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(Non)fuzziness of Identity in the Spanish-Portuguese Borderland: The Case of the Linguistic Community of A Fala de Xálima (Spain)

1. Introduction

This study is devoted to the geolect A Fala de Xálima, which belongs to the Galician-Portuguese subgroup of Romance languages. It is a minoritized language used by about 5,000 people who live in three villages: San Martín de Trevejo, Eljas and Valverde del Fresno, in the Spanish province of Cáceres (Extremadura), on the border with Portugal (the Xálima region).¹

A Fala is known in the contemporary linguistic literature due to its vitality (about 90% of the population of Xálima are A Fala speakers; Ramallo, 2011) and a high intergenerational transmission rate, which is exceptional in comparison with other languages traditionally spoken in the Spanish-Portuguese borderland, today virtually extinct. The latest research (Manso Flores, 2016b; Ramallo, 2011), though

¹ The most important descriptive research regarding A Fala includes: Álvarez Pérez, 2014; Carrasco González, 1996, 1997, 2007; Costas González, 2013; Frias Conde, 1999; Rey Yelmo, 1997a, 1997b.

optimistic, indicates the disappearance of some vernacular forms among the youngest generation, a falling number of L1 speakers and a decline in the functional extent of the local varieties. Among the reasons for this are changes in social structure, low birth rate, new economic relations, contemporary means of transportation, digital communication, etc. A Fala is no longer geographically isolated, which means that an important factor in its preservation since the Reconquista is not the case today.

This article is a summary of certain aspects of a recently concluded study reflecting on the future prospects for A Fala and the chances of its survival in a fast-changing reality. To find the answers, we need to shed some light on what has helped A Fala to survive in the last decades. We also need to examine the real state of preservation of the vernacular forms among the community, which participates freely in the post-modern world. This language remains highly minoritized, unstandardized and unnormalized (Ramallo, 2011, 2018a, 2018b; Valeš, 2017a). It is concluded that A Fala is a significant element of the identity of the members of the A Fala speech community. Its social significance has probably been one of the factors of its preservation.

This article looks into the discursive mechanisms of identity construction used by a member of the Xálima community engaged in the preservation and promotion of the language. The analysed interview was conducted *in situ* and revolved around other language communities of the Iberian Peninsula: the Portuguese community across the border and the Galician community. This is an anthropologically informed linguistic study that can be included in the ontological and epistemological framework of sociocultural linguistics (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2010).

2. Anthropological background

The community under study is not a speech community in the sense proposed by Gumperz, Hymes or Labov, that is, in the demographic sense involving some large social macro-categories.² This language community is not homogeneous. The original study was conducted with 10 participants of different ages (27 to 58), with different social backgrounds and education (e.g. farmers, office workers, school teachers). Some of them have spent their whole lives in Xálima, others emigrated and only came back once retired. There was even one person who was not a native speaker of A Fala. Hence, for the purposes of research on identity, we define the epistemic borders of Xálima as a community of practice (Coupland, 2010; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Meyerhoff & Strycharz, 2013; Rampton, 2009; Wenger, 1998). This is a constructivist, relativistic and interpretative model which offers some nuanced

² Cf. Coupland (2010), Feagin (2013), Rampton (2009) for a robust critique of this kind of epistemological framework regarding some locally-informed sociolinguistic studies.

insights without imposing essentialist categories in an *a priori* fashion (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Rampton, 2009).

Common practice is the only feature which is characteristic of all members of this community. It is an aggregate of people who come together around an observed “mutual engagement” and “jointly negotiated enterprises”. Their practices emerge in the course of their common work (Meyerhoff & Strycharz, 2013) – numerous educational, political and administrative activities which aim to promote and preserve the language, such as the cultural association called A Nosa Fala, a magazine in the local language, *Anduriña*, or proposals for a standard orthography.³ The common practice in the analysed community could be described as “work for the protection of A Fala”. There is also a certain “shared repertoire” (Meyerhoff & Strycharz, 2013) among the members, of linguistic and extra-linguistic nature, which is an accumulative result of negotiations within the community. It includes socially relevant shared family histories, previous interactions, ideological expectations, inside jokes, etc. (Wenger, 1998), which serve as a “brought-along context” triggering identity processes in interaction. “In some cases context is ‘brought along’ and merely has to be indexed in the interaction in order to become (or remain) relevant” (Auer, 1992; Williams, 2008).

3. Identity and stance in interaction

The analysis of the interviews was conducted according to the analytical principles proposed by the anthropologists Bucholtz and Hall (2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2010) in the framework of sociocultural linguistics. They propose a dynamic vision of identity created in an intersubjective rather than individual fashion – a social category which emerges in ongoing conversation rather than one aprioristically fixed in unitary and durable macro-social categories (as is the case in the Labovian approach).

According to the emergence principle, identity is built through discourse and does not exist prior to language contact. It is in interaction where it gains social meaning (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 587).⁴

³ For descriptions of some anthropological, social and cultural characteristics of Xálima, see Costas González, 2013; Dondelewski, 2019; Manso Flores, 2016a, 2016b; Ramallo, 2011; Valeš, 2017a, 2017b.

⁴ The author is of the opinion that this particular framework does not need to be understood as antagonistic towards those sociolinguistic epistemologies which focus on some macro-categories reflected in the individual self and, hence, imply some sort of essentialization. The author also believes that essentialism and intersubjectivism can be viewed as two complementary approaches to linguistic identity, which is compatible with the open and “ongoing” character of Bucholtz and Hall’s proposal. Nevertheless, it needs to be pointed out that there is a considerable ontological discrepancy between the two approaches, which makes it difficult to apply both of them in a single study.

The positionality principle determines identity as positional in the spatial, cultural and chronological sense. In this way, we are able to look at the social processes which take place between the individual social actors (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 591).

Identity also has a relational character (cf. “relationality principle”; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 598–599). It is a social category which obtains its meaning in an intersubjective and interactional configuration of an ongoing conversation. There are three subtypes of these relations, which revolve around the following epistemic axis: *adequation/distinction* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004a, pp. 384–385, 2005, pp. 599–601), *authentication/denaturalization* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004a, p. 385, 2005, pp. 601–603, 2010, p. 24) and *authorization/illegitimation* (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 603–605).

The indexicality principle determines the semiotic function of some language elements which (often indirectly) point to a certain social category (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 593–595). Ontologically, the principle is based on a semiotic link between linguistic forms and social meaning (Ochs, 1992; Silverstein, 1985).

The partiality of identity highlights the often incoherent nature of identity constructions (cf. partialness principle (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 605–607)) – the intersubjective (e.g. ideological) representations shaped through interaction are partial and ephemeral, and they are temporary, local and contextual. It is a constructivist and anti-essentialistic way of understanding the identity process, whereby agency is partial, intersubjective and distributed among all the interlocutors (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, pp. 605–608, 2010, pp. 26–27).

With the above-mentioned ontological and epistemological considerations in mind, we will analyse the conversational strategies which the interviewee and the interviewer employed to construct their respective intersubjective and interrelational identities. Márquez Reiter (2018, p. 56) observes a general consensus in sociolinguistics and in communication studies that the data from qualitative interviews need to be placed in context and that they represent situated interaction. An interview constitutes an event informed by the participants’ ideological constructions of discourse production (Briggs, 1986; Cicourel, 1964). This type of analysis needs to focus on the intersubjective construction of accounts and on how people negotiate meaning during an interview (Márquez Reiter, 2018, p. 56). In this perspective, then, the interviewee becomes a co-author in the process of qualitative data generation.

The speakers build the discourse together through what they say, how they say it and by defining themselves in relation to the others. They can also assume a position and, during the interaction, change it or negotiate it, aligning themselves with or disaligning themselves from a speaker, or even assume various positions at the same time (Davies & Harré, 1999; Sánchez Moreano, 2018, p. 50).

To grasp the dynamic of these conversational and socially meaningful acts we will employ the notion of stance, introduced by Ochs (1992) and developed by du Bois (2002, 2007), Jaffe (2009) and Kiesling (2011), and in Hispanic sociolinguistics

– by Sánchez Moreano (2018). These works demonstrate that dimensions of interaction which have not received due attention can actually be sources of identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 595).

A stance is an evaluative and epistemic orientation taken by speakers during the interaction. A stance implies an evaluation of an existent element in the discursive context (“stance focus”) by a social actor (“stancetaker 1”). This act also implies a positioning towards this element and, consequently, an alignment with or disalignment from the social actor with whom one interacts (“stancetaker 2”) (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 595; Sánchez Moreano, 2018, pp. 50–51).

The notion of stance can be inscribed in Bucholtz and Hall’s indexicality principle as a dynamic and active construction of social meanings negotiated through the ongoing discourse. By means of linguistic tools with indexical properties, the speakers point to certain stances showing their relation both to the socially meaningful elements that appear in the conversation and to their interlocutors. Stance is one of the tools for a discursive construction of identity.

The analytical part of this article offers an interpretation of discursive identity construction according Bucholtz and Hall’s principles. The analysis focuses on the role of the projected identities, their reciprocal perception and the discursive strategies of their negotiation, as well as the indexical character of some discursive elements: the brought-along contexts which are of our knowledge and the stances taken by the interlocutors.

Different approaches to the linguistic reality of Xálima and the cultural beliefs and values present in the community can be looked at as ideologies. Ideologies index different identities. Once apprehended by the members of a community, some ideologies can be treated as the questioning of the collective identity of the community members or their personal identity (self-perception).

Hence, ideologies can meet reactions that seek to confront the perceived threat to identity. One case in point are the different proposals for a standardized writing system, or the discussion about the genetic affiliation of A Fala, to be commented on below, which denote different ideological and cultural domains.

It is worth stressing that these discussions – latent in the community, hence they appear spontaneously or are approached emotionally – create around Xálima a constellation of identity referents at the macrosocial level (Galicia, Portugal, Extremadura, Catalonia, Spain in general). Thus, it is important to emphasize their existence as the already mentioned brought-along contexts, dragged into conversation by certain indexical elements.

4. Interview analysis

The interview was held at the interviewee's home, where the interviewer had been invited. The participant is a local activist and an active member of the association called A Nosa Fala. Over the last years, he has been involved in a local magazine which promotes the language and culture of Xálima. He has also been active in the discussion about the orthography of this variety. He proved to be very attentive and eager to give any information or personal opinion asked by his guest.⁵

The conversation revolved around the issue of the orthography of A Fala and the different hypothesis about its genetic filiation.⁶ There is some opposition among linguists attached to some Galician universities to the proposal coordinated by Valeš (2017a, 2017b), a sociolinguist himself, which is based on Castilian conventions (i.e. those of a different dialectal subgroup), the long-standing local practice and less on the etymology. The other proposal, still being prepared, is closer to the presumed genealogy of the language and modern Portuguese orthography. However, the proposal of the *portuguesistas* was rejected by all 10 interviewees. Apart from that, some Galician linguists tend to view A Fala as part of the Galician dialectal subgroup. As we will see, this meets with criticism and is interpreted as questioning local identity.

Excerpt 1⁷

P – participant; I – interviewer

- 1 I: [...] y onde se podía empregar esto: ortografía oficial? porque de
[...] *and where could you use that official orthography? because*
- 2 momento A Fala non é lingua ni [cooficial no:.]
at the moment A Fala is not even [an official language is it:.]
- 3 P: [exahamenti.]
[exactly.]
- 4 I: (0.3) entón en que áreas en que situacións se podería usalo.
(0.3) so in what areas or situations one could use that.

⁵ Owing to ethical considerations, no other data about the interviewee can be made available in this article.

⁶ Since the 1990s, there has been a heated debate about the genetic filiation of A Fala. As it is today, the most commonly accepted is the opinion of Carrasco González (1996, 1997), who considers it a “third branch” (along with the modern Galician and Portuguese) in the evolution of the medieval Galician-Portuguese. This discussion fosters different modern proposals for an orthographic system of A Fala.

⁷ The transcriptions of the conversations held in A Fala use the orthographic convention proposed by Valeš (2017b).

- 5 P: pues por exemplo (.) o sea comu te he ditu antes (.) desdi un simpli
so for example (.) well as I told you before (.) from a simple
- 6 WhatsApp a cualquier otro escrito que tiñamus que fel o presential
WhatsApp message to any other text we have to write or hand in
- 7 (.) se fai [sempris en: X]
(.) we always [write it in: X]⁸
- 8 I: [xa sabes que en WhatsApp] cando
[you know that on WhatsApp] when
- 9 escribes en castelán tampouco: usas moitas regras ortográfica-
you write in Castilian you don't: follow orthographic rules either-
- 10 >oficial- do castelán verdade?<
>official- rules of Castilian right?<
- 11 P: ya. [pero me refieru ya peru desde iso a:]
yeah. [but I mean yeah but from this to:]
- 12 I: [entón ao mellor en WhatsApp non fai tanta falta non?]
[so maybe on WhatsApp you don't need it so much right?]
- 13 P: ya peru por exemplu a nosa asociación ten unha revista,
yeah but for example our association has a magazine,
- 14 I: ajá.
ah.
- 15 P: que se idita tolus anos que se leva anos iditandu in esti lugal
that is published every year and it's been published here for years and I think
- 16 que é a única publicación periódica que se idita que hai in: in fala pur así
it's the only periodical that is published that is in: A Fala let's say
- 17 idil pero mm: (0.2) digu in fala pero: a mayol parti é in X
but mm: (0.2) I say in A Fala but: most of it is in X
- 18 que se fai aquí (.) pero nos que pertencemos a
because it's published here (.) but as we are members of the
- 19 asociación sempris pedimus algún escrito de: Y algún de Z
association we always ask for texts in: Y or Z
- 20 (.) pa que: vayan aparecendu ahí.
(.) to: appear in the magazine.
- 21 I: mm.
mm.

⁸ Owing to ethical considerations, the names of particular varieties of A Fala have been omitted in the transcript and are referred to as X, Y and Z.

- 22 P: pos esi si siría un bo: un bo situu porque realmenti: a ixhenti que nos
sure it'd be a good: a good place because really: we the people who
- 23 didicamus a: participial in isu nun temos unha
participate in: that we don't have any
- 24 formación e: en: en linguas por así idil non?
education i: in: languages let's say right?
- 25 I: claro. claro. é difícil.
sure. sure. it's difficult.
- 26 P: ca un ten a súa profesión y: tal peru (.) é: algo: voluntario (.) y sí
everybody has his job and: so on but (.) it's: something: voluntary (.) and yes
- 27 que encontrábamus mutísimos problemas co tema de ihcribil (0.5)
we had a lot of problems while writing (0.5)
- 28 porque nun sabíamus comu se ehcribía.
because we didn't know how it's written.
- 29 P: =>nós sabíamos por exemplu que as coixhas nus soan
 =>*we knew for instance that something didn't work*
- 30 mal non mal diferenti< (.) digu jo (.) comu iscribimus istu agora? (0.2)
I mean it sounded different< (.) I mean (.) how the heck do I write it now? (0.2)
- 31 I: e ademáis algúns poden ee: cortarse (.) polo motivo de non saber
and what's more some people can mm: refrain from it (.) because they don't know
- 32 como escriblo e: pasar ao castelán.
how to write and: switch to Castilian.
- 33 P: (0.3) a día de hoxhi creu que mm sería algu: insignificanti
 (0.3) *nowadays I think it mm doesn't: matter so much*
- 34 porque tó mundu (.) na revista se pidi iscritus a tó
because everybody (.) in the magazine we ask for texts from
- 35 mundu (.) todú u mundu quen queira poi preshental i tal e: logu a:
everybody (.) everybody who wants to send a text and so on and then: the:
- 36 ixhenti que istá na revista pos us revisa o le dá un pocu de forma (.)
people who work in the magazine well they correct it shape it a bit (.)
- 37 incluso algúns que mandan en castellanu direhtamenti se traducin i se
some even send them in straight Castilian and they're translated and
- 38 publican. pero esa ixhenti toa iscribi a mayor parti vamos
published. but all these people write the majority let's say

- 39 (.) si ves un escritu en castellano [...] é por porque é por algunha pesoa
 (.) *if you see a text in Castilian [...] it's because it's from a person*
- 40 que nun é du Lugal de tó que a u millol istá cashá aquí pero é de otro
that is not from Xálíma at all that maybe got married here but comes from another
- 41 sitiú e tal que non é capá de: (0.3) pero normalmenti tó u mundu
place and so on so he can't: (0.3) but normally everybody
- 42 se: atrevi a escribil i non: ten: ningún problema eh?
has: the courage to write and they don't: have: any problem huh?
- 43 I: entón se se atreve a escribir (.) para que unha
so if they have the courage to write (.) why do you need a
- 44 ortografía consensual así?
consensual orthography like this?
- 45 P: (0.9) porque (.) o sea (.) mm unha coixha é que te atrevas a iscribil,
 (0.9) *well (.) because (.) mm one thing is to have the courage to write,*
- 46 I: mm.
mm.
- 47 P: i outra coixha é que sepas iscribil.
and the other is to know how to write.
- 48 I: ajá.
ah.
- 49 P: porque hai mutus escritus (.) dos que recibíamos na X (.) in
because there are many texts (.) we receive in X⁹ (.) where
- 50 us que tu didis é que non sei que istá puñendu aquí
you say well I don't know what's written here
- 51 P: o sea pero: (.) pero claro (.) nun sabís que ortografía tes que
I mean: (.) of course (.) you don't know which orthography you need to
- 52 utilizal o que: signu le pos a esti suníu que tú no sabís.
use or which: sign you use for this sound that you know.
- 53 I: evidentemente.
of course.

In lines 1–3 we can observe a simple alignment of the interviewee regarding the comment about the legal situation of A Fala. In terms of identity, this interaction

⁹ Owing to ethical considerations, the title of the magazine has been omitted in the transcript.

consists in authentication performed by the participant in relation to the projected identity of an expert in his research area, constructed by the interviewer.

In lines 4–12, having approved his own identity as sufficiently authentic to pronounce himself on the orthography, the researcher passes on to question the authenticity of the interviewee's identity. He questions the need to establish a unified system by indexing the cultural context: in internet communication, Castilian native speakers (hence also members of the Xálima community) constantly violate numerical rules of the written national language.

In line 13, the interviewee defends his interactional identity mentioning a communicative context which is not oral or informal: the local magazine. The argument is accepted by the researcher (line 14). The participant, in lines 15–24, continues constructing his identity as a good and affectionate speaker of A Fala, who knows well the needs of the community. In a constructivist form, he aggregates one element to the projected identity: he implies that he does not act himself, but as a member of a group of activists (lines 17–20).

In lines 22–24 and 26–27, the activist builds, ideologically, another facet of himself and his community: he indexes the difference between the non-professional *aficionados* and the researcher as an expert linguist. In 25, this projection is aligned with by the researcher. Using this strategy, he also enhances his authoritative position as a professional.

In lines 28–30, the interviewee continues to build his identity as an amateur. In line 28, he makes an ideological declaration implying that there can exist a correct form of writing in A Fala, which should be endorsed by an authority. In lines 31–32, the researcher suggests that – because of the alleged lack of such an authority – people get discouraged from using the local language in writing. In lines 33–42, the interviewee disaligns himself from that statement by limiting the referential domain of the interaction to the edition of the magazine. Moreover, by mentioning those who do not speak A Fala, he ideologically builds his identity as open and tolerant, disregarding the differences.

In lines 43–44, the researcher challenges, once again, the identity of his interlocutor by questioning the need for a “prestigious”, academically approved orthography: “if they have the courage to write (.) why do you need a consensual orthography like this?”. After a long pause, (0.9 s), in line 45, the participant, confused, mentions the need to “know” how to write while devaluing the mere “courage to write”. The expression “know how to write” indexes the overt linguistic prestige (Blas Arroyo, 2008, p. 186; Meyerhoff, 2006, pp. 37–28) and it is an ideological orientation: he implies other regional languages of Spain which have a standardized and institutionalized orthography that can be learnt. By calling attention to this difference between A Fala and other varieties he probably expresses the opinion that an official orthography would corroborate the covert prestige (Blas Arroyo, 2008, p. 186; Meyerhoff, 2006,

pp. 37–28) of the local language by authorizing it as one of the language communities that are better supported by the state.

We can observe that the linguistic prestige is a social category that is constructed, at the micro level, in a relational fashion. It is evident that A Fala enjoys covert prestige. At the same time, its speakers prove to be suspicious about their capacity to create a community-driven written code that would not be proposed by an external authority. However, projecting himself as different from academics and illegitimizing their authenticity as experts, the speaker displays the need to obtain an authorization from academia to accept any writing system. This could be countered by reminding at least one orthography proposal that was rejected in the past without implementation. Even the most widely accepted proposal, which was put forward by Valeš, was fiercely criticized. This ideological tension needs more attention from the sociocultural perspective.

Excerpt 2

The conversation preceding the excerpt analysed below revolved around the subjective affinity felt by the interviewee towards different neighbouring language communities based on his personal experience. Following the ideological affirmation of feeling a “full-blooded” Extremaduran,¹⁰ the interviewer tries to illegitimate his partner’s identity: he disaligns by displaying his facet of a linguist who knows the theories about the genetic filiation of A Fala, at the same time correlating, in an essentialist manner, the local language and the identity of the speaker (“you know the theories right, they say A Fala is outer Galician”). The attempt is met with a clearly negative positioning. The interviewee resorts to the whole spectrum of ideological indexes in the form of axiologically negative opinions about the subjectivity of researchers formulating their conclusions (“nobody has been able to prove its origin for sure (.) so: depending on how you look at it or how you want to look at it (.) you can focus on this or on that”).

P – participant; I – interviewer

1 P: eran de tó norti de Ehpaña. (.) con o cual consideru que os
*they were from all the north of Spain.*¹¹(.) *so I think the Galician*

¹⁰ Due to its sequential form, the passage in question cannot be analysed from the interactional point of view and thus is not quoted in full.

¹¹ The migrants who settled in the area during the Reconquista and supposedly gave origin to the language.

- 2 galegu que teñin máis peshu como lingua galega e tal (.) idil que istu
*people they sure have more importance as the Galician language and so (.) but
to say that*
- 3 é un galegu: comu dixestis tú (.) [non me acordo,]
this is Galician: how did you call it (.) [I don't remember,]
- 4 I: [exterior.]
[outer Galician.]
- 5 P: un galego exterior p- bueno pues me pareci mui aventurau por su
outer Galician w- well it sounds very adventurous on their
- 6 parti (.) que tenin peshu pa idilu (.) pos sí po tenin peshu. o:
part (.) they have more importance (.) sure they have more importance. or:
- 7 *porque é unha lingua das grandis de de importantis de*
because it's one of the big of of the important languages of
- 8 *Ehpaña. pero vamos. ei non me sintu identificau con iso ni creo que*
Spain. but come on. myself I don't identify with this and I don't think that
- 9 *sea: si hubiera siu isu (.) de siguru no: había: no estarías*
it's: so obvious because if it was (.) well there'd be: no: you wouldn't be
- 10 *aquí tú estudiándolo [ni estaría,]*
here studying it [nobody would,]
- 11 I: *ya.*
yeah.
- 12 P: *a ixhenti investigandu de por que istu está aquí. i ya tá.*
there are people studying why this thing exists here. and that's it.
- 13 I: *mm. mm. entendo.*
mm. mm. I see.

In lines 1–8 the interviewee continues expressing his stance against identifying A Fala with Galician by presenting his own ideological orientation. It is interesting what he says in lines 2, 6 and 7: Galician, as one of the biggest languages in Spain, has “more importance”. This comes as a confirmation of the hypothesis proposed above: ideologically, Galician is perceived as a language enjoying more overt prestige owing to being a legally recognized and protected language.

In lines 9–10 and 12, he still defends his point of view, positioning himself favourably towards the researcher by means of an adequation strategy. Although the distinctive feature of the latter is being a researcher (a feature that, as we have seen above, arouses scepticism), this time his identity is considered sufficiently similar to the identity of the activist: the participant implies that the very presence of the

researcher in Xálima means that he questions the “Galicianness” of the language, a hypothesis that has never been proved. Moreover, the researcher is identified, metonymically, as a member of a whole group of sceptic linguists who ask themselves “why this thing exists here”. We could interpret this as a strategy of authorization of the interviewer’s identity. In this way, his role as a researcher is momentarily viewed favourably only to enhance scepticism towards all researchers, whom the interviewer represents *pars pro toto*.

The analysis above draws our attention to the constructivist character of the interviewee’s identity and its partial nature. Responding to an attack against the cohesiveness or the authenticity of his identity, the interviewee aggregates to his interactional construction a new facet which shifts the agency of an individual self to a bigger collective, in this way authorising the ideological position he assumes. Using this strategy, the activist shows himself as an individual and at the same time a member of his community. He finds himself in need of making reference to a bigger group only because his individual identity has been questioned. As specified in the partialness principle, the identity exceeds the individual self.

Discursively, the interviewee refers himself to a community of researchers interested in A Fala in two different ways, highlighting similarities to those he wants to align with or, conversely, enhancing differences, depending on the relational necessities of the moment.

In the presented conversation we can also observe how two interlocutors settle in their contrary positions: one shows himself as a professional researcher and expert in language policy, and the other – as a person savvy about the local reality and a language enthusiast. The attendant positionings they assume highlight the differences between the two selves. It is plausible to add that constructing an identity that is different from another not always imposes the use of axiologically negative language resources. One can also endorse a certain facet of the opponent in order to illegitimate – indirectly and in second order¹² – one that is rejected.

A further aspect that can be observed is the distinction constructed by the participant between Xálima and Extremadura as opposed to Portugal and to Galicia. Another identity axis, at the macro level, which emanates from the conversation is the opposition “friends/neighbours vs academics”, with a significant ideological potential. We shall investigate this opposition in the future.

¹² Cf. second-order indexicality in Ochs (1992, p. 342) and Silverstein (2003, pp. 209–210).

5. Conclusions

The aim of this article has been to analyse the interactional dynamic observable in a conversation with a member of the community of practice of Xálima in relation to the neighbouring speech communities (in Portugal and Galicia) and the projects of orthography standardization.

The interactional dynamic observed during the conversation displays the above-mentioned ontological and epistemic characteristics of identity. This social category is clearly bound with the vernacular language used by the interviewee. The analysis of the material and anthropological observations made above seem to indicate that language heritage is an object of certain axiologically positive social and ideological stances taken by the interviewee, who is willing to act for the preservation of A Fala.

The observations made above enable us to capture the specific interactional dynamics when identity demonstrates its emergent nature. It appears when a social actor does not conform to the social category he or she is being ascribed to by the other interlocutors. Identity is a social category which is being constructed and not a pre-existent source of language practice.

The positionality principle is evidenced if we adopt an anthropological point of view on the analysed community. We can see the great importance of the temporal interactional positionings, which are changed or abandoned in an abrupt way. We realize that the socially meaningful categories used by the interviewee to construct his identity could not be ascribed to any of the traditional sociolinguistic macro-categories. Without considering the anthropological, historical, political and dialectal background it would be difficult to have a grasp of the social (and, hence, linguistic) dynamics *in situ*.

The analysis demonstrates the indexical character of identities constructed by the interlocutors. In the excerpts discussed above we can see stance turns taken by means of acts of alignment with and disalignment from some socially meaningful statements. The indexical function can also be carried out by the ideological positionings assumed.

The strategies of adequation/distinction appear when the interactional identity is being presented as sufficiently similar to or different from the other interlocutor's identity. To this aim, suppressed are the other socially meaningful facets which could distort the image of an adequate or distinct speaker that one wants to build. There are also strategies consisting in authentication and denaturalization, which appear when one calls attention either to the facets of the displayed identity that show it as genuine and authentic to the interlocutor, or when one points to the lack of cohesion or artifice of the displayed identity in order to reject it. We also identified some authorization and illegitimation strategies. Through a metonymic presentation

of themselves as part of an organizational structure which enjoys social prestige, the speakers affirm or reject the momentaneous identity projections.

Finally, we can understand that identity projections are built up as partial accounts which are intersubjective in nature, and that they depend on the conversational context as well as on the ideological dynamics in which they develop. Hence, it is clear that identity is neither inherent nor dependant on solely one social actor, but it is subject to negotiation, it depends on its perception by the others and can be extended by aggregating more facets to the displayed projection. Its content depends on the interactional exigencies of the moment. The identity analysed here is shaped by the agency of both social actors who participate in the conversation and by the ideological contexts that are indexed during their interaction.

We can see that the local language, together with its socially meaningful context of diverse nature, is an important factor for the interactionally built local identity. A Fala can be used as a tool to project oneself as different or similar, whereas the identity created around and in relation to language is, on one hand – interactionally – fuzzy, inconsistent, built up like a patchwork, and on the other hand its ideological component remains sharp and clear.

This methodological differentiation and, more importantly, consideration of the ideologies used to build language identity seems crucial in the context of its potential impact on the revitalization work done for this and other minorized languages.

Transcription conventions

(adapted from Márquez Reiter, 2018; Schegloff, 2007)

[]	overlapping speech
(1.5)	pause and its length in seconds
(.)	micropause
:	lengthening of the sound of preceding letter
.	falling or final intonation
,	continuing intonation
?	rising or question intonation
=	latching utterances
underlying	contrastive stress or emphasis
> <	compressed or rushed talk

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(Non)fuzziness of Identity in the Spanish-Portuguese Borderland: The Case of the Linguistic Community of A Fala de Xálima (Spain)

Abstract

This article analyses the social dynamics observable in a conversation with a minoritized language activist about the neighbouring speech communities. The study demonstrates that the local variety, along with its socially meaningful context, can be an important factor for the interactionally constructed local identity. The interviewee is a member of the community of practice of A Fala de Xálima, a Galician-Portuguese Romance minoritized language with about 5,000 speakers; they live in the Spanish province of Cáceres (on the border with Portugal). The analysis applies the ontological and epistemological principles of sociocultural linguistics in order to identify some indexical interactional orientations, such as stance and ideology.

Keywords: A Fala de Xálima; linguistic identity; sociocultural linguistics

(Nie)ostrość tożsamości na pograniczu hiszpańsko-portugalskim – przypadek społeczności językowej A Fala de Xálima (Hiszpania)

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest analiza dynamik społecznych, które można zaobserwować w konwersacji z aktywistą na rzecz języka mniejszościowego, prowadzonej na temat sąsiednich społeczności językowych. W dalszej kolejności, celem jest ukazanie, że lokalna odmiana językowa, brana pod uwagę wraz ze swoim społecznie znaczącym kontekstem, może znacząco wpływać na lokalną tożsamość językową, budowaną w sposób interakcyjny. Rozmowa została przeprowadzona z członkiem wspólnoty praktyki A Fala de Xálima – języka mniejszościowego należącego do galicyjsko-portugalskiej grupy języków romańskich – która liczy ok. 5000 użytkowników mieszkających w hiszpańskiej prowincji Cáceres (na granicy z Portugalią). W analizie autor posługuje się zasadami ontologiczno-epistemologicznymi tzw. językoznawstwa społeczno-kulturowego i przy ich użyciu opisuje wybrane orientacje indeksykalne o charakterze interakcyjnym, takie jak pozycjonowania społeczne (ang. *stance*) i ideologie.

Słowa kluczowe: A Fala de Xálima; tożsamość językowa; językoznawstwo społeczno-kulturowe

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