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NON-NATIVE BILINGUALISM IN POLAND – A FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

The aim of this paper is to suggest a framework for research on non-native bilingualism (NNB) in Poland (www.nnbproject.eu). The term non-native bilingualism refers to a situation where, in a Polish family residing in Poland, one or both parents resolve to permanently use a non-native language when communicating with their child or children. The research problems of the “NNB in Poland” project are discussed briefly; the author explains the origins of the term „non-native bilingualism”, defines other terms used in the research, presents the case for and against NNB and collates the common beliefs with the results of contemporary research on bilingualism, including non-native bilingualism.

1. Introduction

In Poland there are families where one (or both) Polish parent(s) talk to their child/children in a foreign language. For the purpose of the research I will refer to the phenomenon as non-native bilingualism (henceforth NNB). It should be borne in mind, however, that, as explained in section 3, it is only a working label at this stage of my research. So far single Polish case studies of the phenomenon have been produced, namely Krakowian (2001), Michalak (2009) and Ziętara (2012), the issue has also been touched upon by Romain (1992), Białystok (2001), Pearson (2007), Grosjean (2008), and Baker (2011), who acknowledge NNB, and their work will be presented in detail in section 4.

NNB is also described in languages other than Polish, e.g. Saunders (1982) as well as on online blogs (<http://nonnativebilingualism.blogspot.com/>, <http://non-nativebilingualadventure.blogspot.com/>, <http://www.mapucebilingual.co.uk/bilingual-blog/>) but still evokes a lot of emotion and raises controversy in Poland, to the extent so that if one searches the internet for “*sztuczna dwujęzyczność*” (artificial bilingualism), the view that NNB is dangerous for the child is evoked.

To the best of my knowledge, however, there is no scientific qualitative and quantitative research carried out on a large scale on NNB in Poland so the NNB project aims to fill this gap and provide a fair description of this phenomenon with an analysis of coexistent factors and predictions of real situations while NNB is put to practice in Poland (www.nnbproject.eu).

The present article, dedicated to the presentation of research on NNB in Poland, opens a series of publications (cf. the references in this article Szramek-Karcz in prep. a-h) concerning scientific research on NNB in Poland¹ and is organized in the following way: In section 2 the subject of the research and the definitions adopted are introduced. Section 3 is devoted to a delineation of the origin of and the reason for the NNB label, while section 4 is dedicated to the key issue in scientific discussion, that is the distinction between *an opinion* and *scientific research results* with an emphasis on the methodological correctness of the latter.

2. The subject of the research and definitions adopted

The empirical research on NNB has the character of a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the non-native bilingualism phenomenon in Poland. Its aim is to answer the carefully selected research question and we hope that the conclusion will enable us to make a guidebook and tutorial for parents intending to raise children in NNB. This study of NNB is in response to the rising social interest in this subject, frequent questions directed to the author and lively discussions on online forums. The research does not aim to encourage or advertise the NNB method. It is intended to be a reliable source of information concerning this phenomenon in Poland, so as to make it easier for parents who are considering talking to their children in a foreign language to make a conscious decision. We cannot reprove of a parent who knows a foreign language because they do not talk always and everywhere to their child in this language or because they make such an effort. Children's education, including language education, is an exclusive and personal matter for every guardian. The research does not include evaluative elements and is as objective as possible using the empirical method and the work was only undertaken after over a dozen years of observation and experience allowing the maximum emotional distance from the described subject. Thanks to the cooperation started in 2009 with Bogumiła Baumgartner (Baumgartner 2009, her new website: <http://www.e-bilingual.net>), new families are participating in the research project and benefit from our first research results.

¹ This stage of the research was conducted thanks to a special purpose grant (Fund for Young Scientists) for scientific research funded by the internal competition procedure in 2011-2013.

For the purpose of this research, the following terms are used:

NNB parent (a non-native bilingual parent) – in the context of the research on NNB in Poland it means a person who, while being a Pole and living in Poland, talks to the child in the second language always and everywhere (L2), which she/he learned after the age of 8 because, for the NNB parents surveyed, this is the earliest age at which they started learning a foreign language in school, which makes them qualify as sequential bilingual (sequential bilingual: a bilingual person who learned a second language after having acquired his or her mother tongue. in *International Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 1996:vol 1:276).

Non-native bilingualism (NNB) – it is the situation in which an adult raising a child talks to this child in a foreign language (other than the language of the local community) which is not native for the adult. Since the research was narrowed to the territory of Poland, NNB in practice stands for the situation when a Polish mother or father (or both), permanently living in Poland, talks to their child (or children) in a foreign language. Although it is not excluded, at the present stage of the research, a distinction between non-native bilingual families (one NNB parent) and non-native double bilingual families (two NNB parents), as proposed by Krakowian (2001) in her case study, was not introduced. For now, the families are not differentiated in terms of the number of children, either.

NNB child (non-native bilingual child) is a child who has Polish parents (guardians), permanently lives in Poland and whose parent (guardian) talks to her/him in a language other than Polish which for his/her [parents] are not native meaning in a language he/she is not the native speaker of. So the bilingualism of an NNB child is, according to universally accepted standards and classifications (Romain 1992), simultaneous, that is a child acquires simultaneously two languages before the age of three. The child become bilingual through the strategy of One Person, One Language, called OPOL (Baker 2007), in which each of the parents/guardians consistently talks to a child in one language.

The English term *native speaker* stands for a user of the mother tongue and is used to describe a person who was raised in the sphere of influence of a given language making it his/her first language (L1). (cf. Szramek-Karcz in prep. c, where the difficulty of the *Mother tongue definition* in the case of non-native bilingualism is discussed and on the basis of the life of Elias Canetti, a new approach to defining the mother tongue, based on individual, subjective feelings of bilingual people is proposed. I take a successful adoption of NNB to be a situation in which a child of monolingual parents in a monolingual society becomes bilingual.

Bilingualism in my research on NNB in Poland (cf. Szramek-Karcz in prep. a-h mentioned below) corresponds with the approach proposed by Grosjean (2008: 118) and is defined as ‘the regular use of two or more languages (or dialects)’. The definition corresponds with the notion of multilingualism but, most importantly, with the further distinction of bilinguals made by Grosjean (2008: 119), accounting for an individual linguistic history, relation with languages,

linguistic stability, language functions, language fluency and biographical data which are also taken into consideration during the analysis of NNB. The definition of bilingualism is not straightforward because of many factors playing a role in it.

Białystok (2001: 1-13) also points to the complexity of the situation in which we can call someone *bilingual* and to the difficulty in measuring language fluency. She proposes six points allowing for the initial image of bilingualism among children and also underlines how difficult it is to methodologically conduct proper research comparing mono and bilingual children. In the research on NNB in Poland I do not anticipate the comparison between mono and bilingual children as I consider a selection of the groups of mono and bilingual children that are identical in terms of mental capabilities, social conditions, predispositions, temperament, experience etc. to be impossible due to an insufficient number of bilingual children in Poland. A comparison of this kind is also not anticipated for ethical reasons described in Szramek-Karcz (cf. Szramek-Karcz in prep. b, where principles of NNB research based on Brzeziński's recommendations are explained (Brzeziński J. 2006)). Still, the degree of bilingualism acquired by NNB children constitutes one of the examined factors.

The whole project of the research about NNB in Poland, that the main problem the present article is presenting, started in 1999 by the **Naturalistic Observation** (collection of data without manipulation of the environment) of a 6 years old Austrian boy whose Austrian mother was speaking French to him. The Naturalistic Observation helped to formulate some research questions like:

- Why don't foreign language teachers practice NNB with their own child if it works so well?
- What is the level of proficiency in L2 that the NNB child can achieve?
- How will the NNB parent manage with the growing child and the increasingly difficult word and linguistic constructions to use (greenhouse effect, gearwheels *etc.*).

Then, the project continued with the **Participant Observation** (Participant Observation refers to a form of sociological research methodology in which the researcher takes on a role in the social situation under observation). Another research questions was added, for example:

- Are there any differences in practicing bilingualism between the NNB family and the bilingualism practicing in mixed language families where two parents are native speakers of two different languages and use OPOL strategy?
- What is the most difficult issue to overcome when adopting NNB?
- What is the language between siblings in an NNB family?
etc.

The next step was to meet, talk and study NNB families (2011-2012). Many other questions emerged such as:

- What is the parent's L2 level required to practice NNB?
- What are the differences, if any, between NNB families from different parts of Poland?

and **case studies** (cf. Szramek-Karcz in prep. a.) were employed with more research questions such as:

- Does **dyslexia** preclude the NNB practice?

All research questions and final hypothesis are presented in the article Szramek-Karcz (in prep. e.).

At present, we are studying attitudes towards NNB in Polish society, they are supposed to be one of the main factors influencing the NNB success. The results of the survey as inspired by the study of Baker (1992) will be presented in “attitudes towards NNB in Poland” where attitudes are measured in a seven-point Likert scale and analyzing with the help of the IBM SPSS Statistics program (Szramek-Karcz & Wolny in prep. h.).

The quantitative research on NNB in Poland is pioneering, whereas qualitative case studies have already been the subject of research and there are publications describing case studies of NNB children in Poland (Krakowian 1998, Krakowian 2000, Krakowian 2001, Grabowska 2008, Michalak 2009, Zięta 2012). Apart from this analysis we still encounter too many short subjective inclusions and comments, judgments, hasty generalizations based on brief interviews and unjustified, radical predictions. Treating the subject with neglect and/or unconcealed subjectivity not only disqualifies it from a scientific point of view but also contributes to false and prejudicial stereotypes about NNB. Some of these are presented in section 3.

3. The term NNB

Why was the term NNB chosen instead of *artificial bilingualism* or simply *bilingualism*? The term NNB is neither a re-invention of a scientific-sounding phenomenon nor a needless multiplication of entities but an attempt to objectively name the studied phenomenon for the purpose of further research without pointing to its positive or negative connotations. The term NNB is thus a nod towards an objective approach to science. Below there are views presented of opponents and supporters of NNB which fully justify the choice of a neutral name for the studied phenomenon.

The term *artificial (unnatural) bilingualism* can be seen in the literature on the subject in two cases; namely when talking about learning a foreign language at school or when the opponents of the model of the language education of children by non-native parents are speaking. Woźniakowski (1982:59) calls artificial bilingualism the bilingualism reached at school by practicing dialogues “at the dentists”. Nowadays, the same term is often used to design NNB by others who may not necessarily approve of this model of language education. Grabowska (2008: 30) in her article “*“Natural” and “Artificial” Bilingualism*”. *The development of language and mental functions among bilingual children.*” asks the following question: “Is one really able to form a bilingual mind under monolingual conditions?” (Grabowska 2008(30)). On the basis of the observation

of two NNB families she argues that it is possible if an NNB parent is the father and not the mother. Grabowska (2008) admits that she bases her conclusions on the observation of two families. She argues that all the factors except one that is the sex of an NNB parent were invariable for two observed families. In my research, dozens of factors such as language fluency, personality, motivation, education, attitude towards NNB etc. that could influence the success of raising an NNB child have emerged but no relation between the NNB parent sex and the success of NNB suggested by Grabowska (2008(30) was discovered.

Rokita-Jaśkow (2010:71-75) points to the danger connected with practicing NNB. Earlier (page 58) she asks: “Can we raise a bilingual child in unnatural conditions” and “What are the problems connected with raising a bilingual child in artificial/unnatural conditions? The term *unnatural/artificial* has strongly negative connotations, which are also shown in the comments and observations present in the text.

Grosjean (2010) writes about native bilingual parents. He points to a situation that is frustrating for both parties when a child is expected to talk to a parent in the weaker language when he/she knows the language of the environment: “[...] bilingual parents quickly learned, as have many others, that forcing a child to keep to just one language when his or her interlocutor knows both only leads to frustration on both sides” (Grosjean 2010: 212). He also concludes that bilingual parents are far from being the “friends” with the children’ weaker language and thus their bilingualism. He suggests a solution in creating natural situations of communication for a child in the weaker language, creating a real “need” to communicate in that language (native speakers who do not know the stronger language, holidays in countries of the weaker language). The research on NNB in Poland shows that, in the case of NNB families, non-native bilingual parents manage to transmit their bilingualism onto their children. To what extent, if at all, the children are really bilingual will be presented in the final research result.

Grosjean (2009) does not oppose the very idea of talking to a child in a foreign language but he underlines that the artificiality of a bilingual parent situation might evoke in a child a feeling of deception when he/she finally discovers that the parent unnecessarily “forces” him/her by requiring additional efforts when in fact he/she knows the language of the majority which is easier for the child to communicate in (cf. Szramek-Karcz in prep. f.). My research does not support the thesis of frustrated parents and children. It does not mean that the opinion of Grosjean (2009) is untrue as cultural and geographical factors are also at stake. Naturally, there have been notable cases of protesting children who consistently denied interaction in L2 (Rokita-Jaśkow 2010:71-73).

The skepticism of the researcher does not allow us to simply call the situation of a parent talking to his/her child in a foreign language “bilingualism” in accordance with the wishes of NNB’s staunchest supporters (Pearson 2007, D. Krakowian 1998, 2001, B. Krakowian 2000). Is there no difference between the bilingualism of NNB children and the bilingualism of the children raised in mixed marriages (where each parent talks to a child in their mother tongue) and,

from a child's point of view, is NNB nothing but a bilingualism accomplished by means of the OPOL strategy? Baker (2007) accepts NNB as one of the routes to becoming bilingual. Romain's classification (1992) among different types of bilingualism distinguished type 5 that is nonnative parent's bilingualism.

To sum up, the term NNB was chosen because, for the research conducted in Poland, it allows avoiding bias which can be observed with the use of the terms *artificial bilingualism* (opponents) or *bilingualism tout court* (followers). Moreover, in the times of the omnipresent and dominating English-language scientific literature, the term *artificial bilingualism* yields no English results in the online search engine Google, whereas *non-native bilingualism* appears in discussions, online articles and blogs as well as in the above quoted English literature.

4. Opinions vs. results of scientific research

The key to understanding the different fate of the research and the treatment of the phenomenon of bilingualism, and by extension also that of NNB, is to pay attention to the necessity of the distinction between scientists' remarks based on casual observations and scientific facts based on research.

In other words, in order to get to the gist of the problem, one should determine whether an author of an opinion presents their beliefs, casual remarks based on some natural observation, scientific intuition or on the results of carefully conducted research. Furthermore, if we are dealing with research results, we have to consider the methodology used to avoid misunderstanding and misrepresentation which have also been observed in the history of research on bilingualism (Strazny 2005:276-280).

Laurie (1890:15-16) wrote that if a child had been able to grow up in a two-language environment, then this would surely harm the child and would not double his/her mental abilities but split them in half. It is an opinion to which everyone has a right but it should be considered only as such. It was not a conclusion drawn on the basis of long-term scientific research. Similarly Jespersen (1922:147-149), an outstanding linguist, skeptically referred to child bilingualism arguing that the lower IQ of bilingual children results from the increased effort of their brain and from its wasted potential.

The views of outstanding scientists who did not deal with bilingualism or only expressed their opinion on the subject were confirmed by research results that can no longer be taken into consideration due to serious methodological errors (Strazny 2005). In that research too many important factors such as origin, age, social and economic status, religion as well as the very language skills tested etc. were ignored. The research on bilingualism should include an interdisciplinary approach to the problem based on three pillars: psychology, sociology and linguistics. The very definition of the subject of research poses problems because bilingualism is not an artifact but a natural phenomenon proper for people and thus its definition, classification and division are arbitrary, different for different

researchers, conditioned *nota bene* by geography and culture which is impossible to judge the superiority of one definition of the other (cf. Szramek-Karcz in prep. d.). Defining the harmful or beneficial impact of NNB on a child is a process that should be supported by fair scientific research. Although undermined, the hasty conclusions and methodological errors would continue to stay for too long in the public awareness of entire communities (cf. Szramek-Karcz in prep. f.).

The widespread results of the flawed research rooted in the consciousness of the people are repeated to this day even in the scientific environment, also quite often, as advice of specialist pedagogues, psychologists, and speech therapists. It happens not only in Poland, a mono-cultural and monolingual country, but these views are present also in the USA, which is mentioned by Grosjean (2010), who regrets that many parents from mixed families are advised to cease raising their children in a harmful bilingual environment. In the survey on attitudes towards NNB (cf. Szramek-Karcz & Wolny M. in prep. h.) the stereotypes about bilingualism in Poland are explored.

In my research on NNB in Poland, parents can usually tell an anecdote of how a specialist has advised against employing NNB from an early age. Krakowian (2001:19) quotes a doctor who told her that “[e]verything will become mixed up for the child because of you. The child will not learn to speak Polish correctly”. A little girl, who was supposed to mix everything up is now a grown up woman, whose case did not confirm the doctor’s anxiety. The research on NNB in Poland aims to respond to the most important question; “Which factors determine the success of undertaking NNB in Poland?” (cf. Szramek-Karcz in prep. e.).

The opinions of speech therapists supporting bilingualism are very tentative. But is such an approach justified? If we look at children who start their education at the age of a few years, we can observe that monolingual, healthy children, in the same classroom, differ considerably among each other in four basic language skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) of their mother tongue. Even after a year of learning together under the supervision by the same teacher in the same class, some of them are better at speaking, recounting, writing, reading and some are worse. Each child has his/her own pace, assimilates knowledge differently, prefers a specific way of learning, has a different temper, various innate or acquired problems including speech impediments etc. (Gardner, H., & Hatch, T. 1989). Diseases, the family situation and environment also influence children’s development (cf. Szramek-Karcz in prep. g. The author ascribes the appearance of semi-bilingualism to exterior factors, undermines the very name, and its polonized equivalent used in the literature on the subject in particular and analyses hazards connected with it).

Children grow up and, as monolingual adults, citizens of the same country present language proficiency which varies among individuals. In other words, they attain different levels of language proficiency in their own mother tongue. It would be an interesting challenge to define the language proficiency level of an ideal speaker of Polish and compare it with the average level of native Poles living in Poland. In the research of Miodunka (2006) native speakers came

off worse than foreigners learning Polish as a foreign language. The research on Polish teenagers showed their lack of the lexical knowledge.

Unfortunately the “problem” of bilingual children is that their bilingualism is blamed in the case of any speech problems. After all, we cannot scientifically justify that lisping in a particular child is caused by bilingualism in this particular child. To check whether the bilingualism caused lisping, the factor of bilingualism would have to be eliminated, that is, turn back time to the moment of birth and talk to this newborn child in one language only. Next we would have to compare the results of the same child in the same family, after the same diseases and experiences with the results of the same child after turning back time to the moment when we talked to this child in multiple (in this case two) languages. Then we would have irrefutable scientific proof showing that the bilingualism was or was not the cause of the speech problems. As of today it is impossible. Fortunately, quantitative research offers help. In the light of the data collected, the percentage of children with speech impediments is the same among mono, bi- and multilingual children. The scientific research did not prove the relationship between bilingualism and speech impediments (Grosjean 2010).

Any research comparing mono and bilingual children is methodologically difficult to conduct as, in our opinion, monolingual children are not a model for the bilingual ones. Hasty conclusions obscure the image instead of clarifying the truth. In the case of the comparison of mono and bilingual people, the longitudinal research, that is long-term research, turns out to be the most appropriate (Crak, *Bialystok* and Freedman 2010).

Moreover, one has to be aware that the comparison of mono and bilingual children is not the juxtaposition of two homogeneous groups but collections of individuals who are influenced by countless factors. Even in carefully selected groups (Peal and Lambert 1962), it was found to be possible to select “better” ones (Macnamara 1966) which could explain the excellent test results of bilingual people. This is one more reason to be very careful while presenting opinions and research results concerning NNB.

5. Conclusion

Current research results indicate that a number of participating families successfully apply NNB; on the other hand there are those who have decided to discontinue its use. Moreover, some families have grown to perceive NNB as a source of a child’s failures and difficulties. The study’ therefore focuses on determining the necessary and required factors for NNB implementation to be successful; the assessed factors include linguistic, social, economic, socio-cultural and personality variables, which either separately or in combination may have an impact on both the success of the NNB implementation, when the child develops normally as bilingual, and on the failures, which may include speech defects (Grabowska 2008) or emotional bonding problems between the parent

and the child (Rokita-Jaśkow 2010). Parents who wish to apply NNB in Poland are currently provided with expert opinions which vary to a large extent.

It appears that identifying the factors determining the success of the NNB project (i.e. the adoption of NNB which lead yielding positive results) is of primary importance. This would provide the parents who are willing to put effort into raising a bilingual child with a tool calculating their chance of success as well as an instruction manual or a guidebook that facilitates the proper application of the process.

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