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Authors(s)	Nestor, Niamh, Regan, Vera
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NIAMH NESTOR AND VERA REGAN

3. THE NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

*A Case Study of Young Poles, Language and Identity*¹

INTRODUCTION

Ireland has experienced momentous change over the last 15 years, with a sharp reversal in its traditionally outward-migration patterns to a very rapid increase in inward-migration. Mac Éinrí and White have characterised Ireland's experiences of migration as 'unique, at least in European terms' (2008: 153). This came to the fore towards the mid 1990s onwards when increased economic prosperity led to a skills shortage on the labour market and the concomitant inward migration led to rapid population diversification. This was particularly noticeable after the accession of ten new EU Member States, including Poland, on May 1st 2004.

The impact of this population change has been particularly striking in the pupil profiles of Irish schools. At present, approximately 10% of primary school pupils and 8% of post-primary school students were born outside of Ireland (OECD, 2009). There is a growing body of scholarship on migration into Ireland, with a particular focus on integration and social cohesion. Within this work, there is a dearth of material on young people (Mac Éinrí & White, 2008; Ní Laoire, *et al.*, 2009; Smyth, *et al.*, 2009). While some research is available², e.g., on separated children (e.g., Ward, 2004), migrant children's experiences at school (e.g., Devine, 2009; Keogh & Whyte, 2003), immigration as understood by children from the host community (e.g., Devine & Kelly, 2006; Devine, *et al.*, 2008), the recognition of migrant children's first languages (e.g., McDaid, 2009), and the provision of English language support at school (e.g., Kirwan, 2009; Nowlan, 2008), there continues to be the 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.

The Department of Education and Skills (previously, the Department of Education and Science) published its Intercultural Education Strategy, 2010–2015 (IES) in September 2010 (www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/mig_intercultural_education_strategy.pdf). The IES identifies ten key components and (based on these) five high level goals of intercultural education. Among these is the recognition that knowledge of the language(s) of instruction is crucial for academic success (2010: 46). The IES also acknowledges the importance of valuing the minority student's first language and of encouraging first language maintenance, noting that this will enhance second language acquisition and support identity development (*ibid.*: 40). We suggest that identity development is not only linked to first language development and maintenance but is inextricably bound up with second, third and further language learning as well. In this regard, we believe that a thorough understanding of the dynamics of language and identity is necessary to underpin the IES and it is with this in mind that this chapter has been written. Key questions that arise for consider-

ation in this context are: How is identity constructed through the use of a second language? How does this play out in the daily interactions at school? And, finally, what implications, if any, does this have for policy development and implementation?

This chapter is divided into three parts. First, the authors will briefly review the literature on language and social identity. A description of the nature of Polish migration to Ireland and the doctoral study will follow. Finally, some case study data will be presented and conclusions will be drawn.

LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

International research on language, language variation, and identity has undergone significant transformation in the last half-century. In the 1960s, researchers became increasingly interested in language variation in a social context.³ Since Labov's famous studies in the 1960s (1963, 1966), many studies have been carried out on variation in (first) language (L1) speech (e.g., Labov, 1972a, 1972b). In this tradition, speech variables are the resources available to speakers to mark their place in society, to 'affirm membership in their own social group, or to claim membership in other groups to which they aspire' (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 468–469). Identity is seen as fixed and (relatively) stable and speakers use the linguistic repertoire at their disposal to mark their 'place in the social grid' (ibid.: 469). This approach to L1 speech was later applied to the variation found in second language (L2) speech (e.g., Schumann, 1978). From the mid 1990s, however, researchers began to conceive of the language learner as someone other than the 'ahistorical "stick figure"' (McKay & Wong, 1996: 603) from previous L2 research and moved away from the essentialist treatment of identity to a view which perceived identity as fluid and multi-faceted (e.g. Miller, 1999; Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995; Pavlenko & Blackledge (Eds.), 2004; Rampton, 1995).

In order to learn an L2, learners must have sufficient opportunities to hear and practise the language, whether these are in the formal environment of the classroom (for example, English as an Additional Language (EAL) classes) or in the informal environment of interactions with friends, teachers, and so on. This 'input', as it is formally known in second language acquisition (SLA) research, is crucial as it makes the "facts" [i.e. the grammar, phonology, etc.] of the L2 salient to the learner' (Ellis, 1994: 244).

A further concept which has been widely researched in the field of SLA is that of motivation (cf. Ellis, 1994), whereby a highly motivated learner will acquire a new language with ease. Taking a poststructuralist approach, Norton Peirce (1995) challenges the notion of motivation as overly simplistic in that it fails to 'capture the complex relationship between relations of power, identity, and language learning' (ibid.: 16–17). McKay and Wong (1996) suggest that motivation has connotations of some 'monolithic inner quality that a learner may summon in varying amounts' and leads one to the assumption that a lack of motivation is the root cause for unsuccessful learning (ibid.: 579). As an alternative to the concept of 'motivation', Norton Peirce developed the notion of 'investment' (1995: 17). She argues that a language learner will 'invest' in learning the L2 and will expect a return on his/her investment in the form of 'a wider range of symbolic and material resources' (ibid.). This return should be 'commensurate with the effort expended' (ibid., citing Ogbu, 1978). Thus, each interaction with a target language speaker (a speaker whose first language is the language being learned) will involve an investment in both the target language and the learner's social identity (ibid.: 18).

McKay and Wong (1996) develop Norton Peirce's theory of 'investment' to illustrate the interrelations of power, discourse and the language learner's social identity. Their work describes the various paths taken by the L2 learners in their study to negotiate their identities in the context of the various discourses at work in the school and the wider society. In McKay and Wong's study, parents and teachers positioned Asian students in a 'model-minority' discourse which views Asians and Asian Americans as 'hardworking, disciplined, [and] academically inclined' (ibid.: 586). In other words, the students were perceived as having the essential characteristics to help them succeed at school, simply because of where they (or their parents) were born. In the Irish context, Devine (2005) identifies certain discourses which educators use to position non-Irish-born pupils according to different stereotypical descriptions. For example, teachers described children from Eastern Europe using adjectives such as 'bright', 'diligent', and 'willing to learn' (ibid.: 62).

The authors suggest that the young Poles in this study were subjected to similar discourses and that this may have been reflective of a model-minority discourse at the wider societal level. A popular description of Polish migrants in Ireland is that they are 'hardworking'. This type of discourse may serve to create a stereotype of Polish people but it may also reinforce the view that, in contrast to Poles, other minorities may not be as hardworking. Conversely, this creates a situation whereby Poles may *only* be hardworking and not, for example, 'lazy'. Individuals may accommodate to (i.e., embrace) a positioning in a discourse or they may resist (i.e., reject) (Leki, 1995: 250, cited in McKay and Wong, 1996: 595).⁴ Resistance occurs when an individual is subjected to an undesirable positioning in a discourse. As a result, he/she can engage in a counterdiscourse 'which positions the person in a powerful rather than marginalized subject position' (Norton Peirce, 1995: 16).

In the following discussion, the authors draw on Norton Peirce's notion of investment in language learning and McKay and Wong's discussions of discourse and power in order to illustrate the fluid and multi-faceted social identities of one young Polish woman living in Ireland who, on arrival, spoke little English.

POLISH MIGRATION TO IRELAND

There have been previous migration waves to Ireland from Poland, but not by any means as great as that during the Celtic Tiger years. Grabowska (2005: 32) summarises these waves as follows:

(i) Post World War II migration. The Irish government offered approximately 1,000 third-level scholarships to Polish people who had been forced to leave Poland.

(ii) 'Solidarity migration' in the early 1980s. In the aftermath of the imposition of martial law in Poland (1981–1983), the ruling Communist Party only allowed one-way cross-border movement (Regan and Nestor, 2010: 146).

(iii) 'Migration of hearts' in the mid 1980s. This wave was made up mostly of young Polish women who emigrated to Ireland to marry Irish men. These women often became Irish citizens through marriage.

(iv) Post-1997. Migration during the Celtic Tiger boom years, which Grabowska (2005: 32) describes as having a 'dual character'. Some migrants were outsourced by their multinational or Irish company bosses but most came to Ireland through the process of chain migration. This is a process whereby personal contacts and developed networks of migrants in the destination country lead to an induction

process: ‘One migrant inducts another. Whole networks and neighbourhoods leave to work abroad, bringing back stories, money, know-how and contacts’ (Hochschild, 2006: 214).⁵ Factors influencing an individual’s decision to migrate are complex (Grabowska, 2005: 31) but the post-1997 migration flow is characterised as primarily economically-motivated in nature (ibid.: 32). This was facilitated by the fact that Ireland (along with the UK and Sweden) did not require Polish citizens to hold a work permit in order to gain employment after Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004.

There has been much debate about the actual number of Polish nationals living in Ireland but with no definitive conclusions. According to the 2006 Census (www.cso.ie/statistics/nationalityagegroup.htm), the number of non-Irish nationals living in Ireland rose to almost 420,000, accounting for c. 10% of the total population of the country. This is a substantial increase amounting to a doubling of the estimated 5% of migrants who lived in Ireland before the mid 1990s (OECD, 2009: 15). Within this figure of 420,000 the great majority came from European Union countries (almost 276,000), with 63,276 from Poland, meaning that Poles represented, on paper at least, 15% of the total non-Irish population. Of the 63,276 Poles in the 2006 Census, 5,900 of these were aged 0–19 (Ní Laoire *et al.*, 2009: 20).

However, since Census 2006, reports in the media (cf. MacCormaic, 2007) suggest that the number of Poles in Ireland actually hovers somewhere close to 200,000. A figure which might appear helpful in determining how many Polish nationals have moved to Ireland since EU accession is the number of Personal Public Service Numbers (PPSNs). From 2004–2009, a total of 321,976 PPSNs were issued to Polish nationals (www.welfare.ie/EN/Topics/PPSN/Pages/ppsn_all_years.aspx). Unfortunately, this figure cannot be treated as an accurate indicator of the Polish population in Ireland as not every migrant registers nor does a person have to deregister if he/she decides to leave Ireland. In conclusion, there are no accurate statistics on how many Poles have actually migrated to Ireland nor, more currently, on how many have chosen to remain.

METHODOLOGY

There was a total of 103 young people aged 9–19 involved in the wider study (Nestor) – 61 males and 42 females. Each participant had moved to Ireland since EU accession in 2004. There were two research sites, one urban and one rural, and the research was conducted in the young people’s schools for the most part. On the rare occasion that this was not possible, the researcher gathered data in the young person’s home. Seventy-five of the young people were living in a rural area and 28 lived in an urban area. The difference in sample sizes was due to the nature of access in both research sites. The researcher was given permission to conduct research in more schools in the rural area. Of the total number of participants, 77 (45 males and 32 females) agreed to take part in the interview process. The interviews lasted between 35 minutes and 2 hours. In general, where possible, the researcher spoke to the young person for an hour or longer. Sometimes the age of the young person indicated that one hour might be too long and tiring; on other occasions, the natural dynamics of school life meant that the interview lasted for less than one hour.

Speakers were recorded in semi-directed interviews (cf. Tagliamonte, 2006); however, for the most part, the interviews were largely guided by the young people’s own interests. In the broader research project, the interview data will be analysed

quantitatively and qualitatively for the production of particular linguistic variables (see footnote 2). For the purposes of this chapter, the authors have chosen to draw on one case study in particular in order to elucidate the link between language and identity. The first author speaks Polish fluently after a significant amount of time spent in Poland. She translated any Polish used during the interviews or in the ethnographic questionnaire⁶. Her Polish language proficiency also gave her the status of ‘insider’ during the field study period.

THE YOUNG POLISH PEOPLE IN THIS STUDY

As mentioned previously, Census 2006 returned a figure of 5,900 for Poles aged 0–19 years old. It can be assumed that a relatively significant number of these children and teenagers are in fulltime education (however, no accurate data exist on this). The young people in this study have all migrated to Ireland from Poland since 2004. The decision to migrate was always taken by one or both parents, sometimes with but sometimes without the agreement of the young people. The young people generally live with both parents, and, in some cases, other members of the extended family live in the same house or close by. In other cases, the family remains fragmented due to migration (one parent in Poland and one in Ireland), or has fragmented since arrival.

Since leaving Poland, these young people have experienced the various ups and downs of the migration process. They have felt excitement at the prospect of living in a new country, making new friends, attending a new school, and having new experiences. They have also felt homesickness and loneliness, the anxiety brought on by the separation from family and friends, the insecurities associated with ‘fitting in’, and the often tricky dynamics of friendship-forming while maintaining a consistent commitment to old friends in Poland.⁷ Because these young people are sometimes more proficient in the language of the receiving country, they often become the mouthpieces of their parents in various situations (cf. Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2002). Since the beginning of Ireland’s economic downturn, many of these young people have shared the anxieties of financial and job insecurity borne by their parents. Not least, these young people have had to carry the often overwhelming burden of coping with the demands of a new curriculum through a second language in a very different school system.

ETHNOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

The ethnographic questionnaire was designed to elicit biographical, linguistic, socio-psychological and linguistic-educational data. There were two versions of the questionnaire (one for younger children and one for teenagers), and the participants (N=103; 61 males and 42 females) could complete the questionnaire in Polish or English. The mean age of the participants was 13 years and two months. The mean length of residence in Ireland was one year and five months. The majority of the participants (86%) returned to Poland between one and three times per year, and throughout the interviews, this return to Poland was an important area of discussion.

The participants generally displayed confidence in their own language abilities (Table 1, i). When considering home language usage (Table 1, ii), it is no surprise that Polish is dominant but the results for English-language usage with family

members are interesting. One reason for this could be that some of the young people's close relatives have non-Polish-speaking partners and therefore English has become one of the languages of communication at home. Equally as unsurprising is the result for English-language usage at school (Table 1, iii) but Polish is also used quite frequently, indicating involvement in Polish-speaking networks. This result is further supported by the balance of daily language use (Table 1, iv). The participants regard their multilingual language abilities very positively (Table 1, v).

When asked about national identification (Table 2), the majority of the participants chose 'Polish', but 20% chose to identify as 'Irish-Polish'. Two of the participants identified as 'Other'. One chose a regional identification, while the other (pseudonym: Ola) identified as something 'between' Polish and Irish. Because of the uniqueness of Ola's answer to this question, the authors have chosen to focus on her case in this chapter.

Table 1. Language

First contact with English (mean age)	8 yrs 9 mths
Receiving formal language instruction?	65% attending English classes (for the most part English as an Additional Language (EAL) at school)
Self-reported language proficiency ⁽ⁱ⁾ How well do you speak English? (like a native/very well/well/quite well/a little/not at all)	28% quite well 37% well 17.5% very well 6% like a native

Table 1. (Continued)

Language use in the family ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ How often do you use Polish with your family? (always/often/sometimes/rarely/never)	96% always or often
How often do you use English with your family? (always/often/sometimes/rarely/never)	26.2% often or sometimes
Language use at school ⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ How often do you use English at school? (always/often/sometimes/rarely/never)	84.5% always or often
How often do you use Polish at school? (always/often/sometimes/rarely/never)	54% often or sometimes
Language use and bilingualism ^(iv) Balance of Polish and English in your daily life?	40% a balanced use of both languages 54% use more Polish
How happy are you about the fact that you can speak both Polish and English? ^(v) (very happy/happy/neutral/unhappy/very unhappy)	95% very happy or happy with their bilingualism

Table 2. Identity

How do you identify? (Polish, Irish-Polish, Other)	78% Polish 20% Irish-Polish 2% Other
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THE CASE STUDY

A case study method is appropriate when ‘a researcher wants to better understand a particular case’ and is undertaken because of the unique set of features that characterise the case: ‘it is because of its uniqueness or ordinariness that a case becomes interesting (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1994, 2000)’ (Berg, 2007: 291). Case studies can provide ‘extremely rich, detailed, and in-depth information’ (ibid.: 283) and they open the door to, as Weick (1995, cited in Berg, 2007: 285) described it, ‘the “sensemaking” processes’ employed by individuals and others. This ‘sensemaking’ is ‘the manner by which people, groups, and organizations make sense of stimuli with which they are confronted, how they frame what they see and hear, how they perceive and interpret this information, and how they interpret their own actions and go about solving problems and interacting with others’ (ibid.: 285). The authors are fully aware that by focussing on one participant the benefits of comparability and generalisability are lost. However, we feel that this loss is mitigated by the many gains which come from this approach. In our chapter, we have highlighted the fact that the Intercultural Education Strategy places an emphasis (among other emphases) on the language-identity nexus. But what does this mean? How should educators and other stakeholders understand the link between language and identity, and, in addition, how should they understand this link for those who are learning a new language in a new living situation? Against this background, we have tried to problematise the language-identity link to demonstrate that the issue is by no means a straightforward one. As we shall see, in a small group such as Ola and her peers, there were multiple competing identities with multiple competing benefits on offer. The reality of life at school and outside of school for Ola was ‘kaleidoscopic, complex and complicated, often a patchwork of overlapping activities’ (Blommaert & Dong, 2010: 11). In this respect, the ethnographic approach of the case study method is critical as it serves to illuminate the complexity of this reality while other research methods have as their aim the ‘simplification and reduction of complexity’ (ibid.). Through Ola, we are able to view the contested space of identity. She describes herself as neither Polish nor Irish but as something in between, and in this way, invokes Block’s third place identity (Block, 2007). While her experiences cannot be generalised across the cohort of Polish young people in the wider study, we feel that Ola’s case is important to discuss precisely because it is different.

The School and the Participant

Íascairí Mara School (pseudonym) is a non-denominational post-primary school in a rural area. The School has been designated as disadvantaged by the Department of Education and Skills on the basis of levels of social and economic disadvantage in the student cohort. At the time of the interview, Ola had been living in Ireland and attending Íascairí Mara for two and a half years. She was almost seventeen and about to sit her Leaving Certificate. Her ambition after Leaving Certificate was to

work in the medical field, and she had already taken up a part-time job in her chosen field which she had found as part of her school work experience the previous year.

Language as an Investment in the Future

Ola's family had had some experience of migration before moving to Ireland. Her father had been working in Germany (and previously in the Netherlands) when the family decided that they no longer wanted to live separately, and, as there were no employment opportunities for her father in their home town in Poland, the whole family (Ola, her parents, and her older brother) moved to Ireland. Through the prism of investment in the future, Ola saw this as an opportunity to improve her language skills. Over time, she embraced the change determinedly and pragmatically and viewed the move very positively.

I think it's very good because I learn, like, English a lot and I think that will help me in the future.

The parents interviewed in the doctoral study (Nestor) unanimously agreed that moving to Ireland was a long-term investment in their children's futures and Ola accommodated to this discourse. She was clearly invested in the long-term benefits of acquiring English and was an active agent in her own learning. She sought out opportunities to use the language, thus providing favourable learning opportunities (Spolsky, 1989, cited in Norton Peirce, 1995).

Language and the Identity of 'the Fretful, Frustrated Parent'

Ola's positivity about the move to Ireland was in sharp contrast with her mother's sadness during the first few months in Ireland. Ola's proficient language skills contrasted sharply with her mother's difficulty with learning the language (evidenced by the fact that Ola and her brother translated constantly for their mother) and Ola, ever the pragmatist, self-assuredly believed that low language proficiency was the root cause of her mother's depression and desire to return to Poland.

I think she would prefer to live in Poland because she was very – what will I say – depressed for the first couple of months in here cos all the friends and everyone. Especially the English is so hard for her.

In speaking about her mother, Ola constructed the identity of 'the fretful, frustrated parent'. Language and language proficiency were central to the construction of this identity. Ola's concern about her mother's lack of proficiency in English led to a reversal in the traditional parent-child roles: in this context of the perceived lack of success in a form of learning, Ola became the concerned parent and her mother became the dependent child.

In Norton Peirce's terms, Ola viewed her mother's lack of investment in the language as having led to a low return: general unhappiness with life in Ireland, an inability to put down roots (hence the desire to return), and an unsatisfying job. Interestingly, it was Ola who felt dissatisfied with her mother's (perceived) low occupational status which she pinpointed as being due to her mother's low language proficiency ('she works in fish factory because she doesn't speak English at all'); she never commented on whether her mother actually *felt* dissatisfied. In fact, the large Polish community in the area, which provided Ola's mother with

opportunities to speak Polish and socialise with other Poles, seemed to have helped mitigate her mother's feelings of isolation and dissatisfaction, and Ola acknowledged this in the interview: 'There's like huge Polish community in here so she works with Polish people and meeting Polish friends'. It seems that, in line with the identity of 'the fretful, frustrated parent', Ola's wishes for her mother may not have tied in with her mother's own wishes. Ola's comment, 'she doesn't speak English at all', while perhaps not necessarily possessing truth value, indicates that Ola saw her mother's lack of proficiency as having rendered her invisible when and where Ola felt it mattered, i.e., on the job market and in creating new social networks (understood perhaps as English-speaking networks, given Ola's later comments about learning to speak English well because she chose to make friends with Irish girls in school). In line with the family's primarily economic reasons for migrating and her identity as 'the fretful, frustrated parent', Ola expressed her disappointment at what she perceived to be her mother's lack of agency and urgency about her language skills and, consequently, concomitant static occupational mobility and closed social networks.

Ola expressed frustration at her mother's over-reliance on her children for linguistic support and struggled to understand her mother's lack of agency, but concluded that this had to be due to sheer intransigence on her mother's part.

I think she *thinks* she doesn't have to [learn] because she can always ask me for something, my brother as well.

Ola laughed as she made the above statement but her frustration was evident. She found it difficult to understand why her mother would continue to reject (as Ola perceived it) the idea of learning English, particularly given the fact that Ola and her brother would not always be available to translate for her. Ola believed that her mother must have deliberately chosen not to learn English because she could always rely on her children.

But you know, the thing is, inside her head there's little block saying that, "It's ok. You don't have to study English. Every time, like, you have to translate something, you've Ola and [brother]", you know.

Again, the identity of the 'fretful, frustrated parent' was evident here. Ola could not understand her mother's refusal to learn English despite all of the opportunities available to her and the obvious benefits (as Ola saw it) that this would bring. Ola perceived her mother as taking advantage of the linguistic safety net that her two children provided and she could not understand her mother's refusal to accept the inevitable: that one day she would be out on her own with no more safety nets on offer.

She has to learn because like I'm leaving. I'm going to college or I might go to Poland or something with my brother. And what she'll do then?

Ola impatiently desired to 'cut the linguistic apron strings' and felt that her mother, just like she and her brother had done, would have to face up to the challenge of learning English and overcome her insecurities.

It wasn't easy either to go into school like with no English and all the people were like, "Where are you from? What's your name?" la la la. "I'm from like uh", like all the questions and I didn't know how to answer anything, and I was like, "Oh". I had the dictionary, the, the whatyoucallit, the em the electronic one so that was quicker than book so, but still, it wasn't good at all.

In conclusion, the above discussion illustrates the central role that language played in the resetting of the parameters of a mother-daughter relationship against the backdrop of the migration experience (for similar discussions, see e.g., Hagan, MacMillan & Wheaton, 1996; Kwak, 2003; Lutz, 1998; and Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2002, chapter 3). While it is impossible to generalise from one individual's migration story, what we have attempted to demonstrate here is that, although Ola's mother may have overcome her initial feelings of depression, Ola continued to see an acceptable knowledge of English as key to a happier life. Indeed, many second language speakers see language proficiency as central to the success of their migration experience. This was something which Ola embraced wholeheartedly for herself and which she found the rejection or refusal of difficult to accept in others.

Language and the Identity of 'the New Kid on the Block'

Despite her identity as 'the fretful, frustrated parent', Ola was not completely unsympathetic to her mother's feelings of despair. She had also felt depressed on leaving Poland and had found the challenge of starting school in Ireland both lonely and daunting, primarily due to the language barrier. With hindsight, however, she felt that her novel status in the school helped to remedy this.

I had to leave all my friends and I was so depressed and I didn't want to go to school because, you know how it's like, few days you don't know anyone, my English wasn't so good and that was awful. I was lucky that I came in as a first Polish em person in the school. Together with my brother so but em everyone was really nice and wondering em asking questions and (sic).

Ola became known (and is still remembered) as the 'first' Pole in the school. Indeed, she saw her identity as 'the new kid on the block' as central to her successful language learning. As she was novel and new, she became the centre of attention and made friends easily which, she said, was the reason she learned English so easily. She continued to prefer to socialise with her Irish peers throughout her time at school. In this regard, she compared herself to the other Polish students in the school who had arrived in the school later than her. She suggested that they did not learn English as well as she had because they had chosen to socialise with each other and speak Polish, rather than focusing on making Irish friends and improving their English.

Ola was also 'new' in other ways: she arrived in a town and a region with a long history of emigration and thus embodied the bucking of this long-debilitating trend. In the school, she also bucked other trends: unlike some members of the broader student body, she was courteous at all times, she was dedicated to learning, she was very hardworking, and on numerous occasions, despite the language barrier, she outshone her Irish peers by scoring higher than them in various school and State exams. She thus embodied the identity of 'model student'. In conversations with the staff at the school, it was clear that Ola was well-liked and her academic success granted her somewhat of a 'Wunderkind' status among both the Irish and other minority students. The authors suggest that Ola was positioned in a model-minority discourse at work in the school and that through her identity as 'model student', she accommodated to this discourse.

Language, Resistance and Ruptured Identities

Language was an important element in each of the social identities constructed by Ola. She had invested heavily in her own process of language learning and had, as Norton Peirce would assert, also invested in her various social identities in equal measure. These identities clearly became a site of struggle when a number of other young Polish people enrolled in the school a year after Ola had arrived. During the fieldwork, Ola reported that she no longer identified as Polish but that she also did not identify as Irish. Rather, she identified as something ‘between’ (her own description).

This rupture in her identity was brought about by what she perceived as anti-social behaviour on the parts of some of the ‘new’ Poles in the school. The type of Poland she felt she represented through her identity as the ‘model student’ and her accommodation to the model-minority discourse was not the type of Poland represented by some of the new Poles. In a clear case of ‘distinction’ which ‘depends on the suppression of similarities that might undermine the construction of differentiation’ (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010: 24), Ola railed against the behaviour of some of these new Polish students and re-positioned herself as both linguistically and socially separate from them.

I don’t feel Polish anymore because I’m not, like, living in Poland and actually em actually I adopted more to Ireland but and I don’t like the- what’s happening in Poland now. If the Polish people coming in and putting me in shame and giving me bad reputation, I don’t like to be Polish anymore, like. But em I don’t feel Irish either because I’m Polish (laughs).

In McKay and Wong’s study (1996), the strategy of resistance was actively adopted by one student in their study, Michael Lee. As a Chinese ESL (English as a Second Language) student, he used various resources to ‘put together his own counter-discourse in order to exercise agency’ (ibid.: 594) and resisted his positioning as only-academically-oriented in the model-minority discourse which was at work in the school. McKay and Wong (ibid.) argue that, through this counterdiscourse, Michael worked against himself academically. They suggest, however, that the agency he gained from his various social identities (as athlete and friend) were sufficiently satisfying so as to subvert the need for academic success. The arrival of the large group of new Polish students in Ola’s school resulted in a severe rupture in her repertoire of social identities. Language became a tool by which many of these new students were othered (by the linguistic majority) and which the new students used to resist this othering. Through sheer numbers, the opportunities to speak Polish in school increased and naturally the students availed of these opportunities. While this lessened the opportunity to practise and learn English, what became clear was that the return on the investment the new students would have to make in learning English did not appear to provide the right type of gains for these students at this particular time. Just like Michael Lee in McKay and Wong’s study, these students gained agency through the construction of a counterdiscourse. Both Willis (1977) and Giroux (1983a), though primarily in a discussion about social class, outline how the notions of agency and resistance play out in the site of the school. Students can ‘refuse, reject and dismiss the central messages of the school’ (Giroux, 1983b: 260) by engaging in oppositional behaviour (i.e., a counterdiscourse), even though, ultimately, this behaviour may lead to ‘class subordination and political defeat’ (ibid.). In

a demonstration of resistance through 'distinction' (see above; Bucholtz & Hall, 2010: 24), some of the new Polish students resisted their positioning in the model-minority discourse and instead engaged in a counterdiscourse which enabled them to construct alternative identities such as 'the Polish speaker', 'the lazy student', and so on. This resistance undercut Ola's own sense of self. She felt othered by her own in-group and, through the new students' resistance, her identity became a site of struggle. Block (2007) notes that an individual's sense of identity becomes unstable when he or she moves across 'geographical and psychological borders, immersing themselves in new sociocultural environments' (ibid.: 864) but cautions against assuming that the new identity which may emerge from this period of destabilisation will simply be a combination of the old-plus-new or a half-and-half mixture, whereby 'the individual becomes half of what he or she was and half of what he or she has been exposed to' (ibid.). Rather, what emerges is 'a third place' (ibid., citing Bhabha, 1994 and Hall, 1996) where there is a 'negotiation of difference' (ibid., citing Papastergiadis, 2000) during which 'the past and the present "encounter and transform each other" in the "presence of fissures, gaps and contradictions"' (ibid., citing Papastergiadis, 2000: 170). In order to challenge the counterdiscourse of her peers, Ola re-negotiated her own identities, remaining a 'model student' and a 'hard-working person' but rejecting a national identification as Polish. She renegotiated her national identification away from both dominant identifications in the school – Polish or Irish – to position herself in a third, undefined space in between.

The consequences of the emergence of the new students' counterdiscourse had wide-ranging and long-term effects across the student body. Over the course of the research, the researcher noted a heightening of tension between some of the linguistic majority and some of the linguistic minority students in the school. Ola blamed her Polish peers for this, claiming that they did not make an effort to be friendly towards the Irish students. Through a process of distinction (i.e., they are not 'novel', they are not polite, they do not use the language of the majority), Ola sharpened the boundaries of her own social identity. In interactions between the linguistic majority and the linguistic minority, language – and the Polish language in particular – became a powerful tool of resistance, inclusion and exclusion.

Now, I must say, all the other Polish people that came in are not really em (laughs) in centre- in centre of attention or anything. They're just kind of ignored. I think the Polish people just really bad for the Irish people in school cos they call them names and talk in Polish to the Irish people so (laughs) that's annoying.

The new Polish students drew on their bilingual abilities in the creation of the counterdiscourse and the use of bad language in Polish became a common tool in this process. Ola disapproved strongly of this and distanced herself from this behaviour.

I was here a year on my own like, the only Polish person in the school like together with my brother. They [the linguistic majority students] never know what's "fuck" or "fuck off" or stuff like that. And the minute the Polish- the other Polish people came in, there's like "suka" [*bitch*], "kurwa" [*whore/fuck*] and you know.

Interestingly, the linguistic majority, whose dominant position in the language stakes had been undermined by name-calling in Polish, appropriated the language of the linguistic minority in a powerful counter-move. When the linguistic minority

used Polish expletives in interactions with the linguistic majority, members of the linguistic majority countered with the same.

This struggle also manifested itself in an ethno-territorial division of space in the common area, a large area inside the school where students gathered during break times. The Irish non-Traveller and Traveller students congregated around the edges of the common area (the Traveller students congregated near the staff room entrance), the Poles sat together at tables in the centre of the area, and the small number of Pakistani students in the school retreated to the very fringes of this area. During this time, stories in the media served to heighten tensions further. Dell announced that it was moving its operations to Poland (Scally, 2009) and reports appeared in local, regional and national newspapers about Polish firms refusing to recruit Irish workers in Poland (the infamous 'No Irish Need Apply' story (McDonald, 2009)). At the conclusion of the fieldwork period, the students maintained these in-group social networks.

CONCLUSION

While Ola's story is unique to one person in one place at one time, it is informative in that it illustrates the struggle to achieve self-representation in the linguistic majority language and reminds us that identity is not static or fixed but that it is multiple, fluid, and changing across time and space (Weedon, 1987). Ola invested heavily in her own language learning on the basis that she expected a long-term sustained return. The arrival of the new Poles in the school challenged her sense of self and her accommodation to the model-minority discourse. Educators may position linguistic minority students in particular discourses without taking into account the individual's agency. Often, the agency gained from competing social identities is sufficiently satisfactory and the individual does not feel the need to accommodate to positionings desired for him/her by the relevant authorities (teachers, parents, policymakers, and so on). Just like Michael Lee in McKay and Wong's (1996) study and the new Polish students in this study, a rejection of the dominant school and wider societal discourses led to a situation whereby the students challenged these (undesirable) positionings through the creation of a counterdiscourse and the construction of alternative identities.

These insights are useful for policy makers and teachers in a number of important key respects. While the importance of the influence of Polish parents' desire for their children to achieve self-expression in the majority language (and, thus, future academic and career success) is indubitable, it cannot be taken for granted that each young person will work to fulfil this desire. Policymakers should, therefore, not lose sight of the individuals for whom policy is designed. Polish young people in Ireland demonstrate that they have a multitude of subjectivities and diverse circumstances which they must negotiate in a variety of situations. Despite the best intentions of parents, educators, and policymakers, the struggles and ruptures that these young people face are not accounted for in policy.

The authors suggest that it is in this respect that the school becomes crucial. We see as one of the significant challenges facing the implementation of the IES in Ireland the willingness of educators, with particular reference to those in school management and other important stakeholders (Parents' Council, Board of Management, the wider community), to approach the implementation of the policy across the whole school. The implementation of the policy cannot become the sole remit of

EAL teachers. In order to support these young people on their path to academic achievement and personal fulfilment and to ensure the participation and integration of all young people in the wider society, all those carrying the different and varying responsibilities in a school should be made aware of and encouraged to play their role in the implementation of the IES for his/her school. On-going training, both at the pre-service and in-service stages, is vital in this respect.

The publication of the IES at this stage is both timely and welcome. Over the following years, as this Strategy begins to come into effect, it will be crucial to monitor its impact on the ground, with mechanisms in place to encourage and facilitate feedback from all interested stakeholders, and to ensure that adjustments are made in a timely and a structured way in response to changing circumstances and contexts, both at national and local levels.

NOTES

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- ² This list is by no means exhaustive. See Mac Éinrí and White (2008) for a more comprehensive review of research available on migrant children in the Irish context.
- ³ Variationist sociolinguists are interested in language change. People can say the same thing in different ways, and this language variability is seen as a 'necessary condition for change' (Johnstone, 2006: 46). Variationist sociolinguists explore the social meaning of linguistic variables (e.g., Eckert, 2000) in order to understand broader questions of language change (Johnstone, 2006). A good example of a variable which is currently receiving increased attention in the literature is quotative *like* (e.g., *I was like, "Who does she think she is?"*). In this case, the speaker could alternatively use one of the more 'traditional quotatives', *say, go, think* (among others) (Tagliamonte and Hudson, 1999: 147), which act as competing variables.
- ⁴ See also Wei & Wu (2009) for a description of how bilingual Chinese-English pupils use language to resist positioning in particular discourses and to construct identities in complementary schools in Britain.
- ⁵ The authors would like to thank Diane Sabenacio Nititham for her valuable help with this section.
- ⁶ The ethnographic questionnaire is designed to elicit important background information about the participant, particularly the kind of information which variationist sociolinguists believe may have an impact on the way the person speaks, e.g., sex, age, length of residence in the host country, previous contact with English, use of Polish, and so on.
- ⁷ For a discussion on emotions and human mobility, see the 2008 Special Issue of the *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 29(3) entitled 'Transnational Families: Emotions and Belonging'. Also, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2002) devote a chapter to the psychosocial impact of immigration.

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Niamh Nestor and Vera Regan
School of Languages and Literatures
University College Dublin, Ireland