The linguistics in othering: Teacher educators' talk about *cultural diversity*

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Abstract

'Othering' can be conceptually defined as the manner in which social group dichotomies are represented in language via binary oppositions of 'us' and 'them'. The article aims to contribute to a methodological approach for differentiating the concept of othering in educational settings. We will introduce new ways of conceptualising othering based on findings from an empirical critical discourse analytical study of how teacher educators talk about the term 'cultural diversity'. The study is based on transcriptions of interviews with Norwegian teacher educators. The findings illustrate that teacher educators talk about cultural diversity using seven different ways of othering. These ways of othering are important because teacher educators' discourses influence preservice teachers, in turn, influencing their future teaching in schools. We argue that a critical linguistic awareness of the ways in which pupils are 'othered' is an important tool in counteracting social exclusion and promoting social justice and equity.

Key words: othering, cultural diversity, teacher educators, critical discourse analysis, equity, social justice.

Introduction

Cultural diversity is an important concept in teacher education in Norway as well as in many other countries. However, most of the research on cultural diversity and teacher education has focused on how to address shortcomings in the attitudes and knowledge of preservice teachers (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Sleeter, 2008). Recent developments point to the need for a greater focus on teacher educators' knowledge and professional development (Goodwin et al., 2014; Hallett, 2010; Jacobs, Assaf, & Lee, 2011; Martinez, 2008; Murray, 2014; Timmerman, 2009; Tryggvason, 2012; Williams, 2014). Although empirical research on teacher educators' knowledge about today's increasingly demographically diverse society has been rather scarce (Goodwin et al., 2014), some studies have

addressed cultural diversity teaching in teacher education. For example, one study reports that teacher educators often feel unprepared (Gorski, Davis, & Reiter, 2012) and that there is not necessarily a correlation between teacher educators' self-understanding and their awareness of cultural diversity (e.g. Brown, 2004). Nevertheless, teacher educators' knowledge is important for helping preservice teachers develop culturally responsive understandings (Richards, 2011).

Based on a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001, 2003; Van Dijk, 2006) of how 12 Norwegian teacher educators use cultural diversity as a term and how they understand cultural diversity as a concept, this article contributes to the knowledge on teacher educators' competence in cultural diversity by examining how they construct others when they talk about the term cultural diversity. Furthermore, we contribute to a methodological approach to differentiating the concept of othering in educational settings. The analysis was guided by the following research questions:

- How do teacher educators use the term cultural diversity?
- What may their discursive practices of the term cultural diversity tell us about their conceptual understanding of cultural diversity?

Against this backdrop, the present study illustrates that although teacher educators seemed concerned with social justice and equity, they talk about cultural diversity via seven different ways of othering. In this article, othering refers to the manner in which social group dichotomies are represented in language in unintended ways via binary oppositions of 'us' and 'them' (Pandey, 2004).

It is important to note that in this article, othering is not the same as prejudice, discrimination or racism in terms of their more 'traditional' senses. Thus, othering is not about explicitly promoting ideas of biological inferiority or explicit practices of segregation and derogation. Rather, in this article, it has to do with how people are grouped and minoritised through discursive practices that categorise them as different. Furthermore, discursive practices of othering are a phenomenon that occurs not only amongst teacher educators, but also more generally amongst *all* members of society, including the elite and ordinary people. However, such in-practice ideologies (Van Dijk, 2006), although unconscious, may have a particular influence on teaching practice and, thereby, the ideas of teacher students. Othering is, therefore, an important concept in understanding the reproduction of inequality in society (Van Dijk, 1993). It may be seen as manifestations of power relations in which some groups are defined as others, excluded from the large 'we' in the larger society. They are not one of us.

Our findings are suitable for initiating a discussion of the ways of othering and of countering othering in teacher education, a field of research that hitherto remains largely unexplored. In fact, a search in Academic Research Premier of the terms 'othering' and 'teacher education' rendered only nine articles. None of these nine articles discussed ways of othering and discussed the term in more general ways. Hahl and Löfström (2016), for example, warn against how teacher educators may promote culturalist viewpoints and, from their more 'expert' position, pass these viewpoints onto student teachers who, in turn, project them onto their future students. In another article, Srinivasan and Cruz (2015) focus on including the need to train teachers to recognise and address how 'race' and colour operate overtly and covertly in school communities, mobilised through children's everyday experiences in school. Srinivasan and Cruz do not however discuss the more detailed linguistics that constitutes othering, but refer to race and colour. The linguistics of othering is thus our contribution to the reconceptualization of othering in educational research methodology.

The article is organised as follows. First, we present the methodology by outlining concepts related to critical discourse analysis and presenting our data and methods. Second, we present the findings from our analysis. Third, we present a discussion of our findings and argue that an awareness of the ways in which pupils are 'othered' in society is an important tool in counteracting social exclusion and promoting social justice and equity, which are crucial aspects of Norwegian education. We

conclude that our findings are important because teacher educators' ways of othering may influence preservice teachers and, in turn, their future teaching in schools. Thus, othering in the classroom may lead to the social exclusion of pupils.

Methodology

The methodology in our study is based on critical discourse analytical perspectives, primarily the work of Fairclough (2001, 2003) and Van Dijk (2006). Our empirical data are transcriptions of semi-structured individual interviews with teacher educators. As such, the research methodology used here turns the gaze toward the ongoing and taken-for-granted production of othering and unequal power relations that are discursively produced in the teacher education programme.

Theory

Discourses are believed to represent ideology (Van Dijk, 2006). Participants in particular discourse practices may construct polarisations of in- and out-groups by displaying their generally accepted attitudes, 'obvious' beliefs, opinions or 'common sense'. Yet, they may also construct binary oppositions of 'us' and 'the other' by using subtler discursive practices, which manifest in methods of representation that implicitly construct the other. This is what we found in our study of teacher educators' talk about cultural diversity.

An important concern in discourse analysis is the detection and deconstruction of particular groups' maintenance of social dominance and hegemony through the analysis of the workings of power. The workings of power in our analysis occur through the discourse practices of othering (DPOs), through which the others are represented as unordinary, as well as in the social distance that the teacher educators seem to express towards the others.

In our analyses, we draw on linguistic perspectives and presume that it is in and through linguistic choices that people encode and express their stances, norms, values and worldviews. It is worth underlining that we perceive talk, not only as an individual enterprise, but as a contextually- and historically-bound practice through which individuals speak as members of various communities. In our study, for example, the teacher educators, even though interviewed individually, speak both as individuals and as members of a teacher educator community. Therefore, we postulate that the teacher educator community of this study contains both shared and individual perceptions of cultural diversity.

We are guided by the theoretical perspective of multidisciplinary critical discourse analysis, whose primary emphasis is the study of 'the intricate relationships between text, talk, social cognition, power, society and culture' (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 253). Following these perspectives, our analytical approach examines the extent to which social attitudes and perceptions are reflected and sustained in the microstructures of words, sentences and text and how language is utilised by teacher educators to reflect and sustain social asymmetries. The extent to which language sustains social asymmetries is a matter of power, which is also an important concept in our discourse analysis. According to Van Dijk (2006), ideologies are socially shared representations of groups. They are the foundations of group attitudes and other beliefs. Thus, ideologies 'control the "biased" personal mental models that underlie the production of ideological discourse' (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 138). Ideological discourse is organised through positive self-representation and negative other-presentation. Such in-group–out-group polarisation has often been referred to as *othering*, which may be defined as the manner in which social group dichotomies are represented via language (Pandey, 2004, p. 155).

Following van Dijk (2006), we assume that 'if ideologies are organized by well-known ingroup–outgroup polarization, then we may expect such a polarization also to be 'coded' in talk and text. This

coding may happen by the use of pronouns such as us and them and by possessives and demonstratives such as our people and those people' (p. 126), explicitly or implicitly. Riggins (1997, p. 8) claims that the most revealing features of othering are inclusive and exclusive pronouns and possessives, such as we and they, us and them, and ours and theirs. Therefore, in addition to studying the teacher educators' use of nouns and adjectives in their talk about cultural diversity, we also study their use of pronouns.

Data

The study data comprise transcriptions of 12 semi-structured individual interviews with 12 teacher educators involved in teaching the course 'Pedagogy and Pupil Knowledge'. This course is concerned with pedagogical theories and knowledge instruction and is mandatory for all preservice teachers. Since this particular course is supposed to be integrative in Norway's national teacher education programme, it is mandated to provide preservice teachers with an identity as teachers and serves to override and unify other courses (Ministry of Education and Research, 2010). We purposely chose teacher educators teaching within the subject of pedagogy because they have formative influence on preservice teachers.

The teacher educators were recruited in four steps. First, informative e-mails on the project, along with follow-up phone calls, were directed to the leaders of the two selected institutions. These leaders then recruited staff members who they considered likely to be interested in the topic and, thus, willing to participate in the interview. Third, direct e-mail contact with possible informants was established, and follow-up phone calls were conducted to plan the meetings with those who had a preference for oral communication.

The teacher educators were interviewed during the 2013 to 2014 school year. On average, the interviews lasted 1.5 to 2 hours. They were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, resulting in approximately 180 pages of transcriptions. Each interview consisted of three parts: (1) questions relating to what the teacher educator valued as important in his or her teaching in the course 'Pedagogy and Pupil Knowledge' (e.g. What values are important to you in your teaching? What kind of knowledge do you consider important for a student teacher to have by their completion of the Pedagogy and Pupil Knowledge course? What texts/theories do you consider crucial for a student teacher to be familiar with in order to become a good teacher?); (2) questions similar to those in the first part, though with an explicit focus on the term cultural diversity, and (3) teacher educators' reflections on terms and concepts repeatedly featured in Norwegian primary school teacher education policy and curriculum documents (e.g. In relation to the 'Pedagogy and Pupil Knowledge' course, what do you think of when you hear the following terms: cultural diversity, culture, cultural tradition, cultural heritage, Norwegian culture, identity, multicultural, multiculturalism, globalisation, internationalisation, solidarity?) The first and second parts of the interview were designed to facilitate a comparison of individuals' responses across these two sections. The third part was designed to investigate the teacher educators' perceptions of and responses to the Norwegian educational discourse on teacher education, as expressed in policy and curriculum documents. The analysis presented in this article focuses mainly on the two latter parts of the interviews.

Analysis

We analysed the use of words (i.e. nouns, adjectives and pronouns), their semantic categorisations and how they co-occur with cultural diversity *across* the data. Furthermore, we identified discourse practices based on our semantic categorisations.

Using a critical linguistic discourse analysis, we applied a four-step process (adapted from Fairclough, 2001; Mausethagen & Granlund, 2012) to teacher educators' talk about cultural diversity." For the first analysis, we created a list of the nouns, adjectives and pronouns used by the teacher educators as they talked about *cultural diversity* across the interviews and between the two institutions. The

main analytical strategy employed in this first step was a manual search that identified these terms and then determined the most commonly used nouns, adjectives and pronouns.

The second step of the analysis focused on detecting the ideologically significant semantic categories in which the words from the first step could be categorised. The ideologically significant semantic categories identified serve as indications of the discourse practices related to teacher educators' talk about cultural diversity. Thus, in the third step of our analysis, we identified the discourse practices related to the teacher educators' talk about cultural diversity.
In the fourth step of the analysis, we discussed the consequences of the discourse practices we identified in the previous step. The steps of the analysis are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1:
The four-step analysis

	Aim	Strategy for Analysis	Research Questions
1st analysis	An overview of the nouns, adjectives and pronouns used by the teacher educators when they talked about cultural diversity	Make a list of nouns, adjectives and pronouns	Which nouns, adjectives and pronouns co-occur with cultural diversity?
2nd analysis	A semantic categorisation of the nouns and adjectives based on the 1st analysis	Detect ideologically significant semantic categories representing discourse practices	Which are the ideologically significant semantic categories?
3rd analysis	A list of discourse practices based on categories from the 2nd analysis	Identify discourse practices	What are the discourse practices related to cultural diversity?
4th analysis	A discussion of the consequences of the discursive practices	Discuss discursive practices in a broader context	What are the consequences of the discursive practices?

Findings: Ways of Othering

In our study, we generally found that the teacher educators talked about 'cultural diversity' as something concerning the others. The teacher educators discussed how pupils and parents differed from themselves and did not seem to see themselves as part of Norway's cultural diversity. In talking about how the others differ from themselves, a dichotomy was created between two groups via binary oppositions of us and the others, as represented in the table below. In the interviews, the others were the pupils and parents, who differed from the teacher educators in various ways. The others had different cultures, languages, migratory histories and religions and were visibly and socially different. This way of talking can be described as a DPO (discourse practice of othering) in which the 'ordinary' represents us and the 'unordinary' represents them via implicit or explicit discursively constructed contrasts.

Abu-Lughod (1991, p. 143) claims that culture is the essential tool in creating the other. The findings from our study support this claim by depicting the centrality of culture in our data in making the other. However, by applying a critical discourse analytical approach to the interviews with the

teacher educators, we also find other means of making the other. In what follows, we describe seven different DPOs: cultural, social, cognitive, multilingual, migrational, visible and religious.

The seven ways of othering are presented below in Table 1, where we have categorised the typical features of the seven DPOs based on the contrasts between positive self-representations and negative other representations (Bhabha, 1994). From the 1st analysis, we identified what we found to be the most typical nouns, adjectives and pronouns in the teacher educators' talk about cultural diversity. The original list of nouns connected to culture included approximately 30 different words across the interviews; the list of adjectives connected to social aspects included 28 different words; and the list of nouns connected to visibility and religion included 4 different words in each category. The most nouns and adjectives were found in cultural, social and linguistic othering.

Our findings from the 2nd step of our analysis illustrate that othering in teacher education seems to occur in discursive practices related to these semantic categories: culture, social aspects, multilingualism, migration, nationality, visibility and religion. The adjectives representing the DPOs in the left-most column in the table below are the results of our 3rd analysis where we identified the discourse practices related to the semantic categories.

Table 1: Discursive practices of othering

DPOs	Nouns	Adjectives	Pronouns
Cultural	Ethnicity, pizza, experience, music, dance, others, the foreign, barriers, values	Cultural, mono-cultural, multicultural, different	They
Social	Inclusion, racism, crises, prejudices, depression, violence, belonging, integration, minority, majority, discrimination, pupil groups	Behavioural, emotional, less, multicultural, inclusive, socio-economic, stigmatising, different	This These They Your
Linguistic	Pupils, resources, minorities, plurality, challenges, parents, children, competence	Linguistic, low, bi-multilingual, adapted, Norwegian, foreign, less	They These
Cognitive	Difficulties, dyscalculia, dyslexic children's development, differences	Individual, learning	These
Migrational	Persons, immigrant, majority, minority Nationalities, country, parents	Non-Western, new national, other, different	Implicit those, they
Visible	Skin colour, pupils	Different	Implicit they
Religious	Islam, pupils	Different	Implicit they

Similar to the findings in a study of discourse strategies conducted by Pandey (2004, p. 161), the various discursive practices identified here occur, not in isolation but, rather, in tandem with one another.

Cultural othering. A focus on the culturally different is what we refer to as cultural othering. In the interviews, the teacher educators talked about the cultural differences between pupils and parents and themselves. The teacher educators seemed to think that cultural diversity was about the others: that is, pupils and parents of different cultural backgrounds than their own. Examples of cultural

differences were the teacher educators' talk about ethnicity, the foreign, cultural barriers etc., as illustrated in the table above. The teacher educators spoke in a manner that suggested that only the others have a culture where the others were represented in the explicit pronoun they. In so doing, the teacher educators seemed to position their own culture as the ordinary and the culture of others as the unordinary. The contrast in cultural othering is between the stranger and the native

Social othering. Social factors can also play a role in discursive practices of othering, for example, when cultural diversity is about inclusion. Inclusion in this context is about the need for the others to be included in society as opposed to the ordinary, who are already included. The use of phrases such as *these children* and *their parents* may be interpreted as creating social distance between the speaker and the referenced group of children. The phrases may therefore have been used to mark social distance between the teacher educators and the others. Social othering becomes visible in the implicit contrast between the dependant, who requires special attention and help, and the non-dependant or ordinary.

Multilingual othering. Multilingual othering occurred most frequently in the interviews. The teacher educators talked about the multilingual and the bilingual pupils when they talked about cultural diversity. The importance of working with bilingual children so that *they* can follow ordinary lessons was for example emphasised. The others were the multilingual. The contrast in multilingual othering is between the monolingual and the multi- or bilingual.

Migrational othering. This manifests through contrasts between migrants and non-migrants, with non-migrants representing the ordinary and migrants representing the unordinary. Cultural diversity is about people who come to Norway. The implicit others are those who have migrated to Norway or who have parents who have migrated to Norway. With their many nationalities, the *pupils* were described as nationally different from the preservice teachers, who share a single nationality: Norwegian. Thus, the pupils represent the unordinary.

Cognitive othering. This othering occurs when talking about how to make learning development happen in *these* children, with these children referring to the unordinary pupils who were considered cognitively different (and, implicitly, cognitively impaired). The contrast in cognitive othering is between pupils with high versus low cognitive abilities.

Visible othering. Visible othering is a way of othering by referring to visible differences where the visibly different is the unordinary, whereas the visibly similar is the ordinary. The visibly different included, for example, pupils of a different skin colour or those with disabilities. The contrast in visible othering, therefore, is between the coloured and the non-coloured and between the disabled and the non-disabled.

Religious othering. Religious othering is a way of othering by referring to religious differences in binary oppositions. The contrast in religious othering is between people of one religion and those of different religions.

Similar to findings by Pandey (2004, p. 161), the different discursive practices identified do not occur in isolation but, rather, in tandem. An overview of the contrasts in the DPOs is presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Contrasts in DPOs

DPOs	Implicit contrasts between groups
Cultural othering	The stranger and the native
Social othering	The dependant and the non-dependant
Linguistic othering	The multilingual and the monolingual
Cognitive othering	Persons with high and low cognitive abilities
Migrational othering	The migrant and the non-migrant
Visible othering	The coloured and the non-coloured The disabled and the non-disabled
Religious othering	The religiously different and the religiously non-different

Discussion

The aim of this article was to contribute to a methodological approach to differentiating the concept of othering in educational settings. Our analysis provides an account of how 12 teacher educators may promote social inequality through the use and meaning-making regarding cultural diversity. Our findings show that teacher educators, like other members of society, can express their conceptualisations of cultural diversity in linguistic terms that constitute othering. However, one important difference between teacher educators and 'other members of society' is that teacher educators bestow a certain amount of power to their knowledge and the processes and practices conveying it.

We hope to have demonstrated that it is in the language used to represent cultural diversity that teacher educators can best comprehend the true complexity of representation and exclusion. It is through linguistic choices that teacher educators engage in representations of cultural diversity and, thus, in discursive exclusions. Othering may be seen as a manifestation of power relations in which the other is disempowered through the process of being defined as the other and not as included in the large 'we' of society, as ordinary members of society. Given how teacher educators' meaning-making might influence their teaching (Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008), further insight into such processes could increase our knowledge about how to develop teacher education programmes that promote social justice and equity.

As noted by Pandey (2004, p. 176), it is in the collective portrayal of groups and the choice of othering practices that social injustices have the potential to be replicated in the collective consciousness. The potential for replication is particularly significant in teacher educators' discourse practices of othering, since teacher educators hold trifold power – they are members of the majority; they hold positions within institutions; and they are the experts on teachers – in that, they teach preservice teachers the skill of teaching. Thus, teacher educators' ways of othering may influence preservice teachers and, in turn, their future teaching in schools.

When teacher educators give meaning to the term cultural diversity through the construction of binary oppositions of us and the other in their discourse practices, they discursively reinforce othering and assist in preserving identities that represent the ordinary and the unordinary. DPOs can, therefore, also be viewed as linguistic acts of exclusion.

Following Van Dijk (2006), we consider DPOs to be representations of ideology. We have identified aspects of how processes of othering might be discursively produced in teacher education. DPOs

indicate group ideologies and function as expressions of teacher educators' affiliations with and distances from groups: in this case, pupils and their parents who are different in various ways.

Such in-practice 'ideologies' (Van Dijk, 2006), although unconscious, may influence the teaching practice and, thereby, the language and ideas of teacher students. It is through linguistic choices that teacher educators engage in representations of cultural diversity and, thus, in discursive exclusions. One of the teacher educators reflected on our own opinions when she said that teaching cultural diversity is a dilemma. We believe that the dilemma here is that the more teacher educators talk about cultural diversity, the more they contribute to dichotomies and construct otherness.

Promoting social justice and countering acts of social exclusion are crucial aspects of modern education and schooling. In addition to being taught how to address the needs of all students, preservice teachers must be made aware of and learn how to deconstruct and counter ways in which pupils are 'othered' in society, including implicit practices of discursive exclusions. This is important knowledge, both in terms of these preservice teachers' future work with inclusion (Smith & McCully, 2013) and in terms of equity and social justice (Conklin & Hughes, 2016). In line with Pandey (2004, p. 176), we suggest that not only teacher students but also teacher educators have means to critically explore their repertoires of othering strategies. We believe that such explorations could contribute to an awareness of oneself as a part of cultural diversity and to a critical reflection on teacher educators' linguistic practices.

The aim of education is to create an arena in which all pupils feel included, independent of their differences. Such an aim requires teachers to talk in critically reflective ways that avoid the dominant constructs that foster linguistic othering. We need to develop and educate teacher educators who see themselves as part of cultural diversity and who move away from the notion that cultural diversity is the exclusive terrain of the others—pupils and parents who have special needs, who do not have sufficient competence in Norwegian, who are subjected to racism and prejudices, etc. To provide teacher students with such perspectives, teacher educators require deeper insights into critical theory and more theoretical concepts, which they can use self-critically to reflect on their own teaching and processes of learning and development as teacher educators in an increasingly diverse society. We argue that teacher educators *need more than an appreciation of diversity*; they also need linguistic tools to critique power relations and the discourses that hold down certain members of society through DPOs. Such linguistic tools could counteract discrimination and inequality. Further insight is needed into the actual teaching practices of teacher educators, so as to develop a more comprehensive picture of their discursive practices as well as to suggest implications for their teaching practices.

Concluding remarks

In this article, we have contributed to ways of conceptualising othering by presenting findings from an empirical linguistic critical discourse analytical study of how teacher educators use and make meaning of the term cultural diversity. More precisely, we have explored how teacher educators' use of discursive practices represents their understanding of cultural diversity as a concept. We hold that a critical linguistic analysis of these discursive practices can shed light on the kinds of experiences, attitudes and knowledge in relation to cultural diversity that teacher educators bestow.

Our findings illustrate that othering in teacher education seems to occur in discursive practices relating to culture, social aspects, multilingualism, migration, nationality, visibility and religion. We argue that it is critical to discuss preservice teachers' opportunities to develop the linguistic criticality needed to counter acts of social exclusion in their work as future teachers in demographically diverse societies.

Finally, we suggest that further research should focus on the actual teaching practices of teacher educators to develop a more comprehensive picture of the power relations expressed in discursive practices.

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