Soft power of language in social inclusion and exclusion and the unintended research outcomes[3]*

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Abstract

The paper refers to a small fraction of raw data obtained during 50 interviews carried out in Lisbon and in Warsaw in 2017-2018. Through the preliminary interpretative analysis with the use of MAXQDA 2018, a connection between English language and soft power (Nye 2004) was established. 'Soft power' is a political concept, re-introduced in this paper through the novel interpretation of the research data, whilst looking at the English language from a socio-political, critical pedagogy perspective, in order to investigate its implications for social inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, unexpected matrixes of language, gender and power were discovered, embodying Boudon's concept of unintended consequences of social action (1993). The study was conducted with the use of soft system methodology (SSM) and the notion of 'soft' in social sciences was explored. It also introduced SSM to the analysis of social aspects of the English language in public spaces in Poland and Portugal. Moreover, the results of the study confirmed that there is a connection between English language acquisition and the socio-economic positioning of workers in these locations. The study should be treated as singular and with no intention of building a universal theory, but aims to look into language from an original perspective and to share the most interesting quotes from the research participants, to reveal people's own voices and their own words (appropriately coded to maintain anonymity) and to establish direct contact between the interviewees and their audience.

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Introduction

Amongst the most renowned contributors to the issues of language and power one may place Heidegger (1959), Foucault (1972), Halliday (1978), Habermas (1984), Bernstein (1990), Bourdieu (1991) and Fairclough (1995, 2006, 2010, 2015). In this paper one will find the novel idea of connecting the concept of 'soft power' with the influence of the English language on social inclusion and exclusion in two European cities: Warsaw and Lisbon. The term 'soft power' is adopted from political sciences, where it refers to persuasive influence of one political entity on another without military power, but through economic and cultural influence (Nye 2004). It carries a notion of unspoken, indirect and perhaps even hidden, power potentiality. In the paper, soft power is assigned to English, both as a second language and as a native tongue, entangled in societal mechanisms for social inclusion or exclusion. The research took place in Poland and Portugal due to their distinctiveness in terms of exposure to the English language and vast differences in their own national languages' impact in the global scene. Poland suffered from a lack of contact with the English language due to its geopolitical location and the hundred years of partitions that wiped Poland from the map of Europe. This was followed by the Iron Curtain period, until 1989 and the fall of communism. Portugal has had many political and trade alliances with Great Britain since the 1386 Treaty of Windsor. Moreover, Portuguese (in multiple variations) is widely spoken throughout the world; Brazil, Goa, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe and Equatorial Guinea, all former colonies, whilst Polish spoken outside of Poland is limited to a relatively small number of expatriates. Both countries introduced educational policy on English as a second language into their school curricula at a similar time, yet there are some notable differences between the two in terms of language acquisition by the general public and people's attitudes towards it. Of course, one single study, based on an interpretative paradigm, should not be treated as binding, yet the outcome will be of interest to social scientists, in particular to critical theorists, political sociologists and linguists.

In the paper, access or a lack of access to the English language will be analysed at the following levels:

> (a) an expression of symbolic power
> (b) an element of social norms related to cultural, educational and economic factors
> (c) a factor in gendered relations
> (d) a factor in social positioning related to language

This paper is based on a small fraction of a larger study[5], based on the mixed method approach. The data collection procedure comprised of preliminary quantitative questionnaires for purposely selected target groups, followed by critical analysis of visual materials, such as photographs collected during spatial ethnography sessions to draw the language landscapes. Ultimately, the most important part of the study consisted of in-depth expert interviews with gate keepers and purposely targeted informants, who were expected to help with the understanding of their experiences related to the English language. As part of the study, participants were given a choice of language to interact in with the researcher, who was a

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[5] The research program was much wider as it also comprised of quantitative data collection (over 500 questionnaires in Poland and Portugal), policy documents analysis and field work with visual ethnography data. However, these raw materials will not be considered in this paper.

Polish academic. Some interesting language practices were observed confirming that both researcher's ethnicity and the first language of the participants has an impact on language choices by the interviewees. For this particular paper, the only interviews considered were the ones carried out in English, including both the native speakers of English and non-native speakers, who decided to communicate in English. The decision to use only the interviews in English was fully intentional, as people with excellent English language skills may be considered beneficiaries of the global economic system. They may be viewed as global market celebrities, free to work and live where they wish. This was also a part of a conscious effort to demonstrate that English initially taught as a foreign language may become the second language in certain circumstances. In Poland and in Portugal, English is usually taught at school as a foreign language. Nowadays, due to constant immersion in the English language outside of the education system, its position has been steadily shifting from foreign language to second language. Distinction can be made, when one uses it every day and is surrounded by it. This was the case for the corporate employees that work and think in English every day, as companies' operations often dictate the need for an English speaking work environment. Many native Polish or Portuguese raised an issue that they were unable to switch English off in their heads and that it was functioning inside them even outside of work. This is not surprising. Away from work, commerce promotes English adverts and slogans, considered as trendy and omnipresent in public spaces. Immersion continues through the music industry, film industry, internationalized mass media, the use of Internet Technology and due to frequent visits by foreign visitors. Mixed language marriages often use English at home as a primary communication tool, even if it is not the first language for either of the couple. Being surrounded by the English language certainly shifts the status of English from a foreign language (FL) to a second language (L2). This is especially true for many people living and working in Warsaw and in Lisbon. There is a notion coherent with the issue of inclusion and exclusion that this language shift from FL to L2 does not happen to everybody, but only to certain 'privileged' social strata. However, some researchers of the English language in the EU, like Modiano (2009), claim that in Europe, English has already gained the status of second language (L2), as declared by 38% of the EU population (European Commission 2012: 19).

For this paper, the results of interviews with native speakers of English and people for whom English was the self-identified second language (L2) and who chose to participate in the interview in English, were used. This was done to capture similarities and achieve data saturation in a one, purposely selected social group, that fits the criteria of English language beneficiary and therefore proponent. The voices of the participants are quoted in their original spoken form, as recorded during the interview. No filters or adjustments were applied, as such corrections would dishonour the diversity of spoken Englishes and would be unethical and disempowering towards the participants who claimed fluency. It is also far more interesting to share the raw material in order to note the polymorphism in the use of English by non-native speakers. The areas highlighted (in bold) in the quotes should aid quick identification of the MAXQDA codes used later in the paper to reveal the issues of power.

The mixed method approach used in the study, based on Soft System Methodology (SSM), which is expanded on later in this paper, consisted of multiple, deep sampling procedures carried out in Warsaw and Lisbon in 2017/2018. The average interview time was 30-40 minutes (the longest took an hour and 40 minutes and the shortest only 10 minutes). The interviewees were all adults and able to give informed consent to take part. Amongst them were teachers of English, interpreters, translators, language policy makers, lecturers at Universities, and both international and local company employees at various levels, operating from Lisbon or Warsaw. The group was of mixed nationality, with the majority Polish or

Portuguese. There was a high proportion of native speakers from the UK and US, but also other nationals from France, Belgium, Holland, Italy and Spain. From those who responded to a call for volunteers, over 50 interlocutors were purposely selected, both male and female, age (23-58). Interviews were coded with F for female and M for male with a number. MAXQDA 2018 software was used for preliminary data analysis. MAXQDA is an effective tool of language and discourse analysis, more ecological and faster than traditional strategies. It is computer software for qualitative research analysis that replaces the pen and paper method. It helps to identify and code large quantities of text, to create multi-level code orders and code trees and to visualize dominant and repeated patterns, in order to reach saturation of confirming statements. It also enables the researcher to find unusual and a-typical sentences and to incorporate them in the 'data mining' procedure. The process of coding may be either based on deduction (top-down logic) or induction (bottom-up). In this particular study it is based on the induction model, starting with smaller, individualized codes, which are later grouped into larger categories. It is also possible to quantify the codes and the coded areas, however this was not within the scope of this paper. The interviews were unstructured and therefore had no fixed series of questions. This might be a reason why during the second phase of interviews, it became apparent that the lens of enquiry was unwillingly shifting towards a language, gender and power matrix. This may be seen as a field research exemplification of Boudon's concept (1993) of the unintended consequences of social action. The unintended consequences emerged from repeated patterns of the interviewees embedding language issues into the structure of their intimate relationships. These occurred spontaneously in the participants' narratives about the impact of the English language on their lives and is the main contribution presented in this paper.

1. The notion of soft power

The notion of 'soft' may be found in 'soft boundaries' by Odrowaz-Coates (2015), whilst the idea concerning symbolic power is the ongoing theme across the book recently co-edited by Odrowaz-Coates & Goswami (2017): *Symbolic violence in socio-educational contexts. A post-colonial critique.* Both may be linked to a soft approach to social phenomenon in social sciences. When looking into inclusion and exclusion in an English language context, we may consider that:

> "[…] language is both a site of and a stake in class struggle…" (Fairclough 2015: 66).

Although the above claim refers to language in general, in this case it is applicable to knowledge of English. Soft Power (Nye, 2004) is a theoretical concept established to study the influence of political entities on one another. This political concept may be applicable in the analysis of language and power, where English language is perceived as a medium of soft power. Soft Power may be connected to social norms and Bourdieu's power to judge (1991). Soft power may also be a tool of social distinction as you may observe in the following interview quotes.

Direct expressions of power may be found in this selection of claims:

"… if somebody does not speak English and goes to an English speaking country and would have to speak the language that is common in that country. Definitely that would create **power relationship⁶.**"[F25]

"**Speaking language well does empower people** yes. My parents don't speak other languages."[M42]

"…**native speakers of English have a little advantage** over the indigenous native speakers but only a little - in the past it was a lot more." [F39]

"If you had no good lessons of English let's say you already make a **selection** of those who will learn English and it will be those who have **more economic power**"[F25]

"As for the world, I can not say very much about English language domination, but as for Europe it is a combination of things: post war presence of American troops in different countries. **Deployment of another force in different countries as post war set up.** Aviation as well which has picked up **big time and trade and business between the countries would not afford other language.** People were also moving for a long time where it is easier and cheaper to travel and also you can like….. work travel. So for all these reasons… **we have one single language. And English just won the competition….**Their **culture is quite easy – easy to grab, so because it is not too sophisticated and it sounds cool** – young people – for once – we liked very much whatever would come from America. Even from the UK" [M38].

Indirect expressions of power may be observed in the following quotes:

"I think it is clear that **being a native English speaker gave me better opportunities here in the office** because we are a company that speaks English exclusively and I notice it - it helps. It helped me with getting a job in the office, but now I am also involved in recruiting people for various positions and **those that have better command of English have a definite advantage** whether this is right or not I try to look beyond them but it just helps them express their ideas more clearly…."[M36]

"**Well Language influences the culture**… children will listen to movies which are not dubbed into Portuguese."[F39]

"In my opinion the **USA is so powerful…. instead of invading countries with weapons they invade countries with their own culture**. We are all watching US series we are all watching US movies, we know about US politics, why? … when you go to New York city or to LA as a foreigner Oh Wow it is just like in the movie. **So they are already into your brain**, so it is already kind of culture slightly disturbed." [M42]

"Since I work for a company where I need to speak English from 7 am till 4pm I do not take notice of English signs and posters. **It is like being an immigrant inside my own country**." [F41]

"We have a department called Owner Services and they are a sophisticated call centre, and when we recruit we want them to have a mother language as Russian, as Polish, as German… because **the owners (customers) will want to be spoken to in their own language**."[F34]

"Most people here **communicate in English, so all of the culture and what it brings come here also**. Films are not dubbed but with subscription, so even **small babies like 2 understand English from children stories**." [F26]

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⁶ bold used to highlight areas related to power

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"Majority of **English speakers expect that it is us who will accommodate**… It is **the world language** it is."[M27]

"**I only notice the importance of English here at work.** I cannot have enough money, when I have children, to pay for them to go to a language school… My friend's children go to school - normal school Portuguese one and they speak better English already than me."[F45]

"…..recently in the last 20 years or so there has been a huge uptake in masters, undergraduate, PhD's ….Which has led to this English being a kind of **scientific language** or so I think it is **generational** and I think that because Portugal had a profile that was not that. There, the workforce was not extremely well educated for a long period of time, so now they are becoming able to explore that..."[M44]

"To be able to speak English is advantageous if you are Portuguese, because then you can get a job elsewhere, there is not many countries that speak Portuguese….But if you speak English you will probably end up in England. This is what I usually see. Here in Lisbon even if you speak Portuguese they reply in English. Generally **I have an expectation here that if I speak English they will reply in English**…" [M37]

"**I feel excluded all the time.** My Portuguese is not good enough to … well I can follow most of the dinner table conversation but if everyone is Portuguese and they are speaking Portuguese **I am left out.** I can struggle trying to keep up but **it is a struggle.**" [M43]

"Since I was little I was consuming American movies, American series with subtitles. And it was all in English with the American customs hmmm so even with my **kids they see the American culture so it kind of comes to them and they want to imitate replicate** of what they see on the movies. **Halloween** is a good example…most **kids they like better American music** rather than Portuguese music. They also see how they behave and they follow the movie's pattern not the Portuguese pattern. Like the best schools are in America. I think its more like **America is still an American dream** so everything you only see on the movies you think oh my God, America is so great." [F40]

"**Language can be a tool of power because in this company if you speak better English you get more opportunities to get promoted.** Like a director or a manager whose English is weak – people are not gonna see that person as competent as much as if that person spoke fluent in English. But it can also be a **barrier if people speak in front of you in another language you can not understand, it can be a real barrier.** …Because, although I might be quite fluent in English **sometimes I do not understand the jokes** or the expressions or if they speak too fast and I get a little bit distracted I can easily switch off… I think that you can control your emotions better … Portuguese are very aggressive in the way they express themselves and they speak very straight forward and I think that **working in English helped me control a little bit my emotions**. I am not as aggressive when I speak in English."[F40]

The majority of people who work as interpreters or translators, together with some of the English language teachers and lecturers, considered English to be solely a tool of communication, whilst people representing wider social circles identified its soft power impact.

"Native English speakers move to other countries … they form a pack; because they cannot absorb the local language. We are used to reverting to English… **Here we are – a Polish woman and a Portuguese man talking in English. As a tool. As a communication tool.** The English, because they do not have the second communication tool - they are **victims of their own power**." [M31]

Moreover, two male interviewees described language as a powerful tool and their words will conclude this selection of quotes:

> "I think you could link language to power, you could not say anything else – because generally **people who rise to power are generally great communicators.** …"[M37].

> "…would I class language a soft power? NO!!! **It is hard power!**
> It is a hard power it is a very powerful tool.
> If we think that language is the **very basis of a culture** and you get identified as a culture as a nation (by your language) – you get identified not only by your history or your geography, your house where it is, but also by your language…. So if you do not have a tool you are not as efficient as a communicator within that society, within that environment, **so for the English people to be able to transform their own language into an international business and diplomacy tool, which is a communication tool it's a very, very hard power I wouldn't call it soft power**… [M31]

2. Soft power of language

> "I would pay on a monthly basis to have my work in Portuguese. Because I think it is a natural thing when you explain the things to your bosses or to your peers if you are using your own language it makes things become much, much easier."[M27]

The above quote shows that some Portuguese people do not willingly embrace the idea of working in English, they simply have to adapt and cope with it, if they wish to be employed by international players. It is an expression of power that international companies exercise over local people, who get rewarded by competitive pay packages. The hierarchy attached to language is apparent here:

> "In Portugal it depends on the person how good their English is, but all know English at least on the communicative level. **Starting with people at the reception that are barely communicative up to very fluent."** [F26]

> "**Migrants from ex colonies** – coming for opportunities – mainly from ex colonies – it slightly concerns me that **they are in these much less paid jobs. Portuguese is their second language** and **maybe knowing English – not directly would have some positive effect on their opportunities."**[M31]

> "Whilst at work as an admin clerk in one of the better Universities, **I can communicate in English with everyone apart from cleaning staff, canteen staff and the security man at the entrance** to the car park." [F47]

> "**Knowing English very well gives you an advantage in aviation because it is the official language of aviation. English is undoubtedly the language of commerce and language of business. And diplomacy of course - it gives you an edge**". [M31]

> ""I think in Portugal, coming to an interview, the first question they ask here is 'do you speak English'. And that is already **something that can block you from coming to this good company to work for."**[F25]

The ability to speak English creates a soft hierarchy amongst potential employees, based on the level of knowledge of the language. A concept of 'soft hierarchy' (Falicov, 1998, 10.1111/j.1752-0606.1998.tb01072.x; Graham, 2014,

doi.org/10.1080/23269995.2014.895931) may be applied to the 'ordering' of languages. Interviewees in Warsaw and Lisbon felt that the English language has its momentum and that it is the most important language in the world. Some felt that it may be a temporary phenomenon, most often referring to the potentiality of Chinese or Spanish, yet others suggested that it would be impossible to replace English with a new 'common' language.

> "I think this rise of English language is due to power of USA. You have this giant that speaks English and then you have France which is a small player and then you have the UK which is pretty big and then you have Germany, well Germany can be pretty strong but nobody speaks German just Germany…So I guess **if you look at the international global map you see strong languages like English** … I cannot imagine everybody to speak Chinese in the EU…" [F40]

> "I understand now how **things are spreading of a culture by sort of insipid means and people do not notice it is happening,** but it is happening and kind of **creeping in,** but over a period of time maybe that language will spread even more. But then it is confronted with national identity and **people want to keep their identity, don't they**?"[M28]

Moreover, parents and prospective parents took it for granted that their children must speak reasonably good English and that knowledge of English will have an impact on their future and the opportunities they may have. When asked, if they had a choice to send their children to an English speaking school, 40 out of 50 respondents were convinced that such choice would give the children advantages that they would not get in a native language school. Additionally, all British respondents said they would not send their children to a local (non-English) school. They took it for granted that the children must attend a school where tuition is in English. In fact, some of them chose to move to a foreign country to benefit from the opportunity of accessing private education for their children in British, American and International schools.

> "I do not have much choice here in Portugal because international school is really, really expensive. So I actually have 2 daughters and they attended private school, but a Portuguese school. **Of course they learn English also since they were very little.** And they **both attend English council for additional English lessons.** I have two friends that attend St Julians and their Portuguese was kind of weak. So I think that **knowing English is a plus, but if you become weak in your mother tongue that is not good either**."[F40]

> "**I would not really like sending him to a Portuguese school, because of the language barrier for us**….. He is 6. He is embarrassed to speak Portuguese in front us, but **he can understand more than we think. Maybe it empowers him a bit**…"[M28]

When asked to identify the reasons for popularity of the English language in the world, respondents repeatedly chose the following reasons that can be categorized into two groups:

- historic reasons connected to colonization (with reference to imperial powers)
- globalization (with reference to the US as a global economic power, cinematography power, pop culture power, digitalization power and the naming of technological innovations with English words).

English was considered a language of commerce, technology, the aviation industry, tourism services, international politics and science. This gave it the status of a superior language. Without a good knowledge of English, participation in the above areas of life was considered

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by the respondents to be barely possible. The majority of the native English speakers linked knowledge of the English language at a native level to their own success in life, particularly their professional opportunities. They often felt that they had an advantage over local people that went beyond linguistic skills. Moreover, whilst it would be difficult to get by in English speaking countries without any knowledge of the native tongue, it was possible for the English native speakers to make a successful career without even a minimal knowledge of the local language. All interviewees felt that knowledge of other languages is an added value for the quality of life and life opportunities. At the same time, the majority of the native people of Poland and Portugal who were surveyed, felt that their school system does not teach English well enough and that extra private tuition is necessary to be at the entry level for the labour market. This leads to visible societal inequality. Such inequality was highlighted when confronted with the group of participants in this study. Local people who were either immersed in an English speaking environment or were taught English in private schools at very early age, were very comfortable in responding promptly and eloquently, very confident and keen to talk. They were happy to work in an English speaking environment and very positive about the popularity of the English language. Those who did not have such opportunities in life, appeared to be more stressed in the interview situation, often struggled and expressed irritation and unhappiness that they need to work in a foreign language (English), even when this was linked to a more generous salary, social prestige and work benefits. Social divisions were expressed:

> "Knowing English **opens and wideness the possibilities** and gives me an **advantage** over the people who do not know it. Makes the world bigger. This is what I always tell my daughter it is: "with English you can go anywhere". "You can make yourself understood – you can go anywhere in the world". [F25]

Some people openly envied those who could afford to send their children to English speaking schools and made sacrifices to invest in learning English for their own children. It was interesting that if they could have afforded it, they would have also chosen to send their children to English speaking schools.

> "…Being bilingual is a great gift that you can give to our children. You must keep going with it. It will serve them well." [M43]

Some native speakers of English expressed regret that they do not speak the local language, or do not have time to learn it, or speak it well. Many made no extra effort to change the situation and had an overwhelming expectation that local people would speak English with them or that small groups of locals would switch into English, so that they would always be included. Furthermore, most native English speakers admitted that they tend to spend most of their time with other expats and either make no effort to integrate with locals, or they feel that it is impossible to integrate with locals, as they view them as reserved and only superficially welcoming. This is another expression of language as tool of social inclusion or exclusion.

> "**I socialize predominantly with expats**. I have some Portuguese friends but mostly expat friends…It is because of **in common culture** we have… like we are **social** that kind of thing **rather than the language**…." [M36]

> "**She made some Portuguese friends … through the school – so – again they all speak beautiful English …snobby and a higher class** and even their kids since they have been to St Julian's they all speak fluent English, they learn it from 6,7,8 old…" [M37]

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> "… **I see with a bit of sadness, people giving away one of their most treasured cultural marks, which is their language** and **giving in so easily to English and to mixing English speech** and not making the effort, **not seeing how fragile a culture can be** …."[M31]

3. Language-based soft system

The concept of a soft system, first developed by Checkland (1981), is based on the premise that people differ in how they see and interpret reality, which reflects the true diversified nature of social systems. In soft systems, distinctiveness is not treated as a statistical error or data aberration, but as a norm. This is particularly relevant when looking into motivations of people to learn English or to teach it to their children and their interpretation of why they choose to do so. Therefore soft system analysis must be focused more on an interpretative level and on soft data, emotions, casual interactions, the meaning and the process of sense-making (c.f. Clegg & Walsh 1998). A notion of a soft language based hierarchy was observed amongst interviewees, who assigned value to knowledge of English and shared the opinion that it is linked to class and to social environment. They felt it may be a tool of distinction. In fact, unknowingly they were making such distinctions themselves very often. Exclusion was observed in claims such as

> "…it makes a difference as well **when the natives revert to their native language, so that is like using a secret code**". [M31]

The majority of research participants took knowledge of English for granted. In this study it was also apparent that participants from more wealthy social circles spoke better English than their less wealthy counterparts, despite their accomplished educational level. When thinking about symbolic power, Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' (Burchel et al. 1991) may also enrich the picture of hidden structures of class relations, seeing them as the reflection of overwhelming political and ideological social influence (Odrowaz-Coates 2018).

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> "I am quite **surprised by how much effort people are putting in to take their children to school to get them to get to know a really good level of English**… **Parents have high motivation**." [M1]

> "English became global due to choices taken by people and English language efficiency." [F 20]

> "**In the corporate world we are cut out … from the Portuguese culture. Because we always speak English** even with all the Portuguese guys here, we have to speak English. That is why I am learning Portuguese, not so good as for example **my wife, who does not speak English for example and she is learning Portuguese more. Because she has to**. She is out and about and she had to pick up a language, so she is picking up Portuguese much better that I do…I am cut out speaking English all day. Wherever I go talk to anybody they switch into English as well…you don't meet/need the Portuguese culture." [M42]

'Governmentality' goes hand in hand with our enforced human rationality. Michele Foucault asks us "as rational beings, fortunately **committed to practicing a rationality** …" (1982a, 19) about the reasons we use to justify our choices of historic consequences, limitations and dangers. The majority of respondents, in spite of their country of origin and social standing, took conscious decisions about their children's linguistic education, including the choice of second language, they also invested in their own English language development, perceived as a necessary skill to have for a 'successful career'.

4. Soft system methodology

Due to fluidity and the incidental nature of the phenomenon presented in this paper, the choice of research methodology has a soft and interpretative nature. The method for the investigation of soft systems has its own category, known as 'Soft Systems Methodology' or 'SSM', which embraces the action research paradigm and is particularly relevant to multifaceted, often chaotic problems and environments (c.f. Checkland & Scholes, 1990). Furthermore, Checkland (2011) established that SSM should be used as a learning tool, characteristic of action research, when challenging resolutions to complex problems are implemented, amended and checked, using a feedback loop during real life events. Steinfort (2014) urges researchers to maintain the equilibrium between the study and problem solving within the research situation, characteristic of action research intervention. Action research aims to capture multilayered, intersectional social realms (c.f. Burns 2010, Kemis et al. 2014, McNiff 2013). This often happens through engagement in everyday life activities of the researched, observing, posing questions and taking field notes, which is similar to ethnographic research (c.f. Hammersley 2006). However, ethnographers tend to stray from intentional interruption and making a deliberate impact on research participants, whilst action research allows for such a strategy, developing a learning loop, an opportunity for change and for reflection about the interactions and their meaning, for both the researcher and the research (c.f. Talandis & Stout 2015). Action research may also be defined as an intentional, result-centred spiral process of reflexive study that requires a cycle of systematic data collection and data based action, usually followed by a redefinition of the initial issue (c.f. Kemmis & McTaggart 1988). In their later work, Kemmis & McTaggart (1990) emphasized the reduction in distance between the researcher and the researched, leading to a more participatory model of study, where the researched are included in the process of study, data collection, data interpretation and the overall sense-making (cf. Koshy, Koshy, & Waterman, 2011). Action research is naturally a fieldwork (c.f. Emerson 1981) and it covers the paradigm used in this project.

4. Language , gender and power - unintended discoveries

> "English? It is like a super skill for the future because we are pushed to the corner of Europe due to geographic conditions….people who are native and they are better at a certain level in English - their life is easier… to get in touch with the upper management and to pass their ideas …And **the same thing happens with women. I know women here who are native or they spent a long time in English schools and yes they relate differently with the upper management.**"[M27]

One may ask why did this male Portuguese respondent focus on women without being prompted? Before the answer is found, a theoretical background must be explored. Power distribution in families became an object of scientific enquiry in the late 1950's, when French and Raven (1959) studied family power from a micro-perspective, looking into legitimate power (based on ideology), informational power (linked to the level of education and access to information), referential power (based on positive emotions), coercive power (linked to physical or psychological influence or violence), expert power (related to education and expert knowledge) and reward power (based on financial, emotional, sexual or other form of incentive offered for conforming with one's wishes). Blood and Wolfe (1960) used a macro-perspective on relative resources that couples could contribute to their family. Becker's economic approach to power in the family (1965, 1973, 1975), triggered enquiries into power distribution through consumer decision making. Power was also studied through the lens of

role theory, parental duty and Hochschild's concept of the second shift (1989). The division of labour at home may be of interest. Although it has already been well explored, we will link it with another political concept of power and interdependence introduced by Koehane & Nye (1989) in relation to international politics. Expressions of symbolic violence were explored in the social order replicated in family structure, by Kleinman (2000) and to a degree, originated from Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power (1991). In terms of family, symbolic violence is associated with invisible means of gendered domination through stereotyping, stigmatizing and gender roles (Montesanti & Thurston 2015). 'Power', expressed in direct gendered violence per se (Goswami 2017) or the secondary expression of symbolic violence (Kamalini 2017) is not the one explored here. Gendered power relations were often examined against social status (Hochschild 2013), level of education (Oropesa 1997), monetary power (Blumstein &Schwartz 1983) and all of these factors are reflected in Blood and Wolfe's (1960) study of middle class marriages. Politics of race were also studied (bell hooks 1990 & Bent-Goodley 2009). Okin's (1989) concept of one-sided exploitative relationship, which through marriage, reduces female agency and prosperity on the labour market, reflected a feminist approach to marital power relations. None of the above studies however, refer to the knowledge of language. In this study it became apparent that better knowledge of language, either English or the local language, gave a person an advantage in many areas of professional life but also in their intimate relationships.

"I feel that if you are a woman you cannot be a specialist. Because **being a specialist is reserved for males** because they are the ones with knowledge and you just sit there and look beautiful. **It can also be noticed in language sphere.** … **the woman is moved a little bit to a side.** And this is **regardless of what language the conversation runs and who speaks it better, it is the same with the withdrawal of a woman** from the centre of conversation... This transfers also to work… Categorization male-female with female categorized lower."[F26]

"She (wife) was in a f**antastic job thanks to her excellent English**…**She could work at high level and earn very good money although she did not have higher education.**" [M 1]

"When we first got here the company provided us … with the language lessons. Which my wife took instead of me … which is only fair because as far as I am concerned it is only fair that she can talk or at least understand the language because she is not in the office environment, but **she is out and about with the locals which is more important to know the language to when you work in an English speaking office.**" [M37]

"**It empowers me that I can speak better English**, we are sometimes arguing about what has been said in a TV cartoon and **I am right and it empowers me. I can prove to him I am an expert in English.** I am the one who knows English well he just knows little things. He laughed about it…but **it makes him feel a little bit embarrassed sometimes.**" [F41]

"**We always strive to mix with locals,** that the only thing we try to do since we arrived…**we always failed** because the **Portuguese people they are extremely closed.** They are very kind with you...They talk to you they give you direction if you ask for … but to have one invite you to like go out or even worse to have dinner in their own home … you need to be like family here…I have been told it takes years. **My wife feels cut out** of course…" [M42]

"… **when you have one person (in family) dealing with the school .. one person may feel inferior and the other feel superior but then at the same time** – why can you not learn the language and I have to do it all by myself and have to do all of

these things? We are talking now about school but it can be the doctors. If I had to go to the doctors living abroad as I did… I would be terrified." [F25]

"It took me some time to adjust from Brazilian Portuguese to continental Portuguese in fact **my wife and I would –she is native Brazilian – we would fight as to who was to answer the phone at home.** Because it was most likely a Portuguese person calling and neither of us was understanding what they were saying….**We socialize mainly with expats but not necessarily with expats from my own home country**… expats who form the majority of our social circle.
We do not have any insecurity about speaking Portuguese any longer, continental Portuguese…."[M44]

"…I like this. **She needs to ask me to call to make her hair appointment or nails or beauty so I know how much she is spending and all this. I like to have control a little** …" [M46]

"**I am married to a Portuguese person that is why I am here in the first place….**
My kids went to Portuguese schools my family here and my wife are Portuguese, all the in-laws and I do not live there in 'linea' I live here in Lisbon, so I am Portuguese. I am not part of the expat community. **I am the expat but I am not part of the expat community ever at all.**" [M43]

"**Being in this international company as a woman sadly it does not give me more opportunities for promotion than in a Portuguese company.** Especially in the market that we are working it is **still a male market.** … 90 percent of pilots are men. Of course we have some cabin crew but **they are not the same level** as pilots. I worked for a consultancy American company and I felt I had more equal opportunities than I have here - I do not know if that is because I am a woman or because I am not a pilot, but **I still feel that men here are more in higher position.**"[F40]

"I sometimes dream in English and even when I am with my friends I do not pretend **it is hard for me to find a word in Portuguese, because my day is all about talking and writing in English**…. my husband turns to me and says: "**please you sound like you are a little bit cocky because of speaking in English so people may get it the wrong way**". But it is not. It is natural for me this way and sometimes when **I am thinking I think even to myself sometimes in English. My husband also speaks English and French – French better than me but English I speak better.** … we sometimes speak English in front of kids so that they do not hear that your mother told me that and I did not like it… family stuff … Things that we would not want them to understand."[F32]

"**For women (in Lisbon companies) having great command of English can give them better standing.**"[F30]

"**Knowing English better than my partner gives me an advantage in this sense that I can use my knowledge to sometimes tease him or confuse him with grammar. I can compete economically with him, he earns much more than me but if I can challenge him grammatically it gives me some level of satisfaction. I think that both of us knowing English are a kind of global stakeholders we can find work anywhere in the world – and live anywhere.**" [F26]

"**My wife did not feel the advantage of being a native speaker of Portuguese, because we made a conscious decision at home to speak English at home for the benefit of our 3 children….**"[M43]

The above statements obtained from research participants show that when they reflect on the impact of English on their personal life, they indicate that knowledge of languages has an impact on power relations in families and on gendered situations that occur in everyday life.

Concluding discussion

The majority of research participants were strongly convinced about the importance of knowing the English language and aware of its influence on everyday life, including both personal and career related opportunities. They gave a number of examples where they utilize or observe the use of English, in Warsaw and in Lisbon, on a daily basis. The answers indicated that English is omnipresent in their social environment and surroundings. Language landscape analysis of the city centre, indicated that there are more written English words and slogans in Warsaw than in the Lisbon area. What is more, it was associated with 'cool', 'trendy' and 'better quality' by the interviewees, if English language was used in written advertisements. The respondents chosen for this paper expressed similar experiences of the influence of English on their lives and their opportunities. Due to the nature of their work and social environment, participants who chose to give the interview in English, were immersed in the English language throughout their daily routines. Non-native speakers of English, considered in this paper, declared that English was their second, not their foreign language. It may be a shared experience for many other professionals operating in Poland and Portugal, creating a 'language shift' or a linguistic turn (c.f. Rorty 1991). This is coherent with Modiano's (2009) claim that English has indeed become the second language in Europe. Based on the research findings, one may speculate that classifying English as a second or as a foreign language may be a source of social division and that a lack of English language skills is a growing issue in social exclusion from informed and full participation in social life. This is especially accurate in relation to well paid positions and full use of internet technology. On the other hand, the power of the English language to gain a leading position in European education and the labour market, confirms that the term 'soft power' may be used in relation to language. The notion of shared experiences may be linked to the concept of *imagined communities* symbolically bonded, due to common language and identity (Seilhamer 2017). The notion of imagined communities may also be observed in this study. Imagined communities built on fluency in English, have the potential to create a super-national group identity, linked to language and social class.

It is interesting that participants related their personal experiences at work and at home, with their gender. They often talked about gendered experiences. It was established that the soft influence of English could be a source of additional power in personal relations and the negotiation of self-positioning. This was true for both private and formal relations. Perhaps, the cultural influence of English language on the perceived roles and rights of women, affected greater awareness of gender egalitarianism and provided a notion of empowerment. In the corporate world, an English speaking environment decreased the power distance between employees capable of communicating in English. People with better English language skills felt more empowered to act, to be heard and to communicate directly with the upper management. Fluency could be viewed as a language-based power advantage for native speakers of English operating in Poland and Portugal. Women in the research group claimed to feel 'stronger' as a person and as a professional, due to their English language skills. They often referred to having more freedom of choice and that this came with language proficiency. Moreover, it was only men who declared that they feel disadvantaged when competing against people more fluent in English or with native speakers. It was also the men who identified that their wives had better work opportunities thanks to English language fluency (especially in Poland) and who complained that use of English helps women more than men to shorten power distance towards their superiors (Portugal). Men were also more critical about the influence of 'other cultures' on their 'home culture' due to the popularity of

English and the cultural norms brought in from abroad through the language. This is of course another expression of soft power.

In summary, in the voices of respondents based in Warsaw and in Lisbon, one may find expressions of socially sanctioned self-positioning related to soft power of language, the cultural norms and their symbolic representations (Harré, 2012, Harré & van Langenhove 1999). This goes beyond perceiving English language as a tool of communication. The expressions of symbolic power of language were noticeable as well as a connection to social norms related to cultural, educational and economic factors. Moreover, the unintended gendered discourses linked English language not only to soft power, but also to gendered power matrixes in relationships. The respondents were often reasonably aware of the cultural repercussions of taking on English as a second language, but at the same time accepted it as a global language and highlighted its significance for the future of their children and for socio-economic inclusion. It must be highlighted that the initial investigation, presented in this paper, is just a harbinger for the upcoming book, which contains more robust and holistic analysis of the issues connected to prevalence of English language in Europe.

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