

Development of Polish-Portuguese bilingualism in Brazil

Abstract. The aim of the article is to show the Polish-Brazilian evolution of bilingualism throughout ages. his paper shows different definitions and types of bilingualism, taking into consideration a comparison between the Polish and Portuguese language. Furthermore, I present a review of 150 years of Polish citizens' history in Brazil. It presents their difficulties and the approach of the Brazilian government from the 19th to the 20th century. The most significant subject are Polish schools and organizations. Their history shows how the command of Polish and Portuguese changed throughout ages. There were different conditions, affecting the command of languages in the Polish Diaspora, such as the familial approach or access to Polish culture. I also mention which organizations and people had the biggest impact on Polish citizens in Brazil. I also describe the existing attitude to both cultures and languages in Polish communities. Apart from that, I try to understand the identity and acquaintance of Polish culture nowadays and show actions as a result of which Polish language and history are promoted nowadays.

Keywords: bilingualism, Polish, Portuguese, Brazil, history

Bilingualism

According to The Groot¹ bilingualism has become very popular phenomenon in the world of our modern society of large-scale migration, international markets and finance, backpacking youngsters, and a scientific community in need of a lingua franca to disseminate its achievements among its members. The awareness that bilingualism is not at all exceptional anymore and may not have been so for a long time has recently led to a steep growth in the number of studies on the implications of being bilingual for language use and cognition in general.

¹ A.M.B. Groot, *Language and Cognition in Bilinguals and Multilinguals*, Amsterdam 2011.

However there are many definitions of bilingualism. According to Webster's dictionary bilingual is defined as "having or using two languages especially as spoken with the fluency characteristic of a native speaker; a person using two languages especially habitually or and with control like that of a native speaker" and bilingualism as the constant oral use of two languages"². Commonly, being bilingual equals being able to speak two languages perfectly; this is also the approach of Blomfield³, who defines bilingualism as "the-native control of two languages". In contradistinction to this definition which includes only "perfect bilinguals", Macnamara⁴ proposes that a bilingual is anyone who possesses a minimal competence in only one of the four language skills, listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing, in a language other than his mother tongue.

Different bilingualism types are mentioned in the professional literature, but this article focuses mainly on Polish-Brazilian bilingualism. Bilingualism, in this case, refers to the Polish and Portuguese languages. Due to unfavourable factors such as the sparse Polish community in Portugal, the distance between Brazil and Poland, or the difficult contact between the Brazilian Polish community and Poland, there is scarce literature on the subject. For this reason, the literature describes the history of Portuguese language learning by Poles and, in later years, of Polish language learning by Brazilians, which, due to difficult accessibility, was based not only on education but also on family, the press, tradition, and the promotion of Polish culture.

The Portuguese language belongs to the group of Romance languages, derived from Latin. The grammar and vocabulary of this language are very different from Polish. This results in significant differences in terms of vocabulary, grammar, but also inflexion. This causes excellent problems even today, so in the 19th and 20th centuries, when books were in short supply, learning Portuguese was extremely difficult for Polish citizens.

Historical development of Polish – Brazilian bilingualism

Poles began arriving in Brazil at the end of the 19th century, which was a period of partition, poverty, and repression in the Polish lands. Subsequently, the migration was intensified by the First and Second World Wars. The people who came to Brazil were usually the poor, who came there primarily for economic reasons. For this reason, they thought mainly about feeding their families. For them, the language was essential for communication, work and everyday life. Non-financial issues, i.e., culture, arts and education, remained in the background. At the same time, the majority of immigrants were peasants, which implies a shortage of intelligentsia who could contribute to the development of

² Ch. Merriam, G. Merriam, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Springfield 2003.

³ L. Bloomfield, *Language*, Chicago 1935.

⁴ J. Macnamara, *The bilingual's linguistic performance*, Chicago 1967.

education. This had a significant impact on the willingness to learn and the Portuguese language level.

Captain Lepecki said the following about the languages used in Brazil in the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries:

Portuguese is the official language, as well as being widely spoken, in Brazil. French is quite well known in intellectual and affluent spheres. English is known very little. Emigrants from European countries speak their languages, but even they have to use Portuguese when communicating with each other, except in areas affected by foreign agricultural colonisation, which is as common as Polish in Poland. German is somewhat familiar in the merchant sphere⁵.

Once arrived, as time passed, the Polish community began to organise itself. Initially, the churches were the institutions that adopted educational functions. People gathered in churches to discuss major issues such as education. Despite numerous difficulties, the first Polish school was established in 1876, run by Hieronim Durski. A further school was opened in 1888 in the province of Tomis Coelho, headed by Wawrzyniec Gradowski. Like the daily lives of the colonisers, these schools were of no interest to the Brazilian government. Unfortunately, in parallel with the lack of educated people, there was a shortage of teachers. As a result, people who were members of educational societies and had the aptitude for it became teachers.

Another important way of promoting the Polish language besides schools was provided by Polish newspapers such as⁶ progressive “Świt” published twice a week, Catholic “Lud” also published twice a week, the weekly “Gazeta Polska w Brazylii” and the non-periodical “Ilustrowany Świat Paranski” and “Sportowiec polski w Brazylii”.

“Gazeta Polska w Brazylii”, published in Curitiba between 1892 and 1941, is worth noting for its unique linguistic analysis source. The newspaper’s language underwent many changes over half a century due to changing living conditions, the influence of Portuguese and the isolation of the Polish language in exile (despite the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1920). According to Stapor⁷: “some of the most important changes in the language of the newspaper are the new lexemes and their adaptation (graphically, phonetically and morphologically) to the language system of the Polish settlers”.

The study of such an old material has provided accurate information on how the Polish community changed the Portuguese language at the time, changing suffixes to Polish ones or borrowing Polish words to create neologisms to name concepts and phenomena that were new to them at the time. The newspapers published by the Polish community a hundred years ago are an irreplaceable source of information on how the language has changed over the years.

⁵ M. Lepecki, *Opis stanu Espirito Santo*, Brazylia 1931.

⁶ M. Lepecki, *Parana i Polacy*, Warszawa 1962.

⁷ I. Stapor, *Słownictwo polonijne w Brazylii jako rezultat kontaktów językowych polski-portugalskich (na przykładzie Gazety Polskiej w Brazylii)*, Warszawa 2020.

Table 1. Which language is dominant at Braspol's events?

	J. Stańczewski	M. Kawka	Origen
<i>szakier, szakra, chácara</i> (1st time) 'plot'	Szakier	szakier, szakra	port. br. <i>chácara</i> 'plot'
<i>Fazenda</i> 'farm'	<i>Fazenda</i>	<i>fazenda</i>	port. br. <i>fazenda</i> 'farm'
<i>Grenja</i> 'farm, grange'	–	–	port. br. <i>granja</i> 'farm, grange'
<i>latyfúndia</i> (plural) 'land estate'	–	–	port. br. <i>latifúndio</i> 'land estate'
<i>lot</i> 'vegetable garden'	–	<i>Lot</i>	port. br. <i>lote</i> 'vegetable garden, plot of land'
<i>posa/ possa/ posse</i> 'property, farm'	–	–	port. br. <i>posse</i> 'property, farm'
<i>Sítio</i> 'farm estate'	–	–	port. br. <i>sítio</i> 'place, farm estate'

Source: *Gazeta Polska w Brazylii*, in: I. Stapor, *Słownictwo polonijne w Brazylii jako rezultat kontaktów językowych polski-portugalskich (na przykładzie „Gazety Polskiej” w Brazylii)*, Warszawa 2020.

As the years passed, not only newspapers but also schools grew in number, resulting in centralisation. This resulted in a congress of all Polish societies, which took place in Curitiba in 1908. Unfortunately, it failed. At the time, the inhabitants focused on Poland's prospect of regaining its independence, and education suffered significantly as many teachers returned to Europe. For this reason, many schools were forced to close because their staff were then fighting for Poland's independence.

The only units that functioned during the First World War were religious schools. They were led by several nuns who had come from Poland for this purpose. They then founded a school in Abranches in 1904 and opened 12 Polish schools in total by 1914. Besides, there were 61 secular schools at that time.

Aniela Kaczmarek⁸ says that in 1917, it was noted that dozens of Polish schools had been established, over which the Brazilian government had no control. At that time, it was observed that Polish schools were not following the law that mandates teaching in Portuguese. This led to a law passed in 1920, which established the curriculum and conditions of the study. From that moment on, teaching was compulsorily carried out in Portuguese in schools. As a consequence of this decree, Polish teachers started teaching Portuguese.

In the early 1920s, the situation in education was difficult as many teachers emigrated. Fortunately, the regaining of Polish independence contributed to the establishment of

⁸ A. Kaczmarek, *Emigracja polska w Brazylii: 100 lat osadnictwa*, Warszawa 1971.

the first Polish consulate in Curitiba. At that time, the “Kultura” Union of Societies was founded, which was dedicated to raising the level of higher education in Brazil.

The “Oświata” society was also founded, run by missionaries. It was concerned with the promotion of education and the creation of schools, but in contrast to “Kultura” it paid attention to Catholic values. It helped to establish both an itinerant library and a central library in Curitiba. This has significantly increased their knowledge of Polish literature, culture and language. Then the first secondary schools — colleges — were established.

Moreover, the first Polish theatre and the Theatre Art Society were founded in Curitiba at that time. Theatres and school choirs were further occasions to learn about the culture and the mother tongue. Subsequently, the Central Union of Poles in Brazil was founded, which, among other things, took care of employing Polish language teachers.

Pabis describes that the usual practice was to start lessons in Polish in the morning and then teach in Portuguese in the afternoon. Worth mentioning is that respondents explicitly state that learning in Portuguese was at a low level because teachers did not speak Portuguese well. Unfortunately, the local state teachers did not speak Polish.

Unfortunately, the measures that favoured bilingual schools stopped with the nationalist propaganda that gained momentum in Brazil in 1937. This culminated in 1938⁹ when Decret-Law (No. 406 of 4 May 1938) came into force, which mandated education only in Portuguese.

Article 85 of that Decree-Law read as follows:

In all rural schools in the country, the teaching of all subjects will be in Portuguese, excluding the possible use of direct methods in teaching modern foreign languages.

Paragraph 1. The schools covered in this article shall be managed exclusively by native Brazilians.

Paragraph 2. These schools will not provide foreign language classes for pupils under the age of fourteen.

Paragraph 3. Textbooks for primary education shall be written exclusively in Portuguese.

Paragraph 4. The study of Brazilian history and geography is compulsory in the primary and secondary curricula.

Paragraph 5. In schools for foreign adults, basic knowledge of the country’s political institutions shall be taught.

Subsequently, Decree No. 1.545 of 25 August 1939 banned the use of foreign languages during meetings and public assemblies, which ultimately confirmed the nationalist tendencies of the then authorities and led to a generation gap and the disappearance of the Polish language among the Polish community, as the lack of schools led to illiteracy for the next several years.

Unfortunately, the period of dictatorship and nationalism lasted until the 1970s. Over time, contact with the Polish language and Polish literature and art has faded among suc-

⁹ N.A. Pabis, *Edukacja i kultura: szkoły polskich imigrantów na południu stanu Parana*, in: *Polacy i ich potomkowie w Ameryce Łacińskiej*, Gdynia 2017.

cessive generations. It is challenging to find information about the functioning of Brazilian Polish communities during the period when the use of the Polish language and the celebration of Polish traditions were prohibited. It was only the arrival of John Paul II in Brazil in 1980 that revived interest in Poland among Brazilian Polish communities. Despite this, the generation gap contributed to many difficulties and resulted in poor command of the Polish language among the Polish community.

It is worth mentioning the list of outstanding educators who have contributed to the development of education in Brazil¹⁰:

Leal Zelia Adghirini, Witold Baliński, Czesław Marian Bieżanko, Tadeusz Chrostowski, Daniel Domaszek, Janusz Drapiński, Francisco Filipiak, Waldemiro Gremski, Leopold Hartan, Eugenius Kaszkurewicz, Mariano Kawka, Joao Marciano Komosiński, Stefan Kucharski, Jerzy Langrod, Wanda Cecylia Las, Sofia Linkiewicz, Jan Magaliński, Martin Mikoski, Regina Maria Przybycień, Ugo Erminio Rodacki, Ruy Christovam Wachowicz, Zbrożek Jerzy, Breowicz Wojciech, Durski Hieronim, Wachowicz Roman, Tomasz Łychowski, Maria Ficińska, Fransisco Dranka, Henryk Siewierski.

Knowledge of the Polish language in Brazil nowadays

Since the 1970s, the degree of Polish language proficiency among the Brazilian Polish community depends on many factors. Certainly, bilingual upbringing, or the lack thereof, has the most significant influence. Besides, the environment, surroundings, and access to Polish-language books and press are critical. It is not easy to estimate the level of knowledge of Polish among this social group, but some statistics show it.

Research on the Polish language knowledge among Brazilians was conducted by Braspol, a Polish organisation that brings together Poles living in Brazil.

Table 2. Which language is dominant at Braspol's events?

Which language is dominant at Braspol's events	Number of indications	Percentage of indications
Polish	7	3.3
Portuguese	71	34.0
Mixed (Polish and Portuguese)	113	54.1
Portuguese, but Polish is more often used	18	8.6
Overall	209	100.0

Source: E. Budakowska 2007. *Em busca da etnicidade: movimento da BRASPOL no Brasil – interpretação contemporânea*, Warszawa 2007.

¹⁰ K. Głuchowski, *Materiały do problemu osadnictwa polskiego w Brazylii*, Warszawa 1927.

The survey comes from a book in which Braspol investigates the Brazilian Polish community's knowledge of and willingness to learn Portuguese. It conducted several surveys on the subject. They clearly show that Portuguese dominates over Polish.

After many years of difficulties connected with the lack of access to Polish-language materials, Poles living in Brazil speak mainly Portuguese. The Polish language's degree of knowledge depends primarily to upbringing, knowledge of Polish among parents, and individual willingness.

My observations of the case study on the example of the Brazilian Polish community show that Polish language knowledge in Brazil is an individual matter. The main factor favouring the knowledge of the Polish language is everyday communication in the family home. People raised in homes where their ancestors spoke Polish daily could be called bilingual.

However, some people have also decided to learn Polish on their own despite the difficult environment.

Władysław Miodunka¹¹, in his book and articles on Polish-Portuguese bilingualism, suggests various theories. He bases this on research conducted with Stanisław Kucharski in the 1970s. It confirms the hypothesis that Portuguese is the dominant language. The Polish community is fluent in speech and writing and considers it to be their mother tongue. The knowledge of Polish is much weaker than that of Portuguese, as the following quote proves:

In this context, Polish knowledge should be described as partial: it is mainly a matter of knowing the spoken code (of understanding and speaking Polish) without knowing the written code. The knowledge of the spoken language allows only direct contacts with people who know this language, but it effectively prevents crossing the barriers of place and time – it makes it impossible for them to read Polish texts on their own, to get to know Polish culture, or even to contact their families in Poland or other Poles by letter. [...] Polish-Portuguese bilingualism exists in Brazil, but it has two forms: it is visible in the colonies in the south of the country and hidden in the cities, especially in the big cities.

In her interviews, Aleksandra Pluta¹² quotes people who talk about learning a foreign language abroad.

It is worth recalling the words of Tomasz Łychowski, whose mother was a native German:

After many years, an obvious and yet incredible truth has come to me. In fact, if my mother had not spoken Polish to me in Germany, I would certainly have forgotten my mother tongue. And yet speaking to me in German and not in Polish would have been quite natural for her, even in this purely German environment. After all, this also testifies to her feelings about Poland, her Polish husband and her attitude to Hitlerism.

¹¹ W. Miodunka, *Bilingwizm polsko-portugalski w Brazylii*, Kraków 2003.

¹² A. Pluta, *Droga do Rio*, Warszawa 2017.

Moreover, Jolanta Tambor claims that: “despite unfavourable historical conditions, contemporary knowledge of Polish among middle and older generation Brazilians is satisfactory. She points out that the Polish language has survived for many generations despite considerable difficulties when formulating this thesis. Also, she notes characteristic features such as: “lexemes transferred into Polish from Portuguese with characteristic Polish endings, polonised pronunciation”¹³.

A noteworthy piece of information that the Polish language that is widely known in Brazil is mostly older version of Polish, which has been passed down from generation to generation. In this way, the grandparents taught their grandchildren the language that was used in pre-war Poland. Personally, I consider it a unique phenomenon globally, although the Brazilians know that they do not use the Polish language correctly.

It is worth noting, however, that since the 1970s, the situation of the Brazilian Polish community has been improving, which has resulted in many projects promoting Polish culture, literature, and language among Brazilians, such as:

- the creation in 2008 of the first Polish Studies Faculty on the Latin American continent,
- teaching the Polish language in Polish diaspora organisations or by private persons (often as a volunteer),
- cooperation and exchange opportunities between Polish and Portuguese universities,
- celebrating Polish holidays and traditions in the Polish diaspora organisations, allowing contact with other Poles and learning Polish songs, poetry and other sources of Polish culture,
- translation of Polish literature into Portuguese,
- activities of Polish institutions and the Polish Consulate in Curitiba (methodical workshops for teachers are organised there),
- lectures and seminars with Polish guests as speakers.

Despite this, both society and the government have noticed the need to promote the Polish language among the Portuguese. This can be seen in the report entitled *Sprowadźmy Polaków z Brazylii*¹⁴, whose creation proves that the Polish government cares about improving relations and promoting Polish culture among Poles in Brazil.

Summary

In conclusion, Portuguese and Polish knowledge among the Brazilian Polish community varied significantly depending on the period under analysis. Given that this short

¹³ J. Tambor, *Po polsku, po brazylijsku i po portugalsku – o świadomości językowej Polonii brazylijskiej. Odrodzenie i zanikanie języka*, Katowice 2018.

¹⁴ ZPP (2019), *Sprowadźmy Polaków z Brazylii*, Retrieved 18 October 2019.

article has attempted to cover 150 years of Polish-Brazilian relations, the language has evolved significantly over such a long time. Beginning in the 19th century, when the Poles who arrived in Brazil did not speak Portuguese, through the attempt to study in Polish schools, to the period of compulsory education in Portuguese. This education in the period of repression led to the Polish language's disappearance and a generation gap, the effects of which can be seen today. The extent to which the Polish community currently speaks the Polish language is subjective, depending on the individual and the factors favouring it.

Nevertheless, it can be assumed that part of the Polish diaspora knows Polish on a communicative level, but a large part of it, unfortunately, does not know Polish and does not have sufficient knowledge of Polish culture. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the modern Polish language spoken by the Portuguese has survived several generations and sounds like Old Polish. I believe that the subject of Polish-Portuguese bilingualism should be highlighted to contribute to broadening knowledge of the subject in Poland. As a result, it will facilitate access to Polish language textbooks and all materials that will increase Brazilians' bond with Poland and the Polish community.

Bibliografia

- Bloomfield L., *Language*, Chicago 1935.
- Budakowska E., *Em busca da etnicidade: movimento da BRASPOL no Brasil – interpretação contemporânea*, Warszawa 2007.
- De Groot M.B., *Language and Cognition in Bilinguals and Multilinguals*, New York 2011.
- Głuchowski K., *Materiały do problemu osadnictwa polskiego w Brazylii*, Warszawa 1927.
- Kaczmarek A., *Emigracja polska w Brazylii: 100 lat osadnictwa*, Warszawa 1971.
- Lepecki M., *Opis stanu Espirito Santo (Brazylja)*, Warszawa 1931.
- Lepecki M., *Parana i Polacy*, Warszawa 1962.
- Macnamara J., *The bilingual's linguistic performance*, Chicago 1967.
- Malczewski Z., *Polonii brazylijskiej obraz własny. Zapiski emigranta (2007–2010)*, Warszawa 2010.
- Merriam Ch., Merriam G., *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Springfield 2003.
- Miodunka W., *Bilingwizm polsko-portugalski w Brazylii*, Kraków 2003.
- Pabis N.A., *Edukacja i kultura: szkoły polskich imigrantów na południu stanu Parana*, in: *Polacy i ich potomkowie w Ameryce Łacińskiej*, Gdynia 2017.
- Pluta A., *Droga do Rio*, Warszawa 2017.
- Stapor I., *Słownictwo polonijne w Brazylii jako rezultat kontaktów językowych polsko-portugalskich (na przykładzie "Gazety Polskiej" w Brazylii)*, in: *Polónia e Brasil – mais próximo do que parece*, Warszawa 2020.
- Weinreich U., *Languages in contact, finding and problems*, New York 1953.
- Tambor J., *Po polsku, po brazylijsku i po portugalsku – o świadomości językowej Polonii brazylijskiej. Odrodzenie i zanikanie języka*, "Postricium Polonistyczne" 1918, nr 1.
- The Groot A., *Language and Cognition in Bilinguals and Multilinguals*, Amsterdam 2011.

Netografia

- Kancelaria Senatu. Biuro Analiz, Dokumentacji i Korespondencji (2019). "150 lat polskiego osadnictwa w Brazylii – zarys historyczny." Retrieved 15 October 2019, <https://www.senat.gov.pl/gfx/senat/pl/senatopracowania/173/plik/ot-673.pdf>.
- Konsulat Generalny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w Kurytybie. Retrieved 17 October 2019, https://kurytyba.msz.gov.pl/pl/p/kurytyba_br_pl/polonia_w_brazylia/organizacje_polonijne/
- ZPP (2019). "Sprowadźmy Polaków z Brazylii". Retrieved 18 October 2019, https://zpp.net.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Sprowad%C5%BAmy-Polak%C3%B3w-z-Brazylia_raport.pdf.