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Multilingual moves

Language and motility of migrant communities in Europe

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Publication date
2020

Document Version
Other version

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Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Houtkamp, C. A. (2020). *Multilingual moves: Language and motility of migrant communities in Europe*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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Download date:09 Nov 2026

Chapter 9

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In the scientific literature, starting as early as the nineteenth century, migration scholars have attempted to design a comprehensive theory that explains the origin of migration flows. The scholarly road starts with the demographers, who primarily looked at population density as an explanation for migration. Later, especially from the 1950s onwards, other disciplines such as economics, psychology and sociology contributed to the discussion. The list of explanatory factors grew quite extensive. Economic inequality, both at the individual and country level, approached from classical economics or Marxist perspectives, and psychological issues such as relative deprivation and social networks, are some of the major factors studied to explain the existence and growth of migration flows. Against the backdrop of continuing technological developments in transportation and communications, the fact that these ingredients for migration are still very much present in current times renders the assumption valid that migration flows will persist in the decades to come. This broad array of existing theories on migration has however paid little attention to one other possible factor, one that plays an important role in the everyday life of virtually every individual: language. Language is at best seen as an afterthought, or a small component of the wider theory. For instance, language is part of an individual's human capital, the latter concept being central in the economists' explanation of migration. Language is also relevant in the social networks explanation: obviously, without a common language, maintaining such networks becomes a complicated endeavour. One of the main goals of this research was to explore whether and how language can be integrated as an explaining factor in migration theory. This integration however needs to take place in a different way. Existing theories all, to a large extent, have been concerned with direct explanations for migration. The relationship between language and migration is necessarily indirect. Obtaining a high-level language certificate, as proof of good mastery of a language, would in many cases not directly lead to migration. The hypothesised indirect relationship between language and migration thus renders it complex to integrate language as an explanation in existing migration theory frameworks. It is for this reason this research first turned to the mobility theories as laid out by John Urry, which eventually led us to the motility framework (Kaufmann et al. 2005, Houtkamp 2014, 2018). John Urry's framework's major advantage is that it allows for a fluid understanding of mobility. Migration in its classic meaning involves 'uprootment'. This is what differentiated the concept from its counterpart 'residential mobility', moving without cutting economic and social ties with one's previous space of living. The assumption that migration and uprootment go hand in hand has been challenged due to technological advancements. Increased ease of travel and communication via internet services render it relatively simple to remain in touch with the country of origin. Urry's mobility framework not only acknowledges that 'uprootment' rarely takes place in the present day; it also expands the scope of mobility to

entail not just physical displacement. Ideas such as virtual mobility (i.e. being 'mobile' by for example skyping with family and friends in the country of origin) are not merely fitting analytical concepts for the current age, but also allow for a more relevant role for language when discussing mobility. However, one final theoretical component was still required to make language and mobility/migration fit logically in a theoretical sense, namely a concept that emphasises the indirect nature of the relationship. For these purposes, the biological, and later urban geographical concept of motility played a pivotal role in this study. Motility was developed to be applied not only to the local, but also the global level. Attempts have been made as well to integrate it within existing socio-linguistic models, such as the EGIDS (Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale) of Fishman, and Lewis and Simon (Lewis and Simon 2010). Socio-linguistic research and migration research have been connected through the motility framework. The three components of motility (access, competence and appropriation) were the recurring themes of this research. In step with a deeper understanding of the distinctions between assimilation, integration, segregation and inclusion, which has been extensively developed in this research, the motility framework offers a lens through which the linguistic aspects of both inclusion and mobility can be studied.

It has been stated many times over the course of this study that motility is still a fledgling concept, in need of further development, especially when applied to the global level. Thus, this research has had a strong explorative character. Through studying policy documents and secondary sources about linguistic policy vis-à-vis migrants, and using in-depth interviews with immigrants, the goal of this analysis was to gain a solid understanding of how motility and language policy are related to one another, and how that might eventually provide avenues for further research. The policy documents were selected based on their relevance for the language policy towards migrants, in order to comprehend whether from a language policy perspective the countries studied fit into the ideal-types, or 'national models', in which they are usually categorised, and secondly whether the linguistic infrastructure as put forward in the documents can potentially increase or decrease the motility of the targets of the policy, namely the migrants and their descendants. It was assumed that the two most relevant parts of the linguistic infrastructure were host-language and mother-tongue education facilities. The analysis showed that France, the Netherlands and Sweden barely fit into the ideal-types in which they are often classified. France, with its ELCO policy that is integrated in the secondary school system, can hardly be considered a linguistically assimilationist state; the Netherlands has never been a consistent defender of multiculturalism or multilingualism and instead approached diversity very much from a pragmatic angle, with the primary goal to let mother-tongue education be a bridge towards Dutch language acquisition. Sweden meanwhile offered generous multicultural facilities on paper, but in practice especially its mother-tongue education policy for immigrants suffers from several organisational and financial problems. For all the differences, the policy trajectories of these three ideal-typically different countries are remarkably similar in many fundamental aspects, which could be considered an argument against the idea of 'path-dependency'.

However, some exploration of the practical policy effects has been conducted, through the in-depth interviews among the Turkish and Polish communities in the three countries. This research is one of the few studies that has attempted to incorporate into the analysis the views of those at whom the language policy is targeted. The interviews are therefore truly the backbone of the work. The Turks and Poles, being a non-EU and an EU migrant group, did not display any different attitudes based on ethnicity. However, the policy of their country of residence did seem to affect their perspectives on their mother tongue in particular: policy promoting bilingualism affects the rate of language transmission positively, whilst negative or 'no' policy seems to have little effect at all. External factors, such as transnationalism and especially the socio-economic status of the migrants, have a remarkably stronger influence on attitudes towards language than the policy in place at a given time. To embroider Brecht's famous aphorism, one could argue: 'Erst das Fressen, und dann die Kultur'. Less affluent migrants put more emphasis on the economic aspects of language, combined with a lack of information on the positive effects of bilingualism on a child's human capital, which can lead them to oppose mother-tongue education facilities, and sometimes even inspires them to decide not to transmit their mother tongue. This attitude can relatively easily be countered with positive policy, as the examples of Swedish teachers informing migrant parents show. At the same time, the interviews confirm the large influence of transnationalism, as migrants are very frequently in contact with their family and friends in the country of origin, or even their ethnic peers in other European countries.

Due to transnationalism, policies steering towards linguistic assimilation are practically impossible to render successful. Immigrants and their descendants will use their mother tongue whenever they wish, regardless of any policy. The interviews, in line with previous empirical studies, showed that migrants have very little desire to assimilate completely in their host country. The absence of policy can potentially widen the gap between high SES and low SES migrants. They are capable themselves of transmitting a high level of their mother tongue to their children or have the resources to find private education for them. Low SES migrants either erroneously assume that bilingualism hinders the development of their children, or pass on a lower level of their mother tongue. Multilingualism, and by extension motility, is a tool for the rich, a situation that is bound to persevere when an adequate policy framework is absent.

Furthermore, mother-tongue skills can increase motility. For some groups interviewed, it was clear that they use their Turkish and Polish to migrate between EU countries, so they can connect with their ethnic peers before making the leap to the wider host society, a process that has been aptly described by Putnam as 'bonding' versus 'bridging'(Putnam 2007). Even though the English language was, perhaps unsurprisingly, considered a far more potent tool for motility, the mother tongue plays a very important role as well.

Taking the document analysis and the interviews together, the essence can be summarised as follows, along the lines of the three components of motility.

In terms of *access,* the linguistic infrastructure in the countries studied is deficient, although not to the same degree. The Netherlands is lacking in the areas of host-language and mother-tongue education, since the former is not accessible due to its financial and organisational costs, and the latter has been practically non-existent since 2004. This is a sentiment that is confirmed by the interviews among Turks in the Netherlands and Poles in the Netherlands. Sweden's host-language facilities are deemed, both on paper and by the interviewees, of very decent quality; however its mother-tongue facilities are generous but not always well delivered. France's facilities are in both areas well organised, and regarded as such by the interviewees.

Competence is difficult to evaluate, since this conclusion relies mostly on the self-reported linguistic competence of the interviewees. Based on those self-estimates however, the interviewees in general are at best moderately satisfied with the results of their education, both in their mother tongue and the host language. Some have suggested practical reforms to remedy this problem, such as an increased focus on practical language application or diversifying the levels both in host-language and mother-tongue education classes.

Appropriation, or the migrants' perspective on the value of their language in relation to their mobility opportunities, shows a diverse palette. It shows how little policy matters for their perspective, with the exception of positive policy for some low SES migrants.

In conclusion, this study has achieved most of its main goals. It has managed to integrate language and migration into a theoretical framework, unlike other attempts made before, connecting some socio-linguistic theory with migration theory. It did so by developing an existing concept, 'motility', to make it fit for analysis on the global level rather than just the local. Furthermore, it managed to gain valuable perspectives based on the policy documents and the interviews with migrants on the state of present- day integration policy, focussing primarily on language. These insights also provide both theoretical and practical avenues on language policies vis-à-vis migrants. The study explored the relevant factors for motility and has therefore laid the groundwork for future empirical work.

Future research

This study, due to its explorative nature, provides a number of building blocks for future research. Firstly, the concept of motility inevitably raises important normative questions: do individuals have a right to mobility capital and should it be provided by the state? Should states strive to balance motility and inclusion for their citizens, or is one of the two more important than the other? This study assumed firstly, that individuals have a right to mobility capital and secondly, that motility and inclusion need to be as balanced as possible (in the instance where such a trade-off actually exists), but these assumptions are not beyond normative scrutiny.

Secondly, integration of socio-linguistic studies and motility can be further developed, either by continuing on the path of this study, namely making the connection with EGIDS and Fishman's work (Fishman 1991), or by opening other, new avenues. One of the main achievements of this study is the solidification of the new motility concept into existing theoretical frameworks, but its theoretical integration need not end here. A second theoretical line of inquiry would be to continue to develop the concept of 'transnational inclusion'. In this study, transnational inclusion was carefully raised as a possibility to make the concept of inclusion fit for the current globalising world, by 'freeing' it from the confinements of the nation state. It lay beyond the scope of this study, which was still in essence nation-state focussed, to expand further upon this idea.

Empirically, future studies could gain significantly from the explorative insights presented in this study. This study has elaborated on existing work and identified new relevant factors, which could be implemented in a quantitative study in order to solidify the motility concept with more empirical material. Testing motility, and especially when focussing on its linguistic components quantitatively, would require a longitudinal approach, that, for example, tracks the migration patterns of individuals based on their (newly acquired) linguistic skills. A second important empirical test could be to expand the scope of countries and/or immigrant communities studied. In this research Turks and Poles were chosen because of their relatively high presence in many EU countries. This fact alone however greatly impacts their motility: their mother tongues are widely spoken both in their relatively large kin-states and among ethnic peers in other states. For this study that was an asset, as it allowed us to study the effects of transnationalism, but it is also relevant to investigate the effects on motility of smaller mother tongues. On the country level it might be interesting to study the policy of other larger European countries, such as Germany. Incorporating 'sending' countries such as Poland or Turkey, to analyse the effects of their linguistic policies on motility, or to study their involvement in the migrants' country of origin regarding language training, would also be rich avenues to consider for further research.

Finally there is the involvement of the emigration countries with their diasporas, concerning their integration in general but also language education in particular. It is unquestionable from the interviews and scholarly work that both the Polish and Turkish governments are exercising a degree of influence on their (former) citizens in other European countries. The Haut Conseil à l'Intégration (HCI) in France even explicitly states that the Turkish influence in France is a major argument for organising Turkish language education within the French education system. Otherwise, the HCI argues, French-Turkish children may instead enrol in extra-curricular education organised by institutes such as Diyanet, which would also submit them to ideologies that run counter to the French republican values. A longitudinal study of the effects of such education on diaspora children could shed light on the degree of (undesirable) influence such extra-curricular education may have. This in turn could lead to an important shift in thinking about migrant language policy: the shift from a national to a global, geopolitical perspective.