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MOTIVATION OR DELUSION: TAIWANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' REASONS FOR LEARNING (?) POLISH

Abstract: The present case study investigated the motivation of two Taiwanese university students to learn Polish. It should be seen in the wider context of LOTE instruction in a country where foreign language education has been dominated by English. To date, still too little has been understood about Taiwanese PFL learners' motivations, as previous studies in Poland focused on other demographic groups and the local research exhibited a marked predilection for EFL. The project aimed to (1) identify the factors fueling and impeding the drive to learn Polish, (2) uncover the underlying picture of the educational setting, as well as (3) formulate a handful of practical considerations for FL practitioners. Questionnaires and in-depth interviews served for data collection. The analysis revealed a wide discrepancy between declared motivation and the actual learning outcomes. A need to appear unique and impress others, along with perceived similarities between Taiwan and Poland, inspired both of the informants. Limited knowledge of Poland among fellow citizens did not discourage learning, nor did the lack of a positive image of the target community. The researcher has tried to address the confusion about what it means to learn a language. Despite the limited sample, the results manage to illustrate some of the current problems faced by Taiwanese LOTE stakeholders.

Keywords: Polish, PFL, Taiwan, LOTE, motivation

MOTYWACJA CZY ROZCZAROWANIE: POWODY, DLA KTÓRYCH TAJWAŃSCY STUDENCI UCZĄ SIĘ (?) JĘZYKA POLSKIEGO

Streszczenie: Przedmiotem niniejszego studium przypadku jest motywacja dwójga tajwańskich studentów do nauki języka polskiego. Należy rozpatrywać je w szerszym kontekście

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dydaktyki języków innych niż angielski w miejscu zdominowanym przez tenże. Jak dotąd niewiele wiadomo na temat powodów, dla których Tajwańczycy uczą się polskiego, jako że wcześniejsze badania z zakresu jpjo nie uwzględniały tej grupy, zaś miejscowi badacze to przede wszystkim angielski. Celem badania było (1) ustalenie, jakie czynniki motywują, a jakie zniechęcają tajwańskich studentów do nauki polskiego, (2) lepsze zrozumienie tutejszego szkolnictwa, oraz (3) sformułowanie wskazówek dla stron zaangażowanych w nauczanie języków obcych w tej części świata. Dane zebrano za pośrednictwem kwestionariuszy i wywiadów. Analiza wypowiedzi studentów ujawniła znaczny rozdźwięk pomiędzy deklarowanym poziomem motywacji a faktycznymi osiągnięciami w tej materii. Wśród czynników motywujących oboje badanych znalazła się między innymi potrzeba wyjątkowości i wywarcia wrażenia na innych, a także dostrzegane podobieństwa między dwoma krajami. Nie zniechęcał ich ani fakt, że wiedza ich rodaków na temat Polski jest znikoma, ani mało korzystny wizerunek Polaków, z jakim przyszło im się zetknąć. W artykule dołożono starań, aby wyjaśnić istniejące nieporozumienia co do tego, czym jest nauka języka i ilu wymaga starań. Mimo obecności jedynie dwojga uczestników ukazuje on sedno problemów, z jakim zmagają się obecnie edukacja językowa na Tajwanie.

Słowa kluczowe: język polski jako obcy, jpjo, Tajwan, motywacja

1. INTRODUCTION

The inspiration for this paper came from the research on Duolingo conducted last year, which revealed a deep discrepancy between Taiwanese students' declared levels of interest in Polish as a foreign language (henceforth, PFL) and their actual achievements in the field (Tsai 2023a). One of the interviewees, a philology major, talked about her passion for languages while doing little to prove it. (Reportedly, no adult had ever tried to have any serious conversation about her real motives and learning needs). And yet, she was always present in class, on time, and well-prepared. Was she interested in learning the language or perhaps in taking the class? The reasons why students select a course are often unclear even to themselves. Questionnaires, however, do not always show this, and more detailed insights are obtainable when people feel genuinely heard. This paper documents that such conversations may reveal various layers of interest in a Western language taught in an Eastern context, although it still leaves me puzzled as to why the actual learning outcomes are far from acceptable.

1.1. THE BACKGROUND OF THE CURRENT STUDY

Motivation in the context of foreign language teaching has been widely discussed over the last few decades, but the privileged position of English,

“a must-have” lingua franca, left languages other than English (henceforth, LOTE) somewhat behind (Ushioda and Dörnyei 2017, p. 452). This rings true for many non-Anglophone regions, Taiwan included. The question arises as to what extent the EFL-related findings are applicable in the LOTE context worldwide (Duff 2017, p. 597). Still much is to be discovered about Taiwanese students’ motivations for learning languages that are not in the mainstream, Polish being one of them. In Poland, on the other hand, researchers usually looked at mixed samples or focused on homogenous groups that did not include Taiwanese. The purpose of this case study is to bind these two realms by capturing the specifics of PFL instruction in Taiwan. It is written in English to resonate with a wider readership. The Polish language is in focus, but much should be true for other LOTE scenes. The constructivist theory, honoring individual and social dimensions, has provided the framework for the project. The following research questions guided the study: (1) What factors affected students’ motivation to learn Polish? (2) What could be learned about Taiwan and the local education? Finally, (3) What practical implications could be drawn for FL practitioners and other stakeholders?

The project’s site was a prestigious national university in northern Taiwan in the first semester of 2023/2024. The class, *Polish Communication 2*, was scheduled for Friday (10:10–13:00). Relevant content was provided in an attractive form. Various tools and techniques were implemented, from fancy stationery to delicious food (*grocery store*), container gardens, and a trip to the nearby zoo. The way the class was held was oftentimes complemented by the students, expressing their gratitude for the efforts invested in preparations. There was no room for boredom or discouragement. Regular revisions were offered to consolidate the material. Mutual respect and friendliness defined the relationships in class. I shared with the students some of my FL learning experiences and tips. (The earlier courses in that school were held in a similar atmosphere.) In Dörnyei’s words (2014, p. 521), the class was characterized by a set of features that made the immediate L2 learning environment pleasant and, additionally, student-centered. The two major problems, however, occurred: Only one student was officially enrolled and the learning outcomes were adverse. “Nowadays, students are not interested in learning” was an explanation that I heard from the school administrator, her words being echoed by my colleagues. As explained by one of the interviewees, “Most people just care about the credits, not about Polish.” This paper summarizes the insights provided by two Taiwanese learning PFL, the second participant being from another school. (More detailed characteristics will be offered in the participant description.)

1.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research on motivation in language teaching and learning is abundant. Understood as the extent to which one makes choices about goals to pursue and the effort devoted to that pursuit (Brown 2007, p. 85), it greatly affects how a student performs (Komorowska 2021, p. 33). As noted by the Council of Europe, motivation is a part of a broader “mental context” and, along with the attitudes, values, beliefs, cognitive style, and personality type, shapes the overall learning experience (Piccardo et al., 2011, p. 29). It is a key component of one’s FL learning enjoyment (Mierzwa 2019, p. 172), listed among the non-language objectives for education (*Using the CEFR...* 2011, p. 13). From the constructivist point of view, it stems from both individual’s self-determination and their social interactions as well (Brown 2007, p. 87). Different kinds of motivation are thought to be involved in the learning process, including *global*, *situational*, and *task-oriented* ones, but many researchers emphasized the distinction between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivators, giving priority to the former (Brown 2007, p. 88–89). Among extrinsically administered rewards, positive feedback has proven to have the strongest impact (*ibid.*), for other motivators of this kind “often result in a subconscious resistance” (Gałązka & Doroszek 2021, p. 35).

1.2.1. ADDRESSING THE MYTHS

Two Polish researchers, namely Gajderowicz and Jakubowski (2021, p. 125–126), disagree with the notion of the principal importance of intrinsic contributors, especially in long-term endeavors. They go on to compare it to a fuel that students can run off fast and look at perceived self-efficacy instead. Accomplishments, even small, when experienced throughout learning and emphasized by the teacher, can maintain or generate a higher level of engagement in students. So, perhaps counterintuitively for some, it is not the motivation that generates the achievement, but the other way round. For them, motivation stems from effective teaching methods which, in turn, generate student success. From this perspective, even learners who initially pay little interest may in time get involved. Motivation is, thus, seen as a result of efficient instruction and not as the main drive for achievement. Importantly, motivation is by no means the only factor influencing learning outcomes. Other components of one’s success in FL learning include, as listed by Brown (2007, p. 95), “native ability, age, the context of learning, style preferences, background experience and qualifications,

availability of time to give the effort needed, and the quality of input that is beyond the immediate control of the learner.” It is also not a magic remedy for educators and we cannot hope that once it is there, school life will be smooth and filled with achievements (Komorowska 2021, p. 34). Not every student will be evenly motivated and only some will show higher engagement (Komorowska 2021, p. 34), but still, several steps can be taken to get a little bit closer to the desired outcomes.

1.2.2. REALISTIC SOLUTIONS

As suggested by Padzik (2023, p. 115), it is the instructor’s responsibility to help the students maintain their motivation throughout the study, and, since most of the participants initially come to class without a clear purpose, the very first class is when motivation levels get set. Śmiałek (2021, p. 121–123) wrote that students carefully observe the instructor, reach judgments regarding his or her passion, devotion, and intention, and, next, form their attitude. Gryczka (2021, p. 33), referring to Hascher, encourages developing a positive atmosphere in class, which includes friendly and tactful feedback in case of an error. H. Komorowska (2021, p. 34–39), an established Polish authority in FL didactics, offered a handful of down-to-earth reminders, guarding against excess emphasis on the attractiveness of the class at the expense of knowledge. In cases when high motivation seems rather out of the question, instructors might opt for simply raising interest in students. What seems like settling for second best can be far more realistic, especially in working with young people. Working and studying in an environment where feelings of discouragement and disengagement prevail can be overwhelming, as described by Baous (2011, p. 39–40), and, as such, should be avoided.

1.2.3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this section, a brief overview of selected papers on motivation for learning various languages will be presented. In a study by Kot (2021, p. 34) among the most influential stimulants for learning German students pointed out (1) the way the material was presented and course organized, (2) practical values of the language that one day might be useful at work, (3) grades, and (4) how the teacher treated the students. Other factors included: seeing one’s progress, desire for

fluency, future attempt to get a certificate, communication with native speakers, group work, achievements in class, self-confidence gained on the way, as well as positive feedback, teacher engagement, hope to live in a country when the language is spoken, interest in the topic and, finally, the joy of the parent. Among the impulses for staying active in class were: points for participation (for 69% of the participants), the teacher's behavior (29%), team spirit (16%), and stress (15%). Fewer people opted for classmates, self-growth, or upcoming exams. What demotivated students: low grades, an overwhelming amount of the material, perceived difficulty, unfavorable attitudes toward the German language, or backlog. A study by Szulc-Kurpaska (2015, p. 346) highlighted the importance of autonomy.

As previously mentioned, insights into learner motivation often reflect current historical conditions, with the projects by Makiejew et al. and Łozińska (both published in 2009, before the invasion) and on Ukrainian PFL learners providing a clear example. These investigations remain in striking contrast to the current one, in terms of political and economic dynamics between the countries involved, geographical and historical conditions, as well as similarities between the two languages. In some way, the situation in my study could be seen as reverse to this of Makiejew's and Łozińska's, which was one of the reasons why they attracted my attention. From a Taiwanese perspective, Poland is a remote country that officially does not even recognize the Republic of China, not to mention advocating for its rights, as consistently done for Ukraine. Our language is not similar to Chinese and is widely seen as difficult to master. Fluency in it is not perceived as prestigious. The reasons for learning Polish in Taiwan are, thus, quite different. Among the observations that could provide a common ground, the Ukrainian researchers found a positive correlation between individual's fluency in Polish, measured in the linguistic correctness of the responses, and their motivation (Makiejew et al. 2009, p. 282–283), which could be linked to the already mentioned observations by Gajderowicz and Jakubowski.

An interesting historical perspective may be found in the research by Omulecka and Sajenczuk (1988) who presented the reasons for overseas students to learn Polish in The School of Polish of Foreigners back in 1983/1984. The surveys were conducted when the country was still a part of the communist camp, not long after the Martial Law was suspended. Their sample included mostly students from the Near East, Africa, Maghreb, Latin America, and Vietnam from various social classes. It revealed a prevalence of the instrumental factors (the desire to master the language in a year and get admitted to a local university). They also analyzed demotivating influences which included the perceived difficulty of the language, backlogs from high school, lack of linguistic talent, problems with memory and concentration, negative attitudes of Poles towards foreigners, no signs of success in learning, as well as humble living/learning conditions.

Looking at more recent investigations, in 2017 E. Komorowska analyzed the reasons for learning Polish in the business context, assuming that motivation was a mixture of several aspects (Komorowska 2017, p. 117). Another paper by the same author that did not include Taiwanese respondents was conducted a year ago among multilingual expatriates in Warsaw. The dominating reason for learning was the desire to know the country better, followed by the need to use the target language in everyday situations (despite Polish people's ability to communicate in English, especially in the capital), but also with friends and colleagues. Almost half of the informants did it for enjoyment. Family reasons were much lower in the ranking, while the willingness to talk to one's clients was seen as the least important motivator (Komorowska 2022, p. 10). The researcher concluded that her informants were driven mostly by integrative factors.

1.2.4. RESEARCH ON FL MOTIVATION IN TAIWAN

Research on FL motivation in Taiwan is abundant, but the main focus is on English, and quantitative studies prevail. In 2014, Chen, for instance, conducted a study at a private university in northern Taiwan looking for links between student motivation and participation in EMI courses. Lo (2020, p. 11) looked at local cram schools and decided that in their sample (including 277 valid questionnaires collected among students at different stages) intrinsic factors had a higher impact: "People go there because they need to learn English from inside." This conclusion could be, however, erroneous, given that one's motivation to enroll in the afternoon classes is a complex combination of issues including peer pressure, parental expectations, teacher's suggestion, the desire to earn a decent grade or go to a prestigious school, etc., which are extrinsic. Among the motivating factors, the author listed learner's attitudes toward the curriculum and the instructor's techniques and emphasized the importance of positive feedback in class. A study on FL university students conducted by Huang (2019, p. 585) focused on 8 languages that were selected by nearly 90% of the entire LOTE learner population. Polish, however, was not included. Huang's findings revealed the importance of the learning experience and that students were more motivated to learn LOTE than English.

The problem of motivation was present in my projects involving Taiwanese learners of Polish, although it never became their central theme. My recent studies on Duolingo revealed different motives underlying the decisions to do a course, along with varying levels of enthusiasm. The participant described in my first paper on Duolingo could not help but study Polish in her free time, concluding: "I simply love Polish! Whenever I go back to learning, it is a pure

joy!” (Tsai 2022, p. 39–40). Unsurprisingly, she went on to study in Warsaw. The case described in Tsai (2023a, in print) declared her general interest in foreign languages, but hardly ever initiated any actions on her own and our next project could not be completed. In Tsai 2023b, a case of a woman who kept changing her mind was presented. The obvious contrasts in the profiles inspired this study in which students’ real drives could be shown.

1.3. METHODOLOGY

In the studies above, mostly quantitative measures were used, with questionnaires being the main tool for data collection (Omulecka and Sajenczuk 1988; Makiejew et al., 2009; Łozińska 2009; Komorowska 2017; Lo 2020, Huang 2019). In Chen (2014, p. 53), a mixed method was applied (questionnaires and follow-up interviews), but the answers were still quite general. In multiple-choice questionnaires, nuanced insights are not encouraged. Putting a check next to an answer does not necessarily reflect one’s actual stand on the problem, which can lead to simplified conclusions, as in the paper by E. Komorowska (2022, p. 12) who wrote: “The study participants listed almost 4 reasons for learning Polish, which confirms that the motivation to learn a foreign language is a very complex and multifaceted topic.” The application of qualitative tools allows us to see an even more exact picture of the problem since, “LOTE learners will have particularly unique and often unusual stories to tell” (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017, p. 462). Small numbers of participants additionally encourage such procedures. Thus, two tools were implemented to answer the research questions. First, participants filled in a 50-item questionnaire. Next, a series of personalized questions served as a basis for an in-depth interview, held in the last two weeks preceding the final exam, taking 3 hours each. Combined data obtained at both stages will be presented in the following paragraphs.

1.4. PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Student 1 (henceforth S1) is a man, born in southern Taiwan, where he had graduated from a prestigious male high school and studied at a local university, majoring in computer science. Now he was in Taipei, at the Slavic department of a famous university, officially the only person who had signed up for the course I taught. He had previously taken my class (September 2021–January 2022), but

as soon as the instruction switched from online to offline, i.e. after three weeks, he gave up. At that time, the school informed me that he was struggling with depression. Now he was back, present at every single session, often telling me that the class uplifted his spirit. Among the languages learned in formal settings,² he listed English, Russian, and Serbian. Student 2 (S2) is a woman from northern Taiwan, who had graduated from a top female high school and held a bachelor's in business administration. She insisted on attending my class despite not getting any official record. Apart from Polish, she had received formal instruction in English, German, and Czech. She tended to be late and skipped three classes. Both of the students were in their twenties. They had received a prestigious education and were currently enrolled in the best universities: S1's school ranked second, S2 was in the first uni nationwide. One as well as the other declared that their institutions encouraged learning Polish, but only S1 expected any extra points for coming to my class. S2 had accumulated enough credits to complete her education. Another shared characteristic was the length of previous PFL instruction, namely four semesters. In each case, Chinese and Taiwanese were spoken at home.

1.4.1. STRENGTHS AS POLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

When asked to evaluate their strengths as Polish language learners, S1 pointed out his linguistic sense: "I can speak a language well once I grasp the *feeling* of it."³ "Mostly the things I can remember, I can feel that I am related to it and I know it."⁴ The very same thing could work to his disadvantage: "If I cannot feel it, I'll learn it very slow. It will leave my mind, even without [me] noticing. If I try to memorize, I can memorize it, but then I'll forget it. It is just a group of meaningless sound." S2 saw her strength in a good memory. This was, however, something that she possessed back in her high school years when she could "memorize all the keywords on the bus," so she "seldom studied at home." To save money and stay in shape, she would now ride her bike, which gave her "more flexibility," but negatively affected her ability to remember.

² Specification added to exclude languages learned independently, for example with applications, with no objective standards of evaluation. In that vein, S1 mentioned Croatian, Hebrew, Arabic, as well as Hungarian.

³ S1's questionnaire responses were, in most cases, written in Polish and translated for the needs of this paper. S2's written responses, originally in English, have not been changed.

⁴ In both cases, interviews were conducted in English. Wording original throughout the entire report.

1.4.2. WEAKNESS

In the beginning, S1 saw his weakness in reading Polish words but gained confidence with time. S2 was struggling with apathy, unable to come up with a workable strategy and stick to her resolutions: “I am too lazy and I lack persistence to practice a language every day. Sometimes I think that I can spend ten minutes a day and learn keywords, so after many days I can learn a lot. I’m really lazy. (...) It’s not good for learning. I haven’t solved this problem.” Polish was not an exception: “I look at the keyword list. I can’t memorize it in one day, so I take a look for many days. I don’t want to see it anymore. It’s boring. I stop. (...) It’s the same with other subjects. No exception. I liked to learn everything before but I did not make a good progress. I was frustrated. I cannot improve.” Encounters with others irritated her even more: “If I meet people from Poland, I can only say: *Mam na imię*. After one year, all I can say is the same thing. I didn’t make any progress. Some people start learning Polish after me, but now they can speak many topics, they can chat with Polish people. I feel quite sad.” Confronted with my suggestion that maybe it was something in the way they learned, she said, “I cannot see what they do after class.”

1.4.3. PERCEIVED LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

The perceived level of difficulty: Having a smattering of other languages that he learned with Duolingo, S1 concluded that Polish was relatively easy (4 out of 10). For S2, it was rather difficult (8 out of 10), due to the elaborated lexicon and puzzling grammar, like endings and aspect: “Vocabularies are long. Many cases, some of them look similar: different cases have the same ending. *Dokonany* or *niedokonany*: In Chinese it’s only one form. For one meaning, I have to memorize different verbs, different forms.” She also thought that the resources for learning were not abundant, compared to English.

1.4.4. EXAM RESULTS

The actual exam results were poor and, as such, should be mentioned for a clearer perspective. In Taiwan, students usually receive 0–100 points, with 60 being the passing threshold. S1’s midterm performance was graded 22. For the

final, he received 29. His classmate got 59⁵ and technically a no-show 0 since she failed to show up. (A week after she sent me an e-mail, politely asking when the test was. My patient response was left with no reaction.) Several of the teachers that I consulted expressed no surprise, adding that such outcomes were now common. Throughout the semester, students were familiarized with various learning strategies and equipped with beautiful stationery to prepare self-study materials. Additionally, as an active FL learner myself, I shared with them my own experiences and methods. An individualized diagnosis of mistakes and suggested strategies was offered a week after the midterm. Reportedly, the atmosphere in class was uplifting and the lessons were interesting.

2. FINDINGS

2.1. REASONS FOR LEARNING POLISH

Asked about the reasons for learning Polish, S1 wrote that he wanted to find a spouse from Poland. “The only motive, the key one: To meet one Polish woman, make friends with her, marry her and start a happy family. It was also a dream of my beloved grandmother.”⁶ During the interview, he mentioned that his values overlapped with those of Polish people, and Polish left more room for freedom and connections: “There is a saying: A language reflects how nation thinks. (...) Polish is much more freer. [In] most Slavic languages, you can put what you emphasize at the end of a sentence. The way of talking in Chinese is always fixed: “I’ve eaten a cake.” *Zjadłem ciasto*. But you also can say *Ciasto zjadłem*. I just don’t like the concept that I cannot be clear about what I want to say in Chinese, but probably because Chinese is my second language. Japanese [utterances] are like their merchandise. You have to wrap it, and wrap it, and wrap it, and wrap it, a lot of things. [Pointing to his spacious bag and taking out a small item to illustrate the point.] Maybe it looks beautiful, but you have to unwrap it, unwrap it, and unwrap it. You said all these things just for what? A mindset that everything has to be packed a lot or it will be considered inappropriate, or rude. So, the distance between people will be large. (...) Polish people, once they accept you, the gap shrinks to a very close

⁵ Had she been formally enrolled, an extra point in the electronic system would have been added for a positive record. Not all teachers, however, would do it.

⁶ S1’s questionnaire responses were usually written in Polish. They have been translated for the needs of this paper. S2’s written responses, originally in English, have not been changed.

distance.” S2 gave four reasons. First, she wanted to learn something “unique,” hoping that it would somehow restrict potential competition: “There are only a few people in Taiwan that know this language. When I talk to others about learning Polish, they will think it’s surprising. German is common in Taiwan, so I think it’s boring. There are many people who know it better than I do. (...) But for a language that’s not so common, you know a little bit and you’ll have a unique ability.” Second, she was afraid that Taiwan could be invaded, while Poland was safe because it was “not very close to Russia.” Third, the sunk costs: S2 had already invested plenty of time and did not want to forget what she had already learned. She was hoping to be awarded a scholarship to Poland and achieve B2 within a year. Finally, learning allowed her to meet “interesting people.” More reasons were mentioned when I inquired about starting to learn Polish two years before. S1 had an acquaintance from Poland who told him about the country and its people. Reportedly, the decision to apply for the Slavic department, technically dominated by Russian studies, was dictated by his desire to learn Polish: “I was learning Russian because it was a prerequisite to learning Polish. It was a good start. Russian has the very basic things that I can apply in my Polish class, and vice versa. The knowledge I learn here I can use backward to learn Russian. It’s like a win-win situation.” He wrote he was “blessed by God” to be taking my class. S2 had other considerations. She hoped to “learn an uncommon language in Taiwan which is almost impossible to learn without a teacher.” Comparing the two countries was her first step: “I look up for some info about Poland. The price in Poland is like in Taiwan. The safety is quite good. Poland and Taiwan – we have a similar historical background. We suffer from a neighbor.” Second, she relied on her background: “I’d learned German. If I learn Polish, my German can be useful.” Finally, she carefully checked who the teacher was by reading the online reviews. She came to my class because of the proximity: “Since I come every week, it can’t be too far. In Shilin,⁷ they also offer a Polish class, but it’s too far away.”

2.2. DESIRE TO LEARN POLISH

At this point, S1’s desire to learn Polish was 10 out of 10. He explained: “This is the only thing that leaves me a chance to acquire my happiness,” adding that he did find what he was looking for. When asked if it ever dropped, he joked that it went down to 8 when he found some unappealing foods: “Like *karp*. Ugh, do you really eat that? You’re eating for ten minutes, five minutes

⁷ A district of Taipei City.

spitting the bones.” S2 ranked hers as 7, fueled by the thought of obtaining her MA in Poland and the diverse array of opportunities offered to PFL learners. She deeply appreciated a chance to work at the events organized by the Polish Office in Taipei, including the celebrations of national holidays, TIBE (the annual book exhibition held in Taiwan), and European fairs. Her desire to learn would rise or fall depending on the circumstances. It would be higher upon receiving the scholarship and during the stay in Poland. It dropped after several weeks once she was back to the routine life, with fewer chances of applying what she had learned: “Later I will forget the initial desire and only feel that learning Polish is painful. When I was in Poland, I need to know Polish and I can communicate. When I coming back, I will only use this language in the classroom, but not use, only listen in the classroom. Polish is not the most important thing in my life. My parents will ask me to pass a national exam. I also have my major-related classes. I need to find job. Then Polish become not so important. If I write this in a CV, it’s not very attractive.”

2.3. HOW THE STIMULI TO LEARN POLISH WERE DIFFERENT FROM THE MOTIVATION TO MASTER ENGLISH

We talked about how the stimuli to learn Polish were different from the motivation to master English. S1 emphasized that he was learning the former “for life, not for exams.” There was more freedom of choice and technically no pressure to perform: “If I really hate Polish, I’ll pick another class, but English is different. We were forced to learn English for exams. Adults would think that it’s the end of the world if they see we got only 89/100.” S2 saw it in a more negative light. For her, Polish did not offer as many business opportunities as did English, especially for non-language majors.

2.4. IMAGE OF THE TARGET LANGUAGE COMMUNITY

It was vital to understand what image of the target language community interviewees had. S1 believed that Poles were “patriots, delicate, pleasant to be with, sometimes sad” and elaborated on that, saying: “Most of the Polish people I know will have one or two *pijaks*⁸ at home that cause troubles. I’ve heard of one who burned the house when he was drunk.” Regarding stereotypes,

⁸ Polish for a drinker, an alcoholic.

he provided a very negative description. In the questionnaire, he wrote, “brave but silly.” His explanation was: “Most Taiwanese know Poland was the first country to be invaded because Germans and Soviets attacked it. Every child knows this because their teacher might teach them about Polish people attacking a tank while riding a horse. Polish people are described as primitive people who don’t know tanks existed.” He, however, mentioned having an alternative perspective: “But I’ve done my research. Polish people have good tanks in the early stage of war. They also had some of the bravest tankers, but the number was too little. Cavalry: It’s practical for Poland to have cavalymen. Poland was not fully *zmechanizowana*. If you want to maneuver, horses are sometimes the only choice. Cavalry were, actually, not that primitive things. Poland had better equipment than Taiwanese teachers can imagine. And the first computer, the *bomba*, was invented by Polish.” S2 wrote that Poles seemed “mean,” but they were kind-hearted. Her perception was the same for outlanders in general: “People in all foreigners (...) don’t wear a smile all the time, but when you have a conversation, they are friendly. They also look stronger and they are so big.” A stereotypical Pole was, in S2’s opinion, a conservative catholic disapproving of abortion, an image obtained from the news and television series. Both of my informants had Polish friends who gave them very positive feelings. They showed understanding and provided linguistic support: “They were always there for me to answer the questions. Now it’s already five years. (...) Sometimes I try to speak Polish, but they are always very patient. One of them will personally message me the mistakes and how can I say it better” (S1). “We use Line to chat. I will share my Polish textbook for him. He will teach me more about it. Sometimes I will have a meal with some Polish students. They are friendly. I speak poor Polish. They will be very patient, teach me something that I don’t know.” (S2). Cross-cultural exchanges are a vital part of these encounters: “We share Taiwanese and Polish food. Last Sunday, we taught them how to play mahjong.” None of the participants was inspired by any famous Pole. In S1’s words, his compatriots “have, sadly, too little knowledge and know only about Chopin and Skłodowska,” associated exclusively with France. “Most Taiwanese people are comfortable with countries like China, Korea, Japan, America, and maybe also Germany, France, or Malaysia, but I don’t see that many people familiar with Poland or, for example, Kazakhstan. Perhaps my lifetime is not enough for [exploring the languages of] Central Asia, but Poland is a good start.”

2.5. A TRIP TO THE TARGET COUNTRY

A trip to the target country oftentimes provides a stimulus for improving one's language skills. Unlike S1, S2 had been to Poland. Here is what she recalled: "I want to understand more things, like the menu, the boards that write the name of the place. When I was climbing a mountain, an old lady asks me about something. I'm happy I can understand her question, but I don't have any vocabulary to answer. If I can go to a supermarket in Poland, I will find new words, learned this vocabulary. I learned fruits or vegetables. I learned before, but not put enough attention. After the visit, I try to memorize those things or spell the word. If I face some problems in Polish, I'll spend more time to memorize in Polish." Back in Taipei, after several weeks she got too preoccupied to maintain her passion: "When I stay in Taiwan for longer, within one month I forget that desire. There are many things that are not related to Polish. In September and October, I was busy preparing for the master program in Taiwan.

2.6. HOW POLISH COULD BE APPLIED IN THE FUTURE

Next, we discussed how Polish could be applied in the future. S1 again mentioned the possibility of having a wife. The interview revealed that he had performed a ritual deeply rooted in the local belief system and consulted the spirits of his ancestors, who allegedly agreed, as long as the family line would carry on: "Just remember your kids should continue our family name." The way he expressed himself in written form reflected traditional, patriarchal beliefs: "My son could be Polish, so the family can be bilingual." Inquired about the details, S1 added: "In the current branch of my family, I am the only male descendant. I am supposed to have a son. But, to be honest, I prefer daughters. (...) It's easier to teach little girls something and to shape their personality." Family was not the only option, though: "If someone wants to try a new market, introducing Taiwanese or Chinese things to Poland and Polish things back to Taiwan or translate some of the Chinese classics into Polish. Something I must do it, to be left on this world." He was convinced that "Polish isn't widely known in Taiwan. I think I will be someone important." This need found its reflection in his confession: "I want to build my self-esteem by knowing something others don't."

S2's goal was to receive the NAWA scholarship and spend a year studying in Poland: "Prove myself in the environment full of Polish, or I will just forget." She appreciated the Polish Government's initiative to invite Taiwanese students

for an extended period: “I’m learning Czech, too. Recently, I did not spend too much time. Not too much motivations. There are [1-year] scholarships for Poland, but Czech, they have short-term school, but for more people. It’s for exchange, not for study.” The woman believed that learning Polish would enable her to travel around the country. I could not help but ask whether such an experience could ever compensate for all her efforts. She was positive, associating fluency with involvement: “If I didn’t understand the language, I can’t experience the true life there, only as a tourist. I can take my families there. I only travel to countries that I know the language of.” When asked why people in her generation cared so much about distant trips, she denied it, saying that her family hardly ever traveled. What she was looking for was more about “special opportunities, some Polish activities, meeting some friends that also learn Polish.” They would “share some Polish songs, cook Polish food together, like *pierogi* or *paczki*.” Regarding career, the language could be applicable, though not in an obvious way. It was more of a personal asset, not necessarily a prerequisite for the job: “It’s possible. My sister works in the electric power industry. When she entered the company, they didn’t ask what foreign languages she knew. Now she needs to understand the laws in different countries without Google Translator. Even a company doesn’t require Polish ability, I think it’s quite useful. Recently, there are many products from Poland, for example, chocolate. The trade between Taiwan and Poland is more frequently. Not only Polish, any language.”

2.7. FAMILY

Family was a source of support for S1, but not for S2. The former one recalled, “The only time I got questioned was when my father asked: What language am I going to use when I speak to my grandson?” S2 was not so lucky. She was learning despite her parents being displeased with the idea. Her answer revealed a deeper fracture: “As a freshman, they stop me from learning Polish. They force me to learn German. After I got the school scholarship [for a summer course in Poland], they don’t want me to go there. What can I do after learning Polish?” She persisted: “Only in mouth they will stop me. They don’t want me to learn Polish, but I learn it now. I just keep on doing. If I don’t mention anything, they don’t say. If I tell them I booked the ticket, they will let me go.” The lack of parental support was to be seen in several key areas of her life: “I’m someone easy to give up. If they don’t support me, it’s easy to stop. They never support me to study anything. Even my major, they’re never satisfy. They want me to study something more practical: financial, medicine, engineering. They don’t think business is useful or you can earn more.”

Peer support was to be found mainly among Polish native speakers or fellow learners. S1 found it online. His Taiwanese friends would tease him that now he could “know so many blond beauties.” S2 found understanding at school, especially among students playing *The Witcher* (“Wiedźmin”), a popular video game.

2.8. PERCEPTIONS OF INDIVIDUALS WHO KNOW POLISH

The next question was about the **perceptions of individuals who know Polish, as compared to those who are fluent in English**. In Taiwan, the ability to use the latter is widely respected. S1 saw it, however, in a negative light: “Learning American English is often linked to *you’re going to be a pick-up artist* if you’re fluent in English. Girls will say, “Wow, you’re so fluent in English! It’s not honorable.” His position on The Bilingual 2030 policy was based on a handful of negative assumptions: „It’s good, for now, it’s Chinese. Although I don’t want to admit it, English is the most advantaged language. It gives access to resources in a modern society. Without fluent English, you will always be waiting for translations and you may be tricked. Some people will translate something badly or trick you.” S2 believed that “Most of them are very rich. They can have good education or have been abroad. They have money, they have vivid experience, so we respect them. Elite.” On the other side, fluency in Polish may not come with so much recognition: “Polish? Except for the people that I know from the school, I have not heard of any single person who knows Polish. Recently I attended a wedding banquet. My cousin’s new in-laws didn’t even know what Poland is” (S1). “Most Taiwanese don’t know Poland speaks Polish, not Russian, English, or German. We will connect English with status. We won’t connect Polish with status. Polish is not that common. Rich people have English ability. You speak English well, you earn many money. But there aren’t so many cases when someone speaks Polish and makes a lot of money” (S2). For the man, Taiwanese fluent in Polish would be perceived as an oddity (“a mythological creature”). I was hoping to know whether the students had any intention to impress anyone with their learning outcomes. Both meant to make an impression on their partners. S1’s response was “My future wife.” His classmate wanted her progress to be noticed by her boyfriend, who was learning Polish as well: “He’s younger than me. He learns Polish for one year. He’s an outgoing person. He chats a lot. His learning ability is good. I spend 12 hours a week learning Polish and have been to Poland twice. I learn one year longer, but his Polish level is higher. I am embarrassed. I want to show him that I’m good.” She described him as an extrovert, much unlike herself, proactively searching for learning opportunities: “He will chat a lot with Polish friends,

use apps to memorize keywords, watch YouTube, listen to podcasts and Polish songs and translate the lyrics. To me, if I can read Polish word, is enough, but he will try to speak to others. It's a big difference. He's good at English. It helps him to learn other languages. Should I first make my English become better and learn Polish?" There was perhaps a sense of competition between them, with the partner's insinuations that she should quit: "He says, "You spend so much time. You shouldn't learn anymore." He didn't want me to be better than him. Maybe he's joking." S2 admitted that sometimes she found it stressful. On the other hand, she thought that attending a class was valuable: "He's correct, but if I don't have this class, I don't have anything meaningful to do.

2.9. TIME

When asked to estimate **how much time** per week they allocated to learning outside of the class, S1 answered that from 7 to 21 hours, "depending on mood and mental condition." He went on to imply what sort of materials could be of use: "Learning – not just looking at handouts, but also chatting in Polish and looking at things in Polish. It's for pleasure. A lady is not supposed to hear the details. But I learn new vocabulary, not suitable for recalling here. My friends are so kind and later help me with grammar." There was no fixed schedule since in the past it did not work well: "I'm not a good planner. I was always planning, but I found I failed to make it. So, I do what I feel like when I'm awake and that's all." He reported talking to his Polish peers daily. When encouraged to reflect on how many efforts were invested in reviewing specifically for my class, as opposed to learning Polish in general, with no specific tasks assigned, the participant expressed the following belief: "These are all Polish. I don't see any difference. The language is not something you can dismantle. Most things are connected. Everything is linked." Keeping in mind his midterm performance, aware of the discrepancy between his observable enthusiasm and the actual outcomes, I insisted: „Imagine that I give you a hundred of pieces of information. How many of them would you take?" This was his answer: „Sadly, if you give me 100%, I learn only 60%. It's limited by my personal ability. By time, the 40% that remains, I might remember them. Take time to digest. If words can be used more often, I might remember them more quickly." Further on, he expressed his interest in learning vocabulary related to history, religion, and animals. S2, on the other hand, declared to learn 1 to 5 hours on her own, on Thursday night and Friday morning, right before the class, with the reservation "if I don't have other things to do." She also believed that one day, learning might be incorporated into her routine: "I want to make it a habit to

study Polish every day, even ten minutes, but I will fall asleep if I do it before sleep.” A plethora of obstacles could get in the way: “At night, I always eat too much for dinner. I take a shower, brush my teeth, throw garbage, wash the dishes. It takes more time and I’m tired. So, I never stay late to study. In the morning, I am more focused after a good night’s sleep. Sometimes I’m too lazy to get up early. Sometimes I didn’t go to sleep too early.” Asked to explain what they would do **if they were not in the mood for learning**, S1 wrote that he would silently cry in his bed, while S2’s response was, “I do nothing to solve this kind of problem.” S1 reportedly never experienced a situation in which he did not know how to get ready for the upcoming class. He added that due to his mental condition, his memory had decreased. S2’s answer was, again, “I do nothing to solve this problem.” In the interview, she elaborated that, saying: “I’ll go to sleep, even for ten minutes. Many naps a day, usually three: in the morning, in the afternoon, and at night. If I feel like, I will study. If not, I’ll grab something to eat, walk around, or breath some fresh air. If I’m not in the mood for learning, I’ll keep finding another things to do: texting, take a shower, sleep once again. I always need more time to get into the mood to study. When I finally in the mood to study, only little time left. No mood – hard to do anything. A big problem for me. If I’m not in a good mood, no efficiency.” In the same context, she added: “I can have no answer key. It’s not meaningful to write the homework. Even the teacher checks it next week, the time is too long, I’ll lose the motivation to know the answer. I want to check why answer was wrong and find the reason.”

2.10. PRESENTS TO THEMSELVES

None of them **gave presents to themselves** for the effort invested in learning Polish. S1 said, “If it’s something I’m supposed to do, I don’t deserve a reward,” adding that over time, he had “lost interest in many things.” According to S2, a prize that comes too often soon “becomes a habit, not a reward anymore,” as was the case with snacking: “I keep eating cookies as a reward. It’s not healthy and not very attractive to me, since I do it all the time.” In terms of their **favorite learning techniques**, S1 would talk to his online friends, while S2 would listen to textbook audios and songs: “Singing is a good way to learn Polish. In my school we sang *Hej, Sokoły*. I went to Poland, I heard the song, I was so happy, I know the lyrics. Christmas party next week, they sang some *koledy*. I know the lyrics, I’m happy.” S2 was, however, “too shy” to perform in class, as a part of the instruction. Both would **attempt to find additional materials** about Poland or its language. For S1, it was equal to reading Wikipedia

in Polish, especially about mythical creatures and medieval warfare. S2 had declared to use Duolingo. Requested to specify how many times she had done that in the last three weeks preceding the interview, she said: “Zero.” She further explained: “I have many materials in class, I don’t think I need the app. I don’t like the system. If I don’t have the heart,⁹ I can’t do it anymore. I only have five hearts one day. If I don’t have enough hearts, I cannot use, I have to wait for another day. I was often confused: He [the app] never told me the reason why I get correct or wrong. He just show me the answer. Not a well-organized way of learning languages.”

2.11. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTIVATION AND EXPERIENCES IN CLASS

The next few questions pertained to the **relationship between motivation and experiences in class**. Both of the students admitted that the instructor’s behavior has had a positive impact on their learning. S1 felt influenced by one of his previous teachers: “She knew that I had mental issues. She introduced her daughter who is a psychologist. We still keep in touch. A big motivation to me.” He went on to say that improving Polish was, then, a matter of integrity, so that her kindness did not go in vain: “I have to do something to be worthy of this. I was shaped like this. My uncle shaped me to be an honorable man.” S2 would feel motivated if the teacher talked about “the vivid life in Poland.” Here is what she said: “It will makes me want to go to Poland. Wow! Life there seems so good. If I speak good Polish, I can stay there or reach more Polish people. Once my teacher told us she took a PE class to ride a horse. Wow! It’s so cool. Or she will talk about some dishes in Poland. I want to go there and try.” She was also excited to hear about the potential opportunities awaiting those who have mastered the language (“I will want to study Polish more”), with the reservation that the focus of the class was still on the right subject: “But if too much, it’s a waste of time. I want to study Polish and get those benefits.” She needed the constant support of the instructor to keep going: “Sometimes I learn because of the teacher. I don’t want to disappoint the teacher. I don’t have strong self-motivation.” Learning in smaller groups was one of the ways to achieve it: “If the teacher know me, I can’t perform too bad. In my school, there are classes like one professor and hundreds of anonymous students. I will not perform, since nobody will care about my performance.” This participant, facing her insecurities, wanted a role model teacher who had

⁹ Here: The app’s reward system.

overcome similar struggles: “I’m not sure why can’t I learn Polish well. I’m not smart enough? I don’t use the correct way? The teacher shares experience, then I think when people who are smart, there is a way to conquer the language. My teacher said she used to study in this school and was a top student, but when she went to Poland, she got difficulties when learning Polish. Over one year in that environment, she improved. This story gave me encouraged. Even she suffered some difficulties.” Generally, her impressions were positive: Most of the Polish teachers I met is good. A good teacher is someone who cares about students and writes things clearly. In Poland, it’s very hard to read.¹⁰

Approached about any **discouraging experiences in PFL class**, S1 declared “Not yet.” This student did not accept if the teacher just read from the textbook or slides, without adding anything on their own, which none of his Polish instructors had ever done. Eagerness to offer extra materials or information, especially if requested by the students, was something he appreciated a lot. His classmate, on the other hand, had some unpleasant experiences. She had been previously labeled as an underperformer, which had a devastating effect: “In Poland, when I know the teacher knows me, he just didn’t believe in me, I didn’t do it well. To save time, he will skip me. I’m very bad. The teacher will skip me to save time, he knows I don’t know. I can understand why he do so, but I feel sad.” What was more, she disapproved lack of proper organization. Here is how she saw it: “In Poland, we don’t have textbooks, [only] handouts every day. I cannot preview, I can’t know what topic we will learn. I feel confused. Many handouts, copied from books, messy, no connection, I don’t know how to organize them well. I’ll be very demotivated.” She added: “Some textbooks did not present well-organized grammar or vocabulary. Just provide *ćwiczenias*. Maybe the author thinks we can understand the rules after doing the *ćwiczenia*. I like to read some transcripts or articles. Sometimes it will give us only audio files. What I like is article and all the info in that article. Some do not have everything presented in that article. I don’t like when it’s hard to self-study, no details, we only can learn with a teacher’s help.” What she wanted was the content “useful for daily life.” S2 was also attracted by interesting facts, topics like “the smallest house in Poland or food.” Standard themes covered in magazines for learning English, like *Studio Classroom*, were “very boring.”

¹⁰ Unlike Polish, Taiwanese tend to separate letters while writing by hand. This practice makes it hard for them to decode European handwriting.

2.12. COMPARISON AND COMPETITION

Comparison and competition might be powerful motivators. Both of the students, however, declined. “I avoid comparing. It will further destroy my self-esteem which is already low,” said the 1st case. His classmate answered in a similar vein: “I used to care about this. Since I always perform badly in class, now I don’t care.” Taking classes in another institution, out of her comfort zone, revealed the accumulated backlog: “In my school, I perform well, look up keywords in advance. In this school, like in the afternoon, people can share their opinions. I have a hard time talking about simple sentences. I don’t want to be the poorest guy in class, slow down the progress, but it’s too difficult, so I don’t care, since the teacher and students know my level is just that. I used to think that it’s because they major in Slavic languages, but someone told me that not all. It’s just I did not spend as much time as they did. Teachers here [in this school] focus on teaching, but my teacher [in my school] will tell on culture or her experience in Poland.” Both interviewees compared with one another, each downgrading their skills and attributing higher achievements to the second person. S1 told me, “Her ability is much better than mine.” She said the same about him. Furthermore, a rivalry was not new to her: “Compete with others give me a sense of achievement. In this school – no, but in my school, my boyfriend come to my class with me, so sometimes if I can answer more keywords, I’m happy.”

2.13. MISTAKES

Both of the participants accepted **mistakes** as a part of the learning process. S1 expressed his outlook that if it occurred in class, it was good for him since the teacher was there to help. A lot depended on the reaction: “If I’m shamed or insulted, I’ll start being uncomfortable,” said the student, adding: “Most people are not afraid of mistakes; they’re afraid of the consequences of it. But if the consequence is that you improve, perhaps it’s better to have more mistakes.” S2 was slightly resigned when admitting that “it’s ok to make a mistake in Polish since I am not good at this.” Asked to rank the statement *I want to avoid mistakes, so I study hard* from 0 to 10,¹¹ they gave it 10 and 4, respectively.

¹¹ 0 equal to “totally disagree” and 10 standing for “absolutely agree.”

2.14. CONTACT WITH OTHERS

Learning with others could encourage both of them, 9 and 7 on the Likert scale, but for S1 in a small group: “One, two, or three people plus me. Perhaps I’m selfish, but if more, we’re not gonna make any progress. If a class that has over 10 people, like 20, a few in the back row, they will be playing with their smartphones, sleeping, or chatting.” What motivated, but at the same time frustrated, the female student was the presence of a person from her original institution. “The schoolmate of mine who also takes the afternoon Polish class in this university: She motivates me. I don’t want to be left behind. She can has more vocabularies. She can elaborate things with many sentences. I answer in short sentences. I want to be happy here in this school and learn Polish. I’m stressful.”

2.15. CERIFICATE

Earning a **proficiency certificate** was an option, although not an emergency, for both of the informants. At the moment, it was not available in Taiwan. S1 denied that **tests** would have any influence on his desire to learn: “If it humiliates me too much, I feel destroyed. Like if you give me a picture by Beksiński and ask me to write up to 500 words about it, that kind of thing. It’s hard for teachers to decide how hard an exam can be. There must be a balance. There must be something easy so that a student can establish their self-esteem, but also something challenging, to let the students know there is a room for improvement.” S2 believed that she was motivated by exams: “I can’t feel a sense of achievement when no test. As for midterm, I want to do something to prove that I’ve learned something in this class. Final: I hope I can do well. Since the course in my school ends this week,¹² I have more time to focus. If I can write the test very well, I will feel very proud of myself.” (She added that she had finally taken a look at the exam feedback that I provided. I kept reminding her for a month.)

3. DISCUSSION (*PIEROGI VERSUS KARP*)

Among the **factors influencing one’s motivation to learn Polish**, the following integrational elements were mentioned by both of the participants.

¹² A reference to the newly introduced policy of shortening the semester from 18 to 16 weeks. The last two weeks can be used to flexibly arrange supplementary activities.

The two expressed their *need for uniqueness* achieved by learning a language hardly anyone has heard of. The word “learning” may be more appropriate than “knowing,” as indicated by the results of the tests and by S2 who believed that just a bit of understanding was enough to gain a special position. Similar aspirational-pragmatic drives have been found in Huang (2021, p. 70), while an investigation by Chen et al. (2005, p. 617) revealed that integrative factors had a very limited influence on motivation. *Impressing a partner* was another incentive common for my students. S1 wanted to impress his potential spouse and a native speaker; S2 mentioned her boyfriend, an enthusiastic PFL learner and a critical observer of her learning progress. Both received strong *support from their Polish friends* who provided assistance and encouraged interest. The man was very proactive in his attempts to interact with them frequently and efficiently. His classmate’s encounters with Polish peers were not regular, but stimulating. A strong inspiration, especially in the second case, could come from the *teacher* who had the power to respond with care but could leave the individual humiliated and somewhat ostracized. *Learning with others* could motivate, especially if the group was not too numerous. In larger classes, one could feel dispirited. Additionally, S1 emphasized the positive link between his *family life* and learning, unlike S2 who attended the course despite her parents’ disapproval. Critical reflections upon *values common to Taiwan and Poland* further fueled his desire to study, move from the south to the capital, and apply for the Russian department to learn Polish. The whole journey had started when a friendly stranger introduced to him her country (*meeting a person from Poland*). His eager *interest in history*, especially in military operations, provided another stimulation for curiosity and explorations. As a PF learner from an exotic land, he had perhaps gained a special position among his *online acquaintances*, playing *macho* and receiving support. (Noteworthy, among the nine FL learners whom I interviewed this semester in different contexts, this man was the only one who did not repeat the same mantra “In Taiwan, there are not so many opportunities to practice,” but was proactively increasing his chances). S1 was perhaps more eager to study to *eliminate mistakes* than S2 who gave in. A careful *comparison* that revealed practical similarities between the countries was for her a signal to get enrolled. She was afraid of the *unstable situation in the Taiwan Strait*, but not very well aware of the current military threats by Putin’s Russia. She hoped to get a yearly *scholarship* and study in Poland, travel around, and immerse in the target language, preferably with all expenses covered by the government. Then she would learn, or so she thought. Eager to experience the new culture firsthand, she often volunteered in *events* organized by the Polish Office in Taipei. On the other hand, S2 was reluctant to travel to a remote district where another PFL class was offered, in her case for

free.¹³ Unlike S1, she skipped classes, came late, and did not show up to write the final. The *teacher's constant encouragement* was needed to reanimate her interest in learning. Oddly enough, she got plenty of it in class, and yet it was not enough. Had she felt her parents' support, she might have shown more determination.

For the **counterproductive influences**, both of the informants were vulnerable to downward shifts in the *mood*. Not much was being done to overcome the stagnation it brought. While S1 saw learning Polish as a remedy for his mental condition and struggled only occasionally, S2's behavior was characterized by overwhelming *apathy*. The man's responses, although loaded with negative expressions (*pijak, silly, trick, not honorable, or destroy*, to name a few), were overall pro-learning (with a low-key teaching style being the only irritant). Hers were not. She gave multiple *excuses* for not performing up to her own expectations, from throwing away garbage to not taking a bus. Learning was a pain that she tried to avoid, procrastinating and avoiding improvements, much unlike a motivated learner (Liu 2015, p. 1165; Huang 2021, p. 70). Low self-efficacy and perceived inadequacy were strong demotivators (see also Gutiérrez and Narváez 2017, p. 81; Lee & Feng 2017, p. 104; Yilmaz & Sahar 2023, p. 9). Additionally, PFL teaching materials that were not similar to the EFL resources published in Taiwan left her feeling overwhelmed and confused. However, if what holds true for Taiwanese EFL learners can be applied to PFL, her future advancement should come with a growth in autonomy (Liu 2015, p. 1171).

No correlation had been openly declared between the motivation and the *unfavorable image* of a stereotypical Pole (a naive alcoholic) or a Polish language speaker (rather unwealthy), although it might have been an unconscious obstacle blocking S2's progress (see also Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017, p. 465 and Nikitina 2019, p. 71). It could be that these gloomy outlooks were, at least to some extent, balanced by positive impressions gained through direct interpersonal encounters. None of the participants were stopped by the fact that *Poland was not well-known to the Taiwanese*. On the contrary, this was seen as a good opportunity to differentiate themselves. Fluency in English, from their point of view, came with multiple benefits but was somehow forced through the top-down policies. Learning Polish, on the other hand, was a matter of personal choice and for S2, it could be a way to establish her independence from her parents. As proven by Thompson and Vásquez, some individuals are motivated to study a language precisely because it goes against social expectations (anti-ought-to L2 self, in: Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017, p. 465). *Peer competition* could stimulate these two to work, but it could equally well paralyze their efforts. Interestingly, throughout the responses, collaboration was not mentioned as a remedy to counterbalance the idea of in-class rivalry.

¹³ It would take around an hour. Not very unusual for the Taipei/New Taipei/Keelung agglomeration.

To appropriately cater to the needs of local FL learners, a great deal of **knowledge about Taiwan** is needed. Firstly, *collective orientation* is reflected in the students' need to relate to others. For S1, it is his family, and Western Readers might have been surprised by his reference to ancestral worship when he mentions consulting the spirits of his forefathers for permission to marry a Pole. His patriarchal need for a male descendant is shown when he uses "a son" or "a grandson" for "a child", despite his personal preference to have a daughter. Strong bonds with his online friends, skillfully maintained over the years, are another expression of his community-oriented worldview. S2, faced with parental disapproval of her learning PFL, finds some support and understanding among her schoolmates. Her educational choices were often undermined, despite her studying at the most prestigious school in the country. The parents provided her neither with encouragement nor with a role model (Noels et al 2019, p.131). Secondly, both of the participants believed that *Taiwan and Poland had much in common*, which motivated them a lot. For him, it was in the values, especially in the need for freedom (see also: Huang 2021, p. 70). For her, practical similarities mattered more, especially the widely understood security. When thinking of **Taiwanese education**, it may be necessary to *revise our stereotypes* regarding attitudes toward learning. None of these two individuals had successfully taken any in-class test, although both displayed some basic signs of engagement. They came to class (especially S1), took notes, and actively participated. And yet, their exam performance neither met the requirements nor surprised any of the fellow faculty of this prestigious school. The only comment, as mentioned in the introduction, was that "Nowadays, students are not interested in learning." So, what are they interested in? More research is needed to grant insight into this puzzling issue, but it should not be overlooked. For *teaching material design*, a good hint is in the finding that S2 had expressed her preference for books that required *little to no self-reliance*. Understanding this may help to answer Taiwanese students' needs better. On the other hand, instruction on learning strategies should be a part of a FL course. Interestingly, S2 was not the only student whom I knew who wanted to *preview* the materials at home. This might have been related to her need for control and reducing anxiety, but both could be found if she carefully reviewed what had been taught. Furthermore, *proficiency in English* should not be taken for granted (see Chang 2022, p. 122). The interviews revealed problems with articles, numbers, verb forms, and tenses, to name a few. Confusion over parts of speech was to be seen as well. All of these are common among Mandarin-as-L1 learners, thus, a LOTE teacher might find themselves stuck if trying to build on the learner's knowledge of English grammar.

Finally, a handful of **considerations for LOTE educators and other stakeholders** could be drawn based on the findings. The data revealed

a dramatic **lack of knowledge** about Poland, especially among average Taiwanese not involved in academic activities, like in “What is Poland?” This is paired with an **unfavorable image** of alcoholism, mentioned by S1, and a lack of financial perspectives, as in S2’s belief that “There aren’t so many cases when someone speaks Polish and makes a lot of money.” Solid knowledge should be promoted to fill in the gap and counterbalance the existing stereotypes. Set against Dörnyei’s concept of the ideal self (2014, p. 521), such pictures provide rather poor stimulation: Why should I become fluent if that equals to addiction and limited resources? **Food, travel, and gaming** are among the favorite activities of young Taiwanese and might serve as a hook. Initiatives by the Polish Office in Taipei and **events** aiming to promote Poland cannot be overestimated, as they provide an opportunity to interact and explore. The same is true for the **scholarships** offered by our government. They acted as a strong motivator for S2, who generally had fond memories of the summer courses. A challenge occurs when a student comes back to their routine when little connection between daily life and PFL is seen. Perhaps more attention should be paid to this weak spot when the interest in learning is in danger of dropping. **Materials for a daily self-study** would be of use so that, at least, the knowledge once earned could be maintained. Such exercises should be doable and not overwhelming since, once back in Taiwan, “Polish is not the most important thing in one’s life.” Once again, the powerful impact of gaming could be utilized at this point.

As revealed by Huang (2019, p. 586; 2021, p. 69), learning experience served as a key motivator for LOTE in Taiwan, where other practice opportunities were scarce. Thus, the **teacher** can offer an inspiring **role model as an FL learner**, to show both how to study and overcome obstacles. This sort of input will be stimulating, but not for sure followed. To counterbalance difficult emotions, ostentatiously expressed by S1 and in S2 found only after a careful investigation, **positive education** practices were introduced. Non-language majors like S2 might benefit from **learning how to learn**, for, compared to S1 from the Slavic department, she was disadvantaged, which could further increase her motivation, as pointed out by Chang & Lio (2013, p. 206). There is no guarantee, however, that such initiatives would translate into better learning outcomes. This particular class has been enriched with self-learning tips, positive education techniques, as well as instruction in learning strategies.¹⁴ Given that only two people were present, each got plenty of support and attention, and yet, the measurable results were far from satisfying. Finally, more thought should be given to the process of **positioning** the LOTE in the Taiwanese market. As plain to see, the reasons for learning Polish and English vary, so proposing the same objectives might be counterproductive (see also Liu 2022, p. 14).

¹⁴ More on that in the next study under preparation. The insights about the learning strategies applied by the cases also shed light on their motivation.

To summarize, the data analysis revealed that students' perceived/declared motivation for learning Polish was high. And yet, the objective measurable test results were below the passing threshold. My surprise surprised my colleagues. These three elements, taken together, create a very puzzling picture. Part of the problem was in the students' confusion as to the required self-discipline or actual goals. On the quest to complete his education, S1 had staked everything on one card, moved to Taipei, and started from scratch. He saw mastering Polish as a way out of the trap, but perhaps needed to accept more guidance to navigate. It could be that S2 was not ready to face her real feelings, but the sunk costs invested in learning PFL stopped her from finding another object of interest. Both were young and gifted people and working with them so closely allowed me to see their potential, which had yet to be fulfilled.

The small sample is an obvious limitation of the current study, for two individuals are not enough to represent the entire population. However, the very fact that only one person got officially enrolled shows that unless for credit, students in this particular top school might not be eager to learn Polish. This problem deserves more attention, but – given the cross-cultural differences in communication – getting honest and precise insights from different stakeholders is not an easy task, exceeding the scope of this paper. From the teacher's perspective, there is a huge gap between what one believes should be taught and what in actuality will be learned. In universities, tests ought to be offered twice a semester, which reveals the backlogs. (In some other institutions, one may observe a tendency to entirely avoid tests and any form of challenge, so that the enrollment stays high enough to keep going, at the expense of individual measurable progress). In this test-oriented educational system, university students might be fed up with exams, but they still need to be objectively graded.

Regarding the future directions, updates in qualitative research are needed to reveal the actual reasons for learning languages less popular than English, Japanese, or Korean. On the other hand, scholarships abroad may help the young Taiwanese realize how much independent work is necessary for learning a language. This ability has been impaired by the countless commercial EFL resources that come with ready information. It is enough to pay and memorize, or so it seems. When a Polish language course costs no money but requires self-reliance, obstacles and frustration arise.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of the investigation show an array of motivators for interest in Polish. Despite the small sample size, the research seems to capture the

point of the problem currently faced by Taiwanese LOTE education. It reveals a deep cleavage between declared enthusiasm for learning and one's actual achievements, which, paired with an alarmingly low enrollment rate, leaves one puzzled and concerned. My purpose was not to break a taboo or show a lack of loyalty to the school. On the contrary, I believe studies like this can help raise awareness of what adjustments are needed for teaching/learning to be more efficient. Focusing solely on the motivators while ignoring the outcomes would give a nice paper, but not a meaningful one. Hopefully, the students can redefine their priorities and, if learning Polish is still what ranks high, come to terms with the amount of work to be done with patience and resilience. Focus on the proper aspects of learning cannot be overestimated. Mastering a foreign language should not be confused with the shallowness of instant recognition, the exciting vibe of a cultural event, or an exotic traveling experience. No matter how old-fashioned it sounds, polishing one's language skills takes hours of self-study, devotion, and sacrifice. Cooking dumplings and volunteering at a Christmas party is just a refreshing addition. In conclusion, my wish is that these two, as well as the other FL learners they represent, redefine their goals and invest their energy purposefully and efficiently. A more holistic approach to the problem is needed, so that students feel heard and guided, but grow mature enough to fulfill their basic obligations.

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