# Unity in Super-diversity

## European capacity and intercultural inquisitiveness of the Erasmus generation 2.0

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Vertovec (2007) discusses super-diversity with reference to technological developments and increasing migration patterns which increase exposure to cultural diversity. As a consequence, 'the other' becomes less predictable and assumptions regarding cultural and linguistic features are less easily made (Blommaert & Backus, 2011, pp. 2–4). This paper examines students and graduates living in Brussels who have obtained significant experience working and studying in foreign countries: the Erasmus generation 2.0. We analyse discourse strategies used by members of the Erasmus generation 2.0 coping with super-diversity. The aim is to give insight into how members manage cultural and linguistic differences in interaction, and how this enables them to achieve unity in diversity. Instead of speaking of a European identity, we introduce the notion of 'European capacity', which denotes the ability to manage differences and multiple identities in interaction. European capacity emphasises how communicative competencies allow interlocutors to successfully operate in European multicultural and multilingual groups.

## 1. Introduction

Due to processes of globalisation, migration and European unification, confrontations with foreign cultures and languages have greatly increased (Blommaert & Backus, 2011; House & Rehbein, 2004; Kim, 2008; Vertovec, 2007). Vertovec (2007) speaks of post-multiculturalism and introduces the term 'super-diversity' to describe the emergence of new forms of socio-cultural diversity. Due to technological developments and expanding migration patterns, exposure to cultural diversity greatly increases. Consequently, 'the other' becomes less predictable and assumptions regarding cultural and linguistic features are less easily made (Blommaert & Backus, 2011, pp. 2–4). Kim (2008, p. 360) claims that individuals with 'prolonged and cumulative' intercultural experiences undergo an

'intercultural evolution' characterised by a continuous process of 'deculturation' and 'acculturation'. Individuals leave old customs behind and integrate elements from other cultures into a dynamic and situational applied identity (ibid., p. 360). According to Kim (ibid., pp. 362–363), the ability to learn and change through new experiences is essential for 'intercultural individuals'. Intercultural learning — the ability to gain, adjust and apply cultural and linguistic knowledge in real-time communication — is viewed by many as an important intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Kim, 2008; Knapp-Potthoff, 1997). Where intercultural encounters become more complex, it is no longer sufficient to learn cultural facts. Instead, the ability to *gain* knowledge in interaction allows individuals to search for similarities and successfully operate in intercultural and European contexts, regardless of the cultural backgrounds present. The acquisition of new linguistic structures is important for intercultural learning (House & Rehbein, 2004, p. 1; Kim, 2008, p. 363). The use of foreign languages allows for different identities to be explored, created and expressed linguistically (Ellwood, 2008; Habib, 2008; Rampton, 1996, p. 8). This also accounts for English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) which, according to House (2001), "unites more than (…) divides", since ELF belongs to all Europeans as an instrument enhancing mutual understanding.

This paper discusses discourse strategies used by young Europeans to cope with super-diversity in dinner conversations, and reflects upon intercultural discourse structures that characterise their encounters in European settings. The structure of this paper is as follows: in Section 2, we present the Erasmus generation 2.0 and discuss the concepts of European identity and European capacity; and in Section 3, we discuss the functional pragmatic approach to intercultural discourse. This paper's case study, namely dinner conversations of groups of the Erasmus generation 2.0, is presented in Section 4, and the results are discussed in Section 5. Finally, we present the conclusions in the last section.

## 2.   Erasmus generation 2.0 and European Capacity

The term Erasmus generation ordinarily refers to participants in the Erasmus programme funded by the European Commission. At the centre of this paper is the Erasmus generation 2.0. As opposed to Erasmus students who are often abroad for the first time, thus limiting any studies to the short-term effects of this programme alone (Sigalas, 2010), 2.0 here refers exclusively to students and recent graduates who have obtained a wealth of experience studying and working in foreign countries. Secondly, 2.0 refers to the more general developments in light of super-diversity, namely the increase of mobility and technological developments, to which the

Erasmus 2.0 generation is exposed[1]. Political scientist Wolff sees the seeds of a true European identity in the Erasmus generation[2]. Umberto Eco states that Erasmus has created the first generation of young Europeans and claims it should be compulsory for all Europeans.[3] Correspondingly, the Commission recently proposed a reform program called 'Erasmus for all'. The effect of Erasmus on the emergence of a European identity is much debated and researched (Jacobs & Maier, 1998; Oborune, 2010; Sigalas, 2010; Valentini, 2005). No consensus exists on the effects, nor on the definition of a European identity, including the corresponding goals provided by the European Commission, which differ per Directorate-General (Jacobs & Maier, 1998, p. 9). In this paper, we limit ourselves to the goals promoted in European documentation on learning mobility. As stated in the European Commission's Green Paper *Promoting the learning mobility of young people*, learning mobility 'can help foster a deepened sense of European identity and citizenship'. Amongst the objectives of the European Quality Charter for Mobility (2006, p. 9) is the enhancement of better understanding and knowledge of linguistic and cultural diversity within Europe. The emphasis is placed on diversity, which is also the case for the European motto 'United in Diversity'.

Todorov and Bracher (2008, p. 5) question the concept of European identity and emphasise that Europe is more characterized by its differences than what its countries and regions have in common. They claim that the cultural identity of Europe does not consist of a common language, history, or cultural artefacts nor in 'a repertoire of general ideas', but that it is defined by its manner of handling plurality and by an 'adoption of one common attitude in the face of diversity' (ibid., p. 7). Ongur (2010, p. 133) also debates the existence of a European identity based on a common culture, history, traditions, values and aspirations. In line with Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, Ongur (ibid.) states, however, that 'ingroups' can be formed, enabling groups to construct a temporary social identity. Ongur (ibid., 138) underscores that the forming of a European social identity in groupings (whether social, economic or discursive) should 'not be confused with the idea of bringing them together on the basis of a common identity'.

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**1.** The online European magazine cafébabel.com describes the Erasmus generation as the first generation that grew up without borders, was born with the internet, is multilingual and that has lived 'Europe' on a daily basis. See http://coffeefactory.cafebabel.com/en/post/2011/02/04/Cafebabel.com:-the-Erasmus-generation-now-has-its-media (last visited 10-04-2012)

**2.** http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/26/world/europe/26iht-enlarge2.html?pagewanted=all (last visited 07-02-2012)

**3.** http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/26/umberto-eco-culture-war-europa (last visited 08-04-2012)

We combine the aforementioned approaches; namely, we investigate how Erasmus 2.0 members create unity, or form an ingroup that is defined by similar ways of managing linguistic and cultural differences in interaction. On the basis of discourse analyses of conversations of Erasmus 2.0 groups, we show which intercultural discourse structures come into play whenever cultural or linguistic identities are discussed. On the one hand, we demonstrate how *cultural identification* and *disidentification* processes enable the groups to establish unity *despite* diversity. On the other hand, we demonstrate how *intercultural inquisitiveness* enables Erasmus 2.0 members to establish unity *due to* diversity. In actual fact, we introduce the notion of *European capacity*, which emphasises how multiple cultural and linguistic identities can successfully coexist in interaction. The word capacity denotes a set of abilities that enables the individual to 'do something' and emphasises how communicative competencies permit the interlocutors to operate and integrate successfully in European groups. In comparison to intercultural personhood (Kim, 2008), which refers to any intercultural constellation, European capacity specifically refers to the ability to gain understanding and knowledge of the vast linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe, as is promoted in European documentation on learning mobility.

## 3.   Theoretical approach

Intercultural research has long been reduced to the study of intercultural misunderstanding (Koole & Ten Thije, 1994; Ten Thije & Beerman, 2011). In this paper, we focus on how interactants gain mutual understanding in multilingual and multicultural conversations. The approach of 'beyond misunderstanding' (Bührig & Ten Thije, 2005) is inspired by studies in the framework of functional pragmatics, conversation analysis, ethno-methodology and discourse analysis (e.g. Claes, 2009; Mondada, 2004; Sarangi, 1994).

This study is situated within the functional pragmatic approach of intercultural communication (Ehlich & Rehbein, 1993; Ehlich & Ten Thije, 2010). The aim of the functional approach is to linguistically reconstruct intercultural success in interaction, by analysing the reaction to reaction of which such patterns are made up (Müller-Jacquier, 2000). According to the pragmatic definition, culture consists of collective standard solutions to collective recurring problems (Koole & Ten Thije, 1994). The presence of manifold linguistic and cultural backgrounds in international groups could potentially lead to communication failure. In order to handle differences and contradictions in intercultural groups, Koole and Ten Thije (1994) claim a new communicative repertoire must be formed enabling a common ground and mutual understanding. Koole and Ten Thije (1994) speak

of 'discursive interculture' whenever such a communicative repertoire, consisting of collective (linguistic) solutions, is formed in intercultural groups. The concept of discursive interculture reveals how interactants are able to establish unity or form an ingroup, due to successfully managing differences in interaction. A discursive interculture is a 'culture' that results from cultural contact. An interculture cannot be traced back to the individual cultures present. Discursive intercultures may arise in supranational and multilingual groups engaged in long-term contact. The interactants share common knowledge on the functioning of communication and culture. In time, discursive intercultures can develop into structures that surpass or even alter national cultures (Ten Thije, 2003). This notion is comparable to what Ongur (2010, pp. 133–134) claims, namely that Europeans could form ingroups which may temporarily enable them to construct a social identity. Just like a discursive interculture, this is an identity that results from interaction. However, the word *discursive* specifically refers to the study of discourse structures that characterise the interculture. In this paper, we presuppose that all groups in this study create a discursive interculture and demonstrate which intercultural discourse structures are characteristic of the conversations of the Erasmus 2.0 groups. Analysis of these structures gives insight into how its members express and manage cultural and linguistic differences and identities in interaction.

## 4.   Method

This study applies triangulation (Baarda, De Goede & Teunissen, 2005), using discourse analysis, intercultural biographies and participant observation. The first method concerns discourse analysis of international discourse (Ehlich & Ten Thije, 2010). Secondly, an intercultural biography of each participant was compiled, including information on participants' foreign experiences and language levels according to the European Framework self-assessment grid. The last method concerns participant observation: one of the authors belongs to the Erasmus generation 2.0 and participated in three conversations in Brussels. This allows for a level of data interpretation that could not be reached otherwise (Wilton, 2009, p. 59).

Intercultural interaction has been thoroughly studied in international classrooms (Ehlich & Ten Thije, 2010; Ellwood, 2008; Halevi, 2011; Meierkord, 2007). The institutional character of classroom discourse can greatly influence speech actions and language choice (Ellwood, 2008). This investigation concerns dinner conversation, which is an informal and spontaneous discourse genre (Keppler, 1994). Interactants have no restriction as regards to theme, speaker turn, language and modality (Wilton, 2009). As a result, the topics covered, languages used and references made to cultural and linguistic issues are spontaneous and voluntary.

Due to the action space that is characteristic for this genre, it was expected that multilingual dinner conversation in particular would reveal the intercultural discourse structures of the Erasmus generation 2.0. The institutional goal of dinner conversations is socialisation, for which shared knowledge is required and interactants must mutually develop a communicative repertoire (Keppler, 1994, p. 27). Although socialisation might not seem to fulfil any institutional goals, Ehlich and Rehbein (1979) discuss how 'homileic discourse' can in fact do so. Socialisation in intercultural groups forms an important part of learning within these mobility programmes, preparing young adults for international communication and enhancing knowledge of other European languages and cultures.

The data were gathered with the sole goal of capturing a representation of reality (Habib, 2008, p. 1121), in accordance with the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1972). The corpus consists of six video/audio recordings of dinner conversations (approximately 10:33 hours) in six different groups of the Erasmus generation 2.0 living in Brussels. Three of the recordings were made during dinners in international houses and three during dinners of colleagues and friends. In total, 27 persons participated in the recordings. The criteria for being a member of the Erasmus generation 2.0 are: to undertake work experience in Brussels

**Table 1.** Respondents

| Group | Nationality and abbreviation of the participants in the transcripts * | | | | | | Recording time |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | French (2) | Italian | Spanish (2) | Dutch | Portuguese | Chinese | 1h46 |
|   | Fm1, Ff | Im1 | Sm, Sf | Df1 | Pm | Cf | |
| 2 | French (2) | Italian | Ukrainian | Japanese | | | 1h35 |
|   | Fm2, Fm3 | Im2 | Um | Jm | | | |
| 3 | Hungarian | Italian | Czech | Irish | Luxem-bourgish | | 1h39 |
|   | Hf | Im3 | Cm | Irf | Lf | | |
| 4 | French | Danish | Belgian | | | | 1h51 |
|   | Fm4 | Daf | Bm1 | | | | |
| 5 | German | Danish | Belgian | Dutch (2) | British | | 2h00 |
|   | Gm | Daf | Bm2 | Df2, Df3 | Brm | | |
| 6 | French | Italian (2) | Ukrainian | Dutch | Spanish | | 1h32 |
|   | Ff | Im1, Im4 | Um | Df4, Df5 | Sm | | |

\* The first (and second) letter(s) represent(s) the nationality (F is French), and the final letter the gender (m is male, f is female). Where there were multiple participants of the same gender and nationality, a number was added (e.g. Fm1).

(internship or traineeship); to have completed a minimum of two stays abroad of at least three months each; to master a minimum of two foreign languages; and to be a student or graduate of higher education, aged between 22 and 30, and of European nationality. Four of the 27 participants are not part of the Erasmus generation 2.0 because of their non-European nationality, age or insufficient experience in foreign countries. In total, 16 different nationalities are represented and 19 different languages (predominantly European) form their linguistic repertoires. Table 1 gives an overview of the nationality of each participant per group and the corresponding abbreviations used in the transcripts. The 23 participants of the Erasmus generation 2.0 have spent, on average, 3.8 stays in a foreign country with a duration of 2.3 years. They speak, on average, 3.3 foreign languages and all of them have mastered English at level C1 or C2 according to the Common European Framework of Languages.

## 5.   Results

In this section, we present five intercultural structures frequently used in the six recorded dinner conversations of the Erasmus 2.0 groups. The analysis is divided into structures enabling unity to be reached either *despite* or *due to* diversity. In Section 5.1, we examine *cultural (dis)identification*, which reveals how interactants refer to the cultural and linguistic identities of themselves or others in interaction, and how they differentiate between these identities on a situational basis. By downgrading the relevance of their cultural identity in favour of belonging to the Erasmus 2.0 groups, interactants are capable of reaching unity *despite* diversity. In Section 5.2, we demonstrate the ability to operate, apply and gain linguistic and cultural knowledge in interaction, which we call *intercultural inquisitiveness*. Interactants make use of structures that optimise the cultural and linguistic diversity of the group and so reach unity *due to* diversity.

### 5.1  Cultural (dis)identification

In this section, we demonstrate, alongside two discourse structures, how members of the Erasmus generation 2.0 express their identities by identifying themselves and others (Blommaert, 2005, p. 210) to confirm or contradict their belonging to their cultural group. Cultural identification is often followed by cultural disidentification. As is stated in the Social Identity Theory, group membership can offer the ability to bypass inter-individual differences in groups, which may lead to 'depersonalization' or 'deindividuation' (Ongur, 2010, p. 134). In this section, we

demonstrate that cultural disidentification is a recurring discourse structure in the Erasmus 2.0 groups that contributes to reaching unity *despite* diversity.

### 5.1.1    *Cultural categorisation*

According to Sacks' (1972) Membership Categorization Device (MCD), categorisation can activate knowledge about a certain category and indicate an expected sequence of actions from the one categorised (Sacks, 1972). Vice versa, the display of certain actions can indicate belonging to a certain category. The following excerpts demonstrate the complexity of cultural categorisation in the Erasmus generation 2.0.

*Excerpt 1a: Irish curse so much*

| Irf [v] | [1a] and I mean like Irish people like | [1b] well you must know they curse so much! | [1c] like |
|---|---|---|---|
| Irf [nv] | | ((looking at Cm and Im3)) | |
| Cm [nv] | | | [2] ((looking |
| Im3 [nv] | | | [3] ((looking |

| Irf [v] | and they don't even know that they're doing it | [4b] they don't know | [7a] you know what i |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cm [nv] | at Im3 and smiling)) | [5] HAHAHA | |
| Im3 [v] | | [6a] YHeah | |
| Im3 [nv] | at Cm and smiling)) | [6b] HAHAHA | |

| Irf [v] | mean like I don't know it just seems so bad you just sit at a bar and some tables over there |
|---|---|
| Irf [v] | You just hear like f f f f f f it's just like this CRINGE I don't know [7b] yeah so    [11] and for Irish |
| Hf [nv] | [8] HEHEHE |
| Cm [nv] | [9] HEHEHE |
| Im3 [nv] | [10] HEHEHE |

| Irf [v] | people that's just like constantly (inside) and you're like you just said the F word. no DID I? |
|---|---|
| Irf [v] | and you're like::                                    [13] really? |
| Hf [v] | [12] yeah but that's the same in Hungary my friends are all |
| Hf [v] | 14 yea:::h ( — ) they they speak really really dirty |

In excerpt 1a, the Irish female categorises cursing as Irish behaviour (segment 1b). Despite being Irish herself, she repeatedly refers to 'Irish people' as 'they' (1b, 1c, 4b). By using these 'modifiers' she neutralises the applicability of the category to herself (Sacks, 1972, p. 469). In s14, the Hungarian female uses the same pronoun ('they') in reference to her Hungarian friends. In accordance with the MCD, hearers may apply the rule of 'protection against induction' (ibid.) and need not adjust their knowledge of the category. Instead, the Irish and Hungarian females are viewed as an exception in their category. Sacks (1972) describes this phenomenon rather negatively as being an 'inadequate' member of one's group. In excerpt 1a,

however, self-exclusion from their category allows for both females to be included in the Erasmus 2.0 category.

*Excerpt 1b: Very Italian*
Shortly after excerpt 1a, the Luxembourgish female claims to sometimes use a gesture instead of cursing.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lf [v] | | ¹ᵃ today I was playing squash with my friend↑ and he just took this really evil shot that I | |
| Lf [v] | couldn't get and I was like |  ²ᵃ that's what I did! I was just like | |
| Lf [nv] | | 1b | ²ᵇ ((Italian |
| Lf [v] | | ⁵ᵃ YHeah | |
| Lf [nv] | gesture)) | ⁵ᵇ HAHAHA | |
| If [nv] | ³ HAHAHA | ⁶ HAHAHA | |
| Hf [v] | | ⁷ᵃ VE:::ry Italian | |
| Hf [nv] | | ⁷ᵇ ((Italian gesture)) | |
| Cm [v] | | | ⁸ᵃ CHE CAZZO che cazzo |
| Cm [nv] | | | ⁸ᵇ ((Italian gesture)) |
| Im3 [v] | ⁴ IN ITALIAN? | | |
| Im3 [nv] | | | ⁹ HAHAHA |

According to Sacks, certain actions, such as the gesture in excerpt 1b, can activate knowledge of the corresponding category. This happens here, where the hearers very quickly identify the gesture as Italian (s4, s7a). All clearly have the required cultural knowledge to interpret the gesture even though only one of them is Italian. They laugh (s6, s9), some imitate the gesture (s7b & 8b) and the Czech male verbalises the associated Italian words 'che cazzo' ('what the fuck'; translation by the authors) (s8a). According to the MCD, certain behaviour is an indicator for belonging to the corresponding category. This is not the case for excerpt 1b, as the interactant does not belong to the category of the gesture she makes. Sacks uses the concept of 'imitating' behaviour. In this case, however, we claim this is an example of 'acculturation' (Kim, 2008). The Luxembourgish female does not seem to make the gesture for humorous purposes, as she only realises her use of this gesture is funny when the others start laughing and categorise it as Italian (s5b). A few minutes later in this conversation, the Italian male claims to actually never use this gesture.

Excerpts 1a and 1b both illustrate the complexity of cultural categorisation in the Erasmus 2.0 group, as cultural background is not necessarily an indicator of expected behaviour and vice versa. In fragment 1a, two speakers renounce their cultural background by claiming not to curse as much as their cultural peers. In fragment 1b, a Luxembourgish female uses a gesture belonging to the Italian

language whereas the Italian speaker claims to never use that gesture. Blommaert (2005, p. 206) states that globalisation processes lead to categorical identities becoming less clear-cut or well understood as acts of categorisation. This fragment illustrates that Erasmus 2.0 members correspondingly differentiate their knowledge of categories and apply this knowledge on a situational basis. Doing so leaves room for differences to exist but also for similarities to be emphasised through cultural disidentification, thus enabling them to achieve unity *despite* diversity. We found 15 similar discourse stretches in which we demonstrate how interactants successfully manage complex cultural categorisations in all six cases, and in doing so, enable each other to either identify or disidentify themselves or others with the cultures of themselves or others.

### 5.1.2   *Resisting cultural categorization*

Blommaert (2005, p. 205) states that one is often *grouped* by others in processes of categorisation, whether one wants to belong to said group or not. Day (1998) claims that when individuals are ethnified, either voluntarily or involuntarily, they can respond by 'resisting membership'. This can prevent the ethnified from becoming an outsider. In the following excerpt we demonstrate how interactants use the discourse structure *resistance* to become an insider of the Erasmus 2.0 group.

*Excerpt 2:  I eat this pasta with a spoon*

| Um [v] | [1] I eat this pasta with a spoon! | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Df1 [v] | | [2] very good Um | | [5] let them complain |
| Im1 [v] | | | [4] very good | |
| Im4 [v] | | [3] very good | | |

Excerpt 2 takes place at the beginning of a dinner with friends. The Italian males have prepared pasta. When everyone starts eating, the Ukrainian male (Um) says: 'I eat this pasta with a spoon' (s1). In order to understand this utterance, cultural foreknowledge is required. In Italy pasta should be eaten with a fork; only children or the elderly are allowed to use a spoon. Um portrays this foreknowledge and, by clearly stating he is violating this cultural rule, provokes Im1 and Im4. The Dutch female (Df1) also indirectly provokes the Italian males by approving of this violation and adding 'let them complain' (s5), claiming that this eating behaviour would be reason for the Italians to complain or object. The Italians, however, do not object to the fact that Um eats his pasta with a spoon instead of a fork, which they make clear by responding 'very good'. In doing so, they resist cultural categorisation by diminishing the relevance of their category (Day, 1998, p. 152). Moreover, they ignore the provocation from Df1, which is another act of resisting membership, namely 'interactive avoidance' (Day, 1998, p. 167). It is notable that

the resistance of both Italian males is not to the violation of the Italian eating habit, but to the very fact that they are categorised. This demonstrates a certain degree of disidentification with their cultural background. We found 12 discourse stretches in the corpus in which cultural categorisation led to 'resisting membership' or cultural disidentification. According to Day (1998), resistance can endanger conversations. In the Erasmus 2.0 groups, on the other hand, by resisting cultural categorisations the potential barrier raised by cultural differences is torn down and unity is created *despite* diversity.

The discourse structures of cultural categorisation and resisting membership clearly demonstrate that cultural and linguistic diversity does not form a threat to mutual understanding in these Erasmus 2.0 groups. On the contrary, cultural categorisation is not necessarily used as an indicator of expected behaviour and resisting membership leads to downgrading the relevance of a cultural category and emphasising similarities. Both structures thus attribute to creating unity *despite* diversity.

## 5.2  Intercultural inquisitiveness

In this section, we examine three intercultural discourse structures frequently used in the six discursive intercultures of the Erasmus 2.0 groups, with the aim of applying and acquiring linguistic and cultural knowledge in interaction. Here, we demonstrate how *intercultural inquisitiveness* leads to optimising diversity and thus reaching unity *due to* diversity.

### 5.2.1  *Cultural expert*

According to Koole and Ten Thije (1994), the action potentials of interactants in intercultural discourse may vary according to self- or other-identification with regard to their cultural background. The so-called 'immigrant expert' occupies a position on the basis of other-identification, whereas the so-called 'immigrant representative' occupies a position on the basis of self-identification with his cultural background. Consequently, individuals can either identify themselves as cultural representatives or be identified as cultural experts by others. In the following excerpt, we give an example of an interactant having enough cultural knowledge to fulfil the role of cultural expert, whilst not being an actual member of the culture discussed.

*Excerpt 3: In his country*
The conversation topic in excerpt 3 is the language conflict between Dutch and French speaking Belgians. This topic grants the Belgian male, who is a Dutch native speaker, the role of cultural representative. However, the French man takes up the role as cultural expert instead and the Belgian male renounces his role.

| | |
|---|---|
| Daf [v] | [2a] in the country of Bm1? |
| Daf [nv] | [2b] HEHEHE |
| Fm4 [v] | [1] because all the people especially in eh in the country of Bm1    [3a] they say that they don't |
| Fm4 [v] | speak eh: French eh actually they speak they speak French but they probably refuse to speak |
| Fm4 [v] | French so    [3b] for example if you meet a guy like eh Bm1 you have to say some words |
| Daf [v] | [5a] that would be difficult |
| Daf [nv] | [5b] HEHEHE |
| Bm1 [v] | [4] no I don't I don't insist on people speaking Fre or ahh:: Dutch |
| Fm4 [v] | In ah: |
| Daf [v] | |
| Daf [nv] | |
| Fm4 [v] | [6a] just for the introduction you have to speak in Dutch you know    [6b] just to say okay |
| Fm4 [v]a | I respect your culture I respect your langua:ge and (now) is it possible to speak in French? |
| Fm4 [v] | [6c] that's really important to to to keep a good relationship you know with people like |
| Daf [v] | [7a] yes.    [10] there are some good vibes Bm1 do you feel:: |
| Daf [nv] | [7b] HAHAHA |
| Bm1 [nv] | [8] HAHAHA |
| Fm4 [v] | eh Bm1 and::    [9a] I mean ah all ehh::    you you |
| Fm4 [nv] | [9b] HAHAHA |
| Bm1 [v] | [11] no you know he's really showing me some respect now you can you can wash my feet |
| Daf [v] | [15] no i see your point: |
| Daf [nv] | [12] HAHAHA |
| Bm1 [v] | afterwards. and then we'll really be ah::    [16] now |
| Bm1 [nv] | [13] HAHAHA |
| Fm4 [nv] | [14] HAHAHA |
| Daf [nv] | [17] HEHEHE |
| Bm1 [v] | he'll get some more subsidies to the other side of the country you know. |
| Bm1 [nv] | [18] HAHAHA |
| Fm4 [nv] | [19] HAHAHA |

The French male (Fm4) explains the importance of learning Dutch in Belgium to the Danish female, thus enabling her to gain the knowledge she needs to understand his arguments. Fm4 categorises the Flemish male (Bm1) several times: 'in the country of Bm1' (s1), 'if you meet a guy like Bm1' (3b) and 'people like Bm1' (6c). Bm1 uses 'self-dis-identification' (Koole & Ten Thije, 1994, p. 158) to renounce his representative role: 'I don't insist on speaking French' (s4). With this utterance he does not contradict what Fm4 says about his cultural peers, but he denies displaying the very behaviour which is being attributed to his cultural group.

The fact that Bm1 does not correct Fm4, and the delicate and complicated nature of the topic itself, confirms that Fm4 has enough cultural knowledge to perform the role of cultural expert. The fact that Fm4 understands the Belgian male's joke referring to the financial conflict between Flanders and Wallonia (s16–19), again affirms his sufficient culture-specific knowledge.

In intercultural encounters one often occupies the position of cultural representative to share knowledge of, and sometimes defend, one's culture (Blommaert, 2005; Ehlich & Ten Thije, 2010; Ellwood, 2008; Habib, 2008; Meierkord, 1996). Alongside eight similar discourse stretches, we demonstrate that, throughout the conversations of all six Erasmus 2.0 groups, however, knowledge is often revealed by cultural experts not belonging to the culture discussed, while the actual members dis-identify themselves as representatives. The structure of cultural expert reveals that interactants have much knowledge of cultural and linguistic differences in Europe. The interactants' frame of reference goes beyond their own culture. In combination with self-dis-identification, this reveals that interactants neither feel the need to place their own culture at the centre nor to always defend it. This enables them to expand their common ground and achieve unity *due to* diversity.

### 5.2.2   *Intercultural learning*

In the following excerpt, we will demonstrate that interactants not only apply but also playfully acquire cultural and linguistic knowledge in interaction. The discourse structure of intercultural learning is viewed as an important intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Davis, 2005; Kim, 2008; Knapp-Potthoff, 1997; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009).

*Excerpt 4: Dutch and German language*
In excerpt 4, the French male (Fm4) displays specific and general knowledge of communication and languages (Knapp-Potthoff, 1997) that enable him to quickly and playfully acquire foreign languages in real-time interaction (Byram, 1997).

| Bm1 [v] | | [2] ouais | |
| Fm4 [v] | [1] mais pour toi c'est plus simple l'allemand. | | [3] JE SAIS je sais en cours de Dutch |
| Tr | [1] but for you German is easier | | [3] i know in my Dutch course when |
| Bm1 [v] | | [4] hm | |
| Fm4 [v] | quand eh::quand je cherche un mot je cherche en allemand. | | [5] et tous les mots sont |
| Tr | eh: when I look for a word in German | | [5] all the words are the same |
| Daf [v] | | [7] what? what was that? | |
| Bm1 [v] | | [6] ouais | |
| Fm4 [v] | pareils qua. | | [8a] no I mean when when I'm in Dutch you |

| | |
|---|---|
| Fm4 [v] | know and the teacher ask me for a word in Dutch I and I was like pff I dont know  [8b] so I say |
| Bm1 [v] | [9a] yeah |
| Bm1 [nv] | [9b] HEHEHE |
| Fm4 [v] | the one in German and I found the word   [10] so for example     some something like |
| Daf [v] | [12a] spelen |
| Bm1 [v] | [11] yeah. |
| Fm4 [v] | a spielen which is a a play in a German it's the same word in Dutch spelen |
| Daf [v] | [12b] it's it's the same in Danish as well::  [12c] SPILLE? So:: |
| Fm4 [v] | [13] or ick ick wohne ick wohne in |
| Bm1 [v] | [14a] it's the same   [14b] ik woon in Elsene |
| Fm4 [v] | Elsene    [15a] so ah in German    [15b] in German it's ich eh ich eh wohnt |
| Bm1 [v] | [16a] hmhm. |
| Fm4 [v] | ich wohne? in eh in Ixelles no? |

The French male (Fm4) compares the Dutch and German languages, claiming it must be easier for the Flemish male (Bm1) to learn German (s1). He then tries to compose Dutch and German sentences himself, instead of asking Bm1 for translations (s10, s13, s15b). The Danish female repeats the Dutch word 'spelen' (to play) and compares it to the Danish word 'spille' (s12a-c). According to Byram (1997, pp. 61–63), interpreting and contrasting the languages and, through the languages, the cultures (or 'languaculture' Agar, 1996), of the self and the other is an important element of intercultural learning. Therefore, the utterances in segments 13 and 15b are notable. In segment 13, Fm4 speaks Dutch and says 'Elsene' which is the Dutch name of a district in Brussels, generally only used by Dutch speakers. In segment 15b, he speaks in German about the same district only now he uses the French name 'Ixelles'. Whilst practising and contrasting two foreign languages he has only recently acquired, the French male thus manages to also apply his cultural knowledge of the language difference in Brussels by differentiating between the proper names of the district.

We found 12 similar discourse stretches in which cultural and linguistic differences serve as a conversation topic and facilitate intellectual learning, in all six conversations of the Erasmus 2.0 groups. Interactants willingly make use of the groups' diversity to acquire knowledge of foreign cultures and languages. This *intercultural inquisitiveness* is a key characteristic enabling them to expand their common ground and so achieve unity *due to* diversity.

### 5.2.3  Languaging
The approach of 'languaging' enables the study of the vast linguistic variation in 'super-diverse' contexts (Blommaert & Backus, 2011, p. 8). Language is viewed

as dynamic and creative potential to speak, emphasising the *use of language* and its users: the *languagers*. The following excerpts are part of several small discussions held in four languages, during 3.5 minutes. The focus of the analysis is on three interactants in particular. Table 2 displays their experiences abroad and their language levels based on the self-assessment grid of the Common European

**Table 2.** Intercultural biographies

| Im1 (Italian) | | Living abroad | Sm (Spanish) | | Living abroad | Df1 (Dutch) | | Living abroad |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Italian | L1 | Australia | Spanish | L1 | Italy | Dutch | L1 | Italy |
| English | C2 | France | English | C1 | Ireland | Italian | C2 | Switzerland |
| French | C2 | Belgium | Italian | C1 | India | English | C1 | Belgium |
| French | B1 | | | | Belgium | French | B1 | |
| | | *23 months* | | | *70 months* | German | B2 | *23 months* |

Framework of Reference for Languages.

*Excerpt 5a: Discussion on music*
Primary to the excerpt below, the interactants discuss in English the fact that they always listen to the same music in the house. The Spanish male (Sm) claims that the Dutch female (Df1) is the only one to introduce new music. The Italian male (Im1) disagrees, claiming that Df1 'doesn't know anything'. Sm tells his girlfriend what they are talking about:

| Sm [v] | [1] rolling stones::: bob dylan:: beatles. y dije que ella lo sabia | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| [Tr] | [1] rolling stones::: bob dylan:: beatles and i said that she knows | | |
| Im1 [v] | | [2a] ella? | [2b] ella sa que |
| [Tr] | | [2a] she? | [2b] she doesn't |
| Df1 [nv] | | 3 HEHEHE | |

| Im1 [v] | nada | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| [Tr] | know anything | | |
| Df1 [v] | [4a] ohhh | [4b] che hai contro di ella? | [4c] devi ammetere che sei::: no lascia |
| Df1 [nv] | [4a] ((smiling)) | | |
| [Tr] | | [4b] what do you have against 'ella'? | [4c] you have to admit that you.. no never mind |

| Sm [v] | | [7] mmm | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Im1 [v] | [5] no no vai vai | | [9] bueno bueno |
| Im1 [nv] | [5] no no go go | | |
| Df1 [v] | | [6] no vabbeh, lascia perdere questa | [8] it's great Pa |
| [Tr] | | [6] no never mind let´s let this one go | |
| [nv] | | (0.3) | |

In the above stretch, Im1 crosses to Spanish (s2) and takes up the same discussion as held before in English. Rampton (1996, p. 8) defines 'crossing' as using the language of a group to which the speaker does not belong. Table 2 shows that Df1 does not speak Spanish. Nonetheless, she understands the utterance of Im1 (s4a-b). She repeats 'ella' while asking in Italian what he has against her. This is a rhetorical question as, instead of finishing, she then launches a counterattack. Excerpt 6a is an example of advanced *receptive multilingualism*. Usually this means individuals with diverse linguistic backgrounds speak their mother tongue but have enough receptive skills in the language of the other to understand each other (Ten Thije, 2010, p. 54). In excerpt 5a, however, the Italian male speaks Spanish and the Dutch female responds in Italian. They are thus engaging in receptive multilingualism both using a foreign language. It is notable that Df1 crosses to Italian and not to English in which she has a higher proficiency and which is understood by all interactants at the table.

*Excerpt 5b: Cake discussion*

In the following discourse stretch, we demonstrate how miscommunication occurs, due to the fact that an individual, who is not part of the Erasmus generation 2.0, is not multilingual. The French male (Fm1) is abroad for the first time and only speaks poor English in addition to French. It becomes clear that this is seen as a shortcoming by the others.

| Df1 [v] | [1] Fm1 did you put your:: creation | | [3a] in the oven? | |
| Df1 [nv] | | | [3b] ((gestures of putting something in the oven)) | |
| Fm1 [v] | | [2] yes | | |
| Df1 [v] | [5a] very good | | | |
| Df1 [nv] | [5b] ((thumbs up)) | | | |
| Fm1 [v] | [4] yeah! | | | |
| Ff [v] | | | [6a] no I don't think he did | |
| Ff [nv] | | | [6b] ((looking down and shaking 'no')) | |
| [nv] | | (0.5) conversations going | | |
| Df1 [v] | [7b] you try to talk to him cause:: | | [10a] mais Fm1 tu as mis eh:: | |
| Df1 [nv] | [7a] HAHAHA | [7c] HAHAHA | [7d] HAHAHA | |
| [Tr] | | | [10a] but jojo did you put eh: | |
| Fm1 [nv] | | | ((stands up)) | |
| Ff [v] | | | [8b] cause it's there | |
| Ff [nv] | [6c] HAHAHA | [8a] ((laughing and point- ing | [8c] HAHAHA | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Im1 [v] | | [12] non pas encore |
| [Tr] | | [12] no not yet |
| Df1 v] | | [14] oké. tu le peux mettre |
| [Tr] | | [14] okay. you can put it right |
| Fm1 [nv] | [13] non je vais maintenant | |
| [Tr] | [13] no I'm going now | |
| Ff [v] | [11] tu l'as mis au four? | |
| [Tr] | [11] did you put it in the oven? | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Df1 [v] | maintenant? | [16] peut- être. |
| [Tr] | now? | [16] maybe. |
| Fm1 [nv] | [15] yeah | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Im1 [v] | [17] ouais mais (il est toujours) sa dessert:: doucement | | [19a] si |
| [Tr] | [17] yeah yeah but it is his dessert. relax | | |
| Df1 [v] | | [18a] no che! [18b] ça va eh:: | je peux: |
| [Tr] | | [18a] no but [18c] its okay | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Im1 [v] | everybody said everybody said it's a dESsert. | [19b] come on guys. calm. | |
| Df1 [v] | | | [20a] it was just a |
| Im1 [v] |  (-) | | [21a] yeah. oke. |
| Im1 [nv] | | | [21b] ((nodding yes)) |
| Df1 [v] | question I mean [20b] because he said yes to me when i asked him | | |

A few minutes later, Df1 asks the French male (Fm1) in English with use of gestures (s3b), whether he put his cake ('creation') in the oven (s1 & 3a). Fm1 responds 'yes' (s2) and 'yeah' (s4). It then becomes clear that Df1's efforts were of no use. Fm1 did not understand the question as the French female (Ff) points out that the cake is still on top of the oven (s6 & s8). After this misunderstanding, about which both females laugh very loudly (s7-8), Df1 asks Ff to 'try to talk to him, cause' (s7b), insinuating that it is only possible to communicate with Fm1 in French. Df1 and Ff subsequently both continue in French. Then Im1 enters the conversation. He tells the females to 'relax' and that it is 'his dessert', implying that Fm1 can decide when to put it in the oven (s17). Df1 explains that the issue is not the cake, but the fact that Fm1 answered 'yes' when the answer should have been no. Thus, it comes down to a discussion about Fm1's linguistic skills. Im1 then immediately rests his argument and agrees with Df1. The limited linguistic skills of Fm1 are clearly a recurring issue and are seen as a deficiency. The fact that Fm1 is monolingual hinders successful communication and renders it difficult for him to participate fully in the group.

In both excerpts, the *languagers* do not limit themselves to their mother tongue nor to one common language. The ease with which the *languagers* switch

or cross language within phrases or sentences, confirms a sufficient proficiency in all languages to successfully communicate. It is important to bear in mind that the choice to use multiple languages is made by the interactants themselves. During the conversation as a whole, the Dutch and Spanish interlocutors often initiate Italian whereas the Italian often only speaks Italian when initiated by others. Rampton (1996, p. 8) states that switching to the mother tongue is a claim of membership and solidarity to one's cultural group. The Italian male refrains from claiming solidarity and in doing so, partly rejects his Italian membership. The other languagers on the other hand have both lived in Italy and Italian appears to perform an 'identity function' (House, 2003, p. 559). Using foreign languages is an act of crossing boundaries, exploring ethnicities and creating new identities (Ellwood, 2008; Habib, 2008; Rampton, 1996). The *languagers* display a global identity in which 'discourses of boundary crossing, open mindedness, identity change, multilingualism, and international understanding all figure' (Ellwood, 2008, p. 554). In regard to 'languaging', Blommaert and Backus (2011, p. 8) pose the question of how use of a vast variety of languages does not result in 'massive miscommunication'. In excerpt 6b, we clearly see that *not* being multilingual leads to miscommunication.

Messelink (2011) discusses 12 similar multilingual discourse stretches which confirm that multilingualism is an essential characteristic of the discursive intercultures of the Erasmus 2.0 groups. In conversations, the importance of foreign languages is often mentioned. Using multiple languages is common and enables different identities to be expressed. Understanding multiple languages is sometimes necessary for mutual understanding. Thus, *languaging* proves how unity is achieved *due to* optimising diversity.

The three discourse structures in Section 5.2 demonstrate that *intercultural inquisitiveness* is an essential characteristic in all six conversations of the Erasmus 2.0 groups. Their members portray much knowledge of cultural and linguistic differences; this often serves as a conversation topic and differences are often optimised to gain new linguistic and cultural knowledge in interaction. *Intercultural inquisitiveness* demonstrates how unity is achieved *due to* diversity.


## 6.   Conclusion

In this paper, we introduced the notion of European capacity as an alternative to the study of a European identity. The term European identity is much debated due to a lack of basic criteria such as a common language and shared history and considering that Europe is more characterised by its differences than its similarities. Todorov and Bracher (2008, pp. 5–7), therefore, refer to a common manner

of handling plurality. Ongur (2010, p. 138) advocates the study of a European Social Identity as a temporary and contextual identity of ingroups. The notion of European capacity delineates the capacity to successfully manage linguistic and cultural identities and diversity as well as the ability to achieve unity in diversity.

The notion of capacity does not reveal the emergence of a new identity, but demonstrates how multiple cultural and linguistic identities can successfully co-exist in interaction. In this paper, alongside five intercultural discourse structures, we discussed how individuals have the capacity to create unity, due to or despite diversity. On the one hand, cultural (dis)identification demonstrates how individuals express their identities by identifying themselves and others in a manner in which they leave room for differences and exceptions to exist, but also for similarities to be emphasised through cultural disidentification. Where Goffman (1963) describes 'self-discrediting' rather negatively, in the Erasmus 2.0 groups it proved important to reach unity *despite* diversity. Goffman claims individuals disaffiliate themselves from the group they could otherwise be adhered to. As a consequence of discrediting, one displays opposite actions to the group norm. The Erasmus 2.0 members do in fact display opposite actions; however, in doing so they become part of the Erasmus 2.0 group. Disidentification then means minimising cultural differences and emphasising similarities.

The interactants not only leave old customs behind (deculturation), but they have also clearly acquired and continue to acquire new cultural influences (acculturation) which they integrate into a dynamic and transformative identity: 'one that conjoins and integrates, rather than separates and divides' (Kim, 2008, p. 360). The *intercultural inquisitiveness* of all interactants concerned demonstrates how diversity is optimised in order to apply and gain linguistic and cultural knowledge in interaction. This enables the groups to form a common ground and achieve unity *due to* diversity. Moreover, it proves that cultural diversity and multilingualism are not merely a characteristic of the group, but that they in fact define the unity of the Erasmus 2.0 groups and that of its individual members.

All six groups apply these same discourse structures. We therefore confirm the notion of a European capacity that denotes a set of abilities that enables individuals to successfully operate and integrate in the Erasmus 2.0 groups. European capacity places diversity at the core and is defined by an interplay of past experiences and intercultural encounters in the present, a gathering of super-diverse influences, which individuals with use of diverse discourse structures resist or adopt into their identity. Each member might apply the same structures but the groups are made up of individuals who are all diverse.

Finally, the findings of this research demonstrate general qualities and competencies not only relevant to this generation or to studies in intercultural communication and multilingualism, but to every individual regularly confronted with

foreign languages and cultures. As long as European Unification progresses, globalisation continues to influence our societies, mobility increases evermore and technological developments proceed, exposure to cultural and linguistic diversity will only increase and such competencies will become more important.

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