

“Kocham Cię jak Irlandię”: Young Poles in Ireland, language acquisition and second language identities

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Since the accession of ten new member states to the European Union on May 1st 2004, the notable diversification of the Irish population has been receiving increased academic interest. The 2006 Irish Census shows that Poles currently represent the biggest group of post-EU accession migrants to Ireland, and one area where the rapid reversal in Irish migration patterns is particularly apparent is in the pupil profiles of Irish schools.

Under the general auspices of the IRCHSS-funded joint Trinity College Dublin/University College Dublin project “Second Language Acquisition and Native Language Maintenance in the Polish Diaspora in Ireland and France”, this research project employs a variationist sociolinguistic methodology to investigate second language acquisition and the negotiation of identity among a group of young Polish children and teenagers in Irish primary and post-primary schools. The participants are aged from 9-19 and are all in full-time education in Ireland. They are learning English while also coping with the demands of the national curriculum, as well as adjusting to life in a new country. Language plays a crucial role in the expression of identity (e.g. Norton, 2000; Joseph, 2004; Pavlenko & Blackledge (eds.), 2004; Block, 2007), and multilingual speakers frequently use variation patterns, including lexical and phonological, in the construction of various identities in the particular (speech) ‘community’ they are/would like to be a part of. This paper draws on quantitative data provided by sociolinguistic interviews, combined with qualitative ethnographic data, to draw conclusions about the fluid and multiple identities expressed by the participants through the L2.