Being a Chinese newcomer in Madrid compulsory education: Ideological constructions in language education practice

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on how students from China are institutionally constructed through everyday practice in a Madrid middle school, where three years’ fieldwork was conducted as part of a wider research project. Particular attention is paid to the Welcome Programme at this school, a new educational measure intended for students from a migrant background to learn Spanish before they enter mainstream classes. Taking critical sociolinguistic ethnography as a theoretical/methodological/analytical framework, interactional, discursive, and ethnographic data are used to show (a) what social identities are (re)produced and challenged through school practices, in connection with the ideological framework of the modern nation-state; (b) how these practices contribute to legitimizing a particular distribution/valuation of cultural and linguistic resources within the contemporary Spanish educational system; (c) what the institutional consequences are for these Chinese newcomer students.

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1. Introduction

Chinese migration, with respect to the Spanish context, has become an important research area as a consequence of the rising numbers of Chinese newcomers arriving in Spain in the last 20 years (see Beltrán et al., 2006). Although literature on this issue is still limited in terms of the number of publications, the work done has already drawn a complex picture of the socio-cultural and economic situation of this community living in Spain (see, for instance, Beltrán and Sáinz, 2001, 2002, 2003; Nieto and Fisac, 2002; Beltrán, 2003; Nieto, 2001, 2003, 2007). Particularly, anthropological research in the Spanish context has shown that the Chinese community has traditionally invested in creating in-group social networks as a strategy to gain access to economic capital and, therefore, to maintain a financial niche in the host society (Beltrán, 2004). This strategy then reveals the extent to which this community occupies a weak social position outside its own ethnic networks. However, further research is needed in order to understand how ideologies and social processes affecting (and affected by) Chinese newcomers in contemporary Spain are (re)produced and challenged through everyday practice. For this purpose,

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1 Those officially considered as “immigrants” in Spain make up 13% of the total population (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2008). Among them, the largest communities are from Ecuador, Morocco, Colombia, and Romania. Furthermore, 34 national groups are identified, including communities with more than 20,000 people. With regard to the Chinese population, they now outnumber other traditional immigrant communities in Spain, such as those from Venezuela, Portugal or Chile. Although the first Chinese immigrants came to Spain around 1920, high rates of Chinese immigration are quite recent. Nevertheless, if we compare the Chinese community in Spain to those in other European countries, such as the United Kingdom, France or the Netherlands, Spain’s is relatively new, having become established mainly over the last decade (Nieto, 2001). Thus, while there were fewer than 1000 Chinese people officially registered in Spain in 1980 their numbers had risen to 30,000 by 2000, and to over 125,000 by 2008 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2008).
theoretical–methodological–analytical tools should be applied to shed more light on the relationships and interactions between local and wider social orders. Major contributions to this kind of research have already been obtained from the linguistic, social and discursive turns adopted by contemporary social science in the approach to language, culture and identity. These turns then enable us to link the interactional and textual fine grain of everyday interactions with an account of specific institutional regimes, the wider political economy, and the global process of cultural transformation in contemporary societies (Martin-Jones, 2007).

This paper aims to further the above research, studying how complex relationships between language, identity and social structures are (re)constructed in interactional and discursive processes of categorization within the institutional space of a Spanish school where Chinese newcomer students are involved. The interest of this approach, in the fields of East Asian Studies and Pragmatics, lies therefore in its view of how everyday practice and macro-social phenomena interplay through discursive and semiotic processes. In fact, there seem to be no previous publications that have implemented this perspective by focusing on the Chinese students in the Spanish educational system, although these students are known to suffer the highest rates of educational failure of all those who enter the compulsory education system in Spain after arriving from a non-Spanish-speaking country.3

The data presented in this paper come from a wider research project involving fieldwork in various multicultural and multilingual secondary schools in Madrid (see Martin Rojo, 2010); the results of this project have been extensively examined in diverse Ph.D. dissertations (see Alcalá Recuerda, 2006; Patiño Santos, 2008; Rasskin Gutman, in press). Particular attention is paid in this article to analyzing the School Welcome Programme (Programa de Escuelas de Bienvenida), which is an institutional initiative by the Madrid Regional Government to teach Spanish language to newcomer students and ensure their success in mainstream education.5

Under this programme, participating students are enrolled in a special class (known as the bridging class), where they learn Spanish language for about one academic year, before joining mainstream classes. The examples in this paper are taken from everyday language teaching practices in the bridging class at one Madrid middle school (IES Violetas)6 where three years’ fieldwork was conducted between 2004 and 2007. Special attention is paid to how linguistic and cultural ideologies arising in the ideological framework of the modern nation-state are (re)produced and naturalized in everyday discursive practices within the bridging class, through the categorization and exclusion of the Chinese newcomer students. This analysis provides a basis for a deeper understanding of (a) what social identities are (re)constructed and challenged through school discursive practices in the bridging class; (b) how these practices contribute to legitimizing a particular distribution/valuation of cultural and linguistic resources within the contemporary Spanish educational system; (c) what the institutional consequences are for newcomer students from China.

The next section introduces first some of the main theoretical and methodological principles underlying this research. Section 3 then provides some ideological background on the kind of socio-political and economic shifts experienced in Spain over the last decade, particularly in relation to educational policies and practices. Section 4 gives an ethnographic description of the particular bridging class studied, showing how it became isolated within the Violetas school. Section 5 then focuses on the role of the Chinese students in the bridging class, analyzing the ritualized second-language teaching practices involved, as well as the legitimizing discourse that contributes to naturalizing these practices. Finally, section 6 discusses the implications of the findings, and some conclusions are drawn.

2. Understanding language, culture and identity from the perspective of critical social theory

Understanding of linguistic, social and discursive turns in anthropology, linguistics and sociology has come mainly from studies focusing on the philosophy of language (Wittgenstein, 1952; Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, among others), the Frankfurt School (Habermas, 1973, among others), and post-structural critics (Foucault, 1969; Foucault, 1966, 1975; Bourdieu, 1972, 1982, 1991; Clicourel, 1978; among others). In this regard, language, culture and identity are conceptualized as social constructions that are locally (re)produced and transformed under specific historical, political and economic conditions (Heller, 2007:2). That is, they are seen as social practices linked to ideology and political economy (Gal, 1989) rather than as bounded/neutral entities detached from social life. Thus, contemporary interpretative and critical research usually approaches the social-cultural-linguistic reality from an ontological/epistemological position that acknowledges heterogeneity, dynamism, discontinuity and ambivalence, in contrast to universalism, homogeneity, immobility and clarity (Bauman, 1992:65).

2 This line of enquiry was initiated in Pérez Milans (2006), although interactional analysis in this previous work was mainly aimed at comparing educational practices between an ordinary school and one run by the Chinese community in Madrid.

3 According to the Spanish Ministry of Education (2009), only 35 per 1000 in post-compulsory education are students with an international migrant background. In fact, in 2007, 45% of those officially considered as “foreign students” dropped out of school before completing obligatory education (MEC 2007). Among them, the students arriving from China (who represent more than 15% of the total numbers of foreign students in the 2007–2008 academic year) achieved the worst results (El Pais, 13/04/2009).

4 All methodological and analytical tools used in this paper come from the research project “Socio-pragmatic analysis of intercultural communication in educational practices: towards social integration in the classroom” (BIT2003-04830) (Análisis socio-pragmático de la comunicación intercultural en las prácticas educativas: hacia la integración en las aulas), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and directed by Luisa Martín Rojo.

5 The Schools Welcome Programme has also been experimentally implemented in other regions in Spain, although each region has used a different official name.

6 The names provided for high schools, teachers and students are pseudonyms.
In accordance with the above perspective, the present study is based on the framework of critical sociolinguistic ethnography as defined by Heller (1999, 2002) and Martín Rojo (2010). This framework draws particularly from the fields of pragmatics (Verschueren, 1999), the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1964; Gumperz and Hymes, 1972), interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1999), and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992). Language is thus conceived as being involved in the construction of social–political–historical–ideological reality through human activity rather than being merely a tool for representation. In other words, this framework involves going beyond grammatical approaches and taking into account social life. This broader viewpoint is therefore characterized by four main theoretical–methodological shifts.

First, it implies a shift in the conceptualization of social action, from something determined by external (independent) social structures to a space for symbolic action in which humans construct, reproduce and transform larger conditions of production and distribution of semiotic resources through complex and unpredictable processes of interpretation/negotiation (Cicourel, 1978; Giddens, 1984). Second, it also involves a shift in the way the school is seen, from a neutral space to a modern state institution in which the regulation of activity and knowledge construction are seen as crucial for the process of socio-cultural reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Heller and Martin-Jones, 2001). Third, it entails a shift in the understanding of the space of second language teaching, from a pedagogical tradition interested in designing efficient teaching strategies to a study of the legitimization of interested social identities linked to (language and cultural) ideologies (Block and Cameron, 2002; Lin and Martin, 2005). Fourth, it carries with it a shift in relation to the process of data collection and analysis, from etic criteria to an emic viewpoint oriented towards studying the linguistic and semiotic resources through which participants build up and naturalize social categories in situated context (Goffman, 1967, 1974, 1981; Gumperz, 1982a,b; Goodwin and Goodwin, 2004).

Such an approach to schools and classroom practices is therefore also related to the area of New Literacy Studies (Street, 1993, 1995; Gee, 1996; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Barton et al., 2000; Martin-Jones and Jones, 2000). Thus, literacy practices are considered as complex social/interactional activities in which participants make use of diverse symbolic and material resources for communication purposes, rather than as technical/cognitive abilities detached from their situational context. Studies on school literacy from an anthropological perspective have provided an account of the interests behind the educational institutionalization of an autonomous model of literacy that is disconnected from oral communication (see, however, Heller, 2007b, for an in-depth critical analysis on the dangers of studying literacy practices as specific practices). In fact, this model has its roots in the Nation-State’s political formation and its ideologies about homogeneity, rationality, structures and universal systems and grammars (see Erickson, 1984; Rymes, 2001; Collins and Blot, 2003; Wortham, 2006; Blommaert et al., 2006).

The analysis of local educational practices within broader institutional and socio-economic processes has given place to a large literature focusing on the intersections between institutional processes, national ideologies and the new economy. In particular, this literature has provided an account of how the institutional shaping of language practices in classrooms contributes to control access to those legitimate linguistic and cultural capitals that allow social mobility, in the context of different nation-states transformed both by migration (see Rampton, 1995, 2006 or Martin-Jones and Saxema, 1996; Mondada and Gajo, 2001; Martín Rojo, 2010, as examples of researches carried out in England, Switzerland and Spain, respectively) and by de-colonization (see Bunyi, 2001; Hornberger and Chick, 2001; Arthur, 2001; Ndayipfukamiye, 2001; Lin, 2005; Canagarajah, 2001; Annamalai, 2005; Rubdy, 2005; Martin, 2005, as examples of researches in Kenya, Peru, Botswana, Burundi, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, India, Singapore and Malaysia, respectively).

Taking into account all these theoretical/methodological shifts, the focus is put on certain interactional and discursive strategies. On the one hand, attention is paid to the interactional organization of specific pedagogical activities; in other words, to how participants coordinate their social actions within sets of recurring interactional sequences throughout every unit lesson. Following the work of Mehan (1979), Cazden (1988), Tsui (1995) and Seedhouse (2004), this paper thus studies ritualized patterns of participation through which students and teachers position themselves and others in relation to the knowledge displayed within sequential activities in the class. In particular, this article analyzes how the Chinese students were interactionally categorized within these linguistic performances, which is revealed by examining the social categories that emerge from participation management (i.e. turn-taking, structures of participation, speech acts, language choice, eye-gaze and use of texts in interaction).

On the other hand, discursive practices of legitimization are considered, exploring how specific, normatively values forms of knowledge on the participants and on the classroom practices are established and how they serve in the categorization work (Van Dijk, 1987; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1990; Van Leeuwen, 1995; Martín Rojo and van Dijk, 1997; Martín Rojo, 2003). In particular, attention is specifically drawn on the semantic legitimization strategies of rationalization in order to analyze how management of agent/patient semantic roles, predicating strategies, lexical choices and argumentation schemata is used to construct certain representations of the social reality that justify and naturalize classroom everyday practices.

Nevertheless, before making a close analysis of the data, it is first necessary to offer a brief overview of the current ideological conditions concerning migration and language education in Spain.

### 3. Globalization, migration and language education in contemporary Spain

In the Spanish context, economic globalization is currently making a considerable demographic impact. The political and economic reforms implemented since the late 1970s (i.e. democratization and increasing openness to the international
economic market) were followed by a huge transformation in migration patterns. A situation of large-scale emigration by Spanish workers changed into one of high levels of immigration, from all over the world, into Spain. This process affects the processes of (re)production, distribution and valuation of material and symbolic resources under the ideological framework of the Spanish modern nation-state. Thus, a major contradiction emerges in this context between the democratic commitment of modern states to citizens’ rights and the restrictive views still in place regarding linguistic/cultural homogeneity and standardization (Moyer and Martín Rojo, 2007).

In particular, this new situation provokes tensions concerning the control and regulation of what linguistic and cultural practices are considered legitimate; the cultural and linguistic diversity brought about by immigration challenges a nationalistic definition of citizenship that in Spain is still very much oriented towards modern ideas about an imagined adjustment between culture, language, society and territory (Terrén, 2004:9–25). Therefore, and even though recent EU regulations recognize the languages of migrant minorities within Member States, access to public spaces in Spain (i.e. participation in economic and political life) remains very restricted to a linguistically and culturally homogeneous definition of the citizen that is based on an imagined Spanish heritage.

In fact, reports by the Spanish Institute of Statistics (INE) on economic activities by nationalities reveal an explicit landscape of economic stratification. Newcomers in Spain mainly occupy the social periphery, filling the niche of poorly paid lower-scale jobs in services (57%), construction (23.6%), industry (12.2%) and agriculture (7%) (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2008). This is usually justified in public and political discourse by a racialization of the social reality. Thus, the definition of the “qualified” citizen seems to be traversed by a sharp cultural polarization between the “native population” and the “others”, in which the others are constructed as culturally distant (and sometimes incompatible) people who need to be acculturated in accordance with the “Spanish ideal citizen” to be able to succeed in the host society.

Language is crucial in all these tensions, as “[it] (together with religion, race and class) plays a key role in the processes whereby social actors are granted legitimate membership as nationals, i.e., are treated socially as ‘truly’ French, Spaniards, Catalans or Danes. Linguistic competence and performance is thus increasingly activated to construct or reinforce differences underpinned by other forms of social categorization” (Pujolar, 2007:79). This is particularly important for a monolingual region such as Madrid, where the traditional official language of the state is still the only official language of the region. Thus, linguistic ideologies contributing to devalue all speech forms different from standard Spanish are much more explicit in such a context, where other speech forms associated with immigrants – accents, speech styles, varieties, code-switching and code-mixing – are particularly underestimated.

In the context of a contemporary situation in which states tend to rely on institutions to implement policies regulating citizenship, the Spanish educational system appears to play a crucial role in naturalizing linguistic and cultural ideas of standardization. Institutionalizing pressures arise not only from the requirement for all students to study the curriculum and learn the official language(s) of the host society (i.e. Spanish and, in some areas, another official language, specific to the region), but also from the requirement to display this cultural and linguistic knowledge in specific ways. In this regard, previous educational research has shown that non-standard accents, lexical choices and grammatical uses are institutionally devalued (Carbonell, 1995; Martín Rojo, 2010; Nussbaum and Unamuno, 2006; Alcalá Recuerda, 2006; Martín Rojo and Mijares, 2007a,b; Patiño Santos, 2008; Carrasco, 2008; García et al., 2008; Colectivo IOÉ, 2009).

In consequence, immigrant students’ cultural and linguistic capitals (including that of students from Spanish speaking countries) are de-legitimized by the institutionalization of a “compensatory logic” (Martín Rojo, 2010:137–184), that is, by the implementation of special educational programmes that separate these students from mainstream education and categorize them as “deficient” or “incompetent” on the basis of monolingual (i.e. Castilian Spanish) and ethnocentric evaluations of competence. Thus, students are forced to keep their previous knowledge (i.e. language varieties, linguistic repertoires and cultural backgrounds) out of the school and to take part in basic literacy programmes as a prerequisite for integration, instead of being treated as already literate students (in other languages) who need educational bridges to enable linguistic and cultural transfers.

One of these symbolic spaces where such forms of social categorization are displayed is the institutional document which regulated the School Welcome Programme in Madrid at the time of the study. In fact, this document links, in its very first paragraph, immigrant status to language ignorance and lack of schooling:

“The rising number of foreign students who, in both ordinary and special classes, have in recent years been attending schools funded by the Madrid Regional Government, requires the adoption of measures contributing to their adaptation to the education system, especially in those cases in which such students present a high degree of ignorance of Spanish language or a serious curriculum gap as a consequence of a lack of previous schooling in their country of origin” (Policy document 2006: 1, author’s translation).

Furthermore, this "compensatory logic" seems to vary according to a cultural/national hierarchization, so that the greater the cultural distance perceived, the lower are the educational expectations regarding the different nationality groups of students in Spain (Terrén, 2004:27–60).

Let us now examine the data compiled; the following sections illustrate the extent to which language and cultural ideologies are mobilized within a bridging class in Madrid. Our attention is specifically focused on the teaching of Spanish
Table 1
Students in the bridging class at Violetas middle school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Home language</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shiqing</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Shanghanese</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaosheng</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Shanghanese</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feng</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatima</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Moroccan variety</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fadila</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Moroccan variety</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assya</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Moroccan variety</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnaldo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Brazilian Portuguese</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodrigo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Brazilian Portuguese</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halyna</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

language to the Chinese newcomers, although the next section first introduces the particular situation of this class within the Violetas middle school, in order to contextualize everyday practices here.

4. The bridging class at Violetas middle school: framing tensions, dilemmas and educational isolation

In line with the different analytical perspectives that are of concern in a critical sociolinguistic ethnography, the fieldwork conducted during the three years at Violetas middle school resulted in the compilation of a rich variety of data on the educational experiences of a group of nine newcomer secondary students, aged from 14 to 17 years at the time of the research (Table 1). These data reflect not only the students' initial enrolment in the bridging class, where they spent one year learning Spanish, but also their subsequent incorporation into the school's mainstream classes. The corpus of data includes field notes (360 pages); images of the school's physical spaces (90 digital photos); questionnaires addressed to the newcomer students' families7; teaching materials collected in different classes (49 school data sheets); official documents (the School Welcome Programme policy and the school's institutional documents); individual and focus-group interviews involving the newcomer students and their peers in the school (20 sessions); interviews with different teachers and with the head of the school (11 sessions); and video-recordings made both in the bridging class (20 h) and in the mainstream classes where the newcomers in question were later incorporated (14 h).8

Analysis of these different kinds of data revealed that the incorporation of the nine newcomer students into the mainstream classes was no easy task. Their trajectory from the bridging class to the other classes in the school proved a difficult one, as a result of the progressive isolation of the bridging class within Violetas. This made it difficult for these students to successfully complete their compulsory education (see Pérez Milans, 2007a, for a detailed ethnographic account of this isolating process). These difficulties need to be understood in relation to the institutional contradictions that the school, as a modern socialization institution situated within the ideological framework of the nation-state, faces as a consequence of having to cope with the socio-cultural and linguistic diversity brought about by immigration. Excerpt 1 is extracted from an interview with the school head, in which she remarks upon this contradiction and its educational implications (see Appendix 1 for an explanation of the basic symbols used in the transcripts):

Excerpt 1. "This is our bread and butter"

Miguel: hay mucha polémica porque eh/los profesores normalmente se quejan/ahora se están quejando de que no tienen herramientas para [responder/cada vez]
there's a lot of controversy because er/teachers always complain/now they're complaining that they don't- don't have the tools [to face/every time there's]

Rosa: [sí/cierto]
[yes/true]

Miguel: mayor/ni- disparidad de nivel/[de lengua]
= growing/dis- level of disparity/[of language]

Rosa: [sí sí]
[right right]

Miguel: de- de escolaridad/de escolarización previa//entonces bueno/¿qué opinión te merece esto?
=of- of schooling/of previous schooling/well then/what is your opinion about this?

7 These surveys were designed, collected, analyzed and interpreted within the European project: “Integrating immigrants into their new societies: implications for psychological adjustment, family functioning and labour force participation across five European nations”), funded by ESF (Exploratory Workshop PR/SCSS/A68S, 2002–2005), and supervised by Robin Goodwin.
8 Furthermore, different supporting activities were provided to the school community, so that all participants in the research benefited from the ethnographic experience. Among these supporting activities, most of them concerned translation, interpretation and mediation in (written and face-to-face) interactions between the Chinese students/parents and the school teachers.

Rosa: [pués hombre]/como directora//vamos a ver si soy capaz de superar esa esquizofrenia//como directora y teniendo en cuenta el sitio en el que estamos/en este barrio/y por la propia supervivencia del instituto/yo me tengo que alegrar/eh?//de que haya inmigrantes porque sospecho que va a ser/por el momento la única manera de equilibrar/el tema del descenso de la natalidad/y- pero que no se nos puede olvidar que comemos de esto/o sea/comemos porque hay clientes/no hay/no es por otra/por otra- otro motivo//algunos además tenemos vocación/yo tengo estas cosas/por eso está bien/desde el punto de vista de docente/pues hombre/por que te tengo que decir/por eso lo que imagino que te dirán el resto/que/profesores/que es un problema añadido/si hasta ahora con los problemas/los problemas con los/que nos enfrentábamos habitualmente era/pues si/que cada hijo- cada chaval es/de su padre y de su madre/tiene una formación/tyiene una educación/tiene/yo tengo un bagaje etérea etérea//pero claro/el problema con el que no nos enfrentábamos hasta ahora era el desconocimiento del idioma/como que eso no existía para nosotros//hablábamos siempre de- de contenidos curriculares/de que no sabe matemáticas no sabe lengua y tal/pero claro/no que no sabe hablar español/con lo cual claro/de- en primera instancia instancia el- el que en una clase te encuentres ya con esa dificultad de partida/hace que estas otras/se te olviden/o sea/a mi ya no me preocupa que no sepa hacer un análisis sintáctico o cosas por el estilo (...) entonces sí/eh yo creo que es un poco inevitable expresar u- una inquietud//luego si queremos vemos la parte positiva del asunto/el enriquecimiento cultural/el que algo te aparta/yo creo que eso es más a largo plazo/eh?

{Interview with the head of the school. Recording code: 2a_V010604E}

In the context of rising immigration and controversy that is pointed out during the interview, in relation to the educational arena, Rosa justifies her colleagues’ complaints about the difficulties encountered regarding the current disparity of educational and language backgrounds. Thus, she constructs a social rationalization based on a cause-consequence argumentation schema where this disparity is represented as the cause of the downgrading of the educational curriculum (that is/I don’t worry any more that they can’t do syntactic analysis or things like that), thereby making inevitable the teachers’ reaction of preoccupation (so yes/mm I think it is only natural to express concern). However, it is very revealing that she tries to protect her social image by avoiding any link between these reactions and racism (let’s see if I’ll be able to overcome this schizophrenia), and by framing her argumentation schema within a representation of the school as an institution that needs immigrant students on the basis of market logic and of a supplier-client relationship (we must remember that this is our bread and butter//I mean/we keep going because there are customers).

The contradictions arising at Violetas, thus, involved an institutional tension between making room for the newcomers and maintaining a curriculum that has officially and traditionally been designed for Spanish native speakers. Thus, the school’s interests in responding to cultural and linguistic diversity ran into these contradictions, and so the implementation of new educational programmes ended up by contributing to the representation of diversity as a problem to be solved. In other words, in this institutional framework the school treated cultural diversity as an intermediate and necessary stage towards cultural and linguistic assimilation, which in fact contributed to reinforce the isolation of the bridging class within Violetas.

In specific terms, the contribution of these institutional tensions to the educational isolation of the bridging class in the school was reflected in three domains involving an interplay between (a) the official policy guidelines issued by the Madrid educational administration, (b) the institutional procedures actually applied in the school, and (c) the teaching practices followed in the bridging class. Firstly, the official design of the School Welcome Programme made it difficult to be implemented by the schools, as there were no clear-cut educational and administrative guidelines to ensure the effective integration of newcomer students at the school. The school was not provided with clear, officially defined goals, contents, materials and administrative procedures to rely on, apart from the fact that a separate class had to be set up within the school. This left the department in charge of this programme at the school (the Guidance Department) with the responsibility of improvising its own measures, despite its lack of previous experience.
Secondly, institutional procedures carried out by the Guidance Department to facilitate newcomer students’ incorporation into mainstream classes did not receive enough support from teachers in these mainstream classrooms. Most of them felt that these students’ lack of Spanish language proficiency was an obstacle to everyday activities and therefore to the learning process of the other students. This was the case with respect to the progressive incorporation that was supposed to provide newcomer students in the bridging class with the opportunity of attending mainstream activities for some hours every week. Under this scheme, each of these students was incorporated into their corresponding grade (according to their age) in order to attend the classes considered by the Guidance Department to be the most appropriate for promoting interaction between them and their mainstream peers (which, in practice, were the physical education, arts and social sciences classes).

However, a certain lack of cooperation by the teachers in these mainstream classes hampered this progressive incorporation, as the teachers would complain in order to avoid having newcomers in their classes. In other cases, these students were allowed to join the class, but they were then kept apart from the ongoing activity most of the time (i.e. they were placed at the physical margins of the classrooms and not given any support to participate in group activities). These experiences resulted in explicit resistance by the newcomer students, who after a few months did not want to leave the bridging class to attend mainstream classes. In fact, such resistance to attend mainstream classes contributed to a lack of interaction between the students and teachers in the bridging class and between the other teachers and students in the school. This was clearly visible in symbolic spaces such as during break-times in the playground, when the newcomer students tended to stick together, and apart from the others.

Thirdly, the Spanish language teaching provided did not help to bridge the gap between this class and the others, as the language content studied was mainly geared towards basic communicative skills rather than academic purposes. In other words, the teaching plan was not really designed in line with the official goals of the School Welcome Programme: it was aimed at teaching Spanish for everyday life, not at providing newcomer students with the necessary competence to participate in the mainstream classes where they would later be sent. Thus, the topics covered during the academic year corresponding to this ethnographic study were selected and ordered according to the following sequence: 1 – greetings; 2 – requests and basic instructions; 3 – parts of the body; 4 – city maps; 5 – medical services; 6 – public transport; 7 – the supermarket; 8 – jobs and occupations.

In sum, the interaction between these three domains resulted in a process of implementation of the new educational programme in which the tension between opening up the school to cultural/linguistic diversity and homogenizing students led the bridge classroom to become isolated within Violetas. These students were therefore separated and marginalized from the Spanish native speakers in the school on the basis of a process of linguistic/cultural standardization that the newcomers had to go through before being really incorporated into mainstream education. In this regard, the Schools Welcome Programme failed to guarantee newcomers’ access to the Spanish compulsory education system. In fact, none of the nine students mentioned above succeeded in the mainstream classes once the maximum period of time for them to be in the bridging class had expired, but ended up in compensatory programmes after having failed in all the curricular subjects followed in the ordinary classes. Among them, the Chinese students were specially disadvantaged since all of them dropped out of Violetas after two years without having finished compulsory education. The following section will focus on how these results were (re)produced and legitimated through everyday activity in the bridging class.

5. The Chinese students in the bridging class: constructing isolated participants in the island

Everyday practice in the bridging class was ritualized in accordance with a recurrent interactional organization of the teaching–learning activity. Thus, students and teachers sequentially oriented their social actions with respect to specific educational activities throughout every lesson unit. In other words, they co-constructed educational activities that had specific interactional organization/architecture. Table 2 shows an example of such recurrent organization of classroom activity, listing the linguistic performances in which the nine researched newcomers took part during the lesson unit called “Occupations”:

Among these recurrent interactional sequences, those concerning the work in small groups and the individualized writing activities were of particular relevance in the lesson on “Occupations” as well as in the other lesson units studied during the academic year. In fact, the participation framework in these two educational activities provided the teachers with opportunities to interact more individually with each student. The following sections, therefore, focus on these two activities. Analysis draws its attention to the study of what forms of interactional categorization emerged from participation management in them, with respect to the Chinese newcomer students (sections 5.1 and 5.2), and how these categories were institutionally reinforced and naturalized in discourses produced by the authorized participants in the school (section 5.3).

5.1. Activity in small groups: being a non-legitimate participant

When doing exercises in small groups, the students were usually divided into two different groups, each one working simultaneously under the supervision and support of one teacher. In this way, each teacher managed the participation framework more easily by adapting herself to each student according to the different language proficiencies attributed. Although this is a common pedagogic strategy for attending to individual needs when working with groups of students, it does provide us with an interesting discursive space in which interaction is linked to wider social processes. Excerpt 2 is a
representative example of an eliciting sequence within these working-in-small-groups activities, where one of the teachers (Victoria) interacts with three newcomer students: Gaosheng, Aisha and Rodrigo.

The activity in this excerpt consisted of 21 words that had to be classified under the categories of “shop”, “job” and “place of work”. These words were listed on photocopies distributed to all the students, and they had to group them into the three stated categories by underlining them with different colours (red, black or blue). A recurring basic interactional sequence was therefore constructed for each one of the words on the list. The sequence started with the teacher asking for the word in question. The students then replied by reading out the word. The teacher then asked another question, referring to the colour that had to be matched to the word. Finally, the students responded by highlighting the word in the corresponding colour on their photocopies. This was then followed by a verbal appraisal by the teacher.

Excerpt 2. “What’s a singer?”

**Victoria:** bien/MÁSS {golpea con el boli en la mesa}
ok/WHAT ELSE? {tapping the desk with her pen}

**Assya:** {leyendo} el/cann &
{reading} the/sing &

**Rodrigo:** & ell cantante {subrayando en su hoja. Gaosheng mantiene la mirada sobre su hoja}
& thee singer {underlining on his photocopy. Gaosheng keeps looking at his photocopy}

**Victoria:** {mirando fijamente a Gaosheng} ¿qué es un canTAAnte/Gaosheng?
{looking directly Gaosheng} what is a SINGER/Gaosheng?

**Assya:** cantante {Gaosheng continúa mirando a sus hojas. Todos los participantes miran a Gaosheng}
singer {Gaosheng keeps looking at his papers. All the participants look at Gaosheng}

**Victoria:** AVE MARÍA {cantando y mirando a Gaosheng}/[la la la la] {la profesora señala en la hoja de Gaosheng}
AVE MARÍA {singing and looking at Gaosheng}/[la la la la] {she points to Gaosheng’s paper}

**Assya:** {mirando a la profesora} [AAHH/sí] {Victoria mira a Assya sonriendo y después vuelve la mirada a Gaosheng, que se mantiene callado}
{looking at the teacher} [AAHH/yes yes] {Victoria smiles at Assya and then looks back at Gaosheng, who remains silent}

**Victoria:** {mirando a Gaosheng} &EL QUE CANTA/no? {Gaosheng mantiene la mirada en su hoja. Assya subraya en su propia hoja y Rodrigo mira lo que Assya subraya. Victoria golpea la mesa mientras continúa mirando a Gaosheng}
{looking at Gaosheng} &THE ONE WHO SINGS/right? {Gaosheng keeps looking at his paper. Assya underlines on her paper and Rodrigo looks at what Assya is underlining. Victoria raps the desk and continues looking at Gaosheng}

**Assya:** es azul {Gaosheng sigue mirando a su propia hoja}

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson unit: “Occupations”</th>
<th>Predominant interactional sequences around which teachers–students oriented their social actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introducing the lesson and handing out new related materials and photocopies (one teacher in class)</strong></td>
<td>Teacher-centred explanations and instructions to all students, framing the activity meaning in relation to previous lessons, and providing a general overview of the new lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Copying the new vocabulary (one teacher in class)</strong></td>
<td>Instructions given by the teacher for all students to copy new vocabulary into their notebooks and on the backboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explaining the new vocabulary (one teacher in class)</strong></td>
<td>Teacher-centred explanations and eliciting sequences about the meaning of the vocabulary copied down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Doing exercises on the new vocabulary (one teacher in class)</strong></td>
<td>Instructions given by the teacher to all students on the what, the how and the when of the exercises; eliciting sequences about the exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working in small groups (two teachers in class)</strong></td>
<td>Instructions and eliciting sequences in which the teacher posts display questions by selecting participants in turns in order to correct exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Doing individualized writing activities (two teachers in class)</strong></td>
<td>Instructions given by the teachers to each student according to different levels and competences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Playing games by using new knowledge (one teacher in class)</strong></td>
<td>Instructions given by the teacher for all students to follow in relation to a selected game; peer interaction according to the game’s rules</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Victoria: {a Gaosheng} ¿sí? {Gaosheng parece asentir muy ligeramente y sin levantar la vista de su hoja}
(to Gaosheng) ¿isn’t it? {Gaosheng seems to nod very slightly without looking up from his paper}
Victoria: es una profesión † {vuelve la mirada a su propia hoja}
it’s an occupation † {she looks back at her own paper}
Assya: &azul/?no?
& blue/right?
Victoria: [mirando a Assya] [azul]
(looking at Assya) [blue]
Assya: [azul]sí
[blue]yes
Victoria: [volviendo la mirada a su propia hoja] =muy bien [Assya subraya en su hoja] ¿y qué es un músico?
(looking back at her own paper) =very good [Assya underlines on her paper] and what’s a musician?

{Classroom interaction. Recording code: U1_2-3v_V200404A_b}
derived is an example of this, as Gaosheng and Rodrigo (who was usually categorized by the teachers as an advanced student) were the only ones who, by the end of the exercise, had underlined all the items correctly.

In this regard, the teacher seems to fail to understand that Gaosheng's non-explicit participation does not index his lack of understanding. This could be explained in relation to an intercultural misunderstanding (Gumperz, 1982a; Spencer-Oatey, 2000) as has been extensively studied in the field of intercultural pragmatics by other researchers who have focused on Western-Chinese encounters (see, for instance, Günthner, 1993; Young, 1994; Love and Sophie, 2006), although cultural distance is not taken in this article as an objective or pre-established reality but rather as a discursive construction linked to social, economic and political conditions (see last section in this article).

However, the social construction of the Chinese newcomer students as the poorest language learners in the bridging class did not only take place in the activities where students worked in small groups. The "individualized writing activities" were also an interesting discursive space where these processes of interactional categorization were (re)produced. This question is analyzed in the following sub-section.

5.2. Individualized writing activities: being a non-literate student

As mentioned in section 2 concerning the contribution of the New Literacy Studies, literacy practices in everyday life are more concerned with complex social and interactional activities than with technical and cognitive abilities isolated from their social context. However, schools have played a key role in the institutionalization of the artificial separation between orality and writing, in line with an autonomous model of literacy disconnected from oral communication. These two entities are therefore usually considered within the educational institution as different abilities to be developed at different time-space locations. This was the case of the bridging class, as shown in earlier research (see Pérez Milans, 2007b, for an in-depth analysis of the interactional construction of this separation). Thus, educational activity in such classroom was organized in a way that specific activities labelled as "reading and writing exercises" were worked individually at particular times and in given areas of the classroom (i.e. different exercises had to be conducted in different corners within the classroom).

In other words, writing activities were interactionally constructed in the bridging class as separated, non-communicative exercises even though common everyday activity in the classroom was built up upon communicative practices where all kinds of writing technologies were involved (such as pencils, paper, computers, posters). In particular, the management of those activities concerned with non-communicative writing abilities was stressed by the teachers when working with the Chinese students in the classroom, though they were already literate in a previous language and had the same experience of using the Roman alphabet as the rest of the students in the classroom. Excerpt 3 shows how these interactional spaces for writing were constructed in classroom activity and how the emphasis on technical and cognitive abilities was specially directed at the Chinese students, thereby reinforcing their categorization as non-literate language learners:

Excerpt 3. “Has everyone copied this?”

Victoria: ((a ver)) ([señalando a la pizarra] ¿TODO EL MUNDO HA COPIADO ESTO?

Feng: ((ya está))

Victoria: venga/copia rápido Gaosheng que cambiamos de actividad [mirando en la hoja de Feng] vale/muy bien/

Feng: GUARDAR/[señalando a la mochila de Feng] AQUI’/Y ESTO //A CASA/DEBERES {le da unas hojas con ejercicios}

Victoria: come on/copy fast Gaosheng we’re going to do something else {checking Feng’s paper} ok/very good//PUT AWAY/[pointing to his school bag] HERE//AND THAT //FOR HOME/HOMEWORK {she gives him some sheets of paper with exercises}

Feng: (vale)°

Victoria: Arnaldo/cariño/[le deja una hoja sobre su mesa] haces estos tres ejercicios/tilde diacrítica/¿sabes lo que es?

Arnaldo: Arnaldo/dear/[she puts a sheet of paper on his desk] do these three exercises/diacritic accent/ do you know what it is?

Victoria: {leyendo en la hoja} diia &

° In contrast to what many people think, students in China learn the Roman alphabet from the first levels in Primary education, as English language is compulsory in the Chinese national curriculum. Furthermore, Chinese writing is taught from the very beginning with the support of pinyin, a transliteration system based on the Roman alphabet that is used to help students to pronounce the Chinese characters (see Feng, 2009).
critica/ahora te lo explico//{se acerca a Rodrigo} Rodrigo {mostrándole una hoja} aquí están/las famosas palabras/agudas llanas y esdrújulas/míratelo/si tienes dudas se lo preguntas a tu hermano que ya lo estudió/ quiero que lo entiendas/si no lo entiendes mañana me lo preguntas///hay ejemplos paraa- para que te resulte más cómodo ///y mañana hablamos/¿vale? {Rodrigo asiente con la cabeza. Victoria se levanta. Feng acaba la actividad de copia y va a sentarse junto a Shiqing y Candela para trabajar la lectura. Victoria habla con Arnaldo mientras Candela y Feng leen un libro. Amina y Aisha siguen haciendo la actividad de copia. La vídeo-cámara se centra en Shiqing, Candela y Feng}
& critic/I'll explain it to you now//{she approaches Rodrigo and sits down next to him} Rodrigo {showing him a sheet of paper} here you have/the famous words/words with the stress on the last syllable/words with the stress on the penultimate syllable and proparoxytones//have a look at it/if you have any doubts you just ask your brother as he's already studied it/I want you to understand it/if you don't understand it ask me about it tomorrow/m-/read it/try to understand it ///there are examples for- for you- for you to understand it more easily ///and we'll talk about it tomorrow/ok? {Rodrigo nods in agreement. Victoria stands up. Feng finishes his copying and goes to sit next to Shiqing and Candela to work on reading. Victoria talks to Arnaldo while Candela and Feng read a book. Amina and Aisha carry on copying. The video-camera focuses on Shiqing, Candela and Feng}

Candela: {a Feng} bien
{to Feng} good
Feng: {leyendo} el perro
{reading} the dog
Candela: bien
{reading} good
Feng: {leyendo} el perro/|{Candela señala al libro mientras Feng lee} el perro ↑/corre ↑/rápido ↓
{reading} the/dog/|{Candela points to the book while Feng reads} the/dog ↑/runs ↑/fast ↓
Candela: bien
{good}
Feng: {leyendo} el perro/come ↑
{reading} the dog/eats ↑
Candela: {gesticulando} come/{onomatopeya}
{gesticulating} eats/{onomatopoeia}
Feng: {leyendo} el pe/rro &
{reading} the/dog &
Candela: & el perro
& the dog
Feng: {leyendo} el perro/bebé &
{reading} the dog/drips &
Candela: & no
& no
Feng: {leyendo} bebe
{reading} drinks
Candela: {coge un lápiz y escribe en el libro} bebé
{she takes a pencil and writes in the book} drips
Feng: {leyendo la palabra escrita por la profesora} bebé
{reading the word written by the teacher} drips
Candela: bebé
drinks
Feng: bebé {Candela afirma con la cabeza y señala en el libro}
drinks {Candela nods in agreement and points to the book}

Classroom interaction. Recording code: U1_9-10v_V200404A_c

Excerpt 3 is part of an interactional sequence in which participants change activity, from one directed at the whole group and focused on copying vocabulary about occupations to another in which different participants do different writing–reading tasks simultaneously. Thus, Victoria initiates a change in the participation framework by asking if everyone has
finished once the students have copied all the words that had been written on the blackboard (line 1), which therefore functions as a contextualization cue for the transition to the new activity. In fact, this change in the participation framework is immediately made explicit in the next turn when the teacher interacts with the Chinese students, in connection with what was analyzed previously in excerpt 2 regarding the interactional dynamics between the teachers and the Chinese newcomer students. Victoria thus tells Gaosheng that they are going to change activity (line 6), which is followed by a syntactically oversimplified instruction directed at Feng in a loud voice (lines 7–8).

Once the shift in activity has been carried out, a striking fact is the extent to which different tasks are assigned on a nationality basis rather than on individual competences or levels. In this regard, the students are grouped according to their national origin and located in different corners within the classroom (lines 17–80). While the Brazilian students have to work on accentuation (lines 17–29), the Moroccans carry on copying (line 32) and the Chinese newcomers are expected to do reading with the help of the other teacher (Candela) in the classroom (lines 47–80). For this reason, it is worth examining what legitimate participation framework emerges from the activity that these different national groups are engaged in, as it sheds some light on what knowledge is required of each of them.

On the one hand, the Moroccan students work individually on copying the occupation words, without any interactional support from the teachers. On the other hand, the Brazilian students participate within an interactional framework of “instruction–agreement” interchanges in which Victoria gives them the instructions for carrying out an activity on accentuation (lines 23–28) and the students show comprehension before working individually (line 29). Finally, the Chinese students participate within a framework built up by a “reading command-reading-feedback” recursive interactional structure (see, for example, lines 53–57) around isolated sentences and simple drawings.

Therefore, the participation framework within these “writing-and-reading” spaces in which the Chinese students are engaged stands out in that it contrasts strongly with those in which the Brazilian and Moroccan students take part. Although all literacy activities carried out by the groups show a typical participation framework in which writing–reading is worked without any communicative purpose, those involving the Chinese students seem to be particularly connected to a process of de-curricularization of the bridging class’s educational programme. In fact, the ritualized patterns of participation through which the teacher and the Chinese students coordinate their social actions in such spaces require basically technical abilities concerned with the reading of letters and words within isolated sentences that are not related to the contents of each unit lesson, in contrast to the more content-oriented literacy practices that the rest of the students participate in.

The interactional categorization of the Chinese students as non-literate that emerges from these activities was also reinforced in the kind of tasks that were assigned as homework to the Chinese students, as illustrated in Fig. 1. Thus, these 14–17 year-old-students were supposed to spend long periods of time doing writing activities that focused on psychomotor abilities of colouring and cutting out with scissors, as is done in pre-school education when pupils learn to write a first language. However, these teenagers had already performed them in China when becoming literate in the Chinese language and in learning the Roman alphabet that is used to support Chinese and English language teaching.

As can be seen in Fig. 1, these kind of activities are oriented towards the writing of isolated letters and sentences (see the top and the central part of the figure) and towards the tracing of lines and outlines (see the bottom part of the figure). Therefore, these activities did not contribute to facilitating the successful integration of these Chinese students into the
Madrid compulsory secondary education system, as they did not allow them to take part in the literacy practices that are required in the mainstream classrooms where they were to be sent after a period of time in the bridging class. In this regard, these practices seemed to provide the Chinese students with fewer educational resources (less capital) than their peers, leaving them with fewer opportunities for success in ordinary classes.

However, all these processes of categorization that have been analyzed in relation to the Chinese newcomer students were not only (re)produced through the everyday practices in the bridging class. The interactional construction of these students as being non-legitimate and non-literate participants, no matter what their actual competences were, was also justified and naturalized by the teachers and authorized actors at Violetas by their referring to particular social representations of the Chinese community that are commonly encountered beyond the school context, in society.

5.3. Social representations: being a “stranger”

Apart from the everyday classroom activities analyzed above, discourse practices within the bridging class also involved particular social representations of the students with a migrant background. These representations were (re)constructed by the teachers in order to rationalize their educational decisions and arrangements. Nevertheless, such representations were not always concerned just with that particular group of students in the bridging class, but also with the social stereotypes that circulate in society, by linking immigrant networks to different national and culturally bounded communities. Excerpt 4 provides an example of the stereotypes that circulated within Violetas, which were also reproduced by the teachers in the bridging class when talking about their students.

Excerpt 4. Social representations and culturally bounded groups

Miguel: vale/ y ya para terminar/en cuanto al alumno de origen extranjero//principales retos en la incorporación de estudiantes de origen extranjero al centro/¿se te ocurre así [risas]//a priori & right/ and now to finish/concerning the students of foreign origin//main challenges in the incorporation of students of foreign origin in the school/can you think of any [laugh] a priori &

Pilar: & ordenarlos es un poco/es un poco difícil/mm mira//por los quebraderos de cabeza que nos causan/ desde luego/el idiomático//la integración de tipo idiomático/sin esa ||/visto está que mm vamos a la deriva/mm segundoo- en segundo lugar//no sé cuál poner en segundo lugar//porque te veo a decir que con una cifra mm/muy pequeña||/[risas] pero- pero que causa muchísima distorsión||/es laa integración en cuanto a comportamiento/tenemos lamentablemente experiencias cooon algunos chiquitos/quee/bueno||/ inmigrantes||/o hijos de inmigrantes/quee realmente les cuesta bastante bastante/mantener un comportamiento de estos que decimos mínimamente civilizado||no sé si darte nacionalidades & managing them is a bit/ is a bit difficult/mm look//taking into account the headaches they give us/ definitely/ the language/integration with respect to language/without this ||/it's evident that mm we're drifting/mm secondeo- in second place/I don't know what to put in second place/because I can tell you that with a low number mm/very low||/[laughs] but- but that causes a lot of distortion/it is thee integration in terms of behaviour/ unfortunately we've had experiences with some kids/that well/immigrants||or children of immigrants/that actually have quite quite a lot of difficulty/in behaving in what we call a minimally civilized way/I don't know if telling you nationalities

Miguel: ¿las sabes?
Tienes que saber
Pilar: se saben/si/marroquies & they are known/yes/Moroccan &
Miguel: & ¿problema de disciplina//oo? & & problems of discipline//oor? &
Pilar: & de disciplina/graves//bastante graves//where is the alumnado marroqui/en general (...) desde luego la quee a gran distancia del resto/da problemas/i- insisto de comportamiento/((()])[/since luego es la marroquí/ de integración ||/un poco en el sistema educativo/el que se relacionen con los demás y demás//yo te ((diria)) que es la china/la que tarda más eeeen aceptar que- que tienes que intentar hablar con los compañeros//que es bueno relacionarte//y luego sí/((())) hemos observado también/que sobre todo chicas de COLOR//estoy hablando de Guinea/fundamentalmente/eeh suelen hacer sus pequeños grupos of discipline/serious/quite serious//uh?//(...) it’s usually the Moroccan students/in general (...) definitely the ones that much more than the rest//cause trouble//I mean in terms of behaviour/((()//it's definitely the Moroccans// regarding integration ||in the education system//in terms of having contact with the others and so on/I would ((say))) that it’s the Chinese/who take longest tooo/accept that- that you have to try to talk to your classmates//that it is good to have contact with others//and then/((()//we have observed also/that above all the BLACK girls//I am talking about Guinea/particularly//uhh they tend to form their own small groups

{Interview with the Head of the school. Recording code: 2a_V010604E}
When asked about the challenges faced by the school as a consequence of demographic change, the Head of Violetas replies in excerpt 4 by constructing a social situation that highlights language problems and misconduct by the students. This is discursively justified on the basis of a semantic strategy of social rationalization that constructs bounded groups of nationalities around a main discursive polarization between the Spanish and the non-native students (see Martín Rojo and van Dijk, 1997, for a detailed discussion on the construction of discursive polarization). All newcomers are thus grouped according to their nationalities. Particularly, all of them are linked to different national stereotypes (while the Moroccan students are referred to as the most rebellious, the Chinese and the “black” girls from Guinea are described as the most anti-social as they avoid social contact with their peers) and are semantically constructed as agents of actions against a passive patient “we” in-group (taking into account the headaches they give us).

In this sense, educational matters are explained in relation to a nationalistic view of culture. This view emphasizes processes of “othering” both by assigning negative attributes (“problems”, “misbehaviour”, “social isolation”, etc.) to the non-Spanish students and also by constructing a cultural hierarchy among the non-native groups, in which the Chinese students seem to occupy a distant position. The predicating strategies managed in excerpt 4 thus position these students as non-Spanish students and also by constructing a cultural hierarchy among the non-native groups, in which the Chinese students seem to occupy a distant position. The predicating strategies managed in excerpt 4 thus position these students as the representatives of those who have problems of integration into the Spanish education system (regarding integration in the educational system in terms of having contact with others and so on I would ((say)) that it’s the Chinese). In fact, the teachers in the bridging class highlighted this perceived cultural distance, stating that “the bridging class is not enough for the Chinese because they are less sociable while other students from Eastern Europe adapt to our culture when they arrive in Spain”. Various aspects contributed to this social categorization of the Chinese students in the bridging class, although social stereotypes about the Chinese language and writing seemed to play a key role. Excerpt 5 is a representative sample of the discourses circulating about these students and their home languages and systems of writing:

Excerpt 5. The Chinese students and their language and culture

Miguel: bueno/yy//y la experiencia personal con la- la experiencia personal con la población de origen chino well/and/and what about your personal experience with your- your personal experience with people of Chinese origin?

Candela: ¿mi experiencia anterior?//ninguna/con chinos no he tenido nunca/es la primera [vez]

Miguel: [¿y] con la que estáis teniendo ahora?

Candela: me gusta/me gusta/son otra cultura que me gusta/me gusta ((() )/yo creo que/((() )/el entendimiento/no es/no es la señal/o sea/puedes enseñarles muchas palabras sueltas/es/la estructura de la frase/eh la entonación la entienden/yo—para mi/ mi agrado/porque yo soy de mucha expresividad/de/bromas//me entienden/yo pensé que no era una cultura que iba a entender/pensé que era más recta/más seria/no/en cambio entienden muy bien las—las bromas//entienden mejor que Haylena/fijate/de Ucrania/pues entienden ese conc- ((() )/como te diría yo/la entonación el—eh lo que ((() )/como juegoos/esas expresiones que tenemos/eso sí lo entienden bien/por lo menos a la hora de realizar frases/yo creo que les— se pierden/se pierden//les falta poder expresar/o sea/como que les falta/la colocación/buscar las frases adecuadas//porque no es que utilicen tiempo de verbos/no es que utilicen sílabas de palabras o/oo mm/artículos/es que ellos les cuesta mucho co— eeh intentar eeh/hacer una selección para poder expresar/me gustaría/buscar algo//yo sé que [risas]/sabes cómo te digo/?no?/para/ pero les cuesta/les cuesta/pues además ellos son muy autodidactas/ellos quieren solucionarlo/((() )/ellos cogen su diccionario/yo sal/((() )/o sea/son muy concretos/los marroquíes/no pero los chinos sí son muy concretos/yo creo que el dibujo les huele/ga/() es el propio diccionario la palabra en sí como/esto concepto/eso otra cosa que no es lo que estoy viendo yo que es el dibujo/eso que no sé/algro raro pasa I like it/I like it/they are a different culture which I like/I like ((() )/I think that/it isn’t the sign/I mean/you can teach them a lot of individual words/it’s/the structure of the sentence/uh they understand the intonation/— which I like/because I’m a very expressive person with/jokes/they understand me/I thought it wasn’t a culture I was going to understand/I thought it was stricter/more serious/no/however they understand very well— the jokes/they understand better than Haylena/surprisingly/from Ucrania/so they understand such conceive—/how can I put it/the intonation the—uh the ((() )/like gaames/those expressions that we have/that’s something they understand well/ but when they have to make sentences/I think that—/they get lost/they can’t express themselves/I mean/as if they lack/collocation/to find the right sentences/because it isn’t that they use verb tenses/it isn’t that they use syllables or/oor mm/articles/it is/that they have a lot of difficulty in— uah trying uah/to make a choice to be able to express themselves/I would like/to find something/I don’t know [laughs]/you know what I mean/Don’t you?/for—but it is difficult for them—for they have problems/because in addition they are very self-sufficient/they want to solve it/((() )/they take their dictionary/and they know/((() )/I mean/they are very direct/the Moroccans aren’t/uh the Chinese are very direct/I think the drawing isn’t necessary/() it is the dictionary itself the word in itself like/the concept and their concept—it’s something else that I’m not seeing in the drawing/I don’t know/something strange is happening

[Interview with one of the teachers in the bridging class. Recording code: 1a_V250304E]
Based on a social representation of the Chinese language and the Chinese writing system as unknown, enigmatic, cryptic and purely ideographic, Chinese students were mainly constructed by the teachers as culturally and cognitively distant, as illustrated in excerpt 5 in the case of Candela. Thus, she attempts to explain the language difficulties of the Chinese students by relying on a rationalization that predicates cultural distance (I thought it wasn’t a culture I was going to understand) and strange psycholinguistic processing (it isn’t that they use verb tenses/it isn’t that they use syllables or/oor mm/articles/it is/that they have a lot of difficulty in - uuh trying uuh/to make a choice to be able to express themselves/I would like/to find something//I don’t know [laughs]), on the basis of a cause–consequence argumentation schemata that represents the nature of the Chinese characters as the main cause (it is the dictionary itself the word in itself like/the concept and their concept///it’s something else that I’m not seeing in the drawing/I don’t know/something strange is happening).

In this way, Chinese writing is represented according to the “ideographic myth” (DeFrancis, 1986), by which characters are represented by reproducing the same exotic attributes that European missionaries constructed about the Chinese language in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. That is, Chinese characters are represented as exotic images and symbols that are not tied to any sound and that speak to the mind directly through the eyes, therefore omitting some of the crucial phonetic characteristics that make Chinese writing a self-contained writing system. Thus, the social representation of Chinese writing as purely pictographic or ideographic, completely detached from the oral language, contributes in this case to building up a “psychological exotization” of the Chinese students that is used by the teacher to predict or justify their supposed educational difficulties.

6. Discussion

Analysis of everyday educational practices in a Madrid bridging class shows how ethno-national ideologies regarding legitimate membership are institutionalized in the particular logic of the school. Thus, institutional processes of social categorization in the School Welcome Programme seem to be strongly traversed by discursive practices of polarization that assign bounded linguistic/cultural differences to the different newcomer students, in connection with what has been described by other studies conducted in the Spanish educational context. In doing so, an opposition is always (re)constructed between a “Spanish ideal student” and the non-native students, so that newcomers tend to be institutionally categorized as “non-competent” and “non-literate” on the basis of ethnocentric evaluations of their competences.

In fact, the study of the experimental implementation of the bridging class at the Violetas middle school draws a complex picture, in which the tension between making room for the newcomers and maintaining a curriculum that has officially and traditionally been designed for Spanish native speakers led to this language education programme becoming isolated within the school. Thus, the interplay between the official policy guidelines issued by the Madrid educational administration, the institutional procedures actually applied at Violetas, and the curriculum design on which teaching practices in the bridging class are grounded contributed to constructing cultural and linguistic diversity as an intermediate and necessary stage towards cultural and linguistic assimilation. Therefore, the separation of the nine newcomers from mainstream education was reinforced.

Difficulties and dilemmas faced in everyday activity by the head of the school, the teachers in the mainstream classrooms, the bridging class teachers and the newcomers, thus, need to be examined within this institutional framework. In particular, the “othering” and the social hierarchization of the newcomer students that arise from everyday discursive practices at Violetas seem to be linked to the institutional demands for cultural and linguistic standardization. In other words, pressures to acculturate newcomer students according to a Spanish native-ethnocentric curriculum pushed authorized participants in the school to evaluate these students’ educational and language competences depending on the degree of cultural and linguistic difference that is perceived with respect to the standard. This ideological framework makes stereotyped cultural assumptions (on a national basis) relevant in that it provides teachers with a common reference for adapting their educational measures to their non-Spanish newcomer students and for assessing these students’ improvements.

Such is the case regarding the bridging class analyzed in this study, where the language proficiency attributed seems to be based mainly on the perceived cultural distance. In this sense, analysis of discursive practices in the classroom reveals processes of social categorization where the students of nationalities that are considered more culturally distant tend to be categorized as having more language learning difficulties, regardless of their individual competences. These processes of social categorization were (re)constructed through interaction as well as through discursive strategies of social rationalization. In particular, classroom activity was interactionally organized in such a way that different language activities and demands were made of the students depending on their national origin (instead of distributing activities on the basis of individualized pedagogical criteria), which was discursively justified by the construction of a cultural hierarchy that assigned different socio-cultural stereotypes to each national group.

Among these constructed groups of students, those from China occupied the most distant position. In fact, the study of participation management in the most important recurrent interactional sequences shows them to be constructed as non-competent and non-literate learners, needing most interactional support to follow the on-going classroom activity and being involved in the most basic literacy activities. However, they were already literate (in both Chinese language and in the Roman alphabet) and performed sometimes classroom tasks better than many of their peers. These practices were

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10 Examples of the strong discursive links between the first missionary descriptions and contemporary stereotyped talk about the Chinese characters can be found in DeFrancis (1986).
naturalized by a social representation of these students as culturally, linguistically and cognitively strange (i.e. "psychological exotization"), which in turn was explained in relation to a supposedly unknown, enigmatic, cryptic and purely ideographic character of the Chinese language and the Chinese writing system. Nevertheless, these processes were not unidirectional impositions by the teachers, but rather the result of complex interactions where the students' resistance to engagement in accordance with the legitimate participation framework also contributed to such social categorization.

In sum, this triangulated analysis sheds some light on how macro-social processes affecting (and affected by) Chinese people in the Spanish context are (re)produced and legitimated through everyday practice in institutional spaces. In particular, the logic of the practices analyzed seems to de-capitalize Chinese students and hamper their access to Spanish post-compulsory education, as they are provided with fewer opportunities to engage in complex interactions in accordance with the academic goals established in compulsory education. In fact, the Chinese students in question at Violetas achieved the worst results of all the newcomers after joining mainstream classes once the maximum period of time for them to be in the bridging class had expired. They all even dropped out of the school after two years without having finished compulsory education. As a result, these students could encounter more difficulties in accessing social spaces in which the cultural capital acquired at the school (whether certificates or other forms of knowledge) is required. However, more critical, interactional and ethnographic oriented research in other institutional spaces is needed in order to obtain a wider understanding of these social experiences involving Chinese newcomers in contemporary Spain.

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Appendix A. Symbols used in transcripts

A (capital letters) loud talking
aa lengthening of vowel or consonant sound
/ short pause (0.5 s)
\ long pause (0.5–1.5 s)
[] turn overlapping with similarly marked turn
(() non-understandable fragment
(') low talking
{} researcher's comments
↑ rising intonation
↓ falling intonation
& latched utterances

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Van Leeuwen, Theo. 1995. Discourse and Communication in King’s College London (United Kingdom) and at the Faculty of Education in the University of Hong Kong (China); under the supervision of Ben Rampton and Angel Lin, respectively. He has been Book Review Editor of the Journal of Multicultural Discourses (Routledge) since 2009.

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