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Report

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Polish in Moss Side, Manchester

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Introduction

In our assignment we have been investigating the presence and usage of the Polish language in the Moss Side area of Manchester. We have been considering the possible outcomes of bilingualism in the Polish community and also looking at the Polish community in terms of bilingualism within the learning environment. We decided to study this particular community due to its proximity in our daily lives, and the fact that we thought it would be interesting to further our knowledge and understanding of it. The group has utilised both qualitative and quantitative methods when gathering data, carrying out face-to-face interviews, observations and a questionnaire providing numerical data. We kept to most of our original planned research schedule; however, we decided to modify our questionnaire, reducing the number of questions. This was decided on because we wanted the questionnaires to be easily filled in without people being put off by a time-consuming amount of assessment.

Results

The Polish Advice Centre, situated in Denmark Road, is a central part of this Polish community. The owner explained how he orders his goods from a mass-producing Polish cash and carry. The shop sells a wide range of Polish goods, including food, drink and Polish newspapers. Despite being very near to the Advice Centre, the activities centre did not provide any information in Polish or any other foreign languages.

An important source of information for anyone living in an area is the local council, which provides a wide range of services to residents including:

- benefits, housing, tax credits
- debt
- consumer problems
- enquiries about any Council service
- help to access health services
- basic immigration problems (not asylum)
- health and legal services
- access to education and training

- information and advice on services for older people - help in the home, energy saving advice

We looked into what kind of information was available in the Polish language via Manchester City Council. The council provides 'Link workers' for advice in different languages - unfortunately they do not have a bilingual Polish link worker at the moment. However, the Council can arrange for a Polish-English interpreter to be present at the Town Hall Advice Centre to give Poles advice in their mother tongue.

We spoke to a council worker, who told us that although the council itself does not keep copies, translated leaflets containing consumer advice and information about municipal services are available. If a person rings the council and requests certain guidance e.g. recycling information, they can receive a copy in the post; leaflets can also be downloaded over the internet.

We also looked at the information available in local police stations and found that many are equipped with sources of information in various languages, including posters and leaflets. Again, though, information in Polish is lacking. The reason given for this was that Polish is not one of the most common languages spoken in Manchester. The Greater Manchester Police Authority has translated information in eleven languages on its website. Polish, however, is not one of them.

The police force do have a "Language Line", which provides a telephone interpreting service - this can be provided through the station enquiry counter. A leaflet entitled 'Notice of Rights and Entitlements', which explains police procedure, can be accessed by internet and is available in Polish. Legally this leaflet must be available for access by all (which may be the only reason why it is available in Polish). The lack of quality information available in Polish could lead to language shift, where English would be used over and above Polish. However, as contact with the Police is usually not as common as, for example, contact with a GP, this factor may be negligible.

We visited some doctor's surgeries in the area. Immediately we noticed that there were leaflets in the Polish language, placed in a central position. This gave patients ease of access to information. Even on other leaflets (i.e. English language), there was a number, which people could call to access the leaflets in other languages. In the surgeries we visited, computerised welcome screens had information available in many languages, including

Polish. The reception staff at one surgery told us that there was access to an interpreter, although this service has to be arranged in advance. The provision of Polish language services in the field of medical help seems to be sufficiently abundant in this area of Manchester. This could be a factor in continuing language maintenance; as there is provision for Polish speakers to use their mother tongue, meaning they may be less inclined to use English and so continue to use Polish as the dominant language.

The central hub of the predominately Roman Catholic Polish community we studied is the Church of Divine Mercy in Moss Side. The church and the nearby Community Centre provide a focal point for Polish speakers and their families; these are places to meet community members and to speak in their mother tongue. We interviewed the Priest of this church, who told us that “99.9% of the time” the language of communication is Polish. He said there are some bilingual families, usually with one Polish first-language parent and one English first-language parent. All the services are in Polish, except for 5% that are conducted in both English and Polish. The priest told us that in 2004, when Poland joined the EU, around 80,000 Poles came to Greater Manchester. However, due to the recession he estimates that there are only 20,000 Polish people left in the area - he knows of eight Polish families that have settled here. He told us that a lot of families have since returned to Poland and there are no new families coming to join his congregation.

On Sunday, there is a mass in the church and also a cafe and shop in the hall next door. This is a popular social event for the surrounding community. The majority of the congregation present on Sundays (estimated at approximately 100 regular attendees) are older people, who have been in England for many years. Some of these people do not speak English – obviously, in this case, the issue of language maintenance is a strong; looking at the situations presented by Myers-Scotton, it could be seen that speakers in this case have never learned an L2. Other speakers in the congregation retain their L1 but have learned L2 to use in certain circumstances (perhaps knowing a basic level of English). There are some younger people (30-40 years age range) in the congregation too, and some young people - mostly children and grandchildren of the older people present. In the community hall, Polish is spoken throughout - it is spoken to bilingual children (who themselves speak Polish when in this community).

We also spoke to one of the community leaders at the Centre. She told us on Saturdays there is a Children’s Mass, where attendees are encouraged to speak Polish. Again the issue of language maintenance comes into focus here; the children are encouraged to

maintain the Polish language. However, a lot of children attending this service are 3rd generation Poles, who grow up with English as L1, probably only speaking Polish with a grandparent or when at the Polish church. The Church also runs a school on Saturday mornings with 194 attendees; there is a nursery class, 6 primary classes and 4 secondary classes. An important role of this additional school is language maintenance and transmission, strengthening the children's knowledge and awareness of their community's language. Here Polish is encouraged to be spoken, Polish language and literature is studied as well as geography, history and culture. These classes are important for the upkeep of Polish in this area, as a child may usually speak Polish only with their family, whilst using English in all other areas. The classes can therefore provide teaching in Polish, helping the children to use the language with other areas outside of the home environment and develop and maintain it. Whether or not the children who have Polish as their L1 will show factors of language maintenance needs to be seen by further ethnography or future case studies following the children's progress. This provides the group with issues they can take into account if carrying on to study multilingualism in future modules.

There are two classes for AS and A2 Levels teaching English for adult learners, either people who were born here, but want to improve their English (proving that some people do indeed maintain their L1 even when living in another country), and also new arrivals to the country. There is also an English class for parents who arrive from Poland that they can attend with their children. There is interaction between the church and the Roman Catholic schools in the area- most of the children attending the church also attend the local school.

Finally, there are some extra services available to Polish speakers in the community. There is a large community notice board outside the church with information in Polish; advertising a film club and a regular Alcoholics Anonymous meeting held in their mother tongue. The board provides a place where events can be advertised, all are in Polish with no English present. This trend demonstrates that there is a strong argument for continuing language maintenance, amongst those who use it and are settled here already- although as numbers of Poles living in Manchester may be dwindling, this may negatively affect this factor.

One of the most central factors to investigate in the Polish community is bilingualism in children. We set out to find out more research about bilingualism in the home, amongst peers and in schools. In visiting the Polish Advice centre we spoke to a woman called C¹, who had a 4 year old son. She explained to us how she used her L1 of Polish, and her

¹ For purposes of anonymity, names have been reduced to initials.

husband's L1 of English simultaneously in the home, and how she aspired for her son to have a bilingual language upbringing with both influences of English and Polish culture.

Observation

Although we had gathered information with regards to the language used by Polish people in both the domestic and public domain, this information had been provided by the participants themselves and was therefore self-reported, creating the possibility that some of the results may be unreliable. In an attempt to support the validity of these results, we also carried out an observation in the Polish Advice Centre. After gaining permission from the shopkeeper, we observed the interaction he had with his customers for an hour, and made note of the languages in which they conversed. We found that the majority of the customers were Polish and that they interacted with the shopkeeper in Polish rather than English. It was also interesting to observe the use of language between the customers themselves: one particular couple spoke to each other in Polish throughout their time in the shop. We felt that the high concentration of Polish customers may be due to several factors. The shop is positioned very close to a local shop selling English produce, and we felt that anyone who wished to purchase only English produce would shop there. The majority of the stock in the Polish Advice Centre is Polish, with a few exceptions, therefore making the shop specialised. It seems that Polish customers shopping in the Polish section of Sainsbury's, which stocks a majority of English produce, would be likely to speak English, whereas in the Polish Advice Centre, which caters specifically to the Polish community, there are able to converse in Polish and feel comfortable doing so.

In the schools in the area that we studied, they all showed to have some sort of help available for Polish L1 children to be able to learn English. The way they differed was in the way that the English teaching help was given. Webster, whose pupils speak in total around 17 or 18 languages, had separate English Language group work classes to help the children. The other school, Holy Name, instead gave each child individual help if they needed any assistance in improving their languages skills. The difference between the schools is that Webster at the time we visited did not currently have any Polish children in their classes, but Holy Name did have 10 students of Polish families involved in the school. We discovered from visiting Holy Name, that most of the Polish families were also very closely involved with the Church. This could help with language maintenance as the Polish children at the school are involved in the same community, therefore likely to know each other and use Polish when interacting. This can help in terms of language maintenance, and

it is very likely that many of the children are bilingual, as their classes will be taught in English.

Discussion

Section A

From the results of our sample we can deduce that the native language of 44.5% of the participants of this study is Polish and 55.5% is English. While English is the most common as a native language, we can see that Polish is significant in this area, with just under half of the population speaking Polish as their native language. 66.6% of these people were born in England and 33.3% were born elsewhere. This is interesting as it shows that there are people who were born in England speak Polish as their first language, as well as some immigrants. The ages of our participants varied.

Section B

Our results showed that most people 'strongly agreed' with the statement showing their preference of speaking in their native language, while a small number of people had no preference. With the question of whether or not the participants felt it was important to maintain speaking Polish the results were more spread. Most people either strongly agreed or just agreed, suggesting that some English speakers must have shared the idea that it is important for people to maintain speaking Polish. There were however several who disagreed. These could have been native Polish speakers expressing their wish to embrace the English culture or native English speakers expressing negative views on the use of Polish, perhaps reflecting negative views of the native Polish speakers in general.

The question of 'identifying with the mother tongue' yielded somewhat similar results to the question above, but with responses moving towards the middle ground. The question regarding identification with 'British culture' had a large number of responses strongly agreeing with the statement. This reflects a positive attitude towards Britain from the native speakers of both the Polish and English languages.

The two questions, regarding how helpful the two languages are when getting jobs, gave interesting results. The participant responses suggested that English was very important whereas Polish was not. This is understandable considering that the majority of people in England do not speak Polish.

When asked about whether they would want more public service information in Polish, the response was mostly positive. The highest number of responses was for the agree option, suggesting that the participants are not completely dissatisfied with the Polish language in public service information.

On the question regarding the languages that the participants may want their children to be brought up speaking; the majority of people chose agree/strongly agree for Polish. However, responses for English were far more frequent with the vast majority choosing the strongly agree option. This reflects the view that it is more helpful in England to know the English language rather than the Polish language, in terms of social, school and working life.

Section C

When considering the use of language in the home, our questionnaire results show that in situations where speakers had the chance to use their native tongue, they did. It also shows that usage of the Polish language alone was limited with the highest frequency of this appearing in the 'neighbours with the same mother tongue' question. This could be because of the aforementioned point that people want to use their native language as much as possible, but also that neighbours who share a native language might express unity by choosing to speak in this language with each other. Usage of both the English and Polish languages was relatively high, appearing most commonly under the 'with partner' question. This could show that there are English and Polish couples, who use a little of each other's languages when interacting. Under the 'children's peers' question, the responses was almost all English, which suggests that Polish amongst younger people is not that frequent.

In the local area, the language used was almost exclusively English, and no-one wrote that they used only Polish. Language use when in church was interesting as a comparatively large amount of people wrote that they spoke solely in Polish. This corresponds to information from the Priest.

In terms of media, the majority of people wrote that the main language involved was English, though there was 1-5 people that wrote 'English and Polish' for each subdivision, rising in frequency under the 'internet' question. This would be because of the availability of the Polish language on the internet. The communication section provided similar results, with English being the popular choice, Polish never having lone usage and the combination of English and Polish increasing with questions involving the internet.

The work and school sections were interesting because every single one of the responses was English, though there were three people who failed to supply an answer for the work question, suggesting unemployment. Also only a few people answered questions about school, suggesting that they had no interaction with schools at all. This suggests that there are either are few Polish speakers in the school and work place, or that they choose not to use their native language.

Under the shopping section, the presence of the English and absence of Polish was the strongest, except for under the 'local shop' question. Knowing that this shop has a Polish speaking owner, and doubles as a Polish advice centre, it is understandable that many people choose to speak solely in Polish, or a mixture of Polish and English.

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Appendix

