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New Patterns of Migration in the Light of Language Policy : the Case of Polish Migrants in Wales

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NEW PATTERNS OF MIGRATION IN THE LIGHT OF LANGUAGE POLICY THE CASE OF POLISH MIGRANTS IN WALES

Abstract

This paper is situated within the language policy and planning area of the LINEE project (Languages in a Network of European Excellence) co-funded under the 6th framework programme of the European Commission. It deals with the impact of 'new' migration on officially bi- and trilingual regions in Europe.

After EU-enlargement in 2004, Great Britain was one of a few old member states that did not impose any labour movement restrictions upon the new member states. This facilitated transnational workforce mobility and resulted in sizable flows of migrant workers from Poland to different parts of the country. To date, migratory movements were directed above all towards multilingual cities. Recently, due to economic and social processes such as tourism, outsourcing, dispersed services and industries, migrants have started to spread to the peripheries – to rural areas that have rarely seen migratory movements on such a scale before.

This tendency is observable also in rural parts of Wales. For instance, in recent years a small town like Llanelli (with 45,000 inhabitants) experienced an influx of about 4,000 Polish migrants.

Such considerable migrant flows pose a great challenge for governmental bodies concerned with social welfare, immigration and integration. Yet, the situation in Wales, determined by a linguistic asymmetry with dominant English and minority language Welsh, seen as peripheral in the eyes of British authorities and migrants, seems to be even more complex.

In the light of conceptualization and implementation issues of language policy in Wales this paper seeks to investigate the 'new' migration patterns of Polish migrants in urban and rural sites in Wales. Through analysis of qualitative interviews conducted among Polish migrants during fieldwork in October 2008 and

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March 2009, as well as data obtained from Polish internet forums and blogs, the paper explores the impact of current migration tendencies upon linguistic competence, language acquisition, employment as well as attitudes towards the dominant and minority languages.

Keywords

language policy, dominant language, indigenous minority language, new migration, Welsh.



Acknowledgments

This paper is based on research conducted within LINEE (Languages in a Network of European Excellence), a project co-funded under the 6th framework programme by the European Commission, which investigates aspects of multilingualism and linguistic diversity in Europe. The particular part of the project that this paper explores is the impact of new migration on officially bi- or trilingual regions in Europe, specifically Wales in the United Kingdom, the autonomous region of Valencia in Spain and the canton of Grisons in Switzerland. The research was conducted by a team of researchers, namely: Prof. Clare Mar-Molinero, Dr. Dick Vigers and Dr. Darren Paffey (Centre for Transnational Studies, University of Southampton); Dr. Verena Tunger (Department of Linguistics, University of Bern); and myself.

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1. Introduction

The starting point for the following article was the recent migration movements to specific regions in Europe which arose as a result of current social, political and economic processes. Especially in regions where two or more languages are acknowledged as official, migration issues acquire high complexity and may therefore pose a great challenge both for local authorities and the local community. This situation is exemplified in bilingual Wales, which since 2004 has been experiencing substantial flows of migrant workers from Central and Eastern Europe, above all from Poland.

The interplay of language policy and new migration to Wales, as well as related issues of integration and the inclusion of migrants into

the receiving society is the subject of research presented in the article. In this regard the research focus is put not only on multilingual urban areas with a long migration tradition, but also on peripheries, i.e. rural areas which have hardly experienced migration on such a scale before.

As Gabrielle Hogan-Brun et al (2009:1-5) state in their recent publication, rapidly increasing migration has provoked public debates on integration and inclusion into the receiving societies. One aspect often discussed in connection with this matter concerns the requirement of competence in a national language seen as a precondition for acquiring citizenship. National governments seem to be concerned principally with the necessity of adapting speakers of various languages within the frame of a presumed monolingual population.

This is in line with “the dominant discourse found in most European nation-states, which, although nowadays de facto multicultural and multilingual, nonetheless still see themselves as essentially and indisputably monolingual” (Hogan-Brun et al. 2009:5).

In order to manage the linguistic situation in society, governmental bodies develop language planning strategies directed towards migrants. These language planning efforts are defined by Jan Blommaert (1996:207) as “cases in which authorities attempt, by whatever means, to shape a sociolinguistic profile for their society”.

Taking into consideration measures undertaken by officials to conceptualize language policy and planning, it is evident that they are often fuelled by ideological components aiming at sustaining the idea of the nation “as a stable monolingual norm which is constantly challenged by multilingual realities” (Hogan Brun et al. 2009:5).

This issue creates the core component of activities undertaken by central state authorities. Aspects that are viewed as an obstacle to sustain the idea of the monolingual nation-state seem therefore to be pushed to the peripheries, i.e. marginalized and hardly mentioned in the official discourse. In this regard peripheral is understood as hardly being taken into consideration by central state and central government bodies. This can apply to efforts made by indigenous minorities attempting to promote their minority languages. The word “peripheral” can also refer to societal boundaries and exclusion that migrants face due to their status in the receiving country.

In this context the following sections will present issues resulting from research conducted in Wales in 2008 and 2009 among Polish migrant communities and aspects related to the conceptualization and implementation of language policy in Wales.

2. Context for research

This section outlines the context for the research which the following article is based on. In particular it focuses on language policy in Wales as well as Polish migration.

2.1 Language policy and the case of Wales

Bernard Spolsky (2009:39-40) refers to language policy as operating within a specific domain described by him as any social or political group ranging from a family to an organization to a nation or regional alliance. He focuses his attention on the notion of language policy as consisting of three interrelated components, namely: language practices, language beliefs and language planning activities, referred to by him as language management. While language practices are viewed by him as observable behaviours and choices, i.e. linguistic features chosen or the variety of language used, language beliefs are seen as ideology, i.e. as values ascribed to languages, their varieties and features. In contrast to this is language management, defined by him as “the explicit and observable effort by someone or some group that has or claims authority over the participants in the domain to modify their practices and beliefs” (Spolsky 2009:4).

The specifics of language policy in the Welsh context are characterized by devolution, due to which the United Kingdom as a central nation-state grants authority to the regional legislature in Wales. Spolsky (2009:145) states that this approach is commonly implemented by governments to respond to minority demands for autonomy.

This policy of devolution adopted in the United Kingdom delegates territorial power to ethnic minorities and their languages. The fact of Celtic-speaking regions in the UK being independent at various stages throughout history, as well as the development of Scottish, Irish and Welsh identity coupled with strong cultural nationalism led eventually to the establishment of a devolution policy. This fuelled language management efforts especially in Wales, where the Welsh Assembly made language revival a central focus. However, achieving this goal was not a *fait-accompl*i and did not develop automatically. In 1989 the UK government founded a non-governmental body, the Welsh Language Board, which, though under the auspices of the UK government, was dedicated to promoting Welsh and improving its position. Such language revival efforts also included establishing the Education Reform Act (1988), according to which Welsh was introduced

as a core subject in the educational system. In 1993 the Welsh Language Board became a non-departmental statutory organization aiming above all at equality of Welsh and English. After the devolution act was established in 1999, authority over the Welsh Language Board, formerly held by the Welsh Office of the UK government, was ceded to the National Assembly of Wales (Williams 2006:1-3).

This facilitated the attempts of the indigenous minority to change the peripheral character of Welsh, which at the time had a rather inferior status in comparison to dominant English.

Still, the situation of Welsh may be viewed as challenging not only due to the dominance of English in this asymmetrical linguistic setting but also because of migratory flows that the area is confronted with.

Migratory movements in Wales emerged mostly as a result of policy directed towards citizens of former colonies of the British Empire, as well as towards asylum seekers or refugees. According to statistics, during the decade 1975 to 1985 outward migration in Wales was higher than inward, but since 1994 the converse has occurred and the volume of international inward migration to Wales has begun to rise. Due to EU enlargement in 2004 the migration patterns changed and the inflow increased by 29 percent annually between 2005 and 2007 (Statistics for Wales, 2009: 35-37).

Inward migration is usually experienced in big cities, which can be exemplified by the numbers of immigrants coming to Cardiff. Due to social and economic processes, such as tourism, outsourcing or dispersed services, rural peripheries - Welsh speaking areas - have also become the target of migratory movements. These new migration patterns resulting after 2004 are the research basis for the article.

2.2 Polish migration in Wales

Earlier Polish migration in Wales resulted mostly from UK policy after the Second World War. During this time substantial inflows of Polish migrants came to Wales as well, many of whom were former soldiers unable to return to Poland.

Recent migration to Wales resulting from EU enlargement in 2004 and Accession 8 is characterized by economic factors. The proportion it has reached in many parts of the region could be viewed as surprisingly high. Especially in small agricultural towns that have hardly ever experienced any international migration at all, Polish migrants could be perceived as a challenge for the local community.

The reason that large numbers of Poles travel to Wales is the availability of work and the possibility to apply for it at job agencies in Po-

land. Many Polish migrant workers also come to Wales through social or family networks.

3. Research methodology

Research presented in the article was conducted during joint fieldwork in October 2008 and March 2009. The focus was both on an urban site, i.e. the city of Cardiff, as well as on rural and semi-rural areas, i.e. Llanelli and Llanybydder in the county of Carmarthenshire, which experienced a substantial inflow of economic migrants from Poland after 2004. The research methodology comprised qualitative instruments, i.e. semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, as well as ethnographic observation of language practices. Altogether, three group and eighteen individual interviews were conducted with thirty Polish migrants during the fieldwork in Wales. This mostly refers to migration movements that occurred after Accession 8 was implemented in 2004. As an example of earlier migration tendencies, one group interview was carried out with representatives of the earlier Polish migration to Wales after the Second World War.

The choice of language used for the purpose of the interviews was dependent upon interviewees' preferences. The majority chose Polish, as they presumably felt more secure expressing their thoughts in their mother tongue.

During the joint fieldwork, attention was also paid to including a gender dimension. Therefore a focus was put on achieving an equal proportion of male and female interviewees taking part in the research. However, gender aspects were not of main research interest.

4. New patterns of migration – the case of Polish migrants in Wales

The following sections cover analysis of data collected during the joint fieldwork mentioned above. They focus on new migration tendencies resulting from social and economic processes, as well as newly established regulations, their impact upon linguistic competence, language acquisition, as well as attitudes towards dominant English and minority language Welsh.

4.1 New migration

New migration refers to current migration tendencies emerging as a result of social, economic and political processes facilitating peo-

ple's mobility. Due to these processes, current migration tendencies gain a more temporary and circular character in comparison to previous migratory trends. As indicated above, migrant destination reveals an ongoing shift, as it is directed not exclusively towards multi-lingual and multicultural cities, but spreads and reaches peripheries. This is reflected also in the research sites in Wales.

According to statistics there were over 21,000 registrations from A8 nationals to the Worker Registration Scheme in Wales between 2004 and 2008, and two-thirds of them were from Poland (Statistics for Wales, 2008:1-2). It is estimated that in Llanybydder, an agricultural centre, about 300 Poles are employed in a meat factory. In Llanelli, a large town situated in the county of Carmarthenshire, the number of Polish migrant workers is estimated at 4-8,000.

The majority of migrants interviewed confirm that the main reason for going to Wales was economic and resulted from unemployment or unsatisfactory low wages or salaries in Poland. Thus, they viewed their migration as an opportunity to find a better job and improve their financial status. Although many of them insisted that they were interested in long-term settlement in Wales or in the UK, only one person expressed a wish to acquire British citizenship in the future. This may be linked to new regulations which facilitate people's mobility within the EU and the fact that long-term settlement in a particular EU country does not require having citizenship in that country.

Decisions concerning long-term settlement, as results from the interviews, are above all dependent upon the economic situation in Wales and family status. Generally, migrants who come to Wales with their families and children choose to stay for a longer period of time and do not show as much interest in further mobility to other parts of the UK or to other countries as single people. Nevertheless, they do not exclude further migration either, if the employment situation or standard of living in Wales should worsen.

There is also some evidence of temporary and circular patterns of migration among Polish newcomers. There are migrants who declare their stay in Wales short-term and would like to return to Poland after some months. In some cases, people manage to return, but the economic situation in Poland and lack of future prospects often forces them to move back to Wales again. Interestingly, regulations facilitating Polish mobility to the UK and past migration experiences make decisions on further migration easier. Some informants mentioned their earlier migration experiences, e.g. working in Switzerland, Germany or Sweden, which made them more adaptable and facilitated their settlement in Wales. Some other interviewees also expressed a wish to move to other Euro-

pean countries in the future, e.g. Croatia, or to another English-speaking country, such as Australia or USA, where they could use their language competence acquired in the UK. An example is given below:

Right now I would like to stay here but sometimes I think of changing the country. (...) For sure some English speaking country. I wouldn't be able to learn another language (...). New Zealand for example. Because maybe I could go to a company that's similar to the one I work at here (...) with the same qualifications that I acquired here. (male informant, Llanybydder)

An important factor characterizing the current Polish migration in Wales is transnationalism. This issue will be described in the following section.

4.2 Transnationalism

Transnationalism influences to a great extent the nature of current migratory movements in general. It refers to processes and activities that go beyond international borders and includes, among other things, ongoing ties migrants maintain with their countries of origin. As stated, transnational processes are facilitated mostly by development of modern communication and transportation technology (Bauböck 2008:3). In the context of Polish migration it is visible in migrants having easy access to telecommunications and Polish TV programmes, shopping exclusively in Polish shops, communicating with their relatives in Poland on a daily basis and hardly having any contact with the host community in Wales:

When it comes to Poles, they live together, they work together, they watch only Polish TV, and they are sometimes closed off, they don't want to open up to other people. (male informant, Cardiff)

This aspect is also connected with creating and sustaining social networks among Polish migrants. Many migrants decided to go to Wales as their friends or relatives had already been here. An informant from Llanelli stated:

Actually, we didn't know where we would go at all. Well, yes, we knew that we go to Llanelli, there was a job there, so one of my friends told me [to come to Llanelli]. (male informant, Llanelli)

On the one hand, social networks help Polish migrants to operate and find support during their stay in Wales. On the other hand, such social networks may isolate new Polish migrants from the host community. Remaining within the confines of Polish networks may significantly influence demotivation when it comes to acquiring the lan-

guage of the host community. The fact that they can speak Polish both in the workplace and after work means that many migrants learn neither English nor Welsh. If they need to solve a problem in English, they contact their English-speaking friends or an advice centre:

In general, people here [Polish people] cannot speak English, they don't know the language. They go [to the Advice Centre] if they have a problem. I don't mean that all people go there, but the majority of them do (male informant, Llanelli).

These transnational practices can be viewed as creating a parallel society, where migrants retain ties exclusively with their homeland, at the same time not acquiring the language of the host community and therefore isolating themselves. Operating solely within the confines of the Polish community gives migrants a feeling of security, but it excludes them from such opportunities as, for example, obtaining a better job as that would require, among other things, better language skills.

4.3 English language competence

The English language competence of the interviewees varied considerably, ranging from no language skills to high proficiency. This may be a result of different educational backgrounds and opportunities to learn English. Only a few migrants made some language preparation prior to departure for Wales. A longer stay in Wales does not presuppose progress in English either, especially when migrants perform unskilled activities and work exclusively in a Polish environment. One interviewee from Llanelli describes his situation as follows:

Well, I had really poor language skills. I think it is also because Polish people (...) work among themselves and don't have much of a possibility to have contact with English. The majority in all such companies working through agencies are Polish. The supervisors, the workers are Polish. That's why people don't have much contact with English. They have rather poor language skills.

Some migrants expressed a desire to learn English, but due to long working hours and being constantly among Polish migrants this turned out to be extremely difficult. An example is given below:

And I won't learn the language because I'm not able to do this, because at work there are only Polish people. So I speak Polish all the time. (Male informant, Llanybydder)

Although migrants do not have much opportunity to attend English classes if they work, it can be possible to learn English from everyday communication with the locals. A Polish migrant from Llanelli illustrates:

Well, I was sort of desperate to learn the language. First I was working in Llanybydder, just like the majority, in a meat factory. At first I worked with meat, I was packing meat, then after six months I got a job as a car mechanic and there I got more contacts with English speaking colleagues (...) And year by year, month by month, my English was getting better and better. Right now it's ok.

On the whole English language competence is associated with better status and the possibility of getting more skilled jobs. Those who did not have an opportunity to learn English prior to leaving for Wales, are interested in acquiring it if they plan long-term settlement in Wales. However, they often indicate working hours or household duties as an obstacle in attending language classes.

Still, there were also many statements given by migrants who felt that they did not need to learn English. Those wishing to stay for only a short term in Wales do not want to invest their time in acquiring English, do not view it as an asset and manage to live in Wales without English skills.

4.4 Attitudes towards Welsh, the minority language

On the whole, Welsh is viewed by Polish migrants as an additional obstacle in everyday life situations in Wales. They cannot really see any purpose in acquiring it and argue that it is spoken by very few Welsh residents, mostly elderly people, and that its use is limited entirely to the area of Wales. Additionally, they often explain that Welsh speakers speak English anyway so English skills are sufficient to communicate with them. One Polish migrant from Llanybydder states as follows:

I think it is one of the languages that are about to end. They do everything to maintain it as long as it is possible in Wales, but is it important? I think that for the young generation in Wales not much. Because they amongst themselves, they probably speak Welsh with their parents, but amongst themselves they speak in English, it's easier for them. Maybe among young Welsh people who are eighteen, nineteen years old, only sixty percent know Welsh correctly. The rest know only some words.

One informant expressed his disapproval of Welsh and of people speaking Welsh in his presence:

I know that Wales, Ireland, Scotland, they have their own [language] but if the official language is English, we should speak in English. It really gets on my nerves, I had some problems at home and I called so they came. I spoke in English as much as I could, and then they amongst themselves started to speak Welsh. So I didn't understand anything at all. And I got so irritated! I found it disrespectful.

As acquiring Welsh only really concerns children attending schools in Wales, there were many opinions given on this issue. Generally, parents do not see any purpose in organizing Welsh classes at school. They believe it harms acquisition of English and is an additional difficulty which children often cannot cope with. Nevertheless, in this regard there were also positive statements made. One woman from Llanelli gave her opinion:

I think we're in England, we're in Wales, and if other children learn it, why wouldn't my children? It's obvious they won't learn it fluently but some basics (...) My attitude towards languages is generally positive, maybe because I couldn't learn them. My daughter learns French as well, next year she would like to learn Spanish. It's very good! I am happy with it.

Still, one has to bear in mind that such statements are rather rare and for the most part, Welsh competence is not treated as an asset that could be used as commonly spoken English.

5. Conclusions

Language competence presents a core aspect while analyzing the migration in a specific host community. Taking into consideration officially bilingual regions characterized by linguistic asymmetry with a dominant and minority language acquires even greater complexity.

In the context of the new Polish migration in Wales, much interest has been shown in acquiring English or attending English classes, especially when long-term settlement is the intention. Knowledge of English is mainly understood as a prerequisite for better job opportunities and thus also has financial advantages. A lack of proficiency in English, in turn, may limit migrants to unskilled work, which due to long working hours will not enable them to attend English classes. Consequently, such a situation may force migrants to temporary settlement or to strengthening transnational ties with Poland and thus creating Polish enclaves in particular areas in Wales.

The dominance of English over the Welsh language is evident. The peripheral character and constantly diminishing importance of Welsh stressed by migrants results mostly from the inability to use Welsh as an instrument for job purposes, e.g. as a language of instruction in the workplace.

Paradoxically, bilingual Welsh inhabitants also contribute to this ongoing process of reducing the domain of Welsh if they use English exclusively in order to communicate with other English-speakers.

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Cecylia Barłóg – od 2007 r. doktorantka w Instytucie Lingwistyki Stosowanej Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu. Jej zainteresowania naukowe obejmują przede wszystkim zagadnienia komunikacji interkulturowej, język niemiecki jako język obcy oraz politykę językową. Od lipca 2008 r. uczestniczy w LI-NEE (Languages in a Network of European Excellence), projekcie badawczym finansowanym ze środków Komisji Europejskiej dotyczącym wielojęzyczności w

Europie. Razem z badaczami z Uniwersytetu w Southampton oraz Uniwersytetu w Bernie zajmowała się badaniem wpływu migracji na politykę językową w oficjalnie dwujęzycznych regionach w Europie.

Streszczenie

Nowe wzory migracji w świetle polityki językowej. Przykład polskich imigrantów w Walii

Niniejszy artykuł odnosi się do badań przeprowadzonych w ramach obszaru polityki językowej projektu badawczego LINEE (Languages in a Network of European Excellence) współfinansowanego przez 6. Program Ramowy Komisji Europejskiej. Skupia się on na badaniu wpływu „nowej” migracji w dwu- i trzyczęściowych regionach w Europie.

Po rozszerzeniu UE w 2004 roku Wielka Brytania była jednym z niewielu krajów, które nie nałożyły żadnych restrykcji ograniczających swobodny napływ pracowników z nowych krajów członkowskich. To w dużej mierze zwiększyło mobilność siły roboczej, czego efektem był znaczny przepływ pracowników z Polski do różnych części tego kraju. Dotychczasowe ruchy migracyjne skierowane były przede wszystkim do dużych wielojęzycznych miast. Ostatnio w związku z procesami ekonomicznymi i społecznymi takimi jak turystyka czy *outsourcing* napływ imigrantów zaczął docierać do obszarów peryferyjnych – terenów rolniczych, które do tej pory nie doświadczyły zjawiska imigracji na tak szeroką skalę. Tę tendencję można również zaobserwować na rolniczych obszarach w Walii. Przykładem jest choćby miasteczko Llanelli (ok. 45 000 mieszkańców), do którego w ostatnich latach przybyło około cztery tysiące polskich imigrantów. Tak znaczny napływ imigrantów stanowić może wyzwanie dla instytucji rządowych zajmujących się opieką społeczną, kwestiami imigracji oraz integracji. Jednak sytuacja w Walii charakteryzująca się asymetrią językową z dominującym językiem angielskim i mniejszościowym walijskim, widzianym jako peryferyjny zarówno w oczach władz brytyjskich, jak i imigrantów, wydaje się jeszcze bardziej złożona.

Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje próbę zbadania „nowych” wzorów migracji polskich imigrantów na miejskich i rolniczych obszarach Walii w świetle konceptualizacji i implementacji polityki językowej w omawianym regionie. Na podstawie analizy wywiadów jakościowych przeprowadzonych wśród polskich imigrantów w czasie badań terenowych w październiku 2008 r. oraz marcu 2009 r., jak również analizy danych z polskich for internetowych oraz blogów bada on wpływ bieżących tendencji migracyjnych na umiejętności językowe, nabywanie języka, zatrudnienie, jak również nastawienie wobec języka dominującego i mniejszościowego.

Słowa kluczowe

Polityka językowa, język dominujący, rdzenna mniejszość, język mniejszościowy, nowa migracja, walijski.