

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

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

Edited by  
**David Singleton, Vera Regan  
and Ewelina Debaene**

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**Vera Regan** has a PhD in linguistics from the Université d'Aix en Provence and is Associate Professor of Sociolinguistics at University College Dublin. She is Chevalier de l'ordre des Palmes Académiques and has served as President of the European Second Language, President of the Association for French Language Association and President of the Association of Canadian Studies in Ireland. She has held Visiting Professorships at the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Ottawa. She has published widely on variation theory and second language acquisition.

**David Singleton** took his BA at Trinity College, University of Dublin, and his PhD at the University of Cambridge. He is a Fellow of Trinity College Dublin, where he is Professor of Applied Linguistics. He also holds the title of Research Professor at the University of Pannonia. He has served as President of the Irish Association for Applied Linguistics, as Secretary General of the International Association of Applied Linguistics and as President of the European Second Language Association. His publications range across a wide spectrum of topics – including syllabus design and pedagogical grammar – but currently focus mainly on cross-linguistic influence, the second language lexicon, the age factor in language acquisition and multilingualism.



**Agnieszka Skrzypek** holds a PhD in Psycholinguistics from Trinity College Dublin. She is currently relocating from the University of Limerick to the University of Aberdeen to take up the post of a Lecturer in Linguistics. She has taught on Applied Linguistics and TESOL programmes in a number of third-level institutions in Ireland and Poland. Additionally, she has considerable expertise in statistical research methods. Her research interests include, *inter alia*, the role of short-term memory in L2 learning and L2 processing, computerized working memory training, cognitive linguistics and educational psychology. She has published papers in international journals and edited volumes.

**Polly Walsh** is a Speech and Language Therapist and a graduate of Trinity College Dublin. She has over ten years' experience working with children and adults with intellectual disability. Since 2008, she has worked for St. John of God Community Services. Her research interests include early childhood intervention and intellectual disability, alternative and augmentative communication, and bilingualism and second language acquisition. Her most recent work has involved developing accessible policy documents for people with intellectual disability.

# Introduction

David Singleton and Vera Regan

The chapters in this book are all based on research conducted under the broad auspices of a major project funded during the period 2007–2010 by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities under the title ‘Second language acquisition and native language maintenance in the Polish diaspora in Ireland and France’. The influx of Polish migrants into Ireland had not, before the commencement of the project, been the subject of substantive research from a linguistico-cultural perspective. Our multi-disciplinary, comparative project sought to make good this deficit with respect to the acquisition and use of the languages of the host community and to the transmission of the first language of migrants to their children. The project was designed to yield both sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic findings and, also, to incorporate sociocultural and educational dimensions. A parallel investigation of the Polish community in France was carried out to identify language similarities and differences between the two communities. The point of this comparison was that Polish people had been migrating to France over a very long period. Notwithstanding the divergences between circumstances under which the two groups migrated, the language behaviour patterns of Poles who settled in France would, in our view, provide indicators regarding the linguistic future of Poles in Ireland. Given there had been no attempts in linguistic studies so far to compare Polish migrant communities in two different European receiving countries, we saw our project as constituting an original contribution to the area of sociolinguistic research and migration studies.

The project proceeded under the general supervision of the three editors of this volume: David Singleton, Vera Regan and Ewelina Debaene. A further colleague, John Harris, informally participated in the project on a voluntary basis. Three postgraduate researchers were funded by the project, Romana Kopečková, Niamh Nestor and Agnieszka Skrzypek, and Barbara Bidžinska and Polly

Walsh, who were not financially supported by the project worked within its general ambit. Barbara Bidzińska worked with Polish migrants in Austria, thus extending the geographical range of our investigation, and Polly Walsh worked with very young children, extending in similar fashion the range of ages covered by our activities. All of the above figure in the pages that follow.

It is perhaps worth emphasizing the fact that we endeavoured throughout to render our data-collection procedures as user-friendly as possible, offering participants, for instance, the possibility of responding either in Polish or in a language of their host country (English/French). Participants were consistently thanked – verbally and/or in writing – for their contribution to the project and were made aware of the project website. Moreover, in connection with our recruitment and data-collection activities in Dublin, we offered a much-appreciated free six-month course in English to a large number of our adult participants. A further point worth recalling is that all the non-Polish researchers working on the project acquired some knowledge of the Polish language, have participated in Polish cultural life in Ireland, and visited Poland. We believe that our efforts in all of the above respects had a very positive impact on the way in which our project was looked upon and responded to by the participants.

Sociolinguistic interviews were conducted in both France and Ireland from the start of the project until the end of its funding period, by, and under the supervision of, the two Associate Investigators, Vera Regan and Ewelina Debaene. Data collection involving a general socio-biographical profiling also took place in the context of the other individual projects. Agnieszka Skrzypek designed the language elicitation associated with the above-mentioned English language course. Language elicitation was also carried out by Romana Kopečková. This particular strand of language data collection project involved testing Polish participants on their perception and production of Irish-English vowel sounds.

The contributions to the present volume divide largely into those which proceed from a sociolinguistic perspective and those from a psycholinguistic perspective. The first five contributions all deal with social aspects of second language (L2) acquisition and maintenance, of which the first two deal with the acquisition of French in France by Polish migrants, two address the acquisition of English in Ireland by Polish migrants, and the remaining chapter is concerned with the experiential and acquisitional profile of Polish migrants in Austria. The last three papers all have a more psycholinguistic orientation and all deal with Poles' acquisition of English as an L2 in Ireland.

The more sociolinguistically oriented chapters by Debaene, Debaene and Harris, Nestor, and Regan all treat of the area of SLA and identity, which has recently become an extremely productive area of inquiry (see, for

example, Regan, 2013). Debaene's chapter is a comparative, descriptive look at the Polish diaspora which formed in France in the 1980s and the recent, post-EU-accession Polish community in Ireland. It examines the two migration patterns: (1) migration for settlement and (2) mobility within the EU. Various circumstances under which the two groups migrated, their respective concerns at various stages of their stay abroad, the coping strategies used to minimize stressful situations, the language-learning strategies deployed, as well as degree of maintenance of native language and culture are reported. The research methods described include interviews and media coverage analyses, conducted both in France and Ireland. The factors which emerge from these preliminary results as most influential on the process of integration, have to do with, *inter alia*: reasons for migrating, distribution and number of migrants in the host country, socio-economic status, length of residence, frequency of visits to the home country, and institutional representation.

Regan's contribution uses a mixed method approach to investigate the use of vernacular French by Polish speakers living in France. It combines a quantitative, variationist analysis of a frequently occurring variable in French, the deletion and retention of *ne*, the first particle of negation, with a qualitative analysis which further explores the implications of the quantitative results. The computer multivariate analysis calculates the probability of multiple factors on the use of the vernacular variant. It was hypothesized that those who lived longer in France were likely to use more vernacular variants. The factors which were found to be most significant included length of residence (LOR) in France. Whereas, for the group as a whole, the longest LOR correlates with the highest deletion rates, the figures for two individuals run counter to this direction. At the two ends of the continuum, we see that one participant (the 'bookseller', Mariusz), a high-proficiency speaker with the longest LOR, has, surprisingly, the lowest deletion rate; on the other hand, the 'basketball player' (Anna), with a lower LOR, deletes at a very high rate. Anna's high deletion rate is all the more interesting as women tend to produce lower rates of vernacular variants. The intriguing case of these two speakers prompted a further investigation into the trajectories of their lives through qualitative analysis of these lives and life choices. The two speakers are positioned in opposite directions in space and time. Mariusz orients himself towards Poland and its cultural and literary past. Anna orients herself towards contemporary France and the future. Combining quantitative and qualitative data shows how individuals can contrast with the background of broader social structural categories, depending on the stances they take. These two contrasting speakers demonstrate that, while overall categories are a useful predictor of patterns of L2 acquisition, individuals are more

than simply exemplars of such overall categories. Their personal biographies and current relationships with others in their society lead to significant variations from overall patterns.

Nestor's chapter focuses on the use of discourse markers in the speech of adolescent Poles in Ireland. The impact of Ireland's recent population change has been particularly striking in the pupil profiles of Irish schools. At present, approximately 12% of primary school pupils (Naughton *et al.*, 2010) and 9% of post-primary school students were born outside of Ireland (Department of Education and Skills and the Office of the Minister for Integration, 2010). There continues to be a need for improved policy-making to be better informed by more evidence-based academic research, with particular reference to enhanced social cohesion and inclusion policies. This is particularly necessary given the fact that non-Irish-born children represent a significant percentage of the school population. Equally, the question of integration into the host community continues to be pertinent. One indicator of integration is language. Sankoff *et al.* (1997) claim that the fluency with which a speaker uses discourse markers is an indication of how integrated he/she is into the local speech community. This chapter analyses the discourse marker *like* and its use by young Polish L2 speakers of English. The analysis shows that this discourse marker is a salient feature of the speech of many of the speakers observed and that such speakers follow Irish English patterns, but that there is a high degree of interspeaker variation. A more detailed analysis elucidates notable differences between speakers and indicates that gender and location may have a potentially significant impact.

The Debaene and Harris chapter explores the relationship between attitudes and identity on the one hand and situationally related variations in language use by non-native speakers on the other. This joins the current body of work on identity and Polish L2 speakers of Irish English, see (Nestor & Regan 2011; Regan, in press; Regan *et al.*, 2013). The subjects of the study in this volume are 25 Polish nationals who came to Ireland after the accession of Poland to the EU in May 2004 and have lived in their adopted country for at least three years. Specific attention is given to the phenomena of convergence (Pardo, 2006) and accommodation (Giles *et al.*, 1991). The authors explore the extent to which Polish non-native speakers of English in Ireland aim for, or believe they approximate, native speaker performance in English in different settings (or aspire ultimately to pass for native speakers of English). The speakers' own views on these issues are provided and their assessment of the importance of such issues in relation to identity, the maintenance of solidarity with Polish friends and groups, and their integration into Irish society generally. The mixed-method

approach deployed includes the use of questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, and focus group meetings. Issues include:

- How determined are immigrant Polish people's attempts to acquire native (Irish) English speaker norms and performance in relation to accent, linguistic structure and content, non-linguistic interaction, register, idiom and communication generally?
- How are interactions in English different in terms of convergence and accommodation depending on whether the participants consist of native-native, native/non-native or non-native/non-native groups or pairs?
- How Polish speakers' accentedness in English limits their ability to adapt their speech to native pronunciation? How are convergence and accommodation related to issues of identity?

Bidzińska's chapter analyses the situation of the Polish diaspora in Austria including mutual attitudes, processes of integration and identity formation among immigrant Poles. The study analyses the complex immigrant experiences of Poles in Austria and the impact of those experiences on identity formation of members of the Polish diaspora. The study starts from the premise that one cannot fully understand the complexities of integration without prior knowledge of historical background and relations between the receiving society and particular ethnic groups. Therefore, the author familiarizes the reader with the various contexts of the Polish immigration to Austria. The article has been divided into two parts: theoretical considerations, and empirical study. First, the reader is encouraged to focus on the concept of identity and to consider factors which play an active role in its formation – both on the individual and societal level. Second, the reader's attention is drawn to the concept of Polish identity: what does it mean to be Polish? In this section of the article, different directions in Polish political thought, attachment to the Slavic heritage, strong links to the Catholic Church, and the concept of Polish martyrdom. Third, immigrant policies in Austria are discussed. However, the author warns that the reader should remember that the mentioned regulations were effective at the time of data collection – some laws may have already changed or be amended in the future. The second part of the article presents the participants of the study. This part has also been divided into subsections and includes the research questions which guided the study, tabular presentation of data, and a short discussion. In the last section of the article some directions for future research in the field are suggested.

Psycholinguistic issues are the focus of the chapters by Skrzypek, Kopečková, and Walsh and Singleton. The topics of phonological short-term

memory, phonological approximation, the age factor and lexical acquisition are leitmotifs in this part of the book, resonating with recent and forthcoming publications by the authors in question such as Muñoz and Singleton (2011), Singleton and Kopečková (in press) and Skrzypek and Singleton (2013).

Skrzypek's contribution deals with phonological short-term memory and the L2 learner, particularly in relation to vocabulary acquisition and in relation to adult learners. In the last two decades the relationship between the rate of vocabulary learning and the ability to repeat nonwords (phonotactically licit made-up words that do not exist in the language on which they are based) has been the focus of intense research. Significant positive correlations between scores representing vocabulary knowledge and scores representing the ability to repeat nonwords or lists of nonwords have been reported (for an overview see e.g. Baddeley, 2007; Gathercole, 2006a, 2006b). As correlations are not in themselves indicative of the direction of causality, this relationship can be interpreted as either supporting the claim that phonological short-term memory (conceptualized as immediate memory for verbal wordlike material tapped by nonword tasks) causally affects vocabulary learning or that the reverse holds true. Skrzypek's paper examines this issue in the context of adult L2 learning using the cross-lagged correlational paradigm.

In Kopečková's chapter, second language speech learning among Polish child and adult migrants living in Ireland is examined. Polish children participating in her study perceived similarities between native and non-native vowel sounds differently from the manner in which Polish adults did, which, in turn, predicted and explained their superior L2 production abilities. The author, therefore, argues that perception of cross-language phonetic similarity may play an important role in how accurately non-native sounds are acquired. Other factors, such as native language phonology and quality and quantity of L2 experience, are also discussed in the study as determining the extent to which non-native sounds can be produced with native-like accuracy by learners of diverse age groups.

Walsh and Singleton report an investigation of the vocabulary development of Polish children and Irish children of the same age over a six-month period. The Polish children's English vocabulary levels and patterns of lexical development were compared to those of their Irish peers and also across the Polish group. The gap which emerged between the Polish and Irish children in terms of English vocabulary size was found to be rapidly diminishing - to the extent that on the second testing occasion some of the Polish children's scores were within the native-speaker range. The results also suggest, unsurprisingly, that the Polish children know less about the English words than