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Mothers' Perceptions of the Role of the COVID-19 Pandemic for Minority Language Maintenance in Their Bilingual Children (Speaking English and Polish) Living in the United Kingdom

*Postrzeganie przez matki roli pandemii COVID-19 w utrzymywaniu
języka dziedziczonego u ich dwujęzycznych dzieci (mówiących po
angielsku i po polsku) mieszkających w Wielkiej Brytanii*

Abstract: To answer the question of various forms that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected family language practices in HL families, we qualitatively analyzed 27 interviews with Polish mothers living in the UK and raising their children bilingually. We found that the world health crisis had both negative and positive impacts on each of the language acquired by the children, and we identified themes that recurred throughout the material. The factors included: limited possibilities of traveling – either to Poland or back to the UK, school closures resulting in shifts in childcare constellations, new language and social practices.

Keywords: heritage language; bilingualism; language development during the pandemic; Polish language in the UK

Abstrakt: Aby odpowiedzieć na pytanie, jak pandemia COVID-19 mogła wpłynąć na rodzinne praktyki językowe w rodzinach dwujęzycznych, przeanalizowano jakościowo 27 wywiadów z polskimi matkami mieszkającymi w Wielkiej Brytanii i wychowującymi swoje dzieci dwujęzycznie. Odkryto, że światowy kryzys zdrowotny miał – w percepcji badanych kobiet – zarówno negatywny, jak i pozytywny wpływ na każdy z języków przyswajanych przez dzieci. Ponadto zidentyfikowano tematy powtarzające się w zebranych materiale. Czynniki te obejmowały: ograniczone możliwości podróżowania do Polski lub z powrotem do Wielkiej Brytanii, zamykanie szkół skutkujące zmianami w opiece nad dziećmi, nowe praktyki językowe i społeczne.

Słowa kluczowe: język dziedziczony; dwujęzyczność; rozwój językowy podczas pandemii; język polski w Wielkiej Brytanii

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study was to analyze the various ways in which the pandemic might have affected family practices related to heritage language maintenance in the UK, with Polish as heritage language (HL). We were interested in the subjective perspective of the mothers. The topic was in fact a serendipity which resulted from a larger project focused on family language practices in the UK and Germany (Author et al., in prep.). While analyzing the interviews and the transcripts, we have realized that the pandemic, quarantine, social distancing are relevant to the topic of maintaining Polish as the heritage language, especially with the pandemic affecting families in various ways: impeding travels, causing the loss or decrease in income, changes in childcare due to school closures, etc.

We analyzed transcripts of interviews with mothers who speak Polish and English and live in the UK. The interviews were conducted in 2020–2021. Adopting the approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, we used thematic analysis (Braun, Clarke, 2006) to follow the themes emerging from the interviewees' accounts. The description of the method, results and discussion is preceded by a brief background, introducing the concepts of heritage language, and characterizing the community of Polish speakers living in the UK.

Heritage language

The term “heritage language” (HL) was initially used in the Canadian context to describe any language different from English or French, as a reference for the

languages spoken by immigrants or indigenous Canadians (Cummins, 1991). The denotation of HL has been altered and broadened over the years. HL has been commonly considered as a language used in a familial context (Campbell, Peyton, 1998), or as any language other than English (Van Deusen-School, 2003). Kondo-Brown (2003) proposed another functional operationalization, defining HL as a language regularly used in families and/or the community. This framework included not only the domestic environment, but also the wider community context, underlining the significant role of HL in maintaining both language and identity of heritage speakers. Carreira (2004) argues that definitions of HL learners (and speakers) should note not only language proficiency but also the identity of the speakers and their family background. This approach was adopted as the theoretical background due to its relevance in both the family and the community contexts. Some claim that being a heritage speaker does not have to result in being bilingual (Valdés, 2000). Discussing this claim is beyond the scope of this paper since we would need to provide a detailed overview of the discussion of how bilingualism should be defined and if relative proficiency should be considered a factor for bilingualism. Nonetheless, in order to avoid language attrition, it is crucial that the heritage speakers begin learning HL before or simultaneously with the language which would become the stronger one (Scontras et al., 2015).

The National Centre for Languages in the United Kingdom (CILT) encourages maintaining the use of HL within immigrant families since it has many advantages for the speakers and the community (2006). In the widely spread "Positively Plurilingual. The contribution of community languages to UK education and society" information booklet, CILT implies that acquiring more than one language "brings a range of educational benefits, including cognitive advantages, enhanced communication skills, and an openness to different cultural perspectives" (2006). Realizing the importance of family backgrounds, parents' motivation, techniques and challenges in passing HL to their children for their attainment, and noticing the shifts in family daily routines and practices due to the pandemic, we focused on parents' utterances that relate to the role of the pandemic for the language development of their children and languages practices in their homes.

In the article, when we write about HL in reference to our data, we mean Polish, since this is the heritage language of the children whose mothers we interviewed. However, when we refer to family language practices, we mean the communication in the families that may occur in any language or languages, also including the decisions about which language is used when among the members of the household. While we are aware of the terminological differences between heritage language and minority language, for our sample, Polish is both a minority language and a heritage language. We do not use the terms synonymously, however. When we write about a minority language, we do want to stress the status of Polish in the

United Kingdom. When we write of HL, we want to refer to the situation of the parents' efforts to support their children in the development of the language which is not the majority language of the society they live in.

Polish as a minority language in the UK

Polish is a significant minority language in the UK. Poland's accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004 resulted in mostly economically motivated migration from Poland (Grabowska-Lusińska, Okólski, 2008; Kędra, 2021). In the years after 2004, about three million Poles decided to leave Poland in order to work in another EU country (Kędra, 2021). According to the UK Labour Force Survey, over 250,000 Poles arrived from 2004 to 2006 (see also: Okólski, Salt, 2014). Some of the Polish immigrants tend to form language-based communities.

Kozminska and Hua (2020) identified Polish Saturday schools attendance as a common language practice among Polish residents in the UK. More specifically, 63% of respondents claimed that their children attended Polish Saturday schools regularly. On the other hand, the authors turned their attention to family linguistic practices during their usual daily activities. They evidenced that almost all Polish-speaking parents' dominant language in interactions with children was Polish. However, interviews revealed it was not an intentional language practice, but a result of the insufficient English proficiency on the parents' side. This observation is not surprising, but rather reflects the structure of Polish residents in the UK. In the 2011 Census aggregate data (Office for National Statistics, 2017), slightly over 27% of Polish-speaking immigrants reported that they cannot speak English "well" or "at all". It is not required to use English in the dominant type of employment of Polish workers. According to the Labour Force Survey (LFS, Office for National Statistics, 2019), the top three occupation groups were elementary occupations (28% of total Polish workers), machine operatives (20%), and skilled trades (17%).

The COVID-19 pandemic in the UK

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected families worldwide. It led to closures of schools around the globe (Setiawan, 2020) and existing learning groups have been rearranged (Meinck et al., 2022). Millions of children have discontinued on-site learning as countries implemented nationwide closures (UNESCO, 2022). Most parents had to undergo a transition into balancing homeschooling and doing their jobs from homes, while many lost their jobs together with their income. The na-

tion-wide restrictions related to the pandemic differed for various countries across the world.

By analyzing interviews with 27 mothers of Polish descent, our aim was to understand how, in the perceptions of mothers of children exposed to English and Polish, the pandemic has impacted the language practices at home.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To answer our research question on mothers' perceptions of the impact of the pandemic on the language practices, we have used qualitative data gleaned from a larger project on family language policies and mothers' motivations to pass Polish to their children raised abroad. The data was collected by conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews.

All participants were interviewed via online video communicator (Skype, Messenger or Zoom). The duration of the interviews ranged from 40 to 75 minutes, with most lasting for about 60 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded. Participants were given a picture or chapter book as a gift for their children at the conclusion of the interview. All participants decided to be interviewed in Polish.

The sample was homogeneous in terms of the mothers' first language (Polish) but heterogeneous in terms of socioeconomic status (see Table 1 for the mothers' background information, with occupation used as a proxy for socioeconomic status) and the languages spoken at home (Table 1). All mothers were born in Poland. And immigrated to the UK between the ages of 19 and 34. In 7 of the families, there was only one child. In the remaining 20, there were either two (18 families) or three children (2 families). All the interviewed mothers were raising children with a husband.

Table 1. Interviewees' demographic situation

Pseudonym	Origin	Mother's occupation	Languages spoken at home
Emilia	mother Polish, father English	salary reviewer in HR	Polish and English
Julia	both parents Polish	–	Polish and English
Zofia	mother Polish, father English	English teacher	Polish and English
Anastazja	both parents Polish	at home with children	Polish
Dominika	mother Polish, father English	manager in a restaurant	Polish and English
Lena	both parents Polish	–	Polish and English
Hanna	mother Polish, father South African	–	Polish and English

Pseudonym	Origin	Mother's occupation	Languages spoken at home
Alicja	both parents Polish	–	Polish and English
Maria	mother Polish, father British-Filipino	recruiter and training organizer	Polish and English, a little Filipino
Oliwia	mother Polish, father Hungarian	teacher in Polish school	Polish and Hungarian
Maja	mother Polish, father South African	HR	Polish and English
Zuzanna	mother Polish, father English	currently not working	Polish and English
Karolina	mother Polish, father Scot	programme associate	Polish and English
Amelia	mother Polish, father Italian	marketing strategist	Polish and Italian
Magda	both parents Polish	–	Polish
Caroline	both parents Polish	project manager	Polish
Patrycja	both parents Polish	lab analyst	Polish
Magdalena	mother Polish, father Spanish	accountant	Spanish and Polish
Sonia	mother Polish, father British	–	English and Polish
Wioletta	both parents Polish	teaching assistant	Polish
Kamila	mother Polish, father Northern Irish	cook	English and Polish
Jagoda	both parents Polish	stay-at-home mum	Polish and English
Marta	both parents Polish	health services	Polish and English
Maja	mother Polish, father Scottish	strategy planner	Polish and English
Paulina	both parents Polish	office worker	Polish and English
Natalia	mother Polish, father Italian	accountant	Polish
Patrycja	both parents Polish	owner of a cleaning company	Polish

Source: Authors' own study.

Interview guide

The interview included questions about parents' education, family living both in the UK and outside of the country, links to Poland, language practices at home and in social situations, language proficiency in the languages spoken, plans for the child's education, and hopes for the future. The central topics were the parents' motivation to pass on an additional language to the child or not, the challenges faced in multilingual upbringing, and language practices and strategies. The inter-

view questions were considerably open-ended. While a guide was used to ensure that the same topics were broached across participants (e.g. the parents' education experiences and the child's language practices at home and school), the conversation flowed naturally, and the order of topics varied. Probes (e.g. "Can you tell me more about that?") and follow-up questions were used to encourage mothers to elaborate on their responses.

The complete interview guide was based on Surrain (2018) and is available from the authors. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the authors and by a professional transcriber. They were all cross-checked for accuracy.

Description of participants

A total of 27 immigrant mothers from Poland were interviewed. The interviewees have resided in the UK between 5 and 14 years. They were between 27 and 39 years old. The participants were predominantly highly educated, with 20 of them having obtained Bachelor's (in the case of five participants, their highest level of education was not indicated). Most of the participants were dual-career couples.

Data analysis

For the reported analysis, the material was analyzed using MAXQDA software designed for computer-assisted analysis of qualitative data. During the analysis, we followed the principles of the thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a technique used in many approaches and disciplines that is not accompanied by any specific epistemological assumptions. Due to its theoretical freedom, it is a flexible and useful research tool that can provide a detailed description of the data. However, we identify our approach as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

In the first step, all authors read all the transcripts, assigning codes to the parts of the text that were recurring throughout the material. Next, in a discussion, a set of topics was drawn. It is then when the serendipity was discovered: we decided to take a narrower focus than our original research questions and closely look at the topic of pandemic for language development. Once the decision was made, all authors have read all the transcripts again, this time marking and coding the elements that referred to the new topic. A discussion followed, in which the following themes that emerged from the text were confirmed:

1. Decreased contact with heritage language due to the pandemic.
2. Increased contact with heritage language due to the pandemic.

3. Decreased contact with the majority language due to the pandemic.

4. Increased contact with the majority language due to the pandemic.

Within each of the general themes, we identified subthemes, and then two of the authors recoded the material with the collaboratively prepared codebook. Upon comparing the themes within the coded fragments, the overlap was found to be significant, and any disagreements were resolved through discussion.

RESULTS

We found that the participants refer to both the increased and decreased contact with HL, but also increased and decreased exposure to majority language because of the pandemic. Below, we present the experiences narrated by the interviewees which, according to them, contributed to the interaction of the global health crisis and their family language practices.

Decreased contact with HL

One of the effects of the pandemic was a significant reduction in the mobility of the participants, understood both broadly (difficulties in traveling) and locally (lockdown and social distancing). Some of the mothers that we interviewed noted that this had affected their children's language skills. The families of our participants could not travel as easily as they used to before, therefore, lots of them had to reduce the number of visits to Poland or completely resign from them. The mothers often emphasized the importance of longer stays in Poland in the HL development of their children, so the lack of them was, in their opinion, a huge difficulty in supporting HL.

Because of the lockdown we are not able to go on any trips and so on, you know usually we would go somewhere, we would go to Poland, I would like to spend a few months in Poland, so that he can spend more time with family, and you know "pump" as much of this Polish as possible into him. But we don't have that option and I can't imagine how is it going to be, when this lockdown ends. I can't remember what life before lockdown was like.

A similar experience was described by another participant of our study, Julia.

We go [to Poland] most often for vacations, Christmas, less often for Easter. We were supposed to come this year, but nothing came out of it for known reasons. But we go at least once a year obligatorily and every other year for Christmas, so we are in Poland quite often.

Similarly, Polish family members who would typically visit from Poland to spend some time with their families, especially grandchildren, were often not able to do it in the first year of the pandemic. Dominika talks about it in the following way:

We came here in mid-August; my mom was supposed to be here in mid-September for at least a week. So, we have someone from Poland at least every month and a half. Either it's my mom, my sister or my friend. Or we go. So she comes quite often. Well, this year is so bad in this respect.

Apart from decreased contact with Polish-speaking relatives living in Poland, contact with other Polish-speaking people living in United Kingdom was decreased. Because of the restrictions, mothers and their children could not meet with people outside of the family as easily as before. That was the case for Maja.

And unfortunately, for the last three months since the lockdown was introduced, we haven't been able to see anyone else who speaks Polish. But I hope that when these rules are lifted, we will be able to see a few more people that speak Polish.

Some of them were also forced to resign from attending Polish school and other Polish classes, as these activities were canceled for safety reasons, like Zofia and Hanna.

My daughter went to a Polish school for a year, because of COVID she stopped attending the course in March. It was a Saturday school. But I hope that it will start again in September and then the children will start learning to read and write.

She mentioned sometime last year that she would like to go back to the Polish school, and we even planned to make a trial adaptation this year... (...) But it didn't happen, because here everything got messed up, so yes, and it's like it's still expanding, and we haven't reached it since.

Sometimes the Polish classes were continued in a different form – online or open-air. However, the participants felt that it was still more difficult to participate in those than before the pandemic. Zuzanna had to quit all extra classes out of concern for her older relatives. She also noted that there were some activities that simply could not be done online.

You know there is also this Polish group that we go to (...) and it brings together moms like me, we meet once a week for singing, dancing and so on. It only takes an hour once a week and now because of the lockdown it's been taking place on Zoom, and it didn't make much sense because the kids were all screaming, and nothing could be done about it. But now I'm dropping out of it, they've been meeting in parks a lot lately, and I'm a bit worried about the lockdown, I mean I'm still worried about the virus because we live with my husband's mother who is 69 years old, and she's in the risk group, so we avoid meetings in a larger group.

To conclude, our interviewees pointed out three main reasons for decreased exposition for HL: reduced contact with Polish friends and relatives in Poland, reduced contact with Polish-speaking friends and relatives in the UK and cancellation of Polish classes or inability to participate in them.

Increased contact with HL

Nevertheless, for some families, the limited mobility had a different effect. The language environment, that was predominantly English, started to shift into a Polish-filled context. This happened as a consequence of prolonged family visits, closed schools and limited social contact with English-speaking friends.

The difficulties in traveling forced some of the participants' Polish relatives to prolong their visits, resulting in children's greater exposition to HL. Accordingly, some of them had to prolong their stays in Poland. Lena had to extend her and her son's stay in Poland to approximately half a year, which means the child was separated from his English-speaking father for a long time. That resulted in almost no contact with the English language, which enhanced HL but also led to the child's refusal to use English. Lena felt that the lack of physical presence of the father affected her child a lot and that was his way of expressing it.

We left in January, the plan was that we will stay a few months, but COVID had spoiled our plans, we were half a year without my husband. Generally, he was supposed to come to visit us, but due to restrictions we could not afford it, neither in terms of time nor financially, because no one will give him 5 weeks leave to come, go through quarantine in one country, spend some time with us and go through quarantine in another country. So, the contact with English was very sporadic, and it affected not only his language skills, but emotionally as well, because at the beginning it was easier for him to say "Ok, so we're in Poland, but we're just visiting, and we're going back to England soon" and he talked to his dad a lot and willingly, he missed him (...). Later he kind of gradually lost the need to talk to dad, he was terribly irritated by this situation. On the one hand, it was great because of grandma and grandpa, because of the aunts and uncles, but he missed dad, and it seems to me that he expressed this regret and frustration by refusing to talk to dad. He could hear us talking, but that was, let's say, a tiny fraction of what he was experiencing when we were here in England.

Because of the restrictions children were also spending much more time at home surrounded by Polish-speaking relatives, Polish TV, songs and books which was a huge change in terms of the amount of contact with the Polish language that they had compared to the times before the pandemic. Julia and Emilia told us that there was much more Polish language in their children's lives since the beginning of the pandemic.

Before the pandemic, before it all started there was more English because you know there was a lot of school from Monday to Friday, so half of the day was in English. Until 15:30 from the morning only English, even though there are Polish children at school, it was English anyway. And later it depends... We were meeting with friends, so we were using English anyway, some extra classes were in English too, but now when, you know, everything's practically closed, the pandemic, so it's like school was limited. We are also in Poland right now, so it's like there's more Polish language since March, since April... Maybe more since April, when they closed the schools, there's more Polish language, because they spent more time at home, so we spoke Polish. They spoke English with each other from time to time, but otherwise Polish.

But now we have it so much better with Polish, because my dad is here, the grandfather, because he came and he takes care of my other daughter, because she doesn't go to nursery school yet. (...) So now I can say that my older daughter's Polish has improved a lot because of COVID. Because now she goes to reception, but before that she went to nursery school. And you know, when she was only at home and talked to grandpa and me, and you know, we speak Polish all the time. When there's TV, cartoons... Well 90% of cartoons are in Polish. We also read books, I mean my husband reads to her in English and I read to her in Polish. Songs in Polish, too. (...) Now we noticed that when COVID was there and she did not go to school from March to June, her Polish, due to the fact that my father and I spoke to her, was better than English. And my husband even said that she speaks more Polish than English, and it was like that.

However, we have to point out that this was the case mostly for the families in which all the caretakers were Polish. Hanna, whose husband's native language was English, noticed that since the beginning of the pandemic and switch to online work, she hardly spoke Polish with her child.

Both me and my husband started working from home, so we were all at home together all day and we started speaking more and more English. All of us just started switching to English together and it became such a main communication language in the family.

Some parents, like Alicja, decided to limit their social contacts only to the closest Polish-speaking friends and family, which also resulted in the increased presence of the Polish language in the children's environment.

[My children's friends] are mostly English-speaking if we're talking about school and generally the environment. (...) As of today, given the situation we have, we also have to limit ourselves, etc., these are Polish-speaking children. For now. But as I said, normally, you know, there is school during the week and neighbors' kids and so on, these are English-speaking kids.

Due to the pandemic and the closure of schools, the parents had to take on the role of schoolteachers. Thus school – usually the main source of contact with English – became the source of contact with HL. Alicja told us about her experience

with bilingual homeschooling. She was following the English core curriculum with her children, but she was teaching it in Polish.

Well, because of the recent events English was a bit limited, because the children have stopped going to school or nursery, so the teaching was just taking place at home and in a mixed language. That means the exercises were in English, but they were explained in Polish, like that. But I think from September everything will be back to normal and the children will spend most of their time in an English-speaking environment.

Hence, the difficulties in traveling and limited social contacts, the same things that were causing difficulties in supporting HL for some families, have made it easier for others. In this case, the main differentiating factor that we have noticed was obviously the primary language spoken at home. Mothers whose partners also spoke Polish had different opportunities than the ones who were raising their children with non-Polish speaking partners.

Other new language and social practices

Some of our interviewees talked about new language-related practices that they started during or because of the pandemic. For instance, Maria hired a Polish babysitter to take care of her daughter while the schools were closed.

The Little one has a babysitter now, he doesn't go to a nursery because of the whole pandemic. (...) There's this girl who lives near us, she's a so-called childminder, so she can take care of up to 6 children, but she only has my son for the time being, and she's Polish, she's a great person, she takes care of my son (...), he loves her too and that also develops his Polish a lot.

Some new circumstances might not have been directly related to the pandemic, or we are unsure if they were, such as new neighbors reported by Karolina. People have moved due to economic reasons, especially if they were allowed to work remotely and their place of residence was situated in costly districts. Also, some people decided to move to escape densely populated places. Karolina explains how the appearance of a new neighbor who was her daughter's peer influenced her language behaviors:

A kind of new revolution has occurred in our life because we now have new neighbors who have bought a house next to ours, and these neighbors are Polish. It's a very nice family, by the way. And they have two kids and there's this older son and now during lockdown the kids... My daughter was hanging out on her climbing ladder and the boy was sitting on the tree, and they were talking, and it was a mixture of a bit of Polish and a bit of English, and it was very... I think it might be a bit of a revolution in the way she uses Polish.

For some people, the time of lockdown was a reflection time of life priorities. Anastazja, for instance, has realized that she wants to return to Poland:

I really want to come back to Poland because of my family, so that the girls could have contact with their cousins, with my sisters, with my parents, and with Sebastian's family, because I think that in these difficult times, in which we have been living for almost a year now, family and contacts are the most important thing.

During lockdown, the patterns of communication and the channels have shifted from direct, face-to-face communication into computer-mediated communication. People started using apps, programs, and platforms for videoconferencing not only for professional interactions but also to stay in touch with friends and families. Dominika relates this in the following way:

I can see the difference in the fact that when we call Poland and my sister, who speaks to her [to Dominika's daughter] in English more often, my child enters the interaction with her more deeply than with my mother, who tries not to speak to her in English to keep the conversation in Polish. (...) And the same with my English in-laws who now talk to her on Skype or Messenger – they, for example are able, to play on the phone better because they speak the same language. I can see that sometimes it's hard for her to get in touch [in Polish]. If there is a face-to-face contact, [this difficulty] is not there. She with my mom, I don't know... They can go out to the garden for the whole day and play all day and everything.

Dominika notices that the shift into mediated interaction made it more difficult for her daughter to communicate in Polish.

Learning at home both in Polish and English

Due to schools closure, some parents took up the role of the teacher to their children and decided to introduce explicit instruction-led, class-like activities within their day. This was the case for Oliwia. While the home language was Polish, the mother, deciding upon introducing structured home education, chose to do it in English. Consequently, home language practices shifted from using Polish only to using Polish and English.

DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic played a distinct role in language development for different families. Some of our respondents stayed longer in Poland during the lockdown, while others did not visit their home country as scheduled, depending

on the circumstances. For some, lockdown resulted in increased exposure to English with fewer interactions in Polish, whereas for others – in increased exposure to Polish with limited contact with English. Whereas the global health crisis resulted in unprecedented cancellation of on-site school instruction, which for many HL families meant decreased contact with the majority language and increased exposure to heritage language, since children often stayed at home with their caregivers or other family members, it would be too simplistic to draw unidirectional conclusions on the relation between lockdown and language development in bilingual and multilingual families. As was exemplified in our study, various factors should be taken into consideration when examining HL maintenance during the pandemic, including family composition, family language and social practices, social network, and occupational circumstances of the parents.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the interviews, we have seen that mothers perceive the pandemic and its relation to the heritage language maintenance in various terms. They all seem to realize the crucial role that social and cultural environments play in the individuals' language development, which is consistent with Oppenheim et al. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic, according to the mothers we interviewed, led to significant modifications in language practices in their families. In the case of school being the main source of the majority language, the number of conversational experiences with English native speakers importantly decreased since COVID-19 has led to stay-at-home orders.

According to Serratrice (2020), the quarantine was related to “a return to native languages” in bilingual children due to the fact that the input of dominant societal language was importantly reduced. At the same time, the preference for the home language might be increased considering that family members have become the primary conversational partners (Hardach, 2020; Serratrice, 2020). If this was the case, in Polish-speaking families living in the UK, the COVID-19 pandemic might have resulted in greater fluency in Polish. On the contrary, a crucial part of Polish-English-speaking families consists of Polish- and English-speaking mothers and English- and other languages-speaking fathers. In this situation, English is perceived as the tool in both mother-father's and father-children's everyday conversations, and heritage language might be used only in mother-children's conversational turns. Moreover, if interactions with non-family members might be limited, a mother might be the only link to the heritage language. However, it is known that peer language use is associated with bilingual language development (Kan et al., 2020). We found that the situation of the pandemic was different for

each family. Depending on the circumstances, at the time of the lockdown, some of our interviewees stayed longer in Poland, and others did not visit their home country as planned. The situation might have caused both the increased exposure to English and fewer interactions in Polish for some, while increased exposure to Polish and limited contact with English for others. In no way is our study comprehensive, and studies with carefully controlled variables are needed. However, it does provide us with a landscape of possible varying ways in which the time described were experienced in terms of heritage language maintenance by Polish families living in the UK.

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