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The Polish Language in Georgia (U.S.)[1]

Abstract

Despite the number of people of Polish origin (approx. 9 million) and the long history of this diaspora in the U.S., there have been no in-depth comprehensive sociolinguistic studies devoted to their language situation and bilingualism. The states of the Southeast (including Georgia) are particularly under-researched. The article presents the results of the Polish part of sociolinguistic research on the situation of Slavic languages in Georgia, carried out in the summer of 2022. Since Georgia is rarely a destination for direct migration from Poland, its Polish community differs linguistically and socially from the more typically "Polish" states of the Northeast and Midwest. Based on questionnaire research and interviews, the spheres of use of Polish and English, the linguistic competence of Poles in both languages, and the shape and main motives driving family language policy are discussed.
Keywords: Polish language abroad; minority; migration; bilingualism; family language policy

1 Introduction: The Polish Community in Georgia Against the Background of the Studies on Poles and Polish in the U.S.

The Polish community in the U.S. (9 million according to self-reported ancestry; USCBa, n.d.-a) is not only diverse in terms of geographical distribution, but also in the nature of settlement and social structure. In the typically "Polish" states of the Northeast and Midwest, the percentage of Poles reaches 7–9%. In Georgia, which has 10 million inhabitants, Poles constitute a small percentage of the population (1%; USCBb, n.d.-b). The Polish diaspora in the U.S. is one of the most frequently described Polish communities in the world. Although quantitatively the community seems well-studied, there are both regional and disciplinary disparities: socio–historical studies predominate, to which both monographs and entire journals are devoted, and focus mainly on the Northeast and Midwest (cf. e.g. Brzozowska-Krajka, 2020; Bukowczyk, 1996; PAS, 2023; Znaniecka-Lopata, 1994 and many others). The language of Polish expatriates in America has long aroused the interest of researchers in Poland and overseas. The topic has appeared in collective review volumes (Dubisz, 1997; Nowicka McLees & Dziwirek, 2010) and articles have been devoted to separate problems for years, e.g. phonology (Lyra, 1962), the usage of address forms (Wolski-Moskoff, 2018), language teaching (Klimek-Grądzka, 2017; Lipińska & Seretny, 2012a) and others. States in the Southeast, including Georgia, are definitely under-researched regardless of discipline, although in the case of historical works there are mentions of the settlement of Poles in this area

[1] The article is based on the results of the research project „Slavs in Georgia (USA) – the strategies of short- and long-term strategies of family language policy in diaspora", financed by Polish National Agency of Academic Exchange NAWA under the Bekker scholarship BPN/BEK/2021/1/00241 (internship at the University of Georgia in Athens).

throughout history (e.g. Brożek, 1985, pp. 32–33). However, there has been practically no information about the Polish language in this region. The 107,000 people of Polish descent in Georgia (USCBb, n.d.-b) are a relatively small group in the scale of the Polish diaspora in the U.S., but are a much larger group than the Polish diasporas in many European countries. In spite of this, this community has so far been marginalized or even omitted, not only in sociolinguistic studies. Reducing the Polish community in the U.S. to the Northeast and Midwest is an oversimplification, depriving us of the unique characteristics of the language status of less typical areas for Polish settlement. Noticing this research gap was one of the main motivations for undertaking research into the situation of the Polish language in Georgia during the author's research internship at the University of Georgia in Athens in the summer of 2022.

2 Structure of the Research Group and Study Design

Due to the pilot nature of the study and the lack of previous contacts with Poles living in Georgia, in the questionnaire part of the study it was important to reach the widest possible research group, which would include people representing the studied community and its social and linguistic diversity. For this purpose, contact was established with the Polish Club of Atlanta (PCA, n.d.), an official association of Polish people living in Georgia, which promotes Polish culture and oversees the operation of the Polish Saturday School. A parallel search for less formal organizations, including social media groups, led to the choice of the Facebook group "*Polacy w Atlancie*" (Poles in Atlanta; Polacy w Atlancie, n.d.). Members of this group were invited to participate in a survey which, in addition to the research part, included a question about consent to being interviewed on more detailed issues that could not be captured by a standard tool. Therefore, the sample was not randomized: study participants were selected using the snowball sampling method, often used in the event of difficulties in reaching respondents, which may result from, among other reasons, the initial stage of research and a poorly developed network of contacts (cf. Kubiciel-Łodzińska, 2021, pp. 151–152). Although the representativeness criterion was not crucial at the pilot stage, 116 people took part in the study, which constitutes approximately 10% of FB group members. Taking into account that on average less than 5% of members are active in FB groups (see, e.g., Cucu, 2023), it can be assumed that the sample included the most active ones and it largely reflects the linguistic situation of this part of the community that is most interested in the cultural life of Polish expatriates in America. The balanced nature of the research sample and its proportionality may also be evidenced by the answers given to the question about the region of origin in Poland (first-generation immigrants) or the place of origin of their ancestors (people born in the U.S.). However, these are only indications of the probable at least partial fulfilment of the representativeness criterion, and therefore all statistical data should be treated with reserve and rather a illustrative material. The answers to the question about the region of origin are important because they confirm that the Polish community in Atlanta is not regional in nature and was created by newcomers (and their ancestors) from different parts of Poland, cf. Figure 1.

The questionnaire contained semi-open questions with multiple-choice answers and the possibility of indicating a different (open) answer regarding, among others, reasons for choosing the current place of residence or the ethnic composition of the family. Questions with a 10-point scale were used to self-determine language knowledge or frequency of participation in Polish events, in addition to open questions requiring entering a short answer (mainly in the details, e.g. home region in Poland or profession). Participants who agreed to participate in the qualitative part of the study (semi-structured interviews) and were interested in the study results were asked to provide contact details, which allowed for 20 interviews to be conducted. The questionnaire was prepared in two language versions,[2] and most of the respondents chose the Polish version (104).

[2] An analogical questionnaire was used in the part of the research project devoted to the Russian language (for the results of the pilot study in the Russian-speaking community in Georgia see Głuszkowski, 2023).



Figure 1. Regions of origin of the participants of the survey (or of their ancestors).*

*There were 4 forms without an exact indication or beyond the borders of present-day Poland and 1 without answer.

Only two people took advantage of the opportunity to be interviewed in English, and in the case of one of them it was possible to switch to Polish during the interview.

The vast majority of the survey participants (72%) are in the 30–49 age range, which may result from the thematic profile of the group "*Polacy w Atlancie*", including such topics as job advertisements and questions about everyday issues, such as services, housing, shopping, which are of interest primarily to middle-aged people, who are in full development of their professional career and family life, cf. Figure 2.

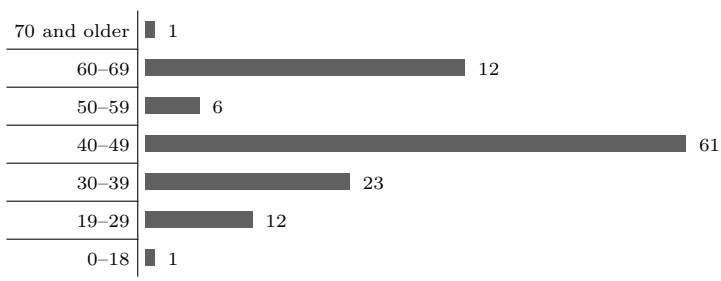


Figure 2. Age structure of the respondents.

This age structure was beneficial for the purpose of analysis concerning the language situation and strategies for maintaining the minority language and culture, with particular emphasis on family language policy. The second important factor from the point of view of the scope of information obtained was the length of stay in the host society. Most of the survey participants had been in America for a very long time – over 10 years ($n = 87$), or were born there ($n = 6$). 16 people had lived in the USA for between 4 and 10 years, 4 respondents had spent between 1 and 3 years in the U.S., and one person had been resident for less than a year. Apart from this one individual, the length of stay of all participants in the survey can be classified as long-term,[3] which often converts into multi-generational migration requiring specific actions towards the minority language and culture, especially with regard to children. While short-term or circular migrations, due to maintained contact with the country of origin, can take place without a set strategy of language and social adaptation, the situation of the participants of our study requires such decisions,

[3] According to the United Nations recommendations on statistics of international migration, a long-term stay begins after 12 months spent outside the country of origin in the territory of another country, which then becomes "his or her country of usual residence" (Raymer et al., 2013, p. 803).

especially since the time and financial costs of traveling overseas are much more often associated with permanent departure than in the case of much more accessible European countries, e.g. the UK (see e.g. Knight et al., 2014, p. 74).

Another important factor influencing the use of language in families is their ethnic composition. Differences in the preservation of the heritage language and culture between homogeneous and mixed families have been discussed many times in the literature (Sims, 2007 and others), also in relation to the Polish diaspora (see e.g. Pułaczewska, 2021; Romanowski, 2022 and others), and in our study we paid special attention to it both in the questionnaire and in the interviews. Due to the fact that the vast majority of the survey participants were born in Poland, the answers to the question about parents' ethnic origin were not varied – almost all of them (98%) are Poles. However, the ethnic composition of the respondents' families is diverse and almost equally divided. Slightly more than half of the survey participants are, or have been, in relationships with persons of another nationality (56), and in 45 cases spouses or partners are, or were, persons of Polish nationality. There were also 15 single people among our respondents, cf. Figure 3.

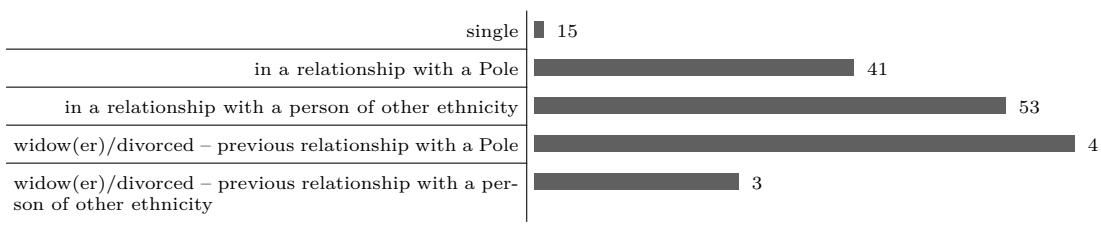


Figure 3. Ethnic composition of the respondents' families.

Among the social characteristics of the study participants, it is worth paying attention to the level of education. 77% of the survey participants have a university degree (bachelor's, master's, postgraduate or doctorate). These are very high rates compared not only to the national average in the U.S. (about 36% of adults have a university degree) but also to recent immigrants coming to the United States in the second decade of the 21st century, whose level of education is higher (approx. 47%) than that of locals and immigrants arriving in the 20th century (USCBc, 2020). In the case of people who came to the United States as adults, higher education was obtained in Poland but was often supplemented by postgraduate studies or taking up another field of study after migration. This is important because specialized education allows you to acquire and develop competences in the field of academic and specialist languages that are impossible to obtain in everyday communication (cf. Schleppegrel, 2004, p. 305), and in the case of the above-mentioned people, it facilitated the equalizing of levels between Polish and English. A variable closely related to education is occupation, and among the participants of our study the majority of people who answered the question about their workplace or profession work in positions requiring specialist qualifications or run their own business. Excluding the lack of answers and groups in the pre- and post-working age, approximately 55% are specialists from various industries and approximately 17% are entrepreneurs of various scales, cf. Figure 4.

The high share of people with higher education and relatively well-paid professions involving previously acquired knowledge and experience may, on the one hand, result from the non-representative nature of the sample, and on the other, be connected with the main motives of Polish migration to Georgia and the reasons for the choice of the current place of residence. All of the survey participants live within Metropolitan Atlanta, an area spanning over 21,000 km² that includes the city of Atlanta and dozens of suburbs, exurbs, and surrounding cities. This is due both to the territorial nature of the "*Polacy w Atlancie*" FB group, which brings together Poles from Atlanta and the surrounding area, but also to the territorial concentration of the Polish diaspora in Georgia (mainly in the Metro Atlanta area). The reason for choosing the current place

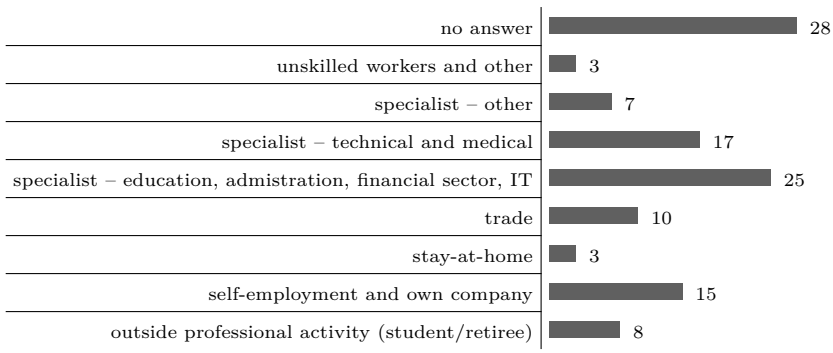


Figure 4. Professional activity of the respondents.

of residence was primarily work (54 responses), and then the fact that relatives or friends live in the area ($n = 24$), as well as the advantages of the area itself (its beauty, location, distance to Downtown Atlanta, safety, etc.). Other reasons given were the location of a good school for children ($n = 11$), living near friends ($n = 11$) or other Poles ($n = 3$), in a relationship with a spouse or partner, among others his or her job ($n = 7$), and unspecified other reasons ($n = 10$). For 5 people, their current place of residence is the home town where they grew up and 7 respondents did not provide any answer. Migration related to a change of place of work (of a respondent or his or her life partner) occurs primarily when the new place of work is more attractive, and therefore it is a form of social advancement. Georgia is not a direct destination for people leaving Poland,[4] and Poles from other states arrive there after initial adaptation, with some social and economic capital and knowledge of American realities, allowing for more conscious choices.

3 Language Competence

In the context of language behavior, which primarily involves the active use of one or more languages and the choice of language in specific situations, the level of knowledge is of key importance. In the case of our study, we paid most attention to competences in Polish and English, but due to the expected wider scope and diversity of language contact, the knowledge and use of other languages were also considered. In the questions regarding self-assessment of the level of language knowledge various language skills were distinguished: active – speaking and writing, and passive – listening and reading. All participants of the study speak and write both Polish and English, which is not surprising taking into account their origin, upbringing and length of stay in America. On a scale of 0–10 (0 – no given skill, 10 – its mastery at the highest level), the respondents rated their knowledge of Polish slightly higher – overall average 9.42. Self-assessments of knowledge of English were similar – overall mean 8.69, cf. Figure 5.[5]

Of course, these ratings are approximate, because in the process of self-assessment each has a slightly different scale, so it is difficult to compare these data on this basis: the same level of knowledge by one person may be rated as 10, and by another as 6 or 8. Therefore, additional questions were asked in the interviews, which, along with the observations made during Polish

[4] The share of foreign-born population in Georgia (10,2%), which is lower than the U.S. average (13,5%), and in the case of the Polish community, the number of people born in the country of origin is approximately 3,000, which is an even smaller percentage compared to those declaring Polish origin (107,000), i.e. 2.8% (Data USA, 2023a; USCBb). In Illinois, which is one of the main destinations for direct migration from Poland, this share is 14% (cf. Data USA, 2023b, n.d.-b; USCBa, n.d.-a).

[5] Nevertheless, despite the low standard deviation ($SD = 5,192$ for Polish, and 5,53 for English), there were respondents who stated that their knowledge of one of the languages was much lower than the average.

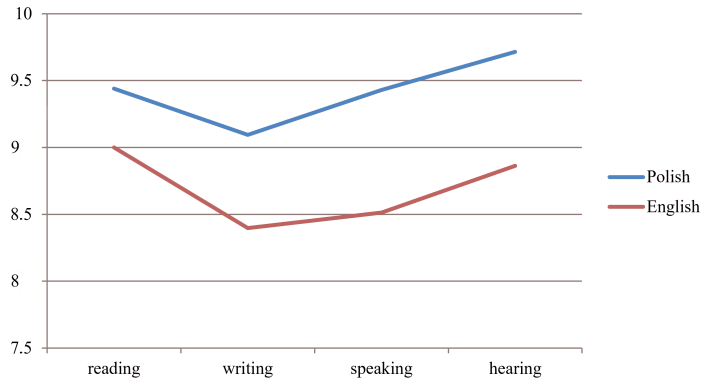


Figure 5. Self-assessment of the level of knowledge of Polish and English.

religious or cultural events, confirmed the questionnaire data and the very high overall proficiency of the surveyed community in both languages.

Despite the high level of proficiency in Polish, the Polish speech of our informants features cases of interference, as well as code-switching and mixing. The linguistic material collected so far includes both pattern (PAT; replication of grammatical or semantic meaning from language A to language B, without borrowing the form itself – "calques") and matter (MAT; morphological material and its phonological shape from language A replicated in language B – "loans and insertions") borrowings (Sakel, 2007). The following examples illustrate the diversity of the above phenomena: *[Szukam] kogoś do naprawy dachu tylko flashing* '[I am looking for] someone to fix the roof, only flashing' (MAT-borrowing, Eng. flashing instead of Pol. obróbka blacharska); *Akceptują dużo różnych ubezpieczeń i mają opcje financing* 'they accept many different insurances and have financing options' (a hybrid PAT- and MAT-borrowing,[6] with the own item *opcje* and transferred *financing*, cf. Pol. *warianty/opcje finansowania*); *Mają uzależnienia do wszystkiego* 'They have addictions to everything' (PAT-borrowing, copying the Eng. construction *mieć uzależnienia leftarrow* to have addictions, instead of Pol. *być uzależnionym*, and the use of the preposition *do* under the influence of Eng. to, instead of Pol. *od*, cf. Pol. *Być uzależnionym od wszystkiego*); *Czy jakiś czas wtedy by działał?* 'Will/would any time then work for you' cf. Pol. *Czy jakaś godzina/pora by wtedy pasowała?* (PAT-borrowings: *czas leftarrow* time, *działać leftarrow* work); *Pójść do Polski na lato* 'To go to Poland for the summer' cf. Pol. *Pojechać* (*polecieć*) *do Polski na lato* (PAT-borrowing *pójść leftarrow* to go). As a result of code completion, both English insertions (single words or entire phrases, such as "That's a very good point") and word-formation innovations appeared, e.g. *Ale zawsze były już wypłaskowane* 'But they have been always already flattened' [about armadillos seen in the streets and parks] *leftarrow wy + płask + ować* instead of Pol. *rozpłaszczyć*, *rozjechać*. Phenomena such as in the last example are particularly interesting because they testify not only to the speaker's insufficient lexical resources, but also to his/her linguistic competence allowing for word-formation creativity.

Code switching often results from the awareness of functioning in a bilingual environment and an informal situation in which interlocutors know that the addressee will understand not only Polish or English messages, but also those containing elements of both codes. The borrowed vocabulary is most often terms referring to the surrounding reality, known in the literature as cultural borrowings (Sayahi, 2014, p. 89), which are used to present a given issue more precisely, e.g. in the statement *Szukam kogoś do naprawy dachu, tylko flashing*, the English word 'flashing' is shorter and more precise than Polish '*obróbka blacharska*'.

[6] According to some approaches, this would be classified as semi-calque, i.e. words and structures created as a result of partial translation of a foreign pattern, using native and foreign elements (Obara, 1989, p. 23).

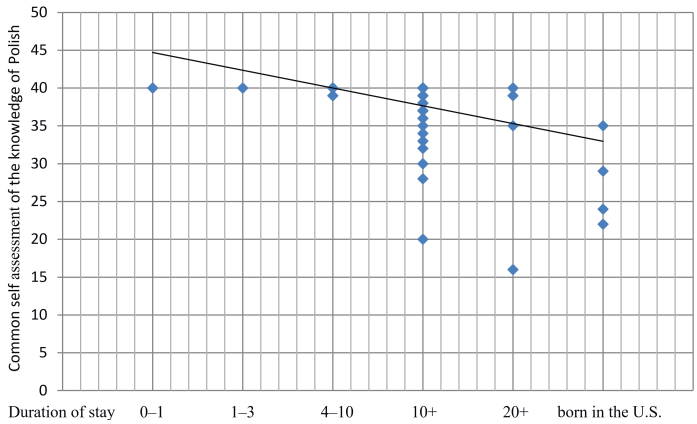


Figure 6. The dependency of overall self-assessment of the level of knowledge of Polish and the duration of stay in the U.S.

Some participants of the study, especially those born in America into mixed families, represented an unbalanced type of bilingualism (cf. Grosjean, 1992, p. 52) in which English was the much stronger language. They spoke Polish with difficulty, but were still able to express themselves on a variety of topics and maintain a conversation. People born in Poland, but also most heritage speakers brought up in homogeneous Polish families, did not use too many PAT- and MAT-borrowings,[7] which appeared primarily in a controlled way (as cultural borrowings, related to local realities that were impossible or difficult to name in Polish).

In the case of statistical relationships, which, due to the method of sampling, should be treated rather as an illustration, there is a certain dependency (weak positive correlation) between the level of education and the knowledge of Polish ($r = 0.18$). In the case of English, there is no correlation with the level of education. There is also a weak negative correlation of the level of knowledge of Polish and English ($r = -0.19$), that is: if someone assesses his/her knowledge of Polish better, he/she evaluates English worse, and vice versa. However, it cannot be said that these are cause-effect relationships, i.e. that a weaker knowledge of Polish leads to a better knowledge of English or that due to higher education, someone knows Polish better.

The relationship between the length of stay in the U.S. and the overall knowledge of Polish (based on all four language skills) is clearer and in line with expectations. There is an average negative correlation ($r = -0.43$), i.e. a longer stay in America is associated with a lower self-assessment of knowledge of Polish, cf. Figure 6.

At the same time, according to expectations, the length of stay in America is associated with better self-esteem with regards to knowledge of English. There is a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.31$) between the overall summary self-assessment of all four language skills and the length of stay. The respondents were also asked to compare their level of competence in Polish and English ("In which language do you find it easier to communicate?"). Most ($n = 67$) declared that they feel equally comfortable speaking Polish and English (including the answers "depends on the situation"). If the participants of the survey decided to indicate one of the languages as their preferred one, Polish gained a certain advantage – 33 responses compared to 14 in favor of English, cf. Figure 7.

The inclusion of languages other than Polish and English in the survey proved necessary, as over half of the respondents ($n = 65$) declared knowledge of at least one additional language, and some people indicated more (2–4).

[7] The collected examples mainly concern people who rate their knowledge of Polish much lower than average, about 3–5.

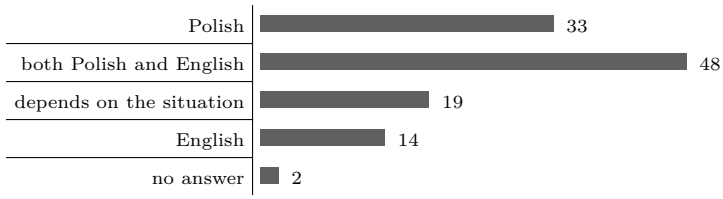


Figure 7. Comparison of the ease of communication in Polish and English.

Table 1. Knowledge of other languages.

Russian: 26	German: 18	Italian: 7
Spanish: 20	French: 11	other: 10

Taking into account the age structure, it can be assumed that the middle-aged and older respondents had the opportunity to learn Russian at various stages of education in Poland, and the other indicated languages are popular both in Poland and in the U.S. (German, Spanish, French and Italian). The group "other" (single indications) includes both cognate Slavic languages (Czech, Slovak, Ukrainian) and those from other groups (Portuguese, Albanian, Japanese), familiarity of which is due to the family or professional background of the respondent. The self-assessment of the knowledge of other languages was generally much lower than that of Polish and English. The highest number of grades ($n = 41$) was in the range of 2–6 (i.e. basic or intermediate level), and 50 respondents did not declare any knowledge of other languages. On a community-wide scale, multilingualism is a fairly common phenomenon and, in individual cases, additional languages may play an important role in selected spheres of life.

4 The Domains of Language Use

The domains listed in the survey (home, friends, neighborhood, work, school, church, culture) cover the basic spheres of life and the set of domains is very similar to those which have been used in many studies of multilingual communities over several decades (cf. e.g. Berisso Genemo, 2022, p. 8; Edwards, 2010, p. 10; Levchuk, 2020, pp. 159–175; Weinreich, 1953/1963, p. 87; Zielińska, 1996, pp. 15–16). Typically, if one of the languages is minority and the other official (state), then the minority language (in our case Polish) is most often used in private spheres (home, friends), and in official spheres (school, work) it may not be used at all. In our case, the situation was slightly more complex due to frequent tri- and multilingualism, so the questionnaire included the use of languages other than Polish and English. However, other languages, although included in the study, were of marginal importance in all spheres in relation to the entire surveyed community, but in individual cases they could play important functions in certain spheres, e.g. neighborhood or home.

Table 2 shows the number of indications of the language variant corresponding to a given sphere of life by individual respondents. The complete domination of the English language ($n = 106$) in the neighborhood domain confirms the observations made on the basis of statistical and demographic data relating to Georgia (Data USA, 2023a): due to the lack of Polish neighborhoods and the rarity of even a single Polish family living in the immediate vicinity, Poles live among the English-speaking population and communicate in this language. The overwhelming predominance of English at work ($n = 97$) was also predictable, although the small but noticeable share of people using both languages in professional life ($n = 12$) is noteworthy. The usefulness of Polish in professional life was discussed in interviews in the context of motivation to pass on the language to subsequent generations and will be discussed in the section on family language policy. Another sphere with a negligible share of Polish was education. As was later clarified in interviews and

Table 2. The use of languages according to domain.

	Domain						
Languages used	Home	Work	School	Neighbourhood	Friends	Church	Cultural life
Polish	26	1	1	2	16	15	3
Polish + other(s)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Polish + other(s) + English	2	1	0	0	4	0	3
Polish + English	54	12	2	7	73	18	44
English + other(s)	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
English	31	97	70	106	21	45	64
other(s)	1	0	3	1	1	5	1
no answer	1	4	39	0	1	33	1

correspondence, people without children mostly skipped this question, although in three cases the answers concerned the respondent's own school experiences or language courses taken as adults (indicating Polish or other languages). For people who have children and take advantage of the opportunity to teach their heritage language in a local school or via online learning from Poland, this was one of the important areas of implementation of family language policy (see section "Group and individual strategies of family language policy").

The role of English is also dominant in the cultural sphere. For over half of the respondents, it is the only language ($n = 64$), and the next largest group are people who use both Polish and English ($n = 44$). The lack of participation in Polish cultural events is not due to a lack of interest in community life, but to problems related to distance. Most official and semi-official events are organized by the Polish Club of Atlanta or the Polish Catholic Mission, which are associated with Lawrenceville and Norcross, located on the eastern and northeastern outskirts of Metro Atlanta.

As expected, Polish is an important language in the home sphere, used alone ($n = 26$) or together with English ($n = 54 + 2$ along with other languages). An important factor in this sphere is the ethnic composition of the family, as the exclusive use of Polish occurs in situations where both spouses or partners are Polish. Polish families also use two languages alternately, which results from their children's bilingual upbringing or contextual code switching, while in mixed families the declared use of languages included both Polish and English, as well as English only. There was also a large share of Polish in the sphere of contacts with friends. Although it was indicated as the main language by only 16 people, as many as 73 people use both Polish and English in this domain. As was explained in interviews and correspondence, the use of two languages applies not only to friends and acquaintances living in America, but also to those from Poland. The relatively large number of indications of English as the main language in this sphere does not result from Poles' reluctance to contact their compatriots, but from their territorial dispersion and quick and effective integration into the English-speaking environment.

Answers to the question about the language used in church require a slightly broader comment. The Roman Catholic Church, although not a national denomination, has the largest number of believers among religious associations both in Poland and among Poles abroad. In the Southeast, it is one of many Christian churches and its adherents make up approximately 9% of the state, being in the minority to various Protestant churches. The overall percentage of people absolutely and fairly certain about the existence of God (88%) and who attend church regularly (42% at least once a week) or less regularly (1–2 times a month or several times a year – 34%) is higher than in Poland, which also increases the role of religion in private and community life (PRC, n.d.). Poles in Georgia do not have their own parish, but the Polish Catholic Apostolate of Saint John Paul II, established in 1989 and run by the Society of Christ for Poles abroad, is affiliated with the St. Marguerite D'Youville Church in Lawrenceville, where one of the masses every Sunday is

held in Polish. Additionally, on the first two Sundays of the month it is possible to attend Mass in Polish at the Mary Our Queen Catholic Church in Norcross (PCAAAa, n.d.-a). The question about the language used in the church omitted non-practicing people ($n = 33$). Only 15 people chose Polish, and another 18 chose Polish and English. As explained in the interviews, the reason for more frequent participation in services in English ($n = 45$) is not a deliberate resignation from the Polish Catholic Mission or conversion to another church, but logistical issues. If visiting the parishes in Lawrenceville or Norcross involves a long drive, many people decide to attend an English-language service (or a service in another language) in a Catholic church ($n = 5$) located in the immediate vicinity of their home. Good knowledge of English means that participation in religious life in this language does not represent a problem for members of the Polish community.

The overall results based on the answers regarding all domains of life were as expected and show the dominance of English in the life of Polish community in Georgia, cf. Figure 8.

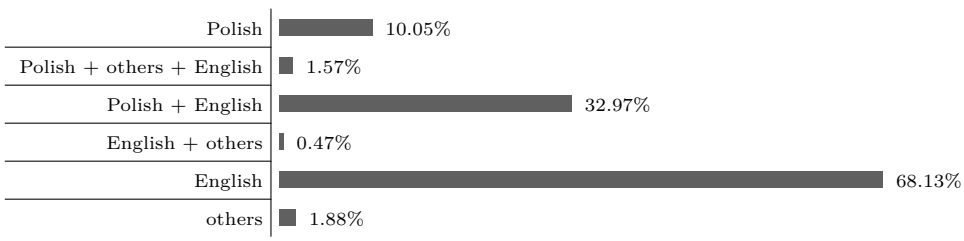


Figure 8. Percentage of language use in all domains.

In order to talk about the actual percentage division of time and range between the languages used by the respondents, time coefficients for each of the spheres should be used. The sole share of English would then likely be greater than 68%. Taking into account all the questions about the knowledge of languages and their spheres of use, it can be observed that the respondents speak English more often and in most cases have mastered it at nearly-native level, but that the average knowledge of Polish in the researched group is better (see the figures 5. and 7.), which is a consequence of the fact that most of the respondents were born in Poland and received their degrees there.

Not only linguistic competences are important in order to maintain the minority language. Various forms of involvement in the life of the community are also vital. In the study, we paid attention to both the types of cultural activity in which respondents and their family members participate, and the frequency of such participation. Participation in Polish cultural life is usually moderate – 65% of the respondents are in the range 1–6, i.e. from "very rarely" to "moderately often". There is also a small, more active group declaring frequent and very frequent participation in these events (range 7–10, approximately 21% of respondents). 16 people declared that they did not participate in Polish cultural events or gave no answer. Responses to family members were similar (a predomination of "moderate" engagement).

Most respondents take part in spontaneous meetings with Poles, e.g. picnics (potlucks), organized by Facebook community groups (43 responses), as well as those prepared by Polish organizations (24 responses) and the Polish Catholic mission. The other events (9 responses) include various meetings, including the Pierogi Festival in Lawrenceville, which is the best-known event organized by the Polish community in Georgia during which many musical, cultural and culinary attractions take place[8] (PCAAAb, n.d.-b), cf. Figure 9.

[8] The festival was suspended during the Covid-19 pandemic, and after its end it has not yet been resumed, although there are inquiries on the Facebook profile expressing interest in subsequent editions.

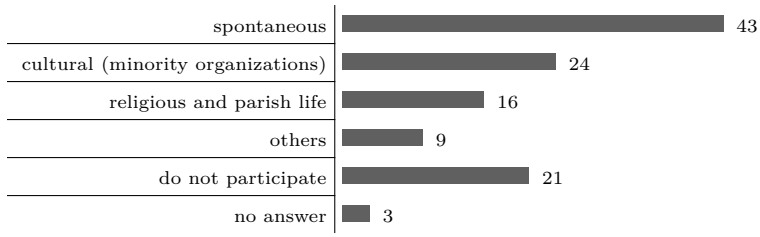


Figure 9. Types of Polish community events attended by the respondents.

Since informal meetings organized among close and distant friends, including through open invitations to Facebook events, take place in various parts of Metro Atlanta, they are an important alternative to official events.

5 Group and Individual Strategies of Family Language Policy

The basic setting for implementing family language policy is communication with one's closest family members (Caldas, 2012). The questionnaire included a question about languages used in the home domain, the results of which show that the proportions of Polish and English in the surveyed group as a whole are balanced: the strategy of using both languages prevails and when choosing one of them as the main one, their share is similar (see previous section). Since the answer "we use both Polish and English at home" may cover many linguistic situations, it was one of the basic issues discussed in detail in the interviews, also in relation to earlier generations of immigrants from Poland and their ways of language adaptation. The Polish diaspora, in subsequent generations born in America, is mentioned by James Crawford (1992, p. 144) as one of the national groups that "now retained only traces of their heritage: the ethnic food, the church, the fraternal order". The loss of the minority language (and to some extent culture) is largely the result of internally inspired assimilation processes taking place in multi-generational immigrant families trying to adapt to the environment, treating it as the only way of social advancement, as well as external factors in the form of informal and institutionalized social pressure, e.g. "English only" movements and legislation, eliminating foreign languages from public space (Baron, 1990, pp. 16–21). These processes and attitudes have been borne out in Georgia because among the newcomers from other states were people from Polish families who emigrated in the first half of the 20$^{\text{th}}$ century and who represented the second, third and fourth generations of American-born Poles. Many first-generation immigrants also reported their observations about this group. People born at the beginning of the second half of the 20$^{\text{th}}$ century, whose parents either came from Poland or were second-generation immigrants who retained Polish as their stronger language, most often did not know Polish. This was not by choice, but was the result of the language policy of their parents, who tried to speak to them only in English in order to make it easier for them to assimilate into the school community and avoid being placed outside the mainstream due to poor knowledge of English. It occurs that the generation born in the 1950s and 1960s, already as adults or even at retirement age, attend Polish courses and discover that they remember certain words or phrases from conversations with their grandmothers, who, knowing English poorly, did not adapt to the language policy implemented by the rest of the family. This complex problem will be one of the threads explored in further stages of the study.

Nowadays, the families of respondents and informants mainly use basic strategies for children to acquire two or more languages, such as "strategy of place" and "strategy of person" (cf. e.g. Verschik & Schwartz, 2013). Forms of transmission of the heritage language to the subsequent generations include regular holiday trips to Poland, frequent contact with family through video and voice calls, and hiring Polish-speaking au-pairs. Moreover, despite the availability of literature in electronic form, printed books, covering various genres of fiction and non-fiction, as well as

children's books, are still popular. Advertisements regarding Polish literature for sale and wanted appear, among others, in the social group "*Polacy w Atlancie*".

Another important channel for implementing family language policy, in the group dimension, is the school system (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013, pp. 1–2). The American public school system does not provide an opportunity to learn Polish or to learn other subjects in Polish. Therefore, in order to take lessons in a systematic way, Poles in Georgia are forced to self-organize. As a result, the Kazimierz Pułaski Polish Saturday School, affiliated with the Polish Club of Atlanta, has been operating since 1998 (PCA, n.d.) and is currently located in Norcross. The main problem the Polish community in Georgia has had to face is the lack of their own permanent location and need to raise funds in order to rent space for the school. Throughout the years, the school's location has moved to various places within Metro Atlanta. The school offers courses at various levels of advancement, both for children and adults. This is not the only form of systematic education in Polish (and knowledge about Poland), because educational services offered remotely from Poland are also widespread. Although the participants of the survey and interviews had a positive attitude towards the heritage language and declared their willingness to pass it on to their children, only 6 people declared that their children went to Saturday school. Sometimes ($n = 7$) the problem was the long distance to the school in Norcross, but the vast majority of people who answered this question did not give a reason for their children not participating in classes ($n = 67$). During the interviews, it was possible to explain that not sending children to classes at Polish schools is neither a result of a poor assessment of the institution itself nor an ambivalent attitude towards the language. The main problems are the distances already indicated in the survey, but also the competition between language classes and training in various sports, which are not only popular but, due to the warm climate of the southern states, possible practically all year round. Moreover, during the pandemic, forms of distance learning became popular, which increased interest in Polish institutions specializing in teaching Polish to Poles abroad.

Contact with Polish language and culture is also possible through cultural institutions. In Georgia, this function is performed primarily by the Polish Club of Atlanta, but there is also a musical organization called the Chopin Society of Atlanta (ChSA, n.d.), and in Savannah there is the General Pulaski Committee, whose mission is to "promote Polish pride, culture and to recognize General Pulaski's achievements". The group organizes annual ceremonies commemorating the 1779 Battle of Savannah (SGPC, n.d.).

The basic motivation for transmitting a minority language to children in the case of circular and short-term migrations is to maintain contact with the home country, where they plan to live in the long term. However, in the case of our respondents and informants, there were no such cases and it is a very rare situation in the context of emigration overseas. Therefore, language policy in a long-term context was important in our study. The motivation to pass on the language to the next generation was mainly the maintenance of identity and of relationships with family members and friends in Poland. These were symbolic values, not pragmatic ones. When asked in interviews about the possible practical dimension of children learning Polish, the participants of our study unanimously claimed that when they try to teach their children the heritage language, they were not guided by this criterion, although sometimes in an unexpected way the Polish language was useful for them or their children in professional life.

Given the development of the linguistic situation of the population of Polish origin in Georgia, special attention should be paid to the younger generation, in which we observe significant differences between those raised in homogeneous Polish families in which both parents are fluent in Polish and those where one parent does not speak Polish. The problem of mastering a language in the diaspora is one of the most researched in contact linguistics and language teaching studies, especially in the context of the difficulties associated with this process. Both in relation to Poles in the U.S. (see e.g. Lipińska & Seretny, 2012a, pp. 28–31) and other communities (cf. Montrul, 2023, pp. 407–410), there have been frequent observations of the inability to reach the level of peers from the country of origin. However, heritage language speakers are not a homogeneous community and, depending on education, socioeconomic capital and the degree of exposure to the language, they

may demonstrate very different communicative competences, both average and very high (Seretny & Lipińska, 2016, p. 185). Thus, in homogenous families, young people born in the U.S. are able to master the heritage language at a high level,[9] while in mixed families many of them do not speak Polish or their knowledge is basic. Due to the fact that Poles, regardless of generation, do not isolate themselves from their surroundings and choose friends and life partners according to universal criteria (common interests, similar social status, etc.) rather than ethnic criteria, the number of mixed families in subsequent generations will increase. This is related to the problem expressed by heritage speakers who were raised in mixed families in answers to the question of the transfer of Polish to their children in the future: "I would like to, but I'm afraid that my knowledge of Polish is too weak to pass it on to children in an *appropriate* form". First-generation immigrants and heritage speakers whose parents are both Polish did not express similar concerns.

6 Conclusions

The interest in the study and the positive response of many members of the Polish community in Georgia allow us to assume that the Polish language plays important communication, social and symbolic functions related to ethnic and cultural affiliation for the members of the community in question. In many respects, the participants are characterized by the same features (active participation in the group "*Polacy w Atlancie*", at least moderate interest in Polish cultural life, education, age, place of residence, knowledge of languages) and therefore it is difficult to find clear relationships based on differences. Most of the participants of the study are well-educated people aware of their origin and willing to preserve it and to transmit it to the subsequent generation.

The issue of intergenerational transmission of the Polish language in the family has been initially confirmed (Polish is present in the domestic sphere, children to some extent participate in Polish diaspora events), both in the survey and in interviews. The main problem in language preservation is the dispersion of the community and the lack or low frequency of face-to-face contacts with other Poles (except for close relatives) in the young generation.

The current young generation have at least one native-speaker of Polish (born and raised in Poland) as a parent. However, their children will have to base their Polish on the language used by the second generation of immigrants. Based on attitudes described in interviews, there are concerns that language purism will prevent the transmission of the heritage language. Young people from ethnically heterogeneous families, when comparing their Polish to their parents' speech, are afraid of using "Ponglish", i.e. a mixed variety that may potentially arise in uncontrolled Polish–English contact without sufficient reference to the linguistic norm, and which has already been observed in Polish diaspora in English-speaking societies (cf. Błasiak, 2011). Due to the pilot nature of the study, the non-representative nature of the sample, and the limited number of interviews, the above assumptions require confirmation at further stages. Further comparisons with larger Polish communities in the Midwest and Northeast (e.g. Lipińska & Seretny, 2012b) seem particularly interesting, taking into account the social factors affecting relatively new, small and widely dispersed communities and those typical of older, larger and territorially concentrated communities. It is also important to compare Georgia's Polish community with other Slavic communities, both in Georgia and in other states, including the competences of heritage speakers commented in this article in terms of academic style and specialist terminology (see e.g. Friedman & Kagan, 2008). Research on the sociolinguistic situation of Poles in Georgia also fits into broader discourses regarding the changing South and the latest immigration in this region from different parts of the

[9] As confirmed in the interviews, in individual cases the level of knowledge of Polish among heritage speakers from homogeneous Polish families was similar to that of their Polish peers, and they were not only able to conduct conversations on everyday topics without, or with very few signs of interference, but also to converse on topics requiring the use of specialized terminology from their field of specialization (studies or professional work). There are also isolated examples of successfully taking up employment or continuing education in Poland.

world (cf. e.g. Howe & Limerick, 2020), as well as general processes in immigrant communities and problems of temporary or permanent re-emigration (Montrul, 2023, p. 411).

Abbreviations

ChSA – Chopin Society of Atlanta, n.d.
PAS – Polish Club of Atlanta, n.d.
PCA – Polish Club Atlanta, n.d.
PCAAAa – Polski Katolicki Apostolat imienia Świętego Jana Pawła II, n.d.-a
PCAAAb – Polski Katolicki Apostolat imienia Świętego Jana Pawła II, n.d.-b
PRC – Pew Research Center, n.d.
SGPC – Savannah General Pulaski Committee, n.d.
USCBa – United States Census Bureau, n.d.-a
USCBb – United States Census Bureau, n.d.-b
USCBc – United States Census Bureau, 2020

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