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Family language policy in the context of return migration: A case study

ABSTRACT. Return migration has probably been granted the lowest attention in the field of family language policy (FLP). The current paper seeks to address this gap in the research and explores the dynamics of FLP of a Polish family in the context of their temporary migration to Germany and return migration to Poland. The authors investigate how mobility affects FLP, especially towards L1 (Polish) and L2 (German) in the context of migration and return migration. The study takes a qualitative, interview-based study design, supported by the language portrait technique. An analysis of the interview data has evidenced the parents' strong support for the maintenance and development of L1 throughout the whole process of migration and return migration and the lack of it in the case of L2 after the return to Poland. The results have also evidenced that individuals in a family, including children, have significant autonomy and agency and can shape their independent FLPs, which are aligned neither with their parents nor siblings.

KEYWORDS: FLP, return migration, heritage language maintenance, L2 loss, child agency.

1. INTRODUCTION

Migration understood as spatial movements of either a group of people or individuals to settle temporarily or permanently have always been part of human history. Such changes in location are rarely spontaneous and provoked by a variety of factors, e.g. political or socio-economic ones, that include displacements caused by war or natural disaster or a pursuit of a better standard of living. Following Stavans and Hoffman (2015: 29), in this paper, the term "migration" is used as an umbrella term for emigration (out of a country), immigration (into a host country) and remigration (a return to the country of origin).

Throughout history, migration has played a huge role in language contact and spread. Nowadays, in the era of mobility and intense contact with other cultures and languages, multilingualism has become a norm in many parts of the world. In this context, a vast majority of research is focused on the pace and effectiveness of learning the language of the destination country and its relation to the social and economic integration of migrants. As Goitom (2019: 394) observes, scholars primarily study “(a) the ease with which the transfer of human capital from the source country to the receiving country can take place, and (b) the ways in which this can augment immigrants’ rate of success in the labour market of the receiving country”. Little attention, however, is paid to the temporality of a given settlement and the idea of returning “home” that often accompanies migrants. Having this possibility in mind, migrants frequently maintain strong ties with their country of origin that also affect the way of constructing their spaces and relationships in the new environment. Functioning in these transnational spaces is facilitated by language that offers a sense of identity and belonging. The construction of such spaces by migrants in the host country illustrates the connection between time and space with a language whose positioning is manifested by its use in interactions (Stevenson & Carl 2010). Language as an element of identity (e.g. Kramsch 2002), also acts as a marker of group belonging, both in a local and transnational sense, and is related to one’s sense of citizenship and place of origin (Kramsch 2002: 9–11). Thus, language might be considered a crucial factor “in reconstructing identity during both migration and the settlement and reintegration process (return-thinking)” (Goitom 2019: 396).

The current study discusses a linguistic identity of a Polish family in the process of migration to Germany and return migration to Poland, as an example of a larger trend. Indeed, in the last two decades, the Polish accession to the European Union in 2004 offered the Poles the greatest impulse for temporary migration which raised from 1,000,000 in 2004 to 2,239,000 in total in 2020. Germany and the UK have traditionally been the most popular destinations for temporary migration for Poles. A significant drop in the number of migrants from Poland to the UK, however, was noted after Brexit (from 678,000 in 2019 to 514,000 in 2020). In 2020, Germany (31.5%) topped the ranking of the most popular destinations for temporary migration from Poland, followed by the UK (22.9%), the Netherlands (6%), Ireland (5%), Italy 3.8%, France 2.8% and Belgium 2.3% (Central Statistics Office 2021). Temporary migration of Poles is typically motivated by higher earnings (78.8%) and a higher standard of living (58.9%), travel opportunities (44%), better social benefits (37.7%) and professional development perspectives (35.7%). Over one-third of the respondents pointed to the lack of jobs in Poland (Central Statistics Office 2021).

Our study aims to investigate and foster an understanding of how Polish migrant families adapt their FLP in response to the changing life trajectories in the context of migration and return migration. It addresses the following research question (RQ):

RQ1: How is FLP shaped in the context of migration and return migration?

A qualitative, interview-based study design has been employed to investigate the dynamics of FLP in the under-researched area of return migration. In its opening, theoretical part, the paper draws on the recent developments in the area of FLP. The next sections discuss the methodology and research results.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICY

Language learning never takes place in isolation. It is embedded in the social worlds in which a child functions, including the most crucial one – the family. Family is “the nucleus of the community interactions that are vital for language socialisation” (Guardado 2020: 39). Family language policy (FLP) as a new research area integrating language acquisition and language emerged in the first decade of the twenty-first century (King & Fogle 2006; King, Fogle & Logan-Terry 2008; Schwartz 2008, 2010). In contrast to psycholinguistic research on bilingualism that investigates how the child acquires language, FLP studies focus on how language is used and managed in the family. In this approach, the emphasis is placed on the parents’ linguistic ideologies and language learning decisions and strategies, as well as the larger sociocultural context a given family is embedded in as key factors affecting the child’s language acquisition and use (Fogle & King 2013).

First and foremost, FLP research centres on the role played by parents in heritage language maintenance by “modifying children’s language development” (Spolsky 2012: 7). As Stavans and Hoffman (2015: 215) put it, “[o]ne of the strongest driving forces of FLPs is the urge to maintain the heritage language while learning the new one(s) as a means of to make the transition from ‘the previous’ life into the ‘new life’”. FLP research is guided by the question of why only some young children exposed to two languages become bilingual which was posed by De Houwer (1999) over twenty years ago. Thus, FLP investigates how parents’ language ideologies and actual language practices might either foster or restrain the child’s use of a particular language (Curdts-Christiansen 2013; Wąsikiewicz-Firlej & Lankiewicz 2019; Romanowski 2021; Stępkowska 2022).

The language policy model developed by Spolsky (2004: 5) is often used in FLP research. This model embraces three elements of a speech community’s language policy, including language practices (language behaviours), beliefs

and ideologies about language, as well as language management, construed as actions that influence language practices (Spolsky 2004: 5). These three components are interrelated and influence one another – ideology informs practices and management, while practices and management have an impact on ideology (Spolsky 2004: 14).

Language practices are defined by Spolsky (2007: 3) as actual “behaviours and choices” made by individuals about language, including its variety and specific linguistic features, such as grammar, vocabulary or phonetics. As evidenced in several studies, the quality and quantity of parental input play an essential role in developing children’s bilingualism (e.g. Döpke 1992; De Houwer 2007). Thus, low exposure to a given language (e.g. a minority language) translates into a less frequent use of this language by the child (De Houwer 2007).

Language ideology embraces specific values, beliefs and attitudes attributed to language as well as its use, which are shared within a certain community (Spolsky 2004; Spolsky 2007; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 2006; Volk & Angelova 2007). They have an impact on the perception of prestige and values ascribed to “various aspects of the language varieties” (Spolsky 2004: 14) and are defined by Laihonen (2008: 669) as “discourse about language”. Developed both at the macro (e.g. global, national or institutional) or micro (e.g. family) levels (King, Fogle & Logan-Terry 2008), language ideologies do not only concern language but also personal and social identity (Lanza 2007). In the family context, language ideology might be interpreted as parents’ discourse about the planned and expected outcomes of their children’s multilingual development (cf. Moin, Schwartz & Leikin 2013; Wąsikiewicz-Firlej 2016: 156). De Houwer (1999) argues that language ideologies held by parents might be reflected in the specific language practices shared in a given family. For instance, parents’ belief that code-mixing has a negative impact on language acquisition may discourage both parents and children from using this practice. Beliefs regarding the perceived prestige of a particular language in society also translate into actual language use in a family: parents who value their first language(s) have a higher chance of passing it/ them on to their offspring (Harding & Riley 1986).

Finally, to clarify the concept of language management, Spolsky (2004: 14) quotes the questions originally posed by Cooper (1989: 31): “Who plans what for whom and how”. In this context, language management entails an explicit attempt to change or manipulate the language ideologies or practices of others (Curdt-Christiansen 2009; Spolsky 2004). For this reason, in some cases it may contradict the ideology and transgress the rules concerning language use shared by a particular language community. Simultaneously, language management is based on language ideologies, which can be considered as the impetus for tangible efforts to modify language practices (Curdt-Christiansen 2009, 2013). In the

family context, language management translates into the attempts of parents/carers to promote the children's language acquisition, which includes, e.g. using their first language(s) to communicate with their offspring, maintaining contact with their relatives and a larger community speaking the target language, visiting their home country(ies), providing formal language instruction (Spolsky 2004: 8). Language management involves the use of some language practices, e.g. corrections or specific language choices (King, Fogle & Logan-Terry 2008: 911), and engagement with the minority language that fosters its acquisition. As advanced by Yamamoto (2001: 128), "the more engagement the child has with the minority language, the greater her or his likelihood of using it". Additionally, De Houwer (2011: 227) suggested that the use of a minority language by the child is particularly strongly fostered by the parents communicating in this language with each other.

2.1. Child agency

A particular FLP originates in a specific linguistic constellation of the person involved in the internal family (i.e. parents, siblings, grandparents, close friends), but it soon becomes modified by the external linguistic environment in which a particular family is embedded (i.e. extended family and friends, communities, country, etc.) that might ultimately modify the initial decisions concerning the use of particular language(s). Parents basically need to address the question of whose languages should be acquired and for what reason. Recently, a large body of studies posits the family as a dynamic system and emphasises the child's agency¹ in shaping FLP and the formation of their linguistic competence and identity (e.g. Hirsch & Lee 2018; Hunt & Davis 2022; Wilson 2020). Luykx (2005: 1409) deems children "family language brokers" who affect "adults' linguistic development". Lanza (2007: 47) does not only point to the child agency in language socialisation but also views children as fully-fledged members of society that contribute to its development rather than are merely shaped by it. This theme strongly reverberates throughout Schwartz and Verschick's (2013) edited collection, especially in the chapter written by Palviainen and Boyd (2013). The authors (Palviainen & Boyd 2013) argue that even very young - three-year-old - children can be involved in the formation and negotiation of FLP, for example, by determining the language they or their parents speak or changing the rules concerning the family language use set by parents. Tuominen (1999) highlights the child's contribution to ensuring the dominant position of English as the ma-

¹ Child agency has been also discussed, e.g. by Caldas and Caron-Caldas (2000, 2002), Okita (2002), Luykx (2005), Lanza (2007), Gafaranga (2010), Palviainen and Boyd (2013), Fogle (2012), Fogle and King (2013).

majority language at the expense of the minority language (cf. Wąsikiewicz-Firlej & Lankiewicz 2019: 173). It must be emphasised that children are not always in agreement with their parents when it comes to FLP and children do not always share parents' identities which might lead to tensions between them (Little 2017; Wilson 2020). Numerous studies point to the fact that FLP-related conflicts often arise from different perceptions of the roles heritage language(s) play for first- and second-generation speakers. The majority of second-generation immigrants do not acquire their heritage language(s) in their parent's country of origin and are not always emotionally attached to their parents' first languages or country/cultural roots and might object to imposed language policies (e.g. Sevinç & Dewaele 2018; Sevinç & Backus 2019). Manifestation of children's/adolescents' negative emotions in heritage language maintenance takes place in response to parents' strict FLP as well as their "fixed monolingual mindsets" and anxiety (Sevinç 2022: 884). By contrast, multilingualism is understood by individuals with "growth multilingual mindset" as "a full repertoire of multilingual practices and a beneficial tool for interaction" that can be adapted and developed during a lifetime (Sevinç 2022: 886). Parents with a "fixed monolingual mindset" hold that "successful multilingualism" involves native-like competence in all languages in a multilingual person's repertoire. They also share a belief that the use of a heritage language might hinder the "majority language development, or vice versa, assuming that their language learning capacity is limited" (Sevinç 2022: 886). Anxiety and pressure accompanying monolingual mindsets have a detrimental effect on family relations and communication as well as social interaction.

2.2. Peers

As noted by De Houwer (2007: 22), societal influences might either foster or hinder parents' efforts in raising bilingual children (also see Hammer, Miccio & Rodriguez 2004; Portes & Hao 1998). For example, Caldas and Caron-Caldas (2000, 2002) underscored that the choice of a majority language by children from multilingual backgrounds is often influenced by social factors. As evidenced in a case study of a bilingual French- and English-speaking family, while parents play a significant role in shaping young children's language choices, after puberty these preferences tend to be influenced by peers (Caldas & Caron-Caldas 2000). These findings go in line with the theory of group socialisation advanced by Harris (1995), which prioritises peer group influences. Accordingly, as illustrated by research carried out by Harris (1995), in ethnic minority families, adolescents tend to switch from their family minority language towards the majority language and acquire their peers' rather than parents' pronunciation.

Similar differences in the use and maintenance of the minority language between children and parents have been reported by Tannebaum (2003) who surveyed 307 migrant children (aged 8–11) in Australia (cf. Wąsikiewicz-Firlej & Lankiewicz 2019: 173). Thus, taking into account the peer pressure that might act against parents' efforts to maintain the minority language, some form of support from minority-language-speaking relatives and childcare providers would be an asset (Bayley, Schecter & Torres-Ayala 1996).

2.3. Siblings

As noted by Unsworth (2016: 140), “there is to date very little systematic research addressing the influence of siblings on bilingual children’s language development”. What emerges from subsequent studies is some evidence that (e.g. Miller 1983) while interacting bilingual siblings tend to opt for L1, the dominant language of their country of residence, instead of L2 (minority language). In her study of bicultural Japanese children in Japan, Yamamoto (1987) implied that the use of English (L2) in the interaction between siblings fostered the children’s bilingual development. On the other hand, children who used Japanese (L1) to communicate with each other were also less likely to interact with their parents, even minority language parents, in English (L2).

Further studies point to the role of schooling and the majority language of instruction (Szczepaniak-Kozak et al. 2023). For example, Yamamoto (2001: 103) put forward a hypothesis that “the medium of instruction in school and the presence of siblings” have the most significant impact on the children’s language decisions. Yet, research up to date has not conclusively established whether the presence of older siblings enhances or impairs language development (Kavanagh 2017: 221).

On the one hand, as illustrated in research (e.g. Kamada 1998; Bridges & Hoff 2014), older children attending school tend to communicate with their siblings and parents in the majority language even if one or both parents use the minority language. For this reason, Unsworth (2016: 140) objects to positioning siblings only as input providers and views them as “potential agents of change in the language use of other family members”. On the other hand, older children can foster the process of minority language acquisition in the younger siblings by playing the role of teachers or role models (Gregory 1996; Gregory & Williams 2000). The results of Obied’s (2009: 705) study of Portuguese-English bilingual families also demonstrated that older siblings might take the role of mediators of both languages in the family home and foster the bilingual development of younger children. In some cases, though, the birth of younger siblings provoked

a language change and a turn towards Portuguese. Thus, Kavanagh (2017: 211) holds the view that children should not be treated as input providers to younger siblings without prior encouragement or learning. This reflection also strongly reverberates in the conclusions of Kavanagh's (2017: 211) small-scale study. In general, older siblings who communicate only in the majority language with their brother or sister may impede their younger siblings' multilingual development and should not be treated as the main minority language providers. Following Kavanagh (2017: 211), it might be concluded that parents, not siblings, should be deemed responsible for providing the minority language input and engaging children in learning it by exposing them to media texts and enabling interaction with other speakers of the language.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

In order to address the research question posed (RQ1), a qualitative study was designed (Creswell 2014) and the semi-structured interview was employed as a research tool (Cross & Galletta 2013) to obtain "a thick description of a complex social issue embedded within a cultural context" (Dörnyei 2007: 155). This kind of interview is "organized around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee/s" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006: 315). The interview draws on the fixed protocol that is supplemented with follow-up questions, probes or comments that enable the interviewee to clarify certain issues or provide a more detailed responses (Dörnyei 2007: 155; Wąsikiewicz-Firlej 2020). Semi-structured interviews are frequently applied in qualitative research to gather open-ended data offering insight into participants' personal experiences, attitudes, perceptions, emotions and beliefs concerning the topic under study in order to "understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Kvale 1996: 1). As this method typically resembles a dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee (e.g. Hatch 2002: 91), researchers often emphasise its relational character and see it as "a shared product of what two people – one the interviewer, the other the interviewee – talk about and how they talk together" (Josselson 2013: 1). Additionally, the case study design enables the researcher to investigate a rather unexplored, complex phenomena over a longer period of time, which would be highly challenging or simply not feasible to be explored by means of other methods (van Lier 2005: 195). Additionally, interviews with

children were supported by the visual portrait that in this study mostly played a role of a stimulus for eliciting verbal data (Busch 2018).

This study provides evidence from interviews with three individuals from one family (mother Aneta and two daughters, Lena and Kamila) with the experience of migration to Germany and return migration to Poland (see section 5.4 for more detailed profiles of the participants).

3.2. Data collection and analysis

The data were gathered by a trained research assistant in May 2021 who conducted interviews with volunteer participants. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, all interviews were conducted online synchronously via a video communicator Skype. Having certain limitations of online interviewing in mind, in recent years it has become a widely applied and legitimate method of data collection (Hewson 2016; O'Connor & Claire 2016). The participants were informed about the aims of the study and expressed their consent to be audio-recorded but the parents made a restriction that only the transcription of the interview can be used for further analysis, quotes and data publication. Before the interview, the participants (children) were instructed by the research assistant to prepare their language portraits, by colouring in the A-4 template of body silhouette (Busch 2018), widely used in research on multilingual repertoires (see Wąsikiewicz-Firlej 2023 for a thorough discussion of the use of projective techniques). The participants were interviewed in Polish – their L1 and the children were assisted by their mother throughout the interview. The interview, which lasted 45 minutes, was audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim using Boje's (1991) simplified transcription conventions and translated into English. Afterwards, the whole corpus of data, including the portraits and interview audio transcription, underwent close reading and listening. Finally, the verbal data were divided into themes for a more detailed qualitative analysis. The interviews were conducted in Polish – all interview excerpts in this study have been translated from Polish to English.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Family profile

The family under study consists of four people: mother (Aneta, aged 36), father (Dawid, aged 39), and two daughters (Lena, aged 12 and Kamila, aged 7).

Driven mainly by economic reasons, the father migrated to Germany in 2012. After a year, his family joined him and spent there the next 7 years until August 2020 when they decided to return to Poland. All family members speak Polish as their first language (L1) and German as a second language (L2). Lena and Kamila also learn English at school which is their third language (L3). During his stay abroad, Dawid managed to learn German at the communicative level and used it at his workplace. Nevertheless, he frequently interacted with the Polish community and spoke Polish daily. According to the family members' declarations, Polish has always been the family's exclusive home language. The father, however, could not take part in the interview so any accounts concerning his language competence or attitude have been provided by his wife, Aneta. Accordingly, the discussion of the research results will be limited to the three respondents taking part in the study, i.e. Aneta (mother), Lena (older daughter) and Kamila (younger daughter). The descriptive data analysis will be followed by a discussion in the next section.

4.2. Descriptive data analysis: Interviewee 1 (Aneta)

Aneta (36), Kamila and Lena's mother, holds a master's degree in pedagogy and she currently works at school as a teacher responsible for taking care of children in the school common room. During her 7-year long stay in Germany, she managed to attain a B1-level of proficiency in German, which she considers "communicative". At the beginning of her stay abroad, the woman mostly spoke Polish in daily interactions with other members of the local Polish community and relied heavily on her compatriots' help in communication with German people. Later on, she became a communicative speaker of the German language and could function abroad in everyday contexts quite independently. Nevertheless, occasionally, her German neighbours helped her in situations when she failed to communicate on her own. Since most of her friends were Polish, her use of German was only limited to workplace settings or conversations with neighbours. Nowadays, after her return to Poland, she communicates exclusively in Polish.

Polish (L1) in Germany

Although initially the family did not plan to return to Poland and the migration seemed permanent, from the beginning of the family's settlement in Germany, Aneta took considerable effort to develop the children's proficiency in Polish and safeguard the position of Polish as the family's home language.

Excerpt 1

Aneta: [we spoke] Polish because it's our mother tongue and at home, we only spoke Polish at the beginning. So, I put a lot of emphasis on them [children] being able to speak and read in Polish. And write, of course.

Indeed, the family home offered a monolingual linguistic environment as Polish was always been used in all possible family interactions, i.e. between parents, parents and children and between siblings. Except for school where the children were exposed to and used German in interaction with teachers and peers, outside the family, they were also socialised mainly in Polish, both with extended family members and friends. Additionally, contacts with their relatives in Poland, as well as summer stays there, were rather frequent.

Except for developing language skills, Aneta also added that she made some efforts to strengthen the children's cultural identity defined by "Polish traditional values"², epitomising, in her view, family, Catholicism and patriotism. This process was fostered by common book reading and constant contact with Polish relatives.

Excerpt 2

Aneta: We celebrated all the national holidays either church holidays or patriotic ones, we inculcated this in the children. We read books in Polish and there was constant contact with the Polish family because they had to learn the Polish language... because the only family we have is in Poland and I can't imagine a situation where they didn't... I can imagine a situation where we all sit around the table, grandmas, grandpas, erm and girls can't talk to their grandmother or grandfather because they only speak German.

What also emerges from Excerpt 2 is Aneta's unsubstantiated anxiety concerning a possible L1 loss that seems rather unlikely given its exclusive use in family interactions.

In the interview, Aneta expresses her positive attitude to multilingualism on several occasions, e.g. "I believe it offers good prospects for the children's

² According to sociological research, Polish core values have traditionally focused on the family, religiousness (identified with Catholicism), traditionalism, hospitality and home (cf. Jachnis & Terelak 1998). Other values highly appreciated in the past embraced patriotism and national themes present in Polish culture, especially evident in literature. At the same time, some researchers (e.g. Gach 1993; Krawczyk 1990) signal that the significance of these values is steadily diminishing. In a similar vein, nowadays religiousness, typically identified in Poland with Catholicism, cannot be automatically ascribed to all individuals. First, it would not be considered representative for the whole society or render the existing diversity. Contrary to the mainstream narrative, a 2018 survey by Pew Research Center (2018) showed that Poles under 45 were among the fastest secularising group among 106 nations under study.

future"; "I am all for children learning languages". As evidenced in the data, Aneta also shares a common myth concerning "effortless multilingualism" (cf. Grosjean 1997, 2021): "[...] the smaller the child, the quicker he or she acquires a language effortlessly, simply through play, and pictures and she doesn't even know that she is learning" (see Excerpt 5). Despite the declared appreciation of multilingualism as an asset, at the onset of their daughters' education in Germany, the parents shared certain concerns related to the girls', adaptation at school and relations with peers and their possible L1 loss. Over time, it turned out that the mother's concerns were unfounded. Although both the girls were schooled in Germany, they managed to settle in quickly in a different educational environment in Poland and build rapport with their new colleagues, which was certainly facilitated by the involvement of a Polish teacher who was always there to help with linguistic or socialising issues.

Their older daughter (Lena) was four when she arrived in Germany and it was not until she started a nursery school that she was first exposed to German.

Excerpt 3

Aneta: Uh, that was a big concern for me, because my daughter was four years old when she left Poland and started kindergarten there. But she adapted very well and was slowly introduced. Fortunately, there was also a Polish woman [...], a Polish teacher, who offered her help and so it went on somehow.

Although the younger daughter (Kamila) was born in Germany, it was not until she turned three that she started her formal education and began learning German. As emphasised by the mother, the nursery school played a crucial role in the process of acquiring German by her daughters.

The children were also exposed to L1 thanks to attending a Polish Saturday School, offering classes in Polish and Catholic religious education. As declared by their mother, the children enthusiastically participated in these classes. Due to the lack of relevant data, it is now impossible to verify whether the children share this opinion.

Excerpt 4

Aneta: Yes, there was a school. It was located next to the Polish church uhm once a week we used to take them to religion and Polish classes. Ehm, they were very happy there... there were various games organised by this Polish school, for example, a carnival party or a children's day, and some different Polish festivals. [laughter]

Due to the parent's engagement in developing their children's proficiency in Polish, the return to Poland was smooth. After several years of education in the German system, i.e. two years of nursery school and five years of primary

school in the case of the older daughter and two years of nursery school and one year of primary school in the case of the younger one, the girls transitioned to the Polish system of education rather effortlessly.

German (L2) in Poland

Although Aneta believes that living in multilingual settings can provide children with a better future, especially when new languages are acquired at a young age, the family does not seem to take the advantage of the girls' early exposure to German and their competence in this language. A year after their return to Poland (2021), Aneta observes, with regret, that her younger daughter (Kamila) has almost lost her German (although this has not been formally verified in any way) and is only using Polish, contrary to the older daughter (Lena) who is still competent in her L2. Aneta believes that her older daughter, Lena, owes her competence in German to a longer period of formal schooling in Germany compared to her younger sister. Currently, Aneta's daughters, especially the younger Kamila, are practically deprived of any possibility of being exposed to German or learning it formally, which gradually becomes a foreign language to them. This appears hard to understand from a linguist's perspective, since finding some free materials for learning German or simply accessing German media in Poland seems relatively easy. The girls, however, are not encouraged or instructed on how to use them. For the time being, Aneta does not take any measures to support L2 maintenance shifting the whole responsibility for this process to the school and her children's informal contacts. The only activity fostering L2 is a possible short visit to Germany in the near future:

Excerpt 5

Interviewer: Uhm, and do you support your children's language learning in any way?

Aneta: Well, at the moment they only learn English here at school. They don't learn German yet in primary school, only from the 7th grade. Which I think is a pity, because **the smaller the child, the quicker he or she acquires a language effortlessly, simply through play, and pictures and she doesn't even know that she is learning.** [emphasis added]

[...] **Well, unfortunately, I don't have enough time for that** [emphasis added], but I often hear how my older daughter has contact with German friends from her old class and school and they often write and talk. We are still planning to go back to Germany for a week to visit these friends.

In Poland, children typically learn English as their first foreign language from the onset of their primary education. Learning a second foreign language (e.g. German, Spanish, French, Russian or any other modern language, depending on the school's resources), begins in the seventh grade of primary school (at the

age of 13/14). For this reason, the older daughter, who is still in the sixth grade, will have German classes at school in a year. It must be emphasised, however, that these classes are for complete beginners and it is very unlikely that Lena will benefit much. Despite these apparent limitations, Aneta emphasises that she has always been an advocate of teaching children foreign languages and expresses her enthusiasm about her daughter learning two foreign languages in the future. In reality, however, she fails to find the time and resources to support this process in any way (see Excerpt 5). Ultimately, she hopes that the education her daughters receive in school will suffice to maintain German. When asked about strategies for L2 maintenance in the future, Aneta again relies solely on school education.

Although the formal provision of German has not begun yet, the school takes certain initiatives to promote this language. Aneta reveals that her daughter has already participated in a German language competition at school targeting older pupils.

Excerpt 6

Interviewer: Uhm, and does the school help your children in any way to develop their linguistic skills? Does it support them knowing that they have studied German before? [...]

Aneta: I think so because the older daughter has had the opportunity to participate in uhm competitions in German, for example, the Zdolny Ślązak competition, while she is currently in the sixth grade, and children enter this competition uh rather yes only from the seventh grade, because this German language is only in the seventh grade at our school and I think it was also such a new experience for her there so the school made it possible to her as well as the teachers.

In sum, as evidenced in the data, contrary to the declared appreciation of multilingualism, the parents have primarily focused on the development of L1. Irrespective of their place of residence, either Poland or Germany, Polish has always played a central role in family communication. As far as the maintenance of L2 is concerned, parents seem to have taken a “let it go attitude”, probably guided by their lay belief that becoming multilingual does not take much effort and does not require any support.

4.3. Descriptive data analysis: Interviewee 2 (Lena)

Lena is twelve years old and attends the sixth grade of primary school. She considers Polish her L1 and evaluates her knowledge of German (L2) as “good”. Additionally, she has been learning English at school for four years. Lena seems rather confident about her competence both in Polish and German.

Excerpt 7

Interviewer: Lena, how well do you know Polish and how well do you know German?

Lena: I know the Polish language very well. I can read, write and read with understanding. I can also speak Polish well. I also speak German very well and can read, write and speak German.

In her language portrait (Figure 1), Lena represented Polish with red “veins” throughout the whole-body silhouette to symbolise the crucial role her L1 plays in her life, especially in communicating with her friends and family.

Excerpt 8

Interviewer: Okay. And here I see red lines like in Kamila’s picture.

Lena: Yes, red lines, because I have red blood flowing in me um it means that I will always be Polish (4.0)

Interviewer: And they are all over your body?

Lena: Yes. [...] Yes, Polish is my uhm (5.0) my uhm mother tongue (...) and it is an important language for me because without it I wouldn’t get along with my family and my friends.

The symbolism of blood, shared by both sisters, might come as a surprise yet neither of the girls (also see the next section) elaborates on the choice of this imagery so it is unclear how they have internalised this ideology. Along with her strong identification with Polish, Lena also expressed her attachment to the German language. Her positive attitude towards L2, represented in the language portrait as green, is also evidenced in the girl’s narration about Germany presented as a country worth visiting with beautiful nature associated with pleasant outdoor activities. The German language is placed in the respondent’s legs to render her association with the language and sight-seeing beautiful sites that requires walking. Despite her young age (12), Lena already sees a practical value in mastering German as a language that might be useful in the future.

Excerpt 9

Lena: I speak two languages, German and Polish. Ehm... Polish is very important to me because without it I wouldn’t be able to get on with my family and friends, and in the shops and so on. German is also important to me, but a little less so, because I don’t use it daily, only when I go to Germany or something like that, but I think it will be useful for me in the future (3.0).

Lena sets clear contextual boundaries between her use of L1 and L2. In Poland, she uses almost only Polish as her use of German is limited to occasional interactions with her old classmates and colleagues from Germany. On the other

hand, while in Germany she mostly used German in interactions outside her family, except for one colleague she communicated with in Polish.

Excerpt 10

Lena: Uhm, now I use Polish at home and in Germany I also used Polish. [...] Now I only use Polish because I have no friends or [...] anyone who speaks German and with whom I can get along.

Interviewer: But you still have contact with your German friends with whom you talk?

Lena: Yes, I talk to them often and text them.

Interviewer: And what language did you use when you lived in Germany and left home?

Lena: I mostly used German because um I had a lot of German friends, um who couldn't speak Polish and mostly that German, but I also had, for example, I think one friend who also spoke Polish, so with her I sometimes used German, sometimes Polish.

Lena recalls that after her return to Poland she occasionally mixed the codes and was short of some words in Polish. In such situations, which were rather infrequent, she used a German equivalent. Currently, however, code-mixing is a thing of the past and while in Poland, Lena communicates exclusively in Polish with confidence.

Excerpt 11

Interviewer: (3.0) And did you often face this situation when you changed language? You would say something in Polish and add some words in German or vice versa?

Lena: Yes, it happened. Mostly when I was already living in Poland I still mixed this German language with Polish. For example, when I forgot the name of a flower in Polish, for example, I had no other option and I had to somehow weave this German into a sentence erm (2.0).

Interviewer: So you just lacked a word sometimes?

Lena: Yes.

Interviewer: And that often happened?

Lena: Erm, no. (2.0) I mean well it happened. (3.0) No. I mean [laughter] well not often.

Interviewer: Erm, and now it still happens?

Lena: No, not anymore. Uhm, now I use Polish at home, and in Germany, I also used Polish.

Lena seems motivated to learn languages and she is convinced that her command of German is very good and she will benefit from it in the future. On the other hand, after a while of reflection, she expressed certain criticism when it comes to the real support of L2 maintenance by her parents. Despite her enthusiasm and internal drive for L2 learning, she feels that her progress

is slowed down by a lack of learning materials, especially handbooks. The girl also drops a critical comment that her parents fail to motivate her to work on her L2 development or invest in it.

Excerpt 12

Interviewer: Uhm, ok, and do you care about learning languages as much as your parents do?

Lena: I think yes because it's an important language though and I know it well and I don't want to erm want to forget it because I think it will be useful for me in the future.

Interviewer: And do your parents encourage you to learn German?

Lena: Well, no, because [...] I want to do it out of my own will and I rarely learn this German because I didn't have German books or something to learn from, well but I am not encouraged by my parents.

When it comes to the use of language at home, Lena appears to be satisfied with communicating with her parents exclusively in Polish and would not like to change it. Her only suggestion concerns the language used to communicate with her sister. The girl believes they both would benefit if they started to speak German in their interactions, at least occasionally.

Excerpt 13

Interviewer: And would you like to change something in terms of using the language at home, for example, or outside the home and learning languages?

Lena: Erm... I could, on the other hand, change [...] the language I speak at home, in the sense with my sister... I could change it. I could speak German to her because she has forgotten the language a bit. I would like to teach her a bit that way, but the way it is with my mum and dad, I think I would like to keep it that way, in Polish.

What appears striking in the above excerpt, is the concern for Kamila's L2 loss and the responsibility Lena wishes to take for its maintenance. Despite her young age, Lena manifests a certain level of agency and independence in shaping FLP.

Another important theme in Lena's narrative is the support offered by the school for her L2 maintenance and development. As she recalls, one teacher from her school noticed that she had a pretty good command of German and felt that such an asset could not be wasted. For this reason, he encouraged the girl to participate in a German language competition, originally targeting older pupils.

Excerpt 14

Interviewer: [...] your mum also mentioned the German competition you took part in.

Lena: Yes, I took part in a German competition. And there erm I got to the final and then, unfortunately, I didn't make it any further.

Interviewer: But you were chosen by your teachers?

Lena: Yes, [...] one of our teachers at our school sort of sent me there because he said I couldn't forget the language because I could speak German well and he just didn't want me to forget it, that's why he sent me there. And it was good for me because erm I also learned new things and I also revised some things that here in Poland at home I couldn't revise because I didn't have books.

As evidenced in the above excerpt, taking part in the competition meant a lot to Lena and the teacher's encouragement inspired her to work harder on her L2. Lena believes that thanks to this competition she has learned some new things and had the opportunity to polish her German.

In general, Lena exhibits a highly positive attitude to learning languages and is likely to become a plurilingual person in the future. At school, the girl also learns English but she is not proficient in using it. Nevertheless, she is determined to improve it and enthusiastically acquires it through listening to songs and watching videos on YouTube as well as attending English classes at school. In her language portrait, Lena also features the French language, coded as pink to symbolise fashion, and Croatian coloured yellow to render sunny beaches and pleasant holiday memories related to Croatia (see Figure 1). The girl, however, does not have any competence in these languages – she only mentioned them incidentally to share some positive associations that they evoke.

4.4. Descriptive data analysis: Interviewee 3 (Kamila)

Kamila, Lena's younger seven-year-old sister, is fluent in Polish but has almost lost her German. Although the girl was exposed to German since her birth in Germany and used to speak it fluently, now Kamila claims to find it challenging even to understand the language. It must be noted, however, that Kamila's actual competence in German has not been verified – its evaluation is based on the declarative accounts of the interview participants.

Excerpt 15

Kamila: I speak Polish very well, but German... I don't understand anything.

Interviewer: But you understood it before?

Kamila: Yes, I understood it before.

Interviewer: But you do not remember it now, right?

Kamila: No, I don't remember anything anymore.

Interviewer: And how long have you learnt German?

Kamila: Seven years.

Interviewer: [laughter] so since you were born?

Kamila: Yes. [laughter]

In contrast to her sister, Kamila features only two languages in her language portrait (Figure 2), i.e. Polish and German. Both sisters, however, use similar imagery to represent Polish, pictured as red lines (“veins”) across the whole silhouette, to render it as blood symbolising origin and ancestry. The girl, however, does not provide any further explanations concerning this ideology epitomising language with nation and blood. Importantly, Kamila makes it clear that her birth in Germany does not automatically define her national identity.

Excerpt 16

Interviewer: Kamila, please tell me about your drawing.

Kamila: Erm, I painted the red blood here because even though I lived in Germany this does not mean that I am German. (191–200)

As expressed further in the interview, the girl has rather positive memories of her stay in Germany, especially those related to her school where she used to go to with pleasure. Although she prefers her current school in Poland, in her language portrait Kamila used the colour of her school building in Germany – orange – to represent German. The placement of German in the legs in the language portrait reflects Kamila’s association with going to school in Germany.

As far the German language acquisition is concerned, it seemed a challenge compared to the effortless acquisition of Polish. While in Germany, Kamila was able to communicate in German as “it was the only way to communicate with other people”. It was also a must to attend school and interact with classmates and friends. She also remembers occasional code-switching between her L1 and L2. In Poland, she communicates in Polish exclusively.

Excerpt 17

Interviewer: And is Polish difficult for you?

Kamila: No, it isn’t.

Interviewer: So, is German easier or more difficult?

Kamila: More difficult.

Interviewer: And what language do you use at home when you do your homework, for example, playing with your sister, cleaning?

Kamila: Uhm no, I use Polish all the time, I don’t use German.

Interviewer: Uhm... and what language did you use when you lived in Germany outside your home? For example, at school, on the playground, at the shop?

Kamila: On the playground with my friend, it was erm I used to talk in Polish because he is also Polish.

Interviewer: Uhm. And at school?

Kamila: And at school, I was already speaking in German, because I had to do it there, because nobody would [...] understand me.

Kamila sees much less value in learning German than her sister. Similarly to Lena, she also observes that her parents are not really engaged in her L2 maintenance and do not really encourage her to use or learn German. Yet, in contrast to her sister, she accepts the status quo and appears satisfied with the exclusive use of Polish in all domains. In her case, learning German is not fostered by the school as at her age this is not part of the curriculum. The girl is not even sure whether she will learn it in the future. Currently, she is learning English at school.

Excerpt 18

Interviewer: (5.0) And do you care about learning German as much as your parents do?

Kamila: No.

Interviewer: And do your parents urge you to learn German?

Kamila: No.

Interviewer: And would you like to change something in terms of using languages at home or outside the home and learning languages? For example, would you like to learn more German?

Kamila: No, I wouldn't like that.

Interviewer: Does it suit you that you use Polish at home or would you prefer it to be it be German?

Kamila: Polish.

Interviewer: (2.0) And do you still get the chance to learn German at school?

Kamila: Yes.

Interviewer: And are you studying now?

Kamila: Not yet, but I don't know if I will study.

Although Kamila notices her parents' lack of involvement in L2 maintenance, she does not question it and seems to share her parents' FLP. After her return to Poland, the girl immediately adapted to the new circumstances and treats Germany as a thing of the past. She has accepted the rapidly progressing process of L2 loss and does express any regrets.

5. CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS

The data gathered in the study have illustrated the fluid and pragmatic character of FLP modified by changing life trajectories of the family under scrutiny as evidenced by different language management of L1 (Polish) and L2 (German) in the context of migration and return migration. As far as the FLP towards L1 is concerned, it has been consistent at the level of ideology, practices and management. The parents, especially the mother, were determined to develop L1 and took certain efforts to ensure it. First of all, they communicated exclu-

sively in Polish at home and maintained bonds with their relatives and friends in Poland with whom they interacted regularly. In Germany, they also mostly socialised with members of a Polish community. Additionally, the mother took some measures to develop her daughters' literacy skills in Polish. The girls also attended a Polish Saturday School in Germany which offered rich linguistic and cultural support. As a result, after the return migration to Poland, both children integrated with the Polish school system smoothly and did not encounter any significant language barrier. The FLP towards L2 was, however, quite different. When in Germany, the parents understood the need for L2 acquisition and managed to achieve a communicative level in German. Their daughters were exposed to German mostly in educational institutions (kindergarten, school) since the age of three and throughout their stay in Germany (7 years) became rather proficient users of this language. The parents, however, did not interfere in this process and let schools, teachers and their daughters' peers "do the job". Despite declarative support for multilingualism, after returning to Poland, the parents took little, not to say no effort, to foster their daughters' L2. In time, they passively accepted the gradual L2 loss, which was particularly rapid (at least at the declarative level) in the case of Kamila, who within less than a year almost "forgot the whole German". Again, the parents were convinced that the school was entirely responsible for their daughters' linguistic development and practically did not engage in active language management.

The results of the study have also shown the agency of children in shaping FLP, often in opposition to their parents and/or siblings as evidenced, e.g. in Hunt and Davis's study (2022). Lena remains critical of her parents' lack of engagement in supporting L2 maintenance and demonstrated certain reflection and agency in setting her own FLP. The girl is determined to maintain her L2 and takes her independent initiative to do so, such as keeping in touch with her friends in Germany to communicate with them in German. Although her mother has expressed pride in her daughter's success in a German language competition, a certain theme of regret for progressing L2 loss emerged from the girl's narrative. Lena has complained that she is not even provided with the proper educational materials to study German, not to mention any additional classes. She is aware that after her family's return to Poland, her incidental interactions with friends in Germany are not sufficient to maintain L2 and more systematic actions should be taken. The only person who encourages Lena to work on her L2 and takes any initiative has been her school teacher, which confirms the importance of family-school cooperation in the child's multilingual development (Szczepaniak-Kozak et al. 2023). Additionally, Lena has voiced her concern about her younger sister's L2 loss. Seeing her parent's inertia, the girl intends to take responsibility for developing Kamila's competence in German, which is not in

line with Stevenson and Carl's (2010) or Stavans and Hoffman's (2015) recommendations allocating responsibility for the linguistic development of children to parents, not siblings. Kamila, on the other hand, does not seem as motivated as her sister to continue maintaining L2 and has accepted her declared fast progressing L2 loss, even having expressed her satisfaction with the current FLP and the exclusive use of Polish.

Similarly to previous research (e.g. Wąsikiewicz-Firlej 2016; Hirsch & Lee 2018; Wąsikiewicz-Firlej & Lankiewicz 2019), the current study has shown a discrepancy between the parents' ideologies and the actual practices and management of the family language use. When it comes to L2, the parents' actions were underpinned by the common myth (cf. Grosjean 1997; 2021) that children acquire language effortlessly and do not require much support in this respect. Consequently, after returning to Poland their investment in L2 maintenance was minimal – the children were not even actively encouraged to access German-speaking media or free educational resources. As a result, L2 has become more like a foreign language taught formally at school along with English, irrespective of the possible educational and professional benefits it could offer in the future. On the other hand, in the case of L1 the parents were determined to maintain L1 seeing it as a part of their identity and without any linguistic training, they took a range of activities (e.g. attending a Polish Saturday School, literacy, contact with family, friends, the importance of socialisation and being part of a Polish-speaking community). These measures turned effective for L1 proficiency development but were never applied to foster L2 acquisition and maintenance. Thus, despite the declared support for multilingualism, the parents in the family under study showcased a particular attachment to their L1 as a strong marker of identity and prioritised its maintenance in the context of migration. Throughout their stay in Germany, the family maintained strong bonds with their country of origin and Polish relatives and friends and socialised mainly with members of a Polish-speaking community. At the same time, they took no initiative to manage L2 maintenance after their return to Poland.

As far as pedagogical implications are concerned, the study has pointed to the need for family-school cooperation. First and foremost, parents should be fully aware that multilingual repertoires are an asset but the responsibility for developing their children's linguistic capital should not be delegated solely to schools. Contrary to the parents' lay beliefs reflecting a common myth of children's effortless multilingual development, the maintenance of L2 does indeed require active engagement and support of caregivers (Curdt-Christiansen & Lanza 2018: 123). Our study has also emphasised the role of family-school coop-

eration in fostering children's multilingual development (also see Ballweg 2022; Szczepaniak-Kozak et al. 2023; Rokita-Jaśkow in this issue). The main limitation of the research undertaken is the case-study design which renders it impossible to generalise the results of the study. Yet this exploratory study can serve as a springboard for large-scale studies.

Overall, having in mind methodological limitations, it might be concluded that the data in the current study provided some evidence that the maintenance and acquisition of L2 after return migration requires considerable determination, resources and, most preferably, institutional support.

Funding acknowledgement and disclaimer

The authors declare that this publication was funded with the support from the European Commission (Erasmus+, Strategic Partnerships, grant number: 2020-1-PL01-KA201-08612). It reflects the views only of its authors. The European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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APPENDIX

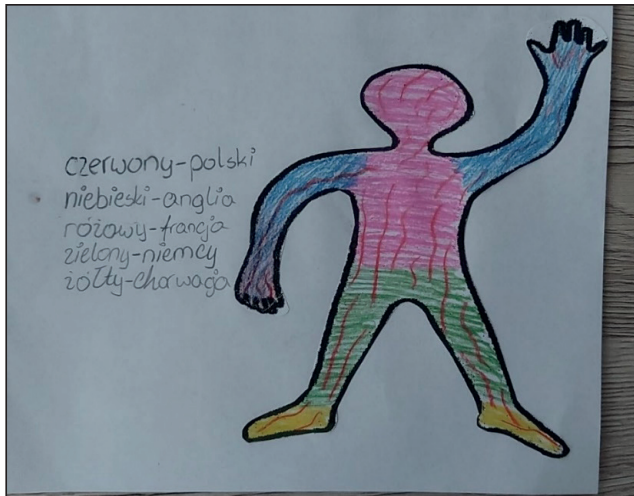


Figure 1. Lena's language portrait

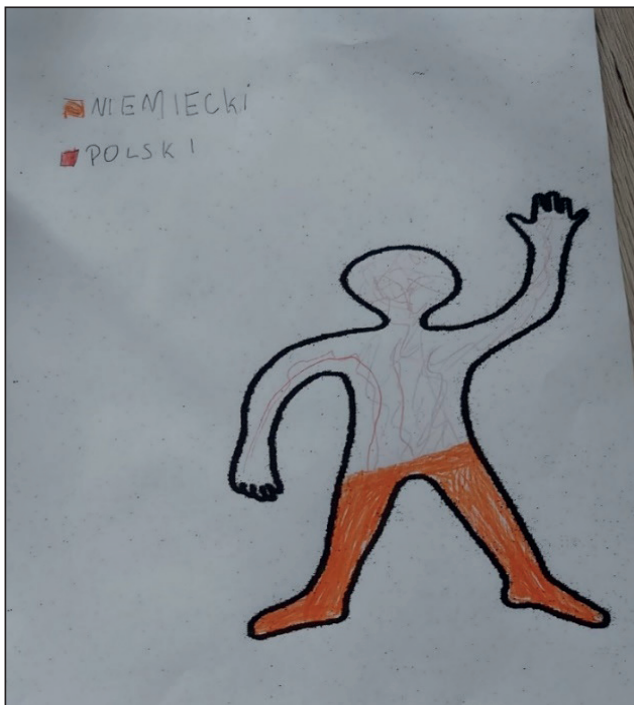


Figure 2. Kamila's language portrait

Received: 30.11.2022; **revised:** 11.03.2023

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