Sociolinguistic Studies

ISSN: 1750-8649 (print)
ISSN: 1750-8657 (online)

Review

Family Language Policy in the Polish Diaspora: A Focus on Australia

Piotr Romanowski (2021)

New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis. Pp. 246
ISBN: 9780367706449 (hbk)
ISBN: 9780367706487 (pbk)
ISBN: 9781003147343 (eBook)

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The last decade has seen a burgeoning interest in language practices within the family and, more recently, in the voices of the children. With an estimated 20 million people of Polish ancestry living outside Poland, and approximately 170,000 of those in Australia, this book is both timely and relevant. Research on Polish immigration has primarily covered topics of Polish migration from a historical and sociological aspect with scant academic interest given to linguistic composition and family language policies.

Family Language Policy in the Polish Diaspora: A Focus on Australia is an admirable study on the development, maintenance, and struggles of Polish as a heritage language in mixed transnational families in Melbourne, Australia. Its exploration of real-life situations provides a valuable contribution to the growing field of Family Language Policy (hereafter FLP). The book consists of an introduction and ten thorough and informative chapters. It is divided into two parts. Chapters one to three are theoretical in nature, and part two, covering seven chapters, is devoted to the four-year-long research and methodology Romanowski has engaged in and practised.

In Chapter 1, 'Polish Immigration to Australia', the author discusses salient concepts including acculturation and adaptation through a social identity theory

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SOLS VOL 18.1–2 2024 249–254 https://doi.org/10.1558/sols.26260
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lens before providing a historical overview of the two waves of Polish migration to Australia – a political exodus post-WWII and an economic exodus in the 1980s. The families studied are of the second wave and are highly educated and proficient in English. The Polish parents in this research are all married to Australians.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide an extensive overview of the theoretical framework covering bilingual children and their language development, an in-depth exploration into the characteristics of bilingual speakers, the process of bilingual acquisition, and language use patterns. Chapter 2, 'Intersections of Bilingual Development, Language Socialisation and Heritage Languages', discusses the bilingual development of children in immigrant families and the hierarchisation of languages as they are shaped by society, the home, and the culture associated with the language. Language socialisation and its evolution as a paradigm are also discussed, and particular attention is paid to the language socialisation of bilingual children in multilingual settings. The section on heritage language studies discusses how heritage languages have been negatively impacted by factors such as wider societal language ideologies and schools which often 'force families to adopt home language practices that favour the decline of the mother tongue' (p. 43). Chapter 3, 'Family Language Policy', introduces FLP, the central theme of this monograph, from the inception of FLP right through to fields into which it has expanded. Readers are introduced to the concepts of language ideology and management which formed the foundation of FLP, as well as language hierarchisation and language negotiation.

Part 2 begins with the research methodology Romanowski employed during his two fieldwork trips to Melbourne in 2014 and 2018. In Chapter 4, 'Research Methodological Background', he outlines his study design and methods of data analysis. A mixed-method methodology was used, incorporating quantitative (an online questionnaire on sociodemographic data and language ideologies and practices) and qualitative data (semi-structured interviews and participant observation of families as well as language portraits by children). Of the 151 responses to the questionnaire, 124 met the criteria of being 'Polish-Australian bilingual exogamous families with school-aged children born in Australia' and attending a Polish Saturday school. Of these, three families were 'carefully selected' as case studies, and two meetings in the children's school and one in their homes, were held with them. Case studies as a method of data collection provides rich, comprehensive data and captures the 'hows and whys' of the data, giving the reader a deeper understanding of FLP in Polish-Australian families. Romanowski uses this data not only to explore the families' language attitudes and practices but also to give agency and voice to children, something only seen

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in more recent FLP whereby children 'employ multiple strategies to navigate the conversation, and use what skills they do have in varied and creative ways' (Smith-Christmas, 2020: 226).

Chapter 5, 'Online Questionnaire', provides a meticulous analysis of the online questionnaires from 17 districts of Greater Melbourne. The sociodemographic profile, unsurprisingly, consisted mainly of women, a common phenomenon in the bilingual rearing of children. In the data, Polish parents admit to consistently using Polish in the home, and while admitting to not favouring code-switching, believe that it allows for more fluid and uninterrupted conversations between family members. However, what the data also shows is the difficulties in avoiding English in certain situations such as homework, in public spaces and in the presence of non-Polish speakers. This is in line with research by Curdt-Christiansen (2013) who argues that the family language is highly impacted by factors outside the family's control. Also noteworthy is the correlation between parental language input and the amount of Polish spoken by the child, highlighting the importance of language management by the parent.

Chapter 6, 'Case Study Report One: Flexible Code-Switching Practices', Chapter 7, 'Case Study Report Two: A Restrictive One Parent-One Language Strategy', and Chapter 8, 'Case Study Report Three: Accommodating Dual-Lingual Interactions', consist of independent case study reports on the language practices and ideologies of three families as they are 'undertaken, experienced and narrated' (p. 96). These families were selected from the questionnaire sample based on their language practices. The families are similar in that all are exogamous marriages, with the parents educated and living in Australia for a long time with a strong command of or even fluent English. All live in well-to-do areas in Melbourne and, prior to having children, had some knowledge of bilingualism and the benefits it has for children. The Polish parents in all families report speaking Polish to their children all or most of the time and all children attend a Polish school weekly. The Andersons (Polish mother) consider their language practice to be flexible, allowing the use of code-switching and preferring approaches such as 'adult repetition' and 'move-on strategy' to strengthen the children's use of Polish in the family. The King family's (Polish mother) language practice is labelled 'highly restrictive and controlling' and a type of 'hyper-parenting' which the mother believes is necessary to achieve 'balanced bilingualism and biculturalism'. Finally, the Adamczak (Polish father) family seemingly have the most relaxed language policy and frequently code-switch to aid communication with the children and to 'avoid unnecessary tensions and complications' (p. 143). What is significant about the three case studies is the language portraits which go beyond linguistic ability to reveal the identities and

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language ideologies of the children. Notions of embarrassment or inflexibility are apparently no longer existent in the children's understanding of how they understand their identity and heteroglossic reality.

Chapter 9, 'Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion', details an in-depth cross-case analysis of the similarities and differences of the three cases as well as validation with respect to the online questionnaires. Overt and covert reasons exist for parents wanting to maintain Polish within the family. Aside from the desire to have their children brought up bilingually, parents also refer to it as an investment and regard it as their parental duty. Also highlighted are the discrepancies of what parents believe they are doing versus what they are actually doing. Previous studies have also drawn attention to similar language practices in the family (King and Fogle, 2006; Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Soler and Zabrodskaja, 2017).

Chapter 10, 'Further Implications and the Way Forward', points out directions in future research in the fields of FLP, particularly in the areas of language maintenance, language socialisation, and dual-language acquisition. Romanowski also emphasises the importance of 'allowing the children to accentuate their perceptions on the established language policies in their home' (p. 182) and advises parents to 'accept their children's language choices reflecting their families' transnational character' (p. 183).

Overall, this book provides a very thorough exploration of actual language use and language ideologies as practised within the families. It is easy to read, accessible, and is a great contribution to the field of FLP. The monograph highlights perfectly the 'invisible work' (Okita, 2002) of developing heritage languages in the home. More importantly, it reveals the fine line between conceding to the reality of external pressures and maintaining 'cultural loyalty [to] and linguistic continuity' with the heritage language and culture (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013: 1).

Though it explores different language practices, the book does not, however, compare these against the linguistic analysis of utterances by the children to examine which are most effective. The reader is given the impression that Polish is most frequently spoken by the King children whose mother enforces a strict language separation policy in the family, yet this practice is seen as 'restrictive and controlling'. Unfortunately, the seemingly most successful linguistic practice is the family whose FLP is seen as rigid and inflexible and lacking any emotional connection to the language. For readers wishing to have strict separate language practices, this particular example may be off-putting.

Furthermore, one wonders if recommending a more relaxed approach to language policy might increase the amount of code-switching used by children and thus increase the feelings of incompetence and insecurity when speaking

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the heritage language. Similarly, the claim that 'language should come from highly proficient speakers' (p. 26) is discouraging to new speakers of the heritage language who wish to support the family's heritage language decision. Strong impact belief is responsible for controlling and shaping children's development of the heritage language and could be improved by having the support and language input of the second parent. Families need to be reminded their language decisions 'will strengthen the family's social standing and best serve and support the family members' goals in life' (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009: 326), emphasising language production over linguistic correctness.

In conclusion, *Family Language Policy in the Polish Diaspora: A Focus on Australia* is a valuable contribution to the field of family language policy and planning. Readers are brought into the complicated fabric of the bilingual home, which allows readers a glimpse at diverse, sometimes unconventional language practices within families and by family members. The intended readership is not confined to academics and researchers but is of universal interest and of use to all interested in the language of families and different family language practices. It is an excellent and timely addition to the growing literature on FLP, language ideologies, and language identity. Furthermore, it is the first of its kind to examine the Polish community in Australia.

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(Received 12th May 2023; accepted 5th June 2023)

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.26260 - Wednesday, February 18, 2026 12:54:09 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80