



The Power of Inherited Language in Multilingual Adults. Survey Study

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ABSTRACT: The considerations in this article are focused on the phenomenon of widespread multilingualism in Europe and the increasing number of multilingual adults. A language biography was used as a research tool to access languages in dreams, prayer and thought. The study was conducted on 68 multilingual people. The following results were obtained: regardless of the bilinguals' age and country of resi-

dence, inheritance languages appear in the majority of the respondents (50/68) in dreams. An even greater proportion in favour of inheritance languages was observed in relation to the language of prayer or thought (50/60). The study confirms the hypothesis that inheritance language is a reservoir of childhood experiences and resurfaces actively in emotional and personal activities performed by bilinguals.

KEYWORDS: emigration, multilingualism, language biography, bilingual.

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1. Introduction

The considerations in this article are based in general on the phenomenon of widespread multilingualism in Europe and the growing number of adult multilingual users of languages, which I will refer to as bilinguals. In particular, the languages present in bilinguals' dreams as well as in thoughts and prayer, were subjected to observation. To access these data, I used a language biography as a research tool.

2. Social context

Since the mid-20th century, Poles have migrated and settled in nearly every corner of the world.¹ Therefore, multilingualism pertains to Poland and the Polish people. There is a lot of writing about the language used by the Polish community abroad [Błasiak 2011, Dębski 2009], the phenomenon of language acquisition in the history of the Polish language [Przyklenk 2014], academic didactics in multilingualism [Miodunka 2018, Pałuszyńska 2021] or last but not least emigration and its cultural effects [Kuros, Loewe, Moćko, ed. 2017; Kwiatkowska 2019; Murrmann 2019; Steciąg 2020]. Two socio-economic phenomena were conducive to these linguistic competences of the Polish women and men. Here, I am referring to just the two most recent waves of Polish emigration to European countries in order to become wealthier and get a better paid work. The first was migration in search for bread and at the same time escape from communism to capitalism in the 1980s. At that time, the emigration applied to families whose descendants many a time embrace already two successive generations. The second one was emigration after the Polish government signed the Schengen Agreement in 2007, which allowed Polish residents to cross the borders of the EU countries freely, including to work in these countries. This emigration mainly pertained to young adults. In 2010, people in the age range of 20–29 emigrated, while in 2020 the age range was as high as 30–39 [GUS 2020]. The former ones often worked abroad several or more months, did not start families and did not feel the need to assimilate in the environment of the country where they settled temporarily. The older generation would leave family members behind while they worked abroad to earn a living and had important reasons to maintain their linguistic competences in Polish. In 2010, the number of Polish emigrants identified in this way was 1,607,000 (according to the Central Statistical Office of Poland, GUS), and by 2017 this number increased to 2,121,000. The year 2017 marked a turning point, as more people returned

1 This is clearly visible on the illustrative maps available on the APPLA organisation's website: <https://appla.org/> [accessed: 27 May 2024].

to the country than left. It should be noted that this trend only lasted for five years, as in 2022 the balance shifted back in favour of emigration. In 2021, the Central Statistical Office of Poland reported that 2,239,000 people were temporarily residing outside the country's borders.

The establishment of corporations in Poland where the working language is different from Polish is another source of bilingualism (Sopra Steria, Capgemini). After all, these are individuals who use a language other than their native one for at least forty hours a week, even though they have not left the country. Magdalena Steciąg wrote about this global phenomenon [Steciąg 2020].² I believe that both of these cultural and economic phenomena, whose performers are people who use two languages differently, are nowadays worth a research reflection. They generate researchers' interest from various disciplines. The observations noted by linguists, glottodidacticians, psycholinguists, sociolinguists or speech therapists are very promising.

I am conducting these interpretations from the perspective of a linguist. The article contains research conclusions drawn from bilinguals' language biographies. A prerequisite for an individual's participation in the project was their identification as a multilingual person. Among the many questions included in the questionnaire, which leads to the creation of a language biography, I was only interested in responses related to the languages of dreams, prayer, and thought. My hypothesis is that the mother tongue is activated during these activities performed by a bilingual.

3. Theoretical context

Ewa Lipińska and Anna Seretny have been conducting research on the competencies of multilingual individuals for years [Seretny, Lipińska 2016; Lipińska, Seretny 2019]. They assume that knowledge about their multilingualism should be obtained firstly through prepared, tested, and selected research tools, and secondly in the area of measurable competencies. Such assumptions can effectively yield comparable data, for example, in terms of differences in the use and application of the mother tongue and inherited language. It is commonly accepted

2 In her article the author describes a very interesting problem of *lingua receptiva*, which means "a communicative phenomenon, occurring particularly on the borders of various countries with more or less similar national languages; receptive multilingualism is usually based on historical tradition, geographical proximity and long-standing neighbourly relations, in the course of which receptive competence is developed" [Steciąg 2020: 36]. Attempts to encourage southern neighbours of Poland to use this form of contacts are presented by a project carried out by researchers, who left its digital footprint in the form of the website <http://www.slavic.network.us.edu.pl/> [accessed: 24 May 2024].

that the competencies of Polish students differ from those of their peers living abroad [Lipińska, Seretny 2012]. A comprehensive study on this subject, utilising a specifically selected tool that is part of the project *Język odziedziczony a ojczysty – porównanie kompetencji w zakresie języka polskiego uczniów z Polski i przebywających na emigracji* (Inherited Language versus Mother Tongue—A Comparison of Polish Language Competencies among Students from Poland and Those Living Abroad) confirmed this opinion [Lipińska, Seretny 2023]. In the research reconnaissance proposed by me with regard to the types of languages used by multilingual individuals in dreams, prayers or thoughts, an equally satisfying tool has not yet been developed for two reasons. Firstly, the languages that appear in the dreams of bilinguals can manifest in a wide variety of countless situations (social-formal), codes (spoken-written), and genres (conversation, song, argument, speech). Secondly, such data are declarative in nature, and a researcher cannot objectively verify them. This applies to the languages of thought and the highly sensitive, intimate realm of prayer. Despite these challenges in achieving objective and comparable results, one way to gain at least some knowledge about the use of languages in dreams, prayers, and thoughts by multilingual individuals is through a language biography, which includes inquiries about these three bilingual activities. I used this tool, and in this article, based on 68 language biographies and thus through the declarations of 68 bilinguals, I report the findings regarding the use of languages in prayer, thoughts and dreams by multilingual individuals or the languages that occur in these activities.

The mother tongue is described in sociolinguistics as a conglomerate of traits. Prototypically, “i.e., ideally, the mother tongue (a) is first learned from parents; (b) is spoken most often and most conveniently; (c) plays an important role in identifying individuals who accept it as their own” [Hentschel 2022: 7]. In glottodidactic literature, it is sometimes replaced by the following expressions: *inherited language* and *inheritance language*. In fact, as Jolanta Tambor believes, in relation to the Polish language [Tambor 2019], bilinguals received the Polish language free of charge and came to possess it as an inheritance. Others, heirs, demonstrated a volitional act in relation to the Polish language and at any time, by their own decisions, use it, resign from it or master it. The language described as *inherited* is not subjected to such conscious care or concern. The cultivation and maintenance of a mother tongue as a minority language in exile should be given more attention due to the lack of a social environment identical to that language.

For Poles staying abroad for extended periods, Polish families and teachers, campaigns are designed by Polish embassies, consulates and foundations

that effectively—through institutional means—create favourable conditions for maintaining competencies in Polish as a community minority language. Here, I will mention just three projects—the foundation-consular Association for the Promotion of Polish Language Abroad (APPLA), the business-oriented Bilingual House and a ministry-led initiative. Educational materials, guides and infographics from the APPLA initiative *Podaruj dziecku swój język ojczysty* (Gift Your Child Your Mother Tongue) are available on the association's website, although it itself ceased further activities in March 2023. The Bilingual House platform (<https://bilingualhouse.com/>) is actively expanding its activities. The website offers offline guides that answer the most frequently asked questions posed by multilingual and multicultural families, instructional videos and regularly updated blogs and vlogs that support multilingual families in raising children. A printed book guide on multilingual upbringing has been released in the publishing market, responding to the expressed needs of interested individuals with migration experience, also often visitors of the website [Nott-Bower 2022]. The third group of access to advice on the options to support the minority language are updated data on the official website dedicated to the Polish communities abroad (<https://polonia.stat.gov.pl/>). This site contains a database of Polish institutions and institutions of Polish communities abroad, including addresses of Polish schools. In 2022, the website provided addresses and contacts to 8900 associations located in 115 countries.

4. Study overview and research tool

One of the ways to effectively recognise the language competences of a multilingual user is to stimulate them to oral narrative. For this purpose, a language biography can be used as a method of work by linguists, psycholinguists, glottodidacticians [Zielińska 2013, 2018; Miodunka 2016] and sociologists. A language biography is:

a method used to describe the ways and conditions of language acquisition, disappearance and use in various situations, emotional attitude to the languages from the point of view of multilingual speakers. [Zielińska 2013: 360]

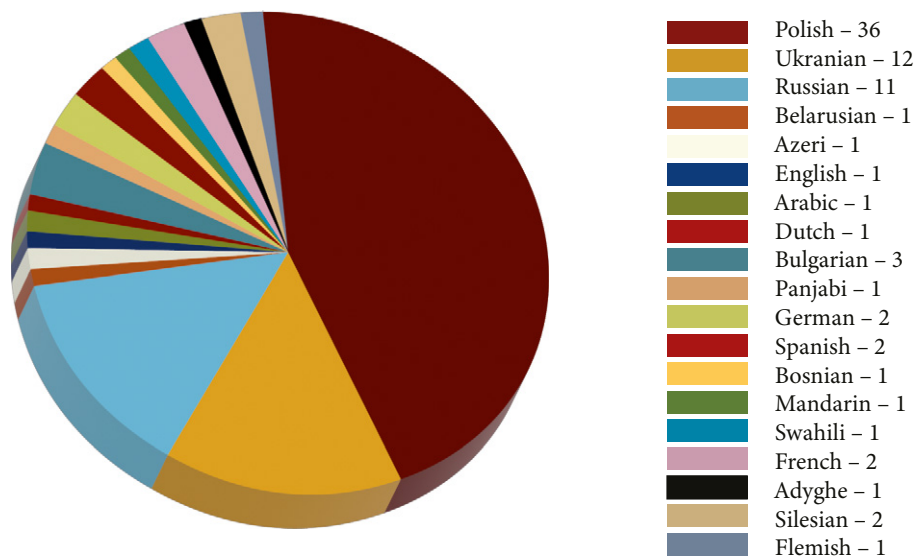
Language biographies are constructed on the basis of data included in the participant's observations, interviews and notes from field studies. They were already known as a method in the early 20th century, and once again became an attractive research tool in the context of mobility, migration, but also the development of glottodidactics as a scientific discipline [e.g., Lewaszkiewicz 2017].

A language biography is created based on a bilingual completing a questionnaire along with a demographic section. The demographic section contains requests to provide: the forename, surname, date of birth, place of residence, origin of parents, origin of life partner, number and age of children, education, occupation and religion. The main questionnaire includes questions about the languages of individual life stages: languages used in the current place of residence, home, social circle, work, and childhood, as well as languages of prayer/thought and dreams. The questionnaire also contains a space for notes and interpretations by the interviewer who actively participates in the interview and observes the behaviour of the respondents, their reactions, elaborations, as well as records additional questions and answers given. The interviews were conducted by participants within several editions of an education programme on teaching Polish as a foreign language held at the University of Silesia. The study was based on 68 language biographies of multilingual individuals, who collectively spoke a total of 16 languages. The linguistic competencies of bilinguals are not static but evolve from conversational competence to academic competence [Cummins, Swan 1986] and a sense of multiculturalism, leading to gradual forgetting due to lack of use and the absence of an environment conducive to remembering. Remembering, as a mental process and cognitive effect in relation to language, implies its use. It seems reasonable to ask in such a designed study how bilinguals remember their inheritance language. What kind of memory do they associate with it? A language biography can extract linguistic exponents of memory from the users' mental reservoir and, with the help of reflection on the language(s), map the places, people and times significant to the user. Therefore, these values serve as two key indicators in memory research [Wójcicka 2014, Chlebda 2018].

5. Analysis and interpretation of the material

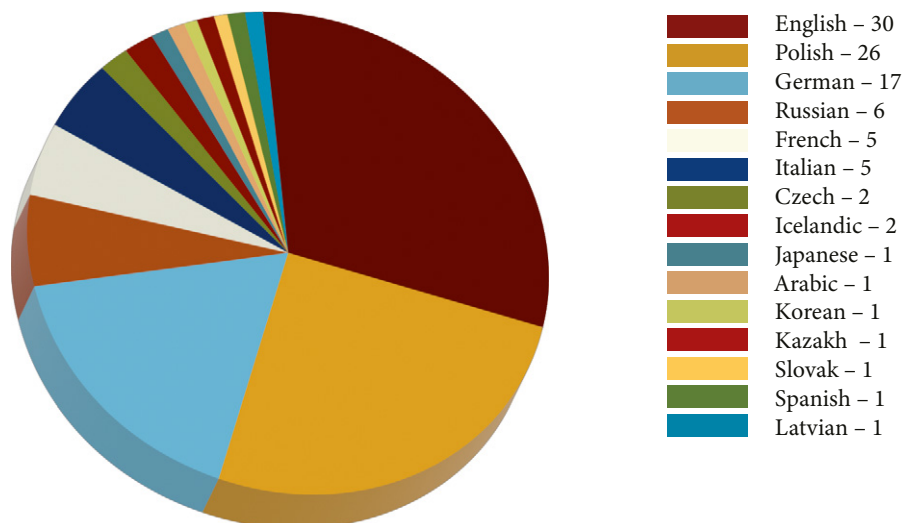
Chart 1 shows the distribution of inheritance languages for 68 people surveyed. In 68 questionnaires, twelve different inheritance languages appeared in the study. The total number of inheritance languages is higher (81) than the number of the respondents (68), because ten people said that they received two inheritance languages, while two people considered three languages to be inherited. These are cases of countries where two languages are official, such as Belgium (Flemish and French), whereas the determination of inheritance languages by several respondents is affected by the history of some countries. It applies to Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus, in which the surveyed Russian, Ukrainian, Belarussian and Polish languages were regarded as such.

Chart 1. Inheritance languages reported by 68 surveyed bilinguals



Source: own work.

Chart 2. Acquired languages reported by 68 surveyed bilinguals



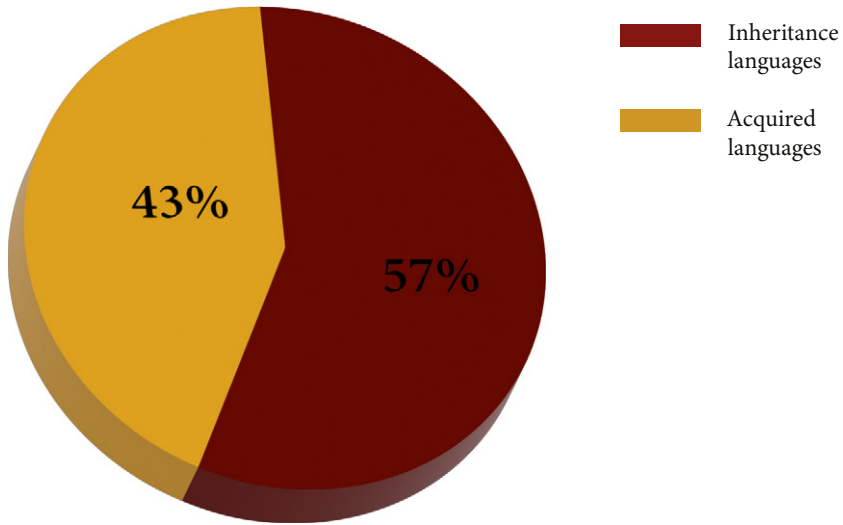
Source: own work.

Chart 2 illustrates the distribution of acquired languages among 68 respondents, of whom 36 are polylingual and 32 are bilingual. In total, 12 acquired languages appeared in the study. On this chart, it is also evident that the number of the respondents is smaller than the total number of languages they speak. After obtaining data about the nature of the bilinguals' (inheritance or acquired) languages, the study correlated these with declarations about the languages appearing in the dreams of the respondents. In the questionnaire, the subject specified these languages specifically (as, for example, Russian, French and Polish), and the interpreter's job was to assign them to the two types of languages known to the bilingual. This was facilitated by the first part of the questionnaire, where the bilingual would fill in the section with languages of childhood, family home, social circle, life partner, workplace, or country of residence.

The inheritance language appeared in 50 responses out of the 68 participants surveyed, while acquired languages appeared in 38 responses. The sum of these data exceeds 68 because more than one language appeared in the dreams of the respondents due to their bilingualism, as well as their social environment. The analysis of the answers suggests that acquired languages affect the language of dreams depending proportionally on two factors: the country of residence and the people speaking in the dream. Languages other than those acquired by the bilingual do not appear in their dreams. Comments from the respondents indicate that for the purpose of the survey, they thought more intensely about the languages of their dreams, although the vast majority of their dreams are silent, dominated by images and movement.

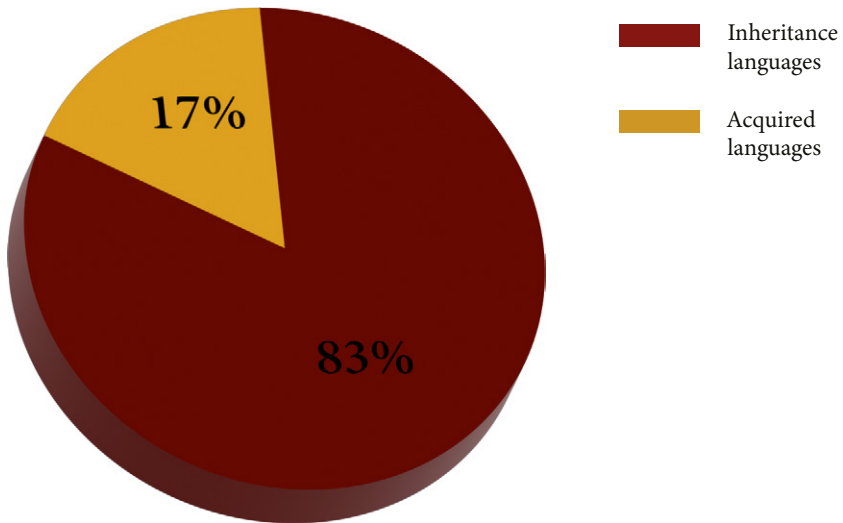
The answers were dominated (50) by inheritance languages, in only ten cases the subjects pray/think in acquired languages. The answers do not add up to 68, because not all the respondents use prayer practices and their thoughts do not have a conscious verbal form. In conversations with the participants of the study, a distinction was made between the language of personal prayer and the language of the liturgy in the church of the place of residence. As could be predicted, in order to make life easier the respondents most often go to the nearest church, so the language of their liturgical prayer was then the language of this place, that is the acquired language. It should be noted that a similar situation can occur when formulaic prayers from a temple are transferred to the home setting. This approach can then be associated with ritualisation, which is somewhat contrary to spontaneous, expressive personal prayer. The analysis of the responses shows that the language of prayers is affected by the acquired languages which are prestigious [Pawłowski 2008]: English/German as acquired versus Polish as an inheritance language or Russian versus Ukrainian. Arabic has a strong position; it is used in prayer regardless of whether it is native or foreign.

Chart 3. Percentage share of inheritance and acquired languages in the bilinguals' dreams



Source: own work.

Chart 4. Percentage share of inheritance and acquired languages in the bilinguals' prayers/thoughts



Source: own work.

6. Conclusions

Irrespective of the bilinguals' age or country of residence, inheritance languages are placed in a statistically significant proportion of the respondents (50/68) in their dreams. The significant (57%) prevalence of inheritance languages in the bilinguals' dreams seems to support the hypothesis about the properties of these languages in the personal cultural reservoir and its impact on unconscious verbal behaviour. An even greater proportion in favour of inheritance languages was noted in relation to the language of prayers or thoughts (50/60). It also follows from the analyses of the answers provided by the participants—either written at the end of the questionnaire or dictated to the interviewer—that inheritance languages are spoken to express communication in relation to children or pets. They are manifested in choosing the baby talk in the form of diminutives and verbal tenderness [Galczyńska 2008]. Inheritance languages activate in affective situations, including stressful ones. The respondents declared that they use vulgarisms in these languages. The study confirmed the hypothesis about the nature of the inheritance language. It serves as a reservoir of childhood experiences and actively resurfaces in the emotional and personal activities performed by the bilinguals, particularly in dreaming and non-formulaic prayer. An additional value of the conducted study is the diversity of inheritance languages spoken by the bilinguals. Thus, the confirmed hypothesis does not pertain only to a specific inherited language but to various languages that have the status of a mother tongue for the heterogeneous research group.

The potential that a language biography as a tool provides for further research is immensely interesting. For example, Brigitte Busch states that language biographies form the basis for describing issues such as the bilingual's language repertoire, language ideologies and experiences related to the use of different/many/two languages. In the study, attention was paid to two of these values: language repertoire and language experience. In the latter property, I included dreaming and prayer. I believe that a language biography can become a valuable research tool for multilingualism not only for glottodidactics but also for disciplines with other scientific and didactic purposes. I include intercultural linguistics, memory studies, ethnology, anthropology, and psycholinguistics among them. I consider the methodological merits of a language biography to be the ability to document the linguistic richness of the protagonists of social archives, who can be bilinguals, the ability to consolidate knowledge about the reasons for acquiring languages in the era of universal democratic freedom and social choice, bilinguals' ability to articulate what has been previously inexpressible or unexpressed, thereby valuing the efforts and competencies of multilingual individuals, as well as to solidify and raise awareness of

multiculturalism, which can be a derivative of the individuals' multilingualism [cf. Loewe 2020]. After all, it is always worth bearing in mind the limitations of this method as a case study, because "Knowledge obtained during research [...] makes it possible [...] only to state that 'it tends to be so' rather than 'it is so'" [Tambor 2020: 227].

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