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The Notion of Fashion among Primary School Teachers

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SUMMARY

The present paper explores the issue of cultural forms and typical sign systems of appearance, concentrating on the notion of appropriate and fashionable clothing among Portuguese and Estonian primary school teachers over the period of 40 years. This social actor has been chosen for analysis because there are certain norms concerning the appearance of this group of educators and this group seems to be relatively homogeneous when compared to other teachers.

Approaching the process of decision-making concerning clothing as a form of culture, the authors show that there is a number of communicative, cognitive and social functions that clothes of primary school teachers perform and that these functions are to a great extent common for Estonia and Portugal. Thus, it is possible to talk about transnational social actor of primary school teachers.

A comparative study of the fashion of primary school teachers in Estonia and Portugal and the analysis of the transformation of fashion over a period of 40 years indicates that there is a number common trends in these two countries. The principal finding of this research project is that the norms concerning clothing have been weakening and the formality of the appearance of a teacher has been decreasing during the period studied. This transformation is also accompanied by decrease in social distance between primary school teachers and students. Thus, the authors of the present paper suggest that clothing can be considered not only as a means of non-verbal communication but also as contributor to the formation of social relations.

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I INTRODUCTION

The present comparative study explores the notion of fashion and decision-making concerning clothing among Estonian and Portuguese primary school teachers as a form of culture. The aim of this research project is to identify the basic aspects of this particular cultural form in Estonia and Portugal and ascertain whether it is possible to regard this type of fashion as a transnational form of culture.

First, the form of fashion studied in this paper is analysed in respect to the four basic definitions of culture. Having ascertained that the decision-making concerning clothing can be considered a form of culture, we study the notion of fashion and indicate the importance of clothes in the process of self-expression and self-definition of an individual.

Then, the transformation of the fashion of primary school teachers in Portugal and Estonia over the period of 40 years is discussed in the context of changes in the role of a teacher and in the system of education in general. As the analysis shows, all these aspects are tightly intertwined.

In order to obtain a better insight into the social practice studied, the characteristics of the social actor are closely analysed. Thus, we explore the common knowledge, values and cognitive resources of primary school teachers in respect to clothing. The study of activities and symbolic objects specific to the group of primary school teachers provides us with additional peculiarities of this form of culture and discerns the rationale behind certain choices. Finally, the discussion of the specifics of places and territories shared by teachers provides us with the context necessary for the understanding of this cultural form.

Having identified the specific features of the social actor, the study focuses on the sign system and linguistic culture peculiar to the fashion of primary school teachers. After the description of cultural form is completed, parallels between Estonia and Portugal are drawn and intercultural dimension of this form of fashion is discussed.

The choice of methodology for the present research project is conditioned by the aims of the study. As our objective is, first, to trace the transformations in the norms and understanding of appropriateness of clothes over time and, second,

compare the trends in Portugal and Estonia, we adopt both diachronic and synchronic approaches.

Theoretical material for the study has been taken from books and Internet sources. However, in order to get a deeper insight into the phenomenon studied, we have also interviewed the people who studied at primary school during the period considered here and also talked to teachers themselves. Thus, we managed to obtain the views of both social actors and the cultural “others”.

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II FASHION AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AS CULTURE

The present paper explores one of the social practices of primary school teachers - the process of making decisions concerning clothing, thus, the activity of defining the notion of fashion. As we attempt to look at this practice as a form of culture, it seems necessary to consider the concept of culture as such and examine our topic in relation to it. Dealing with each of the four principal definitions of culture we, first, look at the community of primary school teachers as possessors of a distinct form of culture in general and then we focus on the social practice of making a choice concerning clothing or, in other words, the culture of fashion among primary school teachers.

Firstly, culture can be defined as a **system of knowledge** and **values** shared by a group of people who constitute a social actor (Stockinger 2004). Primary school teachers as a community are aware of their professional goals and share theoretical and practical knowledge concerning the way of encouraging children to develop intellectually and morally. They educate students in terms of specific subjects and moral values, help them become socialised and in many respects serve as role models. Normally, teachers also have skills of taking care of children in the absence of their mothers but at the same time are able to develop in children independence, self-sufficiency and creativity.

In terms of values, the “hierarchy of preferences conditioning preferential choices within a social actor” (ibid.), primary school teachers can also be considered as members of a common form of culture. The majority of pedagogues value highly such concepts as intelligence, diligence, discipline, punctuality, politeness, truthfulness and tolerance, to name but a few. Thus, in respect to the aspect of knowledge and values a community of primary school teachers can be considered a possessor of distinct culture.

Considering the social practice of making decisions concerning clothing, primary school teachers can also be said to share a certain system of knowledge and values. The overwhelming majority of teachers know what the appropriate appearance of a teacher is and what the established norms for clothing are. It is also possible to claim that this community shares a number of values concerning clothing, such as neatness, functionality, certain conservatism, presentability and femininity, for instance.

Secondly, primary school teachers share a number of **cognitive resources**, which they use to meet the needs and problems relevant for this profession. Most teachers, for example, face the paradox that they have to be a friend and an authority for a student at the same time. In other words, to make the practice of teaching as effective as possible, pedagogues need to make this process interesting and enjoyable for children and, to a certain extent, become a friend/ game-partner for them. On the other hand, a teacher cannot succeed in educating if she or he is not considered authoritative by students: if children do not respect, trust their teacher and do not consider it absolute necessity to complete all assignments in time. So, in order to succeed, teachers need to use a variety of strategies that help them establish adequate distance between themselves and their students. One of the components of these strategies is the choice of clothing, the specifics of which will be analysed closely further in this paper.

Thirdly, a culture can be seen as “**symbolic capital**” (Bourdieu cited by Stockinger 2004) and the possession of this “asset” provides a person with a certain position in the hierarchy existing within a particular social field. Inside the community of primary school teachers, it is also possible to observe the existence of a hierarchical system, or even several of them. On the one hand, the hierarchical place of a teacher is determined in terms of her or his competence in teaching, effectiveness in educating children and ability to obtain and retain the status of authority. On the other hand, the hierarchical position of a teacher is perceived in respect to her or his ability to communicate with students and popularity with them. So, there are different sets of competences that exist within the social space of primary school teachers and possession of these competences determines their position in various systems of hierarchy within different social fields.

The competence in respect to the choice of adequate clothes determines a person’s position in the social hierarchy as well. Although it must be admitted that appearance, and clothing in particular, is not the most important factor in respect to the judgements about teachers and their professional competence, the choices concerning clothing still influence the perception of a person. From the perspective of colleagues and students’ parents, for example, a teacher who is conservative in style would be considered to stand higher in the professional hierarchy than the one preferring explicitly innovative style. It should be mentioned, nevertheless, that

the excessively conservative appearance is not usually considered positive either, as ignoring of fashion may imply general insensitivity to changes and, as a consequence, old-fashionness in the field of educating children. Thus, what constitutes symbolic capital in respect to the appearance of primary school teachers is the ability to balance between the style that conveys authority and professionalism and the one reflecting individuality, friendliness and awareness of modern trends.

Finally, culture can be considered as a **historical form** that evolves and transforms over time. Some features of a cultural form persist and shape new representatives of a social actor and their practices. At the same time, social actor as well as social context in general, modify culture and bring new features into it. Broadly speaking, the objectives and norms for the social actor of primary school teachers have evolved over time. For instance, teachers still must educate children, but now a tendency can be noticed towards placing emphasis not exclusively on instruction but also on development of creativity in children. As one more example of the historical transformation in the culture of primary school teachers, the changes in the power distance between teachers and students can be mentioned. While formerly, there used to be a considerable distance between them, which served as a sign of a pedagogue's authority, by now this distance has been reduced due to the general changes in society.

The notion of fashion among primary school teachers has also been transforming all over the life span of this profession. While a teacher is still supposed to convey an image of authority, the way of achieving this aim has changed. Some decades ago, for example, the professionalism of a teacher could be conveyed through the use of uniform. By now, when individualism and uniqueness of every person are valued more highly and when profit-driven fashion industries encourage consumerism through offering and promoting a great variety of clothes, uniform is not actual any longer and teachers are expected to express their individuality and preferences through the choice of clothes.

The examination of the community of primary school teachers and their practices in relation to the four principal definitions of culture indicates that it is possible to look at this group of people as a social actor and that their decision-making concerning fashion can be considered a form of culture.

III THE NOTION OF FASHION

Fashion can be defined in a great variety of ways. The *WordNet Dictionary*, for example, considers fashion as “the latest and most admired style in clothes and cosmetics and behaviour”. Fashion can also be understood as a body technique, which articulates certain aspects of the language, gestures and disciplines of the body in its habitus. It cannot be understood out of context. What we wear, how we wear it and why we wear it, depends on time and place. In any case, a great number of researchers agree that fashion is “a fascinating study for anyone interested in 'Culture'” (*Fashion, Clothing & Identity*).

The most powerful force in the history of dress and fashion was the desire to survive. King or peasant, millionaire or beggar, high priest or atheist, slave-girl or liberated woman, they all wanted security, for themselves and for their families. They wanted to prevent any threat to that security and used clothes for that purpose.

Analysing the dynamics and norms of fashion in different cultures it is possible to conclude that in the countries where the social order was more static, dress remained more static as well. Norms and traditions have changed greatly in the globalised world, but techniques of dress and decoration in non-western cultures are distinguished from fashion. They are regarded as traditional reflections of social hierarchies, beliefs and customs. Non-western dress in many cases embodies meanings of spirituality, religiosity and fertility while also encoding power relations. Occasionally, dress is also acknowledged as a form of art with aesthetic meanings. The integrity of non-western techniques of dress and decoration was demonstrated in countless instances of colonization.

For centuries fashion has been one of the primary expressions of Western culture in the East and Eastern culture in the West. Again and again, China, Japan, India, Southeast Asia and the Islamic world have provided ideas for Western dress by creating textiles, offering new silhouettes and envisioning alternative domestic interiors and lives. These stylistic influences were facilitated by trade in the 17th century; major textile imports in the 18th century; colonialism, trade, world fairs, travel, and exotic tastes of the 19th century; and global exchange in the 20th century.

While western fashion may be represented in terms of imperialistic intentions to take over the world of clothes, and thereby extinguish other systems, many non-western cultures have shown remarkable resilience and integrity at retaining other dress codes, modifying indigenous codes and developing their own version of "western" fashion. Clothes became a weapon in the struggle between colonisers and colonised. First, the colonizers used clothes to impose the authority of "western" ways; later, local people used indigenous clothes to resist that imposition.

In Algeria, for example, the forcible unveiling of women by the French during the Algerian war became a metaphor for the rape of Algerian society. Subsequently, the veil thus became the sign of unified Algerian identity and the focus of Algerian resistances to resist that imposition.

In Islamic cultures, more generally, the veil has become a key element of moves to re-impose or strengthen Islamic states and undermine western influences. Although traditionally, the veil has religious connotations, the new veil is said to have more complex associations. Veiling meets the conflicting demands of contemporary middle-class women, caught between traditional expectations and actual living conditions. In a study of the new veiling in Cairo in 1992, McLeod concluded that it was a practical technique of resolving the dilemma of travelling and working outside the home with the rhetoric of domesticity and femininity. Rather than seeing the veil as a threat of their independence, women regarded it as an achievement of women who have successfully combined marriage, family harmony and outside employment. As such, the new veil is both an act of protest and of accommodation. It has become a body technique intricately linked to wider political and cultural struggles.

Other non-western cultures engage in their own version of fashion behaviour incorporating elements from western fashion to rework their own body techniques. A study of female politicians in Korea (Soh, 1992), for instance, showed that Korean women have developed a unique system of dress. Depending on the occasion, they adopt one of three dress codes: the *hanbok* (traditional skirt and dress jacket), a western-style woman's business suit or a western-style men's suit. Some wear the *hanbok* for official occasions and western clothes at other time.

In some non-western cultures, there is an investment in maintaining the distinctness of non-western fashion systems because western fashion is often associated with undesirable social practices that other cultures may not wish to emulate. In Bengal, for example, distance from western fashion is maintained by not coining a Bengali word for the phenomenon: there are no Bengali words to translate “fashion” and “style”. This absence of an indigenous term suggests that non-western cultures distinguish their behaviour as unique and different.

In the study of Bengali sari, Nag (1991) explored how the sari - previously associated with traditional customs- has been given a new lease of the life as a fashionable garment. Indian designers have created modifications of the sari such as nouvelle sari, and these versions are sold as fashion, featuring new designs, fabrics and colours geared towards new consumer groups and their lifestyles.

Clearly, different fashion systems compete and interact in the production of various fusions. These and many other examples suggest that techniques of dress and decoration are crucial to assertions and reformations of identity (*Fashion, Clothing & Identity*).

Fashion can be considered a language, a nonverbal system of communication that through its symbols conveys much about the wearer to the viewer. Before people speak to one another, their clothing makes a statement that expresses their sex, age, class, occupation, origin and personality, as well as what they are or what they want to be at a particular moment.

The cut, colour, texture of clothes as well as the context in which they are worn, convey certain messages about the wearer. Considering gender-bending in fashion, for example, Davis (1992) points out that when women wear men’s clothing or even “masculine” textures (such as leather, latex, coarse and heavy wool) they also implicitly bend gender signals; and when they mix masculine textures with feminine ones (e.g. lace beneath latex; chiffon and leather; silk and thick tweed; tulle and bone; satin and rubber, etc.) they become androgynous. The textures particularly predominant in the XX century can also be associated with masculine power and with a phallic symbol (Ian 1993) and fetishisation.

Stating that fashion has its own language, Lurie (1981) considers the varied manifestations of fashion - from uniforms to magical garments - and their varied wearers - from Wilde to Mann's Tazio. Using clothing as a sign system, she

decodes its relation to sexuality, presenting some examples of the language of fashion:

Beard (Early to Mid-Victorian): Associated with war; respectable; paternal; wise
(Late Victorian): Old Geezer

Crinoline (for women): Bulky respectability; moral weightiness (hues must be muted and non-reflective greyish tones; i.e., Lucy Snowe's shocking pink dress in *Vilette*)

Heavy, Coarse Wool: Moral weight; natural virtue; respectability

Light-Weight Shantung: Sentimental, thin-skinned

Stiff Lace Bosoms, Tight Lace Fichus: Queen-like; Romantic waif grown up

Stiff and Sparse Ruffles, Trimmings, Bows: Moral matron

Silk: Foreign word; if heavy and dark, respectable

Bulky, Fringed Shawls: Seemly, queenly drapery

Clothes are generally believed to communicate information about the wearer and “to constitute external manifestations of the internal properties of the wearer” (Claik 1996 cited by Johnson and Lennon 127: 1999). Nevertheless, clothes are also used sometimes to define and redefine the self in an attempt to influence or shape the situation of interaction. So, dress can identify its wearer with a social group or role that the individual wants to emulate. In broader sense, clothes can produce and reproduce certain social and cultural groups along with their positions and relative power (Barnard 1996: 36). This statement can be supported by the example of the significance of jeans for teenagers, a suit for a businessman, the uniform for the militaries, white clothes for the nurses or uniform/casual clothes for teachers.

The thesis of the present paper is that clothing is an important component in the work process of a primary school teacher, it conveys certain messages about the teacher as a professional and as a person and contributes to the formation of her or his image among students and other target groups (mainly colleagues and students' parents). Proceeding from the definition of fashion as “a popular style of clothes, hair, etc. at a particular time or place” (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* 2000: 459), below, we consider the transformation of fashion

among primary school teachers in Estonia and Portugal over the period of 40 years and analyse this particular instance of fashion as a cultural form.

IV ROLE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER IN THE LAST 40 YEARS

Estonia

In Estonia, children go to the primary school (which is always “mixed”, i.e. boys and girls study together) at the age of six or seven and stay there until the age of ten or eleven. During these four years, almost all the subjects are taught by the same teacher, except for foreign languages, music and sometimes physical training. Thus, during the initial years at school children mainly communicate with just one person, who for them becomes the prototype of a teacher – the one who knows much (or, as some children think, who knows everything) and whose example they should follow.

It should also be mentioned here that in Estonia, primary school teachers are exclusively females. As in a classical patriarchal society, in Estonia, it is female duty to take care of children awhile men are supposed only to work and earn money for the family. As the job of primary school teacher involves work with children and demands ability to take care of them, it is unofficially considered female profession and there are no male primary school teachers, although there are male teachers in secondary school and university.

One more reason for men to opt out of this profession is that teaching of basics is considered not serious enough and as in our society males are supposed to perform “serious” and challenging tasks, this profession is not considered suitable for them. It should also be noted that the salary of a teacher is relatively small. A man, however, must be the “breadwinner” for his family; therefore, he has to have a job that makes it possible for the family to subsist.

According to Alevtina Zagura (2004), about 40 years ago, a teacher had much authority in Estonia and was highly respected. At that time, few people had higher education – it was enough to have professional training in order to get a good job and earn well. The salaries of those with higher education were smaller but, nevertheless, these people were respected and were called “intelligentsia”. As to become a teacher it was also necessary to obtain the higher education, teachers were considered somehow different from the “ordinary” people and even a young teacher was highly respected by students and their parents. Nobody dared to argue with a teacher because (s)he was an educated person and,

therefore, knew better what was right and what was wrong. Quite often people came to a teacher to get a piece of advice and, thus, (s)he also performed the role similar to that of a priest or, in modern terms, psychologist.

As a result of all these circumstances, there was quite a large distance between a primary school teacher and a student. This distance was also maintained by means of clothing. A primary school teacher (who was always a woman), was highly feminine: she was always wearing a long skirt or a dress and had a long hair always done in a sophisticated hairdo. The style of her clothes was more official and presentable than that of “ordinary” people: she was wearing one-colour dresses, suits (a skirt and a jacket of the same colour) or just a skirt with a blouse. The clothes were usually dark (black, brown, grey, dark blue or green) with bright colours usually avoided. A teacher was also wearing shoes with a medium heel – the footwear that was usually worn by “ordinary” people at the weekend or on festive occasions. Thus, teachers had at that time a distinctive style and they were visually different from other people.

The situation had changed in about 20 years, by the time our generation went to school. Higher education became more widespread and, as a result, a teacher became less “extraordinary” phenomenon and communicated with the parents of her/his students on more or less equal terms. As the attitudes of parents have influence on the behaviour of their children, the distance between my contemporaries and a teacher became smaller than during the school years of my parents, although we still respected a teacher and considered her an intelligent person. It should also be noted that while about 40 years ago nobody dared to say that a teacher was wrong and argue with her, in our years at primary school it was possible for students to disagree with a teacher and state it out loud.

The clothing of primary school teachers changed as well. Partly due to the greater variety of clothes sold in shops, the fashion of primary school teachers became less uniform and more casual. Official one-colour suits were usually worn on festive occasions. On the everyday basis, however, teachers were wearing dresses/ skirts and blouses of brighter colours, with a variety of patterns and of less “reserved” fabrics (nylon, silk, cotton instead of tweed, wool etc.). Shoes with a medium heel were not a must any longer and the main issue was comfort. Long hair and sophisticated hairdos became less fashionable too and many teachers opted for haircuts which allowed them to get ready for the workday in less time.

What is remarkable, however, teachers still had to bear an image of femininity and trousers were considered inappropriate for this profession.

The position of a primary school teacher is even more different nowadays. This profession is not considered prestigious any longer and many people tend to think that school teachers are those who lack abilities and/ or ambitions to do something more prestigious and well-paid. As the result of this attitude and lack of traditional respect, some children do not consider teachers to be authorities any longer and are less willing to follow all their directives. Even though such an attitude is the case in a certain number (not a majority) of cases, there is a clear tendency among children to consider a primary school teacher an older friend, not an absolute and distant authority and a role model any longer.

Although there is a noticeable movement towards more casual style in Estonian society, informal clothes are not as widespread among primary school teachers as one might expect them to be. In fact, an attempt is being made to sustain the traditional position of a teacher and one of the means for doing this is the code of clothing. While before, there were few explicit rules concerning the appearance of a primary school teacher (Baum-Valgma 2004), now these norms have become a part of the curriculum of the Teacher Training Programme and pedagogues-to-be are instructed in terms of clothing within the framework of the course in didactics of primary education (Rogova 2004). It is explicitly stated now, for example, that a teacher should avoid short and body-hugging garments, excessive skin exposure is forbidden, shoes should be closed and comfortable and it is advised not to wear eye-catching jewellery as it draws attention away from the topics discussed (*ibid.*). Although now it is considered normal for a teacher to wear trousers, jeans are still a controversial issue and debate is going on whether it is appropriate for a teacher to wear denim. The basic requirement for appearance of a primary school teacher is, as it also was 40 years ago, neatness, presentability and good taste.

To sum it up, the position as well as the fashion of primary school teachers has changed over the last 40 years. The power distance between a teacher and a student has become considerably smaller. These days, a teacher is not an unquestionable authority and a role model any longer but, rather, an older friend, an educated and intelligent person whose instructions and advice should be taken into account but they can also be negotiated and changed. The clothing of

teachers has become less formal and reserved, more individuality and personal taste can be expressed through clothing. Nevertheless, certain norms still persist and they are supposed to contribute to the image of a teacher as an intelligent, decent and neat person.

Portugal

In Portugal, primary school teacher has a long history. Here, however, we concentrate on the period of last 40. Until the seventies, there was a highly autocratic political regime in Portugal and the manifestations and consequences of it could also be seen inside the classroom.

According to António Rosa (2004), children started primary school at the age of seven and studied there for only four years. At that time, four years was the obligatory schooling, but if the children did not go the school, parents were not punished for that. If children wanted to continue their studies, they had to go to the nearest cities and attend a high school (called “lycée” at that time) there.

During these four years, for the most of the time, children were taught by only one teacher. Classes were not mixed, that is, girls and boys were taught separately. So, male teachers taught boys and female teachers - girls.

As Alda Tarata (2004) points out, teachers of both sexes were extremely strict and rigid with their students. There was only a professional relationship between a teacher and a student and power distance was great. Teacher's objective was exclusively to teach. So, when students did not know some subject in the class, a teacher had an official right to punish them both psychologically and physically.

The distance between a teacher and a student was also evident in clothes. Male teachers were usually wearing a dark suit and a black hat; female teachers were dressed in a dark suit too (the only difference is that it consisted of a jacket and a skirt, not trousers), used a very formal hairstyle and sometimes also used a hat. Students addressed the teacher using his/her first name adding Mr. or Miss (e.g. “Sr. Eliseu” for Mr. Eliseu and “Dona Maria” for Miss Maria).

Teachers were considered very important people basically in small places like villages. Similarly to a priest and a doctor, they also had a part of the power decision in the City Hall.

After the seventies, with the changes in the politics of the country, the image and behaviour of a teacher changed as well. Classes began to be a mixed and the relationship between a teacher and students became closer. It is also remarkable that a teacher was predominantly female now.

The fashion of clothes became more informal and most of teachers used to dress in a white overall to cover their own clothes. Students used white overalls as well. Nevertheless, students still addressed a teacher “Miss/Mr professor so-and-so”.

Nowadays, according to a primary school teacher Margarida Mendonça (2004), the atmosphere in a primary school is completely informal. Teachers are wearing informal clothes. Neither teachers nor students use overalls to cover their clothes any longer. There are no regulations by the Ministry of Education in relation to the clothes of teachers.

Now, students address the teacher as “you” (“tu” in the “tu/ vous” distinction) and only his/her first name. In addition to being an educator, a teacher is also an advisor and a friend. Quite often, (s)he also performs the tasks that parents are supposed to do but do not have time to.

V PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AS A SOCIAL ACTOR

As it has already been mentioned above, the present paper focuses on a social practice – the choice of appropriate clothes and definition of fashion by primary school teachers. It seems necessary, however, to take a look at the social actor, the persons who participate in this social practice, as well, because the study of a cultural form requires characterisation of both the dimensions of it: social practice and social actor.

The process of defining the fashion for primary school teachers involves a variety of social actors, such as fashion designers, officials of the Ministry of Education, administration of the school, institutions where teachers are trained and of course, the teachers themselves. In this work we focus on the main type of social actors - primary school teachers. Analysing the peculiarities of this social actor in Estonia and Portugal, we describe this group of people in respect to common knowledge, values and cognitive resources; proceed with their specific activities and symbolic objects and, finally, talk about the places and territories shared by teachers.

Common knowledge and value systems

Estonia

All primary school teachers share a common activity – teaching children. They might use different techniques and strategies for doing this but it is still possible to list some aspects of knowledge that all of them seem to share.

Primary school teachers understand that, especially during their first year at school, it is hard for children to get socialised in this relatively official environment. It is difficult for little students not to move around and not to play during a long period of time (a lesson in Estonia usually lasts for 45 minutes), to be quiet, serious, disciplined, listen to the teacher and talk only when they are allowed to. To make this transition easier and less stressful, teachers from time to time assume the role of mother/ nanny. Nevertheless, most of the time they stick to the image different from that of a caring person because the use of formality facilitates for children the process of getting used to the difference between public and

private context and makes it easier to master the norms that they should follow in the public setting.

Primary school teachers as a social actor share the general knowledge that it is necessary to be relatively strict and serious in order to maintain discipline in the classroom. This also contributes to the image of self-confidence and competence, which is extremely necessary because children need a person whom they can respect and trust and who can answer almost all their questions.

All this knowledge is complemented by the competence concerning clothing. Understanding the necessity of emphasising that school is an institutional setting, teachers select the clothes that are appropriate for this context and that contribute to her professional image. All the primary school teachers in Estonia know that, for instance, they should de-emphasise sexuality by avoiding excessive skin exposure and body-hugging garments. They also opt out of wearing casual clothes in order to conform to the atmosphere of a public institution.

Teachers are aware of the norms and traditions of their society (also those concerning clothing) and make every effort to follow them because they know that students tend to copy teachers and a pedagogue should perform the tasks of being a role model with full responsibility.

Talking about values – the beliefs about what is right/ wrong and important in life (OALD 2000: 1435) – it is possible to say that in fashion, primary school teachers as a social actor appreciate professional look and neatness. The latter is especially important because schoolchildren are constantly taught that their clothes should be clean and in order. As a teacher is supposed to serve as an example of appropriate behaviour, she should be especially meticulous in respect to appearance.

The important aspect of clothing for primary school teachers is also comfort. It is relevant, first, because small children require much attention. A teacher must, therefore, focus on the process of teaching and cannot be disturbed by other issues, such as uncomfortable clothes, for instance. Second, working with children, one has to move much. As Olga Rogova (2004), a young teacher, has pointed out, “One never knows what she will have to do today: jump from a table to table or climb a tree”. Thus, it is always better to be wearing comfortable stretch clothes (homepage of ENCEC) that allow free movement.

The value that is especially relevant for Estonian teachers is functionality. As the salary of a teacher is small, it is good to have easily combinable clothes and interesting small accessories (e.g. scarves, belts, modest jewellery etc.) that would make it possible to look always different and fashionable with little spending.

One more characteristic feature of primary school teachers in Estonia is that they avoid excessive fashionability. The reason for this is, first, that such clothes will be out of fashion very soon. Second, too fashionable employee is often considered unreliable (Johnson 1999: 62) – (s)he spends too much time and money on appearance rather than on work and self-development. Last but not the least, by avoiding excessive fashionability, a teacher discourages consumerism in students and shows that one's ideas and individuality are more important than "cool" look.

Portugal

Portuguese primary school teachers, like those in Estonia, also value highly such concepts as intelligence, diligence, discipline, punctuality, politeness, truthfulness and tolerance. So, in respect to knowledge and values, the community of primary school teachers can be considered a possessor of a distinct culture.

In addition to being a teacher, every such person is also a human being with his/ her own knowledge and value systems. Teachers can transmit to their students some of their knowledge and values also through their clothes, through their own distinct fashion. As teachers should serve as role model to their students, they have to choose the clothes adequate to the situation.

Before the seventies, a teacher in Portugal was the symbol of intelligence (Alda Tarata, 2004). Most of people did not have an opportunity to study in a high school or a university; so, primary school was the only opportunity to learn something. A primary school teacher was for children not only the source of knowledge but also that of cultural norms and traditions. Therefore, teachers had to introduce the norms of the public sphere. They did so also through the use of clothes, which were very formal and served as a symbol of teacher's power, authority and distance between the teacher and children. As teachers knew that their image was as a reference for children, they tried to be as professional as possible and to transmit as much of information necessary for children's future life as possible.

Starting with the seventies, with democratic governmental policy and free access to information, primary school teacher is not any longer the only source of information about society, so, now, (s)he can also be a friend. A primary school teacher still continues to be a person with a lot of knowledge and a model for children but (s)he is also an elder friend for them. The relationship between them is now closer than it used to be. The clothes that they use – practical and informal- also show it.

Cognitive resources

Estonia

Primary school teachers in Estonia share a number of cognitive resources – strategies for achieving goals and meeting needs relevant for the social actor (Stockinger 2004).

To maintain discipline and make the process of teaching more effective, it is necessary sometimes to convey authority and power. This goal can also be achieved by means of various strategies involving clothes. The image of power, for instance, can be created by the use of dark colours, such as black and blue (Johnson 1999: 63; homepage of ENCEC) and use of medium or high heels (Johnson 1999: 71). Classical style in clothes also contributes to the aura of authority. These strategies are especially popular among young teachers, who are in the process of assuming the new role, because such clothing symbols project professional image and provide the sense of “personal competence and empowerment” (Johnson 1999: 63) thus making it easier to perform the new role. It is remarkable that more experienced teachers can often relax from such techniques as they feel confident enough even without them. Thus, people can establish social relations through their personal characteristics or, when they lack the necessary ones, they can also use clothes as a means of establishing for themselves positions of relative power (Barnard 1996: 36).

Colours alone can also be used strategically. On the one hand, they should help a teacher be noticeable, different from the background. On the other hand, they should not draw students’ attention away from the content of the lesson (it is hard for children to focus on several things at once, so they choose just one (homepage of ENCEC)). So, primary school teachers avoid grey clothes (they are

too dull) and prefer cheerful colourful clothes, but not too bright. On festive occasions and at the end of the quarter (a period of studying lasting for two months; a school year consists of four quarters), when children are tired of studying, some teachers wear brighter clothes to create good mood.

By following modern trends in fashion, teachers can signal their innovativeness and sensitivity to changes and that not only in the field of clothes but also concerning teaching. Excessive conservatism and ignorance of fashion, on the contrary, can serve as signs of overall old-fashionness.

One of the aims of teachers is also to encourage creativity and sense of uniqueness in children. Applying creativity in designing their appearance, teachers can motivate children to express their individuality in a number of ways, through clothes in particular.

Portugal

In Portugal, like in Estonia, primary school teachers have some strategies/cognitive resources to share according to their challenges. Depending on a situation, a primary school teacher has to be more or less authoritative, directive and friendly and this kind of behaviour transmitted is very influenced by the clothes that the teacher is wearing.

Until the seventies, a teacher had to transmit authority, power and distance to the children and to the society in general. So, a teacher used to dress very formal dark clothes.

Around the seventies, when the governmental policy was beginning to be more flexible, primary school teachers also began to be more flexible and that was reflected in their clothes, which became more casual. Although clothes began to be more informal, a teacher used to dress a white overall to impose a "wall", a difference between a teacher and a student.

Nowadays, primary school teachers have to try to manage different kinds of situations. When classes are much destabilized, teachers tend to be more formal in their fashion to instil authority. When classes are more flexible, teachers instil to be also more informal and transmit more of their individuality.

Specific activities

Estonia

The basic activities that are involved in the process of the decision-making concerning clothing among primary school teachers can be listed in the following order. First of all, teachers familiarise themselves with latest trends in fashion as presented in the media and also look what is sold in shops and worn by other teachers. Then, they buy the clothes that they like most and wear them. If they feel comfortable and confident in these clothes, they continue using them. With time, articles of clothing can be modified through addition of new elements and details. Clothes are worn until they no longer seem relevant and appropriate for the context.

Symbolic objects

Estonia

There is a number of objects that are in Estonian society traditionally associated with teachers and some of them have with time acquired certain fixed meanings. The most obvious attributes of a teacher are, certainly, textbooks and exercise books. Textbooks are seen as sources of knowledge where material is systematically presented and are “deciphered” by the teacher. In exercise books, the results of the work of students can be seen and children’s progress is evaluated by the teacher.

Another object typical of teachers is a class register. It is a symbol of power as a teacher assesses students and writes the marks in the class register. Pointer – a thin stick approximately 40 cm in length – can also be considered a sign of power as it can be used not only for indicating things on a map or a picture but also for punishing misbehaving students.

Many people also associate with a teacher a piece of chalk. Although now more modern means of writing are being introduced, chalk and blackboard are still used in the majority of schools in Estonia and constitute an inalienable part of a learning process.

The most popular object associated with a teacher is glasses. They are universally perceived as a symbol of intelligence (the result of reading much) and authority. This meaning has become so strong that some people even wear glasses with ordinary lenses just to look more competent.

Territory of the social actor

Estonia

In Estonia, schools usually have a special section where students of primary school are instructed. Every primary school teacher has a classroom of her own where she conducts all the lessons. So, during the first four years at school, children usually study all subjects at the same classroom; the exception is the classes of music and physical training, for which there are special rooms.

The territory of the classroom can be divided into two parts – the one occupied by students and the other by a teacher. A teacher occupies a position in front of students, facing them; so that it is possible to notice the dichotomy teacher/ students. Blackboard is usually situated on the wall behind the teacher. So, in order to write something on the blackboard, a student has to go to the “teacher’s” territory.

It is interesting that, traditionally, there was a dais – a kind of stage of about 20 cm in height – in front of the blackboard and the teacher’s table was placed on it or just in front of it. Thus, power distance and teacher’s authority were also symbolically emphasised. This dais, however, can now be seen only in older schools, those constructed more than 30 years ago. As distance between a teacher and students has become smaller, such a symbol of power is considered unnecessary nowadays. Nevertheless, the difference in status can still be noticed. Looking at tables in the classroom, for example, one can see that students usually sit in pairs, sharing a table. A teacher, by contrast, has a table of her own and it is higher and larger than those of students.

Portugal

Typical activities, symbolic objects and places shared by this actor

The most typical activity of a primary school teacher is, certainly, teaching children at school. Therefore, school is the principal place shared by this group of actors. Usually each teacher has their own classroom, where (s)he conducts all the lessons.

In the primary school, a teacher has to undertake different kinds of activities with children, so (s)he has to dress appropriately for the situation. Before the

seventies, primary school activities in Portugal took place exclusively inside a classroom; so, teachers were always dressed the same way: very formally. Their teaching activities were writing on the blackboard or teaching children in their seats. However, to protect clothes and not to smear them with chalk, when writing on the blackboard, teachers used to put on a pair of sleeves over their own clothes.

Students used to seat in individual seats and in the single files, some in the classroom and the teacher used to sit in an individual seat as well but near the blackboard and in front of the students. A teacher's place was usually over a podium of about 20 cm in height.

Quite often a teacher was wearing a pair of small round glasses at the end of the nose; it was done not only to see better but also to acquire a certain authoritative style. A typical attribute of Portuguese teachers, like also of Estonian ones, was a pointer, which was used for indicating something on the blackboard or for punishing students for their mistakes.

After the seventies, as the school system in Portugal changed, the typical model of teaching changed as well. The process of teaching became more dynamic and some classes began to be conducted outside the classroom. So, teachers had to start to adapt their clothes to the kind of classes they were teaching. If they were teaching inside a classroom, they used to wear a white overall to protect their clothes. If the classes were conducted outside, teachers did not have the overall and dressed a comfortable and casual kind of shoes to walk with children.

Nowadays, as the model of teaching has become very informal, teachers are very informal too. They no longer use overalls and protection sleeves; glasses are not worn only as a form of fashion either – now, teachers use glasses only if they really need them. Nevertheless, many teachers are still wearing glasses because this profession requires reading much and, therefore, the eyesight becomes worse. Also a lot of teachers nowadays use a course ring, the stone of which is **dark green**).

The seats of students are situated around the classroom in the form of “U”. A teacher now sits closer to students, almost among them, and not on a dais any longer.

Teachers are wearing the clothes that are appropriate for the classes they teach: if they teach gymnastics, they are wearing a track suit; if they teach swimming, they also dress themselves in a swimming suit; if they teach outside, they are dressed in casual clothes and the same if they teach inside the classroom. With their clothes, teachers can also transmit their feelings and personality, which has important influence on children in their education.

VI SIGN SYSTEM

The sign system of appearance of a person or, in particular, her/ his clothing can be used for communication with other people. Below, we give some examples of how primary school teachers use object sign system, where items of clothing serve as signs, for three kinds of purposes: demarcation of territory, communication and exchange of information and expression of identity.

Estonia

Firstly, primary school teachers clearly use clothes to convey their perception of the territory where they are present at a particular moment. Conducting a lesson in a classroom, for example, a teacher is wearing the clothes that are different from those that she wears at home. By wearing classical and relatively formal dress or a skirt/ trousers, a blouse and a cardigan/ jacket she emphasises that classroom is a public, professional setting where everyone should be conscious of their role and follow official norms of conduct.

The clothes of a primary school teacher, however, can be brighter than those of her colleagues working in a secondary school. Thus, a brighter colour of clothes indicates that a pedagogue works in a primary school, with younger students.

On festive occasions, a teacher chooses more formal garments of “reserved” colours (the classical outfit is a dark skirt and a white blouse) thus establishing the atmosphere different from that of lessons. Clothes also help create more informal atmosphere during class exclusions, when teachers can wear casual clothes and jeans and thus visually become closer to children, assuming the role of an older friend.

Secondly, clothes can be used for communication and exchange of information. Holiday-like outfit can signal that the day is somehow different from others – it can be teacher’s birthday, for example. More formal clothes may imply that there will be an “open” lesson– the one visited by a representative of school administration. A warm jumper and a scarf worn around the neck can signal that the teacher feels cold, maybe she is getting ill and it is better for students behave well and not bother her.

Thirdly, clothes always communicate something about the wearer as a person and constitute “external manifestations of [his/ her] internal properties” (Johnson 1999: 127) or the image (s)he wants to assume. For example, the teacher who is always wearing a skirt, thus avoiding trousers, can be characterised as feminine, to some extent traditional, maybe even mother-like. The woman accepting trousers can be said to be more progressive, active and appreciating comfort. If a primary school teacher likes clothes of a variety of colours (not just black, grey, dark blue or green), especially brighter ones, she is probably a cheerful and optimistic person. The one who often uses various scarves, brooches and necklaces, is usually a creative and artistic individual.

Even the few examples given above indicate that clothes have a great potential of conveying messages and teachers masterfully use them to communicate with students and other people. The only problem with such sign system is that objects do not have single fixed meanings and can result in ambiguity.

Portugal

In Portugal, the prototypical image of a teacher still continues to exist, although, nowadays, not all primary school teachers conform to that image. As we still have a prototypical “imaginary” idea of a primary school teacher, quite often we can identify in a first contact a person as a primary school teacher because of his/ her appearance.

Frequently primary school teachers have a “childish” appearance: use to dress clothes more “young” than they are supposed to dress. For example, sometimes they use tennis and some kind of trousers or skirt that girls use to wear. They also use often the same textures/ fabrics that children use in their clothes; primary school teachers also prefer bright colours.

A similar situation is with the hairstyle. It is not unusual for a female teacher to use a hairstyle like that of a student girl: hair hooks or hair tapes to catch the hair in different styles. This situation, however, is more frequent for younger teachers than for older ones. At the meetings with parents, however, the dress of teachers is frequently more formal.

Glasses are traditionally associated with primary school teachers. When a person begins to use glasses, people frequently say that s(he) looks like a primary school teacher.

Nevertheless, each teacher is a person and has his/ her own individuality and fashion style. They have a double communication: they communicate verbally and non-verbally. They also serve as a model for children, so their fashion style is also an education model for children.

VII THE LANGUAGE CULTURE PECULIAR TO PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

Primary school teachers have a linguistic culture of their own. Even if they do not share the same natural language (in our case, Portugal, Estonian or Russian), their speech style has some common characteristics. Primary school teachers tend to use grammatically correct literary language without any slang elements. At the same time, they avoid complicated words, so that students would easily understand them, and also speak quite slowly and clearly.

Analysing the culture of fashion among primary school teachers, however, it seems more useful to focus not on the features of natural language but, rather, on the “language” of clothes. As it has already been mentioned above, clothes can serve as signs communicating information about the wearer and his/ her social context. Together, these signs constitute a non-verbal system, which can also be called a language.

As the messages that can be transmitted with the help of clothes have already been discussed above, it seems unnecessary for us to focus on this aspect of the linguistic culture of clothes. Instead, we discuss this language culture using socio-linguistic competence approach and analyse it in terms of multilingualism and diglossia.

Language culture can be understood as socio-linguistic competence (Stockinger 2004) or, in other words, as the ability of the members of a social actor to use appropriate language/ register/ linguistic formulae in a number of contexts. Thus, primary school teachers generally know which clothes it is better to wear during an ordinary workday at school, which ones are suitable for festivities, physical training lessons or class excursions.

The sets of clothes associated with different contexts can also be approached as different registers or even specialised languages. So, in this sense, a primary school teacher has to be truly multilingual: (s)he has to be able to choose the right “language” for every context. On the 1st September (the beginning of the school year in Estonia), for example, an Estonian teacher should be wearing a classical suit (jacket and skirt/ trousers) or a dark skirt and a light blouse; at the class excursion – casual clothes, and not vice versa.

According to Charles Ferguson (1959, cited by Stockinger), some communities can be diglossic, i.e. they possess a prestigious High variety Language and a Low variety Language that does not have formal or “official” status. Diglossia results into the emergence of distinct roles that these two varieties perform. It should be noted, however, that one cannot opt out of using one of the varieties: High and Low variety Languages form a complementary distribution (Stockinger 2004) and there are certain functions that only one of them can perform while the use of other variety signals lack of socio-cultural competence.

In the culture of fashion among primary school teachers, it is also possible to notice presence of diglossia. The “High variety Language” can be said to be constituted by classical clothes, the ones traditionally worn by teachers, such as “strict” suits of dark colours made of tweed, wool or other “thick” and “prestigious” fabrics; or, as it is in the case of Portugal, white overalls serving as a kind of uniform. These clothes are considered formal, proper and prestigious as they are associated with a long tradition and experience. The less conservative, casual clothes form the “Low variety Language”. These are usually worn by younger or more progressive/ modern teachers who decide to assume the role of a “teacher-friend” rather than traditional “teacher-authority”. Although children usually value more the language and the role identified here as “Low variety”, we still consider the formal style as “High variety” because prestige is often determined by the power distance and degree of authority. Once again, it should be noted that teachers are usually “bilingual”– they are able to switch to the “language” of clothes appropriate for the given context.

VIII INTERCULTURAL DIMENSION IN THE FASHION OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

Cultural “other”

Any culture is surrounded by a great number of other cultures. Representatives of any culture tend to compare themselves with cultural “others” and perceive all the differences proceeding from their own knowledge, norms and values. The process of thus interpreting other cultures can be called cultural translation.

It is possible to identify a great number of social actors that are in some way different from the group of primary school teachers or can even be opposed to them. In the present paper, however, we focus on the cultural “others” that are linked to everyday experiences of primary school teachers or with whom they are most often compared.

The social actor analysed in this paper - primary school teacher – communicates most often with students, who constitute the principal cultural “other” for him/her. As students are just starting to get education, they know little and teachers – the people who value education highly – see it as a “gap” that has to be “filled” effectively with knowledge. The same with clothes, as children are active and move much, their clothes are sometimes out of order or even dirty. It seems unacceptable for teachers who value and also are supposed to promote neatness and discipline. For this reason, students may consider teachers unreasonably strict, demanding and unable to understand their needs. Nevertheless, most students follow the instructions of teachers and, eventually, they get socialised in the “public life” with all its norms.

The parents of children can also be seen as cultural “other” of teachers. This group is, certainly, more heterogeneous and its members come from different backgrounds and professions; the only common feature for them is the fact that they have children who study at the primary school. Those parents whose values and norms are similar to those of a teacher, will usually approve of him/her; the parents who have different views, however, will perceive the teachers as either too conservative or, on the contrary, too “modern” and unauthoritative. The teacher usually judges parents on the basis of the behaviour of children because, as it is said in Estonia, “a child is the mirror/ reflection of the family”. Thus, if a student

does not behave appropriately and ignores official norms (also those of clothes), a teacher will probably have a negative attitude towards parents.

Other educators, such as kindergarten teachers, secondary school teachers and university lecturers can also be considered as social actors constituting the “other”. From the perspective of fashion, kindergarten teachers are more informal than primary school teachers. As the former have to move much and play with children they often wear casual clothes and jeans.

Secondary school teachers have the style similar to that of primary school teachers. The only difference is that the clothes of primary school teachers are sometimes brighter in order to create a joyful atmosphere for children. It should also be mentioned that the older the students the smaller is the distance between teachers and students and the more informal and less uniform are the clothes of teachers. For example, in Estonia, it is considered normal for a university lecturer to be wearing jeans and, in general, the same clothes as students do. It would be wrong to say, however, that primary school teachers think that university lecturers are too informal and do not look presentable enough and that primary school teachers are too conservative and traditional from the point of view of university lecturers. They, rather, “translate” the fashion of the “other” not only proceeding from their own context and norms but also from those of others and, thus, understand the rationale behind their choices and accept them.

McWorld

Globalization has affected all aspects of our everyday life, changing customs and traditions, our behaviour and attitudes. Similar changes have also occurred in the fashion among primary school teachers and expectations for it on the side of students, their parents, other teachers etc. These changes have also been much influenced by liberal American ideas that have been transmitted by the media and popular culture and, indeed, are changing the world.

School in general and a primary school teacher used to occupy a prominent place in the life of students and in society at large. Nowadays, however, in most countries primary education is not considered a privilege any longer (as everyone is entitled to get it) and, therefore, the attitude towards teachers has changed as

well. This decline of respect and decrease in power distance can be noticed in many countries and in a number of professional fields.

Together with the development of fashion in general, the fashion among primary school teachers has changed, too. While before, primary school teachers used to wear uniform or very official and traditional clothes, such as a dark suit, nowadays their clothes are becoming more individual, informal, practical and comfortable. These days each teacher can through clothes express his/ her own identity, preference and taste. It should be noted here that, paradoxically, with the movement away from uniform, the clothes of teachers in different countries became even more similar as their choice is influenced by global trends in fashion.

The change of fashion has been paralleled by the modification of relationships between teachers and students. While before, there was a large power distance between them, nowadays there is a close and quite informal relationship. This tendency, once again, is typical to a number of countries.

IX CONCLUSION

In this paper we studied the notion of fashion among primary school teachers in Estonia and Portugal over the last 40 years and we concluded that it can be considered as a form of culture.

After having made the comparison of the members of the social actor in Estonia and Portugal we can conclude that there is a number of communicative, cognitive and social functions that clothes of primary school teachers perform and that these functions are to a great extent common for Estonia and Portugal. Thus, it is possible to talk about transnational social actor of primary school teachers.

A comparative study of the transformation of fashion over a period of 40 years indicates that there is a number common trends in these two countries. In both countries, the fashion of primary school teachers has passed from very formal and traditional clothes, which were associated with authority and distant relationship between teachers and students, to nowadays, when practical and comfortable dress is preferred. It seems also important for contemporary teachers to show their individuality and personal taste through clothes.

The relationship between teachers and students is now closer, more informal and a teacher is considered not exclusively an educator but also a friend. It is possible to assume that such change results not only from the general transformation of interpersonal relations in the countries studied but development of more informal social relations is also facilitated by the use of less normative clothes by primary school teachers. Thus, by the use of clothes, a new type of social reality is created.

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