BILINGUAL STUDENTS WRITING ABOUT LANGUAGE IDENTITY AND MATHEMATICAL PARTICIPATION

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I explore processes of negotiating language identity and mathematical participation as seen by Spanish and Catalan bilingual students in mathematics classrooms with Catalan being the LoLT –Language of Learning and Teaching (Planas, 2011). I assume that the analysis of the students’ perceptions gives clarity to how negotiation of language identity and mathematical participation works. The research by Setati and her colleagues (e.g., Setati, Chitera, & Essien, 2009) with multilingual students in South Africa is the more direct reference to my current research. My discussion here is limited to the collection of individual narratives written by ten Latin American Spanish speakers who produced extensive responses when addressed the following task:

Please tell me a little about what language you use during group work in your mathematics classroom and why. I am very interested in who you are and any explanation that you may give me. Write as formally or informally as you like, either in Catalan or Spanish, up to one page. You have around twenty minutes, but you can ask for more.

Despite the political experience of “monolingual bias”, what I found in many texts is that students are highly engaged in the representation of hybrid language identities during group work mathematical interactions. Drawing on the idea of hybrid language identities, it can be argued that the narrative discourses constructed by the Spanish-dominant speakers do not qualitatively differ much from those constructed by the Catalan-dominant speakers. In their writings students address two forms of resistance that work to maintain the use of their two languages. These forms of resistance are primarily linked to the ideas of: (1) not challenging ‘too much’ some of the imagined expectations, and (2) not damaging opportunities of mathematical learning. The students consider both individual interests –their mathematical learning–, and collective interests –the expectations attributed to others in the class.

NOTES
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REFERENCES