Immigrants as new speakers: issues of integration, belonging and legitimacy

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This paper will consider immigrant integration in three different sociolinguistic contexts: Wales, Galicia and Quebec – three contexts, in which immigration is increasingly identified as a crucial factor, crucial to the demographic sustainability of an existing language community (Fishman 2001, De Varennes 2012). Despite recent initiatives from sub-state governments to integrate immigrants, as seen notably in Quebec, but also being discussed in Wales and Galicia, immigrants still face choices and obstacles concerning their new language and community of integration. This paper will focus on the obstacles and challenges that are experienced by immigrants in the process of becoming "new speakers" and "new citizens" of the community. We argue that the definition of being Welsh, Galician or Québécois is being transformed "from within" by new speakers from immigrant backgrounds, but that this redefinition confronts older ethnolinguistic definitions, still very much apparent in discourse and in everyday interactions, including those in language learning classrooms.

Each context will thus draw on separate ethnographic case studies of immigrants and their relationship to the "new" language. The paper will compare and contrast the experiences and representations of immigrants who learn the new language, as well as their claim (or not) to ownership of this language and legitimacy as "speakers". To do this, we tease out discourse on language as resource and language as marker of "community" identity. By comparing data from these three contexts, the paper will examine the challenges "from within" to historically-constructed ethnolinguistic categorisations, brought about by new demographics as well as efforts at linguistic revitalisation which have attracted new speakers.

Keywords: identity, new speakers, immigrants.