Language needs of mobile retirees

A study of linguistic challenges and strategies in international retirement migration, with a case study of Scandinavian retirees in Alicante, Spain

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• What linguistic challenges or problems arise in the context of international retirement migration?
• What linguistic strategies are used, and by what actors, to meet these challenges?
• What implications do different linguistic strategies have, for retirees’ communicative needs, and for inclusion and social cohesion?
• What is reasonable to expect, or demand, in terms of linguistic adaptation from mobile retirees and from the host society?

Key findings I: Factors conditioning language learning and inclusion in international retirement migration

Old age is an obstacle to language learning
English is widely used as a lingua franca
Tourism migration affects perceptions in the host society
Residential segregation precludes interaction with locals
Seasonal mobility facilitates incentives for linguistic integration
Expatriate communities provide native-language settings

Due to these factors, retirement migration differs from other types of international migration – the linguistic challenges differ, the strategies available to migrants and host country authorities differ, and the outcomes in terms of inclusion and social cohesion differ.

Key findings II: Linguistic strategies in retirement migration

1. Communication using the host country language
2. Communication using the migrants’ native language
   - Expatriate communities
   - Interpretation and translation
   - Interpreters
   - Exit
3. Communication using a lingua franca (often English)

Retired migrants use a wide range of linguistic strategies in order to manage everyday communication. Policy makers need to acknowledge and accommodate this diversity, avoid ‘one-size-fits-all’ solutions and instead be prepared to use different linguistic approaches depending on the situation.

Key findings III: Approaches to inclusion in international retirement migration

Assimilation
- Full cultural and linguistic assimilation into the host society
- Unrealistic demands on migrants

Multiculturalism
- Extensive cultural and linguistic rights for immigrant groups
- Unrealistic demands on host societies

Civic integration
- Equal civic rights and obligations for natives and immigrants
- A more realistic approach

In the specific context of international retirement migration, a focus on civic integration appears as the most realistic policy option. This approach focuses on equal rights and obligations rather than on strong demands for cultural and linguistic adaptation.

Key findings IV: Social cohesion?

• Some frustration among the Spanish about foreign residents not learning Spanish
• No accounts of xenophobia, hostility or overt protests against foreign retired residents
• Probable reason: the association between retirement migration and tourism

Project outcomes

• Contribution to the MIME WP6 report
• Contributions to the MIME Vademecum
• Article in Social Inclusion (ed. Maráz & Adamo)
• Draft chapter for the MIME book
• Conference and seminar presentations
• Workshop in Uppsala
• Input to PhD dissertation (Laksfoss Cardozo)

The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Community’s Seventh Framework Programme under grant agreement No. 613344 (Project MIME).