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## Multilingual Families Based in Poland: An Investigation into Family Language Policies

### SUMMARY

This article explores family language policies among mixed families in Poland, focusing on how family members perceive and manage their languages. Using Spolsky's FLP Model, the authors analysed 79 case studies of multilingual speakers based on in-depth narrative interviews conducted between 2014 and 2021. The findings revealed that although families expressed explicit language ideologies and strategies, these often did not align with their actual language practices. The analysis also indicated that the affective and social aspects of multilingualism, such as the language status resulting from the political, social, and historical situation, were crucial factors influencing family language policies.

### KEYWORDS

multilingual family; Family Language Policy; language ideology; language management; language practices; heritage language

### 1. Introduction

This paper presents the results of a study on language biographies of multilingual speakers, focusing on mixed families residing in Poland. This study is situated within the interdisciplinary research field of Family Language Policy (FLP) (Hollebeke et al., 2020; Piller & Gerber, 2018; Spolsky, 2012), where language behaviours are analysed within the broader social and cultural context of family life. FLP views these behaviours as reflections of parental beliefs and the values they assign to their languages and cultures.

Although research on family language policies is a relatively new field, it has garnered increasing interest, as evidenced by the growing number of publications (see King & Fogle, 2013; Lanza & Lomeu Gomes, 2020; Schwartz, 2010, for

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review). What makes this area particularly compelling for researchers, as noted by King and Fogle (2006, p. 696), is that “family language policy decisions merit careful investigation as the linguistic, psychological, and emotional stakes for both children and parents are high”.

Additionally, this research field offers significant opportunities for cross-linguistic comparisons, as many combinations still need to be thoroughly investigated (cf. Bose et al. 2023, p. 359). In particular, there is a noticeable lack of publications devoted to the Polish language (cf. Stępkowska, 2021a).

Building on Spolsky’s Family Language Policy Model (2004, 2012, 2017, 2019), we aimed to identify the language ideologies of the families studied and examine how compatible these are with their family language management and practices. Since the affective and social aspects of FLP are less frequently discussed (cf. De Houwer, 2020; Hollebeke et al., 2020; Ivanova, 2019; Juvonen et al., 2020), this study focused on the affective and social factors influencing the formation of family language policies in mixed families in Poland.

Given the unique nature of each respondent’s multilingual experience and the potential divergence between their perspectives and those of their family members (cf. Wilson, 2020), our study concentrated on attitudes towards languages – particularly heritage languages – and bi-/multilingualism, as well as multilingual upbringing, as perceived by the respondents and their (extended) families. We also considered the attitudes of third parties, such as teachers, educators, and professionals consulted by parents regarding their children’s developmental issues, where the data permitted. We assumed that varying attitudes toward individual languages – shaped by their relative status in Poland and the international community – would be vital in shaping the language policy of the families studied (Curdts-Christiansen & Huang, 2020).

Our analysis concerned 79 cases of mixed families residing in Poland. We acknowledge the limitations of our study and the challenge of generalising from an even larger number of case studies to a broader population (Duff, 2012). Our goal was not to generalise universally but to provide practical insights and illustrate findings with qualitative data. We aimed to corroborate previous research, identify significant patterns, and highlight phenomena and regularities discussed in the literature in a concrete and personal way. However, given the large number of cases, some of our results allow us to draw relevant and new conclusions.

## **2. The study**

### **2.1. Research Questions**

Our analysis is guided by three key questions inspired by Spolsky’s FLP model:

1. What language ideologies do multilingual families residing in Poland represent?
2. Are there discrepancies between the language ideologies of these families and

their actual linguistic realities? 3. Which factors, especially affective and social, can be identified as shaping these discrepancies?

## 2.2. Research material and procedure

Our analysis was based on case studies (language biographies) of bilingual and multilingual speakers. The case studies were conducted by student researchers at the Faculty of Applied Linguistics of the University of Warsaw<sup>1</sup> in the years 2014–2021 as part of a research project devoted to selected aspects of bilingualism<sup>2</sup>. Each language biography was based on an in-depth narrative interview with a bi-/multilingual respondent or – in the case of young children – with their parents (cf. Cavallaro et al., 2023; Doyle, 2013; Et-Bozkurt & Yağmur, 2022; Karpava et al., 2020; Romanowski, 2021, 2022; Sevinç & Mirvahedi, 2023). To minimise the risk of suggested responses, the student researchers conducted an unstructured interview without using a predefined questionnaire, allowing them to freely choose and formulate questions.

For this analysis, we selected 79 language biographies from respondents raised in families, where the parents were native speakers of two or more languages (cf. Guardado, 2017; Yamamoto, 2001) and living in Poland. The respondents' ages at the time of the interview ranged from 2 to 81 years<sup>3</sup>. In all but one family, either the mother or father was of Polish origin (cf. cross-native/community language families, Yamamoto, 2001, p. 42), with 49 cases where the mother was Polish and 29 where the father was Polish. In one case, both parents represented different non-Polish languages (cross-linguistic/non-community language family, cf. Yamamoto, 2001, p. 42). Across the families, the fathers spoke 18 languages other than Polish (see Table 2)<sup>4</sup>, while the mothers spoke 11 (see Table 3).<sup>5</sup>

## 2.3. Aim of the analysis and methodology

The aim of this analysis was to investigate how bi-/multilingual families residing in Poland perceived, managed, and practised language use within the family context, focusing on emotional and social factors that shaped these processes.

<sup>1</sup> We would like to express our gratitude to all the student researchers for conducting the interviews, preparing the case study reports, and for agreeing to use them in our study.

<sup>2</sup> More detailed information about the project, selection criteria for respondents, etc., can be found in Banasiak & Olpińska-Szkielko (2019, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Detailed data on respondents are presented in Table 1 in Appendix: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WWgqrS1Cqh\\_nFUPdfxUGRnSWIsnj1wDSKCR\\_GuW\\_tWg/edit?tab=t.0](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WWgqrS1Cqh_nFUPdfxUGRnSWIsnj1wDSKCR_GuW_tWg/edit?tab=t.0)

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WWgqrS1Cqh\\_nFUPdfxUGRnSWIsnj1wDSKCR\\_GuW\\_tWg/edit?tab=t.0](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WWgqrS1Cqh_nFUPdfxUGRnSWIsnj1wDSKCR_GuW_tWg/edit?tab=t.0)

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WWgqrS1Cqh\\_nFUPdfxUGRnSWIsnj1wDSKCR\\_GuW\\_tWg/edit?tab=t.0](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WWgqrS1Cqh_nFUPdfxUGRnSWIsnj1wDSKCR_GuW_tWg/edit?tab=t.0)

Drawing on Spolsky's FLP model (2004, 2012, 2017, 2019), the study employed qualitative research methods, particularly thematic analysis, to explore the language ideologies, management strategies, and language behaviours of the families involved.

In our study, language ideology refers to parents' beliefs about their own and their partners' languages and cultures, their views on raising bilingual/multilingual children, and their willingness to foster their children's bi-/multilingual competence. Language management, following Lanza (1992, 1997, 2001), is defined as explicit parental strategies aimed at shaping family language practices. These include the "one person, one language" strategy (OPOL), the oldest and still the most common model for balancing languages within the family (cf. Baker, 2011, pp. 92–103; Barron-Hauwaert, 2004; Yamamoto, 2001), and the "minority language at home" (MLAH) strategy, often combined with time- or place-based approaches. The MLAH strategy, aimed at promoting the minority (heritage) language within the family, is also referred to as "the principle of maximal engagement with the minority language" (Schwartz, 2020, p. 200; Yamamoto, 2001, p. 128). The other strategies are, at best, considered "mixed strategies" (Schwartz, 2020, p. 205) and, more critically, as "no strategy at all" (Guardado, 2017, p. 7). In discussing the mixed strategies, Schwartz (2020, p. 205) introduces the concept of the "design of home language environment," defining it as a set of language practices parents use to foster bilingual development. Our study adopts this understanding, which refers to the specific linguistic behaviours observed in the analysed families.

Thematic analysis was used to identify and examine recurring themes in the data, focusing on how family members expressed their beliefs about languages (language ideology), what endeavours they made to sustain their particular family languages – the mother's language (or languages) and the father's language (or languages) and how they navigated multilingual upbringing (language management), and how they actually used their languages within the family (language practices). This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences of family members, with particular attention to emotional and social influences on language decisions (cf. Hollebeke et al., 2020; De Houwer, 2020). By analysing these qualitative data, we aimed to uncover the underlying factors shaping family language policies and offer insights into how multilingual families negotiate language use in their daily lives. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the affective and social dimensions of family language policy (cf. Ivanova, 2019; Juvonen et al., 2020).

For this analysis, L1 was defined as a mother's language, and L2 was defined as a father's language, regardless of whether Poland was the country of origin of the mother, the father, or neither and regardless of which language L1 or L2 or neither was dominant for a child. In the further part of the article, we refer to the

language (languages) of the family other than Polish as a heritage language(s) (cf. Montrul, 2020, p. 61).

## 2.4. Findings

### 2.4.1. Parental attitudes and linguistic realities: the declared versus the practised

In the analysed cases of mixed families in Poland, parents mostly declared mutual respect for all their languages and cultures, equal status of all languages within the family and willingness to bring up their children bi- or multilingually. The following excerpts illustrate this:

#### Case 22:

The decision to raise the child so that she had language competence in both languages [Polish and Italian] was made long before her birth; it was well thought out and jointly agreed upon<sup>6</sup>.

#### Case 59:

The parents had a positive attitude towards both cultures [Bulgarian and Polish]. This seemed to be confirmed by the fact that each of the parents learned the spouse's language, and both languages were used in the home daily.

However, the declared equivalence of the languages did not in all cases translate into the linguistic reality of the family because in almost two-thirds of the cases (65.3%), where Polish was the language of the mother (L1), the father did not know it or did not exceed a basic level of proficiency (see Table 2).<sup>7</sup> This means that in at least 32 out of 49 cases, in which the father's language was different from Polish, the languages could not have equal status within the family. The father's language (L2) became necessarily the only possible language of family communication, sometimes preceded by a stage when a third language (mostly English) was used between the parents:

#### Case 43:

The father did not speak Polish at all. [...] The mother was fluent in both languages. Therefore, the parents communicated with each other only in Italian.

#### Case 63:

The father had never spoken Polish; attempts at learning it were unsuccessful. The parents first communicated in English [...]. Later, when the mother developed her language skills in Greek, they started using it in the family.

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<sup>6</sup> All excerpts were translated into English by the authors of the article.

<sup>7</sup> The scope of our analysis did not include the measurement of the language competence of the respondents and their parents, but we were interested in how the knowledge or lack of knowledge of one partner's language reflected the attitude towards this language of the other parent.

In families where the father's language (L2) was Polish, and the mothers represented other languages, in nearly 69% of the cases (see Table 3), the fathers were proficient in the mother's language, most often for professional reasons and/or related to a longer stay in the mother's country. However, this did not mean the heritage language (L1) received more significant support. In almost all cases, regardless of the father's proficiency in L1, the family language was the father's – Polish.

As for the mother's knowledge of the father's language, instances where mothers did not know it or did not learn it during the marriage were exceptional, with only three such cases among the analysed case studies. In two cases, the mother's language was English; in one case, it was French, which the fathers were also proficient in (Cases 18, 53, and 71).

Thus, the father's language often emerged as the preferred language of the family, whether it was Polish (the majority language) or a non-Polish minority language. But in six cases involving Flemish, Pashto, Swahili, Punjabi, Turkish, and Vietnamese did the fathers, finding these languages "less useful," substantially refrain from transmitting them to their children, opting instead for English:

**Case 67:**

The father of Peter considered this language [Pashto] useless, and as he used only English daily, he did not make any attempt to even speak to him in Pashto.

**Case 74:**

The mother was Polish, while her father was from Kenya [...]. Veronica had communicated with her father in English since childhood.

#### *2.4.2. Parental strategies and agency in multilingual development: from declared intentions to practical actions*

The (declared) attitudes of acceptance and respect for both parents' languages and cultures only partially influenced the language choice for family communication. A more significant influence came from language management, specifically the explicit parental strategies aimed at shaping language practices within the family (Lanza 1992, 1997, 2001).

Regardless of the languages used for communication between the parents and within the family, the OPOL model was the most frequently chosen strategy for interactions between parents and children. However, as noted by Caldas (2012, p. 352), "the majority of parents do not strategically plan a policy". Correspondingly, in many of the analysed cases, the parents' behaviour could likely not be described as consciously "strategic," even though they followed the principle of speaking to the child in their respective languages. The parents sometimes believed their children's bi-/multilingualism would develop "on its own" and were not concerned to take specific actions to support their linguistic development:

**Case 30:**

When Izabell was born, her parents did not particularly think about developing bilingualism in her, as they assumed that alternating contact with two languages from birth would be enough for the girl to become fluent in Polish and English.

Over time, this attitude was modified in some cases. In certain families, especially when the parents realised that the heritage language (most often L2) needed more support, OPOL was eventually adjusted to MLAH. This meant both parents exclusively used the heritage language in interactions with the child (e.g. Case 20) or selected specific times of day to speak the heritage language (time strategy; e.g. Case 36, see below). Sometimes, they also adopted the place strategy – using the heritage language at home while reserving the majority language for interactions outside the home (Case 6).

Most parents were genuinely interested in fostering their children's multilingual competence (cf. Fogle & King, 2013). They closely observed their children and actively sought to address any emerging difficulties. A very interesting example was the case of Julia's family (Case 36). From birth, Julia's parents communicated with her in their native languages – her mother in Polish and her father in English. Initially, Julia's contact with both languages was balanced. However, once she started preschool at the age of 3, her preference shifted towards Polish: "The parents noticed that the child was more willing to speak Polish even in everyday communication at home. The child was increasingly refusing to communicate in English". Noticing this, her parents decided to allocate specific times for English, using it from Monday to Friday evenings ("from 6.00 p.m.") and during activities such as watching films, reading bedtime stories, and playing games. Julia was resistant to this structured use of English, e.g. preferring Polish for shared reading and showing a decreased mood when English was used. Her parents realised they were applying too much pressure and thus shifted to a more relaxed approach. They continued to offer English activities, but only if Julia was interested. This adjustment led Julia to increasingly choose English on her own. Eventually, she communicated with her mother in Polish and English, depending on the situation (English was the family language), and with her father in English.

The parents' care for their children's proper multilingual development is also evidenced by the anxiety they expressed when observing developmental challenges made in several case study reports. The parents frequently indicated the mixing of languages in children, sometimes some delays in their linguistic development and communication difficulties predominantly at the moment of starting education in kindergarten or school (cf. Piller & Gerber, 2018):



**Case 20:**

The first problem was noticed around the age of 5, when Filip, as a normally developing child, spoke relatively a lot, mixing both languages in one sentence.

**Case 38:**

Julie spent most of the day speaking English [her father worked at home and spent all day with his daughter]. Her vocabulary and fluency in Polish became poorer. She often used English constructions in Polish. This greatly concerned her mother, who began to worry about her vocabulary level and how she would be different from her peers when she started school.

Despite these concerns, the family language practices, regardless of whether they were used consciously and strategically, should be regarded as effective since all respondents unanimously identified themselves as (at least functionally) bi-/multilingual and viewed their competence in all their languages as adequate.

#### *2.4.3. Children's subjectivity and agency in multilingual development: personal engagement and identity formation*

In several mixed families we examined, the children ultimately took the lead in shaping their multilingualism and managed the process independently. The respondents, most often in their teenage years, were consciously involved in various actions to support the development of their heritage language and made efforts to improve their knowledge of it, for example, by advancing literacy in this language (e.g. Case 27; Case 75).

Respondents in our study highly valued their multilingual competence and demonstrated very positive attitudes towards it:

**Case 48:**

Lucyna mentioned nothing but positive aspects of bilingualism. She said that her peers influenced her perception of herself more than her family. When she talked about the family situation, she said that both she and her brother were able to speak freely in two languages; everyone's reaction was admiration and sometimes even envy. Everyone said that they would like that too, so Lucyna felt fulfilled, happy and quite special.

Moreover, the respondents knew and appreciated the benefits of bilingualism, including "a very broadly defined tolerance, ease of adapting to a new situation, openness and above-average ability to learn new languages" (Case 8), and they talked about it openly and directly.

In terms of the linguistic competence of the respondents, Polish – as L1 or as L2 or neither (Case 45) – was, without exception, the dominant language in all the cases. The respondents generally identified as Polish but also felt a connection to the language and culture of the other parent's country, as seen in the case of Dominic (Case 16), who considered both Poland and Greece his homeland. The vast majority of the respondents declared that they wanted to live permanently in Poland, although they often intended to or already had studied abroad (not necessarily in the L1/L2



country other than Poland, but in a third country). Many respondents also chose jobs that allowed them to travel frequently to the L1/L2 country (e.g. a translator, travel guide, etc.). If they decided to change their country of residence, it was for practical reasons (career planning) and not for emotional reasons:

**Case 79:**

Zosia was studying oceanography at the University of Gdańsk, so she would like to live in an English-speaking country with access to the ocean, as there is a greater demand for skilled workers in this field.

The respondents had, in general, no unpleasant memories related to their bi-/multilingual upbringing. In single cases, they mentioned their childhood memories of situations that they perceived as unpleasant or discriminatory due to their bilingualism on the part of the social environment, especially their peers. Stasiak (Case 72) had to endure “malicious comments from his peers while discussing the topic of WWII during history lessons”, and Benjamin (Case 11) “was called names and asked to go back to Russia”. Veronica (Case 74) experienced some unpleasantness “for racist reasons”.

Apart from these, the majority of the bilinguals in our study stated that they could not remember any communication difficulties or discrimination from their childhood and declared their willingness to raise their own children bilingually. This best demonstrates their positive attitude toward bilingualism and the fact that they regard it as a value, as it is not at all evident that bilingualism is passed on and continued in the next generation (cf. Varro, 1998; see also Canac-Marquis & Walker, 2016; Schwartz, 2008). In one case, the process had already started:

**Case 62:**

Natalie already had a daughter who was also brought up bilingually. She was helped by her over 90-year-old grandmother from Argentina (the great-grandmother of the child) [at the time of the study she lived in Poland with her son’s family who took care of her], who previously made a great contribution to maintaining the Spanish language as L2 in her granddaughter, the daughter of her son.

#### *2.4.4. The impact of social environment: the role of extended family and experts in shaping multilingual development*

As in the case of Natalie mentioned above, many of the linguistic biographies of the multilingual respondents revealed that the attitudes of extended families, particularly grandparents (cf. Bohnacker, 2022), as well as friends, towards bi-/multilingualism were generally positive, regardless of the languages involved. In many cases, they were strongly committed to supporting the parents in fostering their children’s bi- or multilingual development:

#### Case 75:

The process of language acquisition [of Veronika] took place in favourable socio-psychological conditions and was very successful. She grew up in the most favourable environmental conditions. The community showed full acceptance of her bilingualism. It was not only her parents who tried very hard to support the development of both Polish and Arabic but also the rest of the family, such as her grandparents as well as her peers, who also contributed to this.

The exceptions to this were Russian (e.g. Case 11 and 72 mentioned above) and, surprisingly, German, due probably to historical and political circumstances:

#### Case 41:

The relatives did not fully support the parents' initiative [bilingual upbringing of their son, Konrad, in Polish and German], especially the older generation, including Konrad's grandparents, who judged his parents' actions as 'messing with his head'.

The parents largely considered the opinions of their extended families in their decisions about their children's multilingual development while also being guided by their own intuitions. In contrast, they less frequently sought expert advice or consulted professional literature (cf. King & Fogle, 2006). Nevertheless, there were cases where the parents' decision to limit or stop the child's contact with heritage languages resulted from advice given by specialists, such as teachers, speech therapists and psychologists, to whom the parents turned in cases of observed developmental issues, such as unbalanced linguistic development or delays in language acquisition (cf. Mirvahedi & Hosseini, 2023).

A telling case was that of Iwo (Case 29):

At the age of 6, [...] some symptoms appeared which the school psychologist interpreted as a disorder in the child's language development, possibly including dyslexia. It was suggested that the parents should eliminate one of the languages as this would be crucial in Iwo's 'therapy' and his development would quickly stabilise.

Initially, the parents found it a good solution, but after a short time they decided against it.

They found many documented cases of children with serious language disorders and dyslexia who spoke and read in two languages. Based on reading, scientific research and conversations with other parents and an external psychologist, the parents came to the conclusion that this dyslexic disorder was absolutely not a contraindication to continuing bilingual development.

In Iwo's case, not following the school psychologist's advice was the right choice regarding the child's continued positive progress in his bilingual development, as documented in his language biography. But in another case, the adoption of the expert advice resulted in the loss of the child's multilingual competence:

**Case 45:**

From the very beginning, Linda [her mother was from Kenya and used to speak English, Luo and Swahili as a child; her father was from Zimbabwe and was an English and Shona speaker] had contact with all the languages [...]. Her parents spoke to her in their native languages. They also used English to talk to each other. [...] With time, English began to dominate because the parents preferred to speak this language to each other. [...] Going to the preschool, Linda had problems getting along with her peers and educators. The psychologist advised her parents to start speaking Polish to each other at home. Everyone tried to use the Polish language as often as possible for the child's sake. Sometimes, English also 'crept in.' [...] Linda believed that as a child, she was overloaded with languages and thus had problems at school. [...] She felt uncomfortable, perhaps because the environment and the family did not use the same language. She had too many of them at once. [...] In her dreams, her father spoke Shona, English and Polish. The words spoken in Shona were incomprehensible to her. Dreaming about her mother, she heard Swahili, Luo, English and Polish. In this case, she did not know the meaning of the words in the language of the Kenyan people, too.

**3. Discussion**

Our discussion is based on three essential questions outlined in Section 2.1. Regarding language ideologies, in line with multilingual families both in Poland and internationally, the parents in our study expressed a mutual respect for their languages and cultures, emphasised their equal status, and supported raising their children to be bi-/multilingual (cf. Stępkowska, 2022; Romanowski, 2021, 2022). The families recognised the value of multilingual competence and actively communicated this to their children. This was evidenced by the very positive attitudes toward their own multilingualism among all respondents, as well as their sense of belonging or identification with their parents' cultures and languages (cf. Banasiak & Olpińska-Szkielko, 2020; Dewaele et al., 2020; Ivanova, 2019), regardless of their proficiency level – generally relatively high in most cases – while Polish, as the majority language, remained dominant (cf. Boyd, 1998; Lüke et al., 2020; Montanari et al., 2019; Montrul, 2016, 2023; Puig-Mayenco et al., 2018; Treffers-Daller, 2019; and also Knopp, 2022). This was further evident in the intentional efforts many respondents made to nurture their multilingual competencies (cf. Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 2000, 2002; Fogle, 2013; Fogle & King, 2013; Gafaranga, 2010; Smith-Christmas, 2020; Wąsikiewicz-Firlej, 2018; Wilson, 2020; Zhan, 2023).

These attitudes also reflected the effectiveness of the language management and practices employed within the families. Nevertheless, apparent discrepancies emerge between their language ideologies and their linguistic realities. As stated above, the OPOL and MLAH strategies governed most language practices related to communication in parent-child communication, yet inconsistencies were observed between the intended usage and actual language behaviours (cf. Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Gharibi & Seals, 2019; Hirsch & Lee, 2018; Kopeliovich, 2010; Wąsikiewicz-Firlej, 2018; Wąsikiewicz-Firlej & Lankiewicz, 2019). The factors that seem to most influence these divergences include the role of the

father's language (L2) in family communication and the relative prestige of the specific minority (heritage) languages.

To begin with, there is a notable lack of proficiency in Polish as L1 among most fathers in our study. In these cases, the mothers were inclined – or even compelled by a lack of choice (cf. Stępkowska, 2022, p. 220) – to use L2 at home, which became the sole language of family communication (except for individual interactions between the mother and child). This situation was particularly prevalent since, in most cases, the mothers were proficient in the fathers' languages (cf. Dewaele & Salomidou, 2017; Pfenninger & Singleton, 2018; Stępkowska, 2021b).

It might seem that the father's lack of proficiency in the mother's language (L1 = Polish) would encourage support for L2 as the heritage language. Indeed, in most families where the mother was Polish and the father spoke another language, Polish was not the family language. Although just over a quarter of the cases (see Table 2) indicated that fathers had a good command of Polish, allowing it to be used in family communication, this was not the case in most families. However, whether establishing L2 as the sole family language reflects a conscious MLAH strategy based on the parents' ideological beliefs is debatable; the choice appeared to be mainly influenced by the father's reluctance or inability to communicate effectively in L1.

This assertion is further supported by the observation that the father's language became the primary language of communication between the parents and, consequently, within the family, even in cases where the mother's language was not Polish. In such linguistic configurations, over two-thirds of fathers demonstrated a good command of their partners' languages (see Table 3). Nonetheless, the children's contact with L1 was generally limited to communication with their mother and was predominantly facilitated by her actions (cf. Guardado, 2018; cf. also Banasiak & Olpińska-Szkiełko, 2019; Bezcioglu-Goktolga & Yagmur, 2018; Extra & Verhoeven, 1999; Okita, 2002).

Only in a few families in our study did the fathers' languages not become the family languages. In six cases, the fathers abandoned their languages in favour of English, considering the transmission of their heritage languages unnecessary (cf. Guardado, 2008, p. 178). In three cases, the mothers' languages became the primary family languages: English in two instances and French in one.

These choices did not seem to be random (cf. Stępkowska, 2022). The analysis of various language combinations in our study suggests that parents' willingness to support a heritage language (L1 or L2, other than Polish) depended largely on its status and relative prestige both in Poland and internationally. The families exerted more effort in supporting the development of English, French, Italian, and Spanish. In comparison, much less effort was devoted to languages considered "less prestigious" such as Bulgarian, Chinese, Hungarian, or Serbian. These findings align with previous research, which highlights the influence of language

prestige on parents' language choices and efforts to support their children's heritage language development (cf. Curdt-Christiansen, 2014, 2016; Curdt-Christiansen & Huang, 2020; Curdt-Christiansen & Wang, 2018; Guardado, 2017; Harding & Riley, 1986; Romanowski, 2021). Our analysis revealed that the attitudes of relatives and family friends significantly influenced bilingual parenting practices (cf. Romanowski, 2021; Smith-Christmas, 2014; Takeuchi, 2006). An interesting case was German, where the degree of acceptance from the families' social environment did not correspond to its significance in international communication, suggesting that historical reasons, rather than prestige, played a dominant role. Similarly, Russian was met with reluctance due to historical and political factors.

Regarding the attitudes towards multilingualism expressed by professionals, particularly in education, the greatest significance was given to the role of Polish as the majority language. Educators often focused solely on the development of Polish, viewing it as insufficient or problematic compared to monolingual peers. This reinforced concerns shared by some parents that bilingualism might hinder their children's language proficiency and academic success (cf. Okita, 2002; Piller & Gerber, 2018; Takanishi & Le Menestrel, 2017). Assuming that challenges in Polish language development stemmed from bilingualism, experts often advised against using two languages, especially non-Polish, in communication with the child.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Enabling children to develop multilingual competence is primarily the responsibility of their families. Families play a crucial role, particularly in transmitting their heritage languages to future generations (Fishman, 1991); otherwise, the languages are likely to be lost (Fishman, 2001). At the ideological level, the families in our study seemed aware of this obligation and willing to take on the challenges of raising multilingual children. However, in many cases, affective and social factors appeared to shape the linguistic realities of the family much more than ideologies. Our analysis identified several factors, including the role of the father's language, the relative prestige of the heritage language, and the attitudes of the extended family and social environment, including experts.

Despite the challenges multilingual families face, in all cases examined in this study, respondents considered themselves multilingual and expressed positive attitudes toward multilingualism derived from their personal experiences. Considering a large group of bilingual speakers, our study corroborates the findings of many other studies on family language policy, while also suggesting new avenues for future research. It would be interesting to explore whether a similar balance is maintained in comparable linguistic constellations among families living outside Poland. Further interesting social and affective aspects

worthy of investigation include the role of extended family members, particularly grandparents, as well as the role of siblings and their influence on the development of multilingual competence within families.

While the number of case studies might suggest a quantitative approach, we opted for a qualitative design due to the heterogeneity of the material. Some of our results, given the breadth of cases, offer the potential for original conclusions. However, despite the thorough and reliable preparation of each language biography and alignment with existing literature, we approach our findings with caution, acknowledging the limitations of our study.

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