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# Between duty and neglect: Language ideologies and stancetaking among Polish adolescents in Norway

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## Abstract

Recent political and economic changes in Europe have resulted in an increased mobility of many central and eastern Europeans, including Polish nationals. This article examines how adolescent Poles living in Norway construct their own and other people's Polish language use and maintenance. Basing on a qualitative content analysis of 10 interviews with young Polish transnationals, the article first identifies four common categories of constructing Polish that emerged in the data set: *Polish as intent*, *Polish as obligation*, *Polish as utility* and *Polish as unimportant*. Secondly, employing stance as an analytical heuristic, interview excerpts illustrating the four categories are analysed accounting for the interactional processes of evaluation, alignment and positioning embedded in the stancetaking act. Finally, the ideological implications of the stances constructed towards Polish are discussed and a methodological issue regarding the treatment of the sociolinguistic interview data and the interviewer's role is raised. The findings suggest that competing language ideologies are at work in the researched cohort and show that boys and girls participating in the study construct Polish language use and maintenance differently.

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## 1. Introduction

This article explores how adolescent Polish transnationals in Norway orient towards questions of language practices and language maintenance through stancetaking (Du Bois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009) in interviews. As a result of the recent economic and political changes in Europe, the mobility of Polish people has increased significantly. To a large degree, Poles in Norway can be seen as the representatives of economically motivated migration from eastern Europe after the 2004 EU enlargement, which is still associated with, and often stereotyped and stigmatised as, blue collar labour and work migration (cf. Baba and Dahl-Jørgensen, 2010). Such stereotypes may in particular affect the relationship of young Polish transnationals towards the heritage language and, in the long run, also influence the maintenance of Polish in diasporic communities.

Since young people are often seen as the barometers of social and linguistic change (cf. e.g. Nortier and Svendsen, 2015), the main objective of this article is to investigate how adolescent Poles in Norway discursively construct Polish language use and maintenance and what language ideologies they activate in these constructions. The data stem from

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semi-structured interviews with 10 Polish teenagers living in Norway (see section 4). Firstly, based on a content analysis of the entire data set, the paper maps out how the young people in this study conceived of the use and maintenance of Polish in a transnational context, then it illustrates the development of metasociolinguistic stances in chosen interview excerpts, and finally it discusses the ideological implications of the participants' accounts. Methodologically, this paper argues for an interactionally-oriented analysis of interview data, and points, in line with Morgan (2017), to the usefulness of the stance framework for analysing how (young) people experience and relate to language and language use in the sociolinguistic complexities of the 21st century.

## 2. Polish transnationals in Norway

Following Hua and Wei (2016), I use the term 'transnational', rather than 'migrant', to stress the importance of the interconnectivities across and beyond national boundaries in the participants' experiences. This is particularly relevant in the case of Poles – a nation with a long emigration history (Okólski, 1999), constituting one of the 20 largest diasporas in the world (cf. UNO, 2015). With the opening of EU's inner market in 2004, the transnational mobility of Poles increased even more and according to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there were 18 million Poles living outside of Poland as of 2013 (MSZ, 2013). Due to the geographical proximity and favourable working conditions, many Polish people have chosen Norway as the country of destination.

At present, Poles are the largest 'immigrant group' in the country, constituting almost 14% of the total number of immigrants, with 95 700 Polish people registered in Norway (Statistics Norway, 2016). In spite of being the largest immigrant group in Norway, they remain a rather under-researched population from a sociolinguistic perspective (Bygdås, 2016; Kraft, 2016; Palm et al., 2014). The existing linguistic research on the Polish diaspora elsewhere has focused on language choice in bilingual interactions (Ogiermann, 2013), features of heritage Polish (Kozminska, 2015), language maintenance and ethnic identity (Laskowski, 2013), as well as language shift (Clyne, 2003). Adding to this conversation, this article specifically examines stances vis-à-vis Polish language produced by adolescent Poles living in Norway, as an example of how a new generation of a diasporic community relates to questions of language maintenance and use.

## 3. Language ideologies and stancetaking

Conversations on language use and maintenance often lead to disclosures of people's beliefs and values regarding languages, their speakers, as well as normative prescriptions on how languages and linguistic forms ought to be used. In sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological work such beliefs, values and prescriptions are referred to as *language ideologies* (e.g. Blackledge, 2000; Kroskrity, 2000; Woolard, 1998; Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994). Kroskrity (2010:192) defines language ideologies as a set of 'beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use which often index the political economic interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups and nation states'. These views and beliefs represent ideas about particular forms of language to be used in specific contexts, such as the 'appropriateness' vs. 'inappropriateness' of certain ways of speaking, and statuses of different languages and linguistic forms (e.g. Blommaert, 1999). As such, they are highly evaluative in their character (cf. Morgan, 2017) and can have a significant influence on individual language practices, as well as language policies and management by social groups and institutions. In transnational contexts they have been described, for example, as the driving forces influencing decisions regarding language practices at home among transnational families (e.g. Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Lanza and Svendsen, 2007).

The evaluative character of language ideologies links them to the notion of *stance* (Morgan, 2017) understood here in accordance with Du Bois's model (2007) as 'a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects, and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field' [163]. As pointed out by Jaworski and Thurlow (2009), the relationship between *stance* and *ideology* is dialectical. *Ideologies* refer to sets of shared, general and abstract social representations, whereas *stances* are situational deployments of these representations. Thus, by taking stances, speakers, on the one hand, say something about themselves and their relationship to the world and, on the other hand, through the act of evaluation, activate certain aspects of wider ideologies. Frequent deployment and constant repetition of *stances* contribute in turn to their reification and solidification into personal *stands* and, eventually, through widespread adoption and conventionalisation, into collective ideologies (cf. Jaworski and Thurlow, 2009:221).

In research on stance a common distinction is made between *epistemic* and *affective* stances (Du Bois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009; Ochs, 1990, 1996). According to Ochs (1996:410), an affective stance refers to moods, attitudes, feelings, dispositions and emotional intensity towards a particular object or focus, whereas an epistemic stance denotes knowledge and beliefs, as well as degrees of certainty and commitment to the truth of a proposition. Linguistically, an affective stance may be marked by diminutives, augmentatives, quantifiers, verb voice, sentential adverbs and changes in

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