

Unit 6

Section 6, Activity 8

This is a model answer. Your answers to the three questions on Costa's article might be different.

Context in Shetland school participating in the study

- as early as 2007 there was critical awareness of the negative impact of not making the children's home language part of education:
- "children in Scotland attended a school where teachers had initially introduced Scots in some classes, then gradually in all aspects of education and everyday life, in order to sustain literacy skills among pupils (in the view of teachers, pupils suffered from the distance between their own speech and the Standard English of school, hindering their general progress)."
- The dominant attitude towards Scots since the early 2000s has been to accept any form that children might know, and to let them write in whichever way they find meaningful. These forms may then be discussed in class. Normative ideologies are therefore less present among pupils in Scotland.
- language proficiency is not the only criterion for identifying someone as a speaker of Scots
- The status of Scots insecure, yet varieties subsumed under that label can be heard throughout Scotland on a daily basis

What do the children have to say about the minority languages (my notes only refer to Scots) they are made to study?

- Talking about the language itself proved a source of great satisfaction for children in both locations, and all were enthusiastic about recounting their feelings and ideas on that topic.
- Teachers in the school also advocated 'saving Scots', as a sign proclaimed in one classroom, yet for the children this did not appear to be a pressing issue. To them, this was the language they all spoke on a daily basis, and Scots was understood to be simply a new label reframing their speech from 'slang' to 'language'
- Scots is presented as evolving in a lived-in social space
- In their opposition between a present that allows public use of Scots and a past that did not, they replicate the discourse of language activists. Yet, the past they refer to corresponds to a reality they had themselves experienced or one that had been narrated to them by parents or older siblings.
- focus on language practice, group categorization and social evaluation on behalf of all-too-real 'Others', and construe their participation in the Scots language movement as empowering and relevant to their daily lives.
- a strong paradox: while language advocates present Scots as the language the children use every day, for the children it is connected to formal education and to

acquisition at school. While the children previously experienced a dichotomy between the high variety of the school and the everyday vernacular they used among peers, that latter variety is suddenly given high status and presented to them in written form. In other words, Scots comes to designate both the everyday vernacular of the children and the prestige variety found in books, a duality that needs accommodating to by the children.

- the children are developing a view on what their Scots speech community is from their own experience at school and with peers, leaving their linguistic contact with other vernacular speakers aside because of the ambiguous nature of Scots, standing between its status as a written medium and as an everyday language.

How does this shape their understanding of their human environment?

- Scots just was, and if it had to be anything, then it was 'rude', 'broad', 'coarse', 'posh', or, as in the next extract, 'popular'. Language is therefore not characterized for itself, but is correlated to social and moral evaluations
- The discourse on language serves to express a discourse on shifting authority between a 'before' where Scots was banned and associated with uncouth speech, and a today where it is 'authorized', and where previous structures are replaced by potential agency
- According to the children themselves, there is no shortage of people who understand or speak what they now call Scots, whether at school, at home, or more generally throughout Scotland. There is therefore an easily identifiable 'Scots' speech community in the immediate environment. However, the introduction by language advocates of the term 'Scots' to replace what the children formerly identified as 'Scottish', 'slang', or referred to as 'just the way we speak' implies the merging of the local speech community into a wider language
- community, distinct from the English language community. This provides pupils with a new array of categorizing terms they can use to shape community membership around them, and leaves them with the task of articulating both types of community.

In what way is the children's understanding relevant to the academic study of language revitalization?

- it sheds light on the types of discourse circulating among adults, and on the elements that adults deem relevant to pass on;
- it gives us insights as to how new categories of belonging connected to language are integrated into the everyday lives of children, and how those categories shape their socialization as members of those linguistic groups in the making
- children retain a degree of agency in the shaping of their own narratives, in which elements are borrowed from both discourse on minority and dominant languages, and in which others are formed locally
- children adapt the categories of adults to their own everyday reality - that reality is not one of language advocacy, or of language revitalization, hence possibly the lack of discussion about language among children. Those languages have

become their own, and they need not justify this, unlike adults perhaps. What they need to deal with is how to categorize their environment, and how language fits into that categorizing process

- it helps understanding the socialization of children into groups that are still mostly imaginary (i.e. they are in the process of being created) and into wider (e.g. regional, or national) language or speech communities