



DEVELOPMENTS IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION, POLYGLOTTERY AND GEOLINGUISTICS

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Abstract. *This paper offers an overview of the major events and trends in the field of polyglottery as a science (the study of consciously attained individual multilingualism) from 2010 to 2021 with special attention to its implications for language education and its connections with geolinguistics (understood as global or geographically specified sociolinguistics in the tradition of the American Society of Geolinguistics). Mentioned are, among other things, the milestone academic conferences in New York, Tokyo and Moscow, the creation of the first organized polyglot group in East Asia, and the first graduation papers on polyglottery defended for a bachelor's degree in linguistics. An attempt is made to put these research results and ideas in general scientific context.*

Keywords: *language education, polyglottery, geolinguistics, polyglot, multilingualism, psycholinguistics*

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In recent years we have seen a rapid and productive development of new ideas and trends in the practical study of languages, particularly in such fields as language education, polyglottery and geolinguistics. It seems that after a long period of accumulating empirical data, thanks to the availability of modern information and communication technologies, like-minded language practitioners and researchers found themselves in a position to establish contacts and share knowledge from the perspectives that had not been in the focus of public or scientific attention before.

Polyglottery as a science may be defined as the study of consciously attained individual multilingualism, which, in its theoretical aspects, is adjacent to psycholinguistics, and, in applied ones, to the methodology of language education. The groundwork for subsequent progress in this direction was laid by the reactivation of Amici Linguarum (the international association of polyglots founded by Erik Gunnemark) in 2010 [9], the publication of the first research books on polyglottery [13], [2], [14], and the intensification of information exchange in specialized language learning forums online.

The actual beginning of the modern polyglot movement can be traced back to the year 2013 when the first Polyglot Conference took place in Budapest and the first academic conference on polyglottery, *Multilingual Proficiency: Language, Polyglossia and Polyglottery*, was organized in New York. From that time on, two annual events have taken shape: the Polyglot Conference, which is held every year in a new country (Budapest 2013, Novi Sad 2014, New York 2015, Thessaloniki 2016, Reykjavik 2017, Ljubljana

2018, Fukuoka 2019, online 2020 and 2021) and the Polyglot Gathering, which was conducted in Berlin from 2014 to 2016, in Bratislava from 2017 to 2019, and online in 2020 and 2021. These events made a major novel contribution to the understanding of the polyglot personality, applications of multilingual knowledge and factors of success in learning and teaching languages.

Thus, the 2013 New York conference (hosted by the American Society of Geolinguistics) indicated that the existing juxtaposition between practical language expertise and academic linguistics is counter-productive, and expressed the view that systems of education should move from the language-teaching approach to the language-learning one where the teacher's role will be to encourage and guide students in their self-studies. The conference also recommended that the focus of attention should shift from counting the languages polyglots know to what they can do with this or that particular language and to how they learn them [4].

The discussion of this subject matter was continued in 2014 at the next geolinguistics conference, *Language and the Media*, in a special session dedicated to the 50th anniversary of Amici Linguarum. In that session, Dmitry Spivak stressed the need for polyglot cooperation and the importance of the neuroscientific perspective in polyglottery, Grigory Kazakov recounted the history of Amici Linguarum on the basis of documents from Gunnemark's personal archive, and Dina Nikulicheva shared the first results of her experimental study of Alexander Arguelles's language learning behaviour, which she developed in several subsequent papers [15], [17], [18]. Her first findings included the "sufficiency of 100 hours of daily classes with a strict *reviewing structure* in order to reach a 'functional level' in understanding, reading and speaking" (in the case of a highly organized learner) and the emotional curve of the language learning process with mood swings of 30 to 40 days [16, p. 157–158].

In 2014, the latest ideas of attainable multilingualism were brought to East Asia when Grigory Kazakov and Martin Bragalone founded Tokyo Polyglot and Language Enthusiasts Circle, the purpose of which was to foster polyglottery in Japan by gathering internationally minded people of different ethnic backgrounds interested in the study and practice of multiple languages. The circle operated until 2016 and held about five meetings where participants shared their personal experience of learning, using and travelling with different languages as well as discussed literature on the subject. This was probably the first organized polyglot group in Asia. In 2015, the baton was taken up by an independent initiative in Taiwan [3].

Simultaneously, one could observe active growth of activity in the field of geolinguistics, i.e. global or geographically specified sociolinguistics. In broader terms, it can be described as the study of languages in dynamics and interaction with various contemporary social processes either by reference to a certain geographical point or on the planetary scale. In 2015, after decades of regular meetings in New York, the American Society of Geolinguistics celebrated its 50th anniversary by holding its first international conference overseas, in Tokyo. This conference, which was entitled *Multilingual Perspectives in Geolinguistics* and featured studies involving the use of several languages, proved to be a success and became annual ever since. Among many other papers, were presented the modern history of geolinguistics, the syllabus of a course in accelerated language learning, and the analysis of polyglot experience in the light of personal psychological needs [11]. The Japanese hosts of the conference headed by Hikaru Kitabayashi also started a new prolific series of publications and assisted in organizing geolinguistics activities in Nepal.

All these advances were integrated with the Europe-based international polyglot movement when Grigory Kazakov made a generalizing presentation on the findings in experimental polyglottery at the Polyglot Gathering 2017 in Bratislava [5]. That forum demonstrated that the statement about the priority of self-study is carried out in practice as many polyglots make use of their knowledge not so much in the traditional forms of classroom teaching as in the new forms which may be called language coaching or language mentoring (private enterprises providing interested individuals with recommendations and materials for self-study of languages). The Gathering also elaborated on the factors of the language learning process coming to the following conclusions [6]:

1. Existing formats of examinations and scales of functional skills in languages are only of relative value and cannot be considered objective indicators of language knowledge as a cognitive achievement.

2. So far the only thing, which can be regarded as an objective measure of language knowledge (language potential) is input (the amount of language material processed by the brain), i.e. the number of words one has read and listened to in a target language. The greater this number, the higher the level of language proficiency. Developing methods of tracing and calculating such input remains a topical problem.
3. The main sources of augmenting proficiency in a language are extensive listening and reading.
4. It is important that the language material used should be meaningful and interesting to the learner and should meet his or her personal goals of language learning.
5. The optimal form of organizing learning material and the process of (self) study is a combination of the factors of repetition and novelty.
6. Language learning requires systematic and concentrated investment of time although a functional level of proficiency in a language can be attained in a relatively short period of time (a few months).

The case of polyglottery as a recognized research discipline was further promoted in 2018 when the 9th Session of Leontiev Centre for Intercultural Research at the Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow) was held to examine and discuss the phenomenon of attained individual multilingualism from a psycholinguistic perspective. Grigory Kazakov and Dina Nikulicheva presented both experimental data and theoretical implications stating that cognitive processes and behavioral strategies that enable polyglots to achieve their outstanding results can be modelled in broad educational practice for the benefit of regular learners [7].

That same year, the International Symposium on Language Education, Polyglottery and Geolinguistics was held in Moscow. This event was conceived as a continuation of the 2013 *Multilingual Proficiency* conference in New York and aimed at summarizing achievements of the previous years and setting new goals. Discussions revolved around trends in language education, the development of the polyglot movement, the definition and role of geolinguistics in modern language studies, and the perception of Esperanto in existing education systems. It was noted that the statements of the previous conference were gradually put into practice and its participants became the organizers of major international events (such as the Polyglot Conference); that geolinguistics focuses not so much on the linguistic fact itself as on its connections with social and other processes; and that the lack of widespread recognition of Esperanto may be because in people's minds it is not associated with any specific territory and because there is no school or university with a full cycle of education in this language. The symposium ended with the adoption of a memorandum recognizing the unsatisfactory quality of results in general foreign language education and didactic usefulness of polyglottery data as well as recommending developing courses on language learning, promoting input-oriented activities and working closely with psychological factors in the study process.

Later in 2018, the Polyglot Conference in Ljubljana, on the basis of previous research and practical accomplishments, opened new perspectives in the study of polyglottery. For example, Alexander Arguelles presented preliminary results of what was probably the first mass survey among polyglots (640 respondents) aimed at discovering their character traits as compared with "ordinary" people [1]. In general, the conference led to the realization that in a polyglot's mind linguistic material is only the surface behind which operate more general principles of highly efficient (highly functional) work of a normal brain. That is to say, cognitive skills that ensure the achievement of multilingual knowledge can help achieve outstanding results in other areas of activity (hence examples of polyglots as successful scientists, teachers, businessmen, diplomats, etc.). It also became apparent that two directions have been formed in the study of conscious individual multilingualism: the psycholinguistic one (a polyglot as a linguistic personality and a source of data regarding the language learning process) and the sociolinguistic one (a polyglot as a model for solving problems of international communication and language policy), united by an anthropocentric view of the topical problems of applied linguistics.

The next milestone event was the round table discussion *Psycholinguistic Study of the Phenomenon of Polyglottery* as part of the 19th International Symposium on Psycholinguistics and Communication Theory (Moscow, 2019). This session gathered both polyglots and researchers introducing important sources

and findings into scientific use. Among others, it included a presentation of a new experimental project of learning 10 languages in 1,000 days, the calculations of how much input is needed to learn a language, and a case study of monitoring a polyglot's resource states in the process of learning a new language [20, p. 244–250].

The year 2019 was also when the first graduation paper on polyglottery was written and successfully defended for a bachelor's degree in linguistics. By reference to the ideas expressed in the presentations of the Polyglot Gatherings 2017 and 2018, Anatoly Makarov studied the development of oral skills in the process of learning foreign languages and cultures [10]. The second graduation paper of this kind was produced in 2021 by Stepan Kulakov and focused on the principles of language learning as formulated at the round table discussions on polyglottery since 2013 [8]. The materials of the modern polyglot movement (in particular presentations of Polyglot Conferences and Gatherings) remain a little-developed source of extensive data for similar studies of various subjects in language acquisition, professional application of multilingual knowledge, sociolinguistics, etc.

Later in 2019 two more events made further steps in connecting polyglot expertise with the modern agenda in science and society. The conference *Metacognition in Multilingual Development: From Multilingual Children to Polyglots* in Obergurgl integrated polyglottery into the discussion of language acquisition as an aspect of cognitive development. The Polyglot Conference in Fukuoka, in its turn, demonstrated awareness among polyglots of the responsibility for applying their multilingual knowledge and skills to socially significant purposes (preserving smaller languages and cultures, protecting human rights, overcoming defects of the education system, etc.) as well as their capacity to develop, inside their community, promising solutions for complex problems of our time.

The world pandemic crisis of 2020 encouraged polyglots and linguists to explore new channels of online cooperation, which increased the opportunities for cross-national participation. The Polyglot Gathering and Polyglot Conference for the first time were held in a virtual format but with an expanded program. The Nepalese Society of Geolinguistics organized the first International Webinar on Theory, Research and Practice in Geolinguistics. The round table *Psycholinguistic Study of Polyglottery and Its Application for Language Learning* at the 12th Congress of the International Society of Applied Psycholinguistics, originally planned for 2020, took place in 2021 featuring the topics of input quantity, waves of intensity in language learning, simultaneous study of multiple languages and dynamics of the polyglot agenda over the years [12, p. 181–188], [19].

Developments of recent years show that a whole new movement and discipline have been formed before our eyes representing the social and the academic aspects of one phenomenon. Previously perceived as a mysterious art, polyglottery came into the focus of scientific attention. Polyglots as a unique community where the diversity of languages does not divide but rather unites people started reaching out to the public to offer their perspectives on and solutions to the burning problems of language education, language policy and international communication. Meanwhile, researchers began to monitor, generalize and interpret polyglots' empirical experience as a source of new data for science. It became apparent that all this has great potential for practical application and is widely demanded in the educational field. Thus, polyglottery can be regarded as an optimal model of modern language education and as such becomes a factor that needs to be seen in a broader social context. This brings us to the intrinsic connection between language education, polyglottery and geolinguistics, which will likely be clarified by future developments.

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