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New cultural reality – problem or challenge? Acculturation strategies used by Polish immigrants to Wales

Nowa rzeczywistość kulturowa – problem czy wyzwanie? Strategie akulturacyjne stosowane przez polskich imigrantów w Walii

Abstract

Acculturation is the process of adapting to a new culture, in which members of a minority group – such as immigrants – combine elements of their native values and behavioural norms with those of the dominant culture in the L2 speaking country. The article presents findings from a study on the acculturation strategies adopted by Polish immigrants living in Welshpool (Wales). The research explores how individuals' perceptions regarding their native culture and the culture of their L2 speech community shape their chosen acculturation strategies. The study employed a structured interview method, and the collected data were analysed using a coding approach to identify recurring themes and extract quantitative insights. The results highlight the diversity of acculturation strategies among Polish immigrants and support the hypothesis that integration – considered the most desirable strategy according to Berry's acculturation theory – depends on multiple psychological

and social factors. These include, among many others, motivation to learn the host country's language and openness to interactions with members of the L2 cultural environment.

Keywords: acculturation, social identity, integration, immigrant English, Polish immigrants in the UK

Streszczenie

Akulturacja rozumiana jest jako proces uczenia się drugiej kultury, w ramach którego przedstawiciele mniejszościowej grupy kulturowej (np. imigranci) łączą swój rodzimy system wartości i normy zachowań z systemem i normami kultury dominującej (kultury kraju goszczącego). Prezentowany rozdział przedstawia wyniki badania strategii akulturacyjnych realizowanych przez polskich imigrantów mieszkających w walijskim mieście Welshpool. Przeprowadzone przez autorki badanie pozwoliło na wyciągnięcie wstępnych wniosków na temat tego, jak indywidualne decyzje respondentów dotyczące rodzimej kultury i kultury kraju emigracji mogą przekładać się na realizację danej strategii akulturacyjnej. W badaniu wykorzystano metodę wywiadu ustrukturyzowanego, zaś otrzymane wyniki zostały opracowane za pomocą metody kodowania, czyli kategoryzowania bloków danych w taki sposób, aby określić powtarzające się tematy i uzyskać dane ilościowe. Otrzymane wyniki badań ujawniły różnorodność strategii akulturacyjnych, realizowanych przez polskich imigrantów. Ponadto, analiza tych wyników potwierdziła tezę, iż strategia integracji – która zgodnie z wykorzystaną tu teorią J.W. Berry'ego jest najbardziej pożądaną strategią i prowadzi do ukształtowania zintegrowanej tożsamości wielokulturowej – zależy od bardzo wielu czynników psychicznych i społecznych, w tym – od motywacji danej osoby do nauki języka kraju goszczącego i otwartości na kontakty z przedstawicielami nowej kultury.

Słowa kluczowe: akulturacja, tożsamość, Polscy imigranci na Wyspach Brytyjskich, integracja

Introduction

In an era of intensive migration, the experience of encountering a new cultural reality remains a crucial subject of research. Immigrants who decide to change their place of residence and thus become part of a national or ethnic minority must often adapt to the target country's mainstream culture and redefine their social and cultural identity. The study presented below aims to identify the acculturation strategies employed by Polish immigrants who arrived in the United Kingdom after Poland's accession to the European Union in May 2004. The research was conducted using a structured interview method, based on a questionnaire that examined such aspects of the respondents' life as their willingness to enhance their English language skills, integration with the local L2[1] speech community, and maintaining a regular contact with their home country.

The notion of acculturation

The term acculturation is used to describe the process of finding a balance between two cultures – the minority (native) culture and the majority culture (the culture of the host country) – while adapting to life in the country of immigration[2]. One of the first definitions

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[1] L2 – The Second Language; in case of Polish immigrants to the UK, L2 refers to English as their L2

[2] The term *acculturation* should not be confused with *enculturation*, which refers to the process of acquiring the first (native) culture (cf. Bailey, Peoples, 2013; Lenkeit, 2004; Rosman, Rubel, Weisgrau, 2009).

explaining the phenomenon of acculturation introduced by Redfield, Linton and Herskovitz (1936: 149) states that "acculturation encompasses a series of phenomena, occurring in circumstances in which groups enter into a continuous, occurring in circumstances in which groups come into continuous direct contact, leading to changes in the original cultural patterns that characterize one or both sides of the relationship".

Theoretical approaches to acculturation, applied across various scientific disciplines, clearly indicate that acculturation – understood as learning and/or adapting to another culture – unavoidably results in changes within personal and social identity. The first level of identity, *personal (individual) identity*, refers to the unique characteristics that distinguish an individual. Kłoskowska (1992: 138) points out that "identity is an inherently individual, subjective phenomenon".[3] Individual identity is also called personal identity and Bokszański (1988: 4) identifies it as "a sense of multi-unity, which brings into unity the variety of factors that make up the human individual".[4]

The second level of identity – social identity (also referred to as collective or group identity) – is also described, depending on the perspective adopted, as national/ethnic (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2013), cultural (Kenrick, Neuberg, Vialdini, 1999) or socio-cultural (Tajfel, 1969, 1974). National identity is defined by Bokszański (2005: 133) as a set of "beliefs, attitudes and emotions that is formed in the consciousness of the members of the national collective in connection with their sense of connection with the nation and their experience of participation in the national group. These are beliefs, attitudes and emotions that are subject to the processes of similarity and uniformity to an important extent. [...] The similarity of the cognitive content, attitudes and emotions of a number of individuals centred around ties to the mother-tongue speech community makes it possible to characterize the identity of this community". (Bokszański, 2005)[5]

The subject literature indicates that in today's complex socio-cultural reality, social identity must be viewed as a dynamic and multidimensional phenomenon. According to Bauman (1993), identity is neither once arbitrarily fixed nor based on an outright judgment; it is something that is constructed and can (at least theoretically) be constructed in various ways. Sen (2007) opposes the "disjointed approach" to identity, according to which an individual can identify with only one reference group, and his/her core identity must dominate all others. The author (ibid: xii) claims the opposite approach to identity should be adopted because:

> The same person can be, without any contradiction, an American citizen, of Caribbean origin, with African ancestry, a Christian, a liberal, a woman, a vegetarian, a long-distance runner, a historian, a schoolteacher, a novelist, a feminist, a heterosexual, a believer in gay and lesbian right, a theatre lover, an environmental activist, a tennis fan, a jazz musician, and someone who is deeply committed to the view that there are intelligent beings in outer space with whom it is extremely urgent to talk (preferably in English). Each of these collectivities, to all of which this person simultaneously belongs, gives her a particular identity. None of them can be taken to be the person's only identity or singular membership category.

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[3] Authors' own translation.
[4] Authors' own translation.
[5] Authors' own translation.

A multidimensional approach to social and cultural identity is also reflected in theories of acculturation, which suggest that, under certain conditions, individuals can develop a *multicultural identity* – a sense of belonging to multiple cultural groups.

The concept of acculturation was proposed by anthropologists as a phenomenon referring to the group level (Linton, 1949), however, psychologists also introduced the term "psychological acculturation" (Graves, 1967) referring to the level of individual identity. The process of acculturation is associated with changes related mainly to national culture. Acculturation analyzed from the perspective of individual identity means psychological changes experienced by individuals in the process of adaptation to a new cultural situation (Berry et. al., 2011). These changes occur both in the area of behavioural patterns and attitudes, which means that the concept of acculturation is inextricably linked to the notion of identity.

One of the best-known theories of acculturation is the model developed by Berry (1974). According to the author, the process of acculturation can be determined by juxtaposing two factors. The first is the degree to which an individual is willing to cultivate the customs of his or her culture of origin (national culture), while the second is the willingness to learn a new culture (the culture of the host country). Analyzing these two factors simultaneously, the following acculturation strategies can be identified:

a) Assimilation – when the individual does not retain the identity of the native culture and willingly assimilates the cultural norms, values and traditions of the new culture;

b) Separation – when the individual maintains a strong identity of the native culture and does not assimilate behavioural patterns typical of the new culture;

c) Integration – when the individual both maintains a strong identity of the native culture and assimilates behavioural patterns typical of the new culture;

d) marginalization – means that the individual neither retains the identity of the native culture nor assimilates the behavioural patterns typical of the new culture.

These four acculturation strategies depend on, among other things, situational factors and a person's psychological conditions. According to the theory described above, the acculturation strategy that causes the least acculturation stress and creates the best conditions for learning the culture of the host country is *integration*. This strategy leads to the formation of an integrated multicultural identity, also referred to as *biculturalism*. However, it should be noted that people who experience the acculturation process do not always have the opportunity to choose the best possible strategy. As Berry (ibid) claims: "Integration can be chosen and effectively implemented by a minority group when the dominant society has an open and inclusive approach to cultural diversity". Thus, the lack of support from the host country to enable immigrants to cultivate native traditions can lead to forced assimilation, which means the complete adoption of another culture and, consequently, the abandonment of the native culture.

The aforementioned concept of integration implies a process of two-way adaptation (as opposed to assimilation), i.e. a process of adaptation of both the host society to the immigrants and the immigrants to the host society in political-legal, economic, cultural and linguistic terms. This understanding of integration – as a "two-way" process – is evident in legal regulations on migration policy within the European Union (Suessmuth,

Weidenfeld, 2005). According to these regulations, integration of immigrants should cover all areas of life, including the labour market, education, housing policy (preventing ethnic ghettos), health care, or public life (Kicinger, 2005).

Although J. Berry's model has been used by many researchers of migratory phenomena, it turned out, however, not to be without some conceptual flaws, affecting its methodological effectiveness. Berry (2001) himself noticed that the rapid social changes of the recent years made it necessary to revise the scientific assumptions of his model. Schönpflug (1997) further noted, among other things, the legitimacy of the use in Berry's theory of the "stress and coping paradigm" (an important aspect of this theory is the search for factors determining the effectiveness of adaptation to a new, inherently difficult, socio-cultural situation), which is not adapted to the study of long-term change. Consequently, the researcher cannot be one hundred percent sure whether the changes observed in the members of the research group are caused only by the acculturation process or also by developmental transformations of a more general kind. An extensive critical analysis of Berry's model and a discussion of selected trends in the study of the acculturation phenomenon were also proposed in more recent studies by Łuźniak-Piecha (2016) and Adamski (2020).

Acculturation strategies used by Polish immigrants

After Poland's accession to the European Union in May 2004, the dynamics of Polish post-accession migration became the subject of many studies aimed at determining the nature of migration movements and adaptation processes of new Polish immigrants[6]. In many EU countries, previous migration policies have changed, making it possible to create regulations on immigrants, anti-discrimination, etc. The results of the research conducted by Koryś & Okólski (2004) have shown, among other things, that phenomena such as the globalization of foreign migration and transnationalism have emerged or strengthened, which have contributed to the development of immigrant diasporas and have greatly altered the traditional ties of immigrants to both their home and host countries.

The concept of acculturation discussed earlier has been used by researchers to study the adaptation processes of Polish immigrant communities in various host countries. The purpose of these studies was to indicate to what extent immigrants retain their native (national) culture abroad, and to what extent they are ready to adopt a second culture (the culture of the host country). Andrejuk (2011) studied the acculturation strategies of students within the European Union to find an answer to the question of whether mobile students tend to integrate into the society of the host country or rather tend to Europeanize. Andrejuk (ibid) adapted three dimensions, i.e., identity-cultural, legal and economic dimensions, as indicators of migrant-student integration into the culture of the host country.

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[6] Due to the fact that citizens of countries belonging to the European Union can travel to member countries under the principles of *free* movement of people, services, goods and capital, some researchers propose replacing the term "migration" with free movement, or "free movement" when describing migratory movements within the EU. Consequently, it would be possible to replace the term "migrant" with the term *free mover*. Cf. e.g. Guild, 2004.

The research showed that student migrants – due to their relatively high cultural and linguistic competence – were more likely to adopt integration strategies than low-skilled labour migrants, so in the case of Polish migrants we can talk about the phenomenon of the so-called *segmental Europeanization*.

The aim of the research conducted by Dzięglewski (2011) was to determine possible factors conditioning the course of adaptation of the pioneering generation of Polish immigrants in Ireland. The study revealed a number of barriers that impede the integration process in various dimensions of life, i.e. a) social and economic (e.g. poor contacts of immigrants with Irish institutions), b) identity-cultural (e.g. low level of language competence), c) institutional-legal (e.g. lack of participation in Irish political life at the local level) and d) spatial (e.g. lack of contact between Polish immigrants and Irish in the place of residence). As the author of the study points out, some barriers disappear after immigrants stay in the host country for a longer period of time, while others require active integration policies of the host country and the cooperation of the local community hosting the immigrants.

The study of the process of cultural and social integration of Poles living in Ireland was also conducted by Klimek (2012). The author focused on the behavioural aspect (behaviour), as well as the declarative aspect (attitude to the integration process). The surveys conducted included questions about adaptation tactics undertaken in various areas of life, such as family, social life, leisure time, and cultural practices. The results of these surveys showed that the acculturation strategies most frequently chosen by respondents were integration and separation.

As part of a study of acculturation strategies, Parfieniuk (2009) prepared an analysis of a few case studies based on interviews on adaptation tactics conducted with foreigners living in Poland and Poles living abroad. The results of the study indicated a heterogeneous course of adaptation processes, both at the individual and group level. In addition, differences in acculturation strategies implemented within a single community, or even a single family, sometimes led to internal conflicts, thereby increasing the acculturation stress of members of these groups. The adaptation process was relatively easy for those who were willing to make the effort to learn a new culture.

The adaptation strategies of Polish immigrants residing in Iceland were studied by Nowicka (2020) and were related to four dimensions of life: cultural, economic, social and civic. Based on the results, she found that in each of the four dimensions of life, it is possible to distinguish a dominant strategy and side strategies. In the cultural, social and civic dimensions, separation turned out to be the dominant strategy, while in the economic dimension, integration turned out to be the dominant strategy, which could largely be explained by the inclusiveness of the Icelandic labour market, as well as social and legal protections for workers.

The results of selected studies of the acculturation strategies of Polish migrants mentioned above show that acculturation is a dual process that occurs both at the individual level (= psychological level) and at the group level (= sociocultural level). At the individual level, this process entails changes in identity that translate into changes in an individual's behaviour, and is highly dependent on the cultural distance between the culture of origin

and the host culture, as well as on personality factors. At the group level, acculturation means changes in social structures that depend on the national/ethnic minority and immigrant policies adopted in a country, which also affect the individual's adaptation process. These changes lead to the final result, which is (achieved to varying degrees) adaptation to life in a new cultural context.

The status of Welsh language

When living in Wales, Polish immigrants can immerse not only in an English-speaking environment but also a Welsh-speaking one due to the dual-language status of the country. In Wales, both English and Welsh are officially recognized and they are official languages of the Senedd (Welsh Parliament). For many years, extensive efforts have been made by the local governments to promote and preserve the Welsh language. As a result of special education programmes and legal reforms, nowadays, Welsh is spoken by around 17.8% of the Welsh population, which means approximately 538,300 people[7]. Welsh-speaking communities in Wales (together with certain parts of England) continue to hold the Welsh language as an integral part of their identity and heritage.

As Welsh is an actively spoken language that plays a significant role in Welsh culture, media, and education system, immigrants are encouraged to participate in language learning schemes designed for non-Welsh residents. According to recent data, Wales has become increasingly multicultural and multiligual, with Polish as the third most spoken language used by around 0.7% of the Welsh population, and Arabic as the fourth one (spoken by around 0.3% of the population). Local authorities offer special Welsh language courses for foreigners to help them effectively integrate into Welsh society[8], however, numerous immigrants do not know about them or do not take the opportunity. They choose to learn English because they perceive it as a more globally useful language. The other reason for the English language preference given by immigrants is the fact that they plan a relatively short stay in Wales which does not motivate them to learn Welsh. This kind of arguments appeared in Polish immigrants' responses to the questionnaire applied in the study as well.

The study

The described study of acculturation strategies chosen by Polish immigrants to Wales used qualitative data obtained through a structured interview. The interview was based on a questionnaire that consisted of 6 questions related to the issue of social/cultural identification and readiness to integrate into a new cultural group (the British). The questions were phrased as follows:

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[7] Office for National Statistics, 2021 census.
[8] See for example project Adult Learning Wales, partly funded by the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (Huw 2021).

(1) How are you learning English in the UK? To what extent is the issue of speaking better English important to you?

(2) Which language do you use more often in everyday situations (at home/at work/ among friends/ while shopping, etc.), Polish or English?

(3) To what extent are you interested in what's happening in your home country, i.e., do you follow news about Poland?

(4) How often do you travel to Poland? Do you miss your country when you are in the UK?

(5) How important is it for you to be recognized as a Pole/Polish person?

(6) To what extent do you spend your free time with British people and to what extent with your Polish friends? Do you take an active part in the life of your local community?

The interviews were conducted in English, among 40 Polish adult[9] immigrants living in Welshpool, Wales. According to their responses to the questionnaire, all the participants came to Welshpool before 2008. The group of respondents consisted of people aged 21–36 years. Respondents showed varying degrees of English language proficiency upon arrival in Wales. Moreover, the selected community consisted of Poles living in a relatively small area, working together or close to each other and maintaining regular social contacts with each other. Such a close-knit community is an interesting object of research related to acculturation strategies, as the ability to maintain daily contact with other Polish immigrants potentially enables – though obviously does not determine – the implementation of integration or separation strategies. In the case of dispersed immigrant communities living in metropolises such as London, immigrants may live in very small communities and interact mainly with representatives of the host country's culture. However, it may be the result of a specific social situation (i.e., the lack of a larger group of compatriots with whom to cultivate native traditions), rather than the personal preference. The recordings were made in the respondents' homes using microphones clipped to their clothes, and then processed by the authors of the article (transcriptions).

The questions constituting the starting point for the interview with the respondents were selected in such a way that the answers showed the respondents' attitude towards their home of origin and the country of emigration, their motivation to enhance their English language competence, as well as the degree of integration into the English-speaking community (Welshpool residents). The responses received were analysed in terms of pursuing one of the four acculturation strategies, while the final evaluation of the acculturation strategy was based on indications of the respondent's degree of willingness to integrate into the English-speaking community, the declared desire to continue learning English, as well as the need to maintain regular contact with family in Poland and interest in information about Poland.

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[9] One of the respondents to the survey was still attending high school, but was already 18 years old.

Results

The responses obtained were compiled according to the method of coding, that is, categorizing the data according to recurring themes relevant to acculturation. This way of coding the data made it possible to identify the themes that appeared in the statements of various respondents, as well as to receive quantitative data[10]. The tables presented later in the article contain the categories to which all respondents' statements were assigned, along with sample statements. Question one, i.e., *How do you learn English in the UK? To what extent is the issue of speaking better English important to you?* contains two sub-questions that address the issue of language in different ways, so the analysis of responses to this question is presented in two separate tables (1 and 2).

Table 1: Responses to the question: how do you learn English in the UK?

Category	Number of responses in a category	Example statements
I'm learning on my own	8	*I use the Internet; I learn from CDs because I don't have time for language school.*
I go to a language school	4	*I learn in school and how to speak. I go to a language school*
At work (I work with the British)	16	*I speak English at work; I talk a lot with colleagues at work; I learn mostly at work, I don't read or write much. I have to speak because I work with British people, so I learn.*
I speak English in a variety of situations	12	*I try to learn by listening to others; I learn when I talk in English, I bought the SITA program, but it was not effective; I often talk to a British friend, he teaches me vocabulary and sentences. I talk in English as I meet with colleagues at work.*

Source: own elaboration

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[10] More information on the coding method can be found in the following sources, among others: Babbie, 2005; Elliott, 2018; Flick, 2011.

Table 2: Responses to the question: to what extent is the issue of speaking better English important to you?

Category	Number of responses in a given category	Example statements
To a very large extent	28	*I like the language very much and I like to understand everything that others say to me; For me it is very important; I really want to improve my language skills; I would like to go to a course, but I am too shy.*
To a large extent, but mainly because I have to communicate with others at work	12	*I only work with British people, so at work I have to speak English, and at home I speak Polish, because I live with Polish people; I don't learn from books, I just want to get along. I don't need to speak fluently to be able to work.*

Source: own elaboration

Tables (1) and (2) show the responses to the question about the subjective importance of language competence, and, as can be seen, all survey participants declared a desire to increase their level of proficiency (at the time of their arrival in the UK, it was A1 and A2, i.e. beginner, or B1 – intermediate[11]). Responses to question (1) also indicate a diverse approach to the issue of learning English, i.e. for some respondents it was one of the main goals (on a par with the possibility of gainful employment), while for others it was only a means to the overriding goal of effective communication in the workplace.

The next table shows the answers to the second question in the questionnaire, regarding the use of English in everyday situations.

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[11] The participants' level of language proficiency in the study was assessed using selected descriptors based on the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*, Council of Europe 2001, applied to statements obtained during the interviews.

Table 3. Responses to the question: which language do you use more often in everyday situations (at home/at work/among friends/while shopping, etc.), Polish or English?

Category	Number of responses in a given category	Example statements
I use the Polish language more often	16	*I usually work alone; I don't need to speak English, because I work with the machinery, and I live with Polish people; I speak English at work, but more Polish, i.e. at home and among friends; I don't need to use English at work, and at home I speak Polish with my wife (sometimes in English, because she wants to teach me).*
I use English more often	4	*I work for the British, so I often speak English, more often than Polish. I try to speak English everywhere I can.*
I use Polish as often as English	20	*I have to speak English at work, but at home and when I'm with friends, I speak Polish (most of them are Polish and don't speak English well); Equally, that is, I speak English at school and Polish at home; I speak English only at work and Polish at home, because I live with a Polish girlfriend and among Polish friends; Half and half, because I work only with British people, but live with Poles.*

Source: own elaboration

Analysing the results presented in the table above, it can be noted that almost half of the respondents mainly used their native language in everyday situations. This is probably related to the fact of cohabitation with a Polish partner. An additional factor causing more frequent use of Polish may have been the situation in which the respondents lived close to each other and spent their free time together. In doing so, they showed no initiative to interact with representatives of cultural groups/minorities other than Polish. It can also be seen that half of the survey participants admitted that they communicate with equal frequency in English and Polish, which in turn is a consequence of working in an English-speaking environment. Only four respondents indicated English as the dominant language in their daily interactions (mainly due to gainful employment, which occupied much of their time and required the use of English).

Responses to another question used during the interview revealed Polish immigrants' attitudes toward their home country (Table 4).

Table 4. Responses to the question: to what extent are you interested in what is happening in your country of origin, i.e., do you follow news about Poland?

Category	Number of responses in a given category	Example statements
I am interested in a large degree	32	*Of course, my parents live there, I was born there, I will always be a Pole, I have not cut myself off from Poland; Every morning I try to check what is going on in Poland and then I talk about it with my Polish friends; I watch Polish TV all the time; I often check what the situation is in Poland, whether it pays to save money, etc.; I regularly check how much the pound costs, because it pays me more to work here when the pound is expensive.*
I have little interest in	4	*I watch Polish TV; Sometimes I talk about it with my Polish friends.*
I'm not interested at all	4	*Frankly, I'm not interested in that; I'm too busy working here.*

Source: own elaboration

This question was answered most often with responses indicating great interest, which may indicate the respondents' strong attachment to their home country. The vast majority of the surveyed group was definitely interested in the current situation in Poland, mainly economic. These individuals said they were keeping up-to-date with events concerning the situation on the political scene, as well as changes in the currency market. Several respondents admitted that in the long term they are considering returning to Poland, and this is the reason for their interest in the pound/zloty exchange rate or the increase in the minimum wage in Poland. Only four people declared a lack of interest in what is happening in their country. These were the same people who worked in a British environment and spoke mainly English (see Table 3).

Responses to the next question, regarding the frequency of visits to the home country, indicate that the bond was not maintained through regular visits to Poland, but rather through techniques for maintaining contact at a distance.

Table 5: Responses to the question: how often do you go to Poland? Do you miss your country when you are in the UK?

Category	Number of responses in a given category	Example statements
Very often (regularly)	8	*I go quite often, sometimes I miss; I go 3–4 times a year, I often miss my family, friends and my dog.*

Category	Number of responses in a given category	Example statements
Often	8	*I go 2–3 times a year, I don't miss it because my wife and children are here; I go 3 times a year, I miss my close family in Poland.*
Rarely (once/twice a year or less often)	24	*At least 2 times a year, I miss my family, but here is my husband and I am here for him, something for something; 2 times a year, I miss; About 2 times a year, of course I miss my family and friends, but I feel better in the UK; I travel 2 times a year, but I don't miss my country, because here I have a girlfriend and everything I need; I go 2 times a year, I don't miss my country because here everything is ok, I have a job, I earn money, we have a house, we have everything we need; I go 2 times a year, but eventually I will stop, there is nothing to miss because Poland is ugly and Poles are jealous, unhelpful and lazy, I have never seen a nicer town than Welshpool, I am very happy here.*

Source: own elaboration

The responses presented above show that respondents kept in touch with their Polish relatives, but did so mainly through remote communication (Internet, telephone). A significant group of respondents declared rather sporadic visits to Poland (a maximum of 2 times per year) claiming that they feel comfortable in Welshpool and do not miss anything. However, there were those with statements indicating that some respondents missed their family or friends, so a wide variety of attitudes among Polish immigrants can be seen here. In addition, some emphasized that their standard of living in the UK is higher than in Poland, so they focus on life in the new country. One respondent pointed out the huge contrast between Poland and the UK in various aspects of life (including mentality and attitudes toward compatriots), and the tone of her statement indicated that in the future she might cut herself off completely from her country of origin. A number of respondents added that they miss their family and friends who stayed in Poland, and for their sake they try to keep in constant contact with their home country.

Question five (Table 6) asked how important it was to respondents to be seen/recognized as Polish.

Table 6: Responses to the question: how important is it for you to be recognized as a Pole/ Polish person?

Category	Number of responses in a given category	Example statements
This is important to me / not a problem for me	16	*I don't mind, but some Poles here bring shame to all Poles, because they fight, swear, don't work and are very lazy; I'm not ashamed of it, but I don't spread the word about it either, I have my job and do my job; I'm not ashamed, rather I try to understand Poles who behave inappropriately (don't know the language, look for work, etc.).); I don't hide about it, I am happy and proud to be Polish; I am who I am, I am not ashamed of it, why should I be ashamed?*
It's hard to say (sometimes it's hard for me)	8	*I'm ashamed when I think that I can be associated with Poles who commit crimes here, drink or are homeless, on the other hand, among Poles there are, for example, great scientists and singers, so I shouldn't be ashamed; I'm not proud, now it's worse than a few years ago, because people used to like Poles for being hardworking, and then a lot of criminals came and now people think that all Poles are thieves and drunks.*
It is not important to me	16	*There is no point in hiding, because people will figure it out quickly anyway; Some people are ashamed of the fact that they are Polish, but I don't hide it, I don't worry about it; Poles have done stupid things here and now the British are isolating themselves from us, but it doesn't matter to me.*

Source: own elaboration

The vast majority of survey participants stressed that they do not mind being recognized as Polish and never hide their origin. However, some respondents cited situations due to which the fact of being Polish is not something to be proud of (Polish immigrants coming to the UK have become known as dishonest, uncultured and untrustworthy people). There were references in the respondents' statements to the issue of shame, which can be a reason for hiding the fact that one is Polish. The sense of shame associated with Polish national identity can be a significant barrier to integrating with representatives of the majority culture (respondents mentioned that the British, who know cases of inappropriate behaviour of Poles, have a distrustful attitude towards them). It is also worth noting some statements indicating that there is no reason to hide nationality. Some respondents see no reason why they should be ashamed of their fellow immigrants.

An equally important obstacle to pursuing an acculturative integration strategy may have been low community participation, as indicated by the statements in Table 7.

Table 7. Responses to the question: to what extent do you enjoy spending your free time with British people and to what extent with your Polish friends? Do you take an active part in the life of your local community?

Category	Number of responses in a given category	Example statements
I spend more time with the British	8	*I prefer to spend time with British people, because Poles are not friendly, so I have more British friends here than Polish; I spend more time with my British workmates than with Poles, because I don't have many Polish friends here.*
I spend more time with Poles	16	*I meet both Brits and Poles, e.g. at the gym, but I prefer to spend time with Poles because I understand them better; I only talk to Poles because we live close to each other and we meet often after work, I don't look for other people; I prefer to spend my free time with Polish colleagues, although I'm also open to making friends with Brits, but Brits prefer to stick together; I don't like to spend time with Brits because I'm shy and it's easier for me to get along with Poles.*
I spend time with both British and Polish people	16	*I don't have a preference, the important thing is that I get along; I go to parties and with my English workmates and with my Polish friends; In high school I have contact with British people, and I spend my free time after school with both schoolmates and Poles; I go to the pub and with British people and with Poles, it depends on the occasion.*

Source: own elaboration

The figures and sample statements shown in the table above allow us to draw conclusions about respondents' social preferences. An overwhelming number of respondents preferred to spend time in company of fellow Polish immigrants or to divide their time more or less equally between the company of Britons and Poles. Several respondents admitted that they did not feel welcome as immigrants and that the process of integration was not easy as the Brits formed rather closed social circles. It is also worth noting here that the overwhelming majority of survey participants claimed that they had little involvement in the life of the local community, and their activity in this regard was limited to weekend visits to pubs or the gym. Such a situation may have been the result of a language barrier or the personal preferences of the respondents, as the official municipal websites presented

Welshpool's interesting and diverse cultural and entertainment offerings, despite the fact that it is a relatively small town.[12]

Conclusions

The results of the survey presented above indicate certain acculturation strategies implemented by a group of Polish immigrants. The respondents' answers revealed a relatively large number of Poles whose behaviour in an emigration situation can be described as a strategy of separation. These individuals interacted more often with their fellow Polish immigrants than with the British, probably mainly due to insufficient language skills. It is also possible to distinguish a group of immigrants who were eager to integrate with English speakers, mainly in non-work environments. The integration strategy observed here allows us to assume that in the future – by improving language skills and learning about the culture of the host country – this group of respondents will be able to develop an integrated bicultural (Polish-British) identity. The statements made by some survey participants also indicate the implementation of an assimilation strategy due to the fact that they focus only on contacts with people representing British culture, have few Polish friends and/or do not visit relatives in Poland. The respondents' answers definitely indicate the realization of a marginalization strategy as Poles who did not integrate with the British maintained close social contacts with their compatriots, so they were firmly embedded in the native culture

The data obtained made it possible to determine the direction of acculturation. However, it is not possible to say clearly from the presented data what factors influenced the pursuit of a particular acculturation strategy. It can be assumed that, to a large extent, these were personal factors such as motivation to learn English or readiness to make interpersonal contacts in a new cultural environment.

The acculturation process is extremely complex and always involves changes in social/cultural identity. The final outcome of these changes always depends on a number of psychological and social factors, such as active participation in the socio-professional network, or willingness to improve language skills. The pilot study described above can serve as a starting point for a broader research project on acculturation strategies implemented by Polish immigrants, conducted on a larger group of respondents and in cities of different sizes.

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[12] At the time of conducting the survey, the city had a population of less than 7,000. By comparison, the population of London at the time was about 9 million (this figure refers only to so-called Greater London, not the entire London metropolitan area with all adjacent towns)

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