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**Author:** Sonia Szramek-Karcz

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**Sonia SZRAMEK-KARCZ**

University of Silesia

## **The Success of Non-Native Bilingualism in Poland**

### **Abstract:**

Non-Native Bilingualism (NNB) is a condition where parents share the same native language living in the community where their native language is predominantly used and the child is always addressed by either parent or both in a language which is not their native language. The study of NNB was inspired by parents who had decided to practise NNB despite the critical warnings from some researchers. The question about NNB is not whether it exists, works or is worth trying or not, but why and how NNB families deal with non-native language learning at home, as well as what factors may influence the child's upbringing in NNB. To understand the project and NNB, the holistic thinking style is presented with the emphasis on the numerous factors involved in the process of the Non-Native Child's upbringing. The role of the social factor and history of the society that influence the notion of success are discussed in the article.

### **Introduction**

These days, nobody denies the existence of Non-Native Bilingualism (henceforth NNB). This approach of language education has its place in the literature. Suzanne Romaine (1995: 184, 198–203), following Harding and Riley (1986: 47-8), distinguished among five principal types of early childhood bilingualism. One of them is Non-Native Bilingualism defined as a phenomenon where parents always address their child in a language which is not their native language in an environment where their native language is used as the community's dominant language. The concept of Non-Native Bilingualism is described in the books by G. Saunders (1982, 1988), S. Döpke (1992), M.I. Jimenez (2011), thesis by B. Ziętara (2012), D. Krakowian (2001), A. Michalak (2009) as well as numerous articles and blogs (the list of blogs has been provided in References). The research on this phenomenon considering qualitative and quantitative data is being conducted within the NNBproject.eu (S. Szramek-Karcz 2014a).

Non-Native Bilingualism (NNB) arouses controversy, as its underlying assumption is that a parent does not speak his/her native language to the child. The NNB stems neither from the wish to assimilate with the environment as early as possible (as is the case of immigration), nor from the low status of L1 (as in the case of subtractive bilingualism), but is a conscious decision to speak to a child in a foreign language (parents' L2) in a natural way. NNB is defined in the literature as one of the ways to become bilingual. M. Olpińska-Szkiełko (2013: 79–80) discriminates between three possible types of bilingual upbringing in a family: linguistically mixed families (international couples), immigrant families and the families (NNB families as referred

to in our studies) where: “The child acquires the language that is not native to either of the parents. Moreover, it is not the language of a community within which the family lives. In this case, one or both parents deliberately choose a language different from their native language to communicate with the child. Another variant of this case is when a non-parent staying at the child’s home (e.g. a nanny) speaks a different language to the child. [*author’s translation*]” (M. Olpińska-Szkiełko 2013: 81). Parents understand the significance of natural language learning and more and more of them decide to speak a foreign language to their children. At present, both negative and positive opinions on NNB elucidate the need for the research, analysis and balanced judgements.

The article is organized as follows: first the methodological assumptions are presented with the holistic point of view and the need of understanding the NNB phenomenon in the social context. Next, due to the importance of social factor in applying NNB, the Polish part of the project is presented with the description of the ethnic diversity in Poland. The historical background enables us to understand the attitudes which are crucial for the success of NNB. The issue of the concept of success will constitute the third part of the article. The analysis shows the importance of the social factor in the NNB research and it is devoted to the specific linguistic and social environments for practising NNB.

### **1. The holistic thinking style**

Selected aspects of NNB are handled in detail (S. Szramek-Karcz/ D. Tomaszewski/ K. Kuros-Kowalska 2015), whereas NNB as such is treated holistically. This holistic thinking style (E. Aronson/ D.T. Wilson/ R.M. Akert 2010) focuses on the relationships between objects and is common in the cultural sphere of East Asia. Typical NNB research methods (S. Szramek-Karcz 2014a) include: interviews, questionnaires, naturalistic observations, participant observations, linguistic competence measurements, speech-therapy research on children as well as attitudinal analyses. The main task of the present project is to create a trustworthy list of contributing factors in NNB based on qualitative and quantitative analyses interpreted thoroughly. Ignoring the NNB environment leads to numerous erroneous conclusions (as pointed out by the opponents of NNB) drawn hastily as a consequence of having taken into consideration a too narrow sample and limiting the range of relevant factors.

The research project covers families successfully implementing NNB and those that no longer do it, or even consider it as a mistake. The project’s aim is neither to advise for NNB nor against it. Its objective is to describe the phenomenon of NNB and work out a list of contributing and limiting factors in order to help families to make a conscious decision, to apply the NNB in the right successful way (the meaning of success is analysed hereinafter). The NNB research is family-oriented (J. Brzeziński 2006) where the good state of being constitutes the main interest. The support for NNB families is manifested by organizing workshops for parents and meetings for children. The process of data collection does not disturb the everyday life of the family and protect the relation in the family which make the project a longitudinal study.

The research on NNB started with a ten-month naturalistic observation (October 1999 – June 2000) of a 6-year-old boy, whose parents were Austrian living in Austria. The child’s mother talked to him in French, which the father did not speak. In 2004, a

participant observation of a girl was conducted and then in 2008 another one which involved a boy, both being raised by non-native French-speaking mother. In 2011–2012, meetings with the NNB families from all over Poland were held. Most parents, who were asked about other people bringing up their children in NNB, answered positively. Thus the circle of families taking part in the project was extended substantially to 48 families. With the help of Aleksandra Lazar, the administrator of a Facebook group devoted to raising bi-/multilingual children (July 2015) called ‘Dwujęzyczność dziecięca’ consisting of more than 4,000 members, the project developed on the international scale.

Considering the multitude of factors involved in NNB one must be very careful in data interpreting, in order not to spread the myths about the harmfulness of speaking to a child in a non-native language. In superficially analysed case studies of NNB families, the opponents of NNB make, among others, the *fundamental attribution error*. The term, belonging to the realm of social psychology, stands for the tendency to overestimate the influence of internal factors on human behaviour and underestimates the importance of situational factors. Thus, a significant role in NNB research is played by attitudes (S. Szramek-Karcz/ M. Wolny *in preparation*), sociology (S. Szramek-Karcz, 2015d), an individual’s family situation (S. Szramek-Karcz 2015e – a new case study *in preparation*). As NNB is a sociological phenomenon, the name had to be chosen in a thoughtful manner.

In English the NNB is referred to as ‘elective bilingualism’, ‘artificial bilingualism’, ‘cultivated bilingualism’, ‘intentional bilingualism’, or as adopted in our research, non-native bilingualism. The “non-native” is an unmarked label (as opposed to inherently negative ‘artificial bilingualism’ or positive ‘elective bilingualism’) and, what is more, it does not favour the parent as the only entity bringing up the child in that way, as the role can be fulfilled by a guardian, grandparent or a nanny; see the above-mentioned definition by M. Olpińska-Szkielko (2013: 81). It is the person responsible for a child that decides on their upbringing, using particular educational methods and speaking (or not) a non-native language to the child. It is worth mentioning that parents who started implementing NNB in Poland several years ago were fiercely criticized. Nowadays the situation seems to be less difficult for families starting NNB as it is gaining on popularity. It is to be strongly emphasized that making a particular decision is the parents’ private matter and should not be evaluated without respect for the parents’ choice, because the NNB history of research seems to follow the same path as research devoted to bilingualism used in the past: from total criticism to total delight.

The opponents of NNB raise the argument that it is not bilingualism because the parents are not ‘real’ native speakers and the created situation is artificial. However, the ‘bilingualism’ part in the adopted name of Non-Native Bilingualism is justified as the research in question defines bilingualism – a regular use of two or more languages or dialects (F. Grosjean, 2008: 119). A child who lives in Poland in a NNB family is addressed in a language different from Polish every day, thus it is considered bilingual in the NNB project. The degree of mastering a language, its active or passive usage are discussed elsewhere (S. Szramek-Karcz, *A Non-Native Bilingual Family in Poland*, a case study describing the NNB family with four grown up children, *in preparation*).

The name of this type of language education, that is, “Non-Native Parenting”, even if very true and accurate, could not be adopted as NNB as it is also practised by nannies

or other guardians (M. Olpińska-Szkiełko 2013: 81), grandfathers or uncles (B. Krakowian 2000). One ought to remember that neither a nanny, nor parents, mentioned in the above definition are native speakers of the language they address the child, unless it is a native support, as in Ellen and Chris's family (B. Pearson 2007) where a Spanish nanny was hired to offer some input of Spanish in the NNB family. The holistic thinking style allows us to consider the NNB phenomenon with other members of the family involved as the source of L2 as Non-Native Speakers. As "no man is an island", the social aspects must be the first ones to be taken into consideration, especially the language configuration in the nearest society.

## 2. Polish ethnic diversity

In accordance with what has been stated, it is essential that the first part of the research in question be conducted in Poland, a country in Central Europe with the area of 312,685 square km, the home of 38.23 million inhabitants, including 37,530,000 Polish citizens. The only difference between NNB families from all over the world (the list of blogs in References) is their cultural and social background (the example of Romania in S. Szramek-Karcz 2015d). This aspect turns out to be crucial in taking up and continuing NNB.

Polish ethnic diversity is the first characteristic feature of Polish NNB families as compared with the aforementioned NNB families from other countries. The ethnic diversity of the Polish society sounds like an oxymoron considering the data showing simply incredible, in the world of today, ethnic homogeneity of Poland. Nationalities or ethnic groups other than Poles amount to about 1-3%, whereas foreigners, i.e. people without the Polish citizenship, 0.2% (MSW 2009, in A. Giza/ M. Sikorska 2012: 50). These rough figures follow the fact that „Non-Polish national identity is declared by 444,600 (1.2 %) Polish citizens. Moreover 2.0 % citizens did not declare any national identity.” (M. Moskal 2004: 5).

T. Wicherkiewicz (2006: 657) points out that „During the 2002 official population census, 36,895,241 Polish citizens declared Polish nationality (98.31%), and 37,294, 690 declared Polish as their home language (99.37%), including 36,802,514 Polish monolinguals (98.06%)". This situation can explain the stir, which NNB families cause in the playground, when it is revealed that the parents do not speak Polish to their children. As related by NNB parents, the frequently asked questions then are: "Do you come from England/France/Germany? Your husband/wife isn't a Pole, is she/he? Why do you address your child in a foreign language?" NNB parents point out the fact that when the asking person is informed about NNB, the dialogue tends to change into a monologue – the person who asked questions is telling a story about his/her language learning: the time of its start, its duration, its efficiency. All NNB families have experienced such reactions and consider them typical of newly-met strangers in Poland. The problem is that we do not know how many families are practising NNB in Poland as 48 NNB families studied in the project constitute only a fraction of all parents that apply NNB in Poland.

It is to be emphasized that the present Polish monolingualism came to the fore in recent history. However, before the Second World War, Poland was a multilingual and multicultural country where Poles comprised only 64-69% of all the inhabitants



(N. Davies 1996). In 1939, Nazi Germany by attacking Poland, began the Second World War that until May 1945 had claimed 55 million lives including 6 million Poles. The situation in Poland changed after the leaders of the USA, the USSR and the UK had made some decisions at three subsequent conferences: in Teheran (1943), Yalta (1945) and Potsdam (1945). In the absence of other countries, several changes in Europe were made, among others those in the shape of Poland: eastern Poland was awarded to Russia in exchange for Recovered Territories, formerly German. Those post-war decisions played a part in the division of Europe into two hostile armed camps divided by the symbolic Iron Curtain. At that time Poland got within the scope of communist influence which is seen in the NNB research by the choice of the language and the L2 acquisition strategy adopted.

The present-day, Polish attitude towards Russian is the outcome, among others, of those political decisions. As soon as the communist period in Poland ended, Russian was immediately replaced with Western languages (English, French and German) at schools. Any shortages in teaching staff were alleviated by means of newly-created three-year teacher training colleges. Research into NNB confirms the difficult situation of Russian: namely, the Polish parent who knows both English and Russian either chooses English to communicate with the child, or teaches the child Russian at home, while selecting another language in the playground. Parents teach their children Russian at home in order to spare them rejection, hostile reaction from peers.

As far as multilingualism is concerned, the families participating at NNBproject.eu do not need to keep the rule “speak always and everywhere the one particular language you have preselected”. On the contrary, it is the parents themselves that decide whether they withdraw temporarily from the OPOL rule and switch to the majority language. Research has not demonstrated the fact that parents switching languages may have any harmful influence on the child, whereas forcing the child to answer in L2 can result in both rejecting the language and deteriorating the parental bond. Both acquisition and learning a language should be based on good (intrinsic) motivation (S. Szramek-Karcz 2015c, 2015f). The stand taken by the project researchers is that any decision concerning pursuing, abandoning or following a particular strategy should be left to parents, while describing only those aspects that are worth paying attention to, in order to render bilingualism additive.

The inhabited region reflects the layout of choosing L2 by NNB families in Poland. In the present sample, most German-Polish NNB families (not to be confused with the German minority) live in Opole and Silesian Voivodeships. M. Moskal (2004) writes: “Germans inhabit mainly the Opole province (70.1%) and Upper Silesia (20.1%); however in the case of Silesians the situation is reversed because 85.8% of people who declared Silesian identity reside in the Silesian province and the rest of the population (14%) is concentrated in the Opole province”. However, it does not entail a more favourable environment’s reaction to NNB. One should remember the politics after The Second World War (1933–1945). In Recovered Territories (see the history facts quoted above) the authorities of the Polish People’s Republic adopted the policy of Polonization. As a result German was forbidden, the names of towns and surnames were changed in order to sound Polish. During the recent meeting of NNB families using German the issue of unpleasant and difficult situations they are faced with when heard speaking German to their children was raised.

However, unfavourable reactions from the environment are not limited to German or Russian. Polish linguistic homogeneity results in, among others, not always positive reactions to the parent speaking a foreign language to the child, if the parent is not a native speaker of a language but pretends to be a foreigner. NNB parents write in surveys and say in interviews that they are sometimes treated as if they wanted to show off their language skills or to backbite those present, keep secrets, using the code of another language. Each of the studied families has met at least once with a xenophobic reaction expressed by means of the sentence: “In Poland speak as Poles do,” “I wonder what you are talking about” (uttered in an ironic tone). The homogeneity of Poles can result in lower tolerance of otherness. The data on immigrants’ assimilation and the double-quick attrition of their mother tongue as early as in the first generation show that Poles hardly accept what is other, unknown or new (A. Giza/ M. Sikorska 2012: 54). So immigrants’ quick linguistic assimilation can be associated with the familiar process of Polonization when adopting Polish resulted in raising one’s prestige, social status, etc.

In Poland, not only the linguistic situation has changed (from multilingual into dominated in 98% by Polish speakers), but also the concept of success, whose semantic evolution was analysed in detail by E. Grzeszczyk (2003). The question “how to be successful in NNB” is a tricky one as the concept of success has got two main meanings and still many negative connotations and interpretations analysed below.

### 3. The concept of success

In Poland, the understanding of success, as shown with the ethnic and linguistic situation, must be seen as a process with historical background. Following the change of political system (the fall of communism in 1989), *doing nothing* went out of fashion: “Media started to promote aggressively the new role model – a successful person, active, dynamic and resourceful, concentrated chiefly on a career and receiving an income that allows them to live to a decent standard: to have a house, a car, go on holidays overseas, buy in trendy shops” (E. Grzeszczyk 2003: 9). The word has changed its sense from socialist propaganda for society’s sake into individual success associated with career and money. However, a part of Polish population still considers success as connected with egoism, rejection of moral values in order to gain short-term financial benefits (E. Grzeszczyk 2003: 9). Most of E. Grzeszczyk’s respondents classify themselves as the followers of moderate success understood as “earning a living, decent standard of life and children’s education, albeit without any extravagance” (2003: 290). Indeed, upbringing one’s children in NNB is sometimes seen as extravagance.

This extravagance is observed in the answers collected from the parents. They perceive speaking to their child in public places as an example of difficulties in applying NNB, because it makes them open to criticism and attracts attention. Words from the interview (S. Szramek-Karcz 2014b) for the Polish Press Agency that the most important thing for a child is to be understood, accepted and safe and if speaking to the child in [a language] in public exposes it to ridicule, we can do it more discreetly, were given a warm welcome. Bilingualism should be the source of joy for the parent, as only then the parent’s enthusiasm and positive attitude towards L2 will be passed on to the child. In this respect, the *tall poppy syndrome* known from the Australian culture and described, among others, by R. Dębski (2009: 27) is to be observed in Poland. *Collins Dictionary*

defines the expression as Australian and rather informal, a tendency to disparage any person who has achieved great prominence or wealth: *chop down anyone who does better than the mediocre*<sup>1</sup>. The NNB parents are often seen like a kind of tall poppy.

The suspicious approach to success in Poland (L. Lewicka 2005) is evidenced not only by the titles of publications on ethical standards, such as the collected papers edited by Rev. J. Mariański, S. Zięba (2008) entitled „Godność czy Sukces. Kulturowe dylematy współczesności” [‘Dignity or Success. Contemporary Cultural Dilemmas’], which presupposes that the terms in question are opposite, but also in the guidebook for the large audience. The title of the book *Nice Girls Never Get the Corner Office* by Lois P. Frankel (2014, 2005) was translated into Polish as „Grzeczne dziewczynki nie awansują” [‘Good (not naughty) Girls Are not Promoted’]. This suggests that a woman should be a kind of a ‘naughty girl’ in order to achieve success, in contrast with the contents of the book which is about unconscious mistakes women make that sabotage their careers. Additionally, the cover in the Polish version features a high heel that crushes a man’s shoe. The Polish publisher, to sell the book, indicates the aggressive, unrestrained method of moving up the career ladder. The ‘promotion,’ as it appears in the title, is a symbol of professional success in Poland. We can see the success in a negative context.

What is still underestimated in the Polish society is the motivation for achievements, the strive for better and better fulfilment of one’s responsibilities (no matter if it concerns tidying, writing a book, managing a company), the boost of one’s skills and strengths, noticing still new requirements and creating them (K. Skarzyńska 2005: 69). At the same time, research (D. McClelland 1967, K. Varga 1977, D. Doliński 1995, T. Tyszka 1997, D. Landes 2003) confirms the interdependence between the intensity of motivation for achievements in a given culture and its economic growth. As K. Skarzyńska (2005) notices, in Poland ‘success’ is more appreciated if it was achieved easily, e.g. winning one million zlotys in a lottery is considered a greater success than earning it. Fosterling (2001) demonstrates that the value of success depends on the awareness of its causes. That is why NNB children can hear people underestimating their knowledge of language: ‘The father can speak the language, so he taught it to the child, nothing special in it’. Good motivation (no expectation of recognition by others) is one of the factors in correct NNB practices (S. Szramek-Karcz 2015f).

The attitude towards the English word *success* is reflected in its translation into Polish counterparts: *powodzenie* ‘achievement,’ i.e. in ‘Her success is due to hard work and determination.’ (*cel został osiągnięty*), and *sukces* ‘good result’ in ‘His first film was a great success’ (*dobry wynik, popularność*)<sup>2</sup>.

Likewise, the definition in a Polish dictionary distinguishes two senses<sup>3</sup>:

1. «*pomyślny wynik jakiegoś przedsięwzięcia, osiągnięcie zamierzonego celu*» ‘a successful result of an undertaking, the achievement of an intended goal’
2. «*zdobycie sławy, majątku, wysokiej pozycji itp.*» ‘gaining fame, wealth, a high status, etc.’

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/tall-poppy-syndrome>

<sup>2</sup> <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english-polish/success>

<sup>3</sup> <http://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/sukces;2576536>



The first definition refers to setting goals and reaching them by individuals, whereas the second one is associated with success understood as a social phenomenon. Gaining fame, wealth and a high status did not mean success in all of the societies and in all the epochs (E. Grzeszczyk 2003).

With the NNB research, we want to contribute to the evolution of the word 'success' in Poland and we apply the first sense of that word. The parents are satisfied when they achieve the aims that they have set themselves, or when the result exceeds their expectations. Reasonable expectations are a prerequisite for parents' satisfaction, which in turn translates into children's satisfaction. Therefore, by *success* we mean 'a successful result of an undertaking, the achievement of an intended goal'. The success of NNB means its best course. The best course, in turn, stands for such a way of implementing NNB that is satisfactory for a child and their parents, holds the family together, has a positive effect on the family members.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Non-Native Bilingualism is one possible way for a child who can understand and speak two or more languages or dialects to become bilingual (F. Grosjean 2008: 119). The article is a part of the NNB project. In 5,153 words, we barely scratch the surface of the Success and Non-Native Bilingualism in Poland. The most important factors influencing the NNB were presented and the topic related issues will be continued in further publications.

The holistic thinking style was underlined as the analysis of other factors lead to the harmful and very judgmental opinions about NNB. In the NNB research, one should avoid definitive judgments, as it concerns an extremely delicate matter of family, its life, relationships, communication, etc. The holistic frame leads us to the social factor, especially the linguistic reality the family is living in, the attitudes of the society members, people's every day reaction. Parents are told to stop speaking a non-native language to their child. The aim of the research is to elaborate a list of factors that make NNB a great family adventure.

The sociological aspect is one of the most important issues while choosing the language and practising NNB. The picture of the ethnic diversity in Poland and the history of migrations enable us to understand people's reactions to Poles who live in Poland and speak a foreign language to their child. Fortunately, as shown earlier, in the Polish society the attitudes to NNB change as well as the meaning of success.

The concept of success has involves a sociological aspect and cannot be studied without a society where it is used. The evolution of the word meaning is slowly approaching the concept of the motivation of achievements where self-determination plays a major role. Realistic goals, atmosphere and good motivation are the key to success understood as the achievement of an intended goal.

The research has demonstrated so far that NNB is not influenced by such factors as child's temperament or gender, parent's temperament or gender, their political preferences, religious beliefs or researchers' opinions. In fact, a lot of families decided to take up NNB in spite of researchers' unfavorable opinions because they had met another NNB family or considered the issue of language acquisition according to common sense. The parents' expectations and children's language level are a matter we are going to discuss next.

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