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BECOMING BILINGUAL WHEN LEARNING ABROAD; LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE LEARNING CONDITIONS

DWUJĘZYCZNOŚĆ PODCZAS NAUKI ZA GRANICĄ;
NAUKA DRUGIEGO JĘZYKA W WARUNKACH NAUKI
JĘZYKA DOCELOWEGO

Abstrakt

W pracy zbadano korelację między wybranymi czynnikami a poziomem znajomości języka angielskiego wśród imigrantów. W badaniu wzięło udział 50 uczniów, obierających naukę j. angielskiego w klasie ESL w Communicate School w Manchesterze w Wielkiej Brytanii. Uzyskane wyniki prowadzą

Abstract

The study examines correlation between selected factors and English proficiency levels among immigrants. A sample of 50 learners participated in this research, which took place in the ESL classroom in Communicate School in Manchester, UK. The results lead to conclusions that English proficiency among foreign-born

do wniosków, że na znajomość języka angielskiego wśród osób urodzonych za granicą silnie wpływają zarówno zmienne indywidualne, jak i strukturalne. Zgodnie z oczekiwaniami, na znajomość języka angielskiego imigrantów pozytywnie wpłynął rozwój gospodarczy, a negatywnie dystans językowy. Dodatkowo na biegłość w języku angielskim znaczący wpływ miały również inne, indywidualnie istotne, czynniki.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

dwujęzyczność, uczący się imigranci, język docelowy, dystans językowy

persons is strongly affected by both individual and structural covariates. As expected, immigrants' English fluency was affected positively by economic development and negatively by linguistic distance. Additionally, individual factors also exerted significant impact on English language fluency.

KEYWORDS

bilingualism, immigrant learners, target language, linguistic distance

1. Introduction

Chiswick and Miller (1995) have offered three general mechanisms of language fluency in order to understand the influence of individual and contextual factors on the language skills among immigrants; English language fluency among immigrants is considered as a function of exposure, economic incentives and efficiency. Exposure to English is associated with factors such as the length of residence in the host country, employment status and the language environment where an immigrant lives. Economic incentives are related to economic outcomes. It is assumed that these incentives exist if an improvement in one's command of English made by a foreign-born person is awarded with higher wages and better employment opportunities. Finally, English language proficiency is affected by efficiency by which a foreign-born person learns that language. An effort to learn the language translates into English proficiency. These three general mechanisms have been used to determine the role of individual and contextual determinants of English language fluency.

2. Data and methods

This study is carried out with the use of a questionnaire and a proficiency test. The questionnaires give answers to factual questions related to demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, education attainment or marital status. These specific pieces of information play a crucial role in this research. Taking into consideration these factors, this questionnaire is structured with the aim of receiving needed information for further investigation. The participants are obligated to respond to questions associated with individual characteristics, i.e. place of birth, place of residence, native language, age at migration to the host country, length of stay in the host country, gender, total

years of completed schooling and marital status. To test the proficiency level among immigrants we use standardized reading proficiency test from IELTS.

3. Measurement strategies

There are several independent variables that are essential to carry out the present study, i.e. length of stay in the host country, total education attainment, age at migration, gender, marital status, English official, linguistic distance, political suppression, economic development and ethnic concentration. To find out the correlation between different factors we also need dependent variables. We decided to conduct a proficiency test to assess foreign-born individuals' English proficiency level. We also carry out a questionnaire in order to examine influence of individual and structural covariates on immigrants' English fluency. Each of these covariates provides important information, which are necessary to conduct this research: *length of stay* - measures the total years of living in the host country; *educational attainment* - measures the total years of completed education; *age at migration* - measures the age of the participant at the time of migration, in years; *gender* - distinguishes between men and women; *marital status* distinguishes between married (to a native-born spouse or to a foreign-born spouse) and not married; *English official* - to construct this covariate, we use information on official language in the origin country (Simons & Fennig, 2018). Foreign-born persons from countries where English language is dominant are excluded. We distinguish between countries where English is an official language and is neither official nor dominant; *linguistic distance* - measures the difference between English and other languages. Language scores range from 1 (lowest score) to 3 (highest score) (Chiswick & Miller, 2004); *political suppression* - a freedom rating varies from 1 to 7, where 1= most free and 7= least free. It includes the measurement of political rights and civil liberties. Political rights vary from 1 to 7, where 1= power of opposition, free and fair elections, and 7= civil war and oppressive regime. Civil liberties also vary from 1 to 7, where 1= free economic activity, freedom of expressions and religion, and 7= political terror, no free association and no religious freedom (Freedom House, 2018); *economic development* - to measure economic situation in the country of origin, we use information of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in current U.S. dollars in 2017 (World Bank, 2018); *ethnic concentration* - measures concentration of every participant in a specified geographic area in the host country (Census 2011).

4. Results

The purpose of this study was to determine the correlation between various factors and English proficiency levels among immigrants. It was necessary to create tables in order to illustrate these relationships more clearly. In order to make these tables

we had to obtain the average levels of English language proficiency among different countries. The first table (**Table 1**) below presents the average level of English language proficiency among particular countries.

Table 1. Average levels of English language proficiency among particular countries (Source: own elaboration 2019)

Country	Average level of English language proficiency
Poland	4,15
Bolivia	4,00
Colombia	4,07
Mexico	4,50
Qatar	3,00
Argentina	5,00
Honduras	6,00
El Salvador	5,00
Costa Rica	5,00

Source: Own elaboration after: Tubergen, F. A. V., & Kalmijn, M. (2009).

One of the first issues that has to be taken into account were the data found in Tubergen & Kalmijn (2009) who researched the relationship between the level of English language proficiency and gender. The scholars observed that the effect of gender is quite significant and strong. Women possess higher levels of English language proficiency than men. It might be caused by various factors. Firstly, they expect that many women are white-collar workers and are required to possess a good command of English, whereas men do manual labour and do not need a specialised vocabulary. Secondly, the men who are blue-collar employees often work with people of the same nationality and, as a result, use their first language at work. Finally, many women got married and therefore have greater opportunity to practice their English with a spouse or with their children who attend British schools. Nonetheless, we have to take into consideration the fact that this research was conducted with a greater sample of women and therefore the standard deviation is lower than in case of men. It means that there is an apparent discrepancy between fluency levels among men. Some of them reach higher levels of English fluency than women, but the results had to be averaged in order to describe the general relationship between these variables.

As a form of continuation of the research presented above we were also interested whether there exists relationship between the level of English language proficiency and marital status. Following our questionnaire, it could be observed that immigrants who got married to a foreign-born spouse (39%) possess higher English proficiency levels than individuals who either got married to a native-born spouse (27,5%) or did not get married (33,5%). We expect that people with a native-born spouse got married in order to obtain British citizenship. In all likelihood, they did not have to worry about finances

because their native-born spouse could maintain the family. Consequently, they were not under pressure to learn a host country's language. By contrast, people who got married to a foreign-born spouse usually came to Great Britain with their families and strived to learn the host country's language with the aim of finding a well-paid job and being financially providing for the family. Immigrants who were not married reported the lowest levels of English language proficiency. It might be caused by the fact that they live alone and, therefore, have nobody to communicate with on a daily basis.

Naturally, as a consequence of the two research questions discussed above we also made an attempt to find out whether there can be found any relationship between the level of English language proficiency and age at arrival. As expected, individuals who arrive at a younger age (54%) learn a new language more quickly than those who arrive at an older age (46%). The younger people, for biological reasons, possess a greater ability to learn the new language than do elderly individuals. Moreover, the young may have an internal desire and more energy to learn a host country's language than older ones.

One more issue that interested us was possible existence of the relationship between the level of English language proficiency and length of residence in the host country. Here we observed that many people who have lived in the host country for more than six years were able to achieved C2 proficiency level (62%). However, there were some exceptions, which may be caused by the fact that these immigrants immigrated to the host country in the older age. Additionally, these individuals may have lived in the areas, where the concentration of the same nationality was substantially high. As a result, they may have communicated among themselves using their mother tongue rather than the national one (i.e. English).

This issue became the target of the next aspect of the research. Here we tried to establish the forms of relationship between the level of English language proficiency and linguistic distance. Following a fruitful remark offered by Chiswick & Miller (2007), linguistic distance determines the difference between English and other languages. In our research language scores ranged from 1 (lowest score) to 3 (highest score). We observed that the greater the linguistic distance between the host country's language and language of the origin country, the lower the efficiency of a foreign-born individual for learning the target language. The linguistic distance between Spanish and English constituted the language score of 2.25, which means that people from Spanish speaking countries, i.e. Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico had less difficulty in learning English than the people whose native language was more distant from English. In this case, we observed that in respect of a person coming from Qatar, where the native language was Arabic and therefore the linguistic distance constitutes the language score of 1.50, achieved only B1 level of English proficiency. Most of the Poles we researched, whose native language was Polish and therefore constitutes the language score of 2.00, achieved B2 level of English proficiency. Indubitably, the linguistic distance between Polish and English was not that large and hence the Poles may find it not that difficult to learn English language.

Another issue that sounded interesting for us was the relationship between the level of English language proficiency and political suppression in the country of origin. We measured the political suppression through a freedom rating found in the publication by Freedom House (2018), which varied from 1 to 7, where 1 means that particular country is most free and 7 means that particular country is least free. It also included the measurement of civil liberties and political rights. Civil liberties vary from 1 to 7, where 1 is equal to free economic activity, freedom of expressions and religion, and 7 is equal to political terror, no free association and no religious freedom. Political rights also vary from 1 to 7, where 1 is equal to power of opposition, free and fair elections, and 7 is equal to civil war and oppressive regime. We observe that political suppression in the country of origin has no overall impact on one's English language proficiency. Even though Colombia is a partly free country (civil liberties 3/7 and political rights 3/7), its immigrants report only slightly lower English proficiency level than Poles who come from free country (civil liberties 2/7 and political rights 1/7). However, we found that a person from Honduras, a country that is partly free (civil liberties 4/7 and political rights 4/7), achieved a C2 level of proficiency. We expect that this particular person may have never been affected by political suppression in her country of origin. On the other hand, we also found that the person from Qatar, a country that is not free (civil liberties 5/7 and political rights 6/7), achieved a B1 level of English language proficiency. It means that this particular person might have experienced some traumatic events, such as oppression, discrimination, and other violations associated with civil liberties and political rights in the past which could consequently have caused hampering of his English language development. Fundamentally, we have to take account of the fact that only one person from Honduras and one person from Qatar took part in this study. Thus, they cannot constitute a representative sample of their nations at bottom.

The last but one form of relationship we wanted to establish was the relationship between the level of English language proficiency and Gross Domestic Product per capita in current U.S. dollars in 2017 as a measure of the economic development in the country of origin (World Bank, 2018). Interestingly, we observed that the business-involved Poles possess slightly higher levels of English proficiency levels than the Colombians. Therefore, we find a small positive effect of GDP on English language fluency among immigrants. As expected, immigrants who come from richer countries may be better educated and possess greater knowledge in general. Moreover, immigrants from richer countries may possibly come from affluent families and, therefore, they may have been used to good living conditions. As a result, we assume that they are motivated to learn the host country's language in order to continue living a good life. This extrinsic motivation plays a crucial role in immigrants' lives. After all, knowing a second language is a key ingredient for getting a well-paid job and earning a high salary. The remainder of participants are single representative samples of particular countries and, on this account, we cannot draw any conclusions.

The final aspect we wished to discover in the research was the relationship between the level of English language proficiency and ethnic concentration. We used

the data from 2011 Census, which is planned and conducted by the Office for National Statistics every 10 years in England and Wales. The 2011 Census makes use of a standard set of ethnic groups in order to collect and categorise ethnicity data. This Census uses 18 standardised ethnic categories, i.e. Asian/ Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, and any other Asian background), Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British (African, Caribbean, and any other Black/ African/ Caribbean background), Mixed/ Multiple ethnic groups (Mixed White and Black Caribbean, Mixed White and Black African, Mixed White and Asian, and any other Mixed/ Multiple ethnic background), White (English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British, Irish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, and any other White background), and other ethnic group (Arab and any other ethnic group). The participants of this study live in Manchester, a city situated in North West England. In line with Census 2011, we observe that the concentration of white people in North West England constitutes 3,1 % of the population. In turn, the concentration of mixed people constitutes 1,6 % of the population. Even though the size of the white other group is larger than the size of the mixed group, the white other group possess higher levels of English language proficiency than the mixed group. Nevertheless, we have to take into consideration the standard deviation, which in this case, indicates that the level of English language proficiency may substantially varies between the members of the white other group. As a consequence, many of them may have a lower level of English fluency than those who belong to the mixed group.

With regard to the variable *English official*, we were not able to draw any conclusions concerning the relationship between the level of English language proficiency and English official because the participants of this study come from countries where English is not an official language and is neither official nor dominant. Even though the participants of this study claimed that they came to the United Kingdom without knowing English, some of them could possibly know some basic vocabulary because of widespread tourism in their home countries.

Discussion and conclusion

The obtained results allow us to reject the null hypothesis, i.e. there is no statistically significant relationship between individual and contextual characteristics of immigrants and English language proficiency, and to confirm the alternative one, i.e. both individual and contextual characteristics of immigrants are statistically significant predictors of English language proficiency. Our analysis confirms some of the widely known findings concerning the degree to which English language proficiency among immigrants is affected by human-capital factors, such as age of arrival to the host country, educational attainment, gender, and length of residence in the host country.

The age of entry is essential for learning a target language. According to Stevens (1999), the foreign-born individuals who enter the host country at a younger age possess greater capacity to learn a new language. As assumed, we found that individuals who

arrive at a younger age learn a new language more quickly than those who arrive at an older age.

For Chiswick & Miller (2007), the foreign-born persons who are better educated have well-developed language production functions. It means that the better educated individuals may have innate capacity for learning a new language or unmeasured variables which reinforce forms of human capital. Moreover, immigrants who possess a wider knowledge of their own language may also have a greater ability to learn any other language. As expected, we observed that individuals with a higher education level have better command of English in general.

In line with Tubergen & Kalmijn (2009), gender differences are normally interpreted in respect of exposure and incentives. Many researchers claim that women have been more likely to immigrate for family reasons, whereas men have mainly immigrated with the aim of finding a job (Massey *et al.*, 1993). Thus, it is expected that men are more motivated to learn a host country's language than women because they strive to enter the labour market. What is more, when men finally get employed, they become more exposed to the target language. Surprisingly, our results have shown that women have higher levels of English language proficiency (52%) than men (48%). It may be caused by various factors. Firstly, we expect that many women are white-collar workers and are required to have a good command of English, whereas men do manual labour and do not need a specialised vocabulary. Secondly, the men who are blue-collar employees frequently work with people of the same nationality and, as a consequence, use their native language at work. Finally, we assume that more women than men get married and therefore possess a greater opportunity to practice English with their spouses or with their children who attend British schools.

On the report of many researchers, foreign-born individuals who have lived in the host country for a longer period of time possess higher levels of general English proficiency, higher levels of fluency in particular aspects of English, or a higher frequency of using English to a similar extent as any other language, than those who have lived in the host country for a shorter period of time (Grenier 1984, Loo 1985, Jasso & Rosenzweig 1990, Stevens 1992, 1994, Lindstrom & Massey 1994, Espenshade & Fu 1997). As expected, we found that the longer a particular person lives in the host country, the better his or her English language skills are.

As claimed by some researchers (cf. Stevens & Schoen, 1988, Espenshade & Fu, 1997), foreign-born individuals who get married to a native-born spouse may possess higher English proficiency levels than foreign-born individuals with a foreign-born spouse. It may be caused by the fact that they have more chances to speak English at home and, consequently, they maintain and improve their language skills constantly. Interestingly, our results have shown that foreign-born individuals who married a foreign-born spouse possess higher English proficiency levels than individuals who either married a native-born spouse or did not get married. We assume that some individuals with a native-born spouse got married in order to obtain British citizenship. They probably did not have to worry about financial matters because their native-born

spouse provided for the family. As a consequence, they were not under pressure to learn the target language. By contrast, individuals who married a foreign-born spouse usually came to the United Kingdom with their families and strived to learn the target language in order to find a well-paid job and to financially support the family. With regard to the immigrants who were not married, they reported the lowest levels of English language proficiency. It may be caused by the fact that they live alone and, therefore, may experience a lack of opportunities to communicate with another person on a daily basis.

Apart from individual covariates, we put emphasis on structural factors that also affect immigrants' English language fluency. We decided to analyse the relationship between various structural covariates and English language proficiency. We took into consideration variables, such as English official, economic development, linguistic distance, political suppression and/or ethnic concentration.

The economic development in the immigrant's home country is an important factor influencing English language proficiency. For Tubergen and Kalmijn (2009), foreign-born individuals from poorer nations are less educated and, therefore, they have more difficulties in taking part in the educational system and in entering the labour market in the host country. As a result, they may have fewer language skills than other immigrants. As expected, we found a positive effect of GDP on English language fluency among immigrants. Immigrants from affluent countries report higher levels of English proficiency.

As maintained by Chiswick and Miller (2001), many political migrants are less prepared to enter the labour market than immigrants who leave their home countries in order to find a better job abroad. Furthermore, these political migrants may have lower English language proficiency than other immigrants because many of them might have experienced traumatic events which impeded the development of their language skills. With regard to our investigation, we observed that the factor concerning political suppression in the immigrants' home countries has no overall impact on their English language fluency. Even though a person from a politically suppressed country achieved only a B1 level of English language proficiency, we cannot draw any conclusions regarding this particular case because one person cannot constitute a representative sample of his country.

For Chiswick and Miller (2007), the struggle of learning a new language is often contingent on one's native language. As such, it is less difficult for a Spanish speaker to learn French than it is for a Chinese speaker because French is more distant from Chinese than from Spanish. As expected, we found that the greater the linguistic distance between the target language and the native language, the harder it is for a foreign-born person to learn the target language.

According to Blau (1977), large group size impedes intergroup relations. Intergroup associations become more necessary and thus more common among members of a smaller group rather than among members of a larger group. Because the intergroup associations require command of the host country's language, members of the minority group are under pressure to learn a destination language. In the opinion

of Breton (1964) and Lazear (1999), the necessity for intergroup contact and constant pressure to learn a majority language is assumed to reduce with expanded group size. Blau (1977) also implies that a large minority group is a self-sufficient community with a great number of developing institutions. Thus, members of such an ethnic community can communicate with one another using their first language. In this case, English is used less often and the pressure associated with learning the target language is reduced. Blau's theory clearly explains past findings, pointing out a negative relationship between the group size of immigrants and their English language proficiency. With respect to our findings, we observed that despite a larger size of a white other group, its members report higher levels of English language proficiency than members of a mixed group. Nonetheless, we have to take into account the fact that the standard deviation related to the level of English language proficiency substantially varies between the members of white other group. As a result, a greater number of members of this group may have a lower English proficiency level than those who belong to the mixed group.

Regarding the variable *English official*, we were not able to infer from the gathered data because the respondents of this research come from countries in which English is not an official language and is neither official nor dominant. However, some of the participants might have arrived in the United Kingdom with some command of English because of widespread tourism in their origin countries.

In conclusion, our findings clearly show that the capacity to speak English among immigrants is affected by both individual and contextual factors. Thus, previous research studies, which did not take into consideration contextual characteristics of immigrants, had to be found as not fully complete, failing to aware readers about the significance of contextual covariates.

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