Article title:

Reported Parent–Teacher Dialogues on Child Language Learning: Voicing Agency in Interview Narratives

Abstract:
This study investigates parent–teacher dialogues on child language learning as constructed in 19 interviews with migrant parents of Polish ethnolinguistic background, resettled in Norway and caring for young preschoolers and school-goers. Targeting reported speech as a linguistic resource for enacting agency in discourse, the focal interest is in tracing how the interviewed parents draw on this resource to enact and negotiate their agency vis-à-vis their children’s educators. The analysis reveals that the parents use reported speech as a strategic discursive tool to variably claim their agency across time and space. While L2 emerges as the most prominent theme of the dialogues, the participants also display a sense of ownership of the meaning-making processes involved in their children’s L1 development. Through constructions of concerted bilingual home-pre/school support, the parents thus propel their capacity to imagine their children’s membership in the host and home language communities to the fore.

Key words:
Child language learning, agency, reported speech, narrative, home–school communication and collaboration
Introduction

Successful home–pre/school communication and collaboration are key mechanisms for supporting and building on children’s sense of self as learners and agents in both formal and informal learning contexts (Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti 2005). Through a concerted exchange of information, educators and parents can potentially tailor and attune school and home learning support to children’s individual needs (Garcia and Kleifgen 2010). Research on ethnolinguistically diverse families caring for young children shows that this potential often remains unrealized (Compton-Lilly 2007; Huss-Keeler 1997; Rogers 2002; Roy and Roxas 2011; Rogers 2003). Rather than drawing on their “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti 2005), parents in these families may struggle to navigate the complex web of institutional discourse in their encounters with their children’s educators (Rogers 2003). Furthermore, operating with undifferentiated models of home–school partnerships, often based on mainstream, middle-class norms, schools may constrain rather than encourage parental involvement (Crozier and Davies 2007). Calls for more contextually sensitive empirical studies that explore parental perspectives on home–school communication and their agency in educational partnerships have been voiced (Wesely 2016; Schwartz and Palviainen 2016).

In this study I build on this line of research and explore how Polish migrant parents, all recently resettled in Norway and caring for young multilinguals, construct parent–teacher dialogues on their children’s language learning through 19 qualitative interviews. More specifically, I target the discursive device of reported speech (RS) in their narratives to investigate how they construct and negotiate their agency vis-à-vis preschool and school authorities.
In what follows, I will first lay out my theoretical grounding. Particular attention will be paid to RS as a suitable narrative device to approach the question of agency in research interview narratives. After a methodological note, where I explicate my data collection choices and analytical procedure, a presentation of findings will ensue. A general overview will be provided first, followed by a subsequent microanalysis of representative excerpts of data. I will close with a summarizing discussion and remarks on the significance and limitations of the study.

Theoretical Grounding

Narrative is one of the key empirical sites for exploring how individuals construct their sense of self and other in the world (Riessman 2008; Gubrium and Holstein 2009). In sociolinguistics, structurally well-accomplished accounts of past experience, articulated by a single speaker in a research interview, have long represented the canonical unit of analysis (Labov 1972; Labov and Waletzky 1967). Recently, researchers have broadened their agendas to include a multitude of non-canonical stories with a past, present or even future temporal orientation, enacted as an interactional achievement across a range of everyday conversational and interview contexts (see e.g. Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008; De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2008; Ochs and Capps 2001). In parallel to re-conceptualizing the research interview as a form of social practice, research interview narratives are no longer viewed as content only but as texts co-constructed in a discursive interaction between the interviewer and interviewee/s (Baynham 2011; Talmy 2010, 2011).

---
As with narrative, the scientific interest in agency has flourished greatly in the last few decades (see Holland et al. 1998). Yet, despite its popularity, agency remains a notoriously complex concept that is difficult to locate (van Lier 2008). Based on a view of language as a social action and as a key semiotic resource for the mediation of agency, Ahearn (2001, 112) provides an oft quoted definition of agency as “a socioculturally mediated capacity to act.” While acknowledging that it is broad and may require further refinement, she argues that “anything more than a barebones definition of agency runs the risk of overgeneralizing notions that are actually culturally or linguistically specific” (Ahearn 2012, 280).

Reported Speech in Narrative Discourse

In this study, agency will be explored as encoded through RS in narrative discourse. RS is a “particularly interesting linguistic resource at a speaker’s disposal” that has received much empirical and theoretical attention (Lanza 2012, 294). Fundamentally intertextual, RS has long been seen as “the most basic linguistic counterpart” of the Bakhtinian polyphony of voices (Chovanec 2014, 21). Assigned to characters inhabiting different times and spaces, RS enables narrators to transgress timelines and relive their experiences through a more or less active involvement of their listeners in the drama of their story worlds (Tannen 1981, 311).

Early studies on RS within structural–functional linguistics have proposed several basic typologies and discussed at length their spatial and temporal nuances, such as the distinction between direct speech (DRS) (e.g. Jo said “I'll go!”) and indirect speech (IRS) (e.g. Jo said she

---

2 While the current literature on agency is vast and its review is beyond the scope of this paper, Deters, Gao, Miller, and Vitanova’s (2015) edited volume on agency in second language learning represents but one source that not only bears witness to the continuing scientific appeal and centrality of agency in language studies but also showcases the diversity of approaches adopted therein.
would go) (Coulmas 1986; Leech and Short 1981; Li 1986). More recent studies on RS bear witness to a widening of analytical agendas. Investigating prosodic features of RS in authentic, naturally-occurring speech, Günthner (1999) shows that speakers draw on prosody in both DRS and IRS to discursively layer voices and effectively construct what has been said and how. Holt and Clift (2007) further challenge distinctions between DRS and IRS as not only analytically problematic but also as not always interactionally salient. While earlier studies have drawn extensively on Gofmann’s participant framework and his analytical speaker categories as useful for untangling perspectives in narrative discourse (for discussion, see Schiffrin 2006), Holt (2007) advocates for a shift away from production formats of self and towards seeing RS as a collaborative achievement between a speaker and a variably active listener.

Reported Speech as Agency

Functionally, RS has been studied as a site for narrative evaluation (Labov 1972), for enhancing narrative performativity (Bauman 2000), creating interpersonal involvement (Tannen 2007), enacting narrative reflexivity (Oropeza-Escobar 2013), expressing epistemic authority (Ingrids and Aronsson 2014) or as a tool for indexing gender identities and discursive memberships in distinct communities of practice (Lampropoulou 2011, 2012). In this study, I will build on conceptualizations of RS as agency. De Fina’s (2003) interview study of illegal migrants to the US, for example, presents an analysis of RS as agency in narratives on their border-crossing between Mexico and the US. She operationalizes agency as more or less agentive speech acts attributed to characters in the narrated story worlds through RS employed in

---

3 Since narrators are unlikely to remember the exact words of others, Tannen (1981, 2007) has consistently argued against the term “reported speech” as a misnomer and proposed the label “constructed dialogue/s” as more analytically appropriate. The term “reported speech” nonetheless seems to prevail in different strands of research (Buttny 1998; Miller 2014) and is also adopted in this study.

4 Lampropoulou (2012) can be consulted for a comprehensive review of literature on speech representation in discourse, particularly direct speech.
the initiating turn of each dialogic scene. She argues that her study participants construct themselves more often as passive respondents rather than active agents. Lanza (2012) builds on De Fina’s insights to show how legal work migrants to Norway assert themselves as agents in narratives on their work experience in the host country and also how agency may be actively negotiated in the interview context.

In addition to migrant identity constructions, researchers have looked at language learner identity and agency through the lens of RS. In her interview study on L2 learners in the US, Miller (2014) conceptualizes agency as a socially mediated, situationally negotiated and interactionally performed “capacity by which individuals perceive themselves to be able to act in meaningful ways” (2014, 142). Miller’s work also echoes earlier work on how self-perceived, situationally occasioned membership in “possible and imagined communities” (Norton 2014, 2016; Norton Peirce 1995) figures in L2 learners’ investments in achieving and enacting a variable degree of linguistic competence.

While discourse-analytical studies on non-mainstream, migrant parents’ encounters with their children’s educators provide valuable insights on parental discourse, including their variable enactments of their capacity to act on behalf of their children and, importantly, constraints on such efforts in the institutional context of school (Compton-Lilly 2007; Gebhard 2004; Jones 2013; Rogers 2003; Rogers and Brefeld 2015), they do not specifically target parental agency as RS. Only one recent study (Kotthoff 2015) has been identified where RS is investigated as a positioning device in parent–teacher conferences. However, rather than language learning, the conferences concern children’s future educational paths. Although not targeting RS, Bergroth and Palviainen’s (2016) nexus analysis of educational partnerships in
early childhood education emphasizes the interaction of parental, child and teacher agency in choices on child bilingual development and support.

While current research has advanced our understanding of RS as agency across a broad range of empirical sites, its application in the context of early childhood education remains scarce. In response to this gap in literature, this study aims to make a novel contribution by combining insights from research on RS as agency in narrative discourse with insights from scholarship on home–pre/school partnerships as vehicles for establishing and maintaining equitable early childhood educational opportunities for emerging bilinguals.

Methods

Contextual Frame

In Norway, the onset of compulsory schooling is set at age six. While not compulsory, preschool attendance is high. In the last three years before transition to school attendance reached almost 97% in 2015 (Statistics Norway 2015). Traditionally espousing child-centeredness and play-based learning as central pedagogical virtues, Norwegian early years education is undergoing a change. More academically oriented components, skills monitoring and early L2 interventions, particularly for minority language children considered at risk for language and literacy delay, are making clear, though not uncontroversial, inroads (Reference withheld 2). Bilingual education has also undergone substantial changes in the last few decades (see Reference withheld 1). While mainstream kindergartens are officially monolingual in Norwegian, the current legislation (Education Act 1998) endorses only transitional forms of bilingual education for school children of non-Norwegian ethnolinguistic heritage.
Participants and Data Collection

The present data is based on a corpus of 19 qualitative interviews with Polish migrants to Norway parenting young children. They were recruited according to the following criteria: 1) both parents were of Polish ethnolinguistic background; 2) Polish was the main home language; and 3) at least one child attended the last years of preschool (3–6 years) or the first years of school (6–8 years). The families were recruited through snowballing in personal networks, among the interviewees and in the Polish community in the Norwegian capital, Oslo, and adjacent municipalities.

At the time of the interview, the recruited families’ average length of residence in Norway was six years. Twelve mothers completed higher education and seven completed secondary education in Poland. Most were currently in temporary or permanent employment as civil servants, manual labourers or in teaching and service professions. The pattern was reversed for the fathers – five completed higher education and fourteen were holders of secondary education credentials. They were mostly employed in Norwegian construction services. The families’ profiles broadly resonate with the wider demographic trends in the Polish community in Norway (see Friberg and Eldring 2011).

While necessarily “constructing my research subject” (Miller 2014, 29) in the act of selecting participation criteria, participant co-construction was actively encouraged throughout the data collection process. The interviews took place either on campus (8 cases) or in the interviewees’ homes (11 cases), subject to their own preference. Mothers were the primary

---

5 While the same corpus is used in another study (Reference withheld 2), all analyses and findings in this study are unique.
6 Throughout this paper, I will refer to these educational spaces as pre/school(s).
participants on behalf of the family. In cases where the interview was conducted in the participants’ homes, the fathers chose to participate either fully or as onlookers, offering occasional comments. In line with the strategy of data co-construction, I did not restrict father participation, however fleeting. All interviews were conducted in Polish, a preferred option by all participants and a viable option for myself as a researcher-interviewer, given my command of the language. However, I do not share the participants’ ethnic background and, beyond several personal acquaintances, have no ties to the Polish community in Norway. Likewise, I had no prior relationship with any of the interviewees. While following a thematic guide (see Appendix 1), attention was paid to provide space for the participants to delve into issues of interest as the interviews unfolded. The major themes explored were as follows: 1) the participants’ migration experience; 2) their experience with their own and child multilingualism; and 3) their experience with the Norwegian educational system. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by a Polish research assistant and myself.7

Analytical Procedure

The collected narratives are a-priori imbued with multiple power connotations across several narrative levels (Bamberg 1997): 1) the constructed story worlds, where both parent–teacher relations as well as relations between L2 learners (parents) and native/proficient L2 speakers (pre/school authorities) are potentially salient; 2) in the interview context, where the interviewee and researcher-interviewer constellation implies status differential; and 3) in the wider cultural context, where Discourses with variable ideological potency circulate and towards which narrators may choose to orient situationally (Gee 2012). Echoing Bakhtin’s (1981)

7 For transcription conventions, see Appendix 2.
heteroglossic dialogues, this implies that utterances animated by narrators through RS are seen here as re-contextualized, co-constructed and transformed in multi-dimensional spaces and across several timelines.

Bearing this in mind, I have systematically pursued the following analytical steps. First, I interrogated the entire data set in the analytical software NVivo-10 and looked specifically for any instances of talk where parents made a reference to communication or collaboration with preschool, school or other pre/school-related authorities. In the Norwegian context, these include local health wards, school nurses, municipal pedagogical-psychological services and language specialists working within the educational system. All such instances were coded at the overarching node of “home-pre/school contact.”

Second, within this node, subthemes were identified as either related or not related to child language development. Only language-related sub-themes were subjected to further analysis. All instances of RS, direct and indirect, were then singled out and, in their discursive context, assigned to specific dialogic scenes. Following Tannen (2007, 106–7) and as pursued in previous research (De Fina 2003; Lanza 2012), scenes in this study represent narrative units of various lengths that, as in theatre, present a particular event with a particular casting of characters.

As in earlier scholarship, instances of RS were operationalized as accomplishing agentive actions attributed to characters participating in the identified dialogic scenes. Following De Fina (2003), I used the initial dialogic reference in each scene as an analytical vantage point. However, while I distinguished between the types of agentive actions ascribed to various voices in each narrative scene, I did not qualify them as a-priori more or less agentive. Building on earlier definitions (Miller 2014; Ahearn 2001) and attentive to the complex interlacing of
multiple narrative levels (Bamberg 1997; Bamberg 2004), agency in this study represents a socioculturally afforded and contextually performed capacity, strategically drawn on by the interviewees to mediate their self-perceived need to act on behalf of their children.

All scenes were subjected to the following analytical questions:

1. What voices, enacted through RS, are present in the scene?
2. Who is constructed as initiating the scene in the story world and what agentive actions/moves are accomplished through that voice?
3. How is the scene further developed and actions/moves negotiated among the constructed voices across time and space?

In the presentation of findings, distinctions between direct and indirect RS will be made whenever functionally salient. However, it is not their structural texture but rather the orchestration of RS in the discursive ecology of each scene that will be in focus.

**Findings**

The data set as a whole presents a wide variety of dialogic scenes where the interviewed parents report on conversations with pre/school staff and other authorities supporting these institutions in their language-related work with children. While in some cases the interviewed parents only provide a brief general evaluation of such communication, a total of 85 scenes were identified where the parents construct past, present or hypothetical future situations in which they specifically resort to RS to report on content. These scenes vary in length from fleeting verbal home-pre/school exchanges to more elaborate and vivid scenes involving multiple characters, perspectives and points of view.
A thematic scene count indicates that the issue of children’s L2 skills is by far the most frequently reported topic of parental discussions with pre/school staff, accounting for 65 scenes. Other language-related home–pre/school dialogues in the data concern home language choices and support (19 instances) and the development of skills in languages other than L1 or L2 (1 instance). A marginal feature of the data, the latter was not included in further analysis.

The interviewed parents construct narratives populated by two types of characters: 1) those who inhabit or frequent their homes – in addition to themselves, this includes their children, relatives, family friends and acquaintances in the Polish community; and 2) the institutional space, embodied mainly by pre/school teachers but also by headmasters and other school-related authorities. Within both relational categories, the participating characters may speak on their own behalf or jointly in chorus. As can be seen from Table 1, within the parental story worlds, pre/schools and parents are attributed most dialogue initiations while other familial or institutional voices remain mostly in the shadows in the initial turns. Furthermore, pre/school authorities are constructed as initiating dialogues nearly thrice as often as the parents themselves. In what follows, the analytical distinction between initiating RS as attributed to either parents or pre/schools will be preserved to reflect the main tendencies in the data. Yet, it serves only as an analytical point of departure. As the micro-analysis will reveal, it is by unpacking individual dialogic scenes that a complex weaving of parental agency emerges as a process of strategic employment of various voices across time and space.

(Table 1 about here)

*Children’s L2 Skills Development and Support*
The dialogic scenes on children’s L2 skills touch upon a number of issues, including the general level of L2 competence and progress in L2, L2 support and the enactment and reception of L2 provision offered at pre/school in the past or on offer at present or, hypothetically, in the future. The centrality of this theme in the data, reflected both in the frequency with which it is foregrounded and the range of sub-themes it covers, reflects a keen engagement of the interviewed parents in monitoring their children’s smooth linguistic and, arguably also, educational integration in the new society. It also underscores their own position as L2 learners in need of drawing on pre/school aid for viable assessments of their children’s Norwegian skills. As such, their own self-perceived agency to act on their children’s behalf and their reliance on a smooth communication with their children’s educators are necessarily intricately bound. How subtly this may play out in the narrative encounters that they construct in the interviews is laid out below.

Initiating RS Attributed to Parents

As dialogue initiators, the parents construct themselves as frequently lodging requests with the pre/school authorities, ranging from requests for a course of action, such as additional L2 support or L2 skills evaluation as well as requests for specific language-related advice, concerning, for example, their child’s linguistic preparedness for entry to school. As noted by Fairclough (2001, 46), requests and power in face-to-face interactions are closely bound in that “the right to request someone to do something often derives from having power.” While it is not the actual action but the self-perceived capacity to act that is being articulated to the researcher-interviewer in the interview space, this points towards a keen interest to start an exchange with the authorities on an aspect of their children’s language development.
The following example presents a short story where the narrating mother constructs herself as making an initial request for the teacher’s expert opinion on bilingual development, with a specific reference to her own child:

*Excerpt 1*:

M07: 1. and actually, once I was going home by tram with this DAn ((staff member))
2. and I ASk this DAn.
3. I say “listen you have more experience
4. you have been working here ((inaudible)) for a few years. how IS it with kids?
5. because I:: thought that she ((daughter)) would speak in a few weeks already.”
6. that already –
Int: 7. yeah
M07: 8. kids – because everybody said “kids speak fast. kids learn fast.
9. kids develop fast in terms of language”.
10. I say to this Dan “how is it? eh – when will she start to speak?”
11. and he says “you know what? eh – EVery child is different!
Int: 12. ehm
M07: 13. and she can speak in a half a yeAR
14. maybe she speaks in a year. or after two years she may not speak AT ALL also”.
15. this made me worried also.
16. I thought to myself “damn it. we don’t have two years @ when she does not speak”.
17. and really she did not speak for four month AT ALL.
Int: 18. ehm
M07: 19. so we were a bit worried because well “damn it four months” –

The story is recounted as a string of RS animating several voices. While the mother makes an initial request for information (lines 3–5), it is followed by a statement attributed to a communal voice (lines 8–9), which in unison legitimizes her initial assumption that bilingual development in children is fast. It lends weight to her own worries but also warrants her questioning of the preschool teacher as legitimate. Her request is met with an animated, yet somewhat inconclusive, answer by the teacher (lines 11, 13–14), upon which she further reflects through the enactment of RS: first, in the form of an inner dialogue (line 16), and second, as a
communal parental voice (line 19) united in their worry about the speed of their daughter’s bilingual development.

The passage serves as a particularly vibrant example of parental self-perceived, situationally performed capacity to act: the mother constructs herself here both as an active dialogue initiator, a commentator, as well as a questioning recipient of an expert opinion that, similar to the parents in King and Fogle’s study (2006), she does not accept unconditionally or uncritically. Through DRS, she not only brings the past conversation to life but also signals her own engagement in the issue and invites an active involvement in the story line on the part of her audience (Tannen 2007), in this case her co-participating spouse and the interviewer. She thus weaves her agency as a string of voices inhabiting 1) the immediate setting of the story world (the tram), 2) a non-specific generalized historic space in which the anonymous chorus voices a normative opinion that she can resort to as her alleged assessment benchmark, 3) the interview space where she performs her concern in front of the researcher-interviewer and her husband and, finally, 4) a wider space in which linguistic competence in L2 is constructed as a valued symbolic capital in the resettlement context (Reference withheld 1) that their child is in the process of acquiring.

*Initiating RS Attributed to Pre/schools*

Prominent initiators of dialogic exchanges in the parental story worlds, pre/schools are most frequently constructed as providing information on various aspects of children’s L2 development or as prompting an evaluation of children’s L2 skills, such as in the following excerpt:

*Excerpt 2:*
This passage represents a dialogic evaluation of a child’s L2 skills, frequently found in the data set, where the school acts as an expert providing a brief assessment of those skills. Here it is constructed through the repeated reporting of the teacher’s voice by the mother (lines 2, 5, 7–8). Interestingly, she resorts to a subtle blending of perspectives, as the initial clause in line 7 can be read as a continued indirect report of the teacher’s voice but also as DRS belonging to the teacher or even the mother herself.

In her study of adult migrant L2 learners in the US, Miller (2014) finds that narrators often resort to voicing praise for their own L2 abilities through the assignment of authorship to characters other than themselves. She sees this as their interactional alignment with a socially sanctioned norm against self-directed boasting. In the above case, the triple, complimentary evaluation of the child’s L2 skills through RS can be read as a similar discursive strategy. While assigning the teacher authorship indirectly and potentially also directly, the mother not only enhances the legitimacy of the claim that is being put forward; through subtle prosodic cues and a blending of perspectives, she also lays claim to the assessment as its potential owner. The school and home are clearly established as sharing a common ground on matters concerning the prominence of L2 skills and L2 skills mastery in the child’s learning. The wider social space, where a fast attainment of good L2 skills is highly valued, is thus endorsed in the scene as well.
In addition to providing information and assessments of L2 skills, pre/schools are also frequently constructed as lodging initial requests with parents. While less prevalent than in the parent-initiated dialogues, these range from requests for additional information and consent regarding aspects of child language learning to requests for clarifications or parental cooperation. The latter is illustrated in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 3:
M05: 1: I remember that once ehm:: (0.3) they asked me to –
     2: they gave me this little book (0.1) with pictures (0.1)
     3: ehm:: ehm:: with labels in Norwegian – to glue in labels
     4: ehm:: how it sounds in POlish
     5: so that THEY could learn a little bit that – because there was a period
     6: when Lilly perhaps used many: Polish words!
     7: so that THEY would KNow at least phoNEtically
     8: “right! that if - when she says misiu then it’s bamse ((teddy)) actually”
     9: that they can read it so that they more or less know that she speaks about this.
   Int: 10: right
M05: 11: so I remember I did something like that.

RS is here employed solely to enact the voice of the preschool (lines 1–3–5; line 8). The initiating dialogic line re-creates an actual home–school conversation taking place at the child's preschool at an unspecified point in time. The preschool is in both cases represented by an anonymous teacher chorus rather than by a single member of staff, who in unison makes a request for cooperation in constructing a bilingual communication aid to ease the initial teacher–child interactions. While chorus dialogues of this sort do not normally occur in real life (Tannen 2007), its employment underscores a more indeterminate, collective rather than individual agency assigned to the preschool.

The scene does not report on a controversial situation but rather represents a creative initiative on behalf of the preschool that embraces the child’s Polish ethnolinguistic heritage and institutionally sanctions her translanguaging. It thus inhabits an inviting past space where the
child’s needs and the preschool’s interest in her language development are clearly premised. The mother’s interactional endorsement is, in fact, not voiced with a specific recourse to RS. Rather, it is the absence of further dialogic turn-taking that signals that the issue is settled without controversy and that home–school alignment is achieved, as also confirmed in line 11.

However, not all scenes with RS initiations attributed to schools represent a home–school alignment of interests and perspectives on child L2 development and support. Some dialogues in the data are unsuccessful solicitations of cooperation, where the voicing of parental agency may be constructed as particularly urgent, such as in the following exchange:

*Excerpt 4:*
M03: 1: I think most of all:: (0.2) about: (0.3) that my child deVElops in terms of language
Int: 3: yes
M03: 4: and that it is for her right? for her good.
Int: 5: yes
M03: 6: except for: here I encountered this WAll right? in this very preschool
Int: 7: yes
M03: 8: with Nicki right? that the staff eh:: (0.2) did not understand at all
9: what I’m talking about because
10: “OK calm down because your kid will learn by herself.”
11: and I say “NO she won’t! because if she has not learnt so far
12: and she will be say four years old so – so – soon – it IS a PROblem!”
13: but they did not see any problem totally so (.).

In this excerpt, the enactment of DRS to stage a snippet of a past mother–school exchange (lines 10, 11–12) functions as a particularly vocal example of parental enactment of agency in the story world that, paradoxically, re-creates her failed attempt to act on behalf of her child in the actual world. While it is impossible to ascertain whether the imperative assertion was ever uttered in the very linguistic form enacted by the mother in the context of the interview (see Tannen 2007), it foregrounds a number of salient points.
The mother voices the preschool staff as a conversational and cooperation partner that not only does not take her concern seriously but also transgresses a politeness boundary normally expected between a preschool authority and a parent (line 10). Her equally direct and relentless positioning in her own turn (line 11–12) further intensifies the drama of the scene. Dialogically, it points towards a historical space of unclear temporal bounds, filled with worry, conflict and frustration. It also points temporally towards the interview itself, signalling an already established shared ground as well as a degree of trust towards the interviewer that enables the mother to provide an unembellished evaluation of her prior futile bids for institutional cooperation. The repeated use of the discourse marker right (lines 4, 6, 8) can be read as a continued discursive effort at soliciting a shared perspective with, and an endorsement from, the researcher-interviewer in relating her potentially face-threatening account. The dynamics of the dialogic exchange clearly underscore the function of RS as a strategic discursive tool. While an initiator of the dialogic exchange in the mother’s story world, the school embodies passivity and unwillingness to acknowledge the child’s needs as observed by the mother. A subsequent participant in the exchange, the mother positions herself as a frustrated, worried agent, whose capacity to act is curtailed by an uncooperative institutional power.

Home Language Choices and Support

Dialogic scenes that report on home–school exchanges on the subject of home language choices and support are some of the most vibrant across the data set. The interviewees often resort to RS to variably stage their agency in conversations with the pre/school authorities. Frequently, they construct themselves as rather firm and resolute on how to divide language support duties: a clear line is drawn here between the home environment as “a Polish-only
territory” and the school as “a Norwegian-only territory.” Regardless of whether a dialogic initiation is attributed to the parents or to the educators, an institutional advice that runs contrary to this arrangement may be vehemently opposed. Nonetheless, while representing the main tendency across this sub-theme, there are also some instances where the parents do not reveal as clearly their own standpoint on the issue but rather construct dialogues in which they simply resort to teachers for advice and aid. While less prominent, this position will also be illustrated and commented on below.

*Initiating RS Attributed to Parents*

The following excerpt stages a past home–pre/school dialogue, constructed as jointly initiated by the parents through an assertion regarding the division of language support duties between the home and pre/school:

*Excerpt 5:*

M04: 1: eh:: (0.4) the:y are: of course with – with us and and:: they side with us  
Int:  2:  
M04: 3: because I said at: at: we said in principle  
   4: at at the first *foreldresamtale* ((parent-teacher conference)) th:a:t  
   5: “the Polish language is most important for us and and and it is OUR responsibility  
Int:  6:  
M04: 7: and and and: you are responsible for the development of Norwegian”  
   8: and we never had any eh:: trouble because of that! (0.2)  
   9: on the contrary on the contrary they supported us  
  10: that it is great that we speak Polish with the kids.  
Int: 11:  
M04: 12: so I have heard various opinions  
   13: that that for example:: eh:: (0.2)  
   14: some recommend speaking ONLY: Norwegian: with the kids:  
   15: eh:: we came to the conclusion that absolutely no  
   16: that that: we are Polish we speak only Polish  
   17: and those in preschool:: teachers in preschool and and in school  
   18: they of course support us: us they are with us
This scene serves as an example of a well-orchestrated, strategic enactment of parental and institutional voices. While the mother self-corrects in line 3 to a plural parental voice, united on the issue of home language policies (line 5), she subsequently makes a very direct claim regarding the school’s linguistic responsibilities (line 7). While constructing the preschool as a generic chorus voice with an undifferentiated agency, she specifically locates the dialogue as inhabiting the temporal and spatial bounds of the first home–school meeting (line 4). As such, she makes the issue of home language policies urgent and important. The institutional endorsement of the parental assertion is constructed as an indirect report only (line 10). While the temporal-spatial bounds of the scene become more diffuse in the following lines, she draws here on an unspecified hearsay voice that challenges the agreed-upon home language policy (line 14). Functionally, this underscores the parental stance as reflected yet unwavering, as also reaffirmed through subsequent voicing (lines 15–16). Of particular note in this passage is not only how the parental voice is woven strategically throughout with the aid of RS but also how it dominates the exchange: the school voice as well as the hearsay echo are staged as either being in unassuming agreement or as convenient challenge-makers that propel parental agency to a central stage.

*Initiating RS Attributed to Pre/schools*

In the passage below, home language policies are foregrounded upon a specific initiation by a preschool staff member. Compared to the excerpt above, the weaving of parental agency takes a different form, albeit with the same overt aim: to assert and clarify the mother’s insistence on the division of labour and sphere of influence for L1 and L2:

*Excerpt 6:*
In this excerpt, the mother stages a dialogic orchestration that unfolds gradually. The preschool assistant is constructed as initiating the dialogic exchange through a pressure-ridden request lodged with the mother to speak L2 with her daughter at home (lines 3–4, 6). Constructed through IRS only, the school voice remains conspicuously silent in the remainder of the dialogue. Foregrounding her argumentation chain in lines 7–11 and 13–15, the mother’s overt dialogic resistance to the request unfolds from line 16, intercepted by the voice of the child only (line 17). While the interception may potentially echo an actual dialogue with the child, resorting
to the child’s voice can be read as signalling the mother’s enactment of child-centred parenting, where the child-agent partakes in the meaning-making of home language socialization (see also Revis 2016).

The temporal-spatial coordinates of the excerpt point at a specific dialogic instance. Yet, in legitimizing her stance, the mother’s argumentation transgresses its bounds and points towards past experiences as well as the virtual space of the internet as the sources of information she uses to legitimate her stance (lines 7–9). Indeed, as King and Fogle (2006) argue, parents may often combine external resources as well as their personal experience in deciding on family language policy. Her subsequent verbal opposition stretches across several lines (16, 21–24, 26–28), in which she resists the subject position of an accepting, unassuming migrant parent at the mercy of an institutional voice. Instead she positions herself as a resourceful and assertive agent with clear views on the inter-relatedness of her daughter’s bilingual development and emotional well-being. While not endorsed institutionally, this also foregrounds Polish as a language that clearly matters, at least within the bounds of the home.

As noted above, while prevalent in the present data, the boundaries for L1 and L2 use in the domestic and institutional communication spheres are in some cases less pronounced. The following excerpt illustrates how such a stance may be articulated through the use of RS. It stages a short narrative in which the mother briefly relates a past conversation on the issue of Polish language maintenance:

*Excerpt 7:*

M17: 1: eh: whe: when our child began at preschool! we began to attend
2: when she went the first days they told us
3: that we should only speak Polish to her.
Int: 4: ehhmm ehhmm
M17: 5: they underscored that we should cultivate it every day
6: that the child will NOT speak Polish if we don’t do it.
7: so of course we know about it.
While the passage relates a past home–pre/school conversation, the mother employs IRS only to articulate a piece of advice on home language policy given by a preschool staff chorus. As in some of the other data excerpts presented above, the preschool is endowed with the communal, undifferentiated agency of an expert opinion provider united in its views. By reframing the preschool chorus voice thrice (lines 3, 5–6), it is constructed not only as a source of advice but also as providing a clear institutional endorsement of 1) child bilingualism, 2) of Polish as a language that merits active attention and cultivation within the bounds of the home and 3) of parental agency to act as active L1 transmitters. As in excerpt 3, the mother’s own dialogic silence in the constructed story world may be seen here as a situational alignment with an institutional voice that clearly does not question or challenge but rather embraces the child’s ethnolinguistic heritage. The temporal references (lines 1, 2) also point towards a space where language development is seen as central and where parents and educators do not vacillate in launching a dialogue on the child’s bilingual development as early as possible.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

In the present study, the weaving of parental agency through RS emerges as situationally performed discursive acts involving multiple voices. Broadly speaking, these represent either the more intimate space of the family or the wider institutional space of the pre/school. Bamberg’s three-tier framework of positioning in narrative discourse, encompassing the level of the story world, the interactional world and the broader discursive context, was particularly instructive in the analysis of the agentive capacities assigned to these voices by the narrators.
At the level of the story world, RS may be drawn on in the middle or at the end of a narration as a way of asserting a previously established position or to oppose a statement or advice offered initially by the pre/school authorities. Such findings are in line with recent approaches to the use of RS in narratives, where story climaxes may, for example, serve as “recurrent interactional sites for reported speech” (Holt 2007, 2). While some institutional voices may be constructed as action initiators in the narrators’ story worlds, one needs to venture beyond the level of the story world in order to understand how agency is strategically negotiated by the narrators across time and space. Indeed, story world initiations may be employed as a discursive scaffolding that propels the parental performance of agency in the interactional context of the interview to the fore.

This is most clearly manifested in cases where an institutional power is criticized for turning a deaf ear to parental requests for additional language learning aid or for providing advice at odds with the parents’ views and beliefs, such as in excerpts 4 and 6 and, with less urgency, in excerpt 1. Potentially face-threatening, verbalizing such dialogues is necessarily predicated on a degree of trust between the interviewee and researcher-interviewer. When pre/schools and homes are aligned in their views, as in excerpts 3 and 7, there is, understandably, no urgent need for the parents to intervene or otherwise advocate on behalf of their children. Correspondingly, there may be no specific need to enact their voice through RS. However, the analysis also demonstrates that the parents may resort to RS to comment on their children’s linguistic progress in L2 indirectly, yet with a subtle institutional legitimation and endorsement (excerpt 2), or even to establish the very premise for how bilingual support should be provided in the home and the institutional space (excerpt 5).
The present data also show that the ways and frequencies of enacting agency through RS reflect broader concerns and contexts. Drawing on Norton’s notion of L2 learning as an investment in diverse “possible and imagined identities,” the parents’ dialogic preoccupation with their children’s L2 skills and their keen interest in drawing on institutional L2 support signal an acute awareness of the intimate interaction between language and literacy skills in Norwegian and the “distribution of resources and human possibilities” in the new society (Norton 2014, 114–16). Given the growing emphasis of Norwegian educational policy and practice on the acquisition of L2 skills early in life (Reference withheld 1), the parents’ keen interest and engagement in consulting their children’s L2 development with their educators may be read as a refraction of wider societal forces, values and discourses around the integration, immigration and education of Norway’s migrant population. In such a discursive climate, L2 skills necessarily represent a highly valued cultural capital and a fundamental prerequisite for seizing educational and later professional opportunities in Norway.

While the lack of concrete didactic institutional L1 aid is not challenged by the parents, Polish is constructed as clearly meriting value within the bounds of their homes. In fact, rather than single-handedly promoting L2 development, the pre/schools also lend support to L1 maintenance efforts at home and even to translanguaging practices in the institutional space. When this is not the case, the parents may draw on various available resources and vehemently resist the subject position of unassuming consumers of institutional advice, which runs contrary to their desires and beliefs. They thus display a particularly keen sense of their self-perceived capacity to both self-provide and ensure provision of viable bilingual support through “good” and committed parenting (King and Fogle 2006, 707). By claiming ownership of the meaning-making involved in their children’s language learning (Norton 2014, 115), they also propel their
capacity to imagine their children’s membership in the host and home language communities to
the fore. However, this also underscores how the transitional model of bilingual education in
Norway relegates the development of broad linguistic and literacy repertoires in minority
languages to parental or communal capacity to act rather than to that of an educational system
committed to a broad societal multilingual project. As such, family language policies and
language education policies are shown to be deeply interrelated.

In sum, this study demonstrates that parental agentive positioning is not only occasioned
by the interactional demands of the constructed story worlds but also by the interactional
demands of the interview act, itself located within wider contexts of meaning. As such, the
findings underscore the performative nature of agency and RS as agency across multiple levels
of analysis (Lanza 2012; Miller 2014). The study also lends further empirical evidence to the
conceptualization of the research interview as a social practice and a collaborative achievement
that undergirds the emergence of particular performative and positioning dynamics between the
researcher-interviewer and interviewee/s (Talmy 2010, 2011; De Fina 2009). On a more abstract
level, it underlines the view of space as itself agentive (Blommaert 2005), situationally enabling
or constraining individual constructions of self and other.

While offering novel insights on the discursive enactment of migrant parents’ agency in
their narratives on home–school partnerships, this study is not without shortcomings. First, the
present sample is composed of a small group of labour migrants of European heritage. While
some of them are highly educated, all have already displayed agency and resourcefulness in the
very act of voluntarily leaving their country of origin and setting out on an insecure journey
towards a better economic future in a foreign land. Second, this study is limited to tracing the
discursive enactment of parental self-perceived capacity to act rather than observing the parents’
actual actions or face-to-face dialogues with their children’s educators in institutional settings. Studies pursuing both ends have demonstrated how wider institutional constraints may situationally limit parents’ self-professed agency to act as empowered participants in their children’s education (Compton-Lilly 2007; Rogers 2003). Future empirical investigations may shed further light on how migrant parents’ self-perceived discursive capacity to act on behalf of their children may transgress home and, arguably also, research interview boundaries and translate into successful, mutually empowering dialogic partnerships with their children’s educators across time and space.
References


———. 2004. ‘Form and Functions of “Slut Bashing” in Male Identity Constructions in 15-Year-Olds: “I Know It May Sound Mean to Say This, but We Couldn’t Really Care Less about Her Anyway.”’ Human Development 47 (6): 331–53.


doi:10.1080/01411920701243578.


Reference withheld 1. n.d.

Reference withheld 2. n.d.


