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## Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching

Department of English Studies, Faculty of Pedagogy and Fine Arts, Adam Mickiewicz University, Kalisz

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### Book Reviews

#### *Linguistic and Cultural Acquisition in a Migrant Community*

Editors:

David Singleton, Vera Regan and Ewelina Debaene

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Migrant communities attract the attention of researchers as well as policy-makers and politicians, for various reasons, but it is the nature of linguistic and cultural experience of both migrant and host communities that remains a key factor in understanding the “gains and losses” caused by sustained cultural and language contact. With “adequate communication . . . regarded by many as the key component of intercultural effectiveness” (Ward, Bochner, & Furham, 2001), the acquisition of linguistic and cultural characteristics of the host community becomes a necessity to ensure migrant well-being in the new environment. Treated as a major variable with predictive power, acculturation has a long tradition of being included in the study of language developments (e.g., Schumann, 1986). Thus, the book specifically addressing the issues of language and culture can be expected to provide significant contribution into the field of second language acquisition as well as cross-cultural communication. What makes the book particularly valuable is the focus on Polish migrants discussed across different host counties and forming different communities. Based on the data obtained in the course of a project targeting a community of

recent Polish migrants in Ireland compared to the “Solidarity era” immigration in France, the book includes 8 chapters whose authors investigate various aspects of these two Polish migrant communities (defined with reference to the host community as French or Irish “Polonia”), supplemented by a short report on the Polish community in Austria. The majority of papers (1-5) adopt a sociolinguistic perspective, discussing linguistic signals of social identity in relation to a variety of variables, including attitudes, length of residence, socio-economic status and the characteristics of the migrant community (size and cohesiveness). Psycholinguistically-oriented chapters (6-8), on the other hand, concentrate on the acquisition of selected elements of the target language system (which is English in all three cases) by adults and/or young learners.

The papers adopting a sociolinguistic perspective vary in methods and scope, from general introduction into the history and major characteristics of the Polish community in France and Ireland (Chapter 1) and Austria (Chapter 4), through a preliminary report on the use of an L1 discourse marker *like* in L2 English (Chapter 3) and an exploratory study of accommodation strategies in the use of English by Polish speakers to a mixed-method investigation of a convergence in a variable deletion of *ne* by Polish immigrants in France. The first chapter sets out to compare the cultural and linguistic situation of two very different migrant communities: the so-called “Solidarity” emigration to France (in the early 1980s) with the post-Polish-EU-accession migrants to Ireland (after 2004). The time span and an enormous difference in socio-political as well as socio-economical circumstances prompt a broad political and cultural perspective against which the attitudes and identity issues need to be considered. The data gathered in the course of interviews within each community differ considerably: They come from 10 couples with children and 15 employees of various Polish organizations in France, and 30 Polish people met during various personal contacts in Ireland. The interviews were all conducted in Polish, and while there is some structuring of the interviews mentioned in the case of the French data, the information about attitudes, experience and plans for the future mentioned by the Polish immigrants in Ireland comes from informal conversations. However, as the aim of the chapter is to introduce the context for the two migrant communities rather than to discuss the results of the interviews in depth, the information elicited in the course of the interviews helps to illustrate the major characteristics of the Polish immigrants (especially in the case of France) and a broader socio-political context for each of the groups. Unavoidably, the discussion shows that the multi-layered differences in the conditions under which the two Polish migrant communities formed result in major differences in attitudes and acculturation strategies adopted by the two groups of immigrants. Interestingly, the author puts a strong emphasis on the

information obtained on French versus Irish policy towards immigration, but uses the overall comparison for selecting a number of rather well-known factors that affect integration, such as reasons to immigrate, intended length of residence, status and demographics of the migrant community, institutional support and the degree of contact with the home country, claiming that two migration patterns, namely migration for settlement and for mobility, can be distinguished and put to further investigation in the future.

In contrast to the first, largely introductory chapter, the second one tells the “Tales from the French Polonia” on the basis of a very different study: well-structured, convincingly motivated and described with a strong methodological background. The approach is variationistic, and the issue investigated, which is at the centre of sociolinguistic L2 research, is the use of an informal variant in the target language as a signal of integration with the majority language speech community. The quantitative analysis of L2 speech is based on the data from recorded interviews in French with the use of GoldVarb, and further supplemented by a qualitative analysis of two particularly striking cases. The overall results of the quantitative study show that L2 speakers follow the deletion pattern typical of L1 speakers, and that the level of L2 French affects the convergence pattern. However, in two particular cases, the general pattern is not followed, and it is the attitude towards the home and host community that proves to be decisive in these cases. The authors conclude that it is the combination of the two methods, quantitative and qualitative, that is needed for a comprehensive study which can best account for the dynamics of L2 language use by immigrants. The use of L2 features specific to the host community is further explored in Chapter 3, which concentrates on the positional distribution of *like* as a discourse marker used by young Polish immigrants (aged 9-19) to Ireland. Described for its specific pattern in Irish English, the discourse marker is investigated in the semi-directed interview data obtained from 6 out of 103 participants. This preliminary report brings initial results suggesting the saliency of *like* and the tendency for immigrants to follow the tendencies found in the L1 community.

With Chapter 4 we move back to identity and attitudes rather than linguistic investigation, changing the host community for Austria. A brief account of “the Polish Diaspora in Austria” begins with the discussion of identity issues, a short presentation of the main characteristics of the Polish identity portrayed with reference to history-based stereotypical values (linked to the Polish language but also, somewhat surprisingly, Slavic values), and continues to talk about a project based on interviews with 20 Solidarity era immigrants and 5 representatives of the second generation. The data presented in the paper suggest a surprising similarity between the two groups, but the discussion reveals more complicated patterns in

the data which, however, are not documented. The paper ends with directions for future research, including methodological considerations. Finally, the last chapter within the sociolinguistic approach continues the theme of attitudes and identity considering the patterns of accommodation observed in the speech of 25 Polish post-2004 immigrants to Ireland. As respondents represent a group of young people with previous experience in English, the questions explored in the study refer to the effect their Irish experience had had on the change in their speech patterns and how these speech patterns correspond to the attitudes/identity issues. Some of the intriguing problems include the desire to sound like a native speaker and the consequences that speaking with a foreign accent may have on speech accommodation in a variety of contexts. The discussion is based on the data from focus group meetings, individual interviews and mini-questionnaires, which is the methodology similar to the one employed for the Irish and French Polonia study (the results of the second study are not discussed at length here, but mentioned in the discussion and conclusions). With many interesting comments, the chapter bears a certain similarity to other exploratory and preliminary reports in the first part of the book, offering directions for future research and providing interesting, albeit somewhat poorly documented ideas.

The second part of the book concentrates on language processing and language learning. The first chapter here (Chapter 6) investigates the relationship between phonological short-term memory and lexical knowledge in Polish adult learners of English. The learners were divided into two groups depending on their proficiency level and tested for their phonological short-term memory and lexical knowledge twice, before and after a 6-month language course. The results support a positive relationship between the two tasks, which diminishes with a growing language proficiency; however, as the study uses L1 based nonwords to check the first aspect, the serial recall does not change with the increased L2 language experience of the learners. A thorough analysis and discussion leads to the conclusion that the constructs and tasks used in this study require further exploration. In a similar vein, the following study (Chapter 7), which aims to check the effect of age and environment on the acquisition of English phonology at a segmental level by child and adult learners in an immigrant versus nonimmigrant setting, concludes with a call for developing more reliable measures of constructs used in the study, in this case: language experience and language use. The methods employed relied on similarity judgments between Polish and English segments performed by participants on the basis of the comparison of the auditory material with their self-produced Polish correlated with the degree of intelligibility of their speech, operationalized in terms of the raters' agreement on the segment produced. The results point to a significant effect of age both in production and perception of differences between the vowels of English and Polish, and the effect of immersion

in the English speaking environment. Contrary to expectations, the amount of L1 use has not been found to affect the acquisition of L2 in immigrant children, which is interpreted as a sign that a more reliable, independent measure of language use is needed for further studies. The book closes with the chapter reporting on a study of particular importance for the educational aspects of immigration, as it compares the acquisition of English vocabulary by Irish and Polish children. Nine participants in each group, aged around 7, took an expressive vocabulary test and a word definition task twice, with a 6-month break. The tests were in English and Polish (the translated version was used only once, with the second testing for English). The analysis of the results points to the progress in vocabulary acquisition in both groups; however, the Polish group seems to be making it to a relatively greater extent in terms of the change over the period of 6 months. The quantitative analysis is further supplemented by a qualitative analysis of two highest- and two lowest-scoring Polish children for the purpose of finding possible patterns of variability. In conclusion, the authors stress that it is only when we consider the progress Polish children make in a faster-rate acquisition of vocabulary that we can see the potential of L2 learners in spite of their lagging behind their native English speaking Irish peers. Moreover, individual variability and the effect of such variables as length of residence, L2 exposure and the use of L2 by the parents need to be taken into account in setting realistic goals for learners' achievement.

The studies reported in the two parts of the book provide a number of threads and ideas that combine in providing a multidimensional picture of Polish communities beyond Poland. The greatest strength of the book is in the multitude of approaches, which can inspire future research. As many of the authors admit, the papers tend to report on preliminary or partial findings, exploring the data and looking for initial confirmation of their ideas. While the book contributes to the heavily under-researched theme of Polish recent, post-EU-accession migration, it leaves the reader with a strong hope for further studies based on the project that would provide a more comprehensive, data-based picture of the Polish migrant community in Ireland and elsewhere. Undoubtedly, the methodological choices made by the contributors can inspire discussion and will profit further development of research in the field. The inspirational role of the book cannot be underestimated: By providing insights into the nature of research ideas developed in the project, the book offers a point of reference for other researchers interested in the acquisition of linguistic and cultural aspects in migrant communities.

Reviewed by  
Ewa Waniek-Klimczak  
University of Łódź, Poland  
*ewaklim@uni.lodz.pl*