

Abstract: Clara Keating

KEYNOTE ABSTRACT

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Language provision and the state: imaginations of schooling from a migrant perspective

This presentation focuses on the ways in which the value and purpose of mother tongue schooling is represented in two different contexts of migration in Europe. I will be drawing on broader sociolinguistic and ethnographic research conducted among Portuguese migrants in the UK in the 1990's by Clara Keating and on research with a similar approach among Eastern European migrants in Portugal in the early 2000's, by Olga Solovova. Even though with different aims, both research projects included interviews with parents, with organisers of mother tongue classes and with educational officers, analyses of official policies and documents related to the provision of Portuguese in the UK and Russian/Ukrainian in Portugal, as well as ethnographic observations, not only in mother tongue classes but also in other contexts, such as households and community associations. These two contexts point, in an interesting way, at the intermediate sociolinguistic status of Portuguese, acting both as a state dominant language and a minority language (migrant and lingua franca) within the same European geopolitical space.

The comparison between these two contexts has three different aims. First, it shows how the specific ways in which complementary schooling and provision of mother tongue is being 'imagined' in particular local settings have been shaped by broader historical processes, differently narrated by different nation-state projects. Second, it brings to the fore an explicit focus on the migrant perspective. This adds an additional layer that recognises and explains local understandings of and local investments – or non-investments – on language policies, language use and language maintenance. Third, it indicates the existence of overlapping versions of schooling and language prestige at play in the same space, affected by co-existing, sometimes contesting historical narratives.

The paper ends by reflecting on the comparative perspective as a way of locating research in multi-situated and polycentric critical ethnography, that acknowledges the formal, the informal and the rhizomatic dimensions of language use in late modern societies, thus providing tools for both researchers and researched to assess scope for transformative action.