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Communication patterns in bilingual couples

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the communication patterns among a sample of bilingual heterosexual couples in the less studied Polish context. Drawing on 24 in-depth interviews I examine the reasons for language choices in the couple, with the most engaging arguments being when the minority language is chosen. In the results section, I give the voice to the couples by inserting extracts from the interviews, illustrating the dyadic communication between the partners. The analysis is grounded in the sociolinguistic perspective bringing together linguistic, social and cultural aspects. Through these themes, I come to a more detailed account of communication scenarios conditioned by the L2 command of either of the partners. I report on the couples' language repertoires and the languages of their first contact that result from the individual trajectories of their L2 acquisition and impinge on the agreed communication patterns. My data suggest that bilingual couples do not, as it might otherwise be expected, always end up using the language of the surrounding society. The findings reveal a relative stability of linguistic choices, but also some deviations from once adopted communication patterns. The article shows that language choice and proficiency are closely connected but that other social and ideological factors also come into play.

Keywords: bilingual couples; intercultural communication; language proficiency; in-depth interviews; Poland

INTRODUCTION

Communication patterns in bilingual couples derive from their private language policies and language ideologies which are positioned in the social and cultural environments. These contexts render language ideologies unstable and put them under the constant influence of changes at local and global levels. In consequence, language ideologies often become a symbolic arena of contestation or debates over issues such as race, languages or national identity. Individuals – not least the linguistically mixed couples – are guided by their private language policies, which are more than the speakers' attitudes towards their languages, or speakers using languages in specific ways. Such policies include values, beliefs and practices relating to languages used by speakers as well as the discourse that constructs values and beliefs at local, national and global levels. The sociolinguistic perspective looks at bi- and multilinguals as actors in social life who have manifold sets of communicative resources at their disposal. The distribution and valuation of these resources is uneven, asymmetrical and hierarchical. This means that multilingualism is not only a matter of pure linguistic knowledge, but involves communicative practice and social processes as well (cf. Wei, 2012). This has been proved by the study of Heller (1999) who argued that multilingual practices

contribute to the construction of social boundaries which in turn regulate the composition of language resources (cf. also Gal, 1978).

In private language contact between bilingual partners, activities such as language acquisition, expressing emotions, maintaining marital bonds, and the negotiation of responsibilities for the bilingual upbringing of children, are accomplished through language, although they are not reducible to language use *per se* (Fishman, 1970). Language attitudes and practices among bilingual couples in Poland play an important role in their everyday communication and are clearly reflected in its quality. Depending on the level of mastering of the Polish language by foreigners in couples with Poles, there may appear difficulties in maintaining communication within the couples' bilingual network, and their limited participation in social life, including the long-lasting engagement of the Polish partner as a lay (or natural) interpreter (cf. Pöchhacker, 2004, p. 22). To cope with the situation, couples often apply strategies of power and invest in the learning of the partner's stronger language or decide to use a lingua franca.

I intend to find answers to questions regarding languages and the patterns of communication among intercultural, heterosexual, married couples who reside in Poland. I am interested in their linguistic experiences featuring their language repertoires, language choices as well as attitudes towards specific languages, which inform the complex processes of private language contact between two close persons. One of the goals of this paper is to go beyond discourses of language proficiency and to shed light on other aspects in intercultural communication that contribute to interactional marginalisation, and to connect pragmatic research to the linguistic choices of individuals. Since a specific pattern of communication in a bilingual couple depends largely on the degree of language command of one's partner; it is purposeful first to discuss the language knowledge of individual partners and then, based on that, derive the ways of their private communication. Next, I proceed to assign partners their specific roles deriving from the L2 command of either partner in the couple and discuss my own investigation. By doing so, I propose a typology of the partner's roles corresponding with the linguistic proficiency in the L2 of the other partner.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Communication between partners in close relationships is slowly becoming one of the research areas in sociolinguistics. A number of discourse analytical approaches to couples' interaction, informed by psychology and sociology, can be distinguished (e.g. Pavlenko, 2002; Wierzbicka, 2004). Bilingual narratives have been studied to help understand the respondents' subjective experience of bi- and multilinguality (Besemeres, 2004; Treichel, 2004). Yet not only the narrative structure and coherence has revived the interest of researchers, but also the functions that narratives play in varied contexts. Despite the vast literature on parent-child interaction from a conversation-analytic perspective (e.g. Barron-Hauwaert, 2000; De Houwer, 2007; Döpke, 1992) and children's language acquisition in bilingual families (cf. Lanza, [1990] 2004, 2007; Yip & Matthews, 2007), studies on bilingual couples' communication are rather scant. Moreover, most studies focus on meanings, speakers and contexts at the cost of the actual use of language, that is the social action. As Bailey (2007, p. 261) argues, "formal linguists thus neglect relationships between linguistic forms and the social and political worlds that are described and negotiated through those forms".

Here I look at bilinguality in the couple as a complex set of communicative practices which comes in line with the social approach proposed by Heller (2007). This approach is informed by four sets of concepts. The first set comprises community, identity and language, all seen as social constructs of our organisation. The second concept refers to language as a

set of resources which are distributed unevenly among speakers. The third concept accentuates language which is assigned a value and some interpretation. And, the fourth concept denotes language ideology that leads people to recognise the processes of social construction (cf. Blommaert, 1999; Kroskrity, 2000). Thus, this frame of concepts foregrounds bilingualism as a process and practice that draws on linguistic resources (cf. Blommaert & Backus, 2011).

There are two important elements of categorising the communication patterns in bilinguals couples, namely emotions and proficiency. The studies by Pavlenko (cf. 2002, 2005, 2006) showed that the strongest emotions are embedded in the L1 of bi- and multilinguals, though in some cases languages learnt later in life can acquire a comparable emotional resonance. Statistical analyses indicate that languages learnt later have less perceived emotional force than L1. Another key factor in the bilingual communication of couples is proficiency, which is often proportional to dominance. According to Piller's study (2002) of cross-cultural couples, proficiency stands behind language choice for emotional expression. Pavlenko (2005, p. 231) describes the selves in L1 that are seen as 'more emotional, anxious, childish and vulnerable', while the selves developed in languages learnt later may be identified as "more independent, controlled, and mature". Research on second language socialisation among adults typically describes this process as both a social and a linguistic one, in which the vital changes occur in language proficiency. Some contexts tend to activate certain languages in the repertoires of multilinguals to express emotion (Heider, 1991). Some other contexts are better suited for less emotional language that was learnt later, and thus better controlled by speakers (Pavlenko, 2005).

So far the bilingual talk in the couple has been researched in different contexts, e.g. Japanese (Hardach-Pinke, 1988), German (Piller, 2002), Swiss (Gonçalves, 2013), which in itself presents various dimensions of private contact. Yet these studies, concerning immigration and language issues, were concentrated on one certain type of ethnic or language group. By way of contrast, this paper shows recent empirical evidence for communication patterns in couples of diverse languages and cultures, but who share the same situation of life, namely they are immigrants in Poland and in a relationship with Poles. I place my study in the model of expatriate cross-cultural adjustment (Black et al., 1991), by applying a comparative analysis within the scope of the sample. I also draw on Norton's (1997, 2000) view of the relationship between L2 acquisition and social context. She concentrates on the relation to the cultural and social practices of individuals who learn a language and the host community. Social identity helps them integrate with the social context, in which they learn the language (cf. Barkhuizen, 2004). Specifically, Norton's ideas about language learning revolve around the concept of "investment" which she explains in the following way: 'If learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital' (Norton, 2000, p. 10). In other words, language learners invest in the target language *and* in their social identity. In what follows, the qualitative methodology will find its application in the analysis of communication patterns in bilingual couples informed by L2 command of either partner.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The study adopts an emic perspective by taking into account the viewpoints of participants and making their opinions heard similarly to those of the researchers (cf. Pavlenko, 2002). This duality of voices (of participants and researchers) finely contributes to the global picture of the studied phenomenon. The emic description comes from the participants, from the inside of their culture and communities they belong to. In this perspective the participants are seen

not as passive objects of the analysis or a set of variables, but as active subjects able to make a metalinguistic insight into their own bi- or multilinguality (Cruickshank, 2012, p. 42). Thus, linguistic reports obtained from the in-depth interviews offer a unique source of information about the emotional and psychological dimension of language use by the individuals.

The first step of the procedure was the sampling of 24 target couples bilingual with Poles. The main point of the study was the analysis of the collected textual material. The emerging accounts made it possible to better understand and explain the studied phenomena. In the opinion of Kvale (2007, p. 14), 'the qualitative research interview is the construction site for knowledge'. The value of the knowledge obtained in this way is not its objectivity but rather the befitting rendering of subjective meanings and viewpoints, i.e. moving closer to the ways in which the narrators perceive events. During interviews the bilingual couples shared with me their subjective experiences. People remember and choose what to share in interviews and that is why, according to Caduri (2013), the 'truth' in qualitative research depends on the narratives of participants.

In total, I spent nearly 26 hours (25h 52m) on collecting 24 recorded conversations. The partners were interviewed together. The time per interview ranged from 1h 42m to less than an hour (43 minutes), which gives the mean time of 64 minutes for one meeting. The conversations were transcribed and coded. Most of them were held in Polish, with a few exceptions when one of the partners wanted to express their opinions in English. I proceeded in line with judgement sampling based on the availability of participants. Also, I resorted to the snowball technique to recruit other potential target couples, as some of the participants were very eager to help me out in finding more interviewees. I changed their names to protect their identity. The couples were represented by people of different age. Naturally, the duration of their couplehood was different as well. Most couples have lived in Poland between one to three decades. Nine couples have spent less than ten years in Poland, and only three couples exceeded thirty years living together (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. The years spent together by bilingual couples in Poland

Years together spent in Poland	1 – 9	10 – 19	20 – 29	30 and more
The number of bilingual couples	9	7	5	3

This qualitative study aims to present an account of individual cases in a causal nexus between the L2 command and the ensuing role of either of the partners in bilingual relationships. The facts pertaining to this interrelation have been established on the basis of an analysis of the couples' linguistic repertoires and language choices. The concept of effective communication, as viewed subjectively by the bilingual partners, reveals a particularly engaging area of motivations, justifications and evaluations. The nearest following sections have been grouped according to the level of L2 command between the partners in 24 couples, from the full L2 command though a limited L2 command to a lack of knowledge of the partner's language. Therefore, instead of one joint table presenting the whole sample, I decided to introduce all couples following the mentioned threefold categorisation. The couples in the tables are marked with symbols in brackets. The letters "f" (for female) and "m" (for male) refer to the foreign partners, whereas the numbers refer to the chronology of the conducted interviews. For instance, in Table 1 'Maria and Felipe (m2)' means that Felipe is the foreigner in this couple, who was interviewed as the second one. Also, for the sake of

minimising wordiness, I will name particular couples by the nationality of the foreigner, e.g. the couple of a Pole and a Japanese will be referred to as the Japanese couple.

RESULTS: L2 MASTERY OF THE PARTNER'S LANGUAGE

L2 command in the bilingual couple often draws on the first contact experience which is realised in *some* language. The language of the first contact sets a perspective for communication and becomes a point of reference to mark any changes related to languages, be it a choice of a particular language or a progress in learning it. This is why, in Tables (1, 2 and 3) featuring L2 command in the couples I put a column "Language in which the couple first met".

By way of illustration, I quote two extracts of bilingual couples who talk about the beginnings of their relationships in terms of language use. In the interview with Laura (American) and Marek, I asked them about the significance of the language in which they first met. My question had puzzled them both so that they returned to it during the course of the interview. They were determined to find the answer not so much for me as for themselves. They met in Poland, but their contact began in English. To this day, they communicate essentially in English, though Laura also tries to use Polish to a limited extent. English, as the language of their first meeting, has remained the one which fulfills the most important functions. Based on this fact, Marek spontaneously drew an analogy from his workplace (Extract 1, l. 1–4 and 6–8) which surprised Laura as well (l. 5).

EXTRACT 1: "It matters how the relationship begins"

1	Marek	Maybe it matters how the relationship begins. I can see
2		that on the example of my French colleague because
3		we work together. He speaks Polish to everyone.
4		Really?
5	Laura	Yes. He speaks Polish to everyone. But I met him two
6	Marek	years earlier in English, and we still cannot talk to one
7		another in Polish.
8		But it is a fact that the language when people begin…
9	Laura	The language of the first meeting?
10	Researcher	Yes, it is the most important one.
11	Laura	

Extract 2 of my conversation with Ewa and Martin (French) shows that language negotiation in the couple about the ultimate pattern of communication may be more intricate and allow for several languages and contexts. This couple met in Germany and began to speak German there (l. 4). When they moved to Poland, they changed German for English (l. 9). Now the dominating language of the couple is Polish, also because Martin has become fluent in it (l. 6–7). Still, Ewa plans to improve her French, Martin's native tongue, mostly with a view to communicate with his family and, recently, because of their newborn child, which they want to raise in Polish-French bilinguality.

EXTRACT 2: “We had times when we spoke more in English”

1	Researcher	You met in Germany on Erasmus. And you started to
2		talk to one another in…
4	Martin	In German.
3	Ewa	Martin did not know Polish, I did not know French.
4	Researcher	So, in German. And now in which language? More in
5		French?
6	Ewa	I think we talk more in Polish because we live in
7		Poland.
8	Martin	But it also changed. I mean now it is more Polish, but
9		we also had times when we spoke more in English,
10		and still before that it was German. It has changed
11		with time.
12	Researcher	So now it is Polish with some French?
13	Ewa	Yes.

FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE PARTNER’S LANGUAGE

Bilingual couples in which partners know one another’s languages at an advanced level make up one fourth of the research sample, i.e. 6 couples (see Table 2). Out of these couples, three non-Polish women (Simone, Żanna and Jana) impress with their Polish by speaking it with an almost imperceptible foreign accent. Żanna and Jana speak Polish with their husbands, while Simone and Piotr have decided on an exclusive communication in German. The remaining three couples include Maria who is fluent in Spanish, her husband’s first language. Next, there is Jurij (Russian) speaking Polish, and Michał – a Pole skilled in Portuguese. It is worth noting that none of these six couples used Polish at the time of their first encounters. Simone and Jana used their *lingua franca* (English and Russian, respectively) for a short time at the beginning of their relationships. In turn, Żanna and Rafał first communicated in Żanna’s native tongue, Russian, because they met in Kazakhstan, where Rafał enrolled at a university which required a relevant command of the language.

TABLE 2. Couples in which either partner speaks fluently his or her partner’s language

No.	Couple	Nationality of the non-Polish partner	Language of the non-Polish partner	Language in which the couple first met
1	Maria and Felipe (m2)	Spaniard	Spanish	Spanish
2	Simone and Piotr (f3)	German	German	English
3	Żanna and Rafał (f7)	Kazakh	Russian	Russian
4	Natalia and Jurij (m12)	Russian	Russian	Russian
5	Camila and Michał (f16)	Brazilian	Portuguese	English
6	Jana and Paweł (f21)	Czech	Czech	Russian

Extract 3 shows how Simone and Piotr strive to agree on the overall evaluation of her level of Polish and his command of German. Both express mutual acknowledgement of the efforts put into mastering of the partner’s native tongue. Their evaluation breaks down into specific language skills, which then are compared. Simone emphasises the rich German lexicon in Piotr (l. 4–5), whereas both admit that Simone is good at Polish grammar (l. 7–10).

EXTRACT 3: “His lexicon is bigger”

1	Researcher	Simone you know Polish…
2	Piotr	…very well.
3	Simone	I know Polish. I think I know it well enough… But I think
4		Piotr knows German even better. His lexicon is bigger than
5		mine in Polish, because often when I do not know what it
6		is, you tell me straightaway in German. I think his
7		vocabulary is richer. I do not know, I make fewer
8		grammatical errors.
9	Piotr	In writing. You surely make fewer errors in writing in
10		Polish than I do when writing in German.
11	Simone	Yes.
12	Piotr	I speak German fluently and I think that I do not make too
13		many mistakes, but I do have a problem with writing,
14		because I never learnt it, I never had German at school.

LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF THE PARTNER’S LANGUAGE

Each of the nine couples presented in Table 3 has one partner who is less fluent in the language of the other partner. This disproportion in language command between the partners tends to remain. A typical example is represented by a Japanese woman, Mio (f15), who met her future husband in Poland. When they first met, her Polish was much less advanced than it is now, after 15 years of life in Poland and the using of Polish for everyday communication between the couple. Mio’s husband managed to pick up only some basic Japanese phrases and does not feel motivated to learn Japanese as they both communicate in Polish. Table 3 presents similar couples, in which each partner failed to reach fluency in the L1 of the other partner.

TABLE 3. Couples in which either partner has a poor or passive knowledge of the other partner’s language

No.	Couple	Nationality of the non-Polish partner	Language poorly or passively mastered by the partner	Language in which the couple first met
1	Katarzyna and Erik (m5)	Dane	Danish	Polish
2	Elżbieta and John (m6)	American	Polish	English
3	Laura and Marek (f8)	American	Polish	English
4	Ewa and Martin (m9)	French	French	German
5	Zofia and Omer (m10)	Turk	Turkish / Polish	German
6	Beata and Vincent (m11)	Dutchman	Dutch	Polish
7	Mio and Andrzej (f15)	Japanese	Japanese	Polish
8	Gabriela and Tadeusz (f17)	Romanian	Romanian	English
9	Mim and Tomasz (f23)	Chinese	Chinese	Esperanto

The Japanese couple mentioned above likewise to the Chinese couple belong to the cases which do not evolve. The husbands in these couples do not learn their wives’ languages but rather dabble in them from contexts and situations that occur naturally in their joint lives in the couple. In Extract 4, Mio describes her husband’s command of Japanese (l. 3–4), while Tomasz in the Chinese couple makes a self-evaluation of the knowledge of his wife’s language by saying that he would “get by” though he would not be able “to deliver a lecture

in Chinese". In both cases the minimal essential L2 knowledge is stressed, which is used by the husbands who have no intention to learn better the languages of their wives.

Extract 4: "He remembers what he needs"

1	Researcher	Tell me how your husband knows your language?
2		How does he know Japanese?
3	Mio	Very poorly. He remembers what he needs to remember and
4		what he does not need, he does not remember.
5		For example, he will order a beer in Japan,
6		because we were a few times in Japan.
7		Or "The bill, please", he will ask.

The limited knowledge of the partner's language may come from the prearranged "unwritten agreement", mentioned by Katarzyna in Extract 5 (l. 1–2). In this case, the good command of Polish demonstrated by Erik, her husband, essentially prevented her from learning Danish. In addition, her decision was strengthened by the fact of the close relatedness between Scandinavian languages, of which she takes advantage by being fluent in Swedish. Katarzyna picks up Danish spontaneously from direct contact with the family of her husband.

Extract 5: "Polish dominated from the beginning"

1	Katarzyna	Polish definitely dominated from the beginning and
2		in fact we had such an unwritten agreement. But it
3		was clear that we speak Polish because I did not
4		know Danish at all when I met my husband.

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE PARTNER'S L1

In nine couples, one partner does not know the other partner's L1 at all, as indicated in Table 4. The proportions of the lack of language knowledge in this group of couples are more or less equal, because it concerns four non-Polish men (Matteo, Ronald, Franz and David) and five Polish women (Izabela, Jolanta, Justyna, Marta and Weronika).

TABLE 4. Couples in which either partner does not know the other partner's language

No.	Couple	Nationality of the non-Polish partner	Language not mastered by the partner	Language in which the couple first met
1	Teresa and Matteo (m1)	Italian	Polish	Italian
2	Izabela and Asep (m4)	Indonesian	Indonesian	Polish
3	Jolanta and Oskar (m13)	German	German	English
4	Anna and Ronald (m14)	British	Polish	English
5	Justyna and Ion (m18)	Moldovan	Romanian	Polish
6	Marta and Tesfaye (m19)	Ethiopian	Amharic	Polish
7	Weronika and Sareng (m20)	Indian	Marathi	German
8	Agata and Franz (m22)	Austrian	Polish	German
9	Monika and David (m24)	Australian	Polish	English

This group of couples is best illustrated by Jolana and Oskar. Though married to a German, learning German for Jolanta is a task that requires an extra effort due to her not very enthusiastic attitude to say the least toward that language (Extract 6, l. 1–3). From the beginning of their relationship, this couple's language has been English. Jolanta's husband,

Oskar, has mastered Polish at an advanced level, while Jolanta has failed completely to learn her husband's L1. Both continue speaking English, though they could have already switched to Polish. The birth of their daughter has put Jolanta in front of a real linguistic dilemma, because Oskar speaks German to their daughter and Jolanta does it in Polish. As a result, Oskar understands what Jolanta says in Polish to the daughter, while Jolanta does not understand German in the interactions between the father and the daughter. Jolanta realises that this situation will change only if she begins to learn her husband's L1 (l. 4–5).

EXTRACT 6: "I will have to overcome my dislike for German"

1	Jolanta	Actually I do not know German. I must admit that it never
2		appealed to me. The problem for me was stylistics, and as
3		regards the sound it is quite hard. (…)
4		But I will have to overcome my dislike for German for the
5		sake of my daughter and I will learn with her, surely.
6		Because she uses two languages at the same time, so
7		naturally I need to know what she thinks and I learn with
8		her in the normal course.

COMMUNICATION IN THE COUPLE: THE PARTNER'S ROLE

Having analysed the languages used by the couples and the language repertoires of individual partners, I arranged the stages of the couples' joint linguistic assimilation in a sequential order. These stages presented in Table 5 illustrate the chronology of changes in the bilingual communication of the couples. The stages make up a model of successive communication patterns among bilingual couples, though not every couple needs to go through all the stages. In fact, each stage may have a permanent character. The research question concerns the degree of language assimilation of the non-Polish partners being socialised into the Polish language and culture as adults via marriage to a Polish citizen. The communication patterns involve several stages of language assimilation of the non-Polish partners, ranging from the Polish partner playing the role of an interpreter to the non-Polish partner's full language independence.

The data gathered from interviews allows to distinguish four stages of linguistic assimilation of foreigners in bilingual couples with Poles. At the beginning of the relationship, if the non-Polish partner does not know Polish, the Polish partner plays the role of an interpreter. At the next stage, if the non-Polish partner acquires the passive knowledge of Polish by only being able to understand it, the Polish partner may act as an assistant, mainly supporting the spoken mode. The following stage amounts to the intermediate command of the dominating language (Polish) in non-Polish partners who demonstrate also the speaking skills, which turns the Polish partners into their linguistic companions ready to provide an occasional involvement. The final stage closing up the process of linguistic assimilation equals the full linguistic independence of non-Polish partners, when they can function in the host community without the help of their Polish partners.

TABLE 5. Stages of linguistic assimilation among bilingual couples in Poland, with the indication of language skills in the non-Polish partners and the relevant roles assumed by their Polish partners

No of stage	Level of linguistic assimilation of the non-Polish partner	Non-Polish partner	Role of the Polish partner	Involvement of the Polish partner	Examples of couples
1	Lack of knowledge of the partner's language and culture	cannot communicate unaided	**Interpreter**	significant	m1, m14, m24

2	Passive knowledge of the partner's language and culture	understands the spoken and written language, but cannot speak	**Assistant**	medium	m10, m20, m22
3	Intermediate knowledge of the partner's language and culture	understands the spoken and written language, and can speak	**Companion**	occasional	m2, m6, f8, f16, f23
4	Linguistic independence	has mastered all language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing)	**Partner**	no involvement	f3, m4, m5, f7, m9, m11, m12, m13, f15, f17, f18, f19, f21

DISCUSSION

The paper aimed to explore the communication patterns in linguistically diverse couples. The specific goal was to explicate the nexus between the L2 mastery of either partner in the couple and the way they communicate. The key questions concerned the L2 command of at least one of the partners, the relevant role assumed by the other partner, and the communication patterns that developed as a result of the first two. Furthermore, the overview of the presented data allows drawing some more implications that refer to the main focus of this paper. Though the study featured 24 couples, the results section contains only selected excerpts that were most illustrative of the discussed issues. The results were not planned to indicate how prevalent a given occurrence was, which would not be possible to determine via the qualitative method of in-depth interviewing. Therefore below, where justified, I add comments on similar observations from the interviews with couples who were not literally cited. The present discussion aims at a nuanced analysis that allows for a distinction between individual couples.

Communication of bilingual couples is often an agreed decision of both partners, yet the outcomes are as it happens less predictable. One of the key questions concerns the correlation between the level of knowledge of the partner's L1 and the decision to learn his or her language. Another question revolves round the language of the first meeting. People get to know one another in some language and either they stick to it or change for a different one. The language of the first contact is usually well remembered as the language of the relationship's beginning. Couples which do not use it on a regular basis, sometimes resort to it in vital moments (e.g. Weronika and Sareng). All participants in the target couples came into contact with the languages of their partners as adults. Some non-Polish participants have learnt their Polish partners' language earlier through a formal course of studies, and now they develop the language in their relationships in its natural environment which is Poland, e.g. Jurij (m12) and Erik (m5). Such a situation may be regarded as optimal when the formal theoretical language course is followed by a practical language contact in real life.

Referring to L2 command of the partner's language, I have divided the target couples into three groups, namely (a) when one of the partners is proficient in L2, (b) when he or she has a limited L2 knowledge, and (c) a group of couples in which one of the partners does not know his or her partner's L1. As for the first group, having attained a high proficiency level in the L2, the partners become undemonstrative when evaluating their own language skills or the language skills of their partners. Talking about one's own success may be problematic, so in order to evade this, the participants either refer to the "external" evaluation elicited from the

partner, or they address mutual praises to each other. The appeal to the positive evaluation of one's partner allows one to stick to the rule of being "modest", informed by Grice's cooperative principles (1975), as well as to treat the partner as an authorised "expert" on a foreign language (e.g. Simone and Piotr).

As for the second group, the limited L2 knowledge in the couple mostly remains unchanged. The partner who goes for a formal L2 course followed by a switch to the other partner's language for everyday communication, usually achieves a high level of fluency (e.g. Teresa in Italian, and Vincent, Ion and Gabriela in Polish). This group of couples is characterised by the highest volatility of language choice. Speakers less proficient in the partner's language usually fall back on their native tongues in arguments when they get emotional and need to react faster. Such changes occur, even if the couple regularly speaks the other language (cf. Piller, 2002, 2005). The target participants admit that they perceive their own native tongues as more emotional, which is also validated by other studies (e.g. Pavlenko 2006). Some argue that the languages acquired at an advanced level later in life, have gained an equally strong emotional colour as their first languages. In the opinion of Piller (2002), misunderstandings or argument in bilingual couples may be the only time when partners face the language choice. For the majority of the target couples, the main tool of expressing negative emotions, especially anger, in an argument between a husband and wife, remains the first languages of the partners. This happens in situations where language choice is possible, that is when both partners know each other's languages at least to some extent. Also, one's partner language is sometimes used to verbalise positive emotions. An exception to this rule is the language of communication clearly agreed by the partners, when they both deliberately do not want to depart from the language once chosen (e.g. Simone and Piotr, classified with the first group), or when one partner does not know the other partner's language (e.g. Anna and Ronald, classified with the third group).

As for the third group, the lack of the partner's L1 knowledge practically settles the choice of which language to speak in the couple. However, the question of language learning may come back in the context of children and the language use in contact with them. Many partners in this group of couples intend to learn the language of their wives or husbands together with their children. Such decisions concern particularly the couples who plan to raise their children in bilinguality. This is the case of David (Australian) who felt motivated to learn his wife's language once the couple decided to live in Poland and raise their two daughters (4 years and 1 year old) in Polish-English bilinguality. David can understand only simple phrases in Polish and is able to get the gist of a conversation from its general context. Though he did not start to learn Polish as yet, he admits that the experience of linguistic isolation is very frustrating. On the other hand, if the option of learning the partner's language is impossible or turned out to be a failure, parents tend to rely on children. For instance, Weronika has acquired her husband's language only passively, which is enough to follow the interactions between Sareng and their sons. In the case of talks at a more advanced linguistic level in Marathi, Weronika asks her son for his help in interpreting.

Referring to the choice of language for communication in the couple, there are a few options. As the relationship develops, the couple arrives at a point where they need to choose between the language of either partner, a third language, or even language mixing. For instance, the couple may retain the language of their first meeting, or switch to a different language which may be the language of either partner, or a language foreign to both partners. Based on the sample of 24 bilingual couples I distinguished five communication patterns (see Table 6). For less than half of the participants (10 couples) the language of communication is Polish, which is particularly true of couples where the non-Polish partner has lived in Poland for more than a decade (e.g. m4, m5, f7, m11, m19 or f21). Seven couples use the native

tongue of the foreign partner, and three couples make use of a *lingua franca*. The remaining four couples represent two options of language mixing in their daily communication.

TABLE 6. Languages of communication among 24 bilingual couples sampled for the study

Communication patterns in bilingual couples				
DOMINANT LANGUAGE (Polish)	MINORITY LANGUAGE (the native tongue of the non-Polish partner)	THIRD LANGUAGE	LANGUAGE MIXING	
			Polish and the minority language	Polish and a third language
10	7	3	2	2

Language choice in bilingual couples is not only a mere choice between two languages. It is a choice made in the context of several issues connected with language knowledge and language ideologies in a macro-linguistic environment. Language choice is relatively stable among bilingual couples, i.e. if a couple decided to use a particular language between one another, they tend to stick to this decision. Nevertheless, the couples' communication may be occasionally influenced for different reasons, such as the presence of other persons (family, acquaintances), everyday language or the language of an argument.

The choice of the dominating language (i.e. Polish) is perceived as an unmarked choice of bilingual couples, though it is not the most frequent one. Out of the 24 target couples, half of them use Polish and another half use minority languages (i.e. the language of the non-Polish partner) or a third language (e.g. English, German or Esperanto). Some couples never changed the lingua franca they originally used at their first meeting and this language became their main means of communication. These couples represent a distinct category of communication pattern in a language foreign to both partners. The research sample includes three such couples, i.e. Brazilian (f16), Chinese (f23) and Turkish (m10). The consequences of using a lingua franca is evaluated positively when both partners see the language as a common ground where they have equal chances to negotiate meanings (the Brazilian couple). On the other hand, the use of a lingua franca fails to be an optimal solution if, at first, it was chosen as a makeshift code and remained as such due to the lack of more linguistic involvement (the Turkish couple).

Some couples chose the minority language (L1 of the non-Polish partner) because it ensures the sense of 'being in contact' originating in common language practice, and it is a way of 'compensation' for migration for one of the partners (cf. Piller, 2002). The space reserved for the minority language in the broader context of the majority language (Polish) includes a more distant family, sometimes the workplace, the network of friends or even one's inner language. All couples participating in the study have family members with whom they are in regular contact and who are not bilingual. Quite often they are parents or siblings of these couples, including their distant relatives. As a result, most couples maintain contact in their minority languages, not just Polish. The contact with the extended families of bilingual couples entails making the decision about language choice depending on how these contacts develop (cf. Stępkowska, 2020). In couples where foreigners speak other languages than English and the Polish partners and their families do not know these languages, then the language of contact selected as a *lingua franca* is English (cf. Fasold, 1984, p. 185). This is not the case of couples where Polish partners are fluent in the languages of their partners. Foreigners who know Polish use it in their communication with the families of their Polish

partners, whereas Poles use English in contact with the families of their foreign partners; e.g. Izabela, Michał and Marta. Some participants argued that they had to resort to interpreting to facilitate the contact between the family members of different cultures and languages. Interpreting turned out to be quite a routine practice in the contact between bilingual couples and their families. Interpreting practice often becomes a necessity between more distant family relatives and is described as an unrewarding duty by those who need to interpret. It must be stressed that interpreting occurs in couples not only where one partner does not know the language of the other, but also in couples where either partner has a limited knowledge of the other language. The lack of or limited communication with the immediate family of one's partner poses a problem and a source of frustration for the one who needs interpreting assistance.

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that the linguistic choices in bilingual couples are relatively stable. The language ideologies of bilingual couples, i.e. their opinions about languages, strongly influence the choices made by these couples. Some couples choose language mixing or some form of mixing which evokes equivocal assessment in themselves. They argue that language mixing best expresses their dual identity as a couple. The effort to adapt to new families means much more than the desire for language communication. Partners who take pains to learn the languages of their foreign spouses enter symbolically the other cultures by showing involvement. By doing so they demonstrate their will to tighten the family ties, and sometimes they simply do not want to stand out. A specific pattern of communication in bilingual couples results from one of the major factors or a combination of them, which include (a) the language of the first contact and getting to know one another, (b) the language command of one's partner, (c) the place of residence, and (d) children's linguistic upbringing (cf. also Stępkowska, 2021). The qualitative method made it impossible to treat the study sample as a representative one across the full socio-economic spectrum. Yet despite the limitations, the study offered a detailed account of communication among bilingual couples.

There are also a few theoretical implications to be formulated. This study contributes to research on bilingual couplehood by exploring the communication patterns between the partners. My findings reveal that the language choice for the communication in the couple has an impact on the linguistic assimilation of the partners-foreigners in the host society, and the degree of independence for their functioning in wider social contexts. While research about bilingual couples has mostly focused on the immediate family and the upbringing of children, my study accentuates the need to consider more strongly the language roles played by either partner in the dyadic communication. A further exploration of private language contact seems necessary, an area illustrated by the analysis of language repertoires that determine the specificity of communication in each bilingual couple. This study shows that communication scenarios in bilingual couples present an engaging problem relating to linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of life. More generally, the findings bring out the impact of the host-country context that underpins the communication in bilingual couples.

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