Multilingualism in Dublin: The LUCIDE project

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Abstract

This paper presents data collected under the auspices the LUCIDE network which examined urban multilingualism in contemporary Europe. It describes the approach employed to the study of societal and individual multilingualism in urban settings, and proposes that the notion of 'ordinary multilingualism' may capture the reality of everyday polyphonic language use in contemporary society.

Keywords: Multilingualism; Monolingualism; Urban Studies; Diversity; Applied Linguistics

1. Introduction: Researching the multilingual city

We live in an increasingly urban world. There are 28 mega-cities in the world with more than 10 million inhabitants, but the most rapid population growth across the globe is in fact in small urban settlements with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants. The UN Population Division (2014) estimated that some 3.9 billion people lived in cities in 2014, and predicted urban dwellers will account for two-thirds of the world population by 2050.

The city has been viewed with a combination of wonder and suspicion in literature and in mythology since the first ancient Greek city-state. Our contemporary globalised cities are centres for flows of capital and ideas, and continue to attract new residents – temporary and permanent – in search of material and metaphysical opportunities. Whilst scholars extensively have studied city life through a variety of paradigms in the social sciences and humanities (Sassen 2005; Simmel 1903; Wirth 1938), the multilingual aspect of the city – the intense linguistic contact and interaction between citizens from multiple backgrounds – has not in fact been explored in much detail. Research in urban studies by sociologists, geographers and political scientists tends either to overlook multilingualism or to focus on aspects of identity/ethnicity without mentioning how inextricably languages are bound up with these concepts. The multilingual city therefore provides the opportunity for

understanding social diversity and complexity based on the study of multilingual practices.

The LUCIDE (Languages in Urban Communities: Integration and Diversity for Europe) network, funded by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning programme (2011-14) set out to develop ideas about how to manage multilingual citizen communities, through building up a picture of how communication occurs in urban contexts. Focusing on real-life complexities of language and communication faced by individuals, the work of LUCIDE's researchers aimed to help communities and institutions make better use of diversity both as an economic resource and as a way of strengthening social cohesion, and to understand how the linguistic wealth of our cities and citizens can strengthen the 'diverse unity' of contemporary urban life. The main focus of LUCIDE's data collection activities was the multilingual city. It is not that multilingualism does not exist elsewhere – many rural areas are affected by mobility and migration – but the city is a concentration of different, changing cultures that are creating new kinds of identity. This paper draws on data collected in the city of Dublin, and tries to capture the dynamic and flexible nature of everyday language practices.

2. Approach to multilingualism

The LUCIDE project located itself within in a particular paradigm for understanding multilingualism, what Aronin and Singleton (2012: 1) describe as "the new global linguistic dispensation" — a qualitatively different version of multilingualism that permeates all aspects of contemporary life, a polyphonic and inescapable multilingualism, which is messy, ambiguous and sometimes contradictory rather than clearly cut.

Such multilingualism is a complex notion to capture, especially as there are many competing lay and academic understandings. At the very least, multilingualism can be generally understood in everyday life as the inclusion of, or the ability to use, several languages. It can be used to describe both the capacities of speakers and the languages that co-exist in a geographical location; in other words, it refers to both speakers and communities that use a number of languages.

The LUCIDE research teams adopted a distinction made in the work of the Council of Europe between 'multilingualism' as the co-existence of many languages in a society and 'plurilingualism' as the capacity of an individual to communicate in two

or more languages. It is important to note that plurilingual individuals may not demonstrate a balanced or native-life proficiency in all the languages in their repertoire, and language proficiency and use vary greatly according to the background and context of the speaker. Despite surface indicators that may seem to point to a densely multilingual environment, some city spaces may in fact be populated by speech communities composed of speakers from a multilingual background but who are *de facto* monolingual speakers in their daily lives. Moreover, a shift in language use (Fishman 1991) across generations generally occurs, resulting in monolingualism in the dominant language of the host community, usually the national language variety.

When the many languages of a city are equally accepted, valued and welcomed, and indeed recognised as apt for use in all kinds of situations with other speakers of the same languages, we recognise something of the European ideal of 'unity in diversity'. In LUCIDE's research (King & Carson 2016), we argue that these are the cities that succeed in capturing and distilling the social and linguistic capital, creativity and culture embodied by vital multilingualism. Our focus is not on the number of languages present in a city, as these figures are constantly shifting, but rather on how the many languages of citizens interrelate in city contexts – how these languages are learned, used and maintained in their daily lives. In this approach, we take multilingualism in its many complex forms and outworkings as a resource to be cultivated rather than a deficit or obstacle to addressed.

3. LUCIDE research design

The intensity of the social and linguistic contact in the multilingual city does not always create an easy context for citizens and residents. As one respondent interviewed in Oslo described succinctly, the attitude of many citizens to the city's new linguistic diversity is 'By all means, talk Somali, just not so I can hear it' (Carson, McMonagle & Skeivik 2014: 55). In Limassol, one of the respondents interviewed by the authors of the City Report describes how some citizens complain about 'foreigners who are 'destroying' the city's civilization […] and contribute to the loss of the city's identity; everywhere you go, people speak another language' (Papadima-Sophocleous, Nicolaou, Boglou & Parmaxi 2015). On the other hand, many of respondents in the LUCIDE cities saw multilingualism as a badge of honour, a sign of the creativity and spirit of their city. LUCIDE involved a range of cities in

Europe, Canada and Australia, eighteen cities overall, allowing a wide range of linguistic contexts to be investigated[1].

LUCIDE researchers in each city identified five shared overarching topics to be investigated in their local research site, addressing (1) good practice in the provision of language learning opportunities for immigrants; (2) social inclusion; (3) neighbouring languages; (4) intercultural dialogue; and (5) new patterns of migration. Across these five topics, key spheres of city life were delineated in order to provide for comprehensive and systematic exploration of how languages are encountered, used and learned in city life:

- Education - language learning and language support
- The public sphere - how the city supports democratic engagement
- Economic life – the benefits of multilingualism and the requirements
- The private sphere – how people behave and interrelate and celebrate
- The urban space – the appearance and sounds of the city

Two strands of research were utilized: secondary data collection within the network, followed by primary data collection in each partner city. LUCIDE researchers conducted meta-surveys of recent secondary data on multilingualism/plurilingualism in each the network's cities. The key aim of this research phase was to develop original research questions for primary research. During the review of secondary data, we were interested in examples of multilingualism as well as the more traditional academic or policy documents on multilingualism. These examples varied in each city and sphere of life, but included artefacts (printed/visual/digital) which illustrated the multilingual reality of the city, like websites, advertising campaigns, public or private documents (biographies, diaries, official correspondence). When surveying pre-existing data, we took a broad rather than a narrow approach when deciding what could be included in the first phase of our research. In this phase of our research activities, we focused on recent data, published in 2010 and onwards, or the most recent possible, in order to ensure that we created up-to-date and fresh narratives of languages in each city, and to help formulate valid research questions for the primary data collection phase.

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[1] Athens, Dublin, Hamburg, Limassol, London, Madrid, Melbourne, Montréal, Osijek, Oslo, Ottawa, Rome, Sofia, Strasbourg, Toronto, Utrecht, Vancouver, Varna.

Reporting templates were deployed in order to simplify data recording and sharing in each of the spheres. These templates captured concise information from data on/about multilingualism and plurilingualism (narrative studies/reports etc.), and examples of multilingualism and plurilingualism. Templates collected information on (a) bibliographic information, content overview, methodology and key outcomes of empirical studies and research reports, and (b) on the authors/creators of examples and artefacts, a description of the example and its place of creation/observation. Secondary data was collected and shared via an online city survey. The data generated from this phase of the network's research activities was employed to generate overarching research questions for the primary data collection phase (semi-structured interviews), and to feed into the content development of LUCIDE's reports, seminars, workshops and city reports. This phase of secondary research yielded a considerable quantity of data which allowed us to generate a relevant set of research questions arising from the key areas identified in a content analysis of the recent studies and examples provided by city partners. We articulated three groups of research hypotheses, within the areas of (i) language visibility (including audibility), (ii) affordances and (iii) challenges. Collecting reliable information on linguistic and population diversity in multilingual cities is not easy. Reliable and comparable demographic information on immigrant minority groups is almost impossible to obtain. In some cities, no demolinguistic data were included, often because they were not available — posing questions about ethnicity in a survey, for instance, is prohibited in some contexts.

In the second phase of LUCIDE's research collection, we questioned respondents in each city about the reality of multi/plurilingualism, about language policy/practice, visibility, affordances and challenges. A semi-standardised research design based on stakeholder interviews was created to support primary data collection in each partner city. This phase involved the targeted interviewing of selected individuals in the different spheres. The types of respondents in each sphere included, where possible, two types of individuals: (i) policy-maker/influencers, and (ii) policy-recipients. A template of interview questions was provided for each research team, to be adapted according to the local context and to the background of the interviewees. Interviewers were encouraged to try to ask for specific examples rather than general statements where possible, and to try to focus on comments and reflections related to

respondents' own areas of expertise. In Dublin, thirteen respondents were interviewed, from the following sectors of city life:

1. Business excellence specialist
2. English as a Second Language development officer
3. Multinational company worker
4. Embassy local staff worker
5. Voluntary sector
6. Educational evaluator
7. Director, arts and community resource centre
8. PhD student
9. Customer support in large multinational corporation
10. Tourism
11. Tourism
12. Actor and writer
13. Primary school teacher

4. Multilingualism in Dublin

Turning now to the research conducted in Dublin (Carson, McMonagle & Murphy 2015), despite the images deployed in tourism brochures of green fields and coastlines, Ireland is increasingly urban. In April 2011, 62% of the population lived in urban areas. The total population of Ireland's capital city, Dublin, and its suburbs was 1.27 million, around 28% of the national population. Ireland has transformed from a country of emigration to a country of immigration, and Dublin is a city where immigration is relatively new. The national census of 2002 asked a question on nationality for the very first time. Consecutive censuses in 2006 and 2011 continued to ask this question. According to census results, between 2002 and 2011 there was a 143% rise in non-Irish nationals living in Ireland. It was estimated that by 2006, the migrant population (excluding those born in Ireland or the UK) had increased five-fold to 13.3% of the population of Dublin over the space of a decade (Fahey & Fanning 2010: 1626). In spite of the economic recession, immigration to Ireland continued to increase with a growth of 25% since 2006. According to the census of 2011, non-Irish nationals represented 12% of the overall population, coming from 199 different countries (CSO 2012). In terms of absolute numbers, Dublin City had the highest numbers of non-Irish nationals in 2011, and one in six residents of the

administrative central division of the City of Dublin (within Greater Dublin) was a 'non-Irish' national. Some of the largest groups of immigrants have come from non-English speaking countries, including Poland, Romania, China and Brazil. During the past decade, Polish nationals overtook UK nationals as the largest non-Irish group living in Ireland.

For the first time in 2011 (and just repeated in the 2016 census), a question on home languages was included. Around 11% of respondents recorded a language other than English or Irish used in their home. In total, 182 different languages were coded. Irish nationals who spoke another language at home were most likely to speak French, German or Spanish. For European nationals, Polish was the most common language, followed by Lithuanian, Russian, Romanian and Latvian. Respondents who described themselves as Asian spoke mainly Filipino, followed by Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Malayalam, Urdu and Hindi, and amongst African nationals, Yoruba dominated, followed by French, Arabic, Igbo and Afrikaans. Finally, amongst nationals of the Americas, Portuguese was highly represented (mainly in Brazilian households), followed by Spanish, French, Polish and German (CSO 2012). It is worth noting that the total of 182 languages is an underestimation. Some language varieties are grouped together by respondents – described as, for example, 'Filipino', preventing any distinction between, for instance, Tagalog and Pangasinan or some one hundred and fifty other Filipino language varieties. The formulation of the question also allowed only one home language response, and of course not all respondents may have included their home language.

With two official languages (Irish and English), consecutive censuses in Ireland have contained a question on Irish language ability. In 2006, the number of households in Dublin with one or more Irish speakers (49.2%) was lower than the national average (53.4%) (CSO 2012). The ability to speak Irish relies on the self-assessment of census returnees. The frequency with which Irish is spoken can tell us more about the sociolinguistic vitality of the language, as well as the effectiveness of language policies. The census of 2011 showed the highest number of recorded Irish speakers since the foundation of the State, with a 7.1% rise in those claiming ability in Irish. Due to the size of its population, Dublin had the largest number of Irish speakers on a daily basis – some 18.4% of all daily speakers in 2011. Overall, however, Dublin City and suburbs represented some of the lowest levels of Irish speakers (e.g. 32% in Dublin City and 36% in South Dublin) (CSO 2012). Of those

who claimed to be able to speak Irish in Dublin in 2006, roughly one quarter spoke it within the education system, reflecting its compulsory status in the curriculum. Around just 2% of Dubliners who are able to speak Irish use it on a daily basis and *outside* of education (an important distinguishing feature which sets apart regular use from classroom use).

In addition to the question on language practice in the home, a question on how well speakers of other languages can speak English was included in Census 2011. The question on the census form divided into four categories: "very well", "well", "not well", "not at all". This question was only asked of those who answered "yes" to speaking a foreign language at home. Of those who speak a foreign language at home, 48% claim to speak English very well, 31% speak it well, 15% indicated that they do not speak English well, and 6% claim to not speak English at all. There appears to be some correlation between an improvement in English-language ability and time spent in Ireland. Of those non-Irish nationals who indicated that they arrived in Ireland in 1990, more than three quarters claim to speak English very well. Of those who arrived in Ireland in 2010, 37% claim to speak English very well and 23.7% claim not to speak English well or at all. Children and youths exceeded adults in ability to speak English (CSO 2012).

Our consideration of multilingualism and plurilingualism in five spheres of Dublin life revealed some contradictions in attitudes to describing language practices and language proficiency. Sometimes, professionals and academics who work in areas such as this start their exploration of a topic in a higher gear than necessary, making assumptions which are not borne out in a general population. Our small data set of thirteen interviews tends to support this habit: as practitioners and theoreticians, we fail to engage sufficiently with the way that terminology is understood and used in the very spheres we study. Five of the thirteen interviewees described themselves as 'monolinguals', despite learning and using other languages. When asked if they were monolingual, bilingual or multilingual, they responded:

- Monolingual with some French and Irish
- Monolingual English with minimal French, Spanish, Italian, Russian and Irish
- Monolingual, I suppose but with good levels of Irish
- Monolingual […] however I have recently begun learning the Korean language

- Monolingual with some French and Irish[i]

These responses chime with the comment by one interviewee: "I think we're not terribly attuned to language generally". In this perspective, multilingualism is not only seen as something 'done by others', but is also an ideal, balanced bilingualism or the plurilingualism of professional interpreters, aspirational levels of linguistic proficiency, rather than the workaday reality which linguists understand as a typical multilingual repertoire (e.g. first language fluency, with varying levels of comprehension in different languages according to education, needs, family background and work, which may include only receptive comprehension or a few words in a particular language variety). As mentioned earlier, this type of ordinary or everyday multilingualism is perhaps best described by the Council of Europe's term of plurilingualism which refers to a dynamic capacity where speakers "develop competences in a number of languages from desire or necessity, in order to meet the need to communicate with others" (Coste, Moore & Zarate 2009: 17), a dynamic and flexible shifting of language repertoires to meet different needs throughout the lifespan – rather than a useful ornament or something that others (interpreters, translators etc.) do well. The comments collected on what could be described as 'monolingualism plus' (e.g. "monolingual with some French and Irish") indicate a need for researchers and professionals in the field of multilingualism to raise awareness of what a multilingual repertoire looks like in practice and in the real lives of citizens.

5. Visibility

Whilst the languages of immigrants in cities are very distinctive in some spheres of city life and in neighbourhoods with high percentages of citizens from non-indigenous backgrounds, not all of the languages spoken in a city appear in the city's visual landscape in the public sphere. In Dublin, the role of Irish — first official language yet used rarely for daily communication by most residents in the city — is protected by the Irish Language Act in the public sphere, yet it is almost invisible in the economic sphere, including in Dublin's busy hospitality industry, where English predominates.

It is important to ask whether the symbolic use of languages observed in many cities (for instance in welcome signs or in an information leaflet) is useful in promoting language awareness and in encouraging language use. These types of

signals — whilst perhaps tokenistic in some cases are perhaps a step in the right direction towards the more visible and sustained use of many languages in multiple spheres of city life. Research by Cenoz and Gorter (2006) confirms that the appearance of minority languages in the linguistic landscape does raise language status and bolster maintenance. In other words, even small and symbolic instances contribute to enhanced language vitality, and send out positive signals to local residents that their languages are worthy to be used, to be maintained and to be learned. When the languages of local communities are embedded in the fabric of an area, this can both create a sense of ownership and belonging as well as reflect a degree of valorisation on the part of the whole community.

6. Conclusion

Suzanne Hall (2012: 108), in an ethnography of a multi-ethnic street in London, describes what she terms to be "ordinary cosmopolitanism": "a living amongst and recognition of difference without a convergence to sameness". Our cities have changed irrevocably over the previous century, with the blurring of physical boundaries and distance, unprecedented global mobility of goods and people, and the development of unimaginable technological and communication tools. Perhaps we can ask whether Hall's definition could equally apply to *ordinary multilingualism* — an accepted intermingling of different language varieties (regional, minority, indigenous, non-indigenous, prestigious, non-prestigious) in both private and public settings, where we do not fear languages we do not understand, but instead seek encourage language use, language awareness and language maintenance.

   In Dublin, daily life can only fully be understood with reference to recent immigration to the city, where multilingualism and plurilingualism are simultaneously 'problems' and assets in various sectors of life. In centuries past, efforts at creating the 'good city' or modern urban civilisation focused on infrastructure and transit, health and housing. In this century, in a context of globalisation and migration, the construction of a city's identity is a paramount concern – Sandercock and Lyssiotis (2003: 4) describe our cities as "multiethnic, multiracial, multiple". The research conducted under the auspices of the LUCIDE network in Dublin and seventeen other cities is a timely response to the question of how multilingualism is lived by citizens in contexts of intense and growing linguistic diversity.

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[i] All interview extracts can be found in the LUCIDE City Report on Multilingualism in Dublin, listed in the bibliography (Carson, McMonagle & Murphy: 2015).