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Acts of bridging in communication with newly arrived Ukrainian children in the Norwegian ECEC context

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, we explore emergent communicative practices in a situation where a group of newly arrived children start attending early childhood education and care (ECEC) in a new country. The data are collected in a unique multilingual ECEC setting, organised temporarily for Ukrainian children that had arrived in Norway. Previous research on newly arrived children in ECEC settings in the Nordic context focuses mostly on how one or a few children are integrated into majority-language-speaking groups of children. Our study, however, provides an opportunity to explore communication practices that arise when a group of children share a language with some of the practitioners working with them, but not others. In this paper, we present an analysis of several narratives from practice, where we discuss how children and practitioners use their semiotic resources to accomplish their goals in communicative acts. The narratives show how the ECEC practitioners support children in their communicative efforts and bridge linguistic resources between languages. Inspired by the theory of bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000), we give a definition to acts of bridging and show that these acts of bridging can be performed by both children and practitioners with different language competences.

Keywords: *bilingual teachers, Ukrainian children, acts of bridging, newly arrived children*

Introduction

In the era of migration and globalisation, with increased forced and voluntary migration across the globe, communication patterns are changing. This has created a need for more research on how children adapt to new languages and early childhood education and care (ECEC) environments. Understanding the dynamics of communication in ECEC settings in such contexts, where newly arrived children are integrated into new ECEC settings, is essential in order to ensure effective pedagogical and language learning practices for the ECEC teachers.

ECEC centres serve as the first encounter with the host culture for children in countries experiencing high levels of immigration, and they play a fundamental role in integrating children into a new society (Bove & Sharmahd, 2020). However, the process of integrating newly arrived children into a new educational environment comes with its own challenges. A large study (Tobin, 2020) conducted in five countries (England, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States) found that ECEC centres often lack awareness of how to effectively integrate newly arrived children, meet their social and educational needs, collaborate with immigrant families, address cultural and linguistic differences, and organize best practices for language learning and communication.

Since many practitioners in mainstream ECEC settings are not familiar with the language and culture of the newly arrived children, and these children and their families may have limited knowledge of the host country's language, bilingual and bicultural staff are often employed to facilitate the transition and communication process. These bilingual practitioners often act as cultural mediators and play a vital role in bridging the gap between migrant families and ECEC institutions (Bratland et al., 2012; Mary & Young, 2017; Nasjonalt senter for flerkulturell opplæring [NAFO], 2012; Skoug, 2008; Pesch, 2021; Solberg, 2023; Tefre et al., 1997; Tkachenko et al., 2015). However, research suggests that the position and role of the bilingual staff are challenging and demanding, and often undervalued (Alstad & Sopanen, 2021; Dewilde, 2013; Solberg, 2023). The actual work and challenges faced by the bilingual ECEC practitioners have not received adequate attention in ECEC research. In this paper, we aim to fill this gap by exploring and shedding light on the actual work the bilingual ECEC practitioners perform in communicative situations where participants do not share a common language.

One recent case that has resulted in a significant migration flow to many European countries is the war in Ukraine. This conflict has forced many Ukrainian families, primarily mothers with their children, to flee their homes and seek refuge in other countries. Consequently, many Ukrainian children started attending educational institutions in their host countries. Our research focuses on the very early period of newly

arrived Ukrainian children starting in an ECEC institution in Norway. In this paper, we explore emergent communicative practices through the perspective of a bilingual teacher who serves as a cultural and linguistic mediator between a group of newly arrived children from Ukraine and Norwegian-speaking staff and other children in regular ECEC groups. Our aim is to take a closer look at the bridge-building processes that occur in this setting and analyse everyday situations to understand how acts of bridging between different languages and cultures take place. Inspired by the theory of bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000), we define acts of bridging as communication strategies that help participants overcome language barriers, promote dialogue, create connections, and facilitate communication, interaction and mutual understanding between individuals and groups who speak different languages. Although it is bilingual staff who traditionally fulfil the bridging role, we show through our analysis in this paper that acts of bridging can also be performed by other participants, both children and practitioners who do not share language with the children.

Theoretical background and previous research

A key concept that we want to explore in this study is bridging social capital. Social capital refers to the 'sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). According to Putnam (2000), social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. Putnam (2000) further elaborates on social capital, defining two forms of it—bonding and bridging. Bonding capital refers to the connections formed within individuals belonging to the same group or network, while bridging social capital refers to the connections formed across different groups. Access to bridging social capital is particularly important for newcomers, as it allows them to connect with individuals outside their own group and successfully integrate into the new society. ECEC centres are important institutions that can facilitate bridging social and cultural capital by providing sustained exposure to members and norms of the dominant society. In our study, the focus will be on how different actors in the ECEC centre that receives newly arrived Ukrainian children perform acts of bridging.

Our study is anchored in the socio-cultural theory of learning and language socialisation theories. Socio-cultural theory highlights the importance of cultural and social interactions in children's learning and development and emphasises that learning is a socially mediated collaborative process, where children acquire knowledge and skills through being involved in interactions with more competent others (Bruner, 1997;

Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Language socialisation theories focus on how novices are socialised to become competent members of a community of practice through communicative participation (Duff, 2010). Research on language socialisation in ECEC institutions has recently gained increasing attention (Cekaite, 2022). In a language socialisation process, novices learn the cultural values and practices of the community through language, while learning a language is tightly linked to sociocultural practices (Cekaite, 2022). In the context of early childhood education, language socialisation involves the ways in which young children learn to communicate and interact with others through participation in daily routines and situations in the ECEC institutional environment. As the language learning process is highly affected by social relations, opportunities to participate in social activities and language practices, the role of ECEC practitioners in the socialisation of newly arrived children in a new context and in facilitation of their second language learning, has been emphasised in research (Cekaite, 2022; Schwartz & Deeb, 2021). Recent research also highlights the role of peers in the socialisation process and the bidirectional character of language socialisation, as children and adults influence each other's actions and language use through their agency in the social interaction (Cekaite, 2022; Schwartz & Gorbatt, 2018). While language socialisation research has described teachers' socialisation strategies and discursive structures to facilitate interactional participation and language learning for newly arrived children, less is known about the role language competence and the multilingual repertoires of adults and other peers play in the language socialisation process of newly arrived children.

A number of studies have explored language socialisation processes when newly arrived children join ECEC institutions in a new context (Ilje-Lien, 2019; Kalkman, 2018; Kalkman et al., 2015; Kalkman et al., 2017; Skaremyr, 2019). These studies highlight the significance of interactions between these children and their peers and teachers for their socialisation, language learning, and overall development. Research documents that, despite limited language skills in the new language, newly arrived children are able to communicate using various semiotic resources, including speech, gestures, body language, and material artefacts when they participate in interactions with teachers and peers in the preschool (Ilje-Lien, 2019; Kalkman et al., 2015; Kalkman et al., 2017; Skaremyr, 2019). Previous research also indicates that ECEC settings provide multiple opportunities for newcomers to be part of interactions in groups, where they can be involved at different levels and experience different participatory statuses (Kultti, 2012; Kultti, 2013; Kultti 2014; Kultti et al., 2017; Rickert, 2023). For instance, studies by Kultti (2012, 2013, 2014, 2017) from Swedish preschools show that children with diverse language backgrounds engage in preschools activities like mealtimes, singing, free play, and storytelling in different ways. These activities are usually multimodal, and children employ various semiotic tools, taking on different roles in communication: from

observing silently, or participating non-verbally to engaging verbally using the majority language and home languages.

Many studies of newly arrived children of preschool age are conducted in settings where one or a few newcomers are integrated into a majority-language-speaking group. Such studies pay special attention to the role of teachers as facilitators of the newcomers' voices when they lack shared language. For example, Ilje-Lien (2019), in her study of joint aesthetic explorations of children and teachers, highlights the teachers' awareness of the newcomers' limited verbal participation and the teachers' responsibility to attend to non-verbal signals and create inclusive activities. Mary and Young (2017) and Alstad (2016) moreover describe how teachers who do not have access to children's home languages can recognise their language competencies and bridge the gap between their home culture and institutional practices. By engaging in the children's multiple discursive practices, a teacher in May and Young's (2017) study engaged actively in the children's multiple discursive practices; she valued the children's multilingual repertoires and by this created safe spaces for communication and scaffolded learning and language development. This fostered a climate of confidence and well-being, strengthened home-school relations and inclusion. Sadownik (2018) claims that newcomer children face challenges in participating in informal, play-based activities in the Nordic ECEC context. However, extra language support may help them to participate, gain cultural capital, understand new codes, and establish social networks. The role of the teacher is compared by Sadownik (2018, p. 964) to that of a mechanic who "equips" newcomer children with new and valid semiotic resources in the transition process to enhance their participation opportunities.

Research on the use of bilingual teachers and assistants in ECEC settings highlights their role in socialising newly arrived children into a new language environment (Bratland et al., 2012; Giæver, 2015; Sadownik, 2018; Tefre et al., 1997; Tkachenko et al., 2015). Giæver (2015) emphasises that bilingual practitioners can create warm and caring relations, which might be easier to establish in their shared language, that is, they can understand and comfort children in the language they are comfortable with. The other studies document that bilingual teachers/assistants who share the children's languages can help to clarify misunderstandings, encourage interactions with peers, facilitate learning through participation in play and daily routines, provide translations and guidance when needed, and share their experiences to bridge cultural gaps (Bratland et al., 2012; Sadownik, 2018; Tefre et al., 1997). By sharing their own experiences with the majority staff and explaining cultural aspects of the new country to newly arrived children and their families, they can bridge cultural gaps and facilitate the integration, security, and well-being of newly arrived children in ECEC classrooms.

At the same time, previous studies of bilingual teachers'/assistants' professional practice highlight complex, multilingual language practices. In dynamic and flexible ways, they navigate between different languages to provide multilingual support for the children and collaborate with other majority-language speaking colleagues and the school leadership. Daugaard and Dewilde (2017) describe multilingual teachers, that is, teachers who themselves have a migration background, as inventors of new language practices and argue that their multilingual language practices can challenge traditional understandings of language teaching and learning in multilingual contexts. Yet, some studies (Baker, 2014; Dewilde, 2013; Martin-Jones & Saxena, 1996; Tkachenko et al., 2015) highlight challenges in the work of bilingual teachers/assistants. These challenges stem from the bilingual teachers' low and marginalised status compared to other teachers and a lack of recognition of their work and the multilingual practices they create. As a result, little attention is paid in the schools to the necessity of collaboration and meeting places between bilingual staff and their majority-language speaking colleagues.

Different aspects of bilingual teacher collaboration are touched upon in research on bilingual preschool education. In bilingual educational institutions, teaching practices often involve two (or more) teachers who speak different languages and work together in pedagogical activities. Despite the goal of developing bilingualism, several studies have identified the existence of monoglossic ideologies and monolingual language policies in bilingual ECEC institutions, wherein the two languages are separated, for example, through predetermined monolingual language roles assigned to the teachers (e.g., each teacher speaks one particular language with the children) (Mård-Miettinen et al., 2018; Straszer, 2017). However, such predefined language roles can sometimes pose challenges to co-teaching interactions. Studies by Mård-Miettinen et al. (2018) and Straszer (2017) reveal that teachers do not always strictly adhere to their pre-assigned language roles. Instead, they dynamically and flexibly switch between languages, utilising both languages in their teaching. Such flexible language practices have in the academic literature been referred to as translanguaging. Currently a much-debated concept (see e.g., Cummins, 2021; Li Wei, 2023), translanguaging can be understood in different ways. For our study, we rely on a rather broad understanding of translanguaging as a 'practice that involves dynamic and functionally integrated use of different languages and language varieties, but more importantly a process of knowledge construction that goes beyond language(s)' (Li Wei, 2018, p. 15). Conteh and Brock (2011) and Li Wei (2018) call for the importance of creating translanguaging spaces in education, where it is safe to use all available semiotic resources and engage in translanguaging practices. While there is growing research on translanguaging practices in ECEC settings (Tkachenko, 2024), it seems that little research has been done on how multilingual staff in ECEC institutions mediate multilingual communication between different groups of children.

Summing up, research on newly arrived children in ECEC settings has shown that children can be active agents in their socialisation in a new linguistic environment. They may use different verbal and non-verbal semiotic resources to communicate and through this communication manage to accomplish their goals, interact with the rest of the peer group and the adults, as well as negotiate their social positioning and identity. On the other hand, newly arrived children are dependent on support from competent practitioners who can facilitate their participation in everyday activities in ECEC and make their voices valued and acknowledged. Although the role of bilingual practitioners has been stressed as particularly important, only a few studies (see e.g., Baker, 2014; Conteh & Brock, 2011; Dewilde, 2013; Martin-Jones & Saxena, 1996) have been done on exactly how they mediate communication in complex multilingual language practices.

Context of the study and research questions

This study was conducted in a unique bilingual ECEC setting, specifically organised for Ukrainian children who arrived in Norway due to the war outbreak in 2022. This temporary ECEC service was based as a separate unit within a mainstream Norwegian ECEC centre. Although the reception groups for Ukrainian children in this study were organised separately, they were physically part of a larger mainstream ECEC unit and thus shared their immediate proximity and the same outdoor space with the children from the Norwegian mainstream ECEC unit.

The special unit for Ukrainian children accommodated four groups: two for children aged 3–6 years, with 18 children in each of the groups, and two for children aged 0–3 years, with 9 children in each of the groups. Following the pedagogical norms in Norway (see §17–18 in the Kindergarten Act, 2006), three practitioners worked with each group. However, some of the practitioners were employed part-time and worked just a few days a week, complementing each other; so, in total, fifteen ECEC practitioners were set to work in this special unit. Seven of these had a university degree in ECEC (teachers) and were responsible for planning and leading the services, alongside eight assistants.

All the practitioners in the unit had command of several languages; therefore, they all can be considered bilinguals/multilinguals (Haukås, 2022). For a clearer representation in the text, we still had to distinguish the staff who shared the language with the newcomers from those who did not. Further, in this paper we use the term bilingual teacher/practitioner to refer to those who could speak both Norwegian and the language of the newly arrived Ukrainian children, Ukrainian or Russian, or both. In our analysis, we refer to the practitioners by mentioning their native language, as Russian/Ukrainian-speaking staff or Norwegian-speaking staff, respectively, fully aware that this is a gross oversimplification. Three of the teachers were native Norwegian speakers, only one of

them had some command of Russian. Another four of the teachers were native speakers of Russian and were also fluent in Norwegian. Two of the assistants shared their first language with the children. One of them spoke Russian, one spoke both Russian and Ukrainian, while the remaining six assistants were native speakers of Norwegian.

Ukrainian and Russian are two distinct languages in the Slavic sub-family with a high level of mutual intelligibility between them. The language situation in Ukraine is complex and undergoing a rapid change due to historical, political, and ideological influences. While Ukrainian is the official state language, a significant proportion of the population in Ukraine, particularly in eastern and southern regions, are also fluent in Russian. According to national surveys, most of the population are fluent in both languages (Sokolova, 2022). Due to the provisional nature of the ECEC services organised for Ukrainian children, no proper assessment was made of the children's competence in Russian and Ukrainian, and no information was systematically collected on what was the children's mother tongue. For this reason, we avoid referring to the language used by the children in this study as their mother tongue. According to the bilingual practitioners' informal observations, it seemed that all the children had good command of Russian, and the majority were proficient in both Russian and Ukrainian. As not all the bilingual practitioners or children could speak Ukrainian, Russian was established as the most commonly used language of communication between bilingual ECEC practitioners in this unit and the children, although Ukrainian could be used as well.

The context described in this study created a unique multilingual ECEC setting, where children and practitioners had to make efforts to communicate across their linguistic repertoires. This provides an opportunity to explore acts of bridging and mediation in a multilingual context, which are in focus in this study. In the temporary ECEC centre for Ukrainian refugee children featured in this study, newly arrived Ukrainian children constituted a large group in itself, in contrast to previous research, where the focus has been on the integration of a few newly arrived children in mainstream ECEC institutions (e.g., Ilje-Lien, 2019; Kalkman, 2018; Kalkman et al., 2015; Sadownik, 2018). This context is also different from bilingual ECEC institutions aimed to support learning of other languages than the official ECEC language (e.g., Mård-Miettinen et al., 2018; Straszer, 2017).

As pointed out in the introduction, our aim in this study is to examine emergent communicative practices between participants not sharing the same linguistic repertoires and explore how a bilingual teacher mediates communication in an ECEC setting between newly arrived children from Ukraine, and Norwegian-speaking staff and children. We focus on acts of bridging that take place in everyday communicative situations and

facilitate communication across different languages and cultures. The following research questions guided our exploration:

1. How are communicative spaces created to support newly arrived children in their communicative efforts?
2. How are acts of bridging performed in the communication between newly arrived children and practitioners with and without a shared language?

Method

The data were collected using participant observation in spring 2022. The observation period was three months long, from April to June. One of the Russian-speaking teachers involved in this temporary ECEC centre for Ukrainian children, who is also one of the authors of this article, gathered observations and reflections during her work in the form of narratives from practice. The narratives from practice were written down by this practitioner-researcher whenever noteworthy incidents occurred during her work, and she had an opportunity to write them down. Although narratives from practice as a genre highlight the inherent subjectivity and describe the individual perspectives and interpretations of everyday situations, this is a common way of documenting ECEC centres' pedagogical work, which may be used for critical discussion, professional development, and pedagogical documentation (Ødegaard & Økland, 2015). The term 'narratives from practice' ('praksisfortellinger' in Norwegian) was established by Louise Birkeland at the beginning of the 1990s (Ødegaard & Økland, 2015, p. 18) and has a long tradition in ECEC in Norway. Narratives from practice describe ECEC everyday life and are associated with generating new practice-based knowledge with a further connection to theory (Fennefoss & Jansen, 2020). This study therefore involved participant observations, taken both indoors and outdoors, during children's free play and daily activities. The observations were used to explore how children and adults who do not share the same language find optimal ways to communicate and realise their communicative goals, and to examine the way bilingual practitioners support this communication.

The dataset consisted of seven narratives from practice that described communicative situations that took place in the ECEC. These narratives were analysed by the practitioner-researcher and the university researcher in collaboration, using the stepwise-deductive induction (SDI) method (Tjora, 2021). This method allows for the identification of all the stages in the process of analysis, from reading the raw data, developing and grouping codes, and ultimately connecting those to relevant theories and concepts. The data coding was initially carried out individually by each of the authors and included aspects of

language socialisation, language support strategies, language mediation, as well as who initiated communication and what kinds of semiotic resources were brought in. In the second stage, the authors discussed the codes and established the final focus of the analysis on the acts of bridging. Four vignettes from the narratives from practice were selected to illustrate the findings of the analysis in this paper, the major selection criteria were to cover instances of acts of bridging initiated by various participants.

Ethical considerations

Qualitative inquiry involving minoritised families and children requires a high level of ethical and humanistic awareness to avoid causing any form of harm to the participants. Conducting this research at the temporary ECEC unit for Ukrainian children posed dilemmas related to the balance between research value and ethical considerations. On the one hand, such a study could contribute to the understanding of Ukrainian children's experiences of integration; on the other hand, we had to consider the potential harm or discomfort for participants in a vulnerable situation. The families, especially the small children, who needed protection and support, were taken care of by the authorities in the new country. Their life situation was connected to uncertainty, fear, and worries. Nevertheless, we considered it important to share a glimpse into their lives to enhance a professional understanding of and empathy with their situation.

During the data collection, one of the authors was working at the ECEC centre where the study was conducted. This entailed access to personal and sensitive information from children and parents, who showed great openness and shared personal issues with the staff. However, being part of the personnel, the practitioner-researcher is bound by the duty of confidentiality and had to be aware of her double role during the data collection. The narratives were therefore anonymised when they were written down, ensuring the exclusion of any personal information. Ethical considerations also guided the selection of episodes for documentation, so that they did not portray children in unfavourable or vulnerable positions. Written and oral information was given to all participants in their preferred languages so that they were given a real opportunity to withdraw from observation if they so wished. Children were also given age-appropriate explanations about the study. These measures were taken to uphold ethical standards and respect the privacy and well-being of all involved parties.

Findings

The vignettes presented below are extracts from the narratives from practice written down by the practitioner-researcher. These were chosen to illustrate our analysis of the

whole dataset. In our analysis below, we examine in detail how acts of bridging are performed in these vignettes and stress our findings accordingly.

Pokataj

In the two vignettes below, the Russian-speaking ECEC teacher described several situations, where a particular word in Russian ("pokataj") was used by the children to achieve their communicative goals.

In Vignette 1, a new Norwegian-speaking ECEC teacher heard this word already on his first day at work (lines 1–3), but he could not understand it. To solve this communication challenge, he asked for help from the Russian-speaking colleague (lines 3–5).

1	It had already been a few months since we had started working in the kindergarten for
2	Ukrainian children. One day we got a new Norwegian-speaking employee who knew
3	neither the children nor the routines. Already on his first day at work, he came to me and
4	asked:
5	- Anna, hva betyr "pokatai"? De sitter på dissene og roper, men jeg forstår ikke [= Anna,
6	what does "pokataj" mean? They sit in the swing and say it out loud to me, but I don't
7	understand].
8	I laughed a little to myself because the word "покатай" [= speed up or roll me on
9	something that has wheels] had been one of the most important words learned very
10	quickly by children and adults in both Russian and Norwegian. I was positively surprised
11	that he noticed it already on his first day of work and took the time to find out what it
12	meant.
13	For children from Ukraine, typical swings in Norway are a bit unusual and too difficult for
14	them to manage on their own, even for those who were old enough. The swings in Ukraine
15	are often made of heavy metal, so the children were used to the adults giving them a push
16	for the swing to get moving at high speed. Within just a few days of opening the Ukrainian
17	kindergarten, the Norwegian employees learned the word "покатай" in Russian, because
18	the children always shouted this word loudly while sitting on the swings. After the
19	Norwegian-speaking practitioners got a sense of what this word means, they begun to
20	repeat it. But also, to confirm the children's requests in Russian, they naturally used their
21	own mother tongue, Norwegian - Fart? Vil du ha fart? [= Speed? Do you want speed?] And
22	the children quickly started saying "Fart! Fart!" [=Speed! Speed!] to the Norwegian
23	speakers, who had not reacted to "покатай".

VIGNETTE 1 Pokataj – on the swings

The Norwegian-speaking teacher's request can be considered as an act of bridging: to solve the communication breakdown, he intentionally remembered the word the children used and addressed a language expert. The Russian-speaking teacher reflected upon this situation (lines 8–12): although she saw the humorous side to his request (as she 'laughed a little'), she reacted positively to the colleague's action (lines 10–12) and acknowledged his attempt to solve the communication challenge (lines 11–12). The Norwegian-speaking practitioner in this situation actively arranged a meaning-making process, which we consider an act of bridging. By giving meaning to the words in the children's language, the

Norwegian-speaking teacher created a connection point between him and the children. The Russian-speaking teacher facilitated communication between the Ukrainian children, who initiated communication but could not yet speak Norwegian, and the Norwegian-speaking teacher, who wanted to understand the children's communicative efforts. Understanding of the children' language gave the Russian-speaking teacher the possibility to explain the word to a Norwegian-speaking colleague. Thus, her act of bridging here facilitated mutual understanding between the parties. Through this mediation, the Russian-speaking teacher created a common, shared, translanguaging space (Li Wei 2018; Straszer, 2017), enabling both children and teachers who did not share a common language to find meaning in this interaction. In addition to directly communicating with children during daily activities, the Russian-speaking teacher also provided Norwegian-speaking teachers with a linguistic and pedagogical tool for further communication. Overall, the role of bilingual teachers in the ECEC context extended beyond communication with the children and included the creation of shared spaces that promote greater understanding and inclusivity (Giæver, 2015).

Further in Vignette 1, the word "pokataj" was used to mediate communication between Ukrainian children and Norwegian-speaking practitioners (lines 8–10). Children used this word to get help on the swings (lines 15–16), and the Norwegian-speaking practitioners quickly figured out its meaning (lines 17–19) and repeated it after the children (lines 19–20). The practitioners perceived the children's utterance in their language and chose a suitable way to respond. In addition, the practitioners also said the word in Norwegian (lines 20–21). This mutual act of bridging allowed for the establishment of a meaningful semiotic sign, creating a common repertoire. The children learned the word in the target language, while the practitioners learned it in the children's language. This process exemplifies the teacher as a co-learner, as mentioned by García (2017) and Li Wei (2023). In line with recent works in socialisation theory (Cekaite, 2022), we can also trace how children can be active agents in their socialisation process: the children's communicative initiatives and verbal actions in this situation influenced the teachers' actions and choices.

In Vignette 2, we see how Ukrainian children performed the act of bridging with both the Russian-speaking and Norwegian-speaking practitioners. Through their body movements, the children communicated with practitioners in the room to request help or invite the practitioners in their play. First, the children addressed the Russian-speaking teacher using their shared language (line 4). When the Russian-speaking teacher denied their request (line 5), the children reacted quickly and addressed the Norwegian-speaking practitioner in Norwegian with the same request (lines 6–9), using their emergent verbal competence in Norwegian. The children showed that they were on their way to developing communicative competence in Norwegian and beginning to use Norwegian as a communicative tool. The comment by the author of the narrative at the end (lines 10–

11) explains that the children learned this Norwegian word (“Fart!”) in another situation outside. This shows the children's ability to transfer the semiotic resources from one context to another (Rickert, 2023).

1	There was free play inside. Another Norwegian-speaking assistant and I were together with
2	the children. The children pretended that the big green boxes were boats; they sat two by
3	two inside the boxes and tried to “row”. They asked me:
4	- Покатай (which in Russian means "pull the boxes so they move on the floor").
5	It would be quite heavy to do so, so I said in Russian that I had to take care of my back.
6	While I was explaining to them that I didn't want to get sick but wanted to come to work
7	and play with them, they turned to a Norwegian-speaking assistant and shouted in
8	Norwegian:
9	- Fart! Fart! [= Speed! Speed!]
10	This was something they remembered from outdoor play when they asked for speed on the
11	swings. They used the same word, but in a different situation.

VIGNETTE 2 Pokataj – Playing with boxes

The children’s actions can be interpreted as two different acts of bridging: the first one non-verbal through their actions, and the second one through available linguistic resources. They tried to communicate with all the participants in the room using their whole linguistic repertoires in both languages showing their multilingual competences. By using both languages, they included all the participants in the actual activity with boxes.

Helicopter

In Vignette 3, a Russian-speaking teacher who understood the language of the Ukrainian children mediated communication with and between two groups of children. Several narratives in our data show that, although the Ukrainian children and children from the regular Norwegian ECEC groups share the same outside area, which might provide a good arena for play and communication across the groups, the children from these two different ECEC groups usually do not play together. This was also the case in this narrative: the Ukrainian boys and a group of Norwegian-speaking boys were in the near proximity of each other, but they were involved in different activities (lines 2–6). The sound of a helicopter they all heard created a joint focus of attention in this situation (lines 6–7). By attracting the children’s attention to the sound, both verbally (line 8) and non-verbally (line 7), the ECEC teacher strengthened this joint focus of attention. Her use of a pointing gesture and a simple word in Russian (Oh, look!) can be understood in this situation by all the participants, and thus be regarded as an act of bridging. By avoiding naming the flying object herself, she invited the children to develop the topic.

1	The children from the preschool department in the Ukrainian kindergarten were outside
2	playing. Some of the Norwegian-speaking children were also playing there. The playground
3	was large; there was a lot to choose from: the children could ride bikes, build houses, climb,
4	or play in the sandbox. They were playing two and two together or in small groups. I was
5	sitting in the sandbox with some Russian\Ukrainian-speaking boys. A group of Norwegian-
6	speaking boys were standing and talking about something next to the sandbox. Suddenly,
7	we heard a sound in the air, the sound of a helicopter. I pointed to it:
8	- О, смотрите! [= Oh, look!]
9	- Это самолет! Это самолет! [= It's a plane! It's a plane!] said the boys happily in
10	Russian.
11	- Det er et helikopter! [= It's a helicopter!] said the Norwegian-speaking boys.
12	- Почему тогда такой звук? Разве самолет так шумит? [= Why then such a sound?
13	Does the plane make that much noise?], I asked.
14	- Это спортивный самолет, поэтому такой звук. [= It's a sports plane, that's why such
15	sound.], said the boys in Russian.
16	- De mener at dette er et sportsfly derfor lager den en slik lyd [= They think that this is a
17	sports plane and that's why it makes such a noise], I said to the Norwegian boys.
18	Another helicopter flies by.
19	- О, вертолет! [= Oh, a helicopter!] shouted the Russian/Ukraininan-speaking boys.
20	- Helikopter! [Helicopter!] shouted the Norwegian-speaking boys. And then they
21	repeated the Russian word they had just heard – "Vertolet! Vertolet!" [= Helicopter!
22	Helicopter!]

VIGNETTE 3 Helicopter

The children followed this lead by expressing what object was making the sound. Interestingly, they had different hypotheses: while the Ukrainian boys thought this was a plane (line 9), the Norwegian boys thought it was a helicopter (line 11). In lines 12–13, the teacher tried to contest the Ukrainian boys' hypothesis by indirectly expressing through her questions that such a sound is not typical of planes. The Ukrainian boys explained that it sounded that way because it was a sports plane (lines 14–15), which the teacher chose to say in Norwegian to the other boys (lines 16–17). This action from the teacher's side can be interpreted as a bridging act: she rendered what she and the Ukrainian children were talking about to the Norwegian-speaking boys, who could not understand the language of their communication. It might be that the bilingual teacher also wanted to emphasise the children's different hypotheses about the object they heard, which potentially could stimulate development of this discussion. When another helicopter flew by, the Ukrainian boys identified it as a helicopter, and not as a sports plane. They exclaimed "Helicopter!" in Russian (line 19), while the Norwegian speaking boys used the Norwegian word (line 20). In the last lines (21–22), the Norwegian-speaking boys also used the name of the object in Russian. This can be interpreted as an act of bridging from their side, as it seemed that they noted what the Ukrainian boys were saying and imitated this word. This imitation might not necessarily be a conscious attempt to learn the word the Ukrainian boys have used, but this act of bridging might be

considered as a sign of the joint attention that occurred between the groups in this situation or as a spontaneous response to the teacher's bridging act in line 16.

The analysis of this narrative revealed several acts of bridging performed by different actors. The Russian-speaking teacher used the situation that occurred to create a joint focus of attention for both groups of boys. In her bridging act, she first used non-verbal communication that could be understood by all participants, and then highlighted the content of her conversation with the Ukrainian boys for the Norwegian-speaking children. The Norwegian-speaking boys' act of bridging was expressed through their imitation of the word the Ukrainian children were using.

Eating fruits

In Vignette 4, two practitioners and a group of children aged between 3 and 6 years were engaged in conversation outside while eating their afternoon meal together (lines 1–3). The Norwegian-speaking ECEC teacher pointed to different fruit types, encouraging children to say the names of the fruits in Norwegian (lines 3–6).

1	It was a nice sunny day, and everyone was outside. The kindergarten had an area with lots
2	of trees and stones called "the forest". The children from the group of 3–6-year-olds from
3	the Ukrainian unit were sitting around the table eating fruit together. Even, who could
4	speak Norwegian and a little Russian, started a conversation with kids at the table.
5	- Как это будет по-норовежски? [= What's it called in Norwegian?] - he asked in
6	Russian with a nice Norwegian accent.
7	The children were engaged and wanted to answer correctly. I was sitting next to Katia and
8	Ivan, who were talking to each other:
9	- Eple, это яблоко [Eple (nor.) means apple], - said Katia and put a piece of apple in her
10	mouth.
11	- A due это виноград [And due (nor.) is grape], answered Ivan.
12	- Drue [= Grape], - I pronounced the word correctly.
13	- А киви так и будет киви [= And kiwi is the same, kiwi], - said Katia proudly.

VIGNETTE 4 Eating fruits

In this act of bridging, the Norwegian-speaking teacher initiated a meta-linguistic conversation about what the fruits are called in Norwegian. He used his own competence in Russian to ensure that the children understood the question, but challenged the children to name the fruits in Norwegian.

Meanwhile, two of the children, Katia and Ivan, were sitting close to the Russian-speaking practitioner and were engaged in a conversation with each other on the same topic, namely fruit types (lines 9–13). The girl, Katia, said the names of the fruits in Russian and Norwegian while she was showing them to the boy, Ivan (line 9). Katia's attempt to

connect Russian and Norwegian words can be seen as a bridging act: she connects words from two languages, thus building the bridge between the two languages, and her replication of this meta-linguistic activity can also be seen as a connection to the metalinguistic activity initiated by the Norwegian-speaking teacher initiated with the rest of the children.

In line 11, Ivan followed Katia's initiative and continued in the same manner naming the fruit in both Norwegian and Russian. This can also be interpreted as an act of bridging from his side. As Ivan missed one sound in his pronunciation of drue [= grape], the ECEC teacher provided feedback by pronouncing the correct version of the word. Thus, the teacher used language modelling by transforming the incorrect variant to the correct one.

This kind of linguistic activity in collaboration with children is rooted in the here-and-now situation. The everyday routine situation during the meal is used as a spontaneous, pedagogical session to stimulate children's attempts to use the target language and make connections between the children's language and the target language. Such situations can give children an opportunity to learn new words (Kultti, 2014; Kultti et al., 2017). Practitioners use a metalinguistic conversation as a strategy in order to initiate a bridging act, and the children were engaged and worked cognitively with translation of the words. They used their knowledge in the target language both to initiate and respond to the bridging acts initiated by others.

Discussion

In this study, we explored emergent communicative practices in a temporary ECEC service for Ukrainian children in Norway, focusing on communication between newly arrived children and participants with different linguistic backgrounds. We analysed narratives from practice to understand how shared communicative spaces are created and how acts of bridging are performed. Our analysis reveals the complex and dynamic nature of communication in multicultural and multilingual contexts, where all participants contribute to developing communicative practices and are engaged in different acts of bridging. In the following section, we discuss our findings, addressing our initial research questions, and suggest insights for implications for practice and future research.

How are communicative spaces created to support newly arrived children in their communicative efforts?

Our first research question concerned how communicative spaces in a multilingual ECEC setting are created to support newly arrived children in their communicative efforts.

Being central in the sociocultural theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1978), interaction is also a key aspect of the socialisation process, especially in multicultural and multilingual contexts (Bruner, 1997; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). In line with previous research on the socialisation of newly arrived children (Cekaite, 2022; Duff, 2010; Schwartz & Deeb, 2021), our analysis shows that communicative spaces are created through a variety of means, both verbal and non-verbal. All participants, both Russian/Ukrainian-speaking and Norwegian-speaking practitioners, as well as peers, make important contributions to this process, thus supporting the newcomers' communicative efforts and creating spaces for mutual understanding. These spaces were often characterised by a shared focus on specific here-and-now situations, the children's interests and needs, as well as a recognition of the importance of their communicative efforts and the cultural and linguistic competence that they possess.

Our study highlights the collaborative nature of creating communicative spaces in multicultural and multilingual settings. The Norwegian-speaking practitioners can support newly arrived children by being open to the children's initiatives and valuing their communicative efforts, even when expressed non-verbally or in an unfamiliar language. In our analysis, we also witnessed their agency in creating communicative spaces by becoming co-learners, being attentive to the phrases the children say in their language and taking steps to learn from that. Bilingual practitioners, having command of both Norwegian and the children's language, played an important role in mediating communication between different groups. Children themselves and their peers also contributed to developing communicative spaces through their own initiatives and responses. Our findings align with socialisation theories (Cekaite, 2022) and suggest that effective communication in diverse settings requires a shared understanding of the context, collaborative efforts, and openness to the complexities involved.

How are acts of bridging performed in communication between newly arrived children and practitioners with and without a shared language?

Our second research question concerns acts of bridging and how they are performed. Previous research often highlights the role of bilingual staff as bridge-builders (Bratland et al. 2012; Giæver, 2015; Sadownik, 2018; Tefre et al. 1997; Tkachenko et al., 2015). Similarly, in our analysis, we could see that the bilingual teacher played a central role in mediating communication between the Ukrainian children and the Norwegian-speaking staff, as well as peers. The bilingual teachers employed various strategies in their performance of acts of bridging. They created a joint focus of attention between different groups of children, engaged children in shared learning experiences, and facilitated understanding by explaining what is being communicated in the unfamiliar language. They also supported children's metalinguistic conversations, modelled language use and

helped children to connect knowledge in the language they already knew to the new language being learned. They can also promote translanguaging, encouraging children to be flexible in their language use and switching between languages for effective communication as complex language practices (Daugaard & Dewilde, 2017). Being able to understand both languages, they could create opportunities for the children to expand their linguistic skills and knowledge. Therefore, in line with previous research, our analysis shows that bilingual teachers are central participants in bridging acts, being language experts with a unique competence in mediating communication between children and adults who do not share the same linguistic repertoires.

However, our data demonstrate that the bridge-building role is not exclusive to bilingual staff: both Ukrainian children themselves, their Norwegian-speaking peers, and Norwegian-speaking staff performed verbal and non-verbal actions that can be considered acts of bridging. Such acts of bridging are usually performed during interactions in everyday situations and often associated with accomplishing the participants' communicative goals. Children made attempts to perform the bridging acts both in relation to the Norwegian-speaking practitioners and the Norwegian-speaking peers. They also showed the ability to swich and adjust the use of semiotic resources according to the situation and participants involved, and relied on help from the bilingual staff when necessary. This relates to previous research on newly arrived children as active agents in their socialisation (Cekaite, 2022), who by participating in social interactions are able to use all their semiotic resources flexibly and dynamically in fulfilling their communicative goals. All this underlines the bidirectional character of language socialisation, where children and adults influence each other's actions and language use through their agency in social interaction (Cekaite, 2022).

The analysed narratives from practice show that Norwegian-speaking staff and children could also perform acts of bridging, although they only had limited access to understanding the Ukrainian children's verbal expressions in their language. In our data, we found several examples when Norwegian-speaking children and staff responded to the communicative efforts of the Ukrainian children, relying on the non-verbal clues from here-and-now situations and sometimes actively supporting communication across languages. Examples include when they adopted a word used by the Ukrainian children (Helicopter, Pokataj), tried to figure out the meaning of an expression (Pokataj), or encouraged the newcomers to say something in their language (Eating fruits). All these can be considered as acts of bridging because they create communicative spaces, unite communicative efforts, and draw connections between languages. These examples may remind us of the co-learning and translanguaging spaces highlighted by several researchers working on translanguaging (Garcia, 2017; Li Wei, 2018, 2023) and demonstrated in previous research (Alstad 2016; Mary & Young, 2017). Such mutual

adaptation and mutual influence on each other's language practices may be essential for creating translanguaging spaces and co-learning experiences (Li Wei, 2023), where not only newcomers are expected to learn the language of their environment, but also majority language speakers can learn from newcomers. In this perspective, our data show that newly arrived Ukrainian children, their Norwegian-speaking peers and teachers who do not speak the newly arrived children's language, share, learn, and adapt to each other's needs, language practices, and knowledge. Such co-learning (Garcia, 2017; Li Wei, 2023) may become a meaningful and valuable experience for all participants.

In ECEC settings, communicative situations are often spontaneous, quick, and interruptive, which makes interactions quite complex and dynamic. For newly arrived children, who already use much of their cognitive and emotional resources to adapt to the new environment, this spontaneous nature of interactions in ECEC settings might pose extra challenges. In the practitioners' bridging acts, we identified attempts to create a joint focus of attention and mediate communication both verbally and non-verbally. They engaged in asking questions, providing explanations, and used both the target language and the children's language. Therefore, we believe practitioners' bridging acts can influence the availability of the linguistic context for the children and enrich the interactions through such social contact.

Implications for practice and future research

The ECEC institutional environment plays a crucial role in the integration of newly arrived children and their opportunities for participation and learning (Ilje-Lien, 2019; Kalkman, 2018; Kalkman et al., 2015; Kultti, 2012; Kultti, 2013; Kultti, 2014; Kultti et al., 2017; Rickert, 2023; Skaremyr, 2019; Skaremyr, 2021). In this paper, we have discussed communicative practices in a temporal ECEC setting for Ukrainian children in Norway and analysed how communication between the newly arrived children, practitioners and Norwegian-speaking peers is mediated, as well as how acts of bridging are performed in interactions in everyday situations. Our findings have implications for both ECEC practice and research in the field of early childhood education and children in migration.

Firstly, our analysis shows the significance of acts of bridging performed by both bilingual staff and all participants in communication, including practitioners and peers who do not share the language repertoires of newly arrived children. Consequently, it is crucial for all practitioners to recognise their potential in performing acts of bridging in communication with newly arrived children by promoting openness, being attentive to a whole range of semiotic resources, and adopting the role of co-learners (Garcia, 2017; Li Wei, 2023). Practitioners can also be role models of peer behaviour in this respect. Creating an inclusive and supportive environment and a translanguaging space (Li Wei, 2018), where

all semiotic resources are equally valued and acknowledged, and where individuals feel empowered to bridge language and cultural gaps, might be crucial for effective integration.

Secondly, in line with previous research (Cekaite, 2022; Conteh & Brock, 2011), our study shows that newly arrived children are active agents in their own socialisation and language learning process. They initiate acts of bridging in order to accomplish their communicative goals and create communicative spaces across the different social groups in the ECEC environment. Bridging acts initiated by children should be paid attention to by practitioners in order to give the children both linguistic and socialisation support in their integration process. Although children are active agents in the socialization process, they are dependent on their teachers who are mentally present at the moment, showing a willingness to be engaged in interactions with children. By listening and paying attention to what is happening and interpreting children's verbal and non-verbal communicative efforts, practitioners can make the children's voices meaningful and acknowledged. As Conteh and Brock (2011) also have pointed out, the teachers' mediation of languages might have a strong effect on the children's success. Thus, teachers should acknowledge, facilitate, and support the newly arrived children's own acts of bridging. Recognising and valuing their efforts to communicate and connect with ECEC staff and peers in different ways may promote their confidence, agency, and sense of belonging. Without acknowledgment from the practitioners, the potential of the bridging acts in socialisation can be lost.

Thirdly, our data confirm findings from previous research, regarding the central role of bilingual staff in supporting the integration of newly arrived children (Baker, 2014; Daugaard & Dewilde, 2017; Dewilde, 2013; Tkachenko et al., 2015). In our analysis, we have seen that the bilingual teacher's acts of bridging often created extra opportunities for the newly arrived children to communicate and connect with other peers and Norwegian-speaking practitioners, which allowed them to participate more actively and learn in everyday situations. Therefore, ECEC institutions receiving newly arrived children should provide bilingual support. Although this has not been a common practice in Norwegian ECEC due to practical and economic reasons (Skoug, 2008), our research shows that bilingual support might facilitate the social integration of newly arrived children and support them in participating in meaningful ECEC activities and learning a new language. Further research could explore effective strategies and practices employed by bilingual practitioners in facilitating language learning, cultural understanding, and social integration of newly arrived children. In line with the previous research (e.g., Baker, 2014; Daugaard & Dewilde, 2017, Dewilde, 2013), our study also highlights the potential need for more attention to various aspects of multilingual interactions in teacher education. Teaching education might encompass both specialized training for bilingual

staff touching upon the complexities of their roles, and training for general educators with the regard to their role in facilitating communication with newly arrived children, as well as strategies to collaborate effectively with bilingual staff in diverse classroom settings.

Fourthly, our study reveals that more research is needed on the experiences of newly arrived children and their families and their encounters with early childhood education in a new country, as well as on the effectiveness of different pedagogical approaches and the roles of various stakeholders. Focusing on how the bridging social capital is performed can open possibilities for the inclusion and participation of newcomer children in ECEC institutional contexts. More research in this field can contribute to the development of evidence-based practices in ECEC settings and the adoption of more inclusive ECEC policies.

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