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POLES AND THEIR NON-POLISH PARTNERS: LANGUAGES, COMMUNICATION AND COUPLEHOOD IDENTITY

The article offers an account of a research on language attitudes and language practice of bilingual couples in Poland. The study adopts the-sociology-of-language approach to ascertain metalinguistic awareness among bilingual couples, and to sketch out their individual linguistic experiences. The empirical part features four Poles in partner relationships with foreigners by means of recorded in-depth interviews, to explain how they perceive their own situations and how they function in a monolingual society.

KEYWORDS: bilingual couples, identity, language attitudes, language repertoires

INTRODUCTION TO THE POLISH CONTEXT

The political and economic changes in Poland render the question of bilingual couples particularly rewarding. Such couples present a relatively new phenomenon in Poland and therefore not as yet comprehensively described. The picture of a bilingual couple acts as a converging lens of bigger macro processes. Following the changes in the political system which began nearly three decades ago, Poland stepped on the path of democracy, marked by two milestones. These include Poland's entry to NATO in 1999 and to the European Union in 2004. As a member of these two unions, Poland aspires to an ever higher level of economic and cultural development. Though we might be tempted to draw comparisons, every country presents a unique context created by a specific combination of factors. Mixed couples may not seem a novelty elsewhere (cf. Piller 2002), but in Poland they still do.

At present the phenomenon of linguistically mixed couples appears to have reached a point of 'saturation' in Poles' mentality. Examples of earlier research on multilinguality in families (cf. Lanza 1990/2004) raise justified expectations for this research to collect rich qualitative material, including descriptions of individual life stories of respondents, unique observations and reflections, and an insight into the intimate world of people involved in everyday bilingual communication. Although bilingualism is a well-established field of study, research on bilingual

couples in Poland is practically non-existent in the works of linguists as earlier publications centered around various aspects of language contact (cf. Arabski 2006), or educational context and foreign language teaching (cf. Komorowska 2007).

Until recently mixed pairs of Poles and foreigners deciding to settle down in Poland were regarded as an exception to the rule according to which Polish citizens usually left their homeland to start a family with their non-Polish partners in their countries. However, this 'out-of-Poland' direction cannot any longer be taken for granted as the proportion of bilingual couples in Polish society has risen to the scale of an appreciable phenomenon. In May 2015 the Centre for Public Opinion Research (Polish acronym 'CBOS') conducted a survey on foreigners who settled in Poland. Half of the respondents declared to have known personally someone from abroad living presently in Poland. As many as two thirds of respondents from the biggest Polish cities admitted to have foreigners as their acquaintances. Thus, the major premise of this article assumes that bilingual couples in Poland are to a large extent successful in their linguistic and social adaptation, though distinguished by different degrees of linguistic and social assimilation. Language socialization consists in understanding the cultural patterns and language behaviour. In particular, it is social experience that makes it possible to acquire linguistic, pragmatic and cultural knowledge thereby developing communicative competence. In the words of Garrett (2007: 233), language socialization is "the human developmental process whereby a child or other novice (of any age) acquires communicative competence, enabling him or her to interact meaningfully with others and otherwise participate in the social life of a given community". In addition, Garrett and Baquedano-López (2002: 341) stress the ethnographic orientation of language socialization referring to the relationship between the processes of individual development and socio-cultural contexts in which they take place. The research presented here focuses on the accounts of everyday communicative practice that involves the use of two or sometimes more languages, and the questions of how and why it varies across contexts of bilingual couples. This article considers that these questions can be answered by reaching out to the socialization conceptual framework, and relying on the longitudinal perspective but only in the form and sense as reported by the bilingual couples, and not as an ethnographic study.

BILINGUAL COUPLE: THE CONCEPT AND APPROACH

The selection criterion for the research was the bilinguality of couples living in Poland. The couple's bilinguality is not tantamount to the bilinguality of both partners but at least one of them needs to use either the partner's language or a third language. One's own language repertoire is the result of several factors, such as the readiness and motivation to learn the partner's language, the position of the

partner's language in the hierarchy of global language system, the general linguistic awareness of the couple and the issue of children's bilingualism. When I exchanged views with the couples on their bilingualism they intuitively formulated definitions which could be well inscribed in the words of many authors, Grosjean (2008: 10) being one of them: "Bilingualism is the regular use of two or more languages (or dialects), and bilinguals are those people who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their everyday lives". However, a more distinctive contribution by Grosjean (2008) concerns his "bilingual (or wholistic) view of bilingualism" which he postulated to give the lie to "monolingual (or fractional) view of bilingualism". The latter is still too widespread in the furtherance of separate language competences in a bilingual amounting to the competences of two respective monolinguals. The former view is phrased by Grosjean (2008: 10) as follows:

The bilingual or wholistic view of bilingualism proposes that the bilingual is an integrated whole which cannot easily be decomposed into two separate parts. The bilingual is not the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals; rather, he or she has a unique and specific linguistic configuration. The co-existence and constant interaction of the two languages in the bilingual has produced a different but complete language system.

(Grosjean 2008: 10)

The wholistic view positions the bilingual as a fully competent language user with competences developed to match his needs. Different purposes, interlocutors and domains of life require different language skills which are never perfectly balanced. So, the correlation between the need for a language and the level of its fluency is tightly interlocked, and sometimes referred to as the *complementarity principle* (Grosjean 2008: 243). Yet the question when an individual actually becomes bilingual, remains unresolved or, at best, arbitrary. This is so due to the unsteady nature of this phenomenon shaped by a multitude of factors, including the changes in the bilingual speaker's linguistic knowledge and skills. Bilingual couples decide about their own communication patterns in which they tend to demonstrate language attitudes and varied levels of awareness concerning their communication behaviour. And, in most cases, they create an onset of a specific type of bilingual family by deciding about their children's bilingual development.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The research on bilingual couples in Poland rests on the total empirical core of 24 interviews collected within a span of four months, of which four bilingual couples have been selected for the purposes of this article. The research is qualitative with no aspiration to quantitative depiction, putting emphasis on words not numbers. The thematic structure of in-depth interviews has been planned to collect a range

of accounts concerning various aspects of private language contact experienced by participants. The conceptualization of the research aims to explore the linguistic and social adaptation of bilingual couples in Poland. On a more specific level, this approach involves measures to establish suitable effectiveness criteria for linguistic and social adaptation of non-native speakers of Polish in bilingual couples. The research is anonymous, i.e. the partners in each couple were assigned pseudonyms. The recordings have been transcribed, coded and analyzed by means of the latest software version of NVivo 11. The analysis is largely based on the methodology of the grounded theory which consists in inductive generating new theoretical proposals and hypotheses from the collected data (Glaser/ Strauss 1967). The overriding procedure in the theoretical selection of respondents is the constant comparative method (Gibbs 2007; Glaser 1978).

In general, the theme of languages is not regarded as intimate and it quite naturally excites interest and desire to engage in conversation. Thus, the topic of interviews combined with specific questions to generate extended responses effectively changed the interview schedule into normal conversational encounters with the couples (cf. Milroy/ Gordon 2003: 65). Participants were aware of their roles as informants, expecting to be guided through the topic-shifts of conversations. During the interviews, I tried to position myself as a learner, someone of lower authority than the persons I was talking to, thereby adopting the “counter-strategy of the sociolinguistic interview” suggested by Labov (1984: 40). The emotional involvement of my interviewees that I witnessed made their statements less self-conscious as they seemed to be more concerned with what they said rather than how they did it. These moments proved not only the validity of the suggestion made by Labov, but also the validity of the whole research.

INTERVIEWS: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The structure of interviews splits into sets of questions organized around four main topics: linguistic background, language choice, couplehood identity and children’s bilingualism. In light of these topics, I focus on attitudes and opinions which influence the effectiveness of communication acts and inform private language contact between two close persons. I suspect that the linguistic aspects of life experienced by bilingual couples will yield a valuable outcome which exposes tensions and demands linked with language policy in family. In this respect the research is expected to prove useful in diagnosing language behaviour which affects mutual communication and the sense of ethnicity in mixed couples.

The four couples include three male foreigners (Spaniard, American and Italian) and one German female. For reasons of brevity I will refer to each couple by the nationality of the foreign partner. Though the choice of these couples in terms

of sex is random (in the ratio of three to one), this proportion seems to reflect somewhat intuitively the larger quantitative count. The sampling is respondent-driven (snowball sampling) which is non-probability sampling technique, not meant for statistical calculations. The snowball sampling occurred naturally as most couples recommended other bilingual couples they knew or heard about. From the point of view of the research, snowball sampling makes it possible to assess the social network that connects the population of bilingual couples. All four couples have lived in Poland at least for a decade (see Table 1). The duration of all relationships is longer than the period of their time spent in Poland (between 12 and 15 years), including one couple who has known one another for 20 years. Each couple adopted the language of the non-Polish partner for everyday communication, and are committed to raise their children bilingually.

Table 1. The breakdown of four bilingual couples selected for the analysis.

Polish partner (age)	Foreign partner (age)	Nationality of the foreign partner	Years together	Years in Poland	Language of the couple	Children (age)
Maria 42	Felipe 37	<i>Spanish</i>	15	13	Spanish	2 (10, 4)
Elżbieta 46	John 62	<i>American</i>	14	13	English	2 (11, 7)
Teresa 35	Matteo 40	<i>Italian</i>	12	10	Italian	2 (8, 4)
Piotr 48	Simone 45	<i>German</i>	20	17	German	2 (16, 12)

LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND

THE LANGUAGES OF THE FIRST CONTACT

The couples were asked to recall the beginnings of their relationships in terms of the languages of their first contact. Usually if the Polish partner displayed poor command of the future non-Polish partner's language, they managed to make up for this deficiency in a relatively short time (a few months). Such was the case of Elżbieta and John who communicate in English, and Teresa and Matteo who use Italian. Teresa stressed that at the beginning her knowledge of Italian was "terrible" but she made an impressive progress. She enrolled on a language course and completed it with a certificate of C2 level in Italian. The difference regarding the partners of these two women is that John developed a passive command of Polish, which allows him to function comfortably in the Polish environment, whereas Matteo has not learnt Polish to any communicative degree thereby relying totally on Teresa's proficiency in Italian. The relationship of Maria and Felipe was the least problematic since as they met Maria had already been a graduate of Spanish

language studies. Now, after over a decade in Poland, Felipe can communicate in Polish though he still struggles with Polish grammar and pronunciation, writing being an insurmountable challenge.

THE PARTNER'S LANGUAGE

The command of a partner's language determines not only the communication of the couple, but also the motivation to learn and, in consequence, the language repertoire. Elżbieta, Teresa and Maria speak their partner's languages, thereby developing their skills. Typically, speaking and listening count as their strongest skills. But again, all three can also read and write in their partners' languages. Formal language training is appreciated especially at the initial stage, as in the case of Simone and Piotr. Speaking from experience, Piotr argues that a formalized language course acts as an appreciable booster in further language learning, especially lexicon. The couple tends to make comparisons of each other's language skills, which sharpens their metalinguistic awareness. Simone notices fewer grammar mistakes in her Polish than Piotr makes in his German, but she appreciates his vocabulary:

Piotr jeszcze lepiej zna niemiecki, mi się wydaje. On ma większy zasób słów niż ja po polsku, bo często jak ja nie wiem co to jest, to od razu mówi mi jak to jest po niemiecku. Myślę, że on ma większy zasób słów.

[It seems to me that Piotr knows German much better. His German vocabulary is richer than mine in Polish because often, when I cannot come up with a Polish word, he tells me the German equivalent right away. I think his lexicon is bigger.]

Teresa recalls her monthly crash course of Italian as a positive experience and a justified basis for her future immersion in the language. "The course" – she admits – "gave me the foundation on which I could develop language skills on my own". In her relationship with Matteo she continues to use Italian, reaping the linguistic benefits. Interestingly, by realizing this fact she feels remorse: "I am ashamed to admit but my egoism prevails in this respect".

LANGUAGE REPERTOIRES

The question of partner's language leads to questions about other languages in bilingual pairs. Language repertoires of the four cases reveal that I dealt with multilinguals, Matteo being the only exception as an Italian monolingual. Matteo's wife, Teresa, is communicative in English acquired during her studies. In turn, Elżbieta mentions elementary German and Russian, whereas John adds French, Latin and Chinese to his passive Polish. The American couple is special in that they share a proficient knowledge of Korean. As to Simone and Piotr, she is proficient

not only in Polish but also in English and Spanish which she learnt during her childhood in Argentina plus basic French. As mentioned above, Piotr can boast of advanced German which he blames for his garbled English:

Maturę zdawałem z języka angielskiego będąc w Niemczech. Na początku znałem płynnie, teraz jest taki kłopot, że ja prawie wszystko rozumiem po angielsku, natomiast kiedy zaczynam mówić po angielsku to łapię się na tym, że wychodzi mi niemiecki. Gdzieś ten angielski został zastąpiony przez niemiecki podczas procesu uczenia się.

[I had English at the high school finals in Germany. At the beginning I was fluent, but now the problem is that I understand almost everything in English and when I begin to speak it, I quickly realize I produce German sentences. At some point in my process of learning, English has been supplanted by German.]

Lastly, the Spanish couple enumerate a number of languages other than the partner's mother tongue, all of which do not exceed B1 or B2 levels. Felipe learnt English as the first foreign language followed by French, both mastered at level B1 and finally Polish. Having learnt Spanish, Maria took to English, completed at B2 and followed by French at A2, with some negligible scraps of Latin and Russian.

Table 2. Language repertoires of the bilingual couples.

Couple	Mother tongue	Level of self-estimated knowledge		
		<i>C1 / C2</i>	<i>B1 / B2</i>	<i>A1 / A2</i>
Teresa	Polish	Italian	English	
Matteo	Italian	–	–	Polish
Elżbieta	Polish	English	Korean	German, Russian
John	English	Korean, Chinese	French, Polish	Latin
Simone	German	English	Spanish	French
Piotr	Polish	German	–	English
Maria	Polish	Spanish	English	French, Russian, Latin
Felipe	Spanish	–	English, French, Polish	–

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

In the context of language repertoires, English was given a separate comment because of its special position as a global and most popular first-taught foreign language. Its unprecedented spread motivates people all over the world to master it, which results in “multilingualism and English” (Aronin/ Singleton 2008: 3). As can be inferred from Table 2, this is mostly the case. English appeared as a language of first contact in one non-native English couple, namely between Simone and

Piotr. When they met, for the first three months they used English. The switch into German became the fact after the completion of a five-week German course by Piotr. When they finally decided to move to Poland, Simone found herself in an analogical situation and enrolled on a Polish course. They both appreciate English for its utilitarian value, especially to communicate with the extended family (Simone's brother and his wife live in the United States). Simone describes English as "important, beautiful and cool". Not surprisingly, the appreciation for English is also shared by the other two couples, Italian and Spanish. But in these two cases, the attitude is of a rather declarative nature.

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

The discussion of language proficiency among bilingual pairs reveals language attitudes with a particular emphasis on communicative competence over linguistic competence. This is illustrated by Elżbieta's rhetorical question: "What is the point in producing a grammatically correct utterance, if it is not fully understandable?". Simone, Teresa and Maria in their relationships subscribe to Elżbieta's stance. However, Simone made it clear that communicative competence should soon give way to grammatical correctness. In her verbal interaction with Piotr she corrects his errors, since communicating in an imperfect form was not what they both aspire to. Like Simone, Matteo provides linguistic feedback to his wife, but only when explicitly asked to do so. As to the question of accent, all the opinions indicate that it is quite a desired goal, but it does not play a big role as a conclusive measure of success in language acquisition.

LANGUAGE CHOICE

LANGUAGE MIX

The couples admit that they mix languages. They are aware of code-switching. The reasons for doing this vary from a poor command of the partner's language and making use of one's own language to the desire for linguistic precision. Interestingly, Elżbieta notices yet another reason:

W naszej relacji jest demokracja i to, że akurat język angielski jest dominujący, bo może jest łatwy i jak gdyby zaczęliśmy od początku mówić w języku angielskim, co nie znaczy, że mój język ojczysty jest czymś gorszym albo czymś mniej dobrym. To też jest powiedziałabym możliwość, że mąż się nauczy jak w pewnych sytuacjach, jak coś można nazywać w języku polskim. Także to nie wynika z tego, że ja na przykład nie wiem jak coś powiedzieć, tylko a dlaczego nie?

[We have democracy in our relationship and the fact that English is dominant, as it may seem easy and we began speaking it, does not mean that my language is worse or not good enough. I would say, it is also an opportunity for my husband to learn in certain situations how something can be named in Polish. So, it is not that – for instance – I do not know how to say something in English, but why should I?]

The fourth reason for code-switching is conditioned by a situation where a third language is used for ‘conspiracy’, i.e. not intended to be understood by outsiders. For instance, Elżbieta sometimes resorts to Korean when she wants to tell her husband that she would like to leave a meeting. Maria and Felipe switch languages for humorous reasons as in wordplay, but also to express linguistic or cultural nuances, e.g. there is no equivalent for *kamienica* (tenement house) in Spanish. Felipe may be indicated as a typical ‘code-switcher’; he puts Spanish articles in front of Polish nouns (la *kamienica*), or inserts Polish words when speaking Spanish for precision. They feel comfortable mixing languages because they know why they do it. They would not accept linguistic laziness, but they definitely enjoy practising their special intimate code.

The other two couples, Italian and German, generally do not mix languages. The former do not do it due to a stark disproportion in the command of the partner’s language. Since Matteo hardly speaks any Polish and Teresa is fluent in Italian, there is neither space nor need for code-switching. The latter do not do it due to a high level of language mastery, but Simone stresses that they are linguistically-conscious and they would not mix languages for the sake of children who are expected to learn both.

BILINGUAL NETWORK

Grosjean (2008: 14) notes that bilinguals’ communicative competence should be evaluated through their total language repertoires. The communicative competence develops in everyday life, based on two or more languages depending on interlocutors or situations. The analysis of bilingual networking of bilingual pairs illustrates the relationship between the need and use of a language. Such is the regularity observed in ‘complementarity principle’ which says that the greater the need, the higher the level of language skills (Grosjean 2008: 243). Bilingual network includes relationships with the extended family, friends and workplaces. All bilingual couples face the question of language choice not only at home, but also outside it.

Of the four couples studied here, the American couple stands out in the sense of language interaction with others, which is a consequence of the status and popularity of English. Elżbieta admits, not without irritation, that “most people are very happy to have the opportunity to speak English with John”. She argues that this active approach of others to use English with English-speaking foreigners

is the main reason for their limited progress in Polish. John communicates with friends and acquaintances solely in his native tongue.

Simone and Piotr, in turn, went through different stages of communication patterns with their extended family. Piotr recalls the beginnings with Simone in Poland and his tiring role of interpreter in contact with his parents. Now they are proficient in one another's mother tongue, which gives them comfort in language choice depending on the language skills of their family members. One exception to this regularity is Piotr's brother and his Polish wife and children who live in a big German city. The two couples speak German, which according to Simone, is a habit of past times when they met and she did not know Polish.

In the case of the Italian couple, Teresa keeps on performing the unrewarding role of an interpreter. She speaks Italian to Matteo and Polish to their children. The children respond to Matteo in Italian and to Teresa in Polish. Teresa's commitment to the use of Italian is not only the language strategy adopted at home, but – as she put it – “her positive egoism” to maintain her Italian at a decent level. Since Italian is not as popular as English in Poland and there are relatively few Poles fluent in Italian, Teresa needs to interpret for Matteo in contact with the extended family, friends and strangers.

The situation of Maria and Felipe is similar to that of Elżbieta and John. Maria does need to be her husband's interpreter. Felipe can get by with his Polish which pays off in the contact with Maria's mother and her extended family. Maria is impressed by the level of Polish demonstrated by Felipe, because she rarely gets the chance to see how he performs in Polish. She argues that Felipe is in a comfortable situation. He uses Spanish at work, all their friends speak Spanish and one of her two sisters married a Spaniard. As to her Spanish, Maria – like Teresa – sees a great opportunity for her linguistic development with her Spanish husband. She says “it would be a great loss not to have been able to speak his language, especially as it is easy learning”.

EMOTIONS

The question of emotions expressed by languages constitutes an engaging area of study in itself (Pavlenko 2005). However, the prerequisite for gaining insights into emotions should be at least the intermediate level of the other language. The more balanced in their languages bilinguals are, the more unpredictable yet illuminating the outcome of the emotional and linguistic amalgam can be. The criterion of a balanced bilingual therefore excludes Matteo as his knowledge of Polish is probably less than rudimentary. In the first place most emotions combining two languages are of negative undertones. Elżbieta speaking English to John tends to add some Polish word or phrase if she is unhappy or unsatisfied. This is the signal for John that things have taken a serious turn. She strengthens her English

utterances with Polish question tags, like *no właśnie* (indeed) or *prawda* (isn't it). In turn, John has a favourite word in Polish *dosyć* meaning 'enough' which he often addresses to children if they irritate him. Quite a parallel situation is observed by Piotr when he hears Simone saying to their girls *cholera jasna* (what the hell) when she gets angry with them. And, Maria remembers having talked to Felipe in Polish once when he refused to speak Spanish with her, not because he did not understand but because he did not want to. She switched to Polish to make it more difficult for him to comprehend the message.

HOT TOPICS

Topics revolving around politics, religion and morals usually evoke strong reactions and in that they are akin to emotions. Elżbieta realizes that regardless of Polish verbal inserts, she needs to explain everything to her husband in English. Other couples also tend to keep such conversations monolingual, particularly Teresa and Maria. As to Simone and Piotr, they always begin their discussions in German, but at some points Piotr gives up after which he has to continue in Polish. He confesses:

Bardzo często jest tak, że dochodzę do momentu, w którym chciałbym naprawdę coś sprecyzować albo powiedzieć tak, jakbym powiedział to po polsku i nie jestem w stanie tego zrobić chociażby ze względu na emocje.

[It is often so that I reach a point in which I would like to be very precise or to say something in the way as I would do it in Polish, and I cannot but due to emotions.]

SELF-TALK

An insight into the area of the bilinguals' intimate world reveals some traces of the other language's presence in their minds. The accounts of the use of either language refer mostly to the so-called "inner functions" (Vygotsky 1962) or non-communicative activities of my informants, such as counting, reckoning, praying, cursing, dreaming, diary writing, note taking or talking to pets. The most insightful narrations include three couples but the American one. For instance, Piotr can recall his brother's telephone number in German because originally he memorized it in this language. And he goes on:

Do swojego taty tak samo. Kiedyś się go nauczyłem po niemiecku, zapisałem go i jest mi łatwiej mówić to po niemiecku niż po polsku. Są takie sytuacje, w których na przykład jesteśmy tydzień, dwa tygodnie w obszarze niemieckim i rzeczywiście o czymś myśląc, co jest związane z tamtym miejscem ... wchodzi jakieś wyrazy. Wchodzi i niekoniecznie jakby myślę po polsku. To znaczy czasem używam niemieckiego. Ja sam nie wiem dlaczego tak jest.

[The same is with my dad. I once learnt his number in German, I took it down and now it is easier for me to recall it in German than in Polish. There are situations when we are one or two weeks in the German-speaking context, indeed, when thinking about something related to those places ... some words spring to mind. These words appear in my head and then I do not necessarily think in Polish. That is, I sometimes use German. I cannot explain why it is so.]

Despite an impressive command of her Polish, Simone does not use Polish in self-talk. She rather notices the presence of English in a combination with her mother tongue, German. English occurs in her dreams particularly often. The issue of dreams was also raised by Teresa. She observes how Italian has entered the subconscious and describes the feeling as ‘weird’ and asserts that “this language is simply inside you”. Based on the account of Maria, the experience of Spanish in her thinking is also palpable but only when connected with some situation, place or person.

COUPLEHOOD IDENTITY

CROSS-CULTURAL COUPLEHOOD

The prime advantage of bilingualism is the one that provides the opportunity to experience two or more cultures (Wei 2007: 22). In this section I intend to describe how the couples view their linguistic, national and cultural identities, as well as those acquired through marriage. The research into the linguistic construction of couplehood identity focuses on how they talk about similarities and differences, and how they perform a joint couple identity.

Elżbieta is conscious of the culture issue in her relationship. She talks about Western civilization to which America and Poland belong but, on the other hand, she notices differences between the two. In the context of perpetuating stereotypes, she and John “experience going beyond” – as she put it. Elżbieta is the only one to have raised the question of manifesting national patriotism, exemplary in the United States but much less visible in Poland. Simone and Piotr adopt a more individual perspective. Simone got to know Polish culture through the relationship with Piotr whom she knew earlier. They both argue that German and Polish cultures are not at all distant, and the differences, if any, come to light in the case of certain rituals, circumstances or regionalisms. The enriching combination of Polish and German traditions is consciously created and enjoyed to the full, especially at Christmas and Easter. What came as a culture shock to Simone were the matters connected with bureaucracy and the behaviour of drivers on the road. In turn, Teresa came to appreciate the Italian lifestyle which was alien to her at the beginning, which she describes as “too frivolous”. What she praises as a positive change in her life are the joint meetings of the whole family at a table at mealtimes, a ritual introduced

by Matteo. What Teresa described as “too frivolous” with regard to Italians, Maria names “easy-going” when referring to Spanish culture. She is impressed by the optimistic approach to life demonstrated by Spaniards. They draw a line between professional and private, which is less frequent among Poles. In general, Maria and Felipe as a bilingual couple are disillusioned about Poland, mentioning lack of openness, distance and unfair treatment.

IDENTITY ISSUES

All four bilingual couples unanimously stress that the linguistic and cultural differences play a minor role in their relationships. The Polish partners do not perceive their plight with foreign partners in any way different from the hypothesized situation in which they had monolingual relationships. Elżbieta’s enthusiasm differs from the opinions of outsiders who envy her the possibility to speak English in everyday life. She does not look at her husband through language as others do. Simone admits that she has never had the impression that Piotr was alien to her only because of a different background. As the result, they do not see their couplehood bilingualism as a peculiar feature unique to their relationship. The alternate use of languages comes as a natural activity in their daily life. The mental unity in couple does not depend solely on languages. Their knowledge may help but never hinder the mutual understanding. Teresa admits that sometimes she does not see Matteo as an Italian, not least his southerner looks. She sees the person and common values in the first place, and their bilingualism in couple seems appealing to her. However, due to Matteo’s lack of involvement in learning Polish, Teresa realizes that as a couple they experience some degree of linguistic isolation. Their circle of friends and acquaintances has narrowed down, and even those whom they meet cannot communicate with Matteo if they do not know Italian. “He is always an outsider” – she admits. In the Spanish couple, Maria claims to understand her husband in Spanish. She approaches cultural differences with caution. They may be attractive at first sight, but what Maria values more are similarities of which there are many between Polish and Spanish culture. Maria and Felipe recall their efforts to adapt to one another and their struggle against national stereotypes. She admits to have never decided to marry him if he were a ‘typical’ Spaniard. For Felipe Maria is a typical Polish woman, i.e. quick to speak and act, clever, ambitious, and above all not the type of a housewife. They both agree to have met midway as regards their personalities, and now from the perspective of time they see that their relationship has changed them and their mentality.

CHILDREN'S BILINGUALISM

SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Bilingual couples always face the problem of raising children in terms of languages. It should be noted that couples differ in their linguistic awareness, knowledge of languages and determination to pass bilingualism on their children. In fact, three couples out of four studied here have pursued the 'one person – one language strategy' (Romaine 1995) in which both parents are consistent in the use of their native tongues to children. Though outcomes may be variable, children often achieve quite high language competences. Elżbieta did not resort to any specialist literature, but acted naturally and spontaneously in this respect. She admits to have met with this problem elsewhere but never decided to imitate any other bilingual couple in raising her own children. Simone, in the German couple, consulted specialist literature in which she learnt about the pros and cons of bilingual upbringing. But she did not do it because she was uncertain about what to do. On the contrary, she was raised in a bilingual context and therefore did not have to be convinced about the advantages of bilingualism which she herself experienced. In turn, Teresa sought advice at the neurologist who indicated the 'one person – one language strategy' as the proper one and made it clear that they should be consistent in speaking to children their mother tongues, Polish and Italian, but without mixing them. Only the Spanish couple applied a different strategy, namely 'non-dominant home language'. According to this strategy, both parents speak the non-dominant language, which is Spanish in this case, though they have different native languages. The dominant language of the community, Polish, is the language of one parent, i.e. Maria.

COMMITMENT TO CHILDREN'S BILINGUALISM

Bilingual upbringing is no mean feat as it requires not only the decision, but above all the commitment to the undertaken task. In this respect the German couple comes to the fore as most resolute. Their determination is directly proportional to their awareness of the significance of this process for their daughters. They want to see them functioning comfortably in both societies, Polish and German, through the full participation in languages and cultures. Since the girls are now 20 and 17 years old, their parents got their chance to see the outcome of their bilingual strategy. Simone and Piotr argue that their daughters' identities are distinguished by linguistic and cultural hybridity. To state that by the parents means that they have achieved their educational goal. Judging by the results in children's bilinguality, the other three couples may also be regarded as successful. The partners of Elżbieta, Teresa and Maria speak with their children English, Italian and Spanish respectively. In the three

pairs the youngest child is 4 and the oldest 11, and all of them are active bilinguals differentiating between their parents' languages. Teresa is aware that in future she will need to organize Italian lessons for her children as she expects that Polish will become their stronger language in the course of years, and speaking Italian at home will not be enough to keep the linguistic balance. Guided by similar concerns, Maria sends her older son to the grandparents in Spain for two-month holidays so that he could restore native fluency of his Spanish after the school year in Poland.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The article has taken a sociology-of-language perspective on contributory factors to language attitudes and language practice of bilingual couples in Poland. There are several aspects that shape metalinguistic awareness among these couples, their communication patterns as well as the vitality of languages in private language contact resulting from individual linguistic experiences. The most salient points that have transpired from the discussion above include the following:

- Multilinguals develop a high level of meta-pragmatic awareness, i.e. they tend to see language as an object of analysis, both in terms of meaning and form.
- The emic perspective in the discussed study treats the participants as active subjects, able to share meta-linguistic insights on their bi- and multilingualism. The emic perspective puts the bilinguals' voices on a par with those of the researcher, and offers a valuable source of information on the studied phenomenon.
- Attitudes towards language, its speakers and the motivation to use language is an essential variable in language maintenance which can provide answers to questions of language behaviour.
- The languages of bilinguals undergo constant changes, and their skills in the second language are primarily influenced by social context and communicative needs, thereby revealing different levels of proficiency.
- The knowledge of the partner's language comes to the fore at the cost of other languages, unless the job is closely related to a different language.
- English as a language of special world status is particularly cherished by bilingual couples, which does not necessarily correspond with their actual command of the language but is always present in the 'family language policy' with regard to children's education.
- Linguistic interference and code-switching tends to occur more frequently if the partners know one another's languages at a comparable level.
- Bilingual upbringing is believed by the couples to broaden the horizons and turn children into citizens of the world, as well as make them open and non-discriminative towards people of other nationalities.

- Emotions are expressed in the other language mostly as short words or phrases. Although emotions and controversial topics have a similar potential to evoke strong reactions, it is rather the former that lead to code-switching.
- The issue of stereotypes is often discussed and deprecated as a problem bringing more harm than good.
- The partner's culture is viewed as the enrichment and not as a burden, which is not always the case with language. Individual relationships are not perceived as the relations of two cultures.
- Bilingual couples show a high level of linguistic awareness pointed at their children's linguistic future. Most of them know how to raise children bilingually and in most cases they succeed in doing so.

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