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Language and motility of migrant communities in Europe

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Chapter 4

Motility and Methodology: an Integrated Approach

This study analyses the way in which language, and language policies influence migration patterns in the European Union. 'Motility' is a central concept in the analysis, and this research ensures that all the relevant factors of motility are analysed. To study 'access', a historically attentive policy document analysis is presented for each of the three countries studied. These analyses cover the time between the 1960s, when so-called 'non-European' guest worker programmes were implemented, until the present day. The goal is to study the development of the respective countries' language policies vis-à-vis their immigrants, including the official motivations presented to make policy shifts. In the motility framework, access, competence and appropriation are linked and to a large degree interdependent, so a solid understanding of the different policy climates is essential. Language policies encompass a wide array of facilities, ranging from translation services to education. This study will focus in particular on those language policies that are most relevant in the acculturation process of immigrants: namely host language and mother-tongue education. The interplay between those two is the main driver of linguistic inclusion of immigrants: host society language acquisition is deemed essential by virtually every official body, whilst depending on the social and political context, mother-tongue education is a source of conflict between immigrants and their descendants on the one hand, and their countries of residence on the other. The documents studied are either those officially issued by the government, such as policy briefs, or are policy papers written by bodies close to the government. These documents either mark changes in official policy, or can be reasonably assumed to have strong influence on policy makers. Great inspiration for this study has been drawn from Sonntag and Cardinal's historical-institutionalist approach to analysing language policy (Sonntag and Cardinal 2015). In their work it is explained how language policies in the present day are to a large extent path-dependent: policy solutions in the present are greatly inspired and can only be understood within the context of their institutional history, or, in the vocabulary of Sonntag and Cardinal: 'state traditions'. Inspired by their approach, the language policies of the countries studied are understood in the dynamic context, historical, institutional and normative, in which the state chooses language policies (ibid.). They outline several key questions that will also be answered in this research:

- What are the principles that inform state actions on language matters?
- What are the institutional and administrative parameters of how the state governs languages?
- How and why does the state intervene in language choice and language use? (Sonntag and Cardinal 2015: 5).

These three questions guide the policy document analysis of the three countries studied in this research: the Netherlands, France and Sweden. Traditionally, these three countries represent an ideal-type regarding immigrant integration policy. France is considered an assimilationist country, or as Bourhis et al. state: 'republican' (Bourhis et al. 1997). Sweden has, at least since it implemented its guest worker programmes, a tradition of multiculturalism, including a relatively generous offering of facilities for minority languages, at the other end of the spectrum. The Netherlands is a so-called 'in-between' case; it was, especially in the 1980s, one of the prominent adherents of the multicultural ideology in Europe, but has in recent times steered its policy in the direction of assimilationism. The Netherlands is, due to its transition from one policy ideology to another, the most interesting case from a theoretical perspective. Therefore the chapter on the Netherlands will be significantly more detailed and expansive than those on the other two countries.

Whilst the three countries, according to the literature, differ in their policy ideological traditions, they are similar on other important criteria. All three have been since the start of their respective guest worker programmes until the present day important immigration countries in the EU, both for EU and non-EU migrants. Furthermore, all three countries have made attempts to formulate a comprehensive policy solution to the growing diversity within their borders. Finally, the two migrant groups studied (which will be discussed in the next section) have a sizeable presence in all three countries.

Thus, in order to study 'access', a detailed picture of the different policy frameworks is crucial. Of at least equal importance is the way the official policy impacts its intended beneficiaries, in this case the immigrants and their descendants. Their self-assessed language skills, their perspective on their respective countries' language policy towards migrants and the possible connection between their language skills and mobility options together make up their motility. To gather the necessary data, semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted among members of the immigrant communities. Motility, even though it is underused in current research, has a solid theoretical foundation. Its three-part structure of 'access', 'competence' and 'appropriation' offers a good basis on which to structure the interviews. As such, since one of the primary goals of the interviews is to apply the pre-existing theoretical structure of motility and test its value empirically, the unstructured interview, which is the preferred method when attempting to establish new theoretical concepts based on the interview data, would have been an inappropriate method to use. At the same time however, even though there is a solid theoretical foundation for the concept of motility, this research is still exploratory in nature. Motility has been used sparingly in the social sciences, usually in the local context. The explorative innovation of this study is its use in a global context, which has important implications for the way motility needs to be understood. For instance, the importance of transnational identities is arguably more relevant in the global than in the local urban context. Furthermore, the strong focus on the relationship between motility and language skills and language policy is also new. Explaining and exploring the possible connection between these new elements and the

existing concept of motility as outlined by Kauffman et al. is one of the goals of this study. As such the interview structure, even though it is rooted in a clear theoretical basis, needs to incorporate the flexibility necessary to explore the relatively new motility concept. The motility theorem outlines several factors that require testing, which renders an unstructured interview not feasible; the novelty of the concept when applied to the context of international migration means that the semi-structured approach offers a good balance between formal rigidity and flexibility to study motility in an effective manner.

The interviews have been conducted with members of the Turkish and the Polish communities, and there are several reasons why specifically these two have been chosen. Firstly, there is the sheer size of their diasporas: Turkish and Polish communities are spread all over the EU, and constitute as mentioned previously a sizeable presence in all three countries studied. The size and widespread dispersion of these two groups allows for one major advantage, namely the opportunity to study transnationalism in relation to language and migration, which is essential for research on migration in the present day. Secondly, these two groups allow for a comparison between a non-EU and EU migrant group. First-generation Turkish and Polish migrants have different legal rights in the EU; the latter have more freedom of movement and, in theory, the right to maintain their heritage language in other EU countries according to European Council Directive 77/486EEC.

The interviews explicitly focus on the following motility-related topics, reflected in the questions incorporated in the interview schedule:

- General information about the respondent (socio-economic status, ethnic background, age, gender, etc.)
- Perception of the migrant's own linguistic skills in all languages known.
- Perceived access to physical mobility within the EU, divided into temporary and permanent mobility (motility)
- Willingness/plans to be mobile (motility)
- Frequency of long-distance communication with ethnic peers (virtual mobility/transnationalism)
- Perception of the effectiveness of host society language education
- Type of linguistic education (in the case of second-generation migrants).

Groups are selected by means of snowball sampling. Respondents have been approached using government institutions (e.g. Turkish and Polish embassies in the respective countries), immigrant NGOs, language schools and religious institutions. First contact was made with prominent actors within these institutions to familiarise them with the research. Afterwards, through these contacts, new respondents were recruited. The practical advantage of snowball sampling is the low level of financial and human resources required to execute it. Furthermore, snowball sampling potentially gives the researcher access to respondents who might have been out of reach with traditional sampling methods, due to the fact that the he/

she is introduced by a prominent, trusted member of the community. However, snowball sampling is by definition not randomised. The researcher is dependent on the willingness of organisations to participate, which in itself is a selection mechanism. This leads to the following interview data samples in this study being somewhat skewed: the Poles in the Netherlands (predominantly interviewees who either spoke Dutch or were preparing to learn it), Turks in Sweden (mostly Turks who have at most completed secondary education, interviewed in the Mosque), and the Swedish Poles (respondents mostly educated to tertiary level). Furthermore, potential respondents who have weak social networks can barely be reached using this method. As a result, there is a risk involved that samples might be skewed in a certain category. For instance, if one sample primarily consists of respondents interviewed at a Dutch language school, it is obviously likely that they deem it important to learn Dutch. An effective way to mitigate this problem is to approach a set of actors that is as diverse as possible, which is what has been done for this research.

The interviews are conducted in a language that is as comfortable as possible for the interviewees. The research aims to exclude language as a potential barrier to being interviewed, to avoid a linguistic, and by proxy also a socio-economic, bias in the sample. The interviews were either conducted in Dutch, English or French, or with the assistance of a translator. The vast majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face; some were held by phone and a limited number via skype. Having non-uniform interview methods is not ideal from a purely methodological point of view, as it complicates the comparison between interview groups, but was in some cases necessary for practical reasons. Adopting flexibility in the methodology, but rigidity regarding the content of the interviews and the interview schedule, allowed for the samples to be as diverse as possible in terms of socio-economic status and, most importantly, language skills. However, there are several downsides that need to be discussed and incorporated in the analysis of the interview data. First of all, working with translators removes some control from the interviewer, for obvious language-related reasons. The interview data of the Poles in the Netherlands and Turks in Sweden were predominantly collected with the help of a translator. This risk has been mitigated by primarily asking open-ended questions that require some elaboration on the part of the interviewee. The way in which the interviewees respond to the question would then give an indication whether the original question was properly translated for them. Secondly, potential interview bias (i.e. the different answers respondents could give depending on the persona of the interviewer) can differ between phone, face-to-face and skype interviews. However, all the interviewees have seen the interviewer in person prior to the phone/skype meetings, which would mitigate the risks of interview basis influencing the results. A final potential issue lies with the number of interviews. In total, 72 interviews have been conducted across the 6 groups, with a minimum of 10 interviews per group. If the goal of the study would be to make strong, generalising conclusions on the attitudes of these groups, this number would not be high enough. However, the research goal is a different one. Motility is a fledgling concept in the world of international migration theory and requires significant theoretical and especially empirical development to mature scientifically. It requires a degree of empirical

research on its many intricacies that is well beyond the scope of this study. The interviews presented offer at least two insights: (1) motility is a relevant concept, among different migrant groups of many different social and cultural backgrounds; (2) there are several ways in which motility is linked with the work of socio-linguistic scholars (e.g. Fishman 1991) and migration/integration theory (e.g. transnationalism) that offer promising avenues for future studies. As such, the interview data in this study should be considered as the first, but nonetheless very important, building blocks towards deepening our understanding of motility, migration and socio-linguistics.

Finally, there is a question of how the interviews and the policy-document analysis will tie together to form one cohesive study on motility. The interview data will be actively tested against the results of the policy documents, to answer the following two questions. Firstly: does the policy framework of a given country have a serious effect on the respondents' language-related attitudes and behaviours? There are sources, both from the academic (e.g. Fishman 1991) and non-academic (e.g. Commissie Blok 2004) domain, that question the role of actual policy in linguistic matters. For instance, Fishman argues that language education is not an effective means to promote multilingualism. The most important factor is instead the willingness of parents to transmit the language to their children, independent of state interference. On the other hand Bourdieu argues in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) that languages acknowledged by political authority reinforce their position in wider society. Exploring whether policy and the daily life of immigrants have a strong direct or indirect connection is thus a logical goal of this study. A second main question concerns whether the perception of the immigrants regarding their country of residence's language policy and its effectiveness matches with the goals listed in the policy documents, and how we can explain possible discrepancies.

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[8] A question that arises regarding the methodology is the lack of statistical data, for example in the form of surveys. Supplementing the analysis with quantitative data has been carefully considered, and indeed some statistical data have also been gathered and analysed. However, in the end it was decided not to include that material in this study. The most important question when deciding whether to present a certain body of data or not is the following: do those data, in this form, assist the analysis presented? In general, statistical data are very beneficial to the analysis processes of motility. As part of the concluding remarks of this study in Chapter 9, some possible avenues towards setting up such an analysis in future research are suggested. However, to study quantified motility effectively would require a longitudinal design, which lies beyond the scope of this project due to the large time investment needed, that measures a set of specific variables. The study presented here explores effectively which variables would need to be included in a future statistical study. Thus, the methodology as applied here is a necessary step towards running quantitative analyses in the future.

Obviously, there can be a mismatch between how a policy idea is envisioned on paper and its practical application. In the area of migrant language policy, relatively few studies have put the perception of respondents with a migration background at the forefront of the analysis. This study is fundamentally different in that regard. The perspective of the respondents is a vital point of analysis, as it can offer viable insights into the practical implementation of government policy ideas, and it also partially explains the motility of the interviewees (i.e. 'appropriation'). The answers to these two questions combined will paint a clear picture of how a state's policies affect an individual's motility. Motility is influenced by linguistic competence, linguistic infrastructure and appropriation. All three factors are potentially influenced by language policy. Establishing the presence and strength of the connection between language policy and motility is thus the main overarching goal of this study.[8]