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On ethics in language testing for adult migrants.

Storytelling as an evaluatee-centered assessment technique?

Abstract

A partire dalle prime teorie sul *testing* linguistico (Carroll, 1961; Lado, 1961) ai più recenti approcci critici nei confronti dell'introduzione di requisiti linguistici, e dell'uso di test formali, ad esempio, per l'ottenimento dei permessi di soggiorno e/o della cittadinanza nel flusso migratorio, in pieno aumento in molti paesi occidentali, in particolare nell'area dell'Unione Europea (Kunnan 2004; McNamara – Shohamy 2008; Shohamy 2009; Van Avermaet 2010), si evidenzia come una lingua, uno straordinario strumento di relazioni umane e di integrazione, può diventare un mezzo di esclusione sociale (McNamara 2005; Shohamy 2001, 2009; Blommaert 2006; Avermaet 2010). I risultati dei test, infatti, possono avere un impatto importante sulla vita privata e professionale dei candidati nonché sulla società nel suo complesso. In particolare, negli ultimi anni la questione dell'eticità dei test linguistici sta emergendo a gran voce. Gli aspetti etici connessi all'uso che si fa dei test nella società sono venuti alla ribalta poiché le conseguenze dei test riguardano sempre più spesso i diritti umani e civili dei candidati. Il contributo approfondisce anche lo stretto legame tra la professionalità e l'etica ed esamina il ruolo delle comunità di pratica nella condivisione di un Codice Etico. L'articolo si conclude con alcune proposte alternative al *testing* linguistico formale tra le quali lo *storytelling* che ha come sfondo teorico l'approccio etno-poetico di Hymes (1996; 2003).

Ethical issues have come to the forefront of language testing because of the powerful impact they have on individuals' private and professional lives. Not the less, in recent years, notwithstanding the trust in tests, alternative forms of assessment, which help value individuals' language repertoire, their cultural and affective dimension, have been introduced as opposed to testing mainly in the critical areas of long-term residence permit, access to citizenship and family reunification in the migration flow to the European Union. The ethno-poetic approach of Hymes (1996; 2003) is the theoretical background that led to the reflection presented in this paper according to which a standard test used in the context of migration could at least partially be substituted by storytelling. This paper discusses the close link between professionalism and ethics, which can be identified as the standards of a profession. Davies (2007) states that moral professionalism provides a contract for the profession and the individual with the public, thereby safeguarding all three. This type of contract normally takes the form of a Code of Ethics, a Code of Practice, or a Standards document, introduced by a professional association such as the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) or the International Language Testing Association (ILTA). The importance of being a member of a community of practice will be also examined (Fulcher & Davidson, 2013).

1. Ethics and language testing

The history of language testing began not longer than a half a century ago. It is often said that modern language testing dates to 1961, since this was the date of the publication of the first book on language testing by Lado. The same year, a paper by Carroll (1961), set out the scope of language testing which «[...] is always to render information to aid in making intelligent decisions about possible

courses of action» (*ibid.*, 364). Curiously enough, Carroll seems to have identified one of the most crucial problems of language testing, which still persists today, that is, the relationship between decisions and their consequences. Today's debate also focuses on the role of different stakeholders, and the relationship between all those involved in the various testing events, as well as on ethical issues, fairness, and the power of tests.

The concern for ethical issues and the far-reaching consequences of the use of language tests for individuals and society, form a relatively new concept which has expanded widely only in recent times, that means from the 1990s (Shohamy, 2001). In fact, Spolsky (1995) does not give much evidence about language test developers' or language testers' concern for ethical questions in his study of the history of modern objective language testing, which covers the period from 1913 to 1965 in detail.

In Messick's (1993) opinion, the central notion in language testing is whether the proposed testing should serve as the means to the intended end or whether it could also have unintended, unexpected purposes. Messick was the first to introduce the notion of consequential validity to educational testing and assessment in 1989. In other words, it seems, that what really counts, are not the policy or test makers' intentions, but the real-life effects of tests, both on people's lives and society as a whole. Consequently, more and more attention has been directed towards an approach of shared responsibility, as well as towards a fairer implementation of test results under the umbrella terms of "ethics" (Farhady 1998; Fulcher – Davidson 2013; Shohamy 1997), or "ethicality" (Lynch 1997). Hamp-Lyons (2000 582) talks about «[...] social, professional and individual responsibility» as this term carries «[...] an implication of reciprocity» (*ibid.*, 582), which is not shared by either the terms "ethics" or "moral". In accordance, also Bachmann (2000) links the increased awareness of ethical issues to professionalism. In the same line of thought, Stansfield (1993) associates ethics to language testers' moral conduct in their daily professional practice. Accordingly, language teachers and test designers have become more involved in, and concerned about, tests and their role in their personal, professional and public lives.

Ethicality can be defined in terms of issues, such as harm, consent, confidentiality of data and fairness (Lynch, 1997). Many researchers into ethical, social and political issues, within the methodology of critical social theory, such as Extra, Spotti – Van Avermaet (2009), Lynch (1997), McNamara (2000), Shohamy (1993; 1997; 2000; 2001; 2009), and Spolsky (1995), have contributed to the increased awareness of the importance of shared decision-making and

information exchange in all stages of language testing. These researchers have discussed various aspects of testing procedure, as well as of tests themselves, from their «[...] unchallenged, unmonitored and uncontrolled» (Shohamy 2001 375) character, to their gate keeping function (Bachman, 2000; Van Avermaet 2010). Elaborating fifteen principles that underlie Critical Language Testing (CLT), Shohamy (2001) seems to have provided «[...] the most definitive response to date for a critical approach to language assessment» (Lynch 2001, 362).

CLT examines, among the different domains, the influence and the involvement of the range of stakeholders in a testing context (Shohamy 2001). The scholar underlines «[...] the need to conduct and administer testing in collaboration and cooperation with those tested» (*ibid.*, 376) thus focusing on the need to overcome the deep communication gap between the stakeholders and to promote ethical and democratic principles in language testing.

As a matter of fact, one of the central problems of testing is that the information is not equally distributed among the stakeholders. This condition raises several ethical issues. In most cases only policymakers, politicians and administrators are bestowed with the complete or key information, while learners, their parents or guardians are not fully informed (Farhady 1998). The stronger stakeholders, who have access to the most crucial information on testing, have the power of making decisions on the educational, social, and occupational, and sometimes, on the personal lives of the less informed. In contrast, the weaker stakeholders, such as the test takers, are not able to play a sufficiently active and participatory role in the testing procedure, even if their stakes are the highest (Farhady 1998; Shohamy 1993).

Yet, it would be hard to imagine somebody disagreeing on the necessity of an ethical perspective, not only in language testing, but in testing in general. Likewise we tend to believe that all stakeholders naturally assume their professional responsibility towards the social and individual consequences of their role in language testing (Hamp-Lyons 2000). But as with many other key concepts in the field of language testing, there are disagreements and contrasting opinions, among the scholars and the community of professionals on the treatment of the term 'ethics' (Farhady 1998).

According to a recent ethics guide, published by the BBC, «[...] ethics is a system of moral principles and a branch of philosophy which defines what is good for individuals and society»¹. Ethics seems to cover at least the following dilemmas: how to live a good life, individuals' and groups' rights and responsibilities, principles of moral decisions on what is good, and what is bad, as

¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics>.

well as what is right, and what is wrong². It also includes the civil code of behavior that is considered correct, especially that of a particular group, profession or individual³.

Indeed, it is complicated to determine the limits and the extent of ethics, as well as to find its exact definition. According to the Dictionary of Sociology (Marshall, 1998), research ethics can be defined as follows: «The application of moral rules and professional codes of conduct to the collection, analysis, reporting, and publication of information about research subjects, in particular active acceptance of subjects' right to privacy, confidentiality and informed consent»⁴.

Similarly, Punch (1994) states that ethical topics include consent, deception, privacy, confidentiality and equal opportunity to learn. Hamp-Lyons (2000), instead, points out the importance of language testers' awareness of their social and professional responsibility. She considers this insider viewpoint as the basis of ethical language testing together with «[...] the combination of expanded views of all stakeholders» (*ibid.*, 581).

According to Davies (2008) being a language professional incorporates codes, contracts, training and standards of practice that may change over time. Indeed, language testers have long accepted the APA Standards for Educational and Psychological testing (1999) that form the basic rules for their profession. This means that a professional, who is aware of the changing nature of his/her profession, agrees to behave according to a shared norm irrespective of where he/she operates or the type of institution he/she works in.

In short, professionalism is linked to ethics which can be identified as standards of a profession. Admission and adherence to the community of practice essentially depends on acceptance of the ethical code which, if violated, leads to sanctions for the members of the community (McNamara & Roever, 2006).

2. Development of an ethical perspective in the community of practitioners

The role of all professionals such as linguists, researchers, test makers and teachers, is fundamental to avoid abuses or misuses of language tests and their results. Stansfield (1993) closely links professionalism to ethics, which he considers the moral conduct of language testers as people practicing their profession. Conversely, Davies (2007) states that moral professionalism provides

² *Ibidem.*

³ *Ibidem.*

⁴ <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O88-researchethics.html>.

a contract for the profession and the individual with the public, thereby safeguarding all three.

The contract normally takes the form of a “Code of Ethics”, a “Code of Practice”, or a “Standards document”, introduced by a professional association, and to which individual members subscribe as an act of becoming a member of that profession. Codes of practice, which have been first of all written to give practical guidance on how testers should act in a responsible way, cover such areas as «the professional’s role in society, integrity, conflict of interests, diligence and due care, confidentiality, and communication with the public and clients» (Shohamy 2001, 383).

The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) adopted the Code of Practice in 1994⁵. The Code identifies the responsibilities of the main users of examinations, and aims to safeguard the test takers’ rights in four areas, namely examination development, interpretation of exam results, fairness and information⁶. ALTE also has a particular Language Assessment for Migration and Integration group (LAMI) that cooperates with external bodies such as the Council of Europe. It also promotes relationships between testing and civil as well as human rights. Moreover, it monitors that ethical principles are properly understood and considered by policy makers.

The International Language Testing Association (ILTA) prepared and adopted a “Code of Ethics” in 2000⁷. It contains nine principles that describe what ILTA members ought to do, or not to do, or more generally, how they ought to face the testing procedure as a whole. In this respect the principle number 9 of the ILTA Code of Ethics seems to be particularly important: «language testers shall regularly consider the potential effects, both short and long-term, on all stakeholders of their projects, reserving the right to withhold their professional services on the grounds of conscience»⁸. First, this principle is based on an individual tester’s consciousness and awareness. Second, it states the individual tester’s responsibility to refuse to administer a test, if he/she considers it unfair, or unethical, under particular circumstances, or if the test could put the candidates’ human rights at risk.

From the individual language tester’s viewpoint, a code of ethics, or a code of practice, holds a great importance as it is «[...] a professionally sanctioned document universally accepted by the community of professionals to which every tester can turn when needing guidance on whether any particular practice would

⁵ http://www.alte.org/attachments/files/code_practice_eng.pdf.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ <http://www.iltaonline.com/index.php/enUS/component/content/article?id=57>.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

be regarded by professional peers as ethical or not» (Hamp-Lyons 2000, 588). Being a part of a community of practice is important, as it involves participating, listening to and considering contrary opinions and new evidence (Fulcher – Davidson 2013).

In other words, free and open discussion among scholars seems to be one of the most important instruments to further develop an ethical perspective in language testing. It means monitoring and evaluating the whole process, from the test design to the consequences of the tests, debating on ethics, and posing new demands of professionalism and appropriateness of specific practices within the social, cultural and political contexts (Fulcher – Davidson 2013). Shohamy (2001) calls for a continuous examination of testing to protect and safeguard test takers' rights from the authority, and misuses of tests. She also poses questions on the role of testers once they notice misuses since they may have different viewpoints of responsibility, namely ethical responsibility, responsibility for making others aware, responsibility for all test consequences, responsibility of imposing sanctions and shared responsibility (*ibidem*).

The view of shared responsibility implies the need to be critical about tests and their uses, to collect data on the effects and consequences of tests, to warn about misuses and abuses, and to try to protect all those involved in the testing procedure, mainly the most vulnerable categories such as test takers and their families (Shohamy 1993; 2001). This kind of viewpoint requires each member of the community of practitioners to share news, facts and experiences with both peers and other stakeholder groups in order to facilitate exchange of information.

In the same line of thought, Bachman (2000) sees the solution to the misuses of language tests in the professionalization and respect of codes of ethics, which articulate language testers' responsibilities by informing the test takers about the characteristics and correct use of tests. At the same time, also the codes of ethics attempt to promote the test takers' awareness of their rights, following the principles of shared power and responsibility, collaboration and democratic representation.

Since the power of is not equally shared between the stakeholders, each individual should count himself/herself as a part of community of professionals, because it is without doubt a hard task for an individual language tester try to influence policy- and decision-makers all by himself/herself (Davies 2007). Furthermore, it is not easy to refuse to obey orders and exercise language testers' right to withhold their services under circumstances they consider unfair or unethical. Being a member of a larger community of professionals, makes it easier to share responsibility and ask for support.

As a community of practice, language professionals are likely to be more powerful, and their joint actions can thus be more efficient. On the other side of the coin, language professionals have both moral and professional obligations. Consequently, as the community agrees to follow the principles of shared power, collaboration and democratic representation, it needs to promote both issues of ethical questions and fairness as an integrated part of the language testing process.

3. New approaches

In recent years, more democratic approaches to language evaluation than formalized, standardized tests have been introduced and experimented in order to make the testing process fairer (Beacco et al. 2014; *Council of Europe* 2014; Shohamy 2001). These approaches follow principles of shared power, collaboration between all stakeholders, democratic representation and participation (Shohamy 2001).

Collaborative evaluation methods are used to foster improvement both in the course design and organization. Moreover, from this viewpoint, the evaluation stage is considered as an essential part of the teaching-learning process. Forms of self-assessment and reflection are encouraged through the adoption of methods in which evaluators do not act as experts and counselors ‘who know it all’, but as facilitators, who assist learners to reach their objectives, and as collaborators, who promote mutual understanding and cultivate shared responsibility (*ibidem*).

Collaborative approaches to evaluation are more democratic and fairer because they transfer the assessment process from central bodies to local ones, and thus share power. Besides, they involve the entire local community in an open forum that examines all the relevant matters of concern regarding the acts of teaching, learning and testing (*ibidem*). The local community is intended here as a group that includes test designers, teachers, schools/educational institutions, students, students’ family members and external observers. All components of the community are to share power through an internal, multiple assessment procedure. In this approach each participant collects data and represents them in an interpretative and contextualized way to the other members of the community (*ibidem*).

The data collected obviously assume different forms which depend on the role of the participant. Students/candidates collect material for their language portfolios including self-assessment data and project participation; teachers collect material through classroom observation charts and other activities; schools and educational institutions collect material for administrative use and statistics.

External observers and Non-Governmental Organizations are involved in the process as to the respect for human rights and equal assessment conditions for those who have to be evaluated. Their role is also to safeguard the professional standards of observers/evaluators and of those responsible for defining the approach to evaluation and ensuring its successful implementation (*ibidem*). The data collected from different sources over time should be processed through «[...] constructive, interpretative and dialogical sessions» (*ibid.*, 379)» in order to evaluate candidates with all the possible information on their educational progress. This kind of approach, which strengthens the triangulation of different data and points of views, can be seen as «[...] an art, rather than a science, in that it is interpretative, idiosyncratic, interpersonal and relative» (*ibid.*, 380).

Moss (1996) reports on a language certification experimentation carried out in a local community through contextualization and shared power. This experimentation is based on a dialogue on the language portfolios, documented classroom observations and interactions over time of a group of students. The dialogue takes place between a language professional, who knows the candidates' personal history, background and their educational context, and the candidates themselves. If an external observer/evaluator is present during the dialogue, his/her role is mainly auditory, but at the same time, he/she should ensure the equity and fairness of the assessment event and the tester's professional competence (Shohamy 1997; 2001). This approach acknowledges the importance of the assessment context and starts to formulate the notion of validity as a consensus that can be reached through dialogue that takes place between different stakeholders such as teachers, students, parents, and not between disinterested external experts that have the important, but at the same time, limited role of observing the evaluation event (*ibidem*).

Shohamy (2001) gives an example of language testing of a group of immigrant students who were assessed through a mixed evaluation model, based on the principle of triangulation of different data. The final evaluation is the result of a number of agents from different sources and namely the teachers' tests and observations, the test takers' self-assessment and portfolios plus a standardized, formal diagnostic test administered by a central body (*ibidem*). This model also takes into account the principle of power sharing. As a matter of fact, to get the testing process transparent, effective and fair, power should not be transferred, but shared, which means that local and central bodies should actively collaborate throughout the process (*ibidem*).

Moreover, the complexity and diversity of the migrants' background requires a global vision of the phenomenon (Shohamy 2009). Large-scale, formalized

language tests are used to manage the migration flow and resolve some of the main problems that regular integration policy is not capable to face (Strik *et al.* 2010). The discriminating role attributed to language poses questions on ethics and fairness as individuals' basic civil, personal and human rights may not be respected in high-stakes testing events that are likely to have long-reaching consequences on their personal lives (Farhady 1998; McNmara 2005; Shohamy 1997; Van Avermaet 2010).

For example, migrants may not be granted admission to a country because they do not possess a "sufficient" knowledge of the destination country's dominant language (Strik *et al.* 2010). Likewise, third-country nationals' application for citizenship or for long-term residence permit may be refused only on the basis of a "poor" language knowledge measured through a standardized test that do not take into account migrants' multicultural and multilingual background (Van Avermaet 2010). In addition, large-scale tests hardly correspond to the migrants' real-life language needs in their social space (Shohamy 2001; 2009). Indeed, not all migrants need to be highly proficient in writing, but surely need effective oral communication skills. Still the majority of migrants, who are obliged to sit a language, and always more often, a Knowledge-of-Society(KoS) test to enter a Member State of the European Union, believe in the objective, neutral character of large-scale standardized tests (*ibidem*).

Despite most test takers' trust in tests, they are, on the contrary, often used for gate-keeping purposes, to decide who is in and who is out, and not for integration purposes (McNamara 2000). Shohamy (2001, 375) calls the standardized language tests used to control the migration flow «instruments of power». Instead of tests that do not encourage applicants to use their own language repertoire, those who are being tested/evaluated should be provided with alternative forms of assessment according to one of the principles of democratic forms of evaluation which implies «[...] the need to conduct and administer testing in collaboration and cooperation with those tested» (*ibid.* 376). In other words, new approaches to assessment should include tasks that are centered around contents migrants are familiar with and «[...] incorporate L1 skills and knowledge of negotiation» (Shohamy 2009, 56).

First, this means that the contents and the form of the assessment should be tailored to migrants' real-life language needs, background and contexts. Second, the assessment tool should value migrants' individual language capital in order to build further language skills on their mother tongue or multilingual language repertoire. In such a manner, migrants' linguistic heritage is likely to become a significant element of integration in a multilingual/multicultural society. It is thus important that all the stakeholders involved in the testing procedure agree «[...] to

consider the voices of diverse groups in multicultural societies» (Shohamy 2001, 376).

4. *Storytelling as an evaluatee-centered assessment technique?*

In this regard, storytelling could be introduced into the range of activities and assessment methods as an alternative technique aimed to measure adult migrants' effective (oral) language competence. Since migrants may not know all the assessment/test formats used in the receiving country, strategies such as storytelling, that are familiar to those who have to be evaluated, should be employed. Indeed, storytelling is considered an important skill in all cultures as it is something central to human existence and involves a collaborative, synergetic exchange between the narrator and the listener most people learn to negotiate in the childhood (Ecclestone, 2004). Another of the advantages of adopting storytelling with adult migrants lies in the fact that the capacity to tell stories seems to remain strong across the life span (de Boot – Makoni 2005).

Storytelling is possibly the world's oldest art form not used only to entertain, but to educate and inform (Mello 2001). Besides, it is also a narrative inquiry method of research. It takes place in many different forms, contexts and situations. In the migration flow cross-cultural storytelling plays an important role because migrants as narrators produce a great amount of narratives in bureaucratic and institutional contexts that range from family reunification, asylum, long-term, citizenship applications, meetings with social assistants for social housing and welfare, police interviews to court hearings (Blommaert 2007).

On all these occasions, migrants are likely to tell a story that essentially follows a simple question-answer model. However, these encounters are complicated and layered speech events in which, on the one hand, migrants' narratives are often characterized by a poor command of the host country's language, and on the other, by large use of their L1 and negotiation skills to overcome worry and emotionality that may lead to harmful misunderstanding (*ibidem*). Indeed, Hymes (1996), considers "narrative" as a central modality of language use, in which, cognitive, emotional, affective, cultural, social and aesthetic elements are intertwined. In the same vein, Blommaert (2007, 216) states that «Narrative is therefore to be seen as a form of action, of performance [...]».

On this basis, it is assumed that migrants use the method of storytelling unconsciously in their daily life in a wide range of formal and informal situations. Consequently, migrants' familiarity with this method could be further exploited in assessing their knowledge of the host country's language as storytelling is a

democratic, participatory and evaluatee-centered method that builds on the migrant's L1 skills and experiences.

In the storytelling situation the researcher/teacher/evaluator listens to a story that can be autobiographical, fictional or factual told by a narrator/an evaluatee, trying to capture the link between the personal experiences of the individual and his/her social context (Klapproth 2004). As a matter of fact, narratives seem always to be constructed in a social situation interactionally (*ibidem*). If used in the assessment procedure, the enhancement of the evaluatee's participatory role during his/her "performance" is likely to make the relationship between the evaluator (the listener) and evaluatee (the storyteller) more balanced than in a traditional setting thanks to symbiotic relational dynamics (Ecclestone 2010).

The criteria of "performance assessment" can be applied to storytelling situations. Suskie (2009) states that performance assessment merges learning and assessment in a complex "real-world experience". Introducing storytelling into the learning activities and assessment procedure enables personal ownership in learning and development of skills through application (*ibidem*). McNamara (1996, 6) believes that the main feature of performance assessment is that «[...] actual performances of relevant tasks are required of candidates».

Performance assessment applied to storytelling involves cognitive processes required by test takers including contextualized tasks and judgmental marking in the assessment (*ibidem*). In this regard, performance assessment measures characteristics such as communication, real-world applications and instructionally meaningful tasks (Palm 2001). In addition, the story presentation to peers enables real-world experience in the telling and assessment of an oral story (Suskie 2009). The storyteller will also judge the quality of his/her performance. The triangulation of different data (self-assessment, peer-assessment and evaluator-assessment), that takes into account the principle of power sharing, provides the evaluatee growth opportunity through a mixed-evaluation model (Shohamy 2001).

Today storytelling can also be digital, thanks to IT technology. As migrants, like expats, asylum seekers and refugees, no longer make blind journeys across borders, digital storytelling can be used to assess their real-life skills ability to perform tasks effectively in a digital environment. Indeed, the changing landscape of migration is more and more frequently documented through many-to-many channels, such as the Internet, Youtube or Facebook or many other social networks which allow the migrants to share their voice and tell their story. However, since digital literacy includes the ability to read and interpret media, to

reproduce data and images through digital manipulation, it excludes its use at least with pre literate learners that are the most vulnerable people⁹.

However, with literate migrant adults digital storytelling can become a part of the integration pathway. It allows migrants themselves to post a short digital narrative on the Internet, with the migrant narrating her/his journey or story, accompanied by background music and images. Publishing stories through blog posts, videos and social media allows migrants to share their voice with online communities about their reality and create a better cross-cultural understanding. In such a manner it is also possible to highlight the metaphorical dimension of their journeys when they move «[...] from *society and culture* to another, from one *language community* to another» (Norton, 1995; 2000 cited in Saville 2009, 18).

The assessment of digital storytelling, exactly like the evaluation of any other kind of project, can be divided in three phases: evaluation during the design process, evaluation during the development process, and evaluation after the project is completed. Each of these categories can be sub-divided into self-assessment, peer-evaluation, and educational evaluation. Like with the traditional storytelling, the final evaluation is the result of the triangulation of different points of view in the assessment process.

Today, migrants may also be allowed to tell (their) stories in a creative way in the framework of an educational context. The Italian Language School for Foreigners of the University of Palermo (ITASTRA) carried out a three-year project «Dai barconi all'università» (Amoruso – D'Agostino – Jaralla 2015) from 2012 to 2015. This project focused on the reality of unaccompanied foreign minors whose number has significantly increased in Italy in recent years¹⁰. A group of the minors between 16 and 17, who in those years attended Italian language courses at the ITASTRA were also engaged in a wide range of learner-centered activities such as storytelling embedded in a theatrical experimentation.

A narration and theatre project was realized together with a theater company, *Teatro dell'oppresso*, and intentionally staged in the oratory of *Santa Chiara*, in the historical center of Palermo, and not in the educational context of the University of Palermo. The students were involved in the representation of improvisational theater in which most of all that is performed, is created on stage at the very moment it is performed. The authors explain the aim of the project as follows: «Narrare storie, pensavamo, li avrebbe aiutati a ricomporre i pezzi, a ripensare ad essi oggettivandoli, a connettere il prima e il dopo. Il racconto avrebbe tessuto i fili, la rappresentanza scenica li avrebbe aiutati ad averne più

⁹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/literacy-profiles>.

¹⁰ https://www.unicef.org/emergencies/childrenonthemove/files/Child_Alert_Final_PDF.pdf non dà accesso

piena consapevolezza» (*ibid.*, 250)¹¹. In this case, in addition to self-assessment, peer-assessment and educational assessment, the evaluation process should also include a further point of view to measure arts-based storytelling performance.

In the light of these considerations storytelling has incredible potential: it can be used under a variety of circumstances and delivered through different means such as books, the Internet, theater, etc. Since the discriminating role attributed to “language” poses questions on ethics, looking for quality both in language teaching and testing for third-country migrants who plan to move to another country, for example, an EU member state, means the same as seeking fairness, non-discrimination, transparency and ethicality (McNamara 2005; Shohamy 2001 e 2009; Van Avermaet 2010).

In this regard, all stakeholders should collaborate on the design of tailor-made language courses and methods of performance assessment, suited for the needs of various migrant groups, respecting both the diversity of their language repertoire and the command of their social communication in the host society, as well as their previous experiences in formal and informal learning (Farhady 1998).

Indeed, the studies of eminent scholars (McNamara 2000 e 2005; Shohamy 1993, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2009; Van Avermaet 2010) show on this point that fair assessment practices should be based on the principles of shared power in order to put the evaluatee at the centre of the assessment procedure. This means that understanding and creating “narratives” (storytelling) that is motivating and participatory by nature and aims to acknowledge both the existence of an individual language capital and the co-existence of bi- and plurilingualism, incorporating migrants’ L1 skills and ability to negotiate, can be considered a less biased assessment technique than many other methods.

In conclusion, when migrants are at the centre of the evaluation process, it is easier both to employ strategies they are familiar with and apply more flexible assessment criteria. Finally, this implies the fact that is possible to assess migrants’ language skills from a fairer, more democratic perspective, implementing an evaluatee-centered method through which the focus automatically moves towards real-life use and content.

¹¹ «We thought that storytelling would have helped them to put all the pieces back together, to rethink about them through objectification, to reconnect the “before” and the “after”. The narrative would have reset everything, the performance on stage would have helped them to increase their awareness». The author’s translation.

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