

BAAL/Cambridge University Press Seminar Report for Language Teaching

New plurilingual pathways for integration: Immigrants and language learning in the 21st Century

Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, 27th May 2015

Organized in collaboration with COST Action IS1306 New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges

Introduction

The above seminar was held at Heriot-Watt University on 27th May 2015. The event was organized jointly by BAAL members Nicola Bermingham (Heriot-Watt University) and Gwennan Higham (Swansea University). The event was co-organised with COST Action IS1306 New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges and supported by the Intercultural Research Centre and the Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies at Heriot-Watt University. A total of 10 papers and two keynote speeches were presented. The keynote speakers were Professor Alison Phipps (Glasgow University) and Professor Máiréad Nic Craith (Heriot-Watt University). A round table discussion was also held, with invited speakers including Ms Mandy Watts from Education Scotland; Professor Bernadette O'Rourke, chair of COST Action IS1306; Dr Cassie Smith Christmas, University of the Highlands and Islands; and Dr Kathryn Jones, Director of Language Policy and Research at the Welsh Centre for Language Planning.

Context

The 21st Century is witnessing increased discussions on immigration in local, national and international contexts. National citizenship and integration are highly contested issues. Moreover, sub-state nations in the UK and beyond are undergoing expanded devolution powers, localising policies on education and community cohesion. In many minority language contexts such as Welsh, Gaelic, etc., governments have the

double task of regulating their minority language policies as well as mapping cohesion strategies in response to the increased multicultural reality of their societies.

The aim of this seminar was to bridge the study of language and immigration and consider the extent to which immigrants learning new languages (which include learning majority, minority and/or heritage languages) may contribute to a more comprehensive and plurilingual view of integration today. In light of recent research on immigrant language acquisition and translanguaging (Garcia and Wei 2015), immigrants use and claim ownership over language as part of their repertoire, albeit in various ways and for different purposes. This seminar thus brought together academics, government officials and community practitioners such as the Glasgow Refugee, Asylum and Migration Network to share knowledge and to discuss challenges to integration and implications concerning new and plurilingual immigrant speakers.

While the seminar encouraged interdisciplinary dialogue with a variety of papers from different migration and language contexts and cross-sector round table discussions, the proceedings were directed by key themes and objectives as follows:

- What are the opportunities and challenges for new immigrants who learn new languages?
- To what extent do new immigrant speakers challenge current conceptions of integration, cohesion and citizenship?
- Which steps or initiatives could facilitate a more comprehensive view of integration, cohesion and citizenship in national and minority language contexts?

Papers and discussion

The first keynote of the day was delivered by Professor Alison Phipps from the University of Glasgow, who gave an insightful and thought-provoking keynote address on the challenges of the refugee crisis (which, as she pointed out, is rather a

political crisis) and the demands of hosts on their guests, especially in relation to the function of language.

There were two panels of 5 papers in both morning and afternoon on the themes of language learning and migration from various contexts such as migrants in Northern Ireland, Polish migrant learners of Welsh, new migrant speakers of Faroese. Discussions followed each of the panels, linking some of the themes covered by the presenters such as language socialization spaces e.g. theatre productions by hosts and migrants in Italy by Dr Naomi Wells, museums as integration spaces for migration by Katherine Lloyd; migrants as agents in language learning processes via translanguaging practices by Spanish speakers in USA (Professor Daniela Wawra) as well as migrants' responsabilisation of language learning, turning the monolingual British Citizenship test into a multilingual solution by Dr Kamran Khan.

The second keynote was delivered by Professor Máiréad Nic Craith, who focused on the opportunities and challenges of language learning and integration in Germany where the highest numbers of refugees have been welcomed latterly. Professor Nic Craith critiqued the one-directional concept of integration, highlighting how cultural diversity and multilingualism are becoming more and more part of this debate.

The seminar ended with a Roundtable discussion with five invited speakers, including Mandy Watts, ESOL Development Officer for the Scottish Government. Feeding on much of the discussion and debate over the course of the day, the roundtable focused on how to initiate cross-sector partnerships and projects throughout the UK and beyond, such as with policy makers and how policies, through such collaborations, can and need to be reconceptualised to reflect new plurilingual and intercultural realities.

Outcomes and implications for applied linguistics

The seminar closed with co-organisers thanking all attendees and mentioning a follow-on event to be organised in Swansea University, involving further stakeholders from academia, government and community practitioners.

This seminar contributes to the cross-disciplinary focus of research in applied linguistics, with a vision to generate impact through teaching practice and local and national government policy. This venture has united researchers and practitioners involved with both national and minority languages across the UK and further afield. The seminar has demonstrated the common threads with regard to integration and language learning across these various contexts and the potential for cross-sector partnerships to facilitate innovation and change.

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