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'Second generation' refugees and multilingualism: Identity, race and language transmission

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Abstract

This paper explores the language practices, attitudes to languages and the intergenerational transmission of heritage languages amongst the UK born adult children of refugee parents. The paper draws on empirical data from a research project based on 45 qualitative interviews with three groups of 'second generation' refugees, whose parents came as Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka, Kurdish refugees from Turkey and as refugees from Vietnam. The paper explores the ways in which language is central to political discussions and to national policies on race, cohesion, diversity, 'Britishness' and citizenship. These debates and policies ignore and often silence the positive role of heritage languages. This paper highlights the importance of heritage languages as a signifier for a number of wider issues of identity, which intersect with race and refugee backgrounds in complex ways.

Key words Language, second generation, refugees, identity, race, policy

Introduction

The focus of this paper is on the language practices, attitudes to language and the intergenerational transmission of languages amongst the UK born adult children of refugee parents. Language among the second generation can be on a continuum and will range from English mono-lingualism to fluent bi-lingualism in English and the parental language, with 'limited bilinguals' who lack fluency in the parental language in-between (Portes and Hao, 2002: 892). Language is significant because of its impact on family relations and cross-generational communication and understanding. It also links to identity, race and discrimination (Zhou and Xiong, 2005). Language has political meaning and is central to ideas and policy on social cohesion, national identity and citizenship (Byrne, 2014).

This paper draws on 45 qualitative interviews with three groups of 'second generation' refugees who grew up in London, whose parents came as Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka, Kurdish refugees from Turkey and Vietnamese refugees. While the term generation has multiple meanings we use the concept to indicate kinship descent in the form of a parent/child connection where the child is UK born and the parent or parents are from a refugee background. These generational differences are salient because they can link to the transmission of loss through exile, of identity between generations and they can influence ideas of home, of return and relationship to the country of residence (Loizos, 2007). Therefore the experience of the refugee generation - which is partly distinct from other migrants due to their pre-migration experiences that may include trauma and loss and their differing initial motives for migration - becomes part of the formative experience of the second generation (Jodeya, 2003; Hoffman, 2004).

While there is a plethora of research on second generation from migrant backgrounds (see for example Kasinitz, Mollenkopf and Waters, 2009; Crul, Schneider and Lelie, 2012) there is little known about those from refugee backgrounds, in general, and more specifically on heritage languages among refugees. The contention is that inter-generational language transmission among refugee groups will be affected by pre-migration experiences and the

reasons for exile, by cultural practices and by the socio-political context of both migration and settlement in the destination country (Lao and Lee, 2009). Moreover heritage language transmission will also depend on the English language fluency of the parent generation, on household composition and on social and community networks. Language is therefore complex and requires an understanding of structural factors alongside the micro aspects of families, identity and biographies.

Although heritage languages are generally acquired within the private domain of the family and households, language is not neutral and its interaction with the nation state creates multi-level tensions and complexities that are played out publically. As Harris and Rampton (2003) argue, the study of language is not simply a linguistic exercise, but is an 'ideological enterprise' in which language is used as a signifier for deeper anxieties surrounding race and ethnicity. This nexus is central to colonial historical reproductions of difference through a conception of 'linguistic races' and so language has continued to prove a tenacious signifier in the performance of the cultural work of racial 'Othering' (Ashcroft, 2003). The practices of multilingualism necessarily intersect with institutional power differences; the nation state plays a role in the organisation of language socialisation which marginalises certain minority languages while further entrenching the dominant languages (Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991). In this research the spaces and contexts where interviewees spoke their heritage language or languages were usually domestic or non-public – in other words it was confined to the home, or sometimes refugee community centres and school playgrounds. Rarely were these languages spoken in public spaces, including classrooms, which were regarded as 'English only' sites.

Despite these power relations, the boundaries of language use within our study were also versatile and contextual reflecting what Hewitt (2003) described as the 'fluid chaos' of urban ethnicities, where apparently coherent cultural scenes are also superimposed, one upon another, and no single holistic shape is discernible. Hewitt (2003) suggests a polyculture which is a collection of cultural entities that are not discrete and complete in themselves, are not 'intrinsically equal' but are active together and hence bound up with change. This is in contrast to what Gilroy (1987) refers to as 'ethnic absolutism' within state discourse, where language is constructed as a 'fixed' signifier of difference. This signifier of difference transcends the urban fluidity of everyday language use because it is also entrenched within the policy agendas of the nation state. The contradictory aspects of language will be explored in our analysis in relation to both state policies, which focus on language, and the individual experiences of multilingualism. Through our analysis, we interrogate the assumptions of reified standard languages that are fixed and bounded and of an idealised 'native speaker' (Rampton, 2002). Instead, it will be argued that the participants in this research demonstrate an interactional negotiation of languages, involving human agents reproducing, contesting and reworking the boundaries of ethnic descent (Harris and Rampton, 2002; Valentine, Sporton and Nielsen, 2008; Blackledge and Creese, 2010).

The paper is in three main parts. In the first part we provide context by exploring the political discourses and policy frameworks that surround language. In the second part the methods and sample are explained. The third part of the paper presents a thematic analysis of the empirical data focussing on: language diversity, transmission, the interaction of languages, attitudes to heritage languages, feelings about languages, the sites of language exclusion and the role of the nation state in shaping language practices. The paper shows the centrality of heritage languages to identity. For some language is also intertwined with refugee backgrounds clearly demonstrating the importance of their parent's histories in shaping identities.

Top down approaches towards language

English proficiency was measured nationally for the first time in the 2011 Census, which is an indication of its significance for government. The Census found that 92.3% of the population, aged three and over, reported that English (or Welsh in Wales) was their main language. Around 1 in 13 people (7.7 per cent, 4.2 million people) in England and Wales had a main language other than English or Welsh of which only 3 per cent spoke no English. Nationally this means that only 0.3 per cent of the population speak no English at all. There are regional variations and not surprisingly London has the highest proportion nationally (22.1 per cent) of people whose main language is not English (ONS, 2011). In spite of these relatively small numbers, within British politics, reified constructions of the English language intersect with the reconfiguration of the race relations landscape focusing on 'cultural differences' (Hill Collins and Solomos, 2010). Within this discourse, a renewed and highly politicised debate has pressed forward on immigration, integration and the requirements of citizenship, with new regulations reformulated and framed around the ambiguous notion of 'British values' (Byrne, 2014). To become and to be British requires English language competence, which has imposed a new form of 'linguistic gate-keeping' (Hogan-Brun et al, 2009: 11). These measurements are not simply about language acquisition for new migrant arrivals, but instead intersect with broader themes of nation building and control and have become a focus point for moral panics reflecting racialized fears (Blackledge, 2005).

Indeed, the focus on language connects to the British state's new 'integrationism' with a clear set of normative values; this term focuses attention on the presupposed 'whole' from which groups are segregating and towards which they should be integrating, although the 'whole' is never accurately defined (Kalra and Kapoor, 2009). English language is one focus allowing this whole to be more concretely imagined, while further constructing a visualisation of a racialised 'Other' associated with images of extremism, disorder and the language of the unknown. In this context, politicians in the last decade have increasingly focused on language in wide ranging discussions that intertwine the imagined immigrant and racialised minorities. Tony Blair's speech as Prime Minister in 2006 – post the 7/7 bombings in London - is an example of the way in which language was articulated as central to 'integration'. According to Blair, '...we should share a common language....It is a matter both of cohesion and of justice that we should set the use of English as a condition of citizenship.' The image of the 'outsider' was constructed in association with a foreign language, Blair arguing that 'British preachers' should come out of the English speaking community rather than come in from abroad. 'Where they are recruited internationally, we will require entrants to have a proper command of English and meet the pre-entry qualifications requirements' (Blair, 2006). This speech contributed to a wider political discourse where language was used as a symbolic battleground for meanings of race, the nation state and control.

Similarly, in response to a Census report that revealed 30 per cent of Asian families did not use English as their main language at home, the then Home Secretary David Blunkett led an attack on certain cultural norms. In an essay on 'Britishness', Blunkett wrote 'Speaking English enables parents to converse with their children in English at home and participate in wider modern culture and it helps overcome the schizophrenia which bedevils generational relationships' (cited in Alexander, 2004: 539). The focus on family languages spoken in the home is thus counter-posed to an imaginary monolingual English ideal; not speaking English within the home is constructed as a disruption to British culture and stability but also to inter-generational relationships. Outside the home these attacks on multilingualism also emerge in recent legislation. For example, Part 7 of the Immigration Act 2016 requires English language fluency among all those who work for a public authority in a 'customer-facing role'. This top down focus contrasts with the reality of English language proficiency as an

inevitable progression through generations in recent British history. The second and subsequent migrant generations have historically and contemporarily learned English rapidly, through school attendance; what is at risk is not English, but the preservation of heritage languages.

Methods and sample

This paper draws on the UK data from a cross-national study of London, Paris and Geneva funded by the Swiss Network for International Studies. The fieldwork was carried out in 2014 and 2015 and involved in-depth interviews with 45 UK born adult children of refugee parents who spent all or most of their childhoods in London. Interviewees were contacted by snowballing from multiple starting points that included: community organisations, local politicians, community activists, student societies and the research team's personal contacts. In the final sample, 14 were from Kurdish, 15 from Vietnamese and 16 from Tamil backgrounds; 21 were male and 24 were female; 10 were aged 18-20, 15 aged 21-25 and 20 were aged 26 to 36. The interviews focused on growing up in London, experiences of education and employment, social and community networks, transnational activities and identity and belonging through the lens of their refugee backgrounds. During the interviews, language acquisition, dialogue, language mixing, and the silences within and between languages were all invoked in response to broader questions.

Although we use the concept of 'second generation' refugees to describe the interviewee's backgrounds, some did not immediately identify as coming from a refugee background. This, in part, reflects the silences about trauma and exile that can characterise some inter-generational relationships with parents not talking about their histories (Lev-Wiesel, 2007). In fact, when contacting potential interviewees, some were unsure whether their parents had refugee status in Britain and had to check to be certain that they fit our research criteria. Nevertheless, in many of the interviews reflections of language linked to the importance of preserving a family language, of retaining family histories, which for some tied language into wider narratives of exile.

The interviews were carried out in English. Although this was a monolingual interaction, the diversity of linguistic experience emerged as an important strand in our interviewee's narratives (Gibb, 2014). Certainly for all participants interviewed, English was a daily language for them and there were no difficulties in this being the language of the interview. Nevertheless, heritage languages were almost always invoked by the participants to reflect on their own sense of identity, either referred to as a central tenant of identity or something that was lacking and thus intensifying feelings of loss and of not belonging. Linguistic diversity was clearly evident within our sample and we explore this in the next section.

Language diversity

Everyone we interviewed was fluent in English having been born and educated in the UK. The variations related to the knowledge and usage of the heritage language at home, with peer groups, in communities and in neighbourhoods. Nearly all of those interviewed spoke some of their heritage language – only four spoke none or just 'a small amount', although this was simply a reflection of the participants' self-measurement of language proficiency. Among those of Kurdish heritage there were tensions between Kurdish (heritage language) and Turkish (linked to discrimination) that we explore later in the paper.

Heritage languages are used mostly within the context of the home but there were variations in terms of languages spoken at home and these partly reflected parent's language

competencies, their attitudes to language transmission and their engagement in social, community and neighbourhood networks. Pre-migration education will affect parental English language competency. In our study the key variation was between Tamils – who were more likely to speak English than Kurdish and Vietnamese refugees due to their higher levels of education pre-migration and the colonial-imperial links between Sri Lanka and the UK. Engagement and proximity to co-ethnic social and community networks were also relevant to language acquisition because they offered greater exposure to language and also, in the case of refugee community centres, organised language classes.

Language can also link to refugee backgrounds and reasons for exile. Kurds from Turkey form part of a discriminated against minority and the Kurdish language was banned from public spaces. On arrival to the UK, refugees were often faced with hostility towards their language, with problems arising as the UK government provided Turkish interpreters for Kurdish asylum seekers who were often antagonistic towards asylum seekers (Kushner and Knox, 1999). Different waves of Turkish migration to the UK coalesced around a commonality of a Turkish language. The first generation of Kurdish refugees from Turkey became reliant for employment and for advice and information on Turkish and Turkish Cypriots who had arrived in the UK earlier, could speak English and were able to translate for and organise new arrivals, offer work in textile factories, shops and the food industry (Atay, 2010).

Vietnamese refugees in the UK for the most part had been resettled from camps in Hong Kong and had refugee status on arrival. As a group, levels of education were very low and like their Kurdish counterparts, they arrived without English language (Robinson and Hale, 1989). Language was complicated by the fact that around 60% of Vietnamese refugees who settled in the UK were 'ethnically' Chinese. While they were often categorised by British institutions as 'Vietnamese' their own self-identification is more complex with different Chinese languages spoken within this community (Robinson and Hale, 1989). Those interviewed in our research spoke Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese and different Chinese dialects including Hakka.

In the Sri Lankan case, Tamil refugees often had connections to Britain, particularly as Britain had been a colonial power until 1948 and continued having a presence in the country after this date. Many of the first cohort of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka came from middle class backgrounds and had often been educated in English (Cowley-Sathiakumar, 2008). In our sample, the parents of this group of interviewees were highly educated - half had studied at university level compared with two parents of those from Kurdish heritage and none of the parents of interviewees from Vietnamese backgrounds. However, like Kurds from Turkey, Tamils were also from a discriminated against minority. Language and access to government services characterised the early ethnic tensions between Tamils and the Sinhalese majority and became linked to violence in the 1970s and later civil war which affected the refugee generation and their children (Amarasingam, Naganathan and Hyndman, 2016).

Language is not value neutral; it can be emotional, signifying bonds, relationships, identity and histories when learned within the home as heritage languages as they almost always are. This is in contrast to English, a language first learned and used within the formal and institutional setting of the school (Jodeyr, 2003). The link between language and emotion was raised by some of our interviewees. Saama, a woman of Tamil heritage, describes English as 'an incredibly unemotional language' in contrast to Tamil which is, she said, 'so emotional, every word means so much more'.

Similarly Besna, a woman of Kurdish heritage explained the power of language as follows, ...when I really want to say something to someone, and feel angry about it, I just speak in my own language [Turkish] and it comes out more direct.

Besna's parents were actually first language Kurdish speakers but gradually shifted to speaking Turkish in the UK because the housing estate where they lived in London was predominately Turkish speaking. The geography and context, in particular the clustering of minorities and linguistic groups is a strong determinant of language acquisition and usage.

Among the Vietnamese grouping, there was a greater range of language diversity, as noted earlier due to some being ethnically Chinese, as Sophia, whose parents were refugees from Vietnam explained.

I speak English, and I speak my parents' two different village dialects from China. So when I was growing up I'd speak the different ones to my mum and dad but really because I had older siblings it just became English in the house to them and then to my parents their own languages.

Anne also reflects on her early childhood that at home 'it was going from Hakka to Cantonese to Vietnamese to English'. Even among those who spoke Vietnamese at home, there could be differentiations between Vietnamese from the North and South.

...from a child it's been ingrained into me, you are Southern...you come from generations of Southern people, and Northern people were different. It's weird in London, there's more Northern people than Southern. Most Southern people went to the States, and when I look at my family, when I look at my Vietnamese Southern family, growing up, and when I interact with people, other Vietnamese people now, in London, there is a huge difference. It's kind of like someone speaking Scottish to someone from London. There is a huge accent difference, and also with regards to language as well, so I always had difficulty with other Londoners, sorry, Vietnamese people in London, not a lot of them are Southern (Kim, female Vietnamese heritage).

This division could create communication problems even within the same family. Paul's parents met in the UK, they were both from Vietnam but his father from the North and his mother from the South.

I can speak to my father in Vietnamese, my Vietnamese is quite good....But yeah my mum speaks Cantonese and Mandarin. She speaks Vietnamese too but her Vietnamese is... it's good but she's South Vietnamese, so she's the enemy basically, haha I'm joking!...Her Vietnamese is like South, her mum was Vietnamese from the South... I can understand some of it, but speaking to her in Vietnamese is quite hard, we understand each other but it's not the same, it's quite hard to get an understanding. And her English is not great.

Among those of Kurdish heritage both Kurdish and Turkish were often spoken and sometimes our interviewees, such as Ezgi, spoke a mixture of languages depending on whom she was communicating with, as she explained.

So my parents they left school at an early age and they're not illiterate however the Turkish they speak isn't fluent because they also speak Kurdish and it's a mixture. So at home to my dad I speak in Turkish or in Kurdish, to my grandma I speak in Kurdish, but now to my mum I can speak in whatever language (female, Kurdish heritage)

Among those from Tamil backgrounds, as noted earlier, there was a much greater English language fluency among the parent's generation, than among Vietnamese and Kurds from Turkey although in some cases parents did not understand English and most of our interviewees moved seamlessly between Tamil and English but also mixed languages. The term 'Tanglish' was used to describe language mixing as Abi explains.

OK well if it's me, my mum, my aunt and my cousin we'll talk in Tamil so my mum and all of them will understand. But if it's just me and my cousin we'll always speak Tanglish like Tamil and English mixed together. So my mum will understand half of it and then she'll be like hold on I swear that's English (female, Tamil heritage).

Family context was important in language fluency and use and was the main site of language reproduction, as we explore below.

Language Reproduction

Heritage languages were mainly learned within the home and through family life and so within the family context and between generations they could become a site of conflict, reluctant submission or positive understanding. Language is emotional and is intertwined with relationships, especially inter-generational ones between children and their parents.

When I was growing up there was a rule they tried to enforce of no English allowed in the house, just Chinese only. But then it was hard for them to keep up with that. We'd just start responding in English and they gave up after a while (Ly, female, Vietnamese heritage).

My dad wouldn't let us speak Turkish or English in front of him...like, not in an aggressive way...he would always flick our ears so he said "Whoever speaks Turkish or English to me gets a flick on their ear"...so we grew up with that, he would always do that. So with my dad it was just constant Kurdish, constant Kurdish (Heval, male, Kurdish heritage).

Saama describes the potential fluidity of language and the role of extended families in maintaining language competency.

I think probably at an age when we would probably have started to lose speaking Tamil fluently, our grandma came over from Sri Lanka to live with us and she's very Tamil and I think that's why I can still speak Tamil fluently... Because we had to speak to her in Tamil and she was really strict so there was no getting around it at all (female, Tamil heritage).

The importance of parents and the extended family in the transmission of heritage languages was clear. The few participants who did not speak the original language of their parents explained this through the choices and actions of their parents and family networks. For example, Quan could speak only basic Vietnamese and explains this in relation to the divorce of his parents.

Well my Vietnamese wasn't the greatest. And when my parents split up for a long period of time, my mum kind of just lost track, just left us to do our own thing. I think it was down to her being by herself. When I was a kid, I think it could have been down to I dunno but maybe I don't like to say but maybe she went through a depression or something. I was unaware of it at the time, growing up you don't know these things, but looking back I think maybe she did go through a depression. She started smoking a lot. She was just there in the flat, by herself raising three kids, just alone, smoking all day like nonstop. It was hard for her (male, Vietnamese heritage).

Similarly Rachel describes her inability to speak Tamil in relation to her family upbringing.

But they [parents] never spoke to me in Tamil, just to each other sometimes maybe when they wanted to be secretive. But also maybe because my parents were never at home or they were so busy, or the divorce, I just never really heard it around the house. I mean they weren't ever really there to be honest, we were always at school and then we'd come home and play in the garden or the street... (female, Tamil heritage).

Janith's situation was different from Quan and Rachel. His parents had not spoken English before arriving as refugees to London, however on arrival they learnt English quickly through work and made a conscious decision that Janith would only speak English in order to 'assimilate', something that frustrates Janith who plans to learn Tamil in the future: 'just in a sort of ego way, a claim to have some sort of link to what supposedly is my ethnicity and my culture.' He describes his father's attitude as follows:

...one of his phrases that he uses now is he tried to assimilate as much as possible. He has a big problem with migrants who come here and don't assimilate that's his particular annoyance (male, Tamil heritage).

Maintaining heritage languages took effort and commitment, especially where parents spoke English and there were sibling groups. There was definitely a commitment to the heritage language among the parents of almost everyone we interviewed and more than half had their heritage language supplemented by weekly language classes, organised by community groups normally on a Saturday morning. It was parents that pushed these classes and for the most part, they were not recalled positively.

Giang described his Vietnamese classes as 'incredibly boring' and he resented having to go, saying, 'I actually went because my mum would give me £1.50 for a bag of chips'. Paul has similar memories of Chinese classes:

That was the worst. Saturday should be about having the day off but yeah it was hard going to school on Saturday morning. It should be about cartoons! So I went for a while because my mum wanted me to (Paul, male, Vietnamese heritage).

Those who did attend language schools did not, for the most part, feel that they were productive in relation to language learning as more language was picked up within the home environment. Generally in the classes, written forms of languages were learnt, with varying levels of success. For those who did not attend these classes, this was also a decision made by parents that sometimes had a more political or social stance that connected to their desire for a separation from the 'community'. For example, in the following quote Kaliban explains his parent's reasons for not sending him to Tamil classes showing the intersections of political positioning that can lead to either active engagement or conscious separation from community networks.

...the idea of sending your kid to Tamil school a lot of the people who actually were there, were the kind of people whose parents my parents might not have agreed with politically or the teachers... (male, Tamil heritage).

Language acquisition was not simply a process of learning a skill but was entwined with the political history of a refugee past, ideas of identity and as the mechanism for communicating with family members.

The interaction of languages

The transmission of languages is not simply a fixed process. Instead different languages interact but are also changed and adapted such as the mixing of Tamil and English to form 'Tanglish' as described earlier. In fact Anton a young male of Tamil heritage, went so far as to say, 'I speak kind of Tanglish'. The evolution and mixing of languages is part of what Hewitt (2003) described as the 'fluid chaos' of urban ethnicities and this interplay of languages was particularly evident within friendship networks in London. Abhimanyu, a young man from Tamil heritage, noted in the discussions on learning English at school that,

It was funny my mum used to say I'd come home and say words which weren't Tamil or English so I must have been speaking with some of my Asian friends.

Indeed, growing up in London, with its linguistic diversity, resulted in this linguistic interaction demonstrated in a number of the interviews.

...my main friends because I've grown up with them and they're around Turkish and Kurdish people they speak a bit too... Yeah they'll understand, like basic things, like when they come round to my house they'll understand my mum asking them if they want to eat, put that there, stuff like that they understand and can respond (Gilay, female, Kurdish heritage).

The majority of the kids there [in East London] were Bengali. So me being brought up and raised there I talked and understood Bengali...if someone talks to me in Bengali I will understand it. (Quan, male, Vietnamese heritage).

The language diversity of the second generation in school and within their peer group social networks influenced language used by them but also among family members within the home. For example, Anne's parents worked in a Chinese restaurant and did not speak much English. However, Anne notes her parents learnt English from their children and their friends saying that they were:

...learning the street language as well. You know all the ghetto language. At the time that's what Hackney was all about. So when I was talking to my friends from school you think she's [mum] not listening and don't understand but she knows everything, from top to bottom (female, Vietnamese heritage).

In this sense, the UK born children of refugees also acted as 'family language brokers', engaging their parents in a specific version of English language they were using (Luykx, 2004). This interaction is often ignored within policy discussions, with a stress on a uni-directional English assimilation, rather than a more dynamic understanding of language mixing and transmission.

Heritage languages: Identities, emotions and refugee backgrounds

The importance of speaking the heritage language was almost always stressed by interviewees, even those who did not speak them. Language was a mechanism through which identity, culture and relationships to family and social networks were claimed and defined. Abi describes Tamil as, 'part of my identity, it's my culture'. Not having the language is seen as a dislocation from identity as Saama observes in relation to others.

For people [from Tamil descent] who don't know how to speak Tamil I always wonder who do you think you are? Not in a bad way but more like how do you understand yourself?

Different languages were often tied to childhood experiences and family connections. For some like Abhimanyu it felt 'natural to speak' Tamil as it was his first language but this was not always the case. Saguna spoke Tamil to older relatives and those in the non-English speaking diaspora but nevertheless she felt more comfortable speaking in English saying that 'Tamil doesn't come out naturally'. Regardless of language use and fluency it was crucial for communicating with older family members, with those still in the parent's country of origin and in the wider non-English speaking diaspora.

Language was also tied up with refugee backgrounds and in particular persecution. For Kurds from Turkey this was expressed in relation to the loss of Kurdish for those who only spoke Turkish and English rather than Kurdish. The desire to speak Kurdish and regret about its loss was stressed in the following quotes by Besna whose family spoke Turkish as a consequence of their geography of settlement in a Turkish speaking neighbourhood and Agir who was politically active in diaspora politics uses the term 'shameful' in relation to his lack of Kurdish language.

I wish I knew Kurdish, because you know that's my main language and needs to be spoken, because in Turkey they never used to speak Kurdish, they weren't allowed to (Besna, female, Kurdish heritage).

It's sort of shameful not to be able to speak Kurdish, especially cos like if a protest was to happen about anything, or a demo about any Kurdish, anything to do with the Kurdish race, I would attend. I would be on the front-line (Agir, male, Kurdish heritage).

The loss or lack of Kurdish was tied up with the knowledge of the language of the oppressor, Turkish, as Zelat explained.

If you're Kurdish in Turkey you can't speak. A lot of people are imprisoned for speaking Kurdish. So back home we never spoke in Kurdish. After they all came here and after having had that pressure back at home I guess they thought inside we shouldn't really speak in Kurdish (female, Kurdish heritage).

For the few interviewees who spoke only English, this was expressed with negative emotions, and to wider feelings of a disconnection with their parents and a distancing to the 'community' of their parents. According to Janith, a man of Tamil heritage,

It's frustrating not knowing how to speak Tamil. And it's frustrating being called coconut or being called whitewash.

Janith had both experienced racism from wider British society, while at the same time he felt separated from the 'Tamil community' in London. Rachel was also unable to speak Tamil, and in the following quote she describes her alienation when starting university and joining the Tamil Society for the first time.

I just stood out because people knew I couldn't speak Tamil and it was all new to me. And it was all just so obvious to them! Even like walking around I'd have my sari dragging down on the floor and falling off me....I was known as a coconut, which is like white on the inside and brown on the outside. Like I wasn't proper Tamil.

Language in this sense was a symbol of 'authenticity' for the community. Not only was language a simple functionality in terms of communication, but it also connected to feelings of belonging and loss. Helat is the only interviewee who did not want to pass down the heritage languages he can speak to his children. Helat touches on the pressures he has experienced from others because of his noticeable signifiers of difference which he lives with and as a consequence had actively chosen to go by an English name in his everyday life.

No, it's not really important to me, it's not. I wouldn't teach my kids it. They shouldn't give us Turkish names. Cos we were born here. It's always hard for people here who were born in the UK. I was born in the UK and I was bullied from year seven because of my name. And it happens to a lot of people.

Many of the participants had experienced racism, although for most this did not mean a rejection of their linguistic diversity. These experiences of racism could be informal but were also connected to institutional structures, which will now be discussed.

Top down language socialisation

Brubaker (2015) demonstrates the importance of language for state formation, national identity and citizenship, arguing that states necessarily operate in and through language, and state institutions are used as a form of linguistic socialisation as language repertoires become an important determinant of life chances. The rules and practices that govern the language of public life become chronically and pervasively politicised. It is within this context that linguistic experiences of the UK born adult children of refugees can be further understood. While the importance of heritage languages was stressed by interviewees, as noted earlier, these languages were spoken almost exclusively in private spaces. Public spaces were seen as spaces where English was generally enforced or should be respected, although this was not always adhered to. Three interviewees from Kurdish backgrounds studied Turkish at their state school. Yet for the majority, heritage languages were spoken at home and English was learned at school. When asked in the interview if there was space at school to use their different languages, except for one participant, all others stressed that it was only English 'allowed' in the classroom, and it was only in the playground that this rule was not so thoroughly enforced. For example, Abhimanyu from Sri Lankan Tamil descent explains the difference use of language in relation to space.

Q: What about in public spaces, like in a school or something, did you ever speak Tamil there?

A: I used to think not. I used to think you weren't allowed to speak Tamil there. So if my mum would call me and I was in school or something I wouldn't speak Tamil back to her, I'd answer her in English

Q: Why do you think that was?

A: I dunno, just in case people would hear and think you're different or something.

The concern to fit in, not be different through language use, that Abhimanyu alludes to was echoed within a number of interviews. Heval spoke both Kurdish and Turkish with his family in the house. However he notes,

In school and stuff I'd definitely be reluctant to speak it. It sounds silly now but then it was a major thing. You didn't want people to hear it but at that age if you got people's attention speaking a different language they were gonna look at you and think you're weird or something (male, Kurdish heritage).

Reluctance to use a heritage language was sometimes connected to previous experiences of racism from other school children. However, in some cases there were explicitly assimilationist school policies towards multilingualism. Kaliban initially grew up speaking Tamil in the home although this changed when his older sister attended school and English began to be the dominant language.

Q: When you first went to primary school what language did you speak at home?

A: I spoke English actually. Basically because of my older sister, so before she went to school she spoke Tamil at home because of my parents well yeah that's just what they naturally spoke at home. And then when she went to school she tried to speak to all the other kids in Tamil and they had no idea what she was saying. So she came home and she was like oh the kids in school they only speak one language, they only speak English, whereas we speak English and Tamil. And apparently at her very early parents evening when she was really young, apparently the teacher spoke both to my mum and dad, expressing concern at the fact her English wasn't the same as the others, and they encouraged my parents only to speak English to her at home. And my mum was a bit annoyed at that...

Gilay also comments on this pressure from the school structures:

Q: And in school did you ever speak Turkish or Kurdish?

A: Yeah occasionally we did. But our schools both of them they had this policy of not talking different languages in class. They were like 'just speak English just speak English!' So like most of the time we'd speak English but in break time or lunch-time sometimes we'd speak Kurdish or Turkish (female, Kurdish heritage).

This drive towards English assimilation within the school seems to be in contrast to a national school policy on 'valuing' language diversity. However, Bourne's research (2001) is important in highlighting the contrast between the school policy discourses on 'valuing' bilingualism while in reality other languages are made invisible within the classroom. Bourne's research demonstrates either school structures 'blindness' to other languages, or feelings that speaking these languages in public is 'impolite'. Some languages are more equal than others within the classroom and this reflects a national public policy in Britain (Bourne, 2001).

Conclusion

This paper has explored the acquisition, usage and multiple meanings of heritage languages among the adult children of refugee parents growing up in London. Languages are found to be implicit in the construction, contestation and expression of identities among 'second generation' refugees. Our findings demonstrate the ways in which language use is connected to refugee histories and specific language contexts. Nearly everyone spoke their heritage language, and for those from Kurdish backgrounds the maintenance of the Kurdish language was particularly significant due to the ban of Kurdish in public places in Turkey. For those without Kurdish language, but who spoke Turkish, there were expressions of pain and shame that linked closely to their parent's exile and to their own political activities. Only a few interviewees did not speak their heritage language and they expressed alienation and separation.

Heritage language acquisition and language use is rooted in the private domain but it had public significance. The governance of language would appear to be more symbolic than meaningful. Politics of language use and the policies that exclude languages other than English create an environment where heritage languages are not valued and where there is

hostility which feeds into discourses on racism, Islamophobia and ideas of separation. The linking of language with citizenship makes a clear statement on the requirements of belonging and does not encompass the reality of language, which is more flexible, fluid and contextual. Carrying out the research with those who have grown up in London, a global city characterised by a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual population, clearly impacted on language and language use. Heritage languages did not simply correspond to a 'standard' language but were more dynamic and hybrid with mixtures of languages being used and incorporated into everyday life.

These debates are pertinent in relation to the recent political outbursts of the then Prime Minister David Cameron in 2016, who turned his attention to English language enforcement, with a particular focus on English language acquisition for 'Muslim women' linking language with wider racialised fears (BBC, Jan 18, 2016). Multilingualism is publicly represented in negative ways, or is simply made 'invisible'. The everyday language practices discussed in this paper, among the second generation from refugee backgrounds, unsettles any standardised and reified understanding of language, or an idea of 'authenticity' within these networks of language speakers. As Hall (1996) argues, members of minority groups are not simple inheritors of fixed identities, ethnicities and languages. Instead, they are involved in a continual collective and individual process of making, remaking, and negotiating these elements, thereby constantly constructing dynamic new identities. Embracing multilingualism by seeing the positive aspects of language in a globalised and transnational world would provide a far more 'inclusive' but also outward looking perspective, although this would necessarily involve a wider shift in attitudes and policies towards refugees, migration and race.

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