

Multilingual Speakers' Interview

Agnieszka Pludra and Evangelos Kamanatzis

This report constitutes a brief summary of an interview concerned with our multilingual profiles and learning strategies. The interview took place on the 13th of March 2021 on MS Teams.

What type of multilinguals do we consider ourselves?

This question evoked quite a vivid discussion between us. It was particularly interesting for two reasons. First, we live in two radically different linguistic environments. Second, there is a 20-year age difference between us. Suffice it to say, our approaches to the categorization were rather different. Table 1 recapitulates the main points discussed in regard to the typology of our multilingual profiles. What we focused on the most was comparing each other's considerations regarding the acquisition of languages belonging to the same language families (Polish and Serbo-Croatian in the case of Agnieszka and French and Spanish in the case of Evangelos).

Agnieszka	Evangelos
AGE OF ACQUISITION	
<p>Successive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polish-English <p>Simultaneous:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English-German • English-Spanish • English-Spanish-Serbo-Croatian 	<p>Successive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • French-German-Greek Sign Language (GSL)-Turkish-Spanish-Arabic <p>Simultaneous:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greek-English
<p>Late:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English – at the age of 6 • German – at the age of 10 • Spanish – at the age of 15 • Serbo-Croatian – at the age of 18 	<p>Late:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English – at the age of 6 • French – at the age of 10 • German – at the age of 11 • GSL – at the age of 27 • Turkish - at the age of 34 • Spanish – at the age of 37 • Arabic – at the age of 40
LANGUAGE COMPETENCE	
<p>Unbalanced:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polish – daily conversations with friends and family in Poland • English – education, job, daily conversations with friends • German – no longer used • Spanish – watching films and talking with Spanish friends 	<p>Unbalanced:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greek – mother tongue, still in extent use • English – daily use: education, entertainment, international contact • French – entertainment, rare use • German – dominant in 2000 (Erasmus in Germany) nowadays occasional use • GSL – chatting with friends rarely

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serbo-Croatian – daily conversations when in Croatia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turkish – communicating with Turkish friends rarely Spanish – dominant in 2018 (Erasmus in Spain) still communicating with Spanish friends, entertainment Arabic – only in university for academic purposes
MUTUAL LANGUAGE INFLUENCE	
Additive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Polish-German-Spanish-Serbo-Croatian Subtractive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Polish-English 	Additive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greek-English Subtractive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> French-German-Turkish-Spanish
CONTEXT OF ACQUISITION	
Informal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Polish Serbo-Croatian Initially formal/currently mostly informal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English (though all my university courses are in English) Spanish (though I attend Spanish classes) Formal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> German 	Informal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greek Initially informal/later mostly formal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English (informal until the age of 23) Initially formal/later mostly informal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> German (first in class/later living in Germany) Spanish (first in class/later living in Spain) Formal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> French GSL Turkish Arabic
CURRENT LEVEL	
Proficient: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Polish English Advanced: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spanish Non-proficient: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> German Serbo-Croatian 	Proficient: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greek English Advanced: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spanish German Non-proficient: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> French GSL Turkish Arabic
FREQUENCY OF USE	
Equal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Polish-English Unequal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spanish-Serbo-Croatian-German 	Equal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greek-English Unequal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> French-German-GSL-Turkish-Spanish-Arabic
SWITCHING HABITS	

Frequent switching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Polish ↔ English Polish ↔ Serbo-Croatian English → Spanish Spanish → Serbo-Croatian No switching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All the other combinations 	Frequent switching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greek ↔ English Greek ↔ German (in 2000) English → Spanish (in 2018) No switching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All the other combinations
TYPOLOGY OF LANGUAGES	
Similar languages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Polish-Serbo-Croatian: Slavic English-German: Germanic Different: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spanish: Romance 	Similar languages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spanish-French: Romance English-German: Germanic Turkish-Arabic: Vocabulary Different: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greek, GSL

Table 1. The typology of our multilingual profiles.

What are our learning strategies?

When answering this question, we found out that we have a lot in common. Watching films and TV series is one of our favorite activities, which, among other benefits, greatly improves our listening skills. Interestingly, while Agnieszka prefers watching films with English subtitles, Evangelos either watches them without subtitles or with subtitles corresponding to the language spoken in the film. Other learning strategies we share include: listening to music, studying grammar books, reading about the etymology of studied words, mapping similarities and differences between languages, and engaging in conversations with native speakers. In general, we also agreed that we prefer studying one language at a time. A more extensive list of our preferred learning strategies in subsequent languages can be found in Table 2. As Evangelos is a user of Greek Sign Language, we also dedicated some time to discussing the difficulty of finding resources for studying sign languages. Evangelos admitted that without constant exposure to users of GSL, its acquisition is practically impossible.

Agnieszka	Evangelos
L2	
ENGLISH	ENGLISH
Watching films with subtitles	Watching films without subtitles
Participating in student exchanges	Studying grammar books
Learning song lyrics by heart	Listening to English music
Making flashcards in <i>Quizlet</i>	Participating in international activities
L3	
SPANISH	FRENCH
Transferring grammatical knowledge and some vocabulary items from English – making a map of similarities	Studying grammar books
Reading literature in Spanish and marking new vocabulary	Watching films with subtitles

Engaging in conversations with native speakers	Listening to French music
Watching movies/TV series in Spanish	
Traveling to Spanish-speaking countries	
Reading about the etymology of Spanish words	
L4	
SERBO-CROATIAN	GERMAN
A comparative method (mapping shared words and grammatical structures between Polish and Serbo-Croatian)	Living in Germany and contacting with native speakers
Making flashcards in <i>Quizlet</i>	Studying grammar books
Listening to music in Serbo-Croatian	Listening to German music
L5	
GERMAN	GREEK SIGN LANGUAGE
Drawing associations of more complex words	Communicating with deaf people
	Watching videos on YouTube
L6	
	TURKISH
	Listening to Turkish music
	Studying grammar books
	Traveling to Turkey
L7	
	SPANISH
	Living in Spain and contacting with native speakers
	Studying grammar books
	Listening to Spanish music
L8	
	ARABIC
	Studying grammar books and the Quran
	Listening to Arabic music

Table 2. Our preferred learning strategies in subsequent languages.

What features do multilinguals/polyglots have?

We began answering the question by referring to our own experiences. We pondered what traits proved to be useful when acquiring languages and what characteristics seemed to be slowing the acquisition down. We came to the conclusion that since acquiring a given language's phonology is often challenging for language learners, being communicative and not having social anxiety is particularly helpful, as it allows for developing oral skills by engaging in conversations with native speakers of that language. Agnieszka also mentioned that a mimicry talent and a good ear for music might additionally help learners in this regard. Having discussed this aspect, we moved on to describing some of the most interesting facts mentioned in the assigned video. Here, we mostly concentrated on the short interview with five polyglots. Based on both, the video and our discussion, we created a set of most prominent features shared by multilingual speakers (Table 3). We noticed that while some of the features (e.g. being persistent or having

a mimicry talent) are mostly inborn, others (e.g. being easily adaptive to foreign cultures and better understanding the etymology of words) are developed over the course of language acquisition.

Agnieszka's ideas	Evangelos' ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative • Persistent • Open-minded • Have a mimicry talent • Have a good ear for music • Have good time-management skills • Have strong analytical skills • Better multitaskers • Have low levels of social anxiety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globally aware • Open-minded • Communicative • Easily adaptive to a foreign culture and customs • Better understand the etymology of words

Table 3. Most prominent features shared by multilinguals.

Overall, the interview proved to be a fascinating experience for both of us, as it allowed us to exchange ideas and approaches to studying languages as well as broadened our outlook on numerous issues associated with multilingualism.

References:

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