

**Polish in supplementary schools in Great Britain:
A case study of the Polish School
of Manchester**

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*Received 1.02.2018,
received in revised form 20.06.2018,
accepted 29.06.2018.*

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present and discuss the results of a small-scale pilot study of attitudes towards Polish and English conducted at a Polish supplementary school in Manchester, England. The introductory part of the paper presents definitions of bilingualism and bilingual education as well as a variety of approaches and policies concerning bilingual education in the world. This is followed by some basic data on Polish immigrants living in the UK and Polish supplementary schools in the UK. The questionnaire used to elicit the data consists of two sets of questions: one concerns Polish and the other English. The questions and the answers elicited are discussed and compared, with the final concluding part focused on attitudes to Polish, which is the native language of the informants' families.

Keywords

bilingualism, bilingual education, immigration, sociolinguistics

Język polski w szkołach uzupełniających w Wielkiej Brytanii na przykładzie Polskiej Szkoły Ojczyściej w Manchesterze

Abstract

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest prezentacja i omówienie wyników przeprowadzonego na niewielką skalę pilotażowego badania poglądów na języki polski i angielski, które przeprowadzono w Polskiej Szkole Ojczyściej w Manchesterze w Anglii. We wstępie zdefiniowano pojęcia dwujęzyczności i edukacji dwujęzycznej oraz opisano różne podejścia i rozwiązania polityczne dotyczące edukacji dwujęzycznej w świecie. Następnie przedstawiono pokrótce podstawowe dane o polskich imigrantach mieszkających w Zjednoczonym Królestwie oraz o polskojęzycznych szkołach w tym kraju. Kwestionariusz użyty do uzyskania danych zawiera dwa zestawy pytań – jeden o języku polskim i drugi o angielskim. Pytania i uzyskane odpowiedzi zostały omówione i porównane. Ostatnia część zawiera wnioski skupiające się na języku polskim, czyli ojczystym kodzie rodzin respondentów.

Słowa kluczowe

dwujęzyczność, edukacja dwujęzyczna, imigracja, socjolingwistyka

1. Bilingual education and bilingualism

In world history bilingualism of individual speakers, ethnic minorities and entire societies has been the norm rather than an exception. While the inhabitants of nation-states such as Poland or the Czech Republic are accustomed to the prevailing monolingualism in their societies, English-speaking countries, e.g. the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the United States, have always been multicultural, multiethnic and therefore multilingual. Thus English, although spoken by the powerful majority and used as a standardised language in formal contexts, has never been the only language used by all its speakers as their everyday vernacular. Nevertheless, in Western Europe some languages appeared fairly recently, and the

arrival of thousands of Polish speakers in the UK, some of them initially unable to speak English, which took place following Poland's accession to the EU in 2004, was unprecedented in modern British history. Now that the country's immigration policy is further complicated by the prospect of Brexit, we find it particularly important to study speakers' attitudes towards the use of minority languages in education across the UK. This paper presents a small-scale pilot study of Polish students' attitudes towards Polish, the language of their parents, and English, the majority language around them, with a focus on the educational context. Since the number of respondents is small, this is but a prelude to a larger scale study planned to take place in the future; hence we make no claims to exhaustiveness.

For centuries, bilingualism and multilingualism have posed a challenge to education which has been dealt with in various ways. Attempts at forced assimilation, often based on corporal punishment of children speaking a language other than the one required at school may remind one of a distant past or wartime occupation; but in fact such methods are still in use. Romaine (1995: 242-244) provides instances of schoolmasters punishing children for speaking Tok Pisin in Papua New-Guinea and Kurdish in Turkey. She also describes cases where immigrants in Sweden, upon being deprived of parental rights, had their children placed in Swedish-speaking foster families and were forbidden to communicate with their children using their mother tongue. As regards the Kurds, for example, discrimination against their language continues. The Kurdish Human Rights Project, in its briefing paper of July 2011, describes the restricted language learning opportunities that speakers of Kurdish have, including the fact that Turkey now allows Kurdish courses for adults but no schools or courses with Kurdish as the medium of instruction. This discrimination is enforced by Turkish law: in 2011 two students who had protested about the ban on minority language education were sentenced to over ten years in prison. Iraq appears to be the

only country where instruction in Kurdish is permitted and available albeit insufficiently financed, so that few Kurdish children have access to their mother tongue at school (KHRP July 2011: 14-17).

The opposite extreme of this spectrum consists of full freedom of language (ethnic) minorities regarding education either in their mother tongue or in balanced proportions of the minority language and the official language (majority language). This includes systems wherein members of the linguistic majority are required to study the language of a minority. Such is the case in Canada, where the English-speaking students study French, which is employed as the language of instruction in so-called immersion programmes (Romaine 1995: 253-254, see also García 1996: 407). The most vivid instance of a policy of this type in Europe is the Swedish-language schooling system in Finland, where certain areas (i.e. the Åland Islands and parts of the Baltic coast) have long been populated by a minority speaking local varieties of Swedish (*finlands-svenska*). Children from Swedish-speaking families can attend schools that use exclusively Swedish as the language of instruction and where Finnish as a second language is taught at all levels of education (Romaine 1995: 245). Likewise, children from the Finnish-speaking majority attending mainstream Finnish schools across the country are obliged to study Swedish as a second language (called *pakkoruotsi* 'mandatory Swedish'). This equal treatment of Finnish and Swedish, including mandatory Swedish, results from the history of Finland as a land that was under Swedish rule for several centuries; it also meets with opposition on the part of some Finnish speakers (Wojan 2016: 86). Another example of interest is New Zealand. García (1996: 406) describes the system of Maori-language schooling which has been developed since the 1970s. Such schools use Maori as the medium of instruction and teach English as a second language.

Prior to a presentation of the research conducted we find it appropriate to define the terms *bilingualism* and *bilingual edu-*

tion, since they are described in a variety of ways in the reference sources dealing with the topic. What we mean by bilingualism is not the idealistic concept based on the metaphor THE MIND IS A CONTAINER¹ which consists in ‘filling’ the speaker’s mind with two languages so that he/she is equally proficient in both, and knows and uses them as well as any monolingual native speaker of either of these languages (Martin-Jones and Romaine 1985: 32, cited in Romaine 1995: 263). By contrast, what we mean is different combinations of a speaker’s mother tongue (a first or home language, L1) and the official language of a given nation or speech community (a second language, L2), which does not always enable the speaker to acquire identical skills in both of these languages. Below is a series of sample scenarios of language competences in children of immigrants, as exemplified by Polish children in an English-speaking country such as the UK.

Table 1

Examples of language competences in children of Polish immigrants in an English-speaking country

No.	Parent 1	Parent 2	Home languages	Children’s languages
1.	Polish	Polish	Polish	L1: Polish, L2: English
2.	Polish	English	Polish, English	L1: Polish and English
3.	Polish	English	English (non-native for P1)	L1: English (partly influenced by non-native English)
4.	Polish	other	Polish, other	L1: Polish and other, L2: English
5.	Polish	other	English (non-native for both P1 and P2)	L1: English influenced by non-native English

¹ It is part of the conceptual CONDUIT metaphor, which has been described by cognitive linguists, e.g. Lakoff (1987), Lakoff and Johnson (1980). It is worth pointing out that THE MIND IS A CONTAINER was not originally meant to describe bilingualism but the storage of thoughts, ideas, memories and knowledge in general.

Table 1 contains the mother tongues (first languages) of both parents, the languages that the parents use to raise their children and the languages that children acquire at home and elsewhere. Needless to say, the table is overly simplified. Firstly, it does not take into account different proportions of the two languages used at home (e.g. whether each parent uses just one language consistently). Secondly, it does not show whether Polish-speaking parents teach their children literacy skills or merely spoken language. Thirdly, it omits the amount of time that children spend in Polish-speaking environments such as Polish clubs or whether they spend their entire summer holidays in Poland – in fact, one may also include watching television or reading/listening to Polish on the Internet. Fourthly, some parents who decide to raise their children in English speak the language fluently and accurately, while others have only basic communicative skills; thus the linguistic models that such parents provide to their children are varied when compared to the standard or vernacular native-speaker norms. Also, it is possible to find families in which the non-Polish parent speaks Polish and at least occasionally uses it when speaking to the child. Finally, there is a large group of variables affecting language acquisition that should also be taken into account, namely speech impediments, dyslexia, limited hearing capacity and different forms of intellectual/learning disability. All of the aforementioned factors are far too complex to be shown in a brief table.

Table 1 illustrates the situations of children born in an English-speaking country. However, one should bear in mind that immigrants arrive in their new country of residence with children of different ages. Consequently, numerous students attending bilingual schools or supplementary education may not, strictly speaking, be bilingual, for English might as well be their second or even foreign language.

1. Children born in the UK (English L1 or L2);
2. Children who left Poland while acquiring Polish as their L1, e.g. at the age of two (English L1 or L2);

3. Children who left Poland after having acquired Polish as their L1, e.g. at the age of six (English L2);
4. Children who learnt to read and write Polish and began to learn English as a foreign language in Poland, e.g. at the age of ten (English FL > L2?).

Schools across the United Kingdom teach immigrant children with varied language competences (here we do not discuss indigenous language minorities such as speakers of Welsh in Wales or Irish in Northern Ireland). Hence authorities need to implement consistent educational policies and provide more than one option for immigrant parents to select, since not all immigrants are keen on bilingual education. In fact, some members of linguistic minorities are in favour of full linguistic assimilation of their children rather than using a minority language as a medium of instruction. They fear that bilingual education is an obstacle that impedes young people's educational attainment compared to native speakers of the majority language and therefore lowers their chances of being admitted to a good university or college and finding a job that would match their qualifications (Romaine 1995: 251, 260 provides examples of such attitudes from the USA and Germany). It is essential to realise that education for children of immigrants and other linguistic minorities has a wide range of objectives, some of them directly opposing others. The aims in question range from shaping monolingual native-speaker competence in the majority language with gradual attrition of mother tongue skills (the 'submersion' method) to preserving and developing mother tongue skills ('language maintenance', see Romaine 1995: 257-258) combined with simultaneous development of study skills in the language of the majority. A detailed classification of bilingual education is included in García (1996: 410-416).

A noteworthy and fairly recent concept that describes the multiplicity and multimodality of bilingual speakers' lives is that of *translanguaging*, i.e. the use of whatever linguistic means native speakers of two or more languages have at their

disposal. Instead of focusing on speakers lacking words or structures in one language and thus borrowing them from another, the switching and mixing of separate codes, translinguaging stresses the crossing of traditionally understood linguistic borders and as such has often been applied to the study of education (Vogel and García 2016: 3).

We thus arrive at a definition of bilingual education. It is, we understand, the use of two languages as means of instruction and allows for a fairly balanced maintenance of students' mother tongue and as well as development of majority language competences that are as close as possible to those of its monolingual native speakers at the same stage of education. Contrary to the view derived from the metaphor *THE MIND IS A CONTAINER*, we do not mean that a bilingual speaker (student) should become 'a double monolingual' speaker, i.e. one who knows and speaks two languages just as well as a monolingual speaker who devoted his/her entire early childhood to the acquisition of one language. Occasional calques, such as verbatim translation of collocations, idioms or structures, an audible foreign accent in either language, and code switching or mixing in different situational contexts are not symptoms of the failure of bilingual education or so-called semilingualism unless they seriously impede understanding and cause breakdowns in communication. Bilingual education should enable students to function well in communities of native speakers of both languages and continue their education in either language. In an ideal situation, minority students enrolled in a bilingual programme socialise with the other students, their groups are often integrated and bilingual programme teachers are either bilingual or highly proficient in both languages (García 1996: 418); for example, Polish teachers at a school for Polish children in an English-speaking country could be expected to speak English at the native or CEFR C2 level. This extended definition of bilingual education excludes the following: schools with an extended English curriculum in Poland, since in this context English is merely a foreign language and

not an official or majority language in the country; virtually total immersion in a minority language as in Swedish-language schools in Finland; a gradual change from using students' mother tongue to teaching in the majority language, known as 'transitional bilingualism' (Romaine 1995: 245, see also García 1996: 412); let alone submersion, whose aim is to force students to use the majority language only.

Supplementary (Saturday) schools are one of the most widely available forms of bilingual education. Students attending an ordinary majority-language school on weekdays also go to a separate educational establishment where they study in the language of their community – this form is well-known (García 1996: 414). In their report Evans and Gillan-Thomas provide a description of supplementary schools in the UK (see also Gościmska 2017: 132):

Supplementary schools, sometimes known as complementary schools, provide part-time educational opportunities for children and young people, primarily from Black and minority ethnic communities. They commonly offer mother-tongue language classes, faith and cultural studies, alongside activities such as sport, music, dance and drama, as well as supporting National Curriculum subjects. They are established and managed by community members, often on a voluntary basis, and operate from community centres, youth clubs, religious institutions and mainstream schools. While many supplementary schools are small local groups run by parents, others are part of larger organisations that provide a range of services. There are an estimated 3,000-5,000 such schools in England. (Evans and Gillan-Thomas 2015: 3)

The Polish school in Manchester, where we conducted our study, is one of these supplementary weekend schools.

2. Polish-language education in Great Britain

According to the British Office for National Statistics, the UK is inhabited by 831,000 (\pm 41,000) people born in Poland, which

makes Poles the largest ethnic minority in the country. This number does not include the children of Polish citizens who were born in the UK. An article published in *The Guardian* in 2014 stated that 16,000 Polish children were enrolled in a total of 150 Polish schools throughout the country (Sobków 2014). Over 130 of these schools belong to the Polish Educational Society (Polska Macierz Szkolna), an association of Polish supplementary schools in Great Britain and Northern Ireland which also promotes Polish education and culture in the UK and runs an examination centre which allows candidates to take GCSE and A-level examinations in the Polish language (PES website).

3. Questionnaire-based study

Our study was conducted in English at the Polish School of Manchester (Polska Szkoła Ojczysta). Printed questionnaires were given to eleven students (seven boys and four girls of ages 11-17, the average age being 14) attending the school in April 2017. All but one were born in Poland, emigrated to the UK before the age of five, and were raised in well-educated families. The students answered two sets of questions about English and Polish. The first set consisted of 11 questions regarding learning Polish, and the second set consisted of 15 questions regarding learning English. Half of each set contained open-ended, non-multiple choice questions. In the other half, the questions were provided with two options: multiple choice and 'other', an option with a space that could be filled with the informant's own answer. The introductory part contained questions about the gender, grade, age and native language(s) as well as foreign languages studied by the informants. The students were informed about the aim of the anonymous questionnaire. In the question regarding their native languages eight students selected only Polish as their mother tongue. Three students selected both languages (Polish and English) as their mother tongues. Furthermore, six students were learning

at least one additional language, mainly French although Russian and Spanish were also being acquired.

Some of the questions that we asked referred to “correctness”. We decided to use this prescriptivist term since schoolchildren and teenagers are familiar with the notion of correctness in the objectivist sense; arguably, using terms such as *grammaticality*, *standard* or *non-standard usage* would have rendered the questions incomprehensible even to adult informants.

4. Data presentation

4.1. Attitudes towards Polish

In the part regarding the informants’ attitudes towards Polish and learning the language we posed the questions enumerated below and formulated preliminary conclusions which we realise require both further research on a wider scale and a deeper, more detailed analysis. The questions are presented in the order of appearance on the questionnaire.

Why do you learn Polish at school and outside school?

Four students claimed that they learned Polish due to their parents. Three students claimed that their only motivation was individual self-motivation to master Polish in practice. Two students provided arguments concerning a return to Poland. Only one 12-year-old student claimed that he learned Polish because he is a Pole.

What is your strength as regards your Polish language skills?

Four students considered only speaking Polish as their only strength. Moreover, two students claimed that aside from speaking they had other strong skills in Polish. Five students

claimed writing as their strength and five other informants mentioned reading comprehension.

What is your weakness as regards your Polish language skills?

Six students believed grammar to be their weakness in Polish (two of them mentioned grammar only). Similarly, six students claimed that spelling and punctuation in Polish were their major weaknesses. Only one student regarded speaking as his weakness and another one reading comprehension.

What kind of testing of your progress in Polish do you find the most appropriate?

The majority of the students (e.g. five) wrote that a written form of testing their progress in Polish was the most appropriate (e.g. written tests or dictations). Although six students claimed that speaking was their strength in Polish, there were no consequences of this choice which would be reflected in the methods of measuring their L1 skills. Only one student regarded speaking as the most appropriate method to test his Polish. Three students did not answer this question.

How often do you assess the correctness of your own spoken utterances in Polish?

Only three informants claimed that they always reflected on the correctness of their spoken utterances in Polish. Two students did not answer this question. None of them admitted that he/she never assessed the correctness of his/her own spoken utterances. The six remaining informants did so rarely, occasionally or often.

How often do you judge the correctness of other people's utterances in Polish?

Only one student did not answer this question. Three students claimed that they never assessed or judged other people's utterances in Polish. Three students did it often or invariably. The others judged the Polish of other speakers rarely or sometimes.

Who is the most important authority on Polish usage to you?

For nine of the informants the most important authorities on Polish were their parents (six answers), or their mother only (three). Only one student claimed that the teacher provided the most authoritative model of Polish. The informants who chose their mother rather than both parents may be those whose father is not Polish or they simply believe that their mother speaks a more standard or 'correct' variety of Polish. Note also that no one chose only their father.

Is the mastery of correctness in Polish more important to you than knowledge of foreign languages?

The replies showed a lack of agreement on this issue: four of the respondents admit that correctness in Polish is more important, while four others think otherwise. Three respondents did not answer this question.

Can a good knowledge of Polish help people to learn foreign languages?

Five of the students agreed that a good knowledge of Polish can help people to learn foreign languages.

Are you interested in studying Polish at university?

The majority of the students, namely nine, claimed that they were not interested in studying Polish at university. The aim of this question was to find whether the informants were interested in Polish not only as a means of communication but also as a focus of their future career. We also asked an analogical question about English.

Do you like learning Polish?

Most of the students (seven) liked learning Polish. However, it would be difficult to see whether their positive attitude towards learning the language of their parents is a consequence of attending a Polish school or the reason why they originally decided to enroll in such a school.

4.2. Attitudes towards English

We attempted to make the part concerning English as similar as possible to the part on Polish discussed above. As can be seen, not all the questions are identical, since they had to take into account the fact that the respondents were raised in an English-speaking country and English was also the primary language of their education. As in section 4.1, the questions are presented in order of appearance and each is provided with a summary of the results.

Why do you learn English?

The informants' motivation to learn English was varied, but the most typical answer to this question, written by five students, was that they learnt English simply owing to their place of residence and their attendance at an English-language school.

What is your strength as regards your English?

The majority of the students (eight) believed speaking to be their strength in English – this was similar to their analogical answer concerning Polish. Only five students considered reading to be their strong point.

What is your weakness as regards your English?

For four of the students writing in English was difficult. Similarly, four other students had difficulties assessing their major weakness.

What kind of testing of your progress in English do you find the most appropriate?

The answers to this question varied considerably. The students mentioned the following methods: oral examinations, different written forms and self-assessment. Three students did not provide any answer and two others found written tests the most appropriate form of English language assessment.

How often do you assess the correctness of your own spoken utterances in English?

Three informants self-assessed the correctness of their own English utterances only rarely and one student claimed that he never did so. Five students chose the options ‘always’, ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’.

How often do you judge the correctness of other people’s English?

Seven students claimed that they judged other speakers’ English more often than rarely, namely: always, often or sometimes.

Who is the most important authority on English usage to you?

Five students claimed that their most important authority on English usage was their teacher (their English teacher or other teachers as well). The remaining respondents mentioned the following: a dictionary, nobody, 'everyday life', friends, school-mates etc. In Poland the traditional authorities on Polish usage are the best known prescriptive linguists such as Jan Miodek or Jerzy Bralczyk, and thus Polish teenagers living in Poland are likely to have heard of them. In Great Britain the prescriptive approach to English was a subject of popular debate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whereas currently popular linguistics focuses on aspects of sociolinguistics (e.g. the works by David Crystal) rather than the prescriptive notion of 'good' English. In other words there are no household names among prescriptive linguists whose popularity could be compared to that of Miodek or Bralczyk.

What is the most difficult part of English to you?

Spelling and punctuation proved to be the most challenging aspects of English usage for the respondents.

Is knowledge of foreign languages more important to you than the mastery of correctness in your native language?

More than half the students (six) did not answer this question. Two students claimed that knowledge of foreign languages was not more important than mastering Polish usage and three students claimed that it was more important.

How often, when speaking English to someone, can you recognise correctly that he/she is a native speaker of English?

Five students claimed that they were always able to correctly recognise if they were dealing with a native or a non-native speaker of English. Seven students could do so often or sometimes. We asked this question as we felt that identifying a native speaker of a given language correctly was a significant aspect of bilingual competence, particularly in the case of children or adolescents. In adults this skill is perhaps of less significance since fluent speakers of a foreign language can also develop this ability.

Are you interested in studying English or American studies at university?

Four students were interested, while four other students were not. Perhaps the age of the respondents made the question less relevant than it would have been in a larger group of students aged sixteen to eighteen.

Do you like learning English?

Eight students admitted that they liked learning English.

5. Discussion

None of the respondents failed to answer the question about why he/she is learning Polish at school and outside the school. Statistically speaking (much as we realise that the number of filled-in questionnaires has been small so far), we note that pressure or encouragement on the part of the parents as well as willingness to return to Poland in the future are the most common reasons why Polish adolescents attend schools with Polish as the medium of instruction.

The informants consider speaking to be their best developed skill in Polish, while their weakest points are grammar, vocabulary and spelling (including punctuation). These results may suggest a typically school-oriented approach to language skills,

in that speaking is spontaneous in nature whereas grammar, vocabulary and spelling are skills that are linked to conscious linguistic effort for which grades are assigned at school.

The respondents self-reflect on the correctness of their Polish; however, few of them do so frequently or invariably. Generally, they assess their own spoken Polish more than English. They also judge other people's language and as far as English is concerned, they are able to discern a native speaker from a non-native one.

5. Conclusions

Several years ago Błasiak (2011) described the linguistic situation of a sizeable group of Polish speakers in the UK (128 respondents). On the basis of the questionnaires obtained, Błasiak concluded that for the vast majority of the respondents both languages, Polish and English, were 'valuable and desirable' [our translation, p. 71] and their mastery a worthy pursuit. All of the respondents except for one reported that they were perfecting both languages. Also, a quarter of the speakers admitted they used code mixing, a variety known as Polglish or Ponglish, to communicate with other Polish speakers. This latter observation, one may note in passing, appears to illustrate the aforementioned concept of translanguaging.

Supplementary schools arguably play a significant role in the maintaining of national identity in the youngest generation of Poles living in the UK. Our study, though only preliminary, shows that the informants make a conscious effort to perfect their Polish language skills. They also pay attention to linguistic correctness (in the prescriptivist sense of the term) in Polish and its use in everyday life as expatriates as well as in Poland.

We fully agree with Sibiga (1999: 15), who claims thus: 'Research into the language of students attending Polish schools abroad would prove useful not only in ethnic minority education but also in describing the attitudes of the young generation [of Polish speakers] towards Polish, the state of the lan-

guage overseas and trends in language change' [our translation]. We hope that our study pursues the goals described by Sibiga to a certain extent and that it may become a starting point for a larger study of attitudes towards the Polish language in Polish diasporas abroad.

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