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Global English Versus Local Language During A Sojourn Abroad: A Narrative Study

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Abstract: This paper investigates the interplay between language and intercultural communication with a special focus on the importance of working knowledge of foreign languages other than English for a satisfactory experience during longer sojourns abroad. Its authors present a revised understanding of the role of lingua franca English and a local language (here Polish) in intercultural relationships, especially the crucial influence of local languages on conversational control and social integration while in a foreign land. Our study has shown that lingua franca English is insufficient to successfully function abroad, and individuals deciding to resettle need to invest in learning a local language, which, in the longer perspective, emerges as a medium for in-depth intercultural communication pertaining to self-positioning, relation building, and meaning-making of the new semiotic budget.

<u>**Keywords:**</u> Intercultural Communication, Global Language, Lingua Franca English, Local Language, Investment In Language Learning, Motivation For Going Abroad.

1. Introduction

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Today, short or long sojourns abroad for professional or educational reasons have become a part of the life of a growing number of people, virtually from all corners of the world. From an individual perspective, a stay abroad is a critical life experience for the expatriate and, to a smaller degree, for local persons who come into contact with the foreigner. There are various obstacles on the way to a satisfying co-existence, out of which the chief ones are communication problems, personal inhibitions, jointly with the inability to understand the value system or the mindset of "the other". Right after that, there come problems related to daily functioning, e.g., organizing and legalizing one's stay abroad, daily chores, and arranging matters in public or health service institutions.

The present research subscribes to seeing language as a means of mastering daily life. Communicative competence, or more precisely, in this case, intercultural communicative competence, should be considered as a tool of conversation control. Since communication is strategic and goal-oriented, "there would be no reason to communicate if we were not dependent on others for the fulfillment of our wishes and these wishes or needs are fulfilled by influencing or controlling others' responses to us" (Parks, 1994). In other words, thanks to gathered linguistic and sociocultural knowledge, people become more effective in influencing others, as Parks (1994: 593) postulates.

The global popularity of English certainly facilitates intercultural encounters, but, contrary to popular belief, as we posit in this article, communicative competence in lingua franca English does not ensure satisfying conversational control and is not enough to successfully function abroad. Instead, we postulate that during longer stays abroad, only a good command of the local language facilitates communication and integration. Although we do not negate the status of English as a global language, we assert that maximizing linguistic capacities empowers individuals and offers them new professional and life opportunities. Additionally, mastering the local language enables sojourners to permeate the facades of superficial interactions and engage in quality communication, which involves understanding and producing humor, leads to relationship building, and offers an insight into the culture of the host country.

2. Theoretical background

Language learning is ranked as the most significant motivational factor that encourages people to go abroad (British Council, 2015). The main reasons for individuals to invest in going abroad to learn or improve a particular language include "acquiring symbolic resources (e.g., language, educa-

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-tion, friendship) and material resources (e.g., capital goods, real estate, money)" (Teng, 2019). Other relocation motivations include improving employability and enhancing career prospects (Deakin, 2014), broadening subject knowledge (King, Ruiz-Gelices, Findlay, & Stam, 2004), a general interest in a new culture (Van Mol & Timmerman, 2013), as well as gaining intercultural experience and developing intercultural competence (Sison & Brennan, 2012; (Beerkens, Souto-Otero, de Wit, & Huisman, 2016; Gómez, Imhoff, Martín-Consuegra, Molina, & Santos-Vijande, 2018). If the subjects of mobility are young adults, they most often declare that they are looking for a full (study) foreign experience as something that can enrich them as persons and foreign language communicators (cf. Xamaní, 2015). Last but not least, Deakin (2014) also discerns the category of "personal drivers", seemingly not directly related to educational or professional goals. Such motivational factors can be having fun, traveling, and familiarizing oneself with a new or desired destination, and they are fueled by exploration motives, often combined with associated socio-cultural profits (Gómez et al., 2018). Additionally, sometimes the motive is an idealized image of the destination, which results in general preferences for certain countries due to their greater attractiveness based on stereotypes or popular images.

Some researchers also apply consumption values in their search for motivational factors which can account for expat decisions and language tourism (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991; Gómez et al., 2018). There are basically five groups of such values: functional, conditional, social, emotional, and epistemic. All of these values may jointly influence the destination choice, but ultimately one or two gain an upper hand over the remaining ones. In the majority of cases, individuals are driven by functional/utilitarian values, e.g., geographical proximity, target destination's natural beauty, its variety and quality of food, historical sites, quality of infrastructure and where relevant, educational prestige. Emotional values very often come second in the ranking. Accordingly, people choose destinations that they consider pleasant to visit, and/or which offer fun and relaxation. Many people also travel to make friends or meet people with similar hobbies/interests (social values) in places having a positive image. Those who travel to discover new places and learn new things, often to escape routine, are fueled by epistemic values. Finally, there are conditional values, which will be saliently articulated in our research. These are values that people attribute to objects or here destinations based on "the perceived utility from a set of conditions that enhances the functional or social value" (Gómez et al., 2018). Such values are extrinsically motivated and often appear as a result of greater familiarization with the evaluated object or destination in the process of value re-interpretation. For example, some people choose to go to a certain place because of geographical proximity. Then, they are driven by utilitarian values. However, with time they re-evaluate their motivation to stay in a given country due to conditional values and affordances they observe.

In a more general term, recent study abroad (henceforth SA) research has broadened its scope of language-related interest and embraced other elements of the sojourn, such as romance, self-discovery, relationship building (Coleman, 2013) as well as the dynamics of the sojourner's broadly understood identity formation, including its religious, professional or sexual aspects (Isabelli-García, Bown, Plews, & Dewey, 2018). From this perspective, SA is seen as a potentially "critical experience", which might also involve the student's L2 (second language) identity development. Thus, nowadays, the perception of SA goes beyond the scope of the language environment and is interpreted as an experience that might potentially contribute to identity-building processes and open new avenues for learning and using languages (Isabelli-García et al., 2018). On average, though, as Isabelli-García et al. (2018) argue, instead of promoting L2 learning and student mobility, globalization "in fact promotes English-language acquisition and thereby advantages students in the new global networks in which English has not only become the lingua franca but has also benefited from its value as a 'form of cultural capital' (Short et al., 2001)". Reflecting the logic of neoliberal discourse, English has been, in fact, objectified and ascribed a real market value, deemed as a tool paving the way to socio-economic success and connectedness to global communities (see e.g., Kubota, 2011; Pavlenko, 2001), privileging those who have mastered it, and excluding others. Thereby, it might be concluded that globalization has affected educational policies and individual decisions aiming to attain English-language proficiency at the cost of other languages.

Usually, communication theories assume that ongoing communication and language use depends to a great extent on common ground, e.g., shared conventions, standards, and norms (Kecskes, 2018). In the case of intercultural communication, however, this common ground is limited and cannot be taken for granted; rather, meaning must be co-constructed on spot. For this to happen, interlocutors need to have a shared means of communication. Most people traveling abroad assume that English is a resource that will ensure them a satisfying existence abroad during longer stays (cf. Szczepaniak-Kozak, 2012; 2014). What they usually do not realize as linguistic laymen, is that communication is always about co-constructing meaning and content. When foreigners do not know the local language, they either participate in such a co-construction to a limited or less effective degree or do not participate in this process at all. A good example of missing a co-construction opportunity is not being able to understand humor. In detail, foreigners cannot interpret humor appropriately to the context usually because they do not have access to the local language's conceptual base and very often its socio-cultural background. Additionally, during everyday communication acts, there is a greater reliance on spontaneous language production rather than prefabricated phrases

(Kecskes, 2018). High operational control is also necessary as it is vital for efficient linguistic processing yet extremely difficult in any foreign language. Because speaking a non-native language bears cognitive cost, what usually happens is that after an initial attempt to speak a foreign language in a bi-/multilingual group, both local and foreign speakers turn to their native languages, disregarding the communication needs of their interlocutors at a particular social event. In this sense, we agree with Kecskes (2018) that for communication to be sustained and satisfying, any given interlocutors must share not only a code but also a conceptual sphere and socio-cultural background. Furthermore, according to Kecskes (2018), native speakers of a given language, in a conversation with a foreigner, unconsciously and automatically develop particular supportive behaviours. They expect problems communicating, so they use supportive gestures, repetition, provide more background information, and assume a let-it-pass approach. This puts a cognitive, or even physical, strain on them, and such behaviour cannot last interminably. Sooner or later, if a foreigner does not learn the local language and the locals do not know good English, their intercultural contact ends with native speakers communicating less content and very often less frequently with non-native speakers to avoid communication fatigue. In consequence, non-native speakers are then excluded from certain interactions and, most probably, social practices or opportunities.

In a similar vein, although English dominates as a world language, very often "the ability to speak other languages increases the competitiveness of workers in the global economy" (Gómez et al., 2018). This stance is supported by selected data collected in this study because, indeed, some of our respondents came to Poland to learn the national language and continued to improve their proficiency during their stay. In this sense, some of our respondents can be qualified as language tourists, especially if we adopt the definition offered by Gómez et al. (2018) considering them people: "who travel abroad to improve communicative skills", assuming that "individuals who travel for business or training purposes are also considered tourists".

Currently, more and more researchers point to the synergetic effect that multilingualism may ignite in foreigners (cf. Mehmedbegovic & Bak, 2017). To exemplify, Riera-Gil (2019) emphasizes the interconnectedness and "complementarity" of both global and local spheres of human lives. On the one hand, in the local dimension, people are typically attached to a particular place and need to interact with the community residing in it. For this reason, "[t]o a great extent, local languages are relevant because most people conduct locally rooted lives. Life is, ultimately, local" (Riera-Gil, 2019). On the other hand, citizens of the contemporary globalized world are not limited to a particular place or community, which significantly widens the scope of their possible interactions. Thus, other languages appear to be indispensable for effective communication with broader audiences. Such an approach does not assume the superiority of either the global or the local language, but points to the fact that the capacity to use various languages provides a vast array of opportunities for diverse social interactions and empowers individuals to make their own choices concerning the kind of life they want to live.

In the context of SA experience, swerving away from the dominance of the global language and promoting local languages might also widen the sojourners' socio-economic and living options. First of all, individual multilingualism fosters social engagement with locals, which enhances the overall participants' experience (Hampton, 2016). Additionally, the knowledge of the local language improves the effectiveness of communicative interactions, both in the quantitative and qualitative sense, reflected respectively, in the number of interactions and their quality (Riera-Gil, 2019). Finally, the knowledge of local languages is seen as an asset from the perspective of ethno-cultural socio-economic justice. In the view of modern economic theories (e.g., sharing or collaborative economy), it is construed as a factor contributing to creating equal opportunities and trust-building (Riera-Gil, 2019; Mehmedbegovic & Bak, 2017).

3. Methodology

In order to verify the aforementioned assumptions in the context of real intercultural experiences of SA sojourners, a research project was conducted using a qualitative research design. The primary data collection method was the narrative interview, which has been successfully used as a data-gathering tool across several disciplines, including applied linguistics and intercultural studies. It enables obtaining data that illustrate processes taking place in communication and intercultural cooperation, especially in multinational organizations (e.g., Czarniawska & Gagliardi, 2003; Søderberg, 2006; Gersten & Søderberg, 2010, 2011). According to Søderberg and Worm (2011), data obtained from narrative interviews facilitate identifying both differences and similarities in intercultural experience and enable the researcher to surpass the limitations of interpreting cultural phenomena through clearly defined cultural patterns (e.g., the dichotomous categorization of low- versus high-context cultures or individualist versus collectivist cultures). Along with providing valuable research data, narrative interviews also offer benefits to the interviewees. For example, they contribute to intercultural learning by stimulating the narrator's reflection on their intercultural experiences (Gertsen & Søderberg, 2010).

The collaborative and dialogic nature of the relationship between the researcher and the research participant (Moen, 2006) appears to be one of the most essential characteristics of the narrative interview. Moreover, compared

to other types of interviews, this research instrument, although the least structured, generates stories that provide an insight into individuals' lives and experiences. As Lofland and his colleagues (2006) argue, it provides "rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis" and "its objective is to find out what kind of things are happening rather than to determine the frequency of predetermined kinds of things that the researcher already believes can happen". In this interviewing format, the questions should be formulated as open-ended and the researcher's goal is eliciting a story rather than soliciting answers to a list of questions; a few questions are asked to set the scene and the interviewer predominantly listens to or asks clarifying or probing questions to encourage the interviewee to elaborate on the story and share their emotions and evaluations, which leads to "soliciting a rich and well-developed narrative" (Kartch, 2017). Additionally, Søderberg, (2006) advises narrative researchers to refrain from comments and evaluations in the course of the interview.

With the ultimate goal of eliciting narrations on intercultural experiences and having the principles of narrative interviewing in mind, for the sake of providing consistent data and facilitating the process of interviewing, we ultimately decided to employ a semi-structured approach rather than a purely unstructured one, applying the narrative approach (Søderberg, 2006; Gertsen & Søderberg, 2011) whenever it was possible. We began with questions asking for demographic data (e.g., age, nationality, educational background, SA placement, duration of SA, previous stays abroad, etc.), followed by open-ended questions, corresponding with the posed research questions, and progressed to more specific probes to encourage story-telling.

3.1. Research aims and questions

The interviews were staged to probe into the experiences of foreigners residing for a longer period of time in Poland. The questions concerned their preparation for their stay in Poland and the challenges which they had to face in the foreign environment. The interweaving theme we were particularly interested in was the role lingua franca English and the local language (Polish) played in their intercultural encounters and, more generally, in the entire experience of living abroad. Based on two pilot studies which were conducted prior to this one[4], we were able to formulate the below research questions (RQ), which served as the foundation for the detailed questions asked during the interview sessions:

RQ1: Did the respondents face any challenges in their foreign environment which were bound with their linguistic skills?

RQ2: If yes, were the challenges caused by their language competence in Polish, English or both?

RQ3: What was the respondents' attitude to the Polish language?

RQ4: What was the respondents' attitude to learning the Polish language?

RQ5: How did the respondents evaluate the usefulness of English as a medium of communication in Poland?

3.2. Data collection and analysis

The database analyzed in this paper was gathered through 28 interviews conducted in May and June 2018 in Poland. Participation in the study was voluntary. The homogenous sampling strategy was applied to select interviewees sharing a similar experience, i.e., participation in a long-term study abroad or work placement program in Poland (cf. Dörnyei, 2007).

These audio-recorded interviews lasted 493.25 minutes in total. An average session took 17.6 minutes (min: 4.19 min; max: 48.42 min; median: 16.9 min). To increase the comfort and authenticity of the recorded sessions, the interviewees were assured that their identities would remain anonymous (in the research, their names are pseudonyms; cf. Appendix 1) and the material would be used only for research purposes. The recordings were transcribed verbatim following simplified transcription conventions developed by Boje (1991) and subsequently analyzed. The interviews were conducted in English, which, except for three cases, was not the mother tongue of either the interviewees or the interviewers, which explains certain linguistic inaccuracies in the passages quoted. Where we quote or paraphrase extracts from the transcript, we give their line number.

The data collection and analysis were conducted in an ongoing, iterative, and cyclical process. The data processing consisted of three main stages. First, the authors coded the interview transcripts and interview accounts, focusing on the research questions, looking for recurring patterns and keywords. Second, following the identification of the patterns, the authors conducted an in-depth re-reading and re-examination of each theme in order to gain some

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[4]This study is based on the case study research carried out with the participation of Dutch students during a four-month stay in Italy by Szczepaniak-Kozak (2012, 2014), and its replication with British citizens working in Poland by Szczepaniak-Kozak and Kłodnicka (2015).

insight into the respondents' process of constructing social meanings pertaining to their experience of staying abroad. Third, the patterns were subsumed under larger thematic categories.

3.3. Participants

As can be seen in Appendix 1, the participants in the study were 28 volunteering foreigners residing in Poland (male: n=12, female: n=16). They came from 16 countries in total, located on each inhabited continent except Australia. The country make-up of the sample is as follows: one person from the USA, Italy, Greece, Lithuania, Turkey, Bulgaria, India, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Congo, two people from Canada, Germany, Belarus, and Colombia, 4 people from Spain, and 6 from Ukraine. This composition of the sample actually reflects the ethnicities of foreign residents in Poland. The respondents' average age was 22.3 (min. 19, max. 29, median 22). In the predominant number of cases, they were staying in Poznań (26 people), the fifth largest city in Poland, one person in Wrocław, the fourth largest city in Poland, and one person in Warsaw (the capital city).

Over one-third of the respondents had experienced earlier, longer stays abroad (e.g., in the UK, Italy, or Germany), yet the majority of them did not have any such experience at all or declared only short holiday stays abroad prior to relocating to Poland. Only three respondents had had an opportunity to stay in Poland for a longer period before: Meghan spent 5 months in Łódź, Jack, a fluent speaker of Polish, had visited Poland on numerous occasions, similarly to Hans, who has Polish parents and speaks fluent Polish.

There were a few reasons for the foreigners' coming to Poland. The majority wanted to study (n=25), among these, four also intended to start a professional career. Additionally, two persons planned to continue their work in Poland and one person came to Poznań to do voluntary work within a larger international initiative. Those of our respondents who at the time of the interviews were students represented various higher education institutions and different study areas. They majored in languages, e.g., in English or Russian, engineering, economics, or medical science. The length of their stay in Poland varied from min. 2 months to a maximum of 72 months (median 4 months). On the whole, the interviewees were mostly motivated by personal goals (Deakin, 2014) and did not seem to be very interested in the host country's culture or language (with some exceptions). Instead, they simply fancied the idea of going abroad and meeting new people.

The respondents' proficiency level in Polish was not verified by the researchers, and their evaluation is based on their self-evaluation. Only one respondent considered himself a native speaker of Polish, four respondents described themselves as fluent, six defined their level of Polish as intermediate, three as communicative, and three as elementary. Eleven respondents did not speak Polish at all or knew some basic words only. Interestingly, all respondents declared to have at least a good communicative command of English. Their competence was not formally tested but partly verified during the interviews, which were carried out in this language. Three respondents were native speakers of English, seven respondents defined themselves as fluent users of English, three as independent users, and fifteen deemed their English communicative.

4. Findings and discussion

The analysis will follow the sequence of the research questions as presented in Section 3.1.

4.1. RQ1: Challenges faced by the respondents

Each of the participants experienced difficulties in their daily functioning in Poland. Altogether, we were able to identify 16 types of problems recurring in the respondents' narratives, out of which the most commonly mentioned was the language barrier in Polish (voiced by 23 participants). Other most frequent difficulties were related to a different organizational culture at the workplace (e.g. a language school, a multinational company) or university (n=18), transportation and orienteering (n=17), medical care (n=16), followed by problems at work/school (n=13), with accommodation (n=13), shopping (n=10) or weather (n=9). It must be noted, however, that the majority of the problems mentioned were underlain with linguistic difficulties and the respondents' inability to communicate efficiently rather than substantial cultural differences. For example, although the interviewees complained explicitly about problems with workplace or university organization and supervisor-subordinate relations, the problems would not have become thorny if the respondents had at their disposal some competence in Polish. As the interviewees declared, their Polish interlocutors often lacked basic competence in English, which made simple daily interactions, such as doing the shopping, asking for directions, or seeking medical advice, difficult or even impossible.

4.2. RQ 2: The experience of a linguistic challenge and an attitudinal change

Questions concerning the linguistic challenges which our respondents faced in Poland revealed that the foreigners had to reevaluate their assumption that English is a reliable medium of communication worldwide, including in Poland, jointly with their realization of the consequences which their low proficiency in Polish causes. In general, it appeared that English is spoken by fewer Poles than they had expected, and therefore the majority of the respondents were more eager to learn the local language or considered this a useful investment.

In what follows, first we analyze the accounts which pertain to the foreigners' low proficiency in Polish and their motivation to learn it, and then we delve into the verification of our respondents' expectation that English should be spoken everywhere.

4.3. RQ 3: Language barrier in Polish and the respondents' attitude to it

The majority of our interviewees did not speak Polish at the time of their arrival in Poland. Only a few of them (e.g., Hans, Sasha, Natasha, Jaroslav, Jack) knew enough Polish to function effortlessly on a daily basis from the beginning of their stay. Many of them perceived Polish as a very difficult language or "black magic" in Svetlana's words (17). It is considered as such also by those of the foreigners whose mother tongue belongs to the Slavic group (e.g., Jura, Oksana, Michalina, Sasha), which runs counter to the popular stereotype that all Slavs can easily communicate with one another. More importantly, the language barrier in Polish was reported by the respondents to be the most serious problem they faced. For example, Klaudia mentions her inability to speak Polish as the only negative aspect of her stay in Poland (80-81).

Due to their lack of communication skills in Polish, the interviewees report that they could not fully participate in social life. Michalina (17) catches the drawback of not knowing the language: "I couldn't be like integrated into this society, so… I was, yeah, it was just not so not so good". Additionally, our interviews reveal that although a good command of English is considered a very useful tool in today's world, one should not take it for granted that English will always work everywhere. In the opinion of our interviewees, at the beginning of a conversation, local people are eager to exchange initial pleasantries in English, but sooner or later, they switch to their mother tongue. In the majority of situations, a foreigner who does not have a rudimentary command of the local language is thus excluded from the ongoing conversation. Saskia, a Spanish girl, posits that any longer stay abroad is a new beginning, not because it is a new country or city, but rather: "it's something that is always difficult because you have to make new friends every time you change not only the country but city" (Saskia 5). Other respondents who mentioned the same issue are Oksana and Michalina. As Michalina (57) puts it: "I think the hardest was this integration". Most probably, this is so because people have the power to include others in their community, and they do it by means of language. In detail, in order to engage with a group, a person needs a means of communication, a language. Fabiano presents the same view: "If the ability to communicate in the particular language is not at your disposal, people put you outside," and this is why you need "to put more effort in the learning of the language" (Fabiano 56). Interestingly, some foreigners accept this lack of integration, even if they notice its drawbacks. For instance, Carla (65-69) mentions: "We live in a bubble, you don't have to speak Polish, we don't really get to integrate into the Polish community, but we don't get the real Polish experience".

The respondents often mention that they were not able to understand the humor in Polish, and thus, they did not fully integrate with the social groups they wanted to belong to. Poles tried to translate jokes, but, as Carla (108-109) remarks, translating jokes from your native language may often ruin them and render them not funny anymore. The need for Polish language competence comes to the fore in the case of these foreigners who become more aware of their long-life (professional) goals, underpinned by conditional values. For instance, Helena, a Ukrainian woman, spent three years studying applied linguistics in Lublin, a city in the east of Poland. At that time, she did not learn Polish because she interacted only with Ukrainians, and the languages of instruction at her university were English and Russian. It was not until she attended a professional event in the capital of Poland that she realized that getting by with Russian and English could not be taken for granted in all Polish cities. It occurred to her during a workshop outside Lublin:

176: I faced problems with language again because lots of people spoke Polish, especially people

177: from the administrative part, so... my English wasn't enough, and of course, Russian as well, because

178: It was Warsaw, so not Lublin, and... that is why I saw that at the time I needed to study Polish more

179: In order to be able to continue my career, I need Polish

This reassessment of the value of investing in learning Polish fueled her motivation.

4.4. RQ 4: Investment in the local language (Polish)

Although the majority of the respondents (n=19) declared that before coming to Poland, they had made some investment in learning the Polish language and getting to know the culture or history of the host country, the analysis of individual interviews showed that these were minimal and superficial investments and preparations. Typically, the respondents used language learning apps to pick up some survival Polish (e.g., Steve, Fabiano, Esmeralda, Klaudia). Quite a few did not even make such an effort and came to Poland with absolutely no knowledge of the Polish language (e.g., Oscar 66-68, Carla 34). As Carla (34) puts it, "I didn't know any Polish, not even hello, before I came here". Similarly, Luika did not learn a single word in Polish before her Erasmus exchange, and later she only managed to learn *dzień dobry* (Eng. *Good morning*) and a few rudimentary expressions useful in daily functioning. Only one

person, Natasha, knew Polish before coming to Poland at a level that enabled her a stress-free existence. She attended a one-year course in Belarus, her home country. Significantly, she claims that she did not face substantial problems and she "was never afraid of talking" (33).

Despite the prevailing limited investment in learning the local language, in the analysed material several inspiring success stories of learning Polish during the sojourn can be found. The success, however, did not come easily and required a lot of work, effort, and perseverance. For example, Sandra learnt from an app but she did not consider it effective (26). She then started attending a Polish language course, which was a real challenge for her. Despite investing a great deal of work in learning Polish, she did not achieve results comparable to Ukrainian students in her class, especially in the area of phonetics (93). Semirada, on the other hand, knew only some basic expressions in Polish before her arrival, but after two years, she managed to certify her knowledge of Polish at the A2 level by an official state exam. In a similar vein, Meghan came to Poland with absolutely no competence in Polish. During her first placement in Łódź, she started to learn some basic phrases in Polish to cope with everyday situations. Later on, however, Meghan developed an appreciation for her knowledge of Polish, and during her second stay in Poland decided to learn it regularly by attending private classes:

203: Now I can catch the words,

204: so I can understand what they are saying to me if they are talking about something

205: interesting for me, like, before, if you don't know even a word..., it's hard...

206: It's really hard.

Another example of perseverance in learning the local language is the case of Saskia. While her initial attempts to learn Polish at a course in Munich were rather unsuccessful, after settling in Poland, she became more motivated to learn the language, and this time she was more successful and proud of being able to "understand something" (9).

Out of the five core values that underpin language tourism (cf. Sheth et al., 1991; Gómez et al., 2018), three played the most prominent role in our study. In making their decisions whether to settle permanently or temporarily in Poland, the interviewees were not driven by their desire to learn Polish, due to its low perceived functional value. Initially, they considered it not very useful to know this language. However, what can be noticed in our data is that with time, some of our respondents changed their minds and started to attribute a conditional value to knowing Polish. Having noticed that Poland may be an affordable, comfortable place to live, they started to consider learning Polish as a useful investment, given the socio-economic settings there. Yet another, but rarer in our study, value is a social one – when a person invests in something because he or she wants to be accepted by the target language group or falls in love with a Pole. This runs counter to data on the values which underlie choosing a travel destination with regard to more popular languages, especially English and Spanish. In the case of these languages, the values which come to the fore are: emotional (curiosity, relaxation, fun) and functional ones (usefulness, knowledge of the language, economic strength), jointly with epistemic values (living new experiences, doing something different, or enjoying another culture) (Gómez et al., 2018).

On the whole, the most substantial investment in the language is made by those people for whom staying in a foreign country increases the chances of getting an education and, in the longer perspective, a lucrative job. Surprisingly, this motivation does not depend on the original residence, as it is shared both by Steve from overseas Canada and Jura and Oksana from neighbouring Belarus. After all, it appears that it is not geographical proximity, but rather the motivation to go abroad and the increasing role of conditional values during the stay in the host country that determines the scope of investment in learning the local language.

4.5. RQ 5: The role of the global language (English)

The discovery that English is not spoken everywhere by everyone in Poland was actually quite surprising for the respondents. To illustrate this, Carla mentions that foreigners want to integrate with Polish people, for example, on social occasions, but "it's impossible because they just speak Polish, like only Polish" (Carla 104-105). Maria's account (65) confirms this observation: "Sometimes when I want to buy something, I need to speak Polish because they don't really speak English". Oksana (14) and Klaudia (85-86) are of the same opinion.

The expectation that English should be spoken everywhere was commonly shared by our respondents (e.g., Saskia 40), and its verification in real life sometimes produced a sense of deep dissatisfaction. The frustration with his communication problems particularly strongly reverberates in Frank's narration. He reports that Poles neither speak English nor appreciate foreigners' efforts to speak Polish:

39: Well, my first challenge is the language. (...)

40: If someone is trying to speak Polish, I have noticed that Polish people, they don't

41: make an effort to understand what other person is saying. You want to speak exactly that

42: way that you have to say correct Polish, but you are learning the language.

43: so I have problems when I have to maybe send something in the post office

44: or I am, for example, in a store or shop where people can't speak English.

The alleged unwillingness of Poles to take any effort to communicate in any foreign language is also signaled in Hans's narration:

120: the guys that cannot even do their own laundry when there's like one lady who cannot

121: speak at all English, and she's not even willing to communicate on Google Translate or

122: something like this, because she, she's like telling them that they are in

123: Poland, so they should speak at least something in Polish.

The vast majority of the interviewees reported that communication problems concerned the public rather than the private sphere. For example, Svetlana noted that people do not always speak English in shops or medical care institutions, but she could easily use it in interactions with her peers or at university (39-42). In fact, the respondents frequently point to a huge generation gap in English language competence. Young people, as opposed to older ones, speak very good English (Sandra 138-140). Semirada illustratively contrasts the communication problems in the public sphere, especially medical contexts and public transport (80), with an absolute lack of language barrier in contacts with her peers, who speak very good English (90). This view is also shared by people whose mother tongue is Slavic. Jura, a student from Belarus, expresses his astonishment:

48: it's quite terrible because there is always an old lady… and they don't speak

49: even… a few words in English, I had to show them pointing with my finger on the things that

50: I want to buy… even the water or anything, they don't know what I'm saying to them.

Lucy, a student of English linguistics, is particularly aware of the central role of the local language in daily functioning. Despite being fluent in English, she finds that not being able to communicate in the local language seriously complicates life and makes even basic interactions difficult.

128: (...) I didn't know before coming here, but I realized once

129: I'm here that language is everything, and if you don't know language, everything is really,

130: really, really, really difficult. Just... simple, simple things that you really realize, but

131: then once you live in the place and your daily basic thing relies on it.

However, language sensitivity and awareness are not common among all respondents, especially among native speakers of English, who are used to being able to communicate in this language. This aspect is particularly powerful in Sandra's narration. As a native speaker of English from Canada, Sandra takes other people's competence in English for granted and finds it deeply disturbing when she encounters any obstacles communicating in her mother tongue, even after having realized how difficult it is to master Polish. Overwhelmed by difficulties, Sandra ceased to learn Polish, and instead she adopted the strategy of speaking her mother tongue more slowly (108-109). She concludes her narrative by exclaiming: "Uh, I need language [Polish] just for a bit" (141-142).

What our research indicates is that, despite the growing presence of English around the world, one can barely get by without knowing the local language, especially in countries considered monolingual, e.g., Poland, and during longer stays abroad. Interaction and meaning-making in a local language enable one not only to communicate but also to help develop a more conscious approach to what is said and how it is said. This, in turn, empowers the speaker (Lankiewicz & Wąsikiewicz-Firlej, 2016) and produces a feeling of conversational control. The deconstruction of the myth of English as an international language and a universal communication tool vividly emerges from Lucy's narration:

149: yes, at the beginning, when I came here, my thoughts and my ideas were like 'okay,

150: I know English and English is international'... but no, not really [laughter]

151: [laughter] yeah

152: so I started learning Polish because of that. Because... not only to talk with old people.

153: I don't know, just to connect more or to feel more at home... or to... do the things

154: easier, but the language is not so easy, so... [laughter] I tried that though.

In sum, contrary to our respondents' initial expectations and a strong belief in the status of English as a true global lingua franca, in the course of their stay abroad, the majority of them realize that competence in Polish is not only a pass to their daily functioning or professional career but also a key to satisfactory and deeper interpersonal relations.

5. Conclusion

Despite their openness and positive mindset, the respondents (with some exceptions) did not show a very profound interest in the host country's culture or language. In fact, their narrations revealed a collection of lay theories concerning culture and language, offering a rather simplistic perception of reality. First of all, they shared a belief in the existence of a universal culture that facilitates communication and eliminates any kind of barriers. Another common belief pertained to the status of English as a global language and a universal medium of communication that eliminates the need to communicate in the host country's language and explicates the very low or no investment in learning the local language.

The analyzed stories deconstruct the above-mentioned myths. Contrary to our respondents' prior assumptions, language, including the local one, emerges as the main interaction tool and a key to intercultural understanding. This transition reverberates particularly strongly in the stories of the respondents who have experienced more than one longer stay abroad. Such respondents share more insightful reflections concerning their experiences (e.g., Oksana) and are able to identify a range of values and affordances related to the mastery of the local language. Along with the previously mentioned emotional, social, and epistemic values, paralleled with more spontaneous and satisfying communication, as well as the rise in the quality of the relationships with the locals, some sojourners pointed to the conditional value ascribed to Polish (it offers access to the local job market and opens new vistas for professional career development). Thus, it might be concluded that the first-time study abroad experience is often a springboard for the individual's multidimensional development, and more insightful intercultural and linguistic reflection comes during successive longer stays abroad.

The above conclusions have some serious implications for teaching foreign languages, especially in higher education. First, language learners should be made aware that it is rather heteroglossic multilingualism than monoglossic bilingualism (García & Leiva, 2014) which plays a critical role in personal growth and significantly contributes to the development of cultural awareness. From the perspective of our study, it is also crucial to emphasize language teachers' role in debunking the myths concerning the sufficiency of lingua franca English in intercultural communication. Contrary to popular belief, our study has shown that the global language does not guarantee successful operational functioning abroad. During longer stays abroad, one can ensure a more satisfying conversational control (Parks, 1994) and deeper integration with local people by investing in learning their language. Command of languages other than English should be promoted as an undeniable asset and a medium for more in-depth communication based on understanding and relationship building.

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Appendix 1

Table 1: Participants' pseudonyms and their background

Name	Sex	Country/Nationality/ethnicity	Age
Oscar	m	Colombia	23
Sasha	m	Ukraine	21
Meghan	f	Turkey/ Kurdish	21
Semirada	f	Azerbaijan	25
Svetlana	f	Bulgaria	21
Pablo	m	Columbia	22
Jaroslav	m	Lithuania	23
Esmeralda	f	Armenia	21
Jack	m	Canada	24
Klaudia	f	Germany	22
Anhelina	f	Ukraine	19
Borys	m	Ukraine	22
Hans	m	Germany	23
Sandra	f	Canada	20
Helena	f	Ukraine	22
Luika	f	Greece	22
Lucy	f	Spain	21
Michalina	f	Ukraine	22
Natasha	f	Belarus	21
Frank	m	Congo	29
Oksana	f	Ukraine	22
Maria	f	Spain	27
Rahid	m	India	24
Jura	m	Belarus	22
Saskia	f	Spain	22
Carla	f	Spain	21
Fabiano	m	Italy	24
Steve	m	USA/Canada	20