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‘It is English and there is no alternative’: Intersectionality, language and social/organisational differentiation of Polish migrants in the UK

## **Introduction**

Over the centuries, the existence of many individuals has been marked by relocations: from the countryside to urban areas, from places stricken by poverty to ones promising better livelihood, from areas destroyed by war to more peaceful settings. While movements of people are by no means a new occurrence, contemporary societies are, to a greater extent than in the past, ones ‘on the move’. Globalisation has brought with it the ‘massification’ of migration, leading to a common experience of individuals belonging to different socio-economic and professional groups (Favell et al., 2007) and giving rise to societies characterised by what Vertovec (2007) refers to as ‘super-diversity’.

An inherent feature of superdiversity is a proliferation of the types of migrants, who differ not only in terms of nationality, language and religion, for example, but also in relation to the reasons behind and patterns of migration, and the processes through which they secure accommodation and employment in the host countries (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011; Vertovec, 2010). On one end of the spectrum of migrants are the low skilled/low paid poor ones, who tend to migrate out of economic and socio-political necessity, whereas on the other end there are the ‘moving elites’, for whom economic privilege has resulted in the ability to make personal choices regarding the location of their residence globally (e.g. Bauman, 2007; Munck, 2008). Between these two extremes, there is a variety of ‘middling transnational actors’ (Smith, 2005: 8), whose skills and levels of economic and social capital open up

opportunities to migrate, both to improve their economic position and to foster self-development (e.g. Al Ariss and Syed, 2011; Cappellen and Janssens, 2010; Richardson, 2009).

Concomitant with the multitude of categories of migrants is, especially in Europe, a great variety of languages as a characteristic of superdiversity. In this paper, we are interested in language as a process that produces social and organisational differentiation in the case of migrant workers. As such, our discussion is inspired by the sociolinguistic perspective on globalisation (Piller and Takahashi, 2011) which accounts for the social differentiation produced by language, and language ideologies. This implies that, in order to understand how language produces social differentiation, we must apply a perspective that views language as a process that intertwines with other processes of social positioning. We therefore argue for the usefulness of an intersectional approach in examining the construction of social and organisational positions. By analysing language through an intersectional lens we wish to respond to the call by Lutz et al (2011), who, speaking from a European perspective on the development of the concept of intersectionality, contend that '[t]he multitude and divisions of languages and experiences in Europe are at present giving rise to a number of marginalising effects' and who thus 'consider *language* an intersectionality dimension which needs thorough investigation' (Lutz et al, 2011: 6, original emphasis). Through our study we also place the concept of intersectionality firmly within contemporary debates on mobility and migration, an area which so far has had limited applicability within intersectionality studies (see Phoenix and Bauer, 2012; Johansson and Śliwa, 2013).

In adopting an intersectional approach to language, our paper contributes to an understanding of how language is inextricably intertwined with other differentiating processes such as gender, class and nationality, for example, and through this, whether and how it might play a role in the perpetuation of power relations and systems of domination in globalised social and organisational contexts. An intersectional lens also contributes to our understanding of language as contextually situated and varied, and not representing of ‘the output of a unitary speaker’ (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011: 5). Rather, an intersectional approach supports viewing language as a process, which is locally situated and globally contextualised, and through which social and organisational positions are enabled and articulated, or conversely restricted.

In order to explore the role of language in co-constructing organisational and social outcomes, and in a bid to examine the conditions in which this takes place, this paper is guided by the following research questions: How does language intersect with other processes of differentiation to produce particular social and organisational positions? What enabling or restricting effects of language are experienced and articulated by Polish migrant workers in the UK?

The next section offers a discussion of the link between language and social in/exclusion in relation to an intersectional framework. We then present our methodological approach. Further, in the analysis, we discuss five life histories of Polish migrant workers in the UK to explore how language intersects with other processes producing social and organisational differentiation. In the concluding remarks, we present the theoretical and empirical contributions of our study, and argue for further investigation into the role of language as an intersectionality dimension.

## **An intersectional perspective on language, power and social differentiation**

In this paper, we draw on intersectionality for the particular purpose of analysing the effects produced by the intertwining of language with other processes of social and organisational differentiation. We do not view language merely as an instrumental tool of communication that an individual wields more or less competently, but as a process of differentiation that intersects with other processes such as gender, nationality and class to produce particular social positions. In applying an intersectional perspective to this particular issue, we aim to extend the debate and conceptualisations of intersectionality whilst also providing a contribution to the growing body of research on the role of the English language in contemporary organisations and society (e.g. Musson, 1999; Tietze, 2003; 2008a).

In a global context English constitutes a dominant language, conceptualised through Englishisation and examining the status of English as a global lingua franca (Tietze, 2008a). In an organisational context language has attracted an increased research interest parallel to the growth of linguistically diverse workforces, with one strand focusing on the use of English in contemporary organisational contexts (e.g. Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson 2002; Nickerson 2005; Tietze 2008). Empirical studies conducted to date have typically addressed the role of the English language in multinational settings outside locations in which English is the dominant native language (e.g. Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen and Piekkari 2006; Poncini 2003). However, less is known about the use of English by native speakers of other languages in workplaces based in English-speaking countries. Our study addresses this gap in the literature, using empirical examples from life histories of Polish migrants living in the UK.

Research on intersectionality has by now produced a substantial body of literature (see e.g. Davis, 2008; Dhamoon, 2011; Knapp, 2005; Lutz et al., 2011; Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006), and as the concept has gained more widespread use since its introduction by Crenshaw (1991), it has seen increasingly diverse applications, leading to the call for mainstreaming intersectionality (Dhamoon, 2011). From its initial challenging of single-axis identity analyses, intersectionality has come to be more widely applied as an analytical paradigm to study multiple differences, relations, and social groups beyond the original focus on black American women. For example, it has been applied to whiteness and middle-classness (Levine-Rasky, 2011), which represents a departure from early intersectional explorations of multiple processes of oppression and marginalisation. The ambiguity of the concept has caused contention, while on the other hand its open-endedness has also been seen as the source of its success (Davis, 2008). Whilst acknowledging the multifaceted uses of, and conflicting debates surrounding intersectionality, we consider it a valuable approach to the study of the role of language for processes of social and organisational differentiation.

Key to intersectionality is the analysis of ‘the mutual co-constitution of different categories of social differentiation’ (Lutz et al, 2011:2), and approaches to researching intersectionality include examining differences between and within established categories that form the bases for differentiation, as well as ontologically questioning those categories (McCall, 2005). Importantly, an intersectional approach also considers how such categories are produced and situated within broader historical, economic and socio-cultural processes that organise social difference (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Dhamoon, 2011). It thus enables analyses that account for the experiencing of social practices on an individual level, institutional processes, and cultural ideologies. However, the focus on categories has also provoked the contention that some analyses neglect that ‘race, gender, and class are not the identic properties of individuals

or of groups, but rather, are political relations which structure the lived experience of the subjects they interpellate' (Carastathis, 2008: 29), and give 'rise to particular forms of positionality for social actors' (Anthias, 2006: 27).

The notion of positionality makes reference to both the practices, actions and meanings that underpin social positioning, as well as the social positions that are outcomes of such practices. In other words, it refers to processes of social differentiation which, according to sociolinguists, are articulated and constructed through language (Chand, 2009). When looked at from a sociolinguistic perspective, language practices play an important role in the processes of mediating and transforming relations of social power and inequality both globally and locally. As such, in order to understand the processes of social and organisational differentiation and in/exclusion in the globalised world, it is crucial to address language as one of the dimensions within these processes.

In this context, Piller and Takahashi (2011: 371) point to the connection between language and social inequalities and in/exclusion through drawing attention to 'the relationship between linguistic proficiency and non-language outcomes such as employment, further training, settlement success, social recognition or sustainable livelihoods'. Focusing on the level of the individual speaker, this is, first of all, because of the role language plays in mediating access to and functioning within key sites of social inclusion, such as education, employment and healthcare. Linguistic proficiency, moreover, impacts the development of a sense of belonging for non-native speakers and is seen to be the precondition of social inclusion, based on the understanding that the latter is contingent upon linguistic assimilation (Pavlenko, 2005).

Considered at the level of institutions and organisations, on the other hand, it can be seen that certain speakers and ways of expression are set up for success and others for failure. This is

exemplified by Labov's (1972) study of the American school system and the way it devalues the language variety spoken by African American children. With particular linguistic practices being seen as more legitimate in social settings such as education, employment and healthcare, access to these settings becomes more difficult or perhaps even impossible for those having the 'wrong' kind of linguistic proficiency (Piller and Takahashi, 2011). In the case of the UK, the emphasis on language as a condition for successful 'integration' is exemplified by the 'knowledge of language and life' requirements for obtaining citizenship, which include passing a 'life in the UK' test, and achieving a particular level of English speaking and listening proficiency (UKBA, 2013)<sup>1</sup>. Language thus constitutes a key factor by which social inclusion, or conversely social exclusion, is measured.

Taking into account both the individual and institutional/organisational level perspective on the link between language and social differentiation brings us, as organisational scholars, to recognising organisations as key sites in which mechanisms of inequality and in/exclusion unfold in a way that is associated with the use of language. For example, according to Creese and Kambere (2003), in settings such as job interviews and promotion panels candidates who speak English with particular accents or in non-standard ways can be subject to racialisation and discrimination on the part of organisational decision makers. In organisations that are linguistically diverse, the power to determine what counts as the correct usage of English lies with 'native speakers'. As a result, the 'standard' English speakers are evaluated as speaking 'good English' (Silverstein, 1996), whereas the usage of English that deviates from the standard – for example, as manifested through the accents of non-native speakers – can be seen as inadequate and leading to 'communication problems'. Therefore, within workplace organisations, non-native language speakers can be considered guilty of 'miscommunications

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<sup>1</sup> It can be noted that there are exemptions to this rule, but the focus on language as a key factor for determining acceptable social integration is what we wish to draw attention to.

and poor service' (Chand, 2009: 400) which, in turn, will influence their prospect of organisational progression and their place within the organisational hierarchy.

Based on the discussion above, we argue that it is important to consider the effects of language alongside other differentiating processes, which brings us to propose that an intersectional perspective on language and organisational and social differentiation brings particularly valuable insights. Before discussing our methodological approach we will next outline the background to our study.

### **Background to the study**

Historically, Poland and the UK have been subject to incoming and outgoing migration flows, with both countries experiencing intensive waves of migration in recent years. Two dates are of particular significance in the case of Poland: the fall of the socialist regime in 1989, and EU accession in 2004, which brought about the opening of borders and created unprecedented short- and long-term travel opportunities for the population (Taylor and Śliwa, 2011). The latter date is of key importance also for the UK, since the inflow of migrants that followed the EU enlargement of 2004 has been described as 'one of the most important social and economic phenomena shaping the UK today' (Pollard et al., 2008: 7). The great majority of the post-2004 'new Europeans' arrived to the UK from Poland (Home Office, 2009). As a result, Poles have become the largest foreign national group resident in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Categorisations such as gender, ethnic origin, skills and age – and, we argue, language – that are attributed to different groups of migrant workers contribute to them being 'directed into particular slots in the labour markets of receiving countries' (McDowell, 2008: 495). While diverse and complex in terms of, for example, gender and

occupation, the Polish population in the UK has been subject to the popular stereotype of a hardworking and reliable (male) builder or plumber (Quinn, 2011).

This stereotypical image of the Polish migrant in the UK, however, has been problematised in academic research. In the last decade migration movements of Poles between Poland and the UK have attracted significant interest from social science and migration studies scholars (e.g. Burrell, 2009; Garapich, 2008; Garapich et al., 2009; McGhee et al., 2013; Rabikowska, 2010; Ryan et al., 2009). Empirically, this paper contributes to extant studies exploring the personal experiences of Polish migrants in the UK.

## **Methodology**

To analyse the intersections of language and other processes of differentiation in the case of a particular group of transnational workers, we carried out a qualitative interview study. In conducting the interviews we adopted a life history approach (Maclean et al., 2012; Śliwa and Taylor, 2011). Life histories are particularly suitable for research using an intersectional lens as they allow for the capturing of biographical trajectories as ‘being produced by the intersection of micro dynamics’ (Murgia and Poggio, 2011, p. 11), i.e. conduct and action taking place at the level of an individual, and ‘macro dynamics’, as manifest in regulations and norms at the level of society or institutions (ibid.). In other words, life histories enable analysis at the interconnected levels of individuals, organisations, professions and institutions.

In conducting intersectionality research a narrative approach is considered appropriate in light of the methodological consequences of adopting a focus on a processual and situated performance instead of concentrating on ‘objects of analysis’ such as gender and other categories (Poggio, 2006). Data collection methods recommended by Poggio (2006) include

shadowing, participant observation and narrative interviews. For the purposes of our study, we conducted open, explorative interviews with a narrative focus (Czarniawska, 2004; Gabriel et al., 2010). While personal narratives ‘do not intend to address the complexity of a full range of dimensions in a full range of categories’ (Ludvig, 2006: 248), according to McCall (2005: 1781), their particular advantage for intersectionality research lies in that they enable ‘the partial crystallization of social relations’. Intersectional studies have used narrative interviews to address the relationality and situatedness of categories of difference, and to explore the meanings attributed to them (Essers *et al.*, 2010; Johansson and Śliwa, 2013; Ludvig, 2006).

For the purposes of the current paper, we selected five life histories from a large, in-depth qualitative study addressing the lives of different types of migrant workers in Britain. The interviews were collected between 2009 and 2012. All participants were of Polish origin and at the time of the interviews lived in the UK. Two of the participants were female and three male, and were recruited for the study using a combination of personal contacts and ‘cold calling’ of potential candidates. Wishing to gain insights into a broad range of migration experiences, we selected participants from different backgrounds and occupations (see Table 1):

Insert Table 1 here

To ensure anonymity of the participants, all names have been replaced with pseudonyms and no references are made to specific organisations. All participants arrived in the UK after 1989, and all except one before Poland’s EU accession in 2004.

The interviews lasted between one and three hours. All of them were conducted by one of the authors who is a native Polish speaker. Two of the interviews were carried out in English and

three in Polish. All of them were transcribed and the Polish-language ones were translated in full by the interviewer. Being a Polish migrant in the UK herself, the one of us who conducted the interviews had an a priori knowledge of the research context and first-hand experience of the complex ways in which differentiation occurs within social and organisational settings. As Holvino (2010: 249, quoting Bannerji, 1992) argues, ‘there is no better point of entry into a critique or reflection than one’s own experience’. Of course, the circumstances and experiences of Polish migrants in the UK are very diverse and therefore it would be wrong to claim that a female academic had a privileged access to the experiences of, for example, a male tailor. Nevertheless, it is accurate to say that the existing commonalities allowed the interviewer to establish a degree of rapport with the participants, and for giving her a ‘sense of engaged subjectivity’ (Dhamoon, 2011: 239).

We wished to find out about the participants’ personal and professional trajectories. We asked them to elaborate on their motivations behind and experiences of migration and living and working in the UK, as well as their plans for the future. As scholars with an interest in broadly understood processes of organising, we also asked our interviewees about their experiences of both formal and informal workplaces in the UK, and about the ways in which they have ‘organised’ their lives as migrants (e.g. in relation to the family/ethnic and professional networks they are part of; their transnational movements; how they have secured their employment; and how they spend their free time). Moreover, we asked the participants to elaborate on concrete life events and encounters, in order to get beyond generalities (see van den Brink and Benschop, 2012).

We analysed the interview data through iterative moving back and forth between the interview transcripts, the thematically and theoretically structured material, and theoretical concepts used (Silverman, 2001). We were broadly concerned with positionality, that is,

processes that underpin social positioning, and the participants' ensued narrated positions. Starting by looking at how the participants accounted for their current position in the UK against the background of the economic and social structures that have shaped EU-migration to the UK, we then focus specifically on how the participants account for the enabling and restricting factors of their positioning. In particular, we pay attention to how language enters into such narratives as an explanatory framing device.

### **The intersections of language and other differentiating processes**

To explore the ways in which language intersects with other processes of differentiation to produce particular social and organisational locations, and to gain insights into the enabling and restricting effects of language experienced by Polish migrant workers in the UK, we now turn to the narratives of five Polish migrants whose life histories we have selected for the purposes of illustrating our argument, following Lutz et al. (2011), about the need to consider language an intersectionality dimension.

#### *Moving away – moving down*

We start from the example of Jerzy – a person who, like many other Polish migrant workers who moved to the UK between 1989 and 2004, did not initially have English language skills, thus having limited employment options. Jerzy emigrated to the UK in 2000 when he was 31 and his marriage had fallen apart. Even though Poland had not, by then, been an EU member state, from the beginning of his stay in Britain Jerzy had the right to live and work legally in the country. This was due to his family having German roots, as a result of which Jerzy held two passports: a Polish and a German one.

Following a brief career as a professional sportsperson in Poland in his early 20s, Jerzy – who had an FE-level qualification in IT – worked for a number of years as a manager of a mobile

phone company in his home city. His duties involved being responsible for a team of people and in carrying out his work, Jerzy had the support of a personal assistant. He was earning an above-average salary and enjoyed various 'fringe benefits' such as a company car.

Whereas in Poland Jerzy had middle-class employment and lifestyle, once in the UK, finding work turned out not to be easy for him:

I didn't speak enough English. If I'm looking now to the past, I was stupid. I should have learned English in Poland... that would have been easier for me.

So even though you could work legally, because you had a German passport...

Yeah, but I couldn't find work legally without English. It was really horrible... I go into the shop and I start to speak Polish, OK, [and they're, like], 'oh, fucking hell, what's he on?' I'm like, 'Give me a job'.

As his attempts at entering the labour market legally were unsuccessful, in the end Jerzy drew on his network of Polish migrants in the UK in order to secure paid work in construction, as a manual worker:

Finally, I met another Polish guy, and he was already involved with the building business. And we made something like, two-people company. That was really good change for me.

Over the next decade, Jerzy held a succession of jobs in the UK, sometimes within and on other occasions outside formal employment contracts. He mainly worked as a construction site worker, but also as a hotel room service person and a coffee shop chef. His English improved enough for him to be able to communicate effectively but, as he did not have the right type of language proficiency (Piller and Takahashi, 2011), he was not capable of moving

to a 'white collar' position closer to the one he had been employed in back in Poland, even though this had been his ambition.

Jerzy's trajectory illustrates McDowell's (2008) point about how based on their gender, origin, age and skills – in his case, especially language skills – migrants are 'slotted into' particular locations within the receiving country's labour market. For Jerzy, the effects of language – both in relation to the limited level of his English language skills and because of him being a native Polish speaker – intersected with gender to produce the social position of a working class migrant employed, sometimes only casually, in typically male occupations. As a result of the intersection of these various differentiating processes, Jerzy experienced a worsening of his status both in society and in his new workplaces, relative to the social and organisational positions he used to occupy in Poland.

*(Re)claiming social and organisational position*

While Jerzy's narrative exemplifies the way in which the lack of language skills can result in a migrant moving down the social hierarchy and losing access to organisational positions equivalent to those previously held in the home country, Dariusz's life history suggest that the opposite can also be the case. Dariusz came to the UK in his early 40s, in 2001. While for a number of generations, coal mining had been the main occupation of men in his family, he himself had trained as a tailor. Until 1989, he had worked for a tailoring co-operative in his home town, and afterwards, for a few 'typically capitalist, private' companies. His decision to come to the UK was primarily driven by the inability to continue working in his trade in Poland, caused by the decline of traditional tailoring in the country at the end of the 1990s:

More things were imported, ready, from China... It didn't pay off for the people to have things tailor made any more... Bespoke tailoring collapsed then.

Unlike most migrants of his generation, on arrival in England, Dariusz had some knowledge of English. Already as a teenager in Poland, he had – out of his own initiative – attended an English language course which was delivered outside the regular education system. His language skills enabled him to find work in a bespoke tailoring firm in Savile Row in London. As he explains:

I knew that this was a street where there were bespoke tailors... I was walking around, I went into one place, another one, I asked if they needed a tailor, that I have a lot of experience.

Dariusz was offered probation and subsequently, employment in the third firm he had gone into. At the time of the interview, he was still working there, tailoring suits for wealthy customers from different countries:

There are increasingly more customers from Russia coming and ordering on our street... We have a lot of orders from America, a lot of Jewish people from America or Israel... Sometimes I see a Polish surname on the order. Sometimes Pierce Brosnan, Daniel Craig.

In his work, Dariusz himself does not meet the customers. Interactions with the customers are carried out by British, native English speaking staff, who take measurements and advise customers on the choice of fabric and style of the garment. As Chand (2009) argues, in customer service situations, the native English speaker's English tends to be considered superior to that of non-native speakers.

Dariusz's organisational position as a tailor in an upmarket, old-style English bespoke tailoring company results from the intersection of several processes: language – whereby his ability to speak English allowed him to secure employment there, without having to rely on his Polish migrant network; class – since due to his vocational training his work involves the

‘production’ of goods with his own hands; and being a foreigner – which in the type of the company he works for means that he is likely to be given a ‘backstage’ role, rather than a customer-facing one.

### *Returning to a traditional gender role*

While in his narrative, Dariusz does not make direct references to the impact of being a man on his situation in the UK, the gendered nature of migrants’ occupational trajectories becomes more evident when in parallel to him, the situation of his wife, Ilona, is also considered.

Similarly to Dariusz, Ilona came from a coal mining community, where for generations, men worked down the mine while women were ‘stay at home’ mothers and wives:

No woman used to work at that time. Very rarely a woman would work. Unless she was, I don’t know... educated? Simply, wives were sitting at home. That was the tradition.

Ilona was the first woman in her family who completed vocational education and, at the age of 18, moved out of her parents’ home and started working. During her training as a tailor, Ilona met Dariusz, her future husband. After they had married, she continued working for a tailoring firm, with breaks for maternity leave when their two children were born.

I couldn’t imagine sitting at home... I liked [work]. I never used to want to sit at home. One can do everything after work.

When Dariusz became unemployed in Poland and migrated to the UK in 2001, Ilona remained in Poland for the next three years as she did not want to move abroad. At some point, however, her husband decided that it was time for the family to re-unite:

At the beginning, I didn't want to live here... Dariusz was here and I kept coming here for three years. Finally, he got angry, packed all my things into a parcel and said: 'You won't go back there any more'.

After an over twenty year-long period when both spouses worked, the wife had imposed upon her the expectation that she should give up on her employment in order to join her husband in the UK, where he had emigrated in search of paid work. In combination with a patriarchal family structure, economic necessity contributed to Ilona becoming a 'family follower' migrant (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000). As migrants, Ilona and Dariusz assumed traditional gender roles, with the man becoming the breadwinner and the woman remaining at home. Particularly, in Ilona's case, her social position as a stay at home wife of a Polish migrant worker resulted from the intersection of class-, gender- and language-related processes. She reflects on the impact of her poor English language skills on her (in)ability to secure legal employment in the UK:

I never learned [English]. You know, even now I speak it poorly. Not Dariusz, but me. I can understand a lot but somehow... I'm not afraid to move around, to sort something out, to go shopping or somewhere, this isn't a problem at the moment. I know many things, I can also say a lot but it isn't the same [as being able to speak in a work context].

Overtime, Ilona developed the ability to communicate in English to an extent which is sufficient for her to negotiate matters in the domestic sphere but her English language skills have not improved enough for her to be able to join a workplace organisation in her adopted country. Ilona's narrative confirms Piller and Takahashi's (2011) argument about the necessity of language skills for negotiating access to key social arenas such as employment.

*Moving down and climbing back up*

Similarly to Ilona, Dorota's trajectory gives insights into the gendered nature of migration. At the time of the interview Dorota had been in the UK for eight years. Having an interest in languages, she started learning English at the age of 15:

I left my town especially to go to school that would teach you English... Out of all the languages, I felt I would need that one... I came from a small town, and we didn't have English teachers... My parents never thought I needed any private lessons. So I knew I had to go to school to learn.

Having been a top student in school, Dorota continued to university and qualified as a teacher. She then left to work as an au pair in Amsterdam, and subsequently, decided to pursue postgraduate studies. To afford the tuition fees, she intended to work in London for a while, save money, and then return to do a PhD. Arriving in London, Dorota found work through Polish job advertisements posted 'in a corner shop opposite the Polish centre'. After working in two restaurants, she found another job where her language skills were put into practice:

I got a job with a cleaning agency, owned by an English man. And he needed a Polish person speaking decent English, who would be able to stay in touch with customers... translate whatever the customers wanted, daily organisation.

Shortly after arriving in London, Dorota met a Polish man at a party, who later became her husband, and the plan to return to Amsterdam was abandoned. Workwise, Dorota moved on to the deli counter in the department store where she worked at the time of the interview. Being asked if she sees a discrepancy between her educated background and the jobs she has held, Dorota says:

I think the main thing is that it all had to do with the fact that we weren't part of the EC.

I would have gone for very different jobs from the start if I had a proper working visa.

But they just weren't there, and I just had to whatever was available.

Working for a large organisation like the department store provides security, including a pension scheme and maternity leave 'if we started a family', which Dorota says is not imminently on the cards. It also gives her the opportunity to progress within the organisational hierarchy which is both Dorota's longer-term intention, and a plan her managers' have for her, as expressed by them in her appraisal meeting.

Dorota's trajectory has been marked by macro level legislative and political aspects, such as visa regulations and education fees. Being a talented student with academic aspirations, Dorota's English skills made it possible for her to leave Poland and consider postgraduate studies abroad, but her family background meant she had no financial means to pursue the latter. Arriving in the UK to work Dorota initially relied on an existing network of migrants to find work. Being Polish, female and proficient in English gave her the opportunity to work in customer service in a cleaning company early on, mediating between Polish employees and British customers. Similarly to Jerzy, the combination of her gender, nationality and skills produced her social and organisational position during her first years in the UK. Over time, however, as a result of her personal ambition and thanks to her linguistic abilities, Dorota has begun to move out of the typical 'Polish female working class migrant' position to start climbing up the organisational hierarchy in the UK. Her trajectory demonstrates the effects of the intersection of gender- and language- related processes within the broader macro-political and economic structures underpinning her life history (Knapp, 2005).

*The sky is the limit*

In contrast to the working class Polish migrant workers such as Jerzy, Dariusz or Ewa, the social and organisational positioning in the UK of Michal – an academic coming from a middle class background – is different. Michal arrived in the UK in 2006 from Germany, where he had moved from Poland after finishing school at the age of 19 to do a university degree and subsequently a PhD. His choice to then pursue an academic career in the UK was based on the perceived opportunities:

[You can] come and apply and you really get a chance to be accepted, based on your qualities and not... whom you know and where you are from.

After sending job applications to several universities in the UK, Michal received a Lectureship and subsequently a Senior Lectureship in the institution where he now works. He plans to apply for a Chair in the future, as ‘it’s sort of implicit’ to an academic career trajectory. He sees his promotion prospects as depending on ‘the quality of research you produce’, and considers building a strong research profile his priority. He feels in control of his career progression as he is, he says, in an institution where, regardless of the country of origin, ‘you are treated as an equal’.

When asked about his experience of functioning professionally in English Michal explains:

[Professional belonging] doesn’t define itself through the language because language is obvious. It is English and there is no alternative on the international level. I think it has nothing to do with language... I just accept it, you know: research is done in English in this particular area so you either do this area in English or not at all.

While not considering the language to be of any concern, Michal nevertheless makes sure that his writing is of a high standard by privately paying a native speaker to proofread his work. His attitude confirms a point made by writers on the Englishisation of higher education,

whereby English language proficiency is considered to be a taken-for-granted aspect of entering and progressing within contemporary academia (Tietze, 2008b; Tietze and Dick, 2009).

Michal has a Polish wife and a three-year old child. Financially, he is ‘the breadwinner’ while his wife works part time. Speaking about his current situation, he says he has no links to Poland due to having had his whole career in the UK, where ‘[the system] makes you into a British academic’, situating his professional future in the UK.

Being fluent in English due to his education, language has for Michal never entered into the equation as a possible restraining factor when looking for employment in the UK. His qualification and educational background places Michal in a position where he feels he has the power to shape his own career, as evidenced by a promotion already gained at the time of the interview. In a sector marked by an increasing proportion of international staff, Michal considers himself on equal footing with others who also contend with working in a second language. The ‘qualities’ he is being judged on do not include biographical aspects such as the country of origin. He sees his promotion opportunities as determined by his ability to produce high quality research outputs. At the same time, he does not consider how they might also be supported by the gendered work arrangements between him and his wife, so that his ‘life centers on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children’ (Acker, 1990: 149).

### **Concluding remarks**

In this paper, we have explored how language intersects with other processes of differentiation to produce particular social and organisational positions. Empirically, we have

discussed the enabling and restricting effects of language as experienced and articulated by Polish migrant workers in the UK.

Our findings contribute to the literature on intersectionality by bringing out the crucial role of language as a process of social and organisational differentiation. In simple terms, for a migrant worker, the ability to negotiate access to key social sites – in the case of our research, especially employment – depends to a large extent on her or his linguistic abilities (Piller and Takahashi, 2011). However, to understand the social and organisational positionality of a migrant, it is necessary to consider the impact of language along other processes of social and organisational differentiation, such as gender, class and nationality, for example. Language, therefore, constitutes an important intersectionality dimension (Lutz et al, 2011).

With our study, we also contribute to extant literature by demonstrating the usefulness of applying intersectionality to studying processes of differentiation in transnational contexts. The effects of language and its intersections with other differentiating processes, as demonstrated in our discussion, can be discerned on different levels: from broader macro-socioeconomic and political structures, such as those enabling labour flows within the European Union; to the meso-level of institutions and organisations, which are interested in the employment of migrants characterised by particular occupational qualifications but also linguistic skills and practices; to the micro-level of individuals for whom language is one of the intertwined processes shaping their social and organisational positions, and their lived experience of migration. On all these levels, both the native language of the migrant worker, as well as her or his use of English, can both enable and restrain the extent of social inclusion of the individual living in the transnational context of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007).

In addition to contributing to the literatures on intersectionality and language in the context of social and organisational differentiation, through addressing qualitatively the lives and work

of Polish migrants in the UK, our research also adds to empirical studies focusing on ‘the human face of migration’ (Favell, 2008: 702) and to what Burrell refers to as ‘the personal experiences’ of migrants in the UK (2009: 12). Further, methodologically, we add to empirical studies of intersectionality, especially those mobilising life histories (Essers et al., 2010; Ludvig, 2006).

Paying attention to language helps us better understand the dynamics of social and organisational in/exclusion. Moreover, as a consequence of globalisation, cultural and linguistic diversity have become inherent features of many contemporary contexts. Therefore, to conclude, we call for more research into the intersections of language and other processes in producing social and organisational differentiation.

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