

HOW TO ENTER THE CHURCH WHEN THE DOOR IS CLOSED. LANGUAGE POLICIES IN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES OF JOENSUU IN THE CONTEXT OF A MIGRANT'S CHOICE.

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Abstract

The article describes how Christian churches in the Finnish city Joensuu chose language policies towards Russian-speaking migrants. The author carried out a fieldwork, using participant observation and auto ethnography approaches in all churches of the city. The preliminary hypothesis was that language policy in churches (translation of worship, ability to study Bible, informal talks) determinate religious choice of migrants which influence the strategies of adaptation in a new country. The church parishes have completely different approaches towards the communication with migrants, all described and compared in the article.

Keywords: *Migration, Religion, Christianity. Finland*

Introduction

Charity and social work are common practices for churches of all Christian denominations. Based on the Bible principles, believers are usually convinced that they need to help others even if they do not have the same religious views and denominational affiliation. Social work of Christian churches developed in part from the altruistic acts of church-based and motivated individuals who envisioned, as do social workers today, a society based upon humanitarian and egalitarian values (Graham, Coholic, & Coates, 2006). Several churches offer such kind of social work with migrants (adaptation, material help, assistance with official issues, education). As Hirschman notes, almost all studies of contemporary immigrant churches and temples describe the multiple services they provide to newcomers, from information

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about jobs, housing, and business opportunities to classes in English and seminars on various practical topics. (Hirschman, 2004:1225)

Mission among new migrants usually has two basic directions which can be mixed or separated in various churches: christening (or changing their Christian denomination), and direct assistance to adapt to the realities of a new country including material and moral support. However, churches need to have a particular language and intercultural policy for work with migrants, since most migrants arriving do not necessarily know official language. The policy can focus to integrate the newcomers into the everyday life of a new country or to build an accustomed language environment. These two directions not always coincide with each other.

The aim of this article is to provide insides on how different Christian churches in Finland deal with this contradiction. The paper will describe further which strategies of working with Russian-speaking migrants are developed. In order to provide a comparative view, the article will use the city of Joensuu as a case study.

M. Aleksynska noticed that immigrants' religious behavior is inherently different from the religious behavior of the native-born in Europe, and is particularly rigid and persistent over time. According to her opinion, immigrants in Europe indeed have an overall higher degree of religiosity than the native born within the same religious denomination, but that the differences diminish with the immigrant's duration in the destination (Aleksynska, 2013). Some of the recent economic research also pointed in this direction, documenting a strong persistence of religious identity (Bisin and Verdier, 2000), and of immigrants' religious identity in particular (Bisin et al. 2008).

The Russian-speaking population is the largest group of immigrants in Finland. According to Tilastokeskus 161,850 migrants from Post-Soviet countries had been registered at the end of 2014 (Tilastokeskus, 2015). Obviously, all these people are inhomogeneous by ethnic background, social status, the level of integration in Finnish society and religious views and the motivation to move to Finland. Most of the Russian-speakers in Finland belong to the Orthodox Church (Finnish Orthodox or two parishes of Moscow Patriarchy situated in Helsinki). A large part of Russian-speakers do not belong to any church at all, some aspire to become members of the Finnish Lutheran church or Evangelical Christians. According to a preliminary fieldwork in Helsinki in 2012, there are two main practices of religious life of Russian-speaking Christians in Finland. The first is to create individual Russian-speaking church-communities, just like the Evangelical 'Ark of Salvation'. The second is to become a recipient of a mission work with

migrants, conducted by Finnish Churches. There are as well other practices just like, to visit Russia regularly in order to have communion in a ‘right’ church, but the before mentioned practices are the most obvious and popular.

The initial idea of the research was to examine the differences between two regions: Helsinki and North Karelia. Hence was impossible to identify any homogeneous group of Russian-speaking Christians in Joensuu. As a result the research in Joensuu was redesigned in order to comprehend the practices among all Christian churches in the city. The aim of this article is to consider this issue of language policy in Christian churches on the example of a Russian-speaking population in Finland. Language policy in the church is important for description because it is a part of a language policy according to migrants which are nowhere considered officially. Nevertheless, it influences the life of migrants and can contribute to their integration, mental attitude and even be a reason to change a city of the living. Religion organization is not a necessary part of the adaptation of all Russian-speaking migrants, but for some of them, church can affect the whole strategy of life in the country. This article will show all variations of language policy of all churches in Joensuu. The research focus was to observe all religious propositions for Evangelical Christians and to explore how migrants choose a place for worship and how it influence their integration into Finnish society.

The author visited all Christian churches in Joensuu between September 2014 and March 2015, participated in worship, talked with parishioners, visited Bible studies groups, and observed online information about these churches; their websites and groups in social networks. The fieldwork was usually conducted: come to the church, talk with everybody who is ready to talk.

Research Design

The research is based on the concept of auto ethnography fieldwork. The main purpose was to understand how Christian migrants from post-soviet country can find an adequate place for worship. Auto ethnography is a method which combines the researcher’s self within a particular cultural context (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). By the definition of Reed-Danahay auto ethnography is a “*form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context*” (Reed-Danahay, 1997). This research was an attempt to put an own “self” (migrant, post-soviet, Russian-speaking, student) into the “context” of Christian life in Joensuu. Nevertheless, the author is not Evangelical Christian, which makes a difference in identification. Sometimes the personal

experience of the researcher was similar to the experience of potential informants. When migrants came to Joensuu for the first time, they did not know about the religious life in the city. The researcher discovered the religious life and the search for a place to worship, just like any other migrant. Therefore, it is possible to substitute own imaginaries on searching a church in order to make a conclusion about migrant's religion opportunities in Joensuu at all. Using this methodic, it is possible to understand the feelings of the believers, desired to practice their religion in a new country.

As the article is part of a research on the Russian Evangelical church in Finland, the author used an Evangelical Christian perspective. The Evangelical Christian church is the most diverse according to their ethnic and religious identity. The members are usually strong believers and their religious life is a very important part of their self-identity. In the majority of Evangelical churches Sunday worship is every week obligatory. It is accepted for Evangelical Christians to visit a church of another denomination when traveling, but for fully Christian life, it is required to have a cohesive friendly community around. Communication among other members in the church is compulsory in order to discuss the meaning of sermons, pray for each other and discuss the Bible. In the context of migration, Evangelical Christians can visit other protestant churches for the reason of language and to understand the worship, since it is a necessary part of their Christian life. There are three main functions of the Evangelical church for believers:

Ritual. The main ritual for Evangelical Christians is a weekly worship. The main functions are the performance of the rite (especially communion), listening to the sermon, collective praying and singing, glorification and speaking in tongues in Pentecostal churches.

Education. Usually it describes the Bible study in a group. The members gain knowledge and comprehension of the holy text.

Socialization. This part mainly contains the communication with other parishioners. This includes talking about pressing issues of faith but also simply daily communication with each other (Thumma, 1991: 334)

The functions underline that language is an urgent need for a big number of reasons in fully Christian life. Therefore, it is impossible to be a Christian without full understanding of the language in the church. Martikainen suggests that *"The*

religious affiliation that a migrant had in his or her country of origin seems to be the single most important factor in determining the religious organization in which he or she becomes active in the new social environment” (Martikainen, 2013).

Evangelical Christian can start to visit a church of different denomination abroad for the reason of language, because language guarantees him or her real religious life, where the idea of Jesus and the Bible is more important than the way of ritual. According to previous observation, students, labor migrants, and repatriates are completely different groups in their everyday needs, identification, and willingness to integrate. Moving to a new country is an important and stressful event, so believers need a friendly place which can provide a psychological help and feeling of belonging, so the first visit to a church and the parishioner’s reaction to newcomers are rather revealing.

Churches in Joensuu

Joensuu is a city situated in a North Karelia (Eastern Finland). The population of the city is near 75 000 people. The city is situated a little more than 100 kilometers from the border with Russia. The two main groups of Russian-speaking migrants are due educational migration (mostly students of the University of Eastern Finland and Polytechnic institute Karelia) and due to the repatriation program for Karelians from post-soviet countries. Work migrants play a rather small role. There are three main opportunities to study Finnish language in Joensuu: courses of the Red Cross foundation, courses of the Multicultural society and university courses.

So, what do migrants see first when they arrive to Joensuu? The number of religious buildings is impressing for the size of the city. There are nine main Christian churches of different denominations: four Lutheran, four Evangelical and one Orthodox. There are no advertisings of churches on the streets and on church buildings. The time of worship is usually written on small papers near the entrance (in Finnish) or on the Internet. In the center of Joensuu, the ‘*Kirkkokatu*’, which exactly means ‘The Church street’ is a historical street, which existed from the foundation of the city in 1848. On the two ends of the street is a Lutheran and an Orthodox church, which have the status of “folk” providing them with a special status from the government and are considered as bearers of national virtues. On the same street, there are two parish halls: one Lutheran, one Orthodox, places for gathering, informal communications and small meetings during the week. When standing in the middle of “*Kirkkokatu*” it is very well to understand that Joensuu is

a city, which is historically Christian but at the same time open to interchurch communication.

There are three Lutheran parishes in further districts of the city: one close to the city center on the other side of the river and two in far districts (*Noljakan kirkko* and *Rantakylän kirkko*). According to popular opinion in Joensuu, migrants from post-soviet countries live not in the city center, but in these districts. On the Sunday worship, all four church buildings of the Lutheran parishes are almost full of parishioners (near 300 people each time). Moreover, in the city center, there are three Evangelical churches: Pentecostal church, Free Church, and the City church (which is officially Lutheran, but has adopted worship styles from Evangelical Churches). Each of them has their own modern buildings and is a potential place of worship for migrants. Free Church and Pentecostal church have nearly 200 people on the worship every Sunday. City church is the youngest ecclesiastical body in Joensuu, and around 50 people attend Sunday services. A further Evangelical church was established by students of the University of Eastern Finland from African countries - the International church. The church is open for all, but it is rather not comforting for post-soviet migrants, due to completely unfamiliar music, the accent of pastors and other rituals of worship. The parishioners communicate through a mailing list with part of the Bible to read, recommendations and news.

There is as well a significant Orthodox parish in Joensuu. Its place of worship, founded in 1887, is situated in a historical building which was the former Russian military church. Orthodox worship is celebrated in the church building or in the chapel on the Orthodox part of the neighboring cemetery, which is shared with the Lutheran parishes of Joensuu. A private-owned Orthodox Culture Center is close to the Orthodox Church building. It is a place for events and exhibitions without regular services. Joensuu is the seat of the only Orthodox seminary in Finland. The seminary has a church-building, which is used for training students of Orthodox Theology at the University to conduct services; visitors are welcome to visit, but seldom do so, since it is not an official part of the Orthodox parish life.

Language policy in the church parishes

Tyulenev claims in his book "*Translation and society*" that translation is a social activity which is never practiced outside the social context (Tyulenev, 2014). In the case of religious life, the translator's activity is the main part of church work with foreigners and migrants. Beside the International Church, all worships in Joensuu Christian churches are celebrated in Finnish. Each church provides different types of translation for foreigners and activities for communication and education. Generally

translators in the churches are non-professional. They are parishioners who help out voluntarily. Such kind of volunteering work is common practice in Evangelical churches, since in order to comply the notion of being a Christian and member of the particular church, voluntary service and work are compulsory. Still some parishioners specialized in being translators. Hokkanen, who investigated the translators in the Evangelical church in Tampere, notes this tendency: “*The majority of the volunteer interpreters, who are also members of the church, have received no training in interpreting or translation*” (Hokkanen, 2012). The main conclusion of her research is that “*Interpreters take a more active role in helping a community promote their ideology, and this can be as important as any prior formal training, even the quality of the interpreting being provided*” Translation into English is much easier for Finnish parishioners since the vast majority of Finns communicate in English fluently hence it is easy to find a volunteer in the church to translate worship simultaneously or personally. Translation into Russian is a special skill, served by the specialized translators. The specialization is required since the main idea of the worship should be clear for everybody and the translator should not change it in his own words.

Evangelical churches and parishes

The Pentecostal Church and the Free Church have audio simultaneous translator into English, using special equipment. These two churches are closer to the Evangelical Christianity in music, style of praying and rituals which exist in post-soviet countries. Parishioners in these churches said that they had Russian people on worships, but now they do not visit it anymore. One parishioner told the author that Russian people had stopped to attend services because of language issues. The Free Church is located close to the University. The church provides simultaneous translation. It is oriented to students who come to Joensuu from other cities in Finland as well as from abroad. On Fridays special youth meetings with youth music and communication after worship are held.

The worship of the City church happens in Finnish. More than half of the service constitutes out of singing international songs, which are familiar to people who visited Evangelical churches abroad and sang them in their native languages. The parish does not offer translation, still member provide personal translation when someone who knows Finnish and English is around. The church is challenged by this as every week a different number of volunteers are needed, depending on the number of foreigners attending the mess. The City-parish also organizes movie nights for English-speakers. On such events, visitors can watch a movie on Christian topics

and discuss it in English. All three Evangelical churches in the city provide translation into English, which allows worship believers who are able to communicate with locals in Finnish or English language.

Orthodox Church

The Orthodox parish of Joensuu, which is the second-largest parish of the Orthodox Church in Finland (some 5,600 members in 2014) has worship in Finnish and Russian language. During the sermon priest speak at the beginning in Finnish and after that retail the same information in Russian. On some days there is worship in Russian language only. There is a theological evening course with a discussion of Bible especially for Russian speakers. It is the only church-organized opportunity to discuss the Bible in Russian in Joensuu. During one visited Orthodox worship a new priest was introduced. In his welcome speech, he said that he hopes that Finnish people will visit Russian worships and Russian people should visit Finnish worship because it is evidence that all of them are one big Christian family. As for Evangelical Christians, the Orthodox Church is a not obvious religious choice, because of the huge differences in rituals and theology.

Lutheran church

The Lutheran parishes in Joensuu have individual language policies. Two of them, situated in the city center, have no signs in foreign languages or translation of worship at all. It is thus hard to imagine Russian-speaking migrants joining services at those churches. The situation is different in the periphery parishes Nolja and Rantakylä. Nolja parish has a simultaneous translation with a special audio system, Rantakylä parish provides a text translation of all sermon and songs on the screen. In the Rantakylä church had been an attempt to organize a Bible-study group for Russian-speakers, but, as one leader in the church said, nobody registered.

One more opportunity for worship in English in Joensuu is the 'International worship service', which happens once a month on Saturday evenings in the 'Parish hall'. This event is organized by local Lutheran parishes and the Evangelical City Church. The format of the meeting is a standard Protestant worship: glorification, sermon, communion and communication with drinks in the end. The worship combines features of Lutheran and Evangelical tradition. During the communion the deaconess was wearing traditional Lutheran ceremonial clothes but songs during the glorification were modern and dynamic, some of them with ethnical motives. People pray loudly in different styles, hold each other's hands, and sometimes dance. On some meetings guest priests usually English native speakers from Canada and

Philippines had been invited. Lutheran churches offer more forms of translation, only in areas where repatriates from Russia usually live even Russian translation. Translation of worship does not mean any additional, specific work with Russian-speaking migrants.

Tab. 1 Forms of translation in churches in Joensuu

Type of translation	Religious organisations in Joensuu	Advantages	Disadvantages
No translation	Lutheran parish in the center of Joensuu	No extra expenditure money and effort.	No work with migrants on regular basis.
Simultaneous translation	Noljaka parish, Free church, Pentecostal church	Efficient and understandable translation for all believers	Special equipment and qualitative entrepreneur. High costs.
Text translation	Rantakylä parish	need only projector, which is usually used during the worship anyway.	Need to be prepared before worship. Only special moments are translated.
Personal translation	City parish	No need of special equipment. Personal attention, better communication between believers.	Need more than one translator.
Worship in Finnish and Russian parallel	Orthodox parish	More attractive for Russian speakers worship IN language, not a translation INTO language	Unnecessary information for Finnish-speaking parishioners. No opportunity to understanding for English-speakers.

Source: research by the author

Conclusions

According to the data, Russian-speaking Evangelical Christians in North Karelia cannot find a suitable church for all their religion needs, consisting mainly out of fully comprehension of worship, education, and communication. At the same time, religious organizations do not understand Russian-speaking migrants as a larger group with special needs, despite their number in this region. Churches translate worship into English, because it is easier and more foreigners understand the translation. Nevertheless, not all of post-soviet migrants know English enough to understand the idea of a sermon and participate in parish life. As a result, Russian-speaking Evangelical Christians developed various options on how to cope with this problem:

Move to another city with a possibility to worship in Russian. One family moved from Joensuu to Kotka because there are churches established by post-soviet believers. This is the most radical, but, at the same time, most effective option.

Study Finnish language and become a full parishioner in a Finnish church. This is a more obvious option as it helps to become a part of the Finnish society. However, this option is the most difficult one. The parishes do not offer Finnish courses, migrants have to study the language in other organizations.

Leave church at all. Changing place of living can lead to other changes in life, so the lack of simple worship can be a reason for giving up a Christian life at all.

Obviously, choosing one of these options depends on of the personal situation of every migrant. Aleksynska claims that religiosity can change under the influence of external factors and settings. She mentions factors such as: economic development, former communist past, religious freedom and societal attitudes towards religion (Aleksynska, 2013).

The ability of Russian language worship in the Evangelical church can be the main reason to choose the city for living. Joensuu, despite the convenient geographical position for Russian-speaking migrants is a not suitable variant for Evangelical Christians.

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