

# Post-national identity stances in London's Transnational Academia



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## Introduction

Based on a Master's dissertation project about cultural identity, this poster addresses multilingualism in the academic workplace by analysing qualitatively the experience of six Italian migrants in terms of language choice and communicative challenges. It is pointed out that super-diversity and transnationalism are key factors shaping the experience of recent migrants, and influencing their cultural identity performances by demising traditionally national/ethnic labels. Herein some key findings are presented in relation to two of the research questions tackled in the original dissertation:

- What interactional factors in the workplace influence the way scholars and officers of Italian background go about language choice?
- What communicative and contextual challenges do they face?

The results seem to suggest that post-national stances and indexical construction of European identity are more salient tenets than nationhood and ethnicity (Zappettini, 2016), particularly when exploring identity works in transnational working environments such as academia.

## Theoretical Framework

Key ontological and epistemological concepts are:

- IDENTITY: a social and cultural construct negotiated and co-constructed in interaction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005)
- CULTURAL IDENTITY: an intersection of different layers of identity whose relevance depends on the situation (Zhu, 2019)
- DISCIPLINARY/ACADEMIC IDENTITY: an ongoing creation based on linguistic conventions necessary to become an active member of a working group (Hyland, 2012)
- SMALL CULTURE: emergent group of individuals who share behaviours and practices independently from their cultural backgrounds (Holliday, 1999)
- INDEXICALITY: accumulations of different meanings in a sign used to evoke specific positions or stances (Eckert, 2012)
- EUROPEAN IDENTITY: an all-inclusive category of mobile individuals who embrace cosmopolitanism, foster transnational connections and reject nationhood (Zappettini, 2016)

## Literature Gaps

- CONTEXTUAL: lack of studies focused on the workplace as an investigative context for identity issues
- ONTOLOGICAL: most studies on the Italian community are based on nationalistic premises
- GEOGRAPHICAL: the most prolific studies on the Italian diaspora are from US and Canadian scholars with rare projects focused on the UK

## Methods

- Dataset:** six Italian migrants working in London's Universities who migrated to the UK between 2010 and 2018.
  - Age Frame:** mid-20s to late 30s.
  - Gender:** 5 females vs 1 male.
  - Multilingualism:** All speak standard Italian and English fluently. Other known languages are Spanish, Dutch, Catalan, French, German
- Data Collection:**
  - Snowball/Networking sampling approach thanks to personal connections.
  - Unstructured interviews (conducted in Italian and transcripts translated into English manually) to elicit narrative responses and personal stories to frame their experience as multilingual academic workers. Narratives are 'tools to convey identities' (De Fina, 2014: p.262).
- Data Analysis:** Thematic Analysis to identify recurrent themes in chunks of textual data. The technique used is *Template Analysis* (TA) (King, 2012): '*a priori*' codes are designed as a sample for the analytical process, and later adjusted to what emerges from the data. Meanings and interpretations are elaborated *cross-case* to frame general linguistic practices and identity stances.

## Findings

- Language choice depends on two main factors: ***multilingualism of interlocutors*** and ***topic of discussion***
- The main interactional challenges in the workplace are: ***contacts with the locals*** and ***confusing role conventions***
- PhD students seem to face more linguistic and interactional challenges due to hybrid nature of their academic identity, which adds to their experience as migrant

## Conclusions & Future Implications

- It seems that monolingual colleagues – labelled as '*gli inglesi*' (The English) – are perceived as outsiders: a problem and a linguistic limitation because of their scarce level of multilingualism. Therefore, the participants tend to highlight their distance by evoking their European affiliation and using varied linguistic repertoires
- Conflictual roles of PhD students in migration contexts: future sociolinguistic investigations needed with a focus on interactional/conversational data through ethnographic approaches.
- These studies may provide potential lessons for understanding and framing diversity in a specific professional setting such as academia, and inform practical training for diversity in work teams (ICC studies)

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