



The significance of multilingual children's voices in research

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ABSTRACT: This paper discusses ethical and methodological aspects of research among multilingual children regarding the inclusion of their voices. The starting point of this paper is a field of tension concerning multilingual children's participation in research. On the one hand, children have the right to protection, while on the other, they have the right to be heard and should be studied by virtue of being children. The empirical data for our paper were generated through two qualitative ethnographic research projects undertaken in one Norwegian kindergarten. Throughout our fieldwork, we had various encounters with children, teachers, and parents who negotiated and contested the kindergarten's and our own discourses on multilingualism and specifically categorizations of who is or is not regarded as multilingual. Based on the dialogic concept of voice, discussions on children's perspectives as an analytical construct, and the positioning of children in research, we explore the ways in which our positionality as ethnographic researchers provides opportunities to include children's voices. Furthermore, we discuss the challenges the researcher might encounter when establishing legitimate positions between the three groups—children, teachers, and parents—and the aspects of power involved.

Keywords: *multilingual children's voices, research ethics, ethnography, researcher's perspectives*

Introduction

Anna (4) is one of the children in Haugen Kindergarten in Northern Norway. Her family is from Rwanda, and Anna tells us that they speak Norwegian, Kinyarwanda, and French at home and that she uses English as well. Because of Anna's family background and her description of her language use, we meet her as a multilingual child. The kindergarten staff also anticipate that she is multilingual, but they are aware that her storytelling about her family may be imaginative. Anna's parents have signed the consent form to enable her to take part in our research. Some weeks into the project, we have a conversation with Anna's father to, among other things, clarify Anna's language skills. He points out to us, in a rather severe tone of voice, that Anna is not multilingual. She is Norwegian. Apart from Norwegian, she can say some phrases in French, and she has picked up some English through children's programs on television. According to Anna's father, she neither speaks Kinyarwanda, French, nor English, apart from these few phrases.

(Observation excerpt, March 2016, our translation)

The text presented above is an excerpt from the data collected for our PhD projects (Pesch, 2018; Sundelin, 2024). Both projects focused on multilingual children—respectively, on multilingual children's use of recontextualized language in Norwegian as a second language and on kindergarten teachers' views on and linguistic practices with multilingual children and the teachers' collaboration with their parents. We carried out our ethnographic fieldwork at the same kindergarten, which we have given the pseudonym Haugen Kindergarten. During the time of 2014 to 2016, we visited the kindergarten¹ roughly 2 days a week. Sundelin's research lasted for 15 months, and Pesch's for 10. The data for this article were generated during the fieldwork.

We chose to begin the introduction with a vignette about Anna and her family. This was one of the situations that pointed us to the question of how multilingual children's voices may be included in our research, especially when these voices are contrasting or negotiating researchers', institutions', and parents' categorizations and understandings of multilingualism. The vignette about Anna reveals some interesting contrasts. Anna expressed a desire to be multilingual, and the kindergarten teachers characterized her as possibly a multilingual child owing to her family's language background. In our research, we initially adopted the teachers' view, which corresponded to our theoretical knowledge. However, when we met Anna's father, he clearly stated that his daughter spoke Norwegian only and that she was not multilingual. This made us reflect on the question of how we categorize multilingual kindergartners. This categorization is often based on the staff's, the parents', or our own views, which are often founded on theory. We started to

¹ In this article, we distinguish between the term *kindergarten* for the specific physical institution, like Haugen Kindergarten, and *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)* when referring to the system, as the Nordic ECEC model.

reflect on which possibilities we provide for the children's voices as part of this process, who decides which children are sufficiently multilingual to be included in the study, and the terms on which this decision is based. The aim of our paper is therefore to explore how our researcher's positionality can contribute to the inclusion of multilingual children's voices in research, and we pose the following research question: How can our researcher positionality facilitate the inclusion of multilingual children's voices in research? As both of our projects were ethnographic, ethnography is the starting point of our discussion, and we address the following questions: Which opportunities does ethnography provide for understanding children's multilingual voices? How or to what degree can we understand children's voices as autonomous? Which opportunities and challenges do we encounter in finding legitimate positions between the three groups of participants—teachers, parents, and children—in regard to power relations?

We begin with a short note on the terminology related to multilingualism and then describe important discourses on children and childhood in the Norwegian ECEC context. Then, we present our theoretical concepts combined with prior research on multilingual children's voices and agency. Thereafter, we point to relevant methodological and ethical aspects, followed by a presentation of our data and analysis. We then proceed to the discussion and sum up with some concluding remarks and implications for research and pedagogical practice.

Our views on multilingualism

As researchers, our views on multilingualism are influenced by both theoretical perspectives and our own experiences and encounters through our ethnographic research. When writing about language and multilingualism, there is always a range of terms from which to choose, and the choice may evoke ideas on how the concept of multilingualism is understood. Theoretically, we base our projects on the work of Cummins (2000, 2021) and Øzerk (2016) and on the approaches to multilingualism proposed by García (2009), García and Li Wei (2014), Blackledge and Creese (2010), and Canagarajah (2013). These scholars have argued in favor of different terms for multilingualism and discussed whether concepts such as *native speaker*, *first language*, or *second language* exist; and whether languages as linguistic entities exist at all (cf. Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). In our projects, we use the term *multilingualism* or *multilingual* for children who communicate in more than one language as part of their daily lives. The children participating in our studies were heterogeneous regarding competence in and use of their languages. Some can be described as emergent bilinguals (Alstad, 2021), some had Norwegian as their second language, and others had competence in several languages appropriate for their age. We use the term *first language* to refer to the multilingual children's languages other than Norwegian to distinguish them from Norwegian.

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However, this does not imply that Norwegian is not one of the children's first languages. As will be discussed, these choices involve hierarchical power relations between us as researchers and the children. All the children participating in our studies were 3 to 5 years old and were able to express themselves verbally.

Educational and societal context

Although it is not a mandatory part of the education system in Norway, most children attend kindergarten. In 2022, this was the case for 93.4% of all children (Statistics Norway, 2023a), of which 20% were *from linguistic and cultural minorities* (Statistics Norway, 2023b). Children from linguistic and cultural minorities are defined as children with a mother tongue other than Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, English, or Sámi; additionally both parents must have a mother tongue other than Norwegian. Therefore, the definition does not cover all potentially multilingual children in Norwegian ECEC; for example, children with one Norwegian parent and one parent with a different mother tongue are not included. Multilingualism and linguistic diversity are not new phenomena, as Norway is a historically diverse country. The Sámi are recognized as Indigenous people, and Norway has recognized Kven/Norwegian Finns, Jews, Forrest Finns, Roma, and Romani/Tater as national minorities (Sollid et al., 2023). In addition to these historical minorities, Norway has increasing transnational diversity, and in this article, we focus on multilingual children with a transnational background. Linguistic diversity varies in amount and form throughout the country. Tromsø, where the data for this article was generated, is the largest city in Northern Norway and can be described as superdiverse, albeit on a smaller scale than urban areas further south (Pesch et al., 2021). In 2023, the population of Tromsø was around 77,992, with approximately 140 different nationalities (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2023).

In accordance with the increasing number of multilingual children, ECEC in Norway is viewed as an important arena for children's language development in general and multilingual children's language development specifically. ECEC in Norway is usually attended by children aged 1 to 5 or 6, as children enter primary school the year they turn 6 years old. In Norway, the national framework plan for kindergartens (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017) is legally binding for all kindergartens and provides guidelines for the staff's pedagogical practice. The pedagogical approach is based on four core values—care, learning, play, and formative development—which are understood as integrated concepts based on a holistic view of children and their development (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2018; Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017). Although it is common to divide children into age-related groups (1–2 and 3–5-year-olds), this holistic approach applies to all children regardless of age. Norway is often described as part of the Nordic model, and despite ongoing discussions on how

and whether this model exists, studies point to values such as democracy, play, and learning; a view of the child as an equal subject; and the intrinsic value of childhood as joint, central elements across the Nordic countries (Garvis & Ødegaard, 2018). Accordingly, the framework plan emphasizes the promotion of democracy, diversity and mutual respect, and children's participation, and play. Moreover, the intrinsic value of childhood imposes a perspective that prioritizes the here and now, instead of or in addition to the future perspective. This is true for both micro-interactions—for example, between teachers and children—and for discourses at the macro and societal levels (Kristjansson, 2006). These discourses on the influence of children and childhood on the pedagogical approach in Norwegian ECEC also play an important role for researchers. This point will be discussed in the next chapter.

However, ECEC in Norway has also been under gradually increasing pressure to emphasize learning and the achievement of certain aims for children. Regarding multilingual children, studies at the policy-document level point to vague and diverging discourses on linguistic and cultural diversity (Giæver & Tkachenko, 2020) and to dichotomic constructions of being multilingual versus being Norwegian (Bubikova-Moan, 2017). Palviainen and Curdt-Christiansen (2020) argued that multilingualism is celebrated as a resource in policy documents in the Nordic countries, while a monolingual native-speaker norm prevails. In the Norwegian framework plan, kindergarten teachers are required to “help ensure that linguistic diversity becomes an enrichment for the entire group of children and encourage multilingual children to use their mother tongue while also actively promoting and developing the children's Norwegian/Sámi language skills” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 24). These guidelines may influence the teachers' views on multilingualism and which children they consider multilingual while opening a discursive space for negotiation. As Ødegaard and Krüger (2012, p. 25) pointed out, kindergarten may be viewed as a social field with various practices that shape cultural and discursive conditions for learning and cultural formation. The staff in Haugen Kindergarten, where we carried out our fieldwork, explicitly expressed that they viewed multilingualism as a resource. They did so, for example, by encouraging parents to speak their first language with the children, visualizing diversity in the kindergarten, and expressing a positive attitude toward children's use of various languages. These practices created discursive conditions for the children's understanding of multilingualism and for us as researchers. Like the discourses on children and childhood, these discourses on the multilingualism present in the kindergarten were significant elements of our researcher positionality.

Prior research and theoretical concepts

The starting point of this paper is the field of tension concerning multilingual children's participation in research. On the one hand, children in ECEC in general have the right to protection, and multilingual children specifically are regarded as a vulnerable group (Alstad, 2021; National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities [NESH], 2022). On the other hand, as previously indicated, the Nordic ECEC model is based on the view of children as competent actors who should be studied by virtue of being children (Alstad, 2021). This is based on Norway's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Regjeringen.no, 2016), which states that children have the right to express their views in all matters that affect them and that their views should be given their due weight. An important principle of the convention with regard to our article is the child's right to be heard.

Alstad (2021) pointed out the need to be vigilant regarding ethical research issues, such as being reflexive by addressing the difficult or uncomfortable aspects of research. Such attention to difficult aspects may help researchers rethink our assumptions (Alstad, 2021). One dilemma that Alstad presented is the tension between protection and participation. A second one is that children's needs and interests must be taken into consideration in ways other than through research conducted on adult participants. The researchers must adapt the research methods and content to children's needs and interests. The final dilemma that Alstad pointed to is the consideration of vulnerable groups. Emergent multilingual children learning Norwegian as a second language, as well as their parents, may be regarded as vulnerable groups because language challenges can make it difficult to provide or receive information such that consent can be regarded as free. It could be problematic to consider emergent multilingual children and their parents as one group because there may be considerable individual variations within it (Alstad, 2021). NESH (2022) pointed out similar tensions, emphasizing that children's well-being and integrity override the interests of science and society.

The guidelines provided by NESH (2022) are an important basis for all research carried out within the humanities and social sciences in Norway and are thus also central for our research. Ensuring a balance between protection and benefit is an ethical research positioning, and how researchers position themselves can have consequences for data collection and areas it is possible to develop new knowledge about (Alstad, 2021). As pointed out, there is a field of tension between children's right to be heard and their right to protection. Both NESH's (2022) guidelines and Alstad (2021) pointed to the importance of reflecting on the question of whether the children will benefit from the research and to the need to adjust the research approach and methods.

Studies exploring multilingual children's beliefs regarding multilingualism underscore the need to include the children's views, their agency, and strategies for language policy and learning (Almér, 2017; Bergroth & Palviainen, 2017; Schwartz et al., 2021). As Almér (2017) explained, agency is both individual and interactive. While individual agency means that one has a voice, interactive agency points to the need to have the skills to make this voice heard (Almér, 2017). Dialogue is the key to understanding the processes that enable agency to mature. Agency is of social origin (van Nijnatten, 2013, p. 8), and children need a responsive environment in which to develop agency at different levels. Only then do they learn to become active participants in everyday life (van Nijnatten, 2013, p. 11).

Connected to this, we understand children's voices based on the Bakhtinian (1984, p. 293) concept, referring to the voice as part of a dialogue and as connected to a person's individuality. The concept of voice is also related to the context of which it is a part, and an individual might have different voices in different contexts (White, 2017). Moreover, an individual's voice always carries others' voices and utterances with it. Language is not a neutral medium; it "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other," and an important element is to fill the words one uses with one's own intentions (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). With the intentions we add to our words, we position both ourselves and others in a given context, and it is up to the others to accept, reject, or negotiate this positioning. For children in general, using others' words and filling them with their own intentions in new contexts is part of their language development process. For multilingual children, this process might be more complex, as they also have to adjust to the others' comprehension of their linguistic repertoire (Pesch, 2018, p. 59). Moreover, the voices and discourses in relation to which children position themselves may be more or less authoritative (Bakhtin, 1981). According to Bakhtin (1986, pp. 152–153), authorship depends on the type of utterance and can take different forms. Additionally, the positioning of authorship involves hierarchies, whereby the position of the speaker corresponds to that of the addressee. Multilingual children's authorship is therefore connected to the type of utterance, as well as to their own and the teachers', peers', and researchers' positions.

It is important to state that the Bakhtinian understanding of language, voice, and discourse does not refer to young children, and we want to emphasize that the children in this study were in the process of trying out their voices and filling them with their own intentions in encounters with more or less authoritative voices. Understanding children's voices dialogically therefore means understanding them as part of an ongoing dialogue between children, teachers, parents within the kindergarten, and family, as well as communities outside these contexts in which the child takes part. Children's voices and utterances are responsive to other voices and utterances (Bakhtin, 1986), and vice versa, and through this responsiveness, their voices cannot be understood without the dialogue

and context of which they are part. This also implies that children's voices might challenge existing discourses and knowledge.

Bergroth and Palviainen (2017) pointed out that bilingual children's agency is connected to sociocultural structures in kindergartens, which create frames for the children's language practices. Furthermore, they referred to the significance of children's cognitive capacity, meta-linguistic awareness, and self-awareness, as well as the emerging understanding of practice structures for comprehending children's agency as a capacity to act (Bergroth & Palviainen, 2017). An important element of understanding children's agency is that agency always takes place in and is influenced by sociocultural elements. Within kindergarten, bilingual children's agency is socioculturally mediated, and their language practices are affected by the institution's policy, language, and educational norms. Moreover, the children's agency is connected to the interplay between the kindergarten's policy, their own personalities, and the children's families and communities outside kindergarten. A similar interplay of various elements is emphasized by Schwartz et al. (2021), who studied children's agentic behavior and attitude toward learning each other's first language in a bilingual Hebrew–Arabic kindergarten in Israel. While personal characteristics were one important element, the societal status of the languages, social strategies, and the children's progress in their second language also played important roles. One should therefore be careful when interpreting children's language practices in kindergarten as clear and autonomous stances in favor of or against certain languages (cf. Bergroth & Palviainen, 2017). However, Almér (2017) argued that on several occasions, the children in her study voiced formulations that did not correspond to her questions and thus clearly stated their voices. She also pointed to the researcher's influence on which knowledge children regard as important to talk about (Almér, 2017).

In summary, children's agency is clearly visible in their interactions with peers; teachers; and, we might add, researchers in kindergarten. Additionally, their voices might conform to, oppose, or negotiate the kindergarten's language practice. However, there is the matter of how to interpret this agency, and an important part of this is the question of how to understand children's voices in the interplay between their sociocultural surroundings and personalities. This entails ethical questions and has implications for the view of multilingual children in general and within the specific research project. Another important aspect is the question of how to research and interpret children's perspectives. We turn to this in the next section.

Methodological and ethical considerations

Gulløv and Højlund (2010) discussed children's perspectives as a term and concept. They referred to ethnographic research as one way of encompassing children's perspectives but point out that the knowledge one may establish about children's lives is not identical to children's own understandings. Children's perspectives are not an empirical size but, rather, an analytical construction that is linked to theoretical considerations. The analysis can identify general patterns that the individual child's actions express but that they are unlikely to recognize. Warming (2011, p. 41) argued that children's perspectives are fluid, challenging the idea of children's perspectives as personal dimensions "produced through the child's individual life history, and a collective dimension deriving from the generational structuring of childhood." She discussed how she constructed her own perspective as a researcher based on a "least adult role," which made it possible for her to become familiar and identify with the children's perspectives (Warming, 2011). However, in line with Gulløv and Højlund (2010), she argued that the experience of the researcher as least adult must not be confused with being identical to the children's perspectives. Moreover, she pointed to how our construction as researchers is connected to kindergarten as a social and physical space, and how researchers' recognition of data will always be shaped by their social and material positioning (Warming, 2005). For our research, we added kindergarten's discursive space as an important aspect that shapes the researcher's role. Therefore, as researchers, it is important to view both the concept of children's perspectives and our own interpretations of their perspectives, as created within specific social, discursive, and physical conditions.

Apart from the least adult role, there are various other ways of positioning oneself as an ethnographic researcher among children: as a detached observer (Andersen & Kampmann, 2010), an atypical adult (Gulløv & Højlund, 2010), or an incompetent adult (Corsaro, 2011, p. 53). In this article, it is not our aim to elaborate on these roles and their differences. Rather, we want to emphasize that this role is always shaped by the aim of the study; the specific social, discursive, and physical surroundings; and the researcher's dialogic encounters with the participants and institutions involved in the research. Researchers' roles in ethnographic research are part of their mutual positioning with participants. Another important aspect is how the different roles may position the children and influence their understanding of us as researchers and their own views on being multilingual (or not) or multilingualism in general.

Bodén (2021) pointed out that the literature on methodology and ethics in research with children reveals a scale of prepositions that both rate research approaches as better or worse and position children in certain ways. The scale involves research *on*, *to*, *with*, *for*, and *by* children, with "on" being at the bad end and "by" at the good end of research ethics (Bodén, 2021, p. 5). Research *with* children is considered a paradigm shift from research

on children, and research *by* children is considered especially innovative. When conducting research *for* children, there should be clear indications that it is to their benefit (cf. Alstad, 2021). It is argued that research *on* children positions them as objects, while research *about* children is problematic but less so than research *on* them. Research *with* children positions them as subjects, while research *by* children positions them as coresearchers (Bodén, 2021). The different values along the scale relate to different power relations between the researcher and children and the ideal way to equalize power. Bodén (2021) scrutinized the underpinning philosophical assumptions for the different values attached to the children's positions and research approaches and challenged the inherent logic of the scale. She posed the question of whether children who are engaged in research as coresearchers or with whom research is being done will be able to understand that research is being done at all, because these kinds of research activities often resemble everyday activities in Nordic kindergartens. This is an important question for ethnographic research, as ethnographers often study or engage in daily activities in kindergartens. Moreover, Bodén (2021) promoted the importance of critically discussing ethics in and throughout each project rather than fixing it on a predefined value scale.

Owing to the aim and focus of our studies, we both positioned ourselves as atypical adults in our research projects. In line with Gulløv and Højlund (2010), we argue that this somewhat unidentifiable role for the children was fruitful for our research process and made it possible for us to make the familiar strange (Erickson, 1990), which is a significant aim in linguistic ethnography. However, the fact that we were somewhat unidentifiable as researchers might have made it difficult for the children to understand that we were actually conducting research. This was especially the case for Pesch's project, the aim of which was to study the teachers' linguistic practices with the children. In Sundelin's project, the researcher's position might have been more explicit for the children, as she prepared and carried out special activities with them. However, we both experienced the children's openness and their eagerness to share some of their daily lives with us, and independent of the different positionings, this enhanced our awareness of our responsibilities as researchers. For both projects, we paid attention to the children's agency (Almér, 2017) and their voices (Bakhtin, 1984). In addition to positioning ourselves with the children, we had to position ourselves in relation to the teachers and parents. As previously mentioned, this involved encountering and negotiating teachers', parents', and children's expectations and discourses to legitimate our roles (Gulløv & Højlund, 2010; Scollon & Scollon, 2004) within the practices we studied.

Our data analyses

Both projects were based on linguistic and critical ethnography but used different analytical approaches. Linguistic ethnography is an interpretive approach that studies the local and immediate actions of actors from their points of view and considers how these interactions are embedded in wider social contexts and structures (Copland & Creese, 2015, p. 13). As previously mentioned, important aspects involved discovering the invisibility of everyday life and studying its institutions and social practices from an empirical perspective. The interpretive processes for doing so are necessary to be able to make sense of daily experiences and to make the familiar strange (Erickson, 1990). In Pesch's project, nexus analysis was applied as the meta-methodological framework, understanding ethnography as taking "social action as the theoretical center of the study, not any *a priori* social group, class, tribe or culture" (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 13, italics in original). Consequently, the data analysis in this project focused on discourses on multilingualism present in and circulating through actions, mapping the discourses as part of teachers' professional work, parents' personal experiences and aims, and kindergarten as an institution. In Sundelin's project, thematic analysis was used. This is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insights into patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes for an ultimate analytical purpose (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 4). The analysis focused on identifying how to recognize and describe the use of recontextualized language. Common to both projects, as part of the linguistic ethnographic approach, is that we analyzed linguistic practices among teachers, parents, and children and categorized them according or in relation to different themes and discourses. During the analytical process, we became aware of the situations that constitute the data on which we base our discussion in this article. We will show these in the following section. We chose six different situations in which children expressed their voices related to their own or others' multilingualism in different ways. The children whom we initially categorized as multilingual and as Norwegian monolingual are part of these situations. While the ways in which they express their voices are quite different, a commonality among the situations is that in some way, they oppose or negotiate the views on multilingualism present in kindergarten or how we understood them as researchers. We have chosen to present the different categories in a table for a better overview (see Table 1); however, we want to emphasize that we do not intend to extract the children's voices from their contexts, which we will return to in the discussion section.

TABLE 1 Children's voices on multilingualism

<i>CHILD AND FAMILY BACKGROUND</i>	<i>SITUATION DESCRIPTION</i>
Norwegian children with multilingual families	Here, Anna, whom we introduced at the beginning of the article, is the most prominent example. Anna expressed an eagerness to be multilingual and created stories about herself as a multilingual child with a multilingual family.
Multilingual children using only Norwegian in kindergarten	Liv, a girl growing up using Finnish and Norwegian at home, was one example. Liv refused to use Finnish in kindergarten, and even on occasions when teachers tried to introduce some Finnish words or asked her to be the language expert, she strictly refused to say anything in Finnish. However, she spoke Finnish fluently at home. Dina, another girl in a similar situation, spoke both Norwegian and Icelandic at home but would not use her Icelandic language in kindergarten, even when Sundelin tried to talk to her in Icelandic.
Children with two first languages, one third language from previous kindergarten experience in another country, and Norwegian in current kindergarten	Two of our focus children—Eva and Eline—spoke mainly Russian and Slovenian at home. Before moving to Norway, they lived in Germany and included German as part of their linguistic repertoire. When we started our fieldwork, they had recently moved to Norway and had begun to learn Norwegian. On one occasion, Sundelin spoke German to them, and the children responded using both German and Russian (a language Sundelin does not speak).
Children with one home language and Norwegian as a second language in kindergarten	Adam used Russian at home with his parents but also heard a great deal of English at home. One of the teachers mostly spoke Russian with him, and even though he mainly used Norwegian in kindergarten, he was happy to use Russian as well. Sara, who started in Haugen Kindergarten some months prior to our fieldwork could be described as emergent bilingual, speaking Somali at home, and learning Norwegian in kindergarten. She did not speak much at the beginning of our fieldwork but showed clear signs of joy when teachers used some words in Somali or asked her to contribute by doing so. During our stay, she started using both Norwegian and Somali (especially with her brother).
Multilingual children using English even though this was neither their first language nor the language used in kindergarten	Several of the multilingual children used English during play or communication with peers and teachers. This was an aspect many of the teachers were worried about and tried to put an end to, as they wanted the children to use either their first language or Norwegian.
Norwegian children using the sound of a foreign language to communicate with multilingual children or express themselves through singing	On one occasion, we observed how a child tried to get through to Adam. The children were outside sledding and the child shouted at Adam to get out of the way so she could run down the hill. After some unsuccessful attempts in Norwegian, the girl called out something that sounded like Russian, imitating an intonation and phonetic picture that resembled Russian but without using Russian words. Adam immediately moved out of the way. Another example of similar language use were children singing the song about Karius and Baktus in English without using any English words but imitating an English language intonation and phonetic picture. This song is written in Norwegian and known to several generations in Norway.

Discussion

The aim of our paper is to explore how our researcher's positionality can contribute to the inclusion of multilingual children's voices in research. This question involves several challenges and fields of tension. Because we entered kindergarten as ethnographic researchers, we question the opportunities this granted the children to understand our presence as researchers and to express their voices in relation to this. We may not characterize our approach as doing research *with* children, but we argue that our ethnographic presence as researchers provides both tensions and opportunities vis-à-vis attempts to illuminate the children's perspectives on their multilingual situation. This relates to the question of the research approach and the positioning of children (Bodén, 2021). Another relevant aspect that we discuss is the concept of children's voices or perspectives. Taking the dialogical approach to agency, voice, and authorship as a starting point and following the discussion on whether access to children's perspectives is possible, we elaborate on how we may understand the children's voices as autonomous voices that could be understood as reflecting their own beliefs. A third element of our discussion is our positionality as researchers. As ethnographic researchers in kindergarten, we need to establish legitimate positions in relation to and between the three groups of participants: children, teachers, and parents. The teachers can be seen both as individuals responsible for the pedagogical work among children and as representatives of the kindergarten as an institution. Following Ødegaard and Krüger (2012), we understand that teachers, children, and parents are actors who enter kindergarten with different views and experiences. Teachers especially have a professional role that involves certain requirements, opportunities, and spaces for negotiation (Hennum & Østrem, 2016; Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2018). Two elements of our discussion are how these three groups may influence the researcher's positionality and whose voices are heard. Based on these different aspects, we address the question of how ethnographic research in kindergarten creates space for the researcher's awareness of children's views and how the voices of the latter can be included.

Ethnographic opportunities to understand children's voices

We now turn our attention back to Anna, whose negotiations about wanting to be multilingual were the starting point of our reflections that led to this paper. The story about Anna and the other children in Haugen Kindergarten is the result of two longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork experiences. During this period, we got to know the children, their parents, and their teachers, as well as their perspectives on multilingualism. To discuss the ethnographic opportunities, we find it necessary to describe how we first received information about the existing multilingualism in Haugen Kindergarten.

Our starting point was the need for access to multilingual children, their parents, and their teachers. The potential candidates were presented to us by the leader of the kindergarten. Her knowledge and assumptions, as well as those of other staff members, regarding the children, their families, and their language situations enabled us to be introduced to families using home languages other than Norwegian. As we got to know the children and their families, we discovered several nuances in the children's knowledge and use of languages. We argue that the discovery of nuances was possible solely because of our longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork. We were introduced to Adam, Anna, Liv, and Sara, and as they became our first focus children, we spent a considerable amount of time with them during their days in kindergarten. Because we got to know all the children quite well, and they accepted us as a part of their everyday lives in kindergarten, they showed us their use of and thoughts about their own language use and languages. Our ethnographic fieldwork provided us with the opportunity to participate in everyday activities, to explore these local and immediate actions from the viewpoints of both teachers and children, and to understand them as part of wider social contexts and structures (Copland & Creese, 2015; Scollon & Scollon, 2004). This made it possible to understand the interplay between children's voices and the sociocultural environment and discourses on multilingualism in Haugen Kindergarten (cf. Bergroth & Palviainen, 2017; Ødegaard & Krüger, 2012). Moreover, it added to the aim of discovering the invisibility of everyday life and exploring the language practices of teachers and children from an empirical perspective (Erickson, 1990).

After ten weeks, we discovered through both observations of Anna's language use and the conversation with her father that Anna was not multilingual in reality. She did not use more than one language on a daily basis and therefore did not fulfill the criteria for participation in our projects. As described in the vignette in the introduction, her father expressed explicitly that he did not want his daughter to be multilingual. Without our ethnographic presence, we would not have necessarily noticed that Anna mainly communicated in Norwegian, nor would we have become aware of her negotiations regarding being multilingual. We would probably not have met her father and not been able to experience his clear statement regarding his daughter not being multilingual. Because he signed the consent form, we took this as confirmation of Anna's participation as a multilingual child. Anna's story is the most explicit example in our data of how children's perspectives might differ from those of the kindergartens, and how children's voices might negotiate the existing discourses. It is also the most explicit example of how parents' views might differ from both the kindergarten's and researchers' perspectives of multilingualism as positive and resourceful. This made Anna's story especially challenging for the research project but also particularly interesting to discuss. Other research projects have described potentially multilingual children making up words in languages that they do not know but to which they could have had access through their families (e.g. Giæver, 2018). An important aspect found in Giæver's research, and our

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projects is the multilingual environment of the kindergarten. Viewing the voices of children as dialogically responsive to teachers' and to our own as researchers (Bakhtin, 1984, 1986) and their agency as interactive (van Nijnatten, 2013) and interwoven with the sociocultural environment of the kindergarten, we wonder whether the discourse on multilingualism as a resource in Haugen Kindergarten might have supported Anna's desire to be multilingual and created a space for her negotiations. Anna attempted to fill words with her own intentions, authoring herself as a multilingual child and expressing a desire to be part of our projects. This might also have been supported by our own research focus on multilingual children and our presence in the everyday lives of the kindergartners. Based on this, we may understand Anna's voice as negotiating with us as researchers, with the kindergarten's discourses, and with her father's understanding of her as non-multilingual.

The other children's voices described in the situations above may be understood in a similar vein. While Sara and Adam seemed to accept Haugen Kindergarten's promotion of the use of various languages and expressed happiness when their respective first languages were used, we understand Liv and Dina as using their voices to oppose this same practice. Several of the episodes described in the table above took place more than six months into the project and would not have been noticed if it had not been for our ethnographic approach. An example of this is the situation in which a child used a Russian sound to get Adam's attention. Another example is the situation where children sang the Norwegian song about Karius and Baktus, imitating an English intonation and phonetic structure, but without using English words. Returning to the question of how our ethnographic fieldwork made it possible for us to understand these different voices, we want to discuss the positioning of both ourselves and the children in the project. Bodén (2021) raised the question of how different types of research approaches make it possible for children to understand that they are part of a research project. She also pointed out that the researcher's participation in everyday activities might make this especially difficult. As one of our main methods was participant observation in and of everyday life in kindergarten, there is the question of whether and how the children might have recognized us as researchers. However, we differed from the teachers in Haugen Kindergarten in several respects. We used artifacts such as notebooks, pens, and an iPad to film and record speech. Sundelin also carried out special activities with the children. In contrast to the teachers, we did not attend kindergarten every day, and we regularly left the group rooms to finish writing up our notes. Taking advantage of our roles as atypical adults (Gulløv & Højlund, 2010), we referred to teachers on occasions when the children asked for rules, needed assistance in solving conflicts, and so on. The children's responses to both the artifacts we used and the ways in which we resisted being teachers may have been curiosity and an eagerness to participate in the note taking, filming, and activities but also reluctance to let us get closer. While it is possible to interpret the last response as voicing non-consent, it is more difficult to say whether the artifacts we used enabled

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the children to identify us as researchers when they joined. Based on Bodén (2021), we argue that the different methods we used involved various positionings of the children and that ethnographic research among children enhances the tensions presented by Alstad (2021) and NESH (2022). However, owing to the enforcement of these tensions and the positionality of the researcher within them, ethnographic research provides opportunities to explore and understand children's voices.

Children's voices as autonomous

Previously, we accounted for kindergarten as the sociocultural frame for children's agency and the fact that their voices may challenge existing discourses. Furthermore, we have shown how we interpret the children's voices in an interplay with Haugen Kindergarten as an institution with a positive view on multilingualism, in line with Almér's (2017) and Bergroth and Palviainen's (2017) arguments regarding understanding children's agency as interactive. Connected to this argument is Gulløv and Højlund's (2010) and Warming's (2005, 2011) emphasis on the fact that children's perspectives are analytical constructs, and that the analysis may identify general patterns expressed through individual children's actions. However, it is unlikely that the children recognize the same patterns themselves. Moreover, Bergroth and Palviainen (2017) warned us to be careful about interpreting children's language practices in kindergarten as a clear and autonomous stance in favor of or against certain languages. This is in line with the term *intentions* (Bakhtin, 1981); young children must be understood as trying out their own in different contexts. One example of language policy and practices in kindergarten that may have influenced the children's agency is the use of assistant teachers with first languages other than Norwegian with the aim of supporting children's development in their first languages. For Adam, Eline, and Eva, the kindergarten offered an assistant teacher who spoke Russian with them during a part of our fieldwork. This might have contributed to a legitimization of Russian as a valid language in kindergarten because the teacher's voice involved a hierarchical position (Bakhtin, 1986). When Eva and Eline chose to use Russian and German with us, this legitimization might have played a role in regard to understanding their voices as promoting Russian as one language of communication in kindergarten. However, this interpretation is ours, based on the analytical idea of Eva's and Eline's perspectives, and we cannot be sure of the children's actual intentions or experiences (Bakhtin, 1981; Gulløv & Højlund, 2010; Warming, 2005, 2011).

There is still the question of how we can argue that the voices of our participating children are autonomous. Our main reason is the different choices made by some of the children, which we have already pointed out. This shows that although the children operate within similar contexts, their individual choices may differ. Liv's and Dina's resistance to using their first languages in kindergarten, authoring themselves as non-multilingual in this

context, and Adam's and Sara's happiness to do so and agreement with their positioning as multilingual are examples of such patterns. Another example is the use of English by several multilingual children, which challenged the kindergarten teacher's focus on the children's first languages and Norwegian. However, through the analytical lenses used in our studies, we identified them as general patterns. Hence, children's perspectives on multilingualism and their use of various languages are our analytical constructs (Gulløv & Højlund, 2010; Warming, 2005, 2011).

Almér (2017) and Alstad (2021) pointed to the influence of the researcher on what children understand as important to talk about and their language choices, respectively. Both aspects played an important role in our projects. As previously discussed, Anna's eagerness to be multilingual might have been connected to her desire to be part of the research project. Regarding our language choices as researchers, the examples of Dina, Eva, and Eline are interesting. Being able to speak Icelandic, Sundelin chose to use it to communicate with Dina, who refused. Unlike Dina, Eva and Eline incorporated Sundelin into their Russian repertoire when she spoke to them in German. We interpret these different responses as the children's autonomous voices in dialogue with the researcher's positioning (Bakhtin, 1986) in the sociocultural frame of the kindergarten (Ødegaard & Krüger, 2012) because the children did not follow the researcher's suggestion regarding language choice. In line with Almér (2017), we argue that on these occasions, the children in our study voiced ideas that did not correspond to our language practices or understandings of multilingualism nor to those of the kindergarten. It is therefore possible to understand these children's voices as autonomous in these situations and as a pattern of language choice over time.

Legitimate positions and power relations

As an ethnographic researcher entering kindergarten, one is required to develop relationships with children, teachers, and parents and to find legitimate positions between these participating actors (Ødegaard & Krüger, 2012). It also involves becoming an actor. Regarding the children, it is again Anna's story that showed us most explicitly the possible tensions involved in this positioning. Anna's father did not recognize his daughter as multilingual, but both the kindergarten and the researchers showed the child that being multilingual is positive. Positioning ourselves in line with Haugen Kindergarten's discourses on multilingualism may have enhanced Anna's interactive agency, providing her with the frame and skills to make her voice heard (van Nijnatten, 2013). This corresponds to the value of viewing children as equal subjects and listening to children's voices in Nordic ECEC. While this enhanced Anna's space for negotiation, it could also have led to a potential conflict between her and her father. It provided a context for Anna to try out her voice, authoring herself as multilingual and opposing her father's discourse. This reinforces Bodén's (2021) argument that ethical considerations

connected to the research approach should be contemplated carefully throughout the research and should not be based on a general scale. According to Bakhtin (1986), the speaker's authorship is positioned hierarchically, corresponding to the position of the addressee. The authorship that the children in our study showed might also involve negotiations regarding such hierarchical positionings. During our fieldwork, these authorships were visible through the children's voices and utterances, with us, teachers, and peers as addressees. However, when we write about the children's voices in this article, we re-author their voices, and we fill their words—at least partly—with our intentions in a new context and directed at new addressees (Bakhtin, 1981).

We argue that it is not only the positioning of the researcher and the child and the possible implied hierarchical power relations that involve ethical considerations and possible tensions. Ethical considerations might also arise from the researcher's positioning between the child and other actors in kindergarten. In our project, the children's perceptions of the potential hierarchical power relations might have been influenced by the fact that we, as researchers, supported an already existing view of multilingualism as a resource in the kindergarten. While this may have been positive in many respects and possibly supported some of the children's use of various languages, it might also have involved tensions for others. Another aspect is the question of re-authoring the voices of young multilingual children when disseminating our research. For us, discovering the different views held by the parents, kindergarten, and ourselves was an important experience. It raises new questions about what finding legitimate positions as researchers in kindergarten might involve, and it points to ethical considerations beyond the positioning of children in research and the power relations between children and researchers.

Conclusions

Researchers must address the balance between protection and benefit (Alstad, 2021). We have shown the possibilities in ethnographic research of understanding children's voices and discussed how they can be understood as autonomous. We have not only underlined the child's right to be heard, as emphasized in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but, in doing so, also focused on important ethical considerations. Returning to our research question—how researcher positionality can contribute to the inclusion of multilingual children's voices in research—we argue that critical ethnographic research has the potential to contribute to this inclusion because of the opportunities that this kind of research provides for the researcher's positionality. The enforcement of the ethical tensions involved in ethnographic research with multilingual children contributes to the researcher's awareness of the positioning of children in the interplay of actors (Ødegaard

& Krüger, 2012) in kindergarten. Further potential lies in the requirement to understand the field, studied from the perspectives of its participants, and to focus on the invisibility of everyday life. The first requirement is moreover supported by central values in Nordic ECEC. This provides useful opportunities to include children's perspectives as analytical constructs and to explore their voices in dialogic connections to their sociocultural frames. Furthermore, we argue that it is important for researchers in the field to be aware of the influence we might have on children's understandings of multilingualism and the knowledge they consider important (cf. Almér, 2017). In general, this raises two questions that may apply to any research project involving young children: how children's contributions are valued in research and how children actually recognize the legitimacy of research beyond their everyday encounters with the researcher. Additionally, a suggestion for researchers may be to contribute to an open dialogue on perspectives of multilingualism held by various actors who are part of the research project.

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