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The Polish Language in Egypt: Current Status and Speakers' Preferences

Abstract

The article describes multilingualism and language preferences of the Polish community living in Egypt. The present paper is a first study of multilingualism involving both Polish and Arabic. Field study was carried out in October – December 2020 using surveys and face-to-face interviews. This includes 54 persons who belong mainly to the first generation of migrants, as well as the second and third generation of Polish diaspora. The research aims to explore the process of becoming and being trilingual, and how the use of languages changes in emigration, depending on the spheres of life and self-realization among different generations of the Polish diaspora.

Keywords: multilingualism; Polish; Arabic; Polish community in Egypt

“What makes me myself rather than anyone else is the very fact that I am poised between two countries, two or three languages and several cultural traditions. It is precisely this that defines my identity. Would I exist more authentically if I cut off a part of myself?” (Maalouf, 2000, p. 3)

The Polish presence in Egypt has intrigued a number of researchers, mostly historians, and has been studied in papers and monographs. The latest such publication concerned the activities of Poles in the towns of Giza and Helwan (today districts of Cairo) from the XIX century to the end of World War II (Hoff, 2016). E. Hoff lists three main reasons why Poles, among other Europeans, came to the Nile: 1) the fashion for travelling to Egypt at the time, 2) religiously motivated expeditions on the way to the Holy Land, 3) the discovery of the health benefits of the Egyptian climate. The author also lists, and refers to, the vast literature on Polish affairs in Egypt. Various sociocultural and linguistic contacts between Poland and Egypt, and other Muslim countries, was presented by P. W. Turek, based on his analysis of records of 1250 people from the XII century to the middle of the XX century (Turek, 2003). In subsequent articles, the author described the variation of Polish used by Poles working in Arab countries, labelled by the researcher as a *contract-language* (Turek, 1992a, 1992b). The users of this language variety (argot?) were a group of Polish nationals working for Polish export companies in Egypt, who returned to their homeland after several years of contract work in Egypt. In his paper, P. W. Turek examines the lexical phenomena caused by the influence of Arabic. Significantly, the paper contains a dictionary of lexemes (185).

At one point, the Polish diaspora on the Nile was the largest Polish group in Africa. After World War II, Poland, as part of the communist bloc, supported left-wing or pro-Soviet Arab countries, including Egypt. Under a Polish–Egyptian agreement signed in 1965, young Egyptians

obtained opportunities to study in Poland (Kałaska & Suchcicka, 2012). As a result of this influx of Egyptian students, a group of about 300 Poles who had married Egyptians moved to Egypt, where they settled mainly in Cairo and Alexandria.¹ It was they, above all, who shaped the modern Polish diaspora in Egypt. A smaller but important group of my respondents are economic emigrants moving to Egypt for work due to the development of the tourism sector. These are Polish women who have found work in the famous Red Sea tourist resorts.

Today, the Polish community in Egypt, or the Egyptian *Polonia* (*Polonia* is a term used in Polish to denote a community of Poles, or those with Polish heritage, who live abroad), has an estimated population of about 600.² The J.M. Dzieduszycki Polish School of the Polish Embassy in Cairo enrolls children belonging mostly to the second generation, but some pupils belong to the third generation of the diaspora. In the 2020/2021 schoolyear, 42 pupils, mostly from mixed families but also from Polish families, attend the school.³ Officially, around 40 people belong to the Association of Polonia in Egypt, which was established in 2018.⁴

Before presenting the results of my field research, I will briefly outline C. A. Ferguson's term *diglossia* to define a specific form of bilingualism also used to describe the linguistic situation in Egypt (Ferguson, 1959). The two main Arabic varieties used by Egyptian society — Classical Arabic and Egyptian Arabic — have different special functioning of high (H) and low (L) forms, which are assigned to specific spheres. The high form is used primarily in religion, whereas the low form is commonly used in everyday communication, e.g. in restaurants, shops, offices, and at home. University lectures may be conducted in Classical Arabic (or more accurately, its contemporary official literary form, Modern Standard Arabic), whereas practical exercises may be continued in colloquial Egyptian Arabic. Within these two varieties, El-Said Badawi has specified additional linguistic levels: two levels of classical language (Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic) and three colloquial dialect levels (Badawi & Hinds, 1986). The older version of the classical language belongs to the heritage of high Islamic culture and is used in mosques. The contemporary variety is the language of modern culture and technology. The colloquial dialect levels are closely related to disparities in the social class and literacy of users. The highest level is used only by educated language users, who represent the smallest user group. The lowest level is the language of the uneducated from the lowest social class. In Poland, Janusz Danecki from Warsaw University has penned a comprehensive work on Arabic and its varieties, as well as the language situation and Arabic diglossia (Danecki, 2000).

Given the above information, one should bear in mind that the first language for the second generation of the Polish diaspora in Egypt is Egyptian Arabic, which they assimilate naturally at home, rather than the classical variety. It is not until they start school that they begin to formally learn the classical language (Classical Arabic of heritage and religion and the Modern Standard Arabic of modern literature, science, academia, media, and other official spheres), and from then they simultaneously learn two varieties. As a result, one variety of Arabic is spoken by one my respondents, who studied at university, while a completely different variety of Arabic is spoken by another respondent who does not work and hears mainly the dialect of her husband and his family. Another variation is used in day-to-day communication by Leila — my trilingual interlocutor from the second generation of the Polish diaspora in Egypt, who is a presenter on Egyptian television.

The current paper presents a study of the multilingualism and language preferences of the Egyptian *Polonia*. I conducted a field study from October to December 2020 using surveys on the *profitest.pl* website, which were completed by 54 respondents. I conducted additional interviews with some of the respondents. The respondents are members of the Association of Polonia in Egypt

¹ *Historia Polonii w Egipcie* (n.d.), http://zrp-e.com/?page_id=380

² Data received from the Polish Consulate in Cairo in January 2021. These are, probably, estimates, as determining the exact number is not easy.

³ Data received from the school principal Monika Mucha El-Serougi.

⁴ Data received from the Chairman of the Board, Mrs. Ewa Świerszczyńska.

and users of social media groups of the Polish diaspora.⁵ Research material was also collected from parents of the J.M. Dzieduszycki Polish School of the Polish Embassy in Cairo. I also conducted an interview with the mother of a Polish language student at Ain Shams University in Cairo. The interviews were conducted in Polish, and in only one case did my interlocutor respond in English.

The subject respondents are representatives of three generations of *Polonia* in Egypt. Most of them (79.6%) were born in Poland, the others were born in Egypt (20.4%).

The third generation of the diaspora is represented by a 14-year-old respondent who was born and raised in Cairo. Her grandmother is a Polish woman who emigrated to Egypt. She is a student in the final year of the Polish School, knows Polish well and relates to Polish culture. In the younger classes, there are more third generation children.

11 respondents belong to the second generation of *Polonia*. Most were born and raised in Egypt. Leila lived in Poland for her first 4 years, while Rami spent his childhood “*between Poland and Egypt*”. This group is made up of two school students (14 and 17 years old), and adults ranging in age from 19 to 50. Of the second generation group of respondents, 4 are men. The respondents mostly come from mixed Polish–Egyptian families, in which the mother is Polish and the father is Egyptian. Only in one case is the father Polish and the mother Egyptian.

The vast majority of the respondents (42), are representatives of the first generation of emigration. This is, as in other Arab countries, primarily a female emigration. The group comprises 40 women and 2 men. The age of the respondents ranges from 18 to 60, with the largest group being those aged between 30 and 50. Some have come to Egypt recently, but most have live there for a relatively long time, even as long as 24 years.

63% of those surveyed live in Cairo, which affects their situation. Residents of the capital are in contact with the Embassy and Consulate of the Republic of Poland, and children can study at the Polish School. They have better contact with each other and the possibility of regular meetings on various occasions. For example, in November 2020 children and their families went on an organized Polish Independence Day trip to Alexandria, where they laid wreathes to the Polish soldiers killed in World War II who are buried in the Hadra Military Cemetery. They also attended a history lecture and received Polish souvenirs. An important academic institution in Cairo is the Research Station of the Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw. Ain Shams University in Cairo has a lecturer of Polish language. For the Polish diaspora, there are many more opportunities to meet in the capital.

The respondents resident outside Cairo live in the following localities: 16.7% — Hurghada; 5.6% — Alexandria; 3.7% — Sharm el-Sheikh; 3.7% — Dahab; 7.4% — other (al-Mansura, Ismailia, Marsa Alam, al-Kusajr).

29.6% of the respondents have had additional immigration experience, which influences their everyday language choices. They have lived in other countries such as Italy (5 persons), the UK (5 persons), the USA (2 persons), Denmark, Russia, Azerbaijan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Angola.

In terms of education, the subjects can be divided into 3 groups:

- 74.1% of respondents possess a university diploma;
- 20.4% have secondary education (some arrived in Egypt with secondary education, but this group also includes people who are continuing their education);
- 5.6% have basic education, they are the youngest respondents who are still studying at school and have been included in the current research because of their interesting language biographies.

The last question in the questionnaire was aimed at determining the origin of the subjects. 77.8% of those surveyed said that they and their parents are of Polish origin; 22.2% of respondents

⁵ Eg. “*Polki w Egipcie*” [Polish women in Egypt]; “*Polki gotują w Egipcie*” [Polish women cook in Egypt] etc.

came from mixed Polish–Egyptian families, of which 7.4% indicated Polish–Egyptian origin, 9.3% chose Egyptian–Polish origin and 5.6% chose other:

- *I am Egyptian in Egypt and Polish in Poland, I do not feel strange either here or there;*
- *I am a Polish woman in Poland, and an Egyptian in Egypt* (“*w Polsce Polka, a w Egipcie Egipcjanka*”);
- *In Egypt, I feel that I am Polish, but when I go to Poland, I feel that, really, I am from Egypt;*
- *Egyptian with Polish roots, because all my life was here, but I cannot say that I am only Egyptian or just a Pole, more Egyptian.*

In the second part of the survey, respondents were asked to mark their first, second and third languages. According to P. Levchuk, the first language is “the first language in the order of assimilation, a language naturally assimilated from the mother” (Levchuk, 2020, p. 81). In the research discussed here, one may notice the strong influence of the English language in Egypt. For those who have come from Poland, the second language may be Arabic, which has the status of an official language, but it may also be English. Despite having no official status, English is often spoken among the educated part of society which prefers private British or American education. Therefore, I agree with Levchuk’s definition of a second language, as outlines in his recently published volume on Ukrainian–Russian–Polish trilingualism: “the second language in the order of assimilation, is a language that does not always have to have the appropriate official status” (Levchuk, 2020, p. 82; see also Levchuk, 2019). The third language, on the other hand, is “the language learned/assimilated in chronological order” (Levchuk, 2020, p. 83).

In the study group, the first language is mostly Polish (77.8%, 42 respondents). Arabic follows (9.3%, 5 respondents). 7.4% (4 respondents) claim to be bilingual in Polish and Arabic, and English was given as the first language for 5.6% (3 respondents). The survey data will now be discussed according to the division of the respondents into three generations of *Polonia*.

First generation

These are people born in Poland (42 respondents) to Polish parents and who studied at Polish schools. At home in Poland they used to speak only Polish. The second and third languages of the subjects were formalised in school/study/courses or assimilated during their trips abroad. Some respondents understood the terms L1, L2 and L3 ambiguously. Their responses were carefully analysed in the context of the entire survey, and the following models were identified:

1. L1 Polish, L2 English, L3 Arabic This is the most common model, which represents half of the respondents (23). After analysing the surveys, it can be concluded that 6 respondents who selected Arabic as L3 do not actually use it in everyday life, and their knowledge of Arabic is very poor. Consequently, these 6 cases represent examples of Polish–English bilingualism, which may evolve into trilingualism over time. In this model, Arabic is usually used in offices, restaurants, shops, and is also the language of religion. However, the majority of respondents emphasized that they are still learning Arabic and have a poor knowledge of it, even at the basic level. They communicate in Arabic sporadically and in simple everyday situations. The respondents rated their performance in listening and speaking as average, but said that their reading and writing skills were poor. Some subjects in this group, however, use Arabic quite often and in one case (a man, who, according to the survey, is a professional Arabist) L3 became a functionally first language.

2. L1 Polish, L2 English This bilingual model was declared by 12 respondents.

3. L1 Polish, L2 Arabic, L3 English Declared by 3 subject respondents for whom L3 (English) is used in social contacts, at work, and may also be the preferred language for watching TV.

4. L1 Polish, L2 Arabic Only 1 respondent (female). According to the survey, she uses Arabic in all spheres of life in Egypt, though she also pointed out that she is still learning it.

5. L1 Polish, L2 English, L3 Italian & 6. L1 Polish, L2 Italian, L3 Arabic & 7. L1 Polish, L2 Italian, L3 English, L4 Arabic These three models are related to Italian, which some interviewees learned while living in Italy. In the fifth model, Italian as a third language is limited to contacts with friends, and it is also the preferred language for radio and television. In the sixth model, where Italian is the second language, it is the language used in the family with the spouse, while Arabic refers to official use and social contacts. In the last model, Italian is not only the language of the spouse but also the internal dialogue, English is mainly the language of social relations and Arabic, which is the fourth language, concerns the public sphere — offices, restaurants, and shops.

Second and third generation

We can distinguish four models within these respondents:

1. L1 Arabic, L2 Polish (assimilated at home), L3 English or/and French (learned at school) This model represents 6 respondents. In the case of Sandra and Omar, L3 is French, as they attended a French school in Cairo. In interviews, they stated that Arabic and Polish appeared simultaneously at home in early childhood, with their mother talking in Polish and Arabic and their father in Arabic: *“I will say that Polish and Arabic appeared simultaneously. Except that I have stronger Arabic because I grew up here”* (Omar). The respondents equate L1 with their mother tongue, with which they are emotionally connected. This model also represents Nadine from the third generation of the diaspora. Her Polish grandmother lives in Egypt, and it was with her that she spent a great deal of time talking to in Polish as a child. Her mother spoke to her in Arabic and Polish and she then went to the Polish School in Cairo, where she developed all her skills in Polish.

2. L1 Arabic & Polish (as both first languages assimilated simultaneously: Polish from mother; Arabic from father); L2 English This model is represented by Rami, Omar, Karim and Rania. Rami was born in Poland and his family later moved to Egypt. His parents spoke English to each other, his mother was an English teacher in Cairo, and he was taught English at school. All three languages have been present in his life since early childhood. He studied in Poznań, then lived and studied in England for several years. For the last 5 years he has been living between Cairo and Warsaw, mainly due to work. He is a sound engineer and has a private recording studio.

3. L1 Polish, L2 Arabic (the second language assimilated at home), L3 English (at school) This model is represented by Leila, who lived in Poland for her first 4 years. At home, Leila's parents spoke to each other in Polish. Her mother did not know Arabic at the time, while her father spoke Polish. He spoke Arabic to his daughter but spent most of his time with her mother and thus felt that the language of communication should be Polish.

4. L1 English, L2 Arabic (assimilated at home), L3 Polish (learned in childhood), L4 French (at school) This model is represented by Farida, whose mother is Egyptian and father is Polish. The parents spoke English to each other at home. Arabic was assimilated at home, from family. She is not sure from when she has known Polish. As a young child she visited her grandparents in Poland, then watched Polish films, started talking to her father in both Polish

and English, and finally learned Polish at the Polish School in Cairo. She has been gradually forgetting her knowledge of Polish since her father left Egypt, and she has already finished the Polish School. In her case, Polish is limited to telephone conversations with her father or friends from the Polish School. She says that she can sometimes speak Polish with her mother as a secret language when they do not wish to be understood by others in their surroundings. Farida rates her knowledge of L3 higher in reading and listening, lower in speaking, and weakest in writing. During the interview, she responded in English to my questions in Polish but she understood my speech very well. The last time she was in Poland was four years ago (2016). She utilizes L4 very seldom, normally in social contacts.

The questions in the second part of the survey were designed to determine the scope of functioning of the different languages in separate spheres: the official, public and religious spheres; the sphere of social contacts; and the professional sphere.

I. Language in government and administration: 53.7% English; 46.3% Arabic

13 respondents from the first generation of the diaspora communicate in Arabic on official matters, which requires a good level of competency. The others who selected Arabic here are from the second generation. The other first-generation subjects (29 respondents) stated that they use English in this sphere.

II. Language in shops and restaurants: 57.4% Arabic, 42.6% English

Almost half of the first generation of migrants chose Arabic rather than English (19 out of 42). This sphere requires slightly less knowledge of the language than in official situations. Furthermore, it was stated that for buying something or negotiating the prices, it is useful to show some knowledge of Arabic.

III. The language of prayer

Not all of the respondents take part in religious rites in Egypt. For some, therefore, this language category does not apply. Among practitioners, the linguistic situation is as follows:

- Arabic — most of those surveyed are Muslims. This is also confirmed by research on Polish emigration in Egypt (Kałaska & Suchcicka, 2012). Muslims pray only in Arabic (Classical Arabic), which is why this is the most frequent language of prayer of the subject respondents
- Polish — 4 respondents (Roman Catholics), participate in Polish-language masses in Cairo
- English — 3 respondents (Roman Catholics), participate in masses in English
- Various — “*Polish church online in Polish, international church in Cairo or in Arabic with translation in headphones, a lot also in English*”.

IV. Language in the family

A. The language between partners 11.3% of respondents have no partner. In the first generation, all marriages/relationships are mixed in terms of nationality, and the language they communicate in is primarily English, which was chosen by 64.6% of those surveyed. 20.8% indicated Arabic (these are both second-generation respondents born in Egypt, as well as 5 first-generation respondents — 2 men and 3 women). 4.2% of respondents communicate with partners in Polish. These are all relationships between Polish women and Egyptian men. 10.4% of the respondents stated a different language: *Italian* (2); *mixed English, Arabic and Polish* (2); *mixed Arabic and Egyptian Arabic* (1).

In mixed marriages, only 9.3% of partners speak Polish, the majority (46.3%) do not speak any Polish. 33.3% of respondents indicated that their partners know some Polish: “*poorly, A1, A2, B1, medium, communicative, knows a few phrases, understands a little*”.

B. Language of parents' contacts with children 40.7% of respondents have no children.

First generation

All respondents speak Polish with their children, including 62.5% who speak to their children only in Polish. Others speak both Polish and Arabic (2 respondents), Polish and English (2), and Polish, Italian and Arabic (1). One respondent noted that she communicates with her children in English and Arabic, but also stated that her children know Polish. One of the subjects indicated that he talks to his children in Arabic, Polish, English, and German. He speaks with his wife in Arabic.

Second generation

5 second-generation respondents have children. They all listed different variants of communicating with them: 1) Arabic and Polish, 2) Arabic and English, 3) Polish, Arabic and English, 4) Arabic, 5) English.

In this group, one can notice the immense influence of English in Egypt. Leila pointed out that at home she speaks with her daughter in Arabic or Polish, and they avoid English, because its influence is huge in every field, above all in school.

Only one respondent said that her children do not speak Polish. She sometimes speaks Polish to her elder son, who understands Polish to some extent, while her daughter knows only individual words. She lives in Alexandria. Her son represents the third generation and studies Polish at Ain Shams University in Cairo, but no longer identifies with Polish culture.

V. Language for social contacts

First generation

In social communication, the subjects speak mainly in English (14 respondents), English and Polish (10), or English and Italian (1). 11 respondents stated that they spoke Arabic within the following variants: Arabic (3); Arabic and English (7), Arabic and Polish (1). 6 respondents marked all three languages: Polish, English and Arabic.

Second and third generation

Naturally, Arabic (7 respondents) dominates in the second and third generation, depending on the interlocutor: most use Arabic and English, with Polish being used in social contacts with Poles (5 respondents, including Nadine from the third generation). One respondent reported that she sometimes communicates in French.

VI. Language at work

First generation

14 respondents from this group do not work outside home, taking care of family, or as one interviewee wrote: "*Pleasures, I have never worked here*".

English (17 respondents) dominates when working with colleagues and communicating in professional situation. English is also used together with Arabic (6) and with Polish (4). Only 3 respondents working in Cairo use solely Arabic in this sphere, and 2 stated that they use Polish. Poles who have moved to Egypt are primarily engaged in their own business activities or work

in the tourism sector. Women are often English teachers in kindergartens or schools, hence the dominance of English in this sphere. It is necessary to mention two Polish artists who live and work in Cairo, namely Isabella Uchman and Agnes Michalczyk.

Second and third generation

Arabic (5 respondents) or Arabic and English (2) dominate in the second and third generations. One respondent selected all 3 languages — Arabic, Polish and English — while one of the respondents, who is currently studying in Warsaw, entered Polish.

Three people in this group have no working experience yet. They are currently attending private British schools in Cairo, where they study in English or Arabic, depending on the subject. They also learn French at school. In addition, Nadine, who belongs to the third generation, is in the final year of the Polish School, where classes are held once every two weeks.

VII. Language of internal dialogue

Respondents replied:

- 50% — Polish. These are, of course, people born in Poland, from the first generation of the diaspora, but also 3 persons from the second generation who were born in Egypt.
- 13% — English (first-generation respondents)
- 13% — Arabic (second and third generation born in Egypt, but also a man from the first generation of the diaspora)
- 1.9% — Italian (first generation)
- 20.4% — differently:
  - *I switch between Arabic and English and do not even pay attention* (2nd generation, born in Egypt)
  - *in all three languages* (2 persons from the first and second generation)
  - *some Polish, some English* (4 respondents, first generation)
  - *sometimes in Arabic but mostly in Polish* (2 respondents, first generation)
  - *thoughts do not have language, in my opinion, I think pictorially*

Finally, respondents had the opportunity to share their comments on the use of languages in their families on a daily basis. When asked if any of the languages dominates, the respondents answered as follows:

First generation

- English — 17 answers. However, respondents point out that much depends on the interlocutors around them:

“English prevails when it comes to the four of us, and as I am alone with children, I try to speak only Polish”
- English and Polish — 8 respondents. Women acting as mothers and wives fulfil certain roles in Muslim culture. There is probably more frequent contact between children and the mother, rather than the father. This is the cause of the following language behaviours:

“The son speaks better Polish than Arabic”

“The child speaks perfect Polish, poor Arabic. Dad did not pay attention, because he cared more about knowing Polish, and without communication the language can’t be mastered. Now he is ashamed a little at school, because other children speak fluently. That’s why he wants to fly to Poland”
- Arabic — 6 respondents: *“Arabic prevails, because my children communicate with each other in Arabic”*

- Polish and English at a similar level (2)
- Polish and Arabic (1)
- English and Arabic (1)
- mainly Italian (1)
- “*everyone is multilingual*” (1)

The complex socio-linguistic situation in Polish–Egyptian families is described by one of the interviewees in a very interesting way: “*My husband speaks to the children in Arabic, and most of it I understand, and I speak Polish with them, and my husband understands most of it. My husband speaks Polish, but from the beginning we have talked to each other in English, the children study in Arabic and English at school so they also understand most of what we say. The dominant language is Polish because most of the day I spend alone with the children*”.

Second generation

- Arabic prevails — 6 respondents
- Polish and Arabic — 1 (an interviewee who is still studying and has not started a family; her mother is a Polish woman who speaks Polish with her)
- English — 1: “*English dominates, unfortunately, because we lived in a country where English was the daily language for us and for children*” (USA). (She is also an English teacher at a private school).
- Arabic and English, then Polish (2)
- none prevails (Rami knows all three languages perfectly, he now lives “*between Cairo and Warsaw*”, and has not yet started a family, he is engaged in sound engineering and music production and uses three languages at work: “*The language you choose depends on the caller*”).

Third generation

The youngest respondent, who is still at school, presents some generational differences:

“*English dominates, because there is a lot of English at school, then Arabic, Polish and finally French.*”

One second-generation respondent emphasized her relationship with Polish culture. When asked which language prevails in her life, Leila replied:

“— *Are you asking about language or culture? — About language. — Arabic prevails then — What if I ask about culture, something will change? — Yes, because as I do something Polish, I do it from the heart, you know. And for Egyptian holidays, I don't have that much enthusiasm, you know, I'm not as happy as on Christmas Eve and Easter, when I always try to cook something Polish, when we have a Christmas tree, paint eggs for Easter. And the donuts for Fat Thursday! Well, I order ready-made with Dunkin Donuts, but my mom always did it myself, sometimes I make Polish salad [pol.: sałatka jarzynowa] and bake gingerbread [pol.: pierniki].*”

Rania, whose family is from Gdańsk, said: “*I miss Poland very much, I remember all the streets, I go to Google Maps for satellite view and look where we went to bathe*”. She also told me that her name was Ania, like her mother wanted to name her. However, “*since ‘anā’ means ‘I, me’ in Arabic, my father objected. Therefore, in Egypt it is Rania, and in Poland it is Ania*”.

When summarizing the linguistic situation of the first generation of the Polish diaspora in Egypt, it is important to emphasise the dominance of English in offices, work, social contacts and families, where it is often the language of communication with a husband/partner. Arabic is often the L2, L3 or L4 in this group. Dominating the religious sphere, prevailing in shops and restaurants, Arabic plays a clear role in the sphere of social contacts.

Many of those surveyed are on their way towards trilingualism. They are still learning Arabic, while for a few respondents Arabic has already become the dominant language.

The division of social roles between men and women in Muslim cultures is directly connected with the preservation of the Polish language in all three generations. Children spend more time with their Polish mothers or grandmothers at home, with whom they speak Polish. For the youngest respondents of the second and third generations, Polish is also the language of academia and social advancement. Rami studied in Poland, Omar is currently studying in Warsaw, and another respondent is also considering this possibility.

For half of the respondents, Polish is the language of internal dialogue. Additionally, respondents use it mainly to stay in contact with Polish family, other Poles in Egypt, the Polish School and the Polish Embassy. Older second-generation representatives born in Egypt know Polish from their mothers and the home environment. They did not learn it in a formal way at school. They highly rate their listening and speaking skills, but admit that their reading and writing skills are poor. They may have trouble understanding some of information. For example, Rania watched the 2020 women's protests in Poland on TV, but she could not understand what the reason for them was.

Among the representatives of the second generation, Polish performs another interesting role — it is the language of secrets, which they use when they do not want to be understood: “*Sometimes I speak Polish with my sister, so that they do not understand us, our husbands do not know Polish*”; “*I sometimes talk to my mom when she doesn't want them to understand us*”.

This study demonstrates the complexity of the linguistic situation of *Polonia* in Egypt as the bilingualism and trilingualism of the subject respondents are at different stages. There is no doubt that this problem requires further detailed research.

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Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences

Publishing history: Received 2021-01-02; Accepted 2021-03-31; Published 2021-10-11.