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in Sociolinguistic Migration Research*

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# *Art as a Trigger for Reflection in Sociolinguistic Migration Research*

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## **Abstract**

Research methods that are inspired by the arts have recently become subject to increasing attention for language researchers working in migration contexts. There are various studies that show how *arts-based methods* can be used in socially-engaged research in order to better understand language practices and ideologies. Drawing on a longitudinal study of lived experience of language use in Sweden, the present article demonstrates how *language portraits* and *poetic transcriptions* have the potential to generate alternative narratives and creative forms of representation. Moreover, the article illustrates how *participatory action research* can prompt migrants to reflect on their experiences and emotions together with others in the creation of *drama performances*. These kind of *visual-, textual-, and performative representations* have a connotative force that invites the receiver to emotionally engage with the migrants. Such representations can thus function as a *trigger for reflection* and enable people to react to un-equal sociolinguistic orders.

**Keywords:** Sociolinguistics, Migration, Arts-Based Methods, Representation.

My heart is blue  
it is French  
my black arms Arabic  
my yellow eyes English  
and I talk Swedish now

I'm taking my first steps  
with green feet  
and a red brain  
filled with words

in a new land  
that is mine  
but where  
I do not  
belong

## *Introduction*

The poetic sequence above originates from a conversation with Esraa, a young woman, originally from Egypt, who now lives in Sweden. She is one of several migrants whose lives I have followed over a long period of time (2001-2019) in an ongoing ethnographic research project entitled *Narratives of language use in a multilingual Sweden*<sup>1</sup>. The above verses demonstrate how Esraa locates the different languages that she can speak in a 'body map' and how she relates to colours when she describes her sensation of living in-between languages and cultures (Weisman, 2012). Esraa's narrated experience in poetic form has the potential to appeal the imagination and affect the reader's emotions more directly than conventional transcriptions methods.

In recent years, there has been considerable interest in the use of creative and aesthetic methods in the collection, analysis, and representation of data in qualitative research. This thus challenges more traditional means that are employed to understand human action and experience (Leavy, 2019; Salvin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2014). Even if artistry has been previously used in socially-engaged research, there are actually very few references to the deployment of the arts in this manner before the 1980s – when the post-modern turn opened the door to a variety of visual-, literary-, and performance approaches in the social sciences (Cahnmann Taylor, 2017 p. 355). The concept of *arts-based methods* was first introduced in 1993 at an educational conference organised by Elliot Eisner, who is one of the pioneers in the field (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Lately, the notion of *creative inquiry* has been appealed to in the domain of sociolinguistics, where researchers engage with people's complex communicative practices in relation to language ideologies and political realities. Such inquiry entails the study of art, the production of art, and a reliance on a wide variety of other creative- and aesthetic expressions (see The AILA Research Network on Creative Inquiry, 2019).

This creative inquiry has informed discussions about the quality and ethical validity with respect to arts-based methods; raising questions such as whether the data that is generated during such inquiry can be

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<sup>1</sup> The project (1579801) is funded by the Swedish Research Council.

considered art and whether such data lacks consistency and credibility (Pirtoo, 2002). A further question that is raised is whether the data generated by creative inquiry affects the potential for engaged (activist) researchers to make social difference. Some scholars have argued for a classification framework which can be used to delineate systematic and transparent genres in this domain (Wang et al., 2017). Other researchers have highlighted the fact that the transcendence of existing categories lies in the very nature of arts-based methods, and that it may never be possible, or even desirable, to standardise genres and categories because they then run the risk of losing their unfettered imaginative properties.

In this article, I will not take position in this debate, but I will contribute to it tangentially – by introducing a ‘definition of art’ that is based on reflections of the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas<sup>2</sup> (Armengaud, 2019; Cohen, 2016; Hofmeyr 2017). Levinas is known for his guiding concept *the face* (*le visage*) which refers to the *ethical moment* that takes place in the encounter with another person; i.e., face-to-face (Levinas, 2004; Cederberg, 2010). This confrontation does not necessarily need to be related to the actual face of another person; it can also be associated with the body, or the mere presence of another person. Moreover, the concept is linked with language, as Levinas (1987 p. 55) puts it: “the epiphany of the face is wholly language”.

Transferring the concept of the *face* and the idea of the *ethical moment* to a discussion about art, we observe that, for Levinas, art is meaningful only when it is capable of affecting the senses, the sight, and the perception of the receiver, when it enables a *confrontation* with the other. In this sense, art is always a singular experience, with the ultimate function to captivate the receiver’s attention and create a desire in terms of *engagement*. In other words, rendering Levinas, art is based on the idea that people, by means of artistic expression, enter into a *relationship with alterity*; another person who can never be indifferent to us. Most importantly, he points to the fact that this kind of engagement has a crucial function of *triggering a reflection*; not

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<sup>2</sup> This ‘definition of art’ build on Levinas reflections about the relation between aesthetics and ethics, explained inter alia, in a discussion with Françoise Armengaud, published 2018 in: THINK ART Series of the Institute for Critical Theory: Zurich University of the Arts and the Centre for Arts and Cultural theory. A first excerpt of this discussion appeared in: Levinas, E. & Armengaud, F. (1989). *Art & Text*, 33, 30-41.

primarily in a form of aesthetic values, but in a form of a critical reflection that proposes something, that calls for a response (Mersch, 2019 p. 80).

In the present article, I thus employ Levinas' reflections about art, and draw on examples from my own research project. First, I contextualise the project in sociolinguistic-theoretical terms. I then relate this to my experience of using *language portraits* to prompt research participants to reflect upon and create complementary narratives about their lived experience of language use. Next, I apply *poetic transcriptions* to transmit these narratives in a creative and evocative way. Thereafter, I go beyond my actual research project and engage in a discussion about how *participatory action research* has the potential to include research participants more actively and produce narratives in collaboration with others in the domain of *performative art*. Finally, I demonstrate how this way of proceeding resonates with critical approaches in sociolinguistics; approaches which have the goal to empower individual speakers (the research participants) and aspire to transform unequal sociolinguistic relations in society.

### 1. A multilingual reality and a monolingual norm

Due to globalisation and a significant increase in immigration in recent years, Sweden has become a multilingual country. This has led to certain changes in society, not least in the way people use different languages in their everyday lives. More and more people speak a form of Swedish which they have learned in their adulthood. These people also regularly communicate in one or several other languages.

The Swedish population has often been characterised in terms of diversity and multiculturalism, but there also exists a parallel movement in Sweden that favours a strong regimentation of society with increased demands for homogeneous Swedish values (Milani, 2013). Even if multilingualism is mainly perceived as something positive, it still occurs that people who speak languages other than Swedish – or a variant of Swedish with an accent that indexes non-nativeness – are met with disbelief (Lindberg & Sandwall, 2017). Such attitudes can be observed not only in Sweden. Linguistic diversity – particularly as a result of immigration – is

often seen as a threat, both to social coherence and to integration since a standardised national language and a monoculture is the dominant norm in most Western societies (Blommaert, 2010; Wodak, 2015).

In accordance with a critical approach in sociolinguistic research, there is a growing movement in academia that is driven by the idea of transforming social relationships and changing this *monolingual norm*, or *mindset*, that often leads to linguistic discrimination (Márquez Reiter & Martín Rojo, 2019). The goal is that people should avoid reproducing linguistically-mediated hierarchies and inequalities and that all speakers should develop respect for themselves and for others so as to achieve *linguistic agency* (Ahearn, 2001; Pujolar, 2019). This social change can be facilitated by questioning norms and values that are traditionally assigned to languages that are considered legitimate. Linguistic agency is aligned with the proposal for a more inclusive linguistic order (a so-called *sociolinguistic citizenship*) that also recognises linguistic resources that are not officially approved and mixed language practices, with the aim of fostering increased democratic participation in society (Stroud, 2015).

Given the ideological context described above, to counterbalance and be able to *resist* and even *transform* an unequal sociolinguistic setting, it is important to understand the lived experience of people who have a migration background. In my research project mentioned previously, I closely follow six individuals that came to Sweden in the early 2000s in order to explore how their *language trajectories* develop over time in relation to their social-, cultural-, and political circumstances. These six individuals form a heterogeneous group in regards to their origin, age, gender, social-and educational background. By using *biographical narratives*, the project adopts a phenomenological perspective and investigates embodied dimensions of language use (Ricoeur, 1990; 1983-1985). This approach is informed by the idea that language is “intersubjective bodily-emotional gestures which relate the speaker to the other and to the world” (Busch, 2016 p. 7; Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Thus far, the outcomes of the project show that the research participants experience a wide range of emotions, including shame, fear, frustration, but also satisfaction, joy, and pride (e.g., Kramsch, 2009; Pavlenko, 2012). These emotions are experienced depending on (i) how the participants relate to their language resources, (ii) how they are recognised by others, and (iii) how they understand the opportunities that are

given to them as they take part in society and establish themselves on the labour market (e.g., Duchêne & Heller, 2012).

The negative emotions that the research participants give expression to in their narratives can be explained by the fact they experience learning Swedish as a much longer and more difficult process than what they expected when they first arrived to the country. Still, after eighteen years in Sweden, most of the participants experience difficulty in talking Swedish in certain contexts since they feel ashamed of their accent and they are afraid of speaking grammatically incorrect. This indicates that the participants have internalised a legitimised and dominant model of *speakerhood*<sup>3</sup> where the native, normative, way of speaking serves as a model (Márquez Reiter & Martín Rojo, 2019). The use of categories such as 'native-speaker' versus 'migrant-speaker' leads them to understand themselves in terms of being 'competent' or 'incompetent', which leads to constant frustration.

One of the methodological tools that is used in my project is *conversational interviews* and, in such encounters, it is normal that the participants recall critical moments (Pennycook, 2004). These moments are of particular interest since there is a strong potential for development in narratives that deal with difficulties and negative emotions, not least for the participants' own insights and reflections over what such situations signify and how they might be open to future change (cf. Pavlenko, 2007). Notwithstanding this, I have found it important to compensate for these narratives by asking the participants to give account for their positive experiences of language use. By introducing *language portraits* as a methodological tool (see the discussion in next section), I have been able to capture a more complete picture of how the participants experience their diverse linguistic practices in more neutral, and even positive, terms.

## 2. *Language portraits*

The poetic sequence found at the introduction of this article originates from my first methodological experiment with language portraits. Initially,

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<sup>3</sup> Speakerhood has been defined as a linguistic process of social becoming (Márquez Reiter & Martín Rojo, 2019).

I hesitated to employ this tool because I thought that the participants might think it childish, but it turned out to be an effective way to visually illustrate and represent the participants' *embodied multilingual resources* (eg., Busch, 2018).

This methodological tool is not a recent invention. Language portraits have for instance been used since long in schools to promote language awareness (e.g., Krumm & Jenkins, 2001). More recently, the method has been applied in research into migration and language diversity, where the portraits have generated conversations that reveal power relations and language ideologies (Busch, 2018). Furthermore, conversations about language portraits have been shown to have a therapeutic quality, and have been used in projects involving trauma therapists and linguists in order to strengthen resilience (Busch & Reddeman, 2013).

In previous studies, research participants have been asked to draw their languages and other modalities of communication in a prefabricated, empty silhouette (Busch, 2018 p. 9). While, in my project, the participants were asked to draw a complete body portrait of themselves on a white paper and fill it with colours that represent their different linguistic resources. This resulted in various creative interpretations; including colourful and imaginative portraits with strong symbolic values. These *visual representations* can speak for themselves, inviting the observer to interpret and create meaning. However, they can also be used as prompts that give rise to, or triggering, *narrative explications*. Two language portraits, followed by such explications, are provided below:

Figure 1. Esraa's portrait (left) and Tekle's portrait (right)



The first portrait was drawn by Esraa<sup>4</sup> (shortly presented in the beginning of the article together with a poetic transcription of her narrative explication). In our discussion about her drawing she clarifies that 'blue is the colour of freedom and hope'. The blue heart illustrates how much she 'loves' the French language. Growing up in Egypt, her father decided to place her in a French school (where Arabic and English were also used as mediums of instruction) when she was four years old. Although she never had the opportunity to cross the ocean and visit France, the 'land of her dreams'. Regarding Swedish, she has painted it in red, at the head of the portrait, so as to illustrate how cognitively demanding it is to learn a new language as an adult. Living in a Swedish environment, she says, is like having a 'boiling pot' in the place of one's brain. She has also used a green pencil, filling in the feet of the portrait to illustrate her 'first steps' in the new language and in the 'peaceful nature'. Further, she placed Arabic in the arms of the figure since the language is accompanied by a great deal of gesticulation. The colour black illustrates her 'mourning', since she does not have many opportunities to speak Arabic today. The two squares that replace the eyes in the portrait symbolise English, the language of the news programs that she follows on television. These squares are yellow, thereby mirroring the light of the television screen. Esraa refers with a playful tone to her 'artistic freedom' and laughs when she realises that she has painted her heart on the right-hand side of her body.

The second portrait is by Tekle, a man in his sixties, originally from Eritrea. He draws his portrait in silence and with concentration. Afterwards, he explains: the Swedish language is in the head since 'foreigners' like him have to 'think a lot' when they talk. The head is coloured red, he clarifies, because Swedes get easily burned in the sun. Further, he refers to Tigrinya as his roots, placing this language at the feet in the image. The feet are black, representing the 'dark skin' of the people in his country. These are people who regularly walk barefoot (since the weather permits it), and are often poor (shoes are expensive). Unlike Esraa, for Tekle the colours that he used in his portrait do not mainly symbolise feelings and emotions, but a more practical, cultural reality. The other languages that he masters are Amharic (official language of the neigh-

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<sup>4</sup> The names of the research participants (Esraa and Tekle) are pseudonyms.

bouring country Ethiopia) and English (learned at high school). He refers to these languages as 'useful clothes' (a yellow sweater and green pants) that can be put on and off when needed. The hands of the portrait are painted in blue. Tekle remarks that his 'fingers are Italian', since the Italians (Eritrea was an Italian colony 1890-1947) are good 'hand workers', something he claims to have inherited. In earlier meetings with Tekle, he always referred to the difficulties 'having a black face' in Sweden and being subjected to discrimination. Nothing on this topic came up when he commented on his language portrait. In fact, he expressed pity for Swedes since so many of them are sensitive to the sun and have difficulties in understanding 'migrant Swedish'.

There are significant differences to be found in these two narrated explications that can be explained by taking the research participants' different cultural-, educational-, and linguistic backgrounds into account. However, what the participants have in common is that they do not categorise the languages that they speak as either their first language, second language, third language, and so on. Instead, they refer to their linguistic resources as a whole, a *linguistic repertoire*, in which different languages complement each other and are used in different contexts for different purposes (e.g., Busch, 2017; 2018).

Moreover, my conversations with the participants about their language portraits often created a *translanguaging space* where the participants used several different languages when they explained the content of their portraits (Wei, 2011; Bradely & Atkinson, 2019). This took place, for instance, when Esraa learned that I speak French and then changed from speaking Swedish over to French. Subsequently, she continued her explication by mixing the two languages, sometimes even adding English words. This act of translanguaging was performed without comment (it was considered as normal) since the different languages that she used were immediately connected with her personal experiences and attitudes towards the languages she was talking about. Even Tekle engaged in translanguaging, by exploiting a well-established strategy of replacing Swedish words and expressions that were difficult for him to pronounce with English terms so as to ensure that he was understood.

Consequently, the participants presented themselves as *multilingual subjects* when they made their comments about their language portraits. A

notable aspect of their narrative explications is that the portraits produced a distance that provided space for an interesting form of self-reflection to take place. This was manifested when the participants occasionally shifted from talking about themselves in the first person (I) to the third person (s/he) or by using impersonal pronouns (one, you, it). In the drawings, they could see their own faces and bodies on paper, thereby gaining insight into themselves from another perspective – from a *visual representation*. This shift in perspective can be related to Levinas' concept of *face*; the portraits enabled the participants to enter into an *ethical moment*; taking up a particular *relationship* with themselves, by seeing themselves as an 'other'. According to Levinas, art can be described in terms of a *doubling of reality* (Hofmeyr, 2007; Cohen, 2016 p. 173). However, he does not restrict art objects to only the visual product, but also considers criticism to be an essential element of all artistic expression. In such critical comments, he places particular emphasis on observations with a didactic value (Cohen, 2016 p. 184). The use of language portraits as a methodological tool gives space for these aspects (visual representations, narrative explications, critical- and didactic comments) to emerge.

### 3. *Poetic transcriptions*

In my project, I have developed a practice of creating *poetic sequences* of the research participants' biographical narratives. The approach stems from an anthropological tradition where certain linguists re-transcribe narratives (initially American native folk stories previously presented in prose) in a particular poetic layout (e.g., Rothenberg & Tedlock, 1970). According to Dell Hymes (1981; 2003), the pioneer of the field *ethnography of communication*, oral talk has an inherent poetic organisation, since it is always performed in shorter sequences, in so-called discourse units. Hymes is also one of the originators of *ethnopoetics*, a rather complex method of transcribing oral talk in a poetic form. This method builds on a faithful rendering of a narrative, respecting the speakers' discourse markers (words such as oh, well, so, but, you know), false starts, and repetitions, etcetera (see Hymes, 1981; 2003 for a more detailed description). Lately, a number of sociolinguists have shown some interest in ethnopoetics, using this

method in the transcription of everyday narratives in different domains, particularly in education, but also in other kinds of encounters such as asylum applications and courtroom hearings (Blommaert, 2007; Blackledge et al., 2016). The primary motive behind the adoption of this method has been to *give voice* to people who otherwise would not have been heard since they have been marginalised by society. In migration contexts, there has also been an attempt to *reconstruct* and *revalue* linguistic varieties that deviate from normative ways of speaking (Blommaert, 2006).

In my own practice, I have been inspired by the field of ethnopoetics, but also by a subsequent movement in the social sciences; the so-called *poetic inquiry* approach that employs poetic transcription in a more creative way than previously (Glense, 1997; Richardson, 1992). Scholars who engage in poetic inquiry are often poets themselves and have consequently established a somewhat subjective approach to the transcription process. Following this approach, the point of the departure in my practice is always the words of the participants, although I frequently reconstruct their speech order in short sequences so to reveal thematic structures more clearly. Further, I divide the participants' speech sequences into *lines*, *verses*, and *stanzas* (standard poetic terms, also used by Hymes, 1981; 2003) based on the participants' prosody, shorter pauses, and silences. In this way, the transcriptions capture (to some extent) the original rhythm of the performed narratives.

It is important to note that this transcription practice includes a close analyse of the context, and (on the part of the transcriber) a choice as to whether to accentuate (or not) certain aspects that are considered important for the result of the study. However, transcribing and quoting research participants always requires a discussion about the notion of *reflexivity*, in order to give account for the ontological-, epistemological-, and methodological assumptions that lie behind the researcher's approach (Bucholtz, 2000). Such concerns are related to *ethical validity* and also demand careful interrogation of the question of *who* is entitled to tell the stories of others, as well as *how* they should be told, and *why* they are told in a certain (Shuman, 2015; Kohler Riessman, 2015). In this context, note that feminist theorists have taken into critical consideration the risk of objectifying people by reproduction of unequal relations, or by speaking *for* or *about* people who

normally do not express themselves in the public domain (e.g., Spivak, 1988; Shuman, 2015).

In my work, I refer to this poetic transcription practice as *transformation process* in order to underline the fact that the narratives have undergone an important change by my hand (this has been explained elsewhere, Ahlgren, 2014; in process). Furthermore, it should be noted that this kind of transcriptions no longer contains any trace of the interactive aspects of the conversation and discussion that took place with the participants (e.g., Bucholtz, 2000). Notwithstanding this, poetic transcriptions have several advantages, not least for the *dissemination* and the *reception* of the narratives, both inside and outside the academic world. Primarily, the graphic form of the transcriptions, together with the fact that they do not contain so many words, adds to their *readability*. The form also lends the narratives a rhythm that adds life to them, something which facilitates the reader's connection with the narratives and imaginative engagement with the experiences of the participants.

Moreover, poetic transcriptions accentuate the participants' *linguistic creativeness* and the resourcefulness in the way they speak, and can thus instantiate alternative models of *speakerhood* (Márquez Reiter & Martín Rojo, 2019). All such aspects cannot be perceived in the poetic sequence created from Esraa's narrative (cited in the introduction of this article) since it is based on a conversation that was carried out mainly in French, and has been translated into English. Tekle's narrative (as represented in the poetic sequence below) is given in a bilingual version that illustrates his particular way of speaking Swedish and his translanguaging, since he incorporates English words and phrases (in italics in the English version) when he comments on his language portrait:

Svenska är i huvudet  
du måste veta språket här  
annars är det inte möjligt  
to integrate

Swedish is in the head  
you have to know the language here  
otherwise it is not possible  
*to integrate*

Tigrinja finns i fötterna  
hans barfötter är svarta  
tröjan är yellow och byxan green  
like protection and relax  
har jag Amharinja och English

Tigrinya is in the feet  
his bare feet are black  
the sweater is *yellow* and the pants are *green*  
*like protection and relax*  
I have Amharic and *English*

Mina blå fingrar är italienar  
för dom är duktiga med händerna  
vi har lärt av dom  
att jobba hårt

My blue fingers are Italians  
since they are good with their hands  
we have learned from them  
to work hard

#### 4. *Toward participatory action research and the performative arts*

In my research project, I use *language portraits* and *poetic transcriptions* as complements to other more conventional means of collecting, analysing, and representing migration narratives about language use. By combining two established methodological approaches – for the first time in this article – and by creatively adapting them for the purposes of my project, I provide an example of the hybrid nature of research methods that are inspired by the arts (Barone & Eisner, 2012, Chanmann Taylor, 2017). The visual and textual representations that these methods give rise to can be presented independently, with or without comment and further explication, depending on the context in which the representations are disseminated. An important potential of these representations lies in their *connotative force*, that invites the audience to engage emotionally, to reflect over their content, and to enter into a *relationship* with the individuals who are represented (Mersch, 2019).

Another method that is particularly suitable for prompting migrants to reflect over their experiences and emotions together with others (be they other migrants, researchers, or artists) is *participatory action research* (Reason, 2008). In accordance with the critical approach in sociolinguistics, participatory action research has an explicit objective to raise awareness of the collective dimension of the participants' situation so that inequalities in society can be addressed. Similarly, participants can facilitate the development of strategies and the discovery of alternative ways of coping with issues that are difficult to talk about, by exploring such issues in confidence and with trust. Earlier projects have shown that collaborative practices through the *performative arts*, such as drama and theatre, can create *safe spaces* in which lived experiences of language, as well as multiple forms of *belonging*, can be narrated and explored (Lehtonen & Pöyhönen, 2019). Feelings of belonging – or rather non-belonging – are something that

the participants in my research project often report on in their biographical narratives, especially when they talk about how they experience a sense of *in-betweenness* (e.g., *ibid.*; Wiesman, 2012). This *in-betweenness* refers to places, relationships, and languages from which they are dislocated, as well as to places, relationships and the language in the new country.

Moreover, drama and theatre can help to strengthen the use of a new language, since such performative practices build on collaboration and communication; not only on oral communication but also on additional means of expression such as gestures and other facial and body signs (Schewe, 2004). Performative practices can also enable people with alternative models of speakerhood and multilingual resources and to gain recognition by acting on a stage in front of an audience.

Within the context of the *performative arts*, personal testimony has been considered as a tool for *empowering* individuals through the sharing of *subaltern experiences* caused by social injustices (Spivak, 1988). But since such representations of victimhood can be problematic to share with others, it has turned out to be rewarding to blur the borders between reality and fiction. This approach has been implemented in a project in Italy, where newly arrived refugees participated in a drama workshop to create a performance in which they proposed an inverted migration journey, thereby radically changing expectations and perspectives with respect to actual human migration (Dalziel & Piazzoli, 2019). The Italian workshop resulted in a performance that included people from the North (Europe) and their migration journey to the South, i.e., to the African continent. Once in the South, they encountered problems related to weather acclimatisation, difficulties in language learning, and the struggle for integration in a xenophobic environment. In the creation of this (sometimes) ironic and humorous performance, the imagination of the participants filled in the gaps of the narrative. Additionally, the performance was produced in a *safe space*, where people from Nigeria and Cameroon took up 'expert' positions by virtue of the fact that they possessed knowledge and skills about the language and society that was on display in the performance, the project turned out to be empowering and beneficial for the participants.

In Sweden, there are several ongoing projects where migrants are working together with artists to produce drama performances. The group *Acting for Change* is one example of collaboration where migrants from

Syria, Eritrea, and Afghanistan share their experiences of creating a new home in Sweden (Malmberg Linnman, 2018). One of their performances, *Home or About Love*, is based on the participants' thought and narratives. This performance is intimately intertwined with *Del amor (teatro de animales)*, a play by the Spanish writer, Fédérico García Lorca, where an absurd and humorous intrigue gives account for how a dove, a pig, a donkey, and a nightingale discuss their liberation from human oppression.

Another example from Sweden is *TeaterInterAkt* (2019), a community theatre group that base their performances on documentary material, collected through interviews and workshops. In *No Border Musical*, they portray an imagined utopian future, where everybody has the right to settle wherever they want. In the performance, they refer to the European migration 'crisis' and the policy of closed borders as a bizarre condition and a situation that recalls the past, when refugees were forced to live without papers and without rights.

Enabling migrants to create a distance from their own experiences and allowing them to step outside the role of the victim permits the enactment of new, powerful narratives where these individuals re-acquire the agency to transform their life world (Dalziel & Piazzola, 2019). In such a process, being acknowledged by an audience is of particular importance, since it is an avenue by which they can relate to society and the surrounding world. Moreover, it is a method which can be used to position 'bodies in a space' in a theatrical setting that proposes and offers up a *relationship* to a wider audience outside the academic world. Having said this, we return to Levinas' reflections about art. For him, the ethical aspect of this encounter (between the participants and the audience) is fundamental, because it relates to the *vulnerability* of the other – in moments of joy and pleasure, as well as in moments of discomfort and suffering. It is, however, important to underline that when Levinas talks about the *face* of the other, this should not primarily be construed as referring to a person's uniqueness, emphasising the fact that each and every person is different, whether this be by dint of the person's ethnicity, language, class, gender, religion, or any other biological or cultural difference (Cederberg, 2010). The otherness of the other is to be found in the precise sense of the human as such and one's encounter with the other. According to Levinas, art initiates an ability, in the viewer, to see the other. In that sense, *performative art* is perfectly

aligned with his idea of how the *face* is revealed: the body and the language of the other opens up an arena of shared experience, creating empathy through a change of perspective. This is an area of central importance to the creation of a sense of solidarity in society.

### *Concluding remarks*

The application of creative methods that are inspired by the arts to sociolinguistic migration research enables researchers to explore subjective descriptions, emotions, and ideologies that are intimately related to the research participants' *language trajectories* and *linguistic repertoires*. The form of representations that these methods offer – visual, textual, and performative representations – invites the receiver (the observer/reader/audience) to *enter the life-world* of the research participants. The invitation is moreover a proposal, the purpose of which is to facilitate understanding of the participants' perspectives – not necessarily in terms of identification – but, rather, in terms of an emotional confrontation that creates a *relationship* with the examined persons (Mersch, 2019).

Invoking Levinas' reflections about art is a way to illustrate how arts-based methods can create empathy and compassion and *trigger critical reflection* that enables people to react to social injustices. In the present study, the injustice is instantiated by the *monolingual norm* as opposed to a *multilingual reality*. This injustice pertains not only to Sweden and the northern part of Europe, but also to countries in the Mediterranean region.

One might wish to talk about arts-based methods in terms of *resistance* to more conventional methods, since they allow for the exploration of creativity – linguistic as well as aesthetic – and challenge established principles in qualitative research. Not least by offering new ways of communicate research finding and make them more accessible to larger and diverse audiences. Moreover, one can also highlight the dimension of *reinsurance* that this kind of method provides since they offer a way of blurring borders – not only between methodological approaches but also between reality and the imagination. Thereby, they offer 'protection' to the individual research participant since this kind of representations are obviously based on a *construction* of reality (something that immediately

invokes a discussion of reflexivity). This protection is also in place when the research participants comment on their language portraits instead of themselves, or perform on a stage (as one of several *dramatis personæ*). Considering *oneself as another* is a face-saving activity that satisfies an ethical concern which should be taken in consideration in further discussions about validity in arts-based research (Goffman, 1967).

This article has focused on the outcomes, the results – the representations – that arts-based methods give rise to and their ability to engage an audience – inside and outside the academic world. Further, it has elaborated on how such arts-based methods can raise awareness in research participants, thereby enabling them to learn about themselves and to build (positive) recognition for their multilingual resources. This has been done by respecting the claim that arts-based methods have the ability not only to show how the world is, but also why it is thus, and how it can be transformed.

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