

## Community language policy, planning and practice: The case of Polish in the Republic of Ireland.

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**Key words:** *Polish Diaspora, community language, language policy, language practice, migration, mobility*

### Abstract

As a result of high levels of immigration, Ireland is undergoing a rapid transformation. The sheer size of the Polish Diaspora which has formed here since Poland's accession to the EU in 2004, poses new challenges to policymakers in terms of language policy and the use of community languages in the public space. A call made recently for Polish to join Irish and English as official languages of State – irrespective of the likelihood of success – is indicative of how acute the situation has become. A unique phenomenon can be witnessed in Ireland, namely, a great effort on the part of members of the host community to master the language of a migrant community. With a view to identifying issues faced by Polish migrants, a number of research projects are in progress that focus on linguistic paradigm shifts.

### Introduction

This paper investigates the paradigm shifts in ethnolinguistic practices among immigrants which are the result of migration, mobility and human capital investment. The example of the post-2004 Polish Diaspora in Ireland will be used to illuminate multilingual practices, unprecedented in scale and scope, in transcultural Europe. Current and planned research initiatives addressing areas of concern and/or formulating implications for language policy and practices in the new multicultural and multilingual Ireland will be discussed. The text is meant as a briefing and invitation to a debate on proposals to regulate community language policy both in Ireland and the whole of Europe.

### 1. Language and migration

Increasing attention has been paid recently to the effects of globalization and the transnational flow of goods and services but also transnational traffic of people and therefore of language(s), both physical and virtual (Murais & Morris 2003; Gardt and Huppaufl 2004,

Wright 2004 cited in Mar-Molinero & Stevenson, 2006: 1). Fishman remarks that

languages are not merely innocent means of communication. They stand for or symbolize people, i.e. **ethnocultures**, and it is not obviously apparent to what extent administrative [...] structures [...] can, in practice, actually recognize, empower, and/or assist them. (Fishman, 1995: 51)

Shohamy (2006) observes that – contrary to the assimilative patterns adopted by immigrants in the past - current immigrants demand recognition and the right to disagree with the hegemonic ideology as they strive for legitimacy for maintaining their differences. They refuse therefore to acquire the hegemonic and homogenous national language and would rather maintain their home languages (Shohamy, 2006: 36). Adding to that, Extra and Yağmur remark that with national boundaries eroded, local background and origin became more important (Extra and Yağmur, 2004: 12). Discussing transnationalism, Shain (1999) refers to those who change their place of residence but at the same time continue to maintain close connections with their kin society (cf. Meinhof & Triandafyllidou 2006: 205).

Language and social integration are identified in the Final Report by the High Level Group on Multilingualism (Commission of the European Communities, 2007) among research areas especially worthy of pursuit when – as a result of mobility and migration - new forms of multilingualism are coming into existence. At the same time, the presence of migrants, as well as globalization and advances in ICT give rise to new needs in and forms of interlingual and intercultural communication. Busch discusses newly emerging heteroglossic practices such as phone-in programmes, duplex programmes or other multilingual programmes which search for approaches other than simple translation (Busch in Mar-Molinero, 2006: 206-219)

Complex loyalties and affiliations are a part of the current nation-state and so are the languages. Pennycook (2004, cited in Shohamy, 2006: 10) remarks that “the moment has arrived to argue that the language concept [...] has served its time.” As a result of free international travel and globalization, languages tend to mix and form various hybrids. In the same vein, Gubbins & Holt (2002, cited in Shohamy, 2006: 38) and Trim (2002 cited in Shohamy, 2006: 38) claim that language identity in Europe is diverse, complex and changing as boundaries of language, citizenship and borders are breaking up, resulting in emerging languages which are not distinct and homogenous.

Van Dijk (1998, cited in Ricento, 2006: 44) defines language policy and planning as: “shared framework(s) of social beliefs that organize and coordinate the social interpretations and practices of groups and their members.” Ricento sees them as “intellectual and conceptual frameworks which may be invoked in applied research on language

status and use (e.g. in favour of promoting language diversity).” (Ricento, 2006: 44)

According to Schiffman (1996) and Spolsky (2004) (cited in Shohamy, 2006: 56), the term “language policy” encompasses a range of forms including overt and covert, implicit and explicit methods and policies. They make a strong case for the formulation of a new, expanded kind of language policy which would take into account varied mechanisms involved in the creation of language practices. These mechanisms include rules and regulations, language educational policies, language tests, language in the public space as well as ideologies, myths, propaganda and coercion.

Preliminary research findings generated by a study of the Polish Diaspora in Ireland, presented below, will feed into the above theoretical discussion and illuminate the issues associated with new language-use patterns and intercultural dialogue resulting from mobility, with particular reference to the Irish experience.

## ***2. Polish Diaspora in Ireland***

In the three years since Poland’s accession to the EU and the provision of unrestricted access for Polish nationals to the Irish labour market, one can say that the Polish community has established its strong presence and impacted significantly on the linguistic landscape in Ireland. With up to 200,000 members, according to some estimates (cf. Monaghan 2007:44), the Polish Diaspora constitutes approximately five percent of the whole population while Polish-language speakers already outnumber native speakers of Irish. A call made recently for Polish to join Irish and English as official languages of State, irrespective of the likelihood of success, is indicative of how acute the situation has become.

### **2.1. Demographics**

Reliable data as to the exact number of Poles who have arrived and settled in Ireland after 2004 are for the most part unavailable and, likewise, there is a shortage of quantitative data concerning the make-up of the Polish Diaspora in Ireland. According to The Central Statistics Office (CSO); Population and Migration Estimates, based on the 2006 Census of Population (<http://www.cso.ie/census>), it is estimated that the cohort of non-nationals resident in Ireland is of the order of 400,000. Among the newly formed communities, the Polish Diaspora is undoubtedly the largest and most vibrant. 26% of migrants in Ireland are Polish-nationals. More than half (54%) of Polish immigrants are aged 25-44, and a further 28% are aged 15-24.

Poles are most likely to live around towns, cities and transport networks. There is a significant concentration of Poles in the Dublin area (around 80% of Polish nationals in Ireland). Smaller urban areas such as Killarney,

Monaghan and Roscommon also display clusters of Polish nationals (O'Brien 2007:8). Census-based statistical data, however, suggest a very widespread dispersal of Poles in almost every part of Ireland (Central Statistics Office, Theme 2 - 2: Usually resident population by nationality, 2006).

## 2.2 Declared and anticipated length of residence

Dustmann (1999) discusses the interdependence between (1) the intended duration in the host country and (2) the investment in the acquisition of language capital. Moreover - as the preliminary findings of a study undertaken by the author among the Polish Community in Ireland and France indicate - the declared length of residence bears heavily upon native language use patterns (cf. Debaene, forthcoming).

Prior to the fall of Communism in 1989, when Poland was behind the Iron Curtain and mechanisms behind the decision to migrate were not only economic but also political, a vast majority of Polish people migrated with an intention to settle permanently in their new country. Polish migrants at that time tended to immediately spread throughout the receiving country and adapted themselves to new conditions. They often emphasized that they did not keep in touch with other Polish migrants because they wanted to learn the new language as quickly as possible and to integrate into the host society (cf. Sobczak, 2007, online). Native language maintenance did not receive enforced institutional support, such as use of a language in mass media, as the medium of education, or for religious purposes, (cf. Giles, 1977, cited in Meyerhoff, 206: 108) to address huge waves of migration of Polish people. A so called "DIY" approach was therefore the only way available to those Polish migrants who were committed to maintenance and transmission of their native language and culture to their children (cf. Debaene, forthcoming).

By contrast, Polish immigrants in Ireland see their departure from Poland as a temporary measure – time to save up money and to gain experience that can later on be used in Poland. This sort of thinking, as well as frequent visits to Poland (no longer limited by political or economic factors) has led to a situation where integration may not be perceived as an immediate and pressing need (cf. Sobczak, 2007).

According to findings reported by national survey agencies (e.g. Warsaw-based agency Kinoulty Research), 50% of the Poles questioned would like to live in Ireland as long as possible, while 18 per cent want to stay here permanently. Barely one-third treat their stay in Ireland as temporary (Monaghan 2007:44).

Curiously, these findings differ sharply from what is admittedly more anecdotal evidence in the form of thirty Poles (aged 20-45) who have lived and worked in Dublin for at least two years, and who were

interviewed by the author on several occasions between 2005 and 2007<sup>1</sup>. All the informants were met by the author in 2005, through networks developed in the course of her work as a Polish Government Lector in the Department of Russian and Slavonic Studies at Trinity College and also people met in the streets, shops, and on planes.

Many of the interviewees (20 out of 30) said they were going to stay in Ireland for 'up to 5 years' and were then planning to return to Poland. Five respondents who admitted that they would like to stay in Ireland permanently were partners (spouses) of Irish citizens. The five remaining informants (students and university staff members) said that they were "keeping their options open and are waiting to see what time brings". "I don't know how long I'm going to stay in Ireland," was their most common answer and, even though leaving Ireland presents itself as one of the options, they do not necessarily equate it with a return to Poland. Those young, educated people are usually interested in gaining new experience and enhancing their qualifications, thus increasing their competitiveness on international labour markets. This would indeed confirm The Polish Ambassador in Ireland, Tadeusz Szumowski's claim that the term "migration" is a misnomer when used with reference to the Polish nationals and "mobility" should be used instead (e.g. Tadeusz Szumowski, personal communication, Oct. 2007). (cf. Debaene, forthcoming)

### **2.3. Degree of contact with the home country**

According to Kropiwiiec & King O'Riain (2006), Polish migrants to Ireland are still well connected to Poland. Many use technology to communicate with family and friends, almost all use the Internet and Internet telephony, Skype. A high number of remittances to Poland show that they also invest in Poland rather than in Ireland (Kropiwiiec & King O'Riain, 2006: 44). The majority of the author's respondents in Ireland said they went to Poland at least twice a year to visit their families and friends (scheduled flights on 32 routes between Ireland and Poland offered by at least seven airlines facilitate such visits). What is more, over 60% of all the respondents admit that they often host their Polish friends and family members who come to visit them here. Interest in the Polish cultural events and in the political situation in Poland (as shown in the high turn out at the parliamentary elections in October 2007 with 20,000 registered for voting in Ireland) is also indicative of

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<sup>1</sup> The sample consisted of: employees of Polish organizational structures (Polish media in Ireland, Polish cultural, social organizations), shop assistants, employees of call-centres, students and staff members at Dublin universities and vocational schools, Polish partners (spouses) of Irish citizens enrolled in Polish language programmes in the Department of Russian and Slavonic Studies, Trinity College Dublin. All of the subjects whose testimony is reported here remain in touch with the author to the present day. All the interviews were conducted in Polish. (cf. Debaene, forthcoming)

Polish migrants' concern with current developments in their home country and most likely their plans to return.

#### **2.4. Attitudes of the host community towards new arrivals; interculturalism**

Due to its size and vibrancy, the Polish community has found itself at the centre of public attention. Results of the analyses of Irish media coverage conducted since January 2007 to date are proof of this interest. The case of Ireland – as has already been observed for over three years since Poland's accession to the EU – is following the multicultural model for integration. The value being placed on the Polish contribution to the mainstream culture is reflected in:

- Strong presence of the Polish language in public spaces (e.g. translation and other language services, public school exams can now be sat in Polish, etc.);
- Strong representation of Polish culture (numerous Polish cultural events held in Ireland over the last three years);
- Well-developed Polish infrastructure (numerous Polish shops and services);
- Polish media operating in Ireland;
- Particular attention paid to the Polish community in the Irish media;
- Rising interest in the Polish language and culture on the part of Irish people.

Furthermore, Polish events which have taken place in Dublin over the last 6 months (e.g. Polish Film Festival at the Irish Film Institute, Polish Art exhibition in the National Gallery in Dublin) were met with strong interest on the part of the host community. Polish cultural events held on a regular basis not only facilitate contact between Poles and their native culture, but also contribute to promoting it amongst the Irish. In the three years since Poland's accession to the EU, one can say that the Polish community has established its strong presence in the host society and greatly enriched the cultural scene in Ireland.

By way of a summary, one can argue that an unprecedented phenomenon is discernible in Ireland – namely, a great effort on the part of the host community members to master the language of a minority migrant community and to find out about its culture.

#### **2.5. Polish language in Ireland**

The Polish language is rapidly appreciating in value on the linguistic market in Ireland. A wide and elaborate linguistic infrastructure has developed around the Polish community, with more than 15 Polish-language publications or websites operating here and a network of shops, bars and religious groups already established (cf. Mac Cormaic 2007:6). What is more, the Polish language and culture have penetrated local media with a Polish supplement to *The Evening Herald* being awarded the Media and Multicultural Award for its contribution to the integration of cultures. It is worth mentioning here

that the Polish community is the only minority migrant group in Ireland to date which has its own supplement published weekly in a national newspaper. What is more, Polish now occupies a sizeable share of radio and TV broadcast time (e.g. the City Channel co-production with a Polish news magazine) as well as radio and TV advertisements and many job advertisements. Increased enrollments in Polish-language courses are proof of the increasing interest in Polish among the general public in Ireland. Polish-language programmes have been offered by various educational institutions with a view to equipping community interpreters, translators, educators, language-support teachers, and police service employees with Polish language skills needed to assist Polish migrants and their children. Polish language and culture programmes at a university level are offered by Trinity College Dublin (at present the only academic institution in Ireland where Polish can be studied at a university level) as part of European Studies, Two Subject Moderatorship and - since October 2008 - are envisaged also as part of Business Studies.

Both the Polish and Irish governments as well as non-governmental organisations have given strong support to the provision of Polish-language skills in Ireland with a view to fostering intercultural understanding. State exams can be sat in Polish, both at the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate levels. Support materials for schools have been developed to promote the use of native languages, including Polish, in Irish mainstream schools. On the other end, Polish universities have started offering Polish-medium fly-in classes held on the premises of Irish universities through the medium of Polish to those expatriated Polish community members who have plans to return to their home country and wish to obtain a degree from a Polish university without need to travel. Further to that, Polish schools have been established in major Irish towns. (cf. Debaene, forthcoming)

In light of the rapid growth of the use of Polish in Ireland, there are a number of concerns which have to be addressed. Some observers remark the Polish-speaking networks could lead to a "parallel society" and hinder integration with the host culture. A number of issues have been reported by Polish community members as problematic, such as restrictions on the use of Polish in the work place, the lack of representation of the Polish alphabet in official documents and legislative acts; demand for Polish translation of the road code (as disproportionate numbers of Polish people have been involved in accidents on Irish roads) and work laws (to prevent exploitation of migrant workers), or bans on Polish-language translation in public spaces,

### **3. Research directions; current and envisaged research projects; preliminary findings**

A number of interdisciplinary research projects are currently in progress in Ireland, focussing on linguistic paradigm shifts in the new multilingual Ireland – including among others, the language-oriented section of the “Trinity Immigration Initiative”, “North-South Languages Survey”, “European Language Portfolio”, and “Education Policy and Minority Languages in Eastern and Central Europe”. With a specific focus on the post-accession Polish Diaspora, a research project entitled “Second language acquisition and native language maintenance in the Polish Diaspora in Ireland and France” was initiated in 2007, to be discussed further in the subsequent section of this paper.

#### **3.1. Second language acquisition and native language maintenance in the Polish Diaspora in Ireland and France**

(The following section of this paper draws on data collected under the auspices of the IRCHSS-funded project “Second Language Acquisition and Native Language Maintenance in the Polish Diaspora in Ireland and France.”)

With a view to addressing the Polish Community from a linguistic-cultural perspective a research project is currently being carried out at Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin. This multi-disciplinary, comparative project is focused on the acquisition and use of the languages of the host community and on the transmission of the first language of migrants to their children. The project is designed to yield both sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic findings and, also, to incorporate sociocultural and educational dimensions. The research methods employed so far have included questionnaires, interviews, language elicitation instruments, media search. The project sets out to determine the factors which condition the success or failure of second language acquisition, and those factors which affect the transmission of Polish language and culture to the children of Polish immigrants. The Project received financial endorsement from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences and, in June 2007, was officially launched by the Polish Ambassador and received an official support from the Polish Embassy.

##### ***Questionnaire-derived preliminary findings***

The research questionnaire (cf. Kopeckova *et al*, 2007) was made available online in November 2007, and preliminary results obtained to date from a sample of 87 Polish nationals provide insights into the sentiments expressed by Polish community members towards the widespread use of the Polish language in Ireland.

In response to the question: *What is the balance of Polish and English in your everyday life in Ireland?* over 55% of the respondents claim they use Polish “more” (39.1%) and “much more” (26.4%) often than English,

23% believe the balance in use of Polish and English to be in equal proportions. Just over 11% state they employ the English language more frequently than Polish. These results are a strong indicator of how widespread the use of the native language is among Polish community members in Ireland (see Table 1).

**Table 1** : Balance in use of English and Polish

	Frequency	Percent
Valid much more English	3	3.4
more English	7	8.0
half and half	20	23.0
more Polish	34	39.1
much more Polish	23	26.4
Total	87	100.0

47% of the respondents indicate they are either satisfied (35.6%) or very satisfied (12.6%) with opportunities to use/hear Polish in Ireland (see Table 2). As these results indicate, the subjects do not seem to share a concern, commonly voiced by observers, namely that the widespread use of Polish could negatively impact on second language acquisition and integration.

**Table 2** : Satisfaction with opportunities to use/hear Polish

	Frequency	Percent
Valid very satisfied	11	12.6
satisfied	31	35.6
neutral	40	46.0
Dissatisfied	4	4.6
very dissatisfied	1	1.1
Total	87	100.0

Polish culture maintenance is perceived as *important* and *very important* by respectively 58.6% and 36.8% of the respondents (cf. Table 3). These results are indicative of strong commitment on the part of Polish migrants to their mother country and culture.

**Table 3** : Perceived importance of Polish culture maintenance

	Frequency	Percent
Valid very important	51	58.6
important	32	36.8
neither important nor unimportant	4	4.6
Total	87	100.0

The full version of the research questionnaire can be accessed at: <http://www.researchstudies.eu/polishdiaspora/index.php>. (For further discussion of the results, see Singleton *et al*, 2007).

In the future stages of the research project, sociolinguistic interviews and interview-based case studies are envisaged which will help monitor second language acquisition patterns and Polish/English language analyses as used by Polish migrants.

### **3.2. Minority language policy, planning and practice.**

Closely linked to the Polish Diaspora Project described above, a longitudinal research project was designed by the author, which sets out to identify areas which should inform language policymakers with regard to the Polish language in Ireland by way of a survey of the demand for Polish language in education, media, translation services, cultural, economic, and social life; the patterns of Polish language use; attitudes towards the widespread presence of the Polish language; areas of concern. This survey will be conducted among employees of public services, both Irish and Polish, language-service providers, employees of Polish-language media and Polish community members:

- translators and language-service providers,
- language-support teachers (in primary and secondary education sector)
- employees of:
  - call centres operating through the medium of Polish;
  - the financial sector
  - Polish-language media
  - Polish cultural organizations
  - Polish Embassy and Consulate in Dublin
  - Department of Social and Family Affairs
  - Polish union representatives with SIPTU

The demand for Polish language services will be estimated and the number of Polish community members who have availed themselves of such services established. In the further stage of the research project, a survey will be conducted among Polish community members to document interest and reliance on Polish-language services, Polish-language media, Polish cultural organizations, language attitudes, intercultural skills as well as the patterns of Polish language use. Further, the study will also focus on the participants in Polish-language courses, their motivational patterns and linguistic needs. A survey will be conducted among Irish participants of Polish-language courses offered both in private language schools and at university level.

Analyses of Polish-language media, press coverage, websites, Internet, and blog networks constitute a substantial part of the envisaged methodology.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Polish, the biggest community language in Ireland since 2004, has not to date been regulated by a coherent language policy. The widespread use of the Polish language and a number of concerns which have arisen in consequence of the high level of immigration of Polish nationals to Ireland should be subjected to a pan-European and cross-institutional debate where the focal points to be addressed include:

- Community language translation in the public space;
- The role of community languages in mainstream education;
- Representation of the e.g. Polish alphabet in official documents and legislative acts;
- The influence of the widespread use of community languages on the pace and quality of integration of Polish community members into the host community;
- Provision of Polish language skills to the host community members;
- Special measures (preferential treatment) of one particular community language which is represented by disproportionately higher number of speakers (e.g. the case of the post-accession Polish Diaspora and the Polish language in Ireland).

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