

Languages, Social Media and Polish Teenagers in Norway

According to recent statistics Poles are the biggest immigration group in Norway at the moment (Statistics Norway, 2015). At the beginning of 2015 there were 91 000 Polish immigrants living in Norway. If Norwegian born to Polish parents are taken into consideration, then the number amounts to 99 424 persons in total. The ‘group’ is, however, widely under-researched. In spite of the striking figures, there is hardly any knowledge on their language and language use and virtually no studies on their identity constructions in the Norwegian setting. As Waerdahl (2016) notes, it is especially the Polish children that blend in and are ‘invisible’ in Norway. This poster presentation will aim at reducing the ‘invisibility’ of Polish immigrants by shedding light on language and identity constructions of Polish adolescents living in Norway.

This contribution will focus in particular on the role of computer mediated communication (CMC) in identity constructions by multilingual teenage speakers of Polish origin living in Norway. The current sociolinguistic approaches influenced by poststructuralism and social constructionism define identities as fluid, constructed, dynamic and multiple. The term is employed here, after Norton (Norton, 2013), ‘as the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future’. Given that, internet activities nowadays are increasingly used not only as means of gaining and exchanging information but also as ways of experimenting with identity construction (Jordán-Conde, Mennecke, & Townsend, 2014), I am, in this poster, exploring the role and potential of CMC in online identity negotiations by multilingual and multicultural teenage users.

This poster presentation draws on a data set obtained from a qualitative study on the importance of computer mediated communication practices among adolescent children of Polish immigrants living in Oslo and Akershus. In particular, having analysed the use of languages, images and multimedia content in status updates, posts and users’ homepages on social media (such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, vlogs etc.), the paper presents examples of translingual attitudes (Ricker Schreiber, 2015) and hybrid identities constructed by the teenage immigrants in their disclosures on social media platforms. To complement the data on the teenagers’ social media activity and to illuminate their perspectives on social media use, data from semi-structured interviews conducted with the study participants are presented along with the analysis of CMC activities.

Keywords: identity, multilingualism, adolescents, computer-mediated communication, social media

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