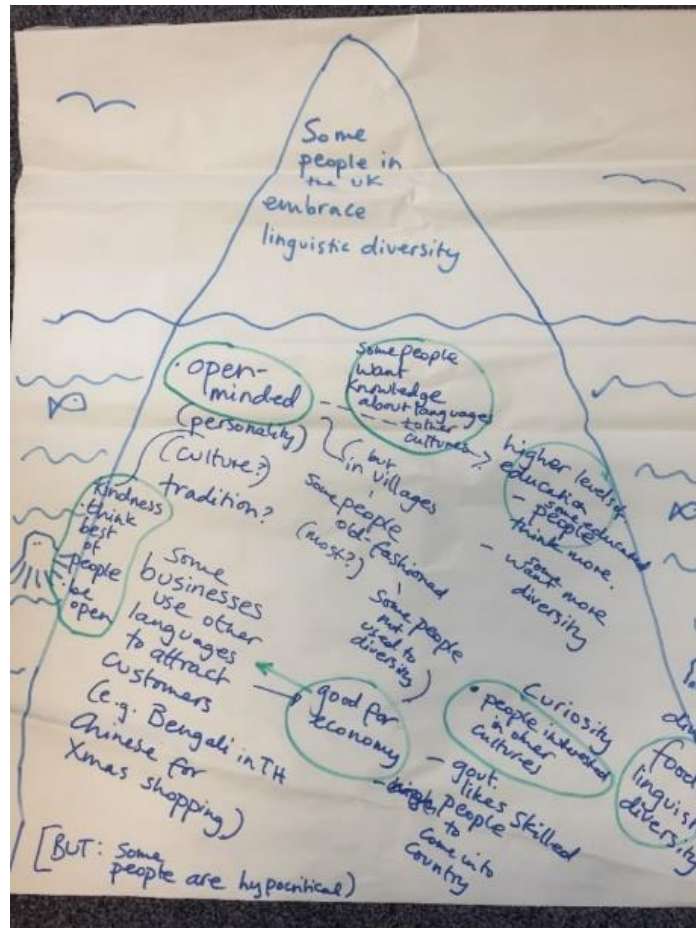
help students make sense of these contradictory experiences, then, in sessions 4 and 5 we turned to the theme of languages in public and political discourse.

5.4 Languages in public discourse

The discussions about language use in different domains which we discussed in the previous section revealed a slight divergence in the experiences of the two groups. At Tower Hamlets, although some admitted to feeling a bit embarrassed speaking English – particularly in front of people who they perceived as speaking better than them such as their children or compatriots who had been in the UK for a longer time – most initially said they generally felt comfortable speaking their first languages in most situations; as we show later (5.4.2), at Henry Cavendish there were rather more stories of hostility and language discrimination. When we delved a bit deeper, however, different experiences emerged at Tower Hamlets which suggested a more complex picture. For example, although many students agreed that as Londoners they felt part of the multicultural realities of London life and comfortable with their multilingual identities and practices, when travelling outside of London to smaller towns and areas where monolingual British people were in the majority, their experiences were less positive. Some said they felt uncomfortable and some had had experiences of hostility. One of the tensions we explored with this group, then, was the complex fact that within the UK two seemingly opposing attitudes are to be found: a positive one amongst members of the public who embrace multilingualism and a negative one held by those who are antagonistic towards it.

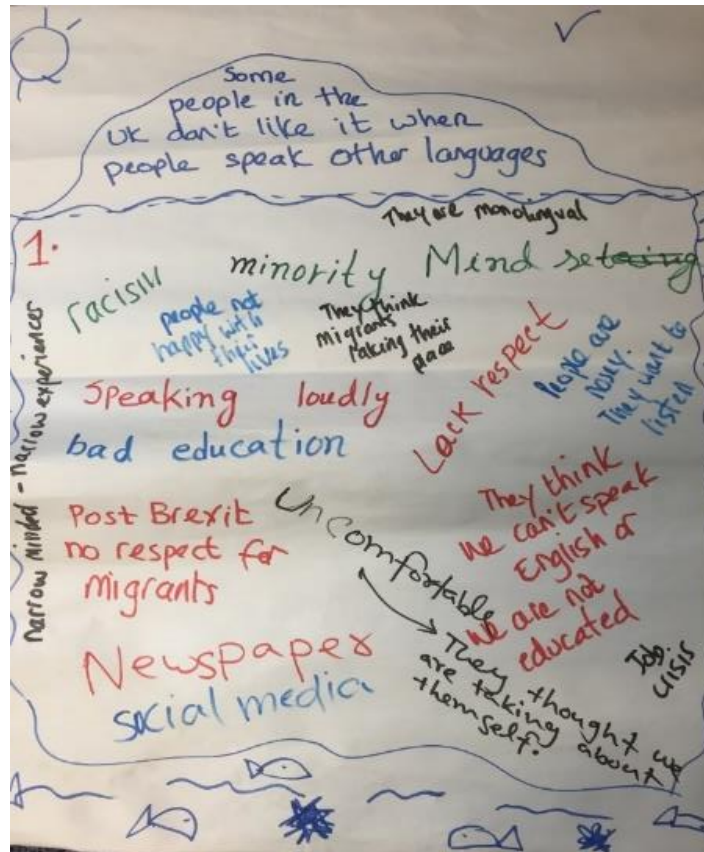
5.4.1 Activities for exploring different attitudes to language diversity

We explored these conflicting discourses by means of a video and an iceberg tool. The video (<https://tlangeseminar2017.wordpress.com/2017/01/05/first-blog-post/>) shows Birmingham locals interacting with newly-arrived linguistic minority customers and traders in a market, in a display of ‘multicultural conviviality’ (Gilroy 2004). This was then contrasted with stories from the print media about people suffering racism and language discrimination in the period after the EU referendum in 2016 (see Appendix A). The two opposing stances represented in these texts were then explored further using an iceberg tool, the tip of the iceberg representing the visible manifestations of the phenomenon and the hidden part the underlying reasons for it. Students worked in two groups to fill the icebergs with their ideas and experiences. The iceberg tool prevents superficial or easy explanations by forcing the group to unpick an obvious or common sense statement. Below are pictures of the two icebergs and a summary of the discussions they represent:



Iceberg 1: some people in the UK embrace linguistic diversity

In this discussion, viewpoints ranged from the idealistic (people in London are kind and open) to the cynical (people are hypocritical and just pretend to enjoy diversity). Students pointed out that that living in a multicultural city such as London provides affordances for getting used to and appreciating different languages, food, customs and so on, some commenting that this was one of the things they themselves enjoyed about living in the capital. They contrasted this with people living in more rural communities where people are ‘old-fashioned’ and unused to ethnic and linguistic diversity. In their attempts to account for differences in attitudes between those who embrace linguistic diversity and those who do not, some put it down to personality (some people are kind and think the best of others) and some suggested it was due to educational levels; this was challenged, however, by someone who pointed out that politicians are often vocally opposed to linguistic diversity despite being highly educated. Perhaps influenced by the video they had viewed on the Birmingham Bullring markets, the discussion also touched on the economic side of linguistic diversity: some students felt that the traders were amenable to linguistic minority customers because of the need to sell their produce, whilst others pointed out that some languages such as Chinese and Bengali had economic value in some areas of London and in some businesses.



Iceberg 2: some people in the UK don't like it when people speak other languages

When we first started the discussion about iceberg 2, 'some people do not like it when people speak languages other than English', students immediately wrote 'racism' in the blank space underneath the tip of the iceberg. Had it not been for the tool, the discussion would have finished there. Instead, the group were forced to think about other ideas. After about 5 minutes of silence the ideas started to flow and although the initial contribution of 'racism' remained the most important factor, the discussion helped us arrive at a broader understanding of the roots and causes of language discrimination. Students pointed out that linguistic discrimination had been a particular problem in the period just after the vote to leave the EU in June 2016 (see 5.4.2 for more on this) and that perhaps language was being used as a proxy for other prejudices. Again, as with iceberg 1, economics was raised as a factor: in times of austerity and unemployment people an anti-foreigner sentiment tended to rise and fears voiced that migrants will take scarce jobs from locals. Others mentioned attitudinal differences (people are narrow-minded), suspicion (people think we are talking about them) and behaviour – some maintained that the real problem was that speaking languages other than English in public is 'rude'. Finally, perhaps as a result of the readings they had discussed previously (see Appendix A) some blame was laid at the doors of the British media who were seen to adversely influence their readers against speakers of languages other than English.

5.4.2 Activities for exploring language discrimination

At Henry Cavendish the theme of language discrimination was salient from quite early on in the project. In one activity in session 3 students were discussing whether they agreed or disagreed with statements about language use in different domains. In response to the statement: 'children should speak their parents' language at home and English outside', most students broadly agreed.

The teacher then probed with the question ‘so don’t you speak your language with your kids outside?’ To this came the indignant comment: ‘some people don’t like when you speak Polish outside. My friend in the supermarket was told to speak English when she was talking to her daughter’. There was a buzz of interest in this and we decided it warranted further exploration. To do this we used two participatory methods: forum theatre, based on the work of Augusto Boal and ‘problem-posing from a code’, a technique derived from the work of Paulo Freire (1970, see also Auerbach 1992, Auerbach and Wallerstein 2005). A code is the encapsulation of a problem which is currently affecting the whole group and can be in the form of a picture, a photo, an audio recording, a dramatization or something else. In this case we used a drawing as shown below:



‘The supermarket racist’: a Freirean code

Problem-posing involves a five-stage exploration of a problem that is relevant to the whole group. These are:

1. Describe the content – what do you see?
2. Define the problem – what exactly is the problem here?
3. Personalise the problem – has anyone experienced this?
4. Analyse the problem – what are the causes and consequences of the problem?
5. Solutions – what can we do about this?

The sheer extent of the problem which emerged during the personalisation stage of this activity was surprising, even to us as experienced teacher/researchers. Practically everyone in the group had a story to tell and one or two people said they experienced some level of discrimination related to their use of language ‘every day’. When the teacher asked ‘why is the man in the supermarket saying this?’ the students had two explanations: one was that he was old and averse to the changes he saw in his neighbourhood, and the other – not of course antithetical – was that this was an act of racism.

In terms of solutions and taking action (stage 5 in the problem posing process) we wanted our students to be better equipped to deal with incidents of racism and language discrimination and to this end we used forum theatre, a method which originates from the work of Augusto Boal, a theatre director and activist who developed an approach called *Theatre of the Oppressed* in the 1960s, ‘70s and ‘80s (Boal 2002)⁵. The method is based on the development of a short play or

⁵ See Winstanley (2016) for a detailed account of using Forum Theatre in ESOL contexts.

scene that encapsulates some form of oppression – usually based in economic or social injustice – experienced by the members of the group. The audience, i.e. the members of the group, watch the play and are subsequently brought into the performance. The play is repeated and someone from the audience steps in to play the part of the protagonist, trying out new ways to react to the problem or at least to disrupt the oppression. The solutions to the problem should be ways of addressing the problem in the short term, not just those which require big legislative or structural change. This might involve saying something different, adopting a different attitude or tone, making use of other people present in the scene, or even withdrawing from the situation altogether. The exploration of different outcomes allows the group to consider different ways of reacting to situations of oppression. The process of different people performing the protagonist role allows the individual's experience to become 'pluralised' as Boal puts it. According to Boal the process of repeating a performance gives us the chance to challenge our reactions to day to day events which over time have come to seem, 'obvious' and 'normal', or, as Boal points out, 'mechanical'. Mechanical reactions, according to Boal, block personal and political transformation. Forum theatre allows us to be involved in a process of 'de-mechanisation', i.e. 'the retuning (or detuning) of the actor [who] must relearn to perceive emotions and sensations he has lost the habit of recognising (Boal 2002: 30).

At Henry Cavendish, students worked together in four groups, first to share their experiences and then choosing one of their stories to dramatise. These were about 1) an Algerian Muslim woman getting into an altercation on a bus with an aggressive, racist man who (perhaps inadvertently) endangered her child; 2) an Indonesian woman being asked to stop speaking her language to her mother on her mobile phone; 3) tourists being asked to stop using French on a bus and 4) an argument with a neighbour who discriminated against a Polish child playing in the garden next door. They then created the play, chose actors for each part, rehearsed and acted them out in front of the group. The last play (no. 4) was performed several times with different students taking the part of the main protagonist (the child's mum) and experimenting with alternative ways of dealing with the situation. There was then a discussion about the pros and cons of the different solutions and a chance to reflect on what might have been done differently. The plays were both entertaining and disturbing and facilitated a sense of solidarity between students. For example, the Algerian woman in the first play reported that at the time of the incident she did not feel she had handled the situation well; after the play, however, she received a wave of empathy and affirmation from her classmates who reassured her: 'you reacted like a Mum'.

5.4.3 Observations and reflections

The sessions on language practices in the community were closely related to one of the main political tensions of current times. Racism has long been a discussion topic in our ESOL classrooms but this was the first time we had specifically addressed the question of language discrimination (or 'linguicism' as it has been labelled by some sociolinguists, see e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas 2015: 1). It was important that the activities we chose for this – the iceberg, problem-posing with a code and forum theatre – provided us with enough time to share difficult experiences – including about our own tendencies to discriminate – to analyse the causes of these experiences and to try out new ideas in a safe but challenging space. Arguably, these sessions also put us and our students in a stronger position to be able to react to and resist instances of discrimination. According to the feedback students gave us later, many of them felt liberated by being able to share painful stories; the plays in particular proved to be highly popular and memorable and were still being discussed weeks later. As teachers, we were able to gain insights into the daily lives of some of our students and to understand how fraught it can be for speakers of other languages in spaces such as public transport, even in a superdiverse London

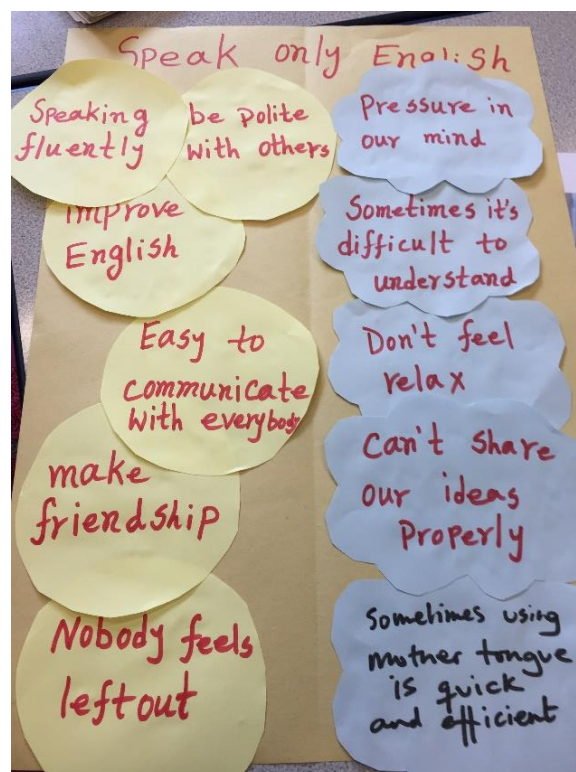
neighbourhood which to all intents and purposes should be a place of ‘multicultural conviviality’ *par excellence*.

5.5 Issues in ESOL: the classroom and ESOL funding

The final theme we wish to discuss in this report is that of ESOL itself. In the final two sessions we organised a series of activities which focused on students’ experiences of learning English in London: what has helped them, what has hindered them, the accessibility of ESOL classes and cuts to ESOL funding (see 5.6). In the course of these discussions a debate arose about using students’ own languages in class. This provoked quite a few contrasting opinions and one of the liveliest discussions of the entire project, although again there was some divergence in the two groups, with the students at Henry Cavendish being more in favour of using their other languages in class than those at Tower Hamlets where some students expressed strong feelings and opinions against. This came as a surprise to us, having spent the previous six weeks exploring sociolinguistic themes and encouraging students to use their languages in classroom activities. Although students claimed the right to speak their first languages in public spaces in their daily lives, and were very indignant about language discrimination, these opinions did not seem to extend to the ESOL classroom; although all of them admitted to using their languages during activities and classroom tasks, some of them were of the opinion that this was a kind of weakness and should be stopped by the teacher.

5.5.1 Activities for exploring ‘English Only’ in the classroom

Given the strength of feeling expressed by some students about this, we invited students to take part in a ‘pros and cons’ activity in which they explored their feelings and opinions further. An example of the activity is seen below; the suns represent the ‘pros’ and the rainclouds represent the ‘cons’ of using only English in class.



Pros and cons: speaking other languages in ESOL class

5.5.2 Observations and reflections

Although this activity produced very heated discussions, as the example in the photo suggests, when students were asked to think more deeply about the pros and cons of ‘English Only’ they came face to face with the contradictions in some of their arguments and their responses became more nuanced. Some maintained that it was better for their fluency and necessary if they were to improve and that asking for translations all the time was ‘lazy’. Perhaps the most common belief was a fear expressed by some students that if they spoke a lot of their own language in class it would limit still further the restricted time they had in their daily lives to speak English. Many of the reasons put forward in support of ‘English Only’, however, were actually about good manners and relationships: nobody should be left out, it’s easier to communicate with everyone and it’s more polite.

It became clear that many of the students’ beliefs had been formed and reinforced in other language classes they had attended; in some there had been a strict ‘English Only’ policy, even where the teacher had spoken the language of the majority of the students. Although in practice some teachers question the ideologies underpinning monolingual approaches to ESOL (see e.g. Winstanley 2015) the opinions of ESOL teachers in the UK have generally been formed by many decades of an orthodoxy in ELT pedagogies in which there is no place for students’ languages and which have frequently insisted that English should be the sole language of communication in class (see Hall and Cook 2013 for further discussion). Although some students strongly agreed with this, others felt that not being able to speak their own language – especially at beginner levels – was oppressive and for many it had been such a negative experience that they had left their class. These students felt that a more open approach to other languages was more helpful and had boosted their confidence and made learning easier: as one student said at Henry Cavendish ‘in this class we feel free so we can open our mind and learn because we are not scared and stressed’. Others pointed out that their participatory ESOL classes are not concerned solely with a focus on linguistic form; students are expected to think about and discuss a wide range of topics, some of which they do not feel able to fully engage with using only English; as we pointed out in 4.7, for them being able to discuss complex ideas in their own languages first had made all the difference between participation and silence. In the end, then, most students were able to see both sides of the argument and even some of those who were adamant about ‘English Only’ seemed to change their minds slightly after their exploration of the debate. One student who had been very vocally in favour of ‘English Only’ said several weeks later: ‘I have two ideas now... sometimes I think only English is important in the class... sometimes I think no! In my head is conflict. English is important and our own language is important too’

5.6 Students taking action on ESOL funding

We end our discussion of *Our Languages* with a description of some action that the students at Henry Cavendish were able to take around the issue of ESOL funding at a national level. Frequently, when there is tension around questions of integration, social cohesion and the dangers of religious extremism, attention is cast in the direction of ESOL as a solution to these problems⁶. Our project coincided with an instance of this and provided us with an opportunity to take action on some of the questions we had been discussing during our course. The chair of a committee, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration (APPG 2017) which was collecting evidence to feed into their final report happened to be Chuka Umunna, the local

⁶ Since 2001 linking lack of English with social problems such as these has become common in political discourse (see e.g. Simpson 2015).

Labour MP for the students at Henry Cavendish School. The interim report had focussed on the importance of learning English as a guard against segregated communities. The emphasis however, was not on the right to learn English, but on the *obligation* to learn, the implication being that sizeable numbers of immigrants are not making the effort. The report produced a headline in the Daily Mail which read: ‘All migrants should learn English before moving to UK: Verdict of Labour MP...it's time to ditch failed multiculturalism’. There was no mention in the report, however, and neither of course in the Daily Mail, of the cuts to ESOL that have created a fall in provision by around 60% since 2007. Many students in the group felt that this was unfair and that the headline fed into negative stereotypes about speakers of other languages. Given the experiences of so many of our students of language discrimination and long waiting lists for ESOL it seemed important to challenge this. To this end we sent one of our graphics, a language learning river which showed the things which had helped and hindered students’ learning of English, to Umunna, along with written testimonies from our students and an invitation for him to visit our class in Streatham to learn about ESOL.



The language learning river

We were formally thanked for our contribution and in a subsequent meeting with Umunna he admitted that perhaps something was wrong with the initial emphasis of the APPG report if it was received in that way by the Daily Mail. The final report, *Integration not Demonisation*, published in August 2017, was more careful to avoid the negative emphasis. The top line of the report stated: ‘anti-immigrant rhetoric and xenophobia are making it harder for immigrants to become full members of British society’.

In terms of English language learning, the APPG renewed its call for compulsory English classes but added that ‘fluency in English should be viewed as the right of every citizen’. Given the

extent to which demand for ESOL classes outstrips supply, we are not convinced they need to be compulsory, but we welcome the language of 'rights' as a step in the right direction. For us, it was a fitting end to *Our Languages* to be able to take action on an issue the students had become so knowledgeable and opinionated about.

6. Conclusions

This report has provided a picture of the main sociolinguistic themes we covered in the *Our Languages* project as well as some of the activities we designed to explore them further. By way of reminder, the three aims of the project were:

1. To explore the question: how far do the experiences of other migrant groups resonate with the Sri Lankan Tamil experience revealed in the DALs data?
2. To explore the possibility of strengthening the relationship between sociolinguistic themes and teaching; to investigate whether and how reflexive explorations of these themes can enhance ESOL pedagogy.
3. To improve students' and teachers' understanding of our own situations, both sociolinguistically and more generally.
4. To explore ways of establishing a pedagogical approach that is more in tune with students' linguistic realities and those of their local communities.

In our conclusion we address how far we think these aims were achieved. We have divided our comments into three sections: 1) the students' experiences of the project, for which we have drawn on our own observations and what students told us during evaluation, 2) our experience of the project and 3) some possible broader implications.

6.1 Students' experiences of the Our Languages project

The main observation we would make about our first aim is that the over-arching topic proved to be extremely highly generative, so much so that at the end of the course, the group at Henry Cavendish said they wanted a further eight weeks to continue the discussion. This is rare: in our experience of other participatory ESOL projects, a topic generally holds the interest of a group from three-six sessions, already a departure from the standard model of moving on every one-two sessions. The interest, enthusiasm and passion with which the language related themes were taken up indicated to us that the experiences of the Sri Lankan Tamils, whilst not identical, certainly resonated with the majority of students in our classes. Students told us they continued thinking about the discussions long after class and several said they had had discussions with family and friends about the issues raised.

With regards to aims 2 and 3, the first observation we would make is that the course provided an unusual opportunity to draw on students' immediate everyday experience and at the same time to offer them the terminology and knowledge they needed to analyse this experience and enhance their understanding of it. The project was, in our opinion, extremely beneficial for language learning and development. Students progressed in several areas of language: firstly they started to develop an academic register in their discussions about sociolinguistics. They were keen to learn the 'correct' terms for phenomena they regularly discussed in their communities and began to use these from an early stage in the project. One of the Bangladeshi students told us – jokingly but proudly – that her family had commented that she was coming home from class 'sounding like a dictionary'. Being involved in a research informed project meant that the students learned research related terms such as 'theme', 'data' and 'participant' as well as expressions which

enabled them to take part in discussions related to the DALs recordings such as the phrase ‘I can relate to that’. The second area of development was pragmatic competence; being engaged in lots of discussions meant students needed to use turn-taking devices, interrupt successfully and practice agreeing and disagreeing sensitively. Talking about difficult issues such as racism and discrimination required that students employ linguistic face saving devices – such as the softener ‘I don’t want to be rude but...’ when putting forward an unpopular viewpoint or asking an intrusive question. Thirdly, we observed that many students developed what might be called ‘multilingual narrative competence’. In a similar way to the DALs interviews, the students were encouraged to draw on their own experiences. This produced numerous stories, some which were told several times over; one particularly striking example of this occurred in the session at Henry Cavendish during the forum theatre experience (see 5.4.2). The Algerian woman whose story about her experience on the bus provided the material for one of the plays can be heard in our recordings telling her story first in Arabic to her companions, then in French to one of the teacher researchers. The play was then performed in English and the story was summarised again, in English, to those in the class who had not fully understood the play. The nature of many of the activities we employed in the project created similar opportunities for repetition, retellings and re-castings which are believed to be essential for language learning and acquisition. Finally, the course provided the opportunity for students to carry out a small piece of research themselves – in the form of an interview with a speaker of a language other than English – and to develop their literacy in the form of a research report and an essay about their linguistic repertoires.

6.2 Our experiences of the Our Languages project

From our point of view as teachers we would make several points about our experiences on *Our Languages*. Firstly, we found what the students had to say about the sociolinguistic themes which emerged in the project genuinely fascinating. This created for us a level of engagement and an authentic desire to listen to students and share on a personal level with them which we rarely experience when teaching more traditional ESOL topics. The second observation concerns the fit between participatory approaches to ESOL and our attempts to inform our teaching with sociolinguistic knowledge. We are convinced that the methods, techniques and activities we drew on helped to create a safe but challenging space necessary for students to grapple with new concepts and ideas and share their experiences, some of which were difficult and personal.

Participatory approaches and tools lend themselves particularly well to explorations of the ideologies underlying common sense beliefs and discourses. In this project, each topic was saturated with contested language ideologies, i.e. ‘beliefs about the inherent superiority of some forms of language over others and therefore the presumed superiority of the speakers associated with the dominant linguistic varieties’ (Riley 2012: 496). Exploring language ideologies can give an insight into how beliefs and attitudes around language in majority groups can be used to discriminate against minority individuals and groups and how language is used by powerful elites to maintain dominance; this was certainly the case in the discussions we had about language discrimination and racism in sessions 5 and 6. However, our exploration of language ideologies went beyond these politically charged topics to challenge certain common sense assumptions about e.g. the language varieties acquired by students’ children, ‘English Only’ in the classroom and the status of students’ own languages in relation to the Standard in their home countries, i.e. Bangladesh, Morocco, Italy and so on. Activities such as the tree, the iceberg and problem posing offered students – and ourselves – the opportunity to see the underlying contradictions in some of these debates and in some cases to modify long-held or unquestioned opinions.

The fourth aim of the project was to explore ways of establishing a pedagogical approach that is more in tune with students' linguistic realities and those of their local communities. From the outset we were of the opinion that fostering a positive multilingual environment was good for the community building which is important for participatory pedagogy and we noticed soon into the project that students were using the classroom as a creative 'translanguaging space' (Li Wei 2011), i.e. they were automatically playing with their other languages as well as deploying broad communicative repertoires, far more than we had observed students do in the past. Valuing students' other languages and drawing on their existing resources seemed to enhance their confidence and self-esteem and, as we discussed in 4.4, many students commented that feeling free to use their own languages facilitated their learning of English; this is difficult to evidence in an eight week project but has been clearly documented elsewhere (see e.g. Auerbach 1993). Of course, the debate on English Only in class (5.5) shows the strength of some ideologies; despite all our best efforts we were unable to convince some students to change their minds about the use of other languages in class (although on the plus side this gave the lie to some of the criticisms participatory pedagogy receives as being a bit 'brainwashing' or serving the political agendas of teachers!). The lesson we took from this was that there is a certain amount of preparatory work to be done with students around monolingual ideologies and language learning before the implementation of a multilingual syllabus may be possible. However, we remain convinced that politically, promoting the ESOL classroom as a multilingual space remains essential: at a time when debates about immigration and cultural difference are ever more toxic, we believe that a positive attitude towards multilingualism goes some way to offset the aggressive monolingualism sometimes found outside the classroom and offers our students a space where their multilingual realities are celebrated, not held up as a problem to be solved.

Finally, the project presented some challenges for us and raised questions about our pedagogy in future work:

- Although we adopted a 'translanguaging stance', for various reasons to do with our training and lack of confidence in our own competence, two of us found it quite hard to use the languages we shared with students during classroom activities. As teachers, therefore, we were forced to confront some of our own ingrained practices and to challenge our own beliefs and practices as well as the students'.
- At times we struggled with the logistics of multilingual activities, especially in Tower Hamlets where there was a linguistic majority group in the class. For them, using their own languages in class was straightforward; for others, however, who did not share a language with anyone else, some of the activities left them feeling slightly isolated and marginalised. This problem, one of the commonly cited reasons for avoiding use of other languages in class, needs to be addressed when considering multilingual activities.
- Due to the nature of the topic, at times our own knowledge of sociolinguistics was stretched and we were being looked upon by the students as experts. This created questions for us about how far we need to be prepared to intervene with 'facts' from research, e.g. about use of other languages in class, and how we can square this with participatory pedagogy which eschews the notion of the teachers as 'experts'.
- At times we were aware of the temptation to privilege some experiences over others. We need to consider how we can capture the complexity of the range of students' experiences and to ensure we don't overplay particular experiences (e.g. language discrimination) and downplay others (i.e. positive experiences of multicultural conviviality)
- On occasions, students expressed racist or prejudiced ideas. In each case we challenged their comments, sometimes feeling somewhat inadequate in the process. We need to think about more effective ways of doing this.
- Students told us that when discussing their experiences of racism and discrimination they found it better to talk about what action they could take rather than just talk about the

experience of the discriminatory act. We need to consider further what we as teachers might do to help them do this.

6.4 Beyond the project

Finally we would like to consider two issues which have implications beyond the 8 weeks of *Our Languages*. The first concerns issues of social justice around how the multilingual competences of migrant adults and their children are viewed. Firstly we noted the frustration and guilt which emerged for the students around their children's lack of competence in their heritage languages and which seemed to be exacerbated by the symbolic violence caused by the dominance of conventional ideas about bi/multilingualism and the actual ways families communicate. Nowadays, the benefits of bilingualism in education are well documented and parents are encouraged to help their children maintain their heritage languages. However, the type of bilingualism promoted in schools is often that of 'parallel monolingualisms' (Heller 1999:5); children are expected to achieve a high level of competence in both English and their parents' language and there is far less knowledge relating to the benefits of a large communicative repertoire which enables people to, as Canagarajah (2007: 238) puts it, 'shuttle between communities'. Incorporating these ideas into ESOL classes can begin to raise awareness amongst students about differing degrees of competence in heritage language learning and about the benefits of the ability to draw on different aspects of a large communicative repertoire in different situations. Students will thus be encouraged to be more positive about their children's – and importantly, their own – language abilities and about their cultural and linguistic differences, and we will be able to be more culturally relevant as teachers. Finally, the points we are making here suggest there is a strong case to be made for researchers working in the field of multilingualism and translanguaging to attempt to get their work more broadly disseminated amongst the public and educational policy makers.

The second issue concerns the position of ESOL in political and public discourse and language policy. We believe that the campaign around the EU referendum in June 2016 uncovered – or generated – an intensification in anti-migrant narratives, many of which relate specifically to language and speakers of languages other than English. In this climate, it is imperative that we use our knowledge and experience to produce counter narratives and disseminate these as widely as possible. We see this study as forming part of the creation of such counter narratives. We also feel it is important that ESOL does not inadvertently reinforce negative attitudes to multilingualism. Instead ESOL practitioners who are committed to social justice need to be at the forefront of the challenge against such attitudes, many of which rest on erroneous and outmoded information about how language works in our society. With this report we hope to encourage teachers and students to bring these issues into the classroom and to equip them with ideas and information to oppose language discrimination.

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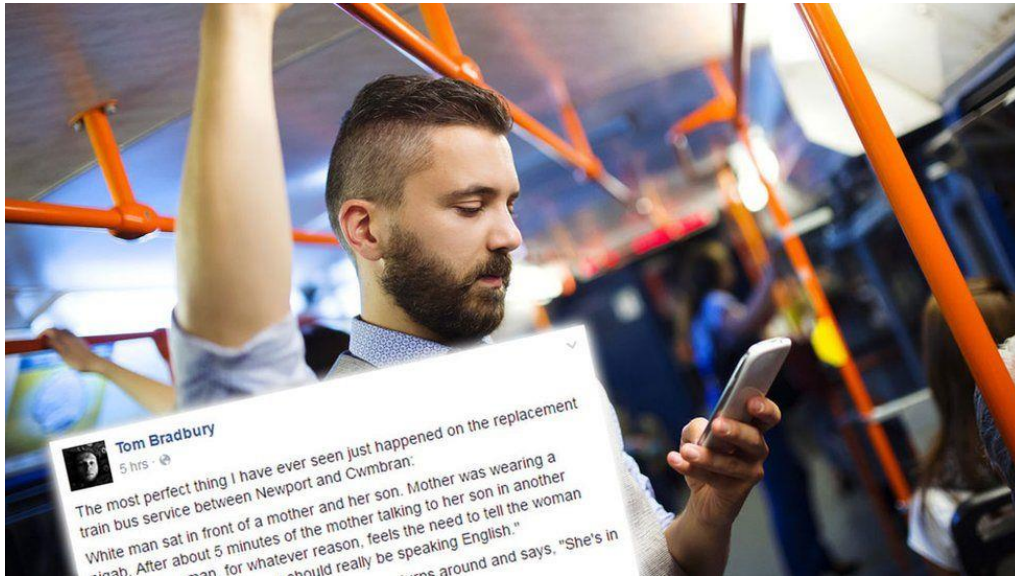
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Appendix A

Text 1

Welsh woman on bus shuts up racist who told Muslim passenger to 'speak English'

21 Jun 2016



A Muslim woman was apparently told she "should really be speaking English" by a stranger on a bus, when she was actually speaking Welsh.

Fellow passenger Tom Bradbury says he saw the moment as he got a bus from Cardiff to Newport. He told *BBC Newsbeat* that the racist made his comments as the woman chatted to her son. But his putdown backfired when a Welsh woman said the Muslim woman was speaking Welsh.

"After about five minutes of the mother talking to her son in another language, the man, for whatever reason, feels the need to tell the woman, 'When you're in the UK you should really be speaking English.'" wrote Tom in his Facebook post. "At which point an old woman in front of him turns around and says, 'She's in Wales. And she's speaking Welsh.'"

Tom, 26, told *Newsbeat* that he isn't a Welsh speaker himself, but "the woman seemed to be joking with her son and making him laugh. Then the guy in front interrupted. He came across quite rude. I was surprised to hear someone come out and say something like that so directly. The older Welsh woman's response was almost immediate, though. It made the few of us in the surrounding seats laugh and the guy seemed to shrivel up a little bit and mumble something to himself and then he stayed quiet."

Tom, who runs an events company that puts on live music shows, says he wasn't paying much attention to the other passengers on the bus until he heard the man's comment. "I've heard there are lots of similar stories from various places and that doesn't surprise me at all. I'm sure similar things have happened all over the world where ignorant people get called out," he added.

His post has now been shared nearly 20,000 times on Facebook.

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Text 2

“I’ve stopped speaking in Spanish on the streets after I was shouted at on a bus after Brexit”

07.07.2016 - London, United Kingdom - eldiario.es

This post is also available in: Spanish



(Image by Cristina Garcia, in eldiario.es)

Cristina has stopped calling her mother when she leaves work. She would have to speak in Spanish on public transport and after the 23rd of June she prefers to avoid it. The same day on which 52% of voters in the United Kingdom decided to leave the European Union she suffered a xenophobic incident on the bus she takes home every day.

“I sat in the seat next to the driver, as always. My mum called and we chatted about how our day had been.” She was distracted when the bus braked sharply and made her jump and she thought there had been an accident. But no. “The driver stopped the bus and got out of his seat to shout at me that if I wanted to continue speaking in my ‘shitty language’ I should go upstairs.”

No one said anything. “There were about 12 people who said nothing. I felt impotent and outraged.” Cristina puts it down to the referendum result, “without doubt”. There has been a climate of tension since then, and this had never happened to me before in the two years I’ve been living here in London,” she said.

The British Police reported a 57% increase in racist incidents in the first four days after the Brexit result was announced. Many victims have turned to Twitter and Facebook and lots of messages condemning racist incidents have been retweeted and shared. There are also on-line campaigns to raise awareness. One campaign was started thanks to the anger of Karissa Singh, a young woman who couldn’t believe what was happening and felt she had to do something. Karissa set up a Twitter account, ‘PostRefRacism’ that now has

9,000 followers and a large number of tweets denouncing all kinds of racist incidents that have occurred since the Brexit result. “I decided to set up a space to document these aggressions, to combat their normalisation, and encourage people to call out such incidents,” she explained.

Cristina didn't hesitate to go to her local police station the next morning after the incident on the bus. “That afternoon the police came to my house to take my statement. The officers were charming and understanding. I'm happy I reported it. It's a behaviour that I will never allow, not here, nor in any other part of the world. Not against me, or anyone else,” the Spaniard assured.