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*DWUJĘZYCZNI I DWUKULTUROWI. BILINGUAL AND
BICULTURAL. SPEAKING POLISH IN NORTH AMERICA,*

ED. KATARZYNA ZECHENTER,

PUNO – POLISH CULTURAL INSTITUTE, LONDON –

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The book edited by Katarzyna Zechenter titled *Dwujęzyczni i dwukulturowi. Bilingual and Bicultural. Speaking Polish in North America* is a guidebook for parents who are Polish speaking and their non-Polish partners. It is divided into XIII chapters; each discussing bilingualism from a different perspective – from advantages through ways to make it achievable; testimonies of bilingual and monolingual people from all around the world up to a list of useful resources. The writers were able to expose the natural fear of bilingualism that can be felt by parents and to mediate it into knowledge of undoubted advantages of speaking more than one language by advising on how to support children on their journey through different cultures. The first part of the book is mostly concentrated on language/s learning and teaching it/them through play. The other part emphasises the cultural echoes of bilingualism.

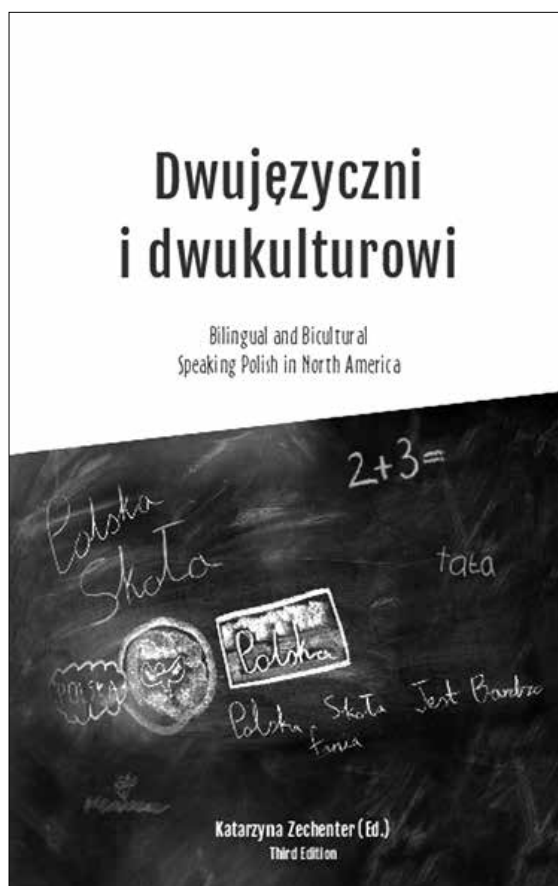
The publication lacks the definition of bilingualism, however, as explained by the editor, the aim of the book was not to focus on the definitions and a theoretical discussion, as the guide should serve the practical goal and highlight the

positive effects of the bilingualism as a broad concept (Katarzyna Zechenter, p. 11). The message of the abovementioned reasoning might be interpreted by the readers as freedom in choosing their definition and trying bilingualism on their terms. The book as a whole sends a clear message, to both children and parents, that they are not losing by speaking many languages, quite the opposite, they are gaining – parents by establishing better contact with their children, children by acquiring endless opportunities in their personal and professional life. While the title might suggest North America and specifics from the area mentioned, it can be successfully used and read by parents of Polish origins worldwide, as the guidance is profoundly universal.

Edyta Nowosielska, in Chapter II, asks fundamental questions, questions that most of the parents of potentially bilingual children might ask themselves at some point. She makes comments on fears and possible obstacles that parents and children might approach at the beginning of their formalised school education. The author of the chapter provides the ideas and methods on how to introduce/maintain contact with minority language/s at home.

Halina Stochnioł, in Chapter III, presents the fears of newcomers surrounded by a new culture – understood as a monolingual parent/s who have to raise a child in a new country. At some point, they might start speaking to their child/ren in a majority language to „help” them adapt to a new environment. Stochnioł explains the roots of the abovementioned approach, and she reassures parents that they should continue the natural way of bringing up a child – by speaking their native language as they would do in a monolingual society. She gives a brief guidance on supporting bilingual children at the main stages of their development. As the book is aimed at parents mainly, the writer provides exact and precise examples of how to deal with common mistakes made by children (e.g. mixing languages). The theoretical discussion has been omitted as it would disturb the recipient of the advice and ideas provided. The vice chair of the Polish Educational Society in London lists the potential challenging behaviours and situations in which a child might refuse to speak the minority language/s and provides parents with the solutions, ways to react to those obstacles. She mentions the extraordinary, yet quite obvious but rather not remembered truth that parents of bilingual children are not alone. She encourages readers to socialise with other parents so that they can learn from them and their stories.

In Chapter V Katarzyna Zechenter gives ideas for additional ways of building a secure language scaffolding later in children’s development, e.g. sending



a child to a Polish Saturday school. However, she believes that the parents play the leading role in the bilingual development and they are the key to it. Every parent is a teacher, in the most natural way, where teaching/learning process is just playing and spending time with their child as it is the regular way of supporting them despite the language used. The author challenges the notion that learning is a painful experience. In fact, learning is based on an act of enjoyment and sense of accomplishment. The author of the chapter points out that upbringing of a bilingual child is no different than upbringing of the monolingual one, only the environment is different.

Monika Płata in Chapter V focuses on more theoretical approach by explaining most common speech problems in an easy and accessible way. Marzena Owińska (Chapter VI) presents the actual situation of second language status in the US and opportunities for bilingual children. Chapter VII briefly explains the beginnings of the Polish community in North America. Chapter VIII discusses opportunities at American universities for bilingual students. The editor does not forget non-Polish parents, as Professor Anne White in Chapter XI aims at them. Chapter XII adds crucial elements – testimonies of bilingual/mul-

tilingual and monolingual people from all around the world. I find Ania's story (p. 204–206) extremely emotional and interesting, as she discusses a missed opportunity of being fully bilingual. The last chapter provides a list of resources that are very often known only to the teachers and language professionals.

Overall, the publication was much needed, and undoubtedly it is already a part of primary literature for Polish emigrants, who are looking for help in raising their children. Non-Polish speaking parents are also invited by the editor to expand their knowledge, so they can equally participate in raising a bilingual individual. The authors acknowledge the difficulties and reassure that they are a part of the natural process and should not be feared but should be embraced. It does not provide specialist field terminology or complicated work scheme, yet offers advice to parents. The guide directs the way rather than forces to follow it. The publication is free from judging parents who decided to raise their children as monolinguals. The fact that very often the same ideas are discussed in separated chapters, and it may feel very repetitive at times, enables potential readership to read only sections they are interested in, instead of reading the whole publication. The book would benefit from having a full Polish version as some chapters are not accessible to Polish-speaking monolingual parents. The fact that the book is available as an eBook and it is free to be accessed online is an additional advantage. All the factors (the accessibility, the content etc.) make this publication an ideal starting point for widening parents' knowledge regarding the bilingual upbringing of their children – so the book serves its purpose. This guidebook undeniably contributes to increasing awareness of positive effects of speaking more than one language. Finally, *Dwujęzyczni i dwukulturowi. Bilingual and Bicultural. Speaking Polish in North America* inspires to take up the bilingual journey with our own children.