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ADDRESSING THE NEED FOR LANGUAGE SUPPORT FOR THE MIGRANT AND REFUGEE COMMUNITY IN THE EAST MIDLANDS, U.K.

ABSTRACT

For migrants and refugees, language is essential for dealing with officials, engaging with employment, receiving healthcare and feeling comfortable in a new environment. Despite this, there is no uniform approach to English language support for incoming migrants or refugees to the East Midlands. This paper discusses the situation regarding language provision for these communities and identifies the gaps in current language provision which derive from reductions in government funding over recent years. It looks at a mixed methods doctoral study that sought to identify the language needs of the Polish community in the region and describes a University of Nottingham initiative to address the gap in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision for adult learners, both migrants and refugees, in the Nottingham area.

Keywords: *ESOL provision, refugees, migrants, adult education, community-based learning*

ODZIV NA POTREBE PO JEZIKOVNI PODPORI ZA PRISELJENCE IN BEGUNCE V EAST MIDLANDS, VELIKA BRITANIJA - POVZETEK

Za priseljence in begunce je jezik ključnega pomena pri stikih z uradniki, zaposlitvi, uporabi zdravstvenih storitev in na splošno za dobro počutje v novem okolju. Kljub temu v regiji East Midlands ne obstaja enoten pristop k zagotavljanju jezikovne podpore za priseljence ali begunce. Članek obravnava jezikovno pomoč, ki je na voljo tem skupnostim, in opredeljuje vrzeli v okviru ponujene pomoči, do katerih v zadnjih letih prihaja zaradi zmanjševanja temu namenjenih javnih sredstev. Članek izhaja iz doktorske študije, ki je uporabila raziskave mešanih metod in katere cilj je bil ugotoviti jezikovne potrebe poljske skupnosti v regiji ter opisuje pobudo Univerze v Nottinghamu, da odpravi vrzeli v pomoči pri učenju angleščine, ki je na voljo odraslim govorcem drugih jezikov, tako priseljencev kot beguncev, na območju Nottinghama.

Ključne besede: *angleščina za govorce drugih jezikov, begunci, priseljenci, izobraževanje odraslih, skupnostno učenje*

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INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the current situation regarding language provision for migrant, asylum seeker and refugee communities in the U.K., focusing in particular on the Nottingham area. The first section of the paper describes a mixed-methods doctoral study, *Translating Cultures, Adapting Lives* (TCAL), in which one of the authors of the current paper set out to identify the language needs of migrants in the East Midlands, focusing in particular on the Polish community. This study reinforced the perception that there was a significant need for ESOL support not only for the migrant community but also within asylum-seeking and refugee circles. This paper, therefore, looks at the importance of English language (ESOL) support in general and details cuts to funding and to the availability of ESOL support for both the migrant and refugee community over recent years. The final part of the paper then describes an initiative set up at the University of Nottingham to address the gaps in ESOL provision for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in the Nottingham area. This specific programme enabled trainee ESOL teachers and other students to engage with both adults and teenagers from the refugee and asylum-seeking community and to provide ESOL support for many who are currently excluded from ESOL provision for reasons either of finance or status.

STUDY OF ESOL FOR THE POLISH COMMUNITY IN THE EAST MIDLANDS

The Polish community in the East Midlands comprises post-war refugees and many waves of migration, of whom the post-EU accession (1st May 2004) wave is the largest and in terms of numbers seems to have surpassed the immigration from the Indian sub-continent (Kaczmarczyk & Okólski, 2008) while Polish became the second language spoken in England and third in Wales (ONS, 2013; BBC, 2013). Although Holstein and Gubrium (1994) emphasise that language is viewed as the primary symbol system through which meaning is conveyed, from the structuralist perspective it rather creates a barrier between individuals and their environment as it communicates the construction of the dominant social group (Patton, 2002). Therefore, language should be at the centre of migration debates in any society. The 2011 UK Census revealed that the Polish language is the second most spoken language in England and third in Wales (BBC, 2013), and in the East Midlands among non-UK passport holders, as many as 50,740 individuals reported Polish citizenship (Migration Observatory, 2012). Regarding the language question, in literature there is considerable evidence of the significance of languages, both native and target languages, for Polish-speaking individuals migrating to other countries (for the UK and Australia see, for example, Besemeres (2008), White & Ryan (2008), Temple & Koterba (2009) or White (2011)). The doctoral study *Translating Cultures, Adapting Lives* (TCAL) conducted in the East Midlands corroborates earlier findings and further substantiates this research area (Seredyńska-Abou Eid, in print).

THE STUDY ‘TRANSLATING CULTURES, ADAPTING LIVES’

The research study *Translating Cultures, Adapting Lives* was aimed at first generation post-EU accession Polish migrants in the East Midlands, a region that comprises Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, and Northamptonshire. Since Polish migrants reside in all locations around the UK, the area of the East Midlands was chosen for practical reasons of accessibility and the virtual impossibility to do a cross-country research within the confines of a doctoral research study. Moreover, Lincolnshire is the second area after London where Eastern European migrants settled in large numbers as there are many opportunities to find seasonal jobs, mainly in agriculture.

This mixed-methods qualitative study was designed to collect primary data in the East Midlands through an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews (May 2013–March 2014), ethnographic observations (2008–2014) and a small-scale study of online communities (2010–2011). Regarding the questionnaire and interviews, the snowball sampling technique proved most efficient and resulted in 97 questionnaire responses fully qualifying for further analysis, eleven individual and eight institutional interviews. While interviewees originated from among questionnaire respondents who declared their readiness for possible further involvement, institutions such as Nottinghamshire Police, Lincolnshire NHS, the Polish Consulate or Polish association were approached in response to media publications about Polish migrants and as a consequence of a completed literature review. Regarding the demographics of the respondents, the participating individuals were adult Polish post-EU accession migrants of all age groups, representing a range of educational levels and backgrounds. It is noteworthy, though, that only a third of all participants were male. The data obtained through these different methods was cross-tabulated and triangulated to verify the convergence of the respondents’ ideas and opinions that reflect migrants’ lived experience within their migration projects.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY FOR POLISH MIGRANTS

The results of the TCAL study indicate the high importance of the English language for Polish migrants in their lives in the UK as a vast majority of the respondents agreed that “proficiency in English is important for [their] live[s] in the UK” (Q18, LG5). In their comments, survey participants further added that “[they] wouldn’t be able to do [their] job[s] if [they weren’t] fluent in English” (in the original: “bez biegłej znajomości języka nie byłabym w stanie wykonywać swojej pracy”) and emphasised that language proficiency is “fundamental” (“fundamentalna”), “especially at work” (“zwłaszcza w pracy”). Similar results were obtained in earlier studies on Polish migrants in other parts of the UK (see White, 2011) and observed in online conversations on Polish fora. Irrespective of that, it needs to be noted that neither in this project nor in other studies on Polish migrants did the respondents recognize the English language as their socio-cultural capital, as defined by Bourdieu and Coleman (Halpern, 2005), which could bring more global

prospects in the future in the form of employment opportunities in other parts of the world or as a global communication tool. The language has not been perceived, perhaps not yet, as a potential door-opener in terms of migrants' future professional and personal opportunities, for example, for further migration projects outside the UK.

Even though the Polish migrants do not identify the English language as a career booster, most of the TCAL respondents declared that their proficiency in English improved since they had moved to the UK, regardless of their length of stay in the country. In their comments in the questionnaire and during interviews, many respondents declared that they did not speak English when they came to the UK or that they were learning English as a foreign language at school, but "school is school, you know how they teach" ("jak to w szkole, wiadomo jak uczą"). It is noteworthy that in Poland over 90% (93.7% in 2012) of pupils learn English as a foreign language. According to European data, in Poland the first foreign language is introduced as compulsory at the age of 7 (primary education) while education in the second foreign language starts for students of 13 years of age (lower-secondary/primary¹ education) (Eurostat, 2012). Furthermore, from September 2017, compulsory foreign language education was also introduced for pre-primary education (Dziennik Ustaw, 2014). Furthermore, foreign languages are included in the matriculation (baccalaureate) exams (equivalent to A-Level) at two levels: basic and advanced, both written and oral, while the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is applied across all levels of education. The first incarnation of written matriculation in English occurred in 1992. Therefore, at first glance it could be assumed that many Polish migrants should have a certain level of fluency in English; however, for migrants born before the early 1970s, English may be challenging as at school they learnt Russian as a foreign language.

TCAL results further indicate that migrants' inability to communicate in English, even at a very basic level, has been identified as a serious impediment to social integration and active participation in community life. In Lincolnshire, for example, such an obstacle is claimed to be one of the most significant barriers preventing migrant registration with doctors (GPs). In addition to assertions that many migrants seem to be unfamiliar with procedures, possibly due to a different organisational model or divergent expectations of staff and patients in the home country, gaps in health monitoring and screening can pose a serious health challenge to the local community. Moreover, lack of language proficiency can also impact on migrants' communication with the police in emergency situations, such as witnessed or experienced crime, hate crime or domestic violence. In both cases, health and crime issues, using translation services may either be impossible or inconvenient for the patient or victim due to the sensitive nature of the matters.

¹ The 1999 reform of the educational system reinstated the division of primary and secondary education into three levels, i.e. primary (7–12 yrs), lower- (13–15yrs) and upper secondary (16–19 yrs). This division was reversed by a reform of 2016; however, those pupils who started lower secondary school before the latest reform will complete their education in accordance with the previous system.

CURRENT PROVISION OF ESOL FOR POLISH MIGRANTS

The provision of English language courses for migrants occurs through various, often charitable, organisations and more informally on online fora. The latter should be categorised more as a special interest group on a Polish community platform that discusses various everyday language issues and intricacies, e.g. the English Zone on Moja Wyspa [My Island]. Otherwise, institutions such as the Signpost to Polish Success (SPS) in Nottingham, the Skegness Polish Educational Association (SPEA) or the Square Mile Project in Leicester provide English lessons for migrants to help them improve their language skills to enable their functioning in the host culture and society. It needs to be emphasised that there is no uniform policy or approach to teaching English to migrants within city or county councils and within the whole region. Therefore, attendee-related requirements and restrictions vary due to differences in the nature of those organisations. SPS, for example, provide language classes for unemployed migrants only, while the Square Mile Project has a territorial restriction, i.e. the literal square mile around De Montfort University. SPEA, on the other hand, offers support classes for the pupils of the Polish Saturday School and some additional courses for local migrants. While SPS and the Square Mile provide English lessons free of charge, SPEA includes the costs of English lessons in the tuition fee of students and charges a small fee for the other classes. Furthermore, the provision is not limited to Polish migrants only, with the exception of the Polish Saturday School in Skegness, but is also open to other Central and Eastern European migrants whose communities are much smaller than the Polish one. From the perspective of the host/local community, these migrant communities could be perceived as ethnocultural groups that “retain a sense of their cultural identity, and who (on that basis) participate in a social framework that is characterized by some social norms (legal, economic, political agreements) about how to live together” (Berry et al., 2007, p. 347; see also Neuliep, 2012).

THE IMPORTANCE OF ESOL SUPPORT FOR ALL: THE CURRENT SITUATION

The situation in terms of ESOL provision for the refugee community has much in common with that of the Polish community as described in TCAL. It seems evident that knowledge of a host country’s language is central to successful and comfortable life in a new country. It makes social and economic sense for the host country, and benefits migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in a myriad of ways (see, for just a few examples from the research and government documentation, Ager & Strang, 2008; Casey, 2016; Doyle & O’Toole, 2013; Greater London Authority, 2012).

Jenny Roden, Co-Chair of the National Association of Teaching English & Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA) sums up some of the identifiable benefits of ESOL support for migrants as well as the economic benefits for the host country, and these statements are equally true for the refugee and the asylum-seeking community, who may well have different immediate needs, but still need English language to fulfil them:

By enrolling on an ESOL course, migrants are able to develop the language skills they need to gain employment, interact with others and manage everyday tasks with ease, without relying on costly state-funded interpreters or family and friends. From an economic perspective, migrants unable to learn English are often in low paid jobs or unemployed, and many rely on the state for housing and benefits (NATECLA, 2017).

Charitable and other organisations in the U.K. have been arguing for years for a national strategy for ESOL. Considerable research and official documentation indicate that a lack of English language prevents both migrants and refugees from engaging with services such as health care and education, increases isolation, inhibits independence and affects health, employment and residential location. Refugees, in particular, have to engage with official bodies on their arrival in the UK and having to rely on interpreters can make some feel vulnerable.

In 2011, Dame Louise Casey was asked by the UK government to look into integration and opportunities for ethnic minorities in the UK. Her report, published in 2016, highlighted throughout the significance of English language skills and the need for further provision of English language support (Casey, 2016). More expansively, in section 6.51, the report stated:

In relation to integration and economic success, one factor that stands out strongly as a barrier to progress is proficiency in English. English language is a common denominator and ensuring everyone is able to speak English enjoys strong public support. Lack of English skills presents a clear barrier to social and economic mobility – going for a job interview, writing a letter to a bank or understanding the country you live in. (Casey, 2016, p. 94)

Successive British governments have repeatedly acknowledged the benefits of providing both the migrant and refugee community with language support and the most recent Government document on integration, the Integrated Communities Green Paper of April 2018, in fact insists that new arrivals to the U.K. “should learn to speak and understand our language and values and seek opportunities to mix and become part of our communities” (Integrated Communities Green Paper, 2018).

Despite this, ESOL provision in England remains patchy at best and has seen numerous and persistent funding cuts over the years. Fees were introduced for ESOL courses between 2007 and 2008 when automatic fee remission was withdrawn. Between 2011 and 2012, full-funding for ESOL courses was further restricted to individuals in receipt of Job Seeker’s Allowance or Employment Support Allowance, and funding for ESOL in the workplace was withdrawn. The Casey Review of 2016 noted that

during the review, a number of providers of English Language courses told us that funding for [ESOL] provision from Government had reduced in recent

years, was being devolved locally and focussed more on higher-level language and other skills for those seeking employment. They felt that there was a significant gap in funding for pre-entry and entry level English language courses. (Casey, 2016, Section 6.51)

In response to this gap, the Casey Review recommends “[i]mproving English language provision through funding for community-based classes and appropriate prioritisation of adult skills budgets” (Casey, 2016, p. 17).

According to a statement in the House of Lords in 2016, the Skills Budget for ESOL was halved from £203 million in 2009/2010 to £104 million in 2014/2015 (House of Lords, 2016). As a consequence of these funding cuts, waiting lists for the classes that are available can be considerable. In a survey of ESOL providers carried out by NATECLA in 2014, 80% of responders said their institution had “significant waiting lists of up to 1,000 students” and 66% said that they believed lack of funding was the main cause of this. In sum, according to NATECLA, the number of adults who are able to enrol on a course fell from 207,400 to 131,000 between 2008/2009 and 2014/2015 (NATECLA, 2014).

For refugees and asylum seekers specifically, the briefing paper on adult ESOL in England drawn up for the Government in April 2018 notes that although the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) continues to provide funded ESOL for some refugees, eligibility and fees remission restrictions apply. Those who fall outside the eligible categories have to pay at least 50% towards course costs, regardless of income. Asylum seekers are unable to access a course until they have lived in the UK for six months and are only eligible for basic funding after this time (House of Commons, 2018).

Others, for example those who come on spouse visas, are treated as international students for at least a year. In all these cases, the cost of learning English is often prohibitive. Even the provisions that do exist are dependent on space and availability of classes (House of Commons, 2018). It is evident that there is both a clear benefit and a clear need for funded and available ESOL support.

ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES IN THE NOTTINGHAM AREA

Nottinghamshire and the East Midlands has always been an area where migrants have settled. After the Second World War considerable numbers of Italians and Poles settled in the region, and both Leicester and Derby in particular have long been destinations for the Afro-Caribbean community as well as those from the Indian sub-continent. The 1999 Immigration Act introduced the dispersal process for asylum seekers, in which asylum seekers are ‘dispersed’ away from London and the south east to areas where there is cheaper housing and, supposedly, capacity in the infrastructure (Immigration and Asylum Act, 1999). Since 1999 and the introduction of ‘dispersal’, numbers of refugees and asylum seekers have been housed in Nottingham through the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

In 2000 the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum (NNRF) was set up to provide advice and support for asylum seekers and refugees in the city alongside other national charities such as the British Red Cross and Refugee Action. Over time, the range of voluntary sector support for refugees and asylum seekers has developed and diversified and a variety of refugee community organisations have been established in Nottingham.

The situation of those going through the asylum-seeking process in the region has been compared to those in what is generally known as the resettlement scheme. The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) was launched in 2014 in response to the protracted conflict in Syria. The UK government resettled 216 vulnerable people through this scheme from 2014, and in October 2015 the Prime Minister David Cameron announced an expansion of the programme with a target of resettling 20,000 people over a five-year period. Local Authorities would be able to sign up to the programme voluntarily and would receive funding from central government to cover the first twelve months of a refugee's resettlement costs.

In Nottinghamshire, both the City and a number of District and Borough Councils signed up to the scheme. A cohort of 81 individuals were settled in Nottingham in December 2015 and by September 2017 a further 23 families had arrived in 6 separate cohorts in the City and County (Nottingham Citizens Independent Sanctuary Commission, 2017).

A report conducted by Nottingham Citizens into Nottingham's place as a city of sanctuary investigated the needs of the wider asylum-seeking and refugee community in the Nottingham area. In particular, this report compared the provision offered to Syrian families under the Government's VPRS with provision for other migrants and refugees:

Those arriving under the VPRS are guaranteed funding, accommodation, English language provision and a case worker. This contrasts with the wider experience of the refugee and asylum seeker community who come with significantly limited funding for support (Nottingham Citizens Independent Sanctuary Commission, February 2017).

Specifically, in relation to ESOL provision for those on the VPRS, the Home Office celebrated the fact that

additional funding for English language training will mean all adults arriving through the scheme anywhere in the UK will receive an extra 12 hours a week of tuition, for up to 6 months. This [...] will assist families to integrate into their new communities more quickly and make it easier for them to seek and obtain work. (House of Commons, 2018)

These are, of course, all provisions to be celebrated, and those in the VPRS are, after all, particularly vulnerable, but it indicates that there can be a will and a way to provide

considerable support for the refugee and migrant communities. The All-Party Parliamentary Group noted:

While the recent additional funding announced to provide teaching for resettled Syrian refugees is a welcome acknowledgement of the importance of ESOL classes, similar support is needed for all other refugees. (APPG, April 2017, p. 30)

BASIC EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE IN NOTTINGHAM (BEGIN)

Nottingham is unusual and fortunate in that it has an organisation that coordinates ESOL screening and referrals in Nottingham and manages a waiting list of people who are eligible for classes (785 at 24/01/2017). BEGIN offers a central advice and placement service for ESOL and Functional Skills across the Nottingham area. Each year it enables almost 4,000 adults aged 16 or over to find the right ESOL course at the right level, time, location and cost that fits with work, childcare and other commitments. It matches the status of the learners in terms of eligibility, income and additional learning needs with available courses. In 2017 Basic Educational Guidance in Nottingham (BEGIN) worked with 3,800 people, numbers which are representative of a typical year. Asylum seekers and refugees made up 35% of these in 2017. ESOL for migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and other non-English speaking residents in the U.K. now represents 90% of BEGIN's work (BEGIN, n.d.).

THE ESOL MODULE WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM ADVANTAGE AWARD (NAA)

There is much talk of community engagement, outreach work and links with the community from the Higher Education sector these days. Much of this is often merely a statement of principle. On the University of Nottingham website, the only community and widening participation projects described ended in 2016, although the University is apparently currently drawing up a revised widening participation strategy for autumn 2018. On the other hand, employability and work experience is of growing importance for today's students. A recent survey by Nottingham's Students Union indicated that although the majority of students pay their fees, write their essays and attend their lectures because they "have an interest in the subject", the second reason given for attending university was "to get a better job" (O'Boyle, 2018), and most universities offer employability pledges and opportunities for the students.

The Nottingham Advantage Award is a programme set up primarily with a focus on employability and is in fact run by the Careers and Employability team at the University. The Award runs parallel to but separate from the students' main degree and offers them opportunities to take modules which relate to mentoring, cultural awareness, entrepreneurship, volunteering and work in the local community.

With our knowledge of the need for ESOL support in the area, in 2016 we set up an ESOL module on this programme. This was set up with the aim of achieving two aims in particular; to fill the gap in ESOL provision for the migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking community and to offer trainee teachers and other students with teaching experience at the University of Nottingham the chance to engage with this community and to get teaching practice.

Over the last three years, four cohorts of up to sixteen trainee teachers have run six two-hour team-teaching sessions over six weeks providing ESOL support for refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and others from the community who are looking for ESOL support. The majority of the trainee teachers are either on the M.A. programme in teaching ESOL or an undergraduate Modern Languages degree, but we have also had volunteer teachers who are studying politics, biochemistry, and molecular medicine. They have come from the UK, Indonesia, Vietnam, Poland, Saudi Arabia, and China.

The learners on the NAA Module are primarily directed to us by BEGIN and are migrants and refugees of a range of statuses who are all on the waiting list for ESOL sessions. As regards their situation in terms of funding for ESOL support, some would be fee paying and some entitled to free ESOL, although obviously they do not pay to attend our sessions. In terms of their status, we have EU Nationals, EEA Migrant Workers, Asylum Seekers who have not yet been resident for six months, those on a Married/Spouse Visa, Asylum Seekers of longer duration, and Refused Refugees. Their nationalities and countries of origin are equally diverse. We have had learners from Poland, Nigeria, Russia, Pakistan, Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran, Benin, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Senegal, Ukraine, and Sudan.

Challenges in setting up the programme

There have been a number of challenges in setting up the programme. We have no budget for venue hire, so have had to rely on the good will of the community. This inevitably turned out to be the local churches. There have been issues with these venues in terms of their practical suitability as classrooms as well as the cultural context for some learners. They have also been at some distance from learner residences, and there are issues around accessibility and childcare.

Attendance and levels

Asylum seekers and refugees' situations and eligibility for ESOL can change very quickly. If their asylum claim is refused, they will suddenly no longer be eligible for funding until or unless they make a fresh claim and have an appeal over six months old; if there are issues with their accommodation they may be moved to another city. There may also be various factors which can affect whether or not they will be able to attend classes, such as the venue, travel costs, childcare needs, or work schedules (for refugees). The levels of those who attend are very mixed – with some never having had any schooling, and others having quite fluent levels. The majority, however, are pre-entry or level 1 in ESOL terms.

Programme success and recognition

The programme has also, however, had a number of successes in the two years we have been running it. We have been named Advantage Award Module of the Year for 2018 at the University. We hope to expand the programme in 2018/19. We have been approached by a school with a particularly multi-cultural intake to set up similar ESOL sessions for parents of the pupils and are looking at starting lessons for both migrants and refugees in Signpost to Polish Success (SPS).

CONCLUSIONS

The eagerness of migrants and refugees to adjust through learning and improving the host language depicts a mostly integrative strategy of acculturation, which encompasses the retention of culture of origin and exchanges with the host culture(s). This should encourage local and national authorities to offer a more inclusive provision of ESOL, which would benefit both the local communities and their new members. There is also a need for further critical exploration of some of the contradictory and controversial aspects of such programmes. The All-Party Parliamentary Group Report from April 2017 nonetheless emphasised the importance of ESOL support and the need for funding increases as well as training for those involved in providing ESOL support. The recent Government Green Paper (Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, 2018) also noted the need for additional classes in ESOL where there is evidence of need, as well as the need for a national ESOL strategy in England. It is to be hoped that there will be a greater recognition of the place and importance of ESOL support for both the migrant and refugee community. In the meantime, academic circles could be of help through organizing modules for ESOL students that could be of benefit to future English language teachers and migrant and refugee communities in need of English.

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