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# Linguistic and communication education at Polish lessons during the period of cultural change Musings on the curriculum

Starting with the assumption that “an educator always operates within a cultural context, while new tendencies impact education, especially humanistic education,”<sup>1</sup> I would like to discuss in this article the major challenges posed by the 21<sup>st</sup> century for linguistic and communication education in terms of the Polish language as the mother tongue. I assume that these challenges are the consequences of the changes happening in today’s world, e.g.: globalisation, commercialisation, multimediality, the computer science and information revolution, the community of the Web, image culture, popular culture, and the marginalisation of the values of the humanities and turning to a pragmatic approach to life. I also believe that a Polish teacher should take responsibility for the linguistic development of the new generation, as socialisation cannot replace education, and linguistic education must be opened to three perspectives: to the past (to shape a “common” language, thus ensuring the survival of an integral inter-generational identity and the *bene dicendi* universal principles), to the present (the identified modern linguistics and communication, both in terms of its positive and negative aspects), and to the future (even though it remains unknown). Furthermore, I see the main goals of linguistic education in terms of a mother tongue, resulting from dynamic transformations in all areas of

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1 K. Ożóg, “Współczesne problemy kształcenia humanistycznego – czy zmierzch kultury pisma?”, in: *Kształcenie językowe w dobie kultury masowej polisensorycznej*, U. Kopeć, Z. Sibigi (eds.), Wydawnictwo URZ, Rzeszów 2010, p. 11. [Unless indicated otherwise, English versions of quotations were translated from Polish]

life, such as the shaping of the desired attitudes and the system of values around the language and communication,<sup>2</sup> and satisfying the linguistic and communicational needs of pupils aimed both at cultural transmission (enculturation) and the demands of the modern world.<sup>3</sup>

Further in the article I shall focus on defining (though still in rather general terms) the contents of linguistic education within the second goal, using as the starting point the analysis of the dynamics of the changes happening in the external cultural and communication context in reference to school. Therefore, I will concentrate on the linguistic and communicational needs of pupils resulting from, on the one hand, the transformations of traditional conventions of linguistic and communicational behaviour, including the spreading of counter-models of communication, and, on the other, the formation of new linguistic and communicational attitudes adjusted to the needs of the new communication.

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From the moment they are born modern humans live in the world of the media, which has become for them the natural private and professional environment of communication. Many social contacts are today mediated through the media, and according to cultural scholars one could talk about the formation of a mediatised society.<sup>4</sup>

The media influence language and communicational conventions. They influence (through socialisation) the formation of linguistic and communication competences.<sup>5</sup> The typical qualities of media texts include non-linearity, fragmentariness, collage-like elliptical and abbreviated content and form, interactivity and strong presence of dialogues, and multicode simultaneity (code synergy). Apart from adaptations of traditional genres, new genre models of texts emerge, which

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2 A question arises which values and attitudes should be considered desirable in the new cultural and communicational reality.

3 In the case of the latter it is necessary to specify a model which could be used to identify the needs. One outcome of the fulfilment of the goal should be the formation (both intentional and spontaneous) of linguistic awareness (or knowledge on language and communication/linguistic and communication knowledge).

4 T. Goban-Klas, *Cywilizacja medialna*, WSiP, Warsaw 2005, p. 43.

5 According to Halina Zgótkowa and Tadeusz Zgótko, the Polish language of the media has a twofold impact on everyday communication. On the one hand, it consists of imitation, i.e. conscious use of the Polish language as it is used by persons seen in the media, which is considered as a model worth following, and, on the other, of the so-called traces, i.e. spontaneous involuntary transfer of elements of the Polish of the media to everyday communication (H. and T. Zgótko, "Polszczyzna mediów w komunikacji codziennej – ślady i naśladownictwo", in: *Język w mediach masowych*, J. Bralczyk, K. Mosiotek-Kłosińska (eds.), *Upowszechnianie Nauki – Oświata „UN-O”*, Warsaw 2000, pp. 51–59).

function within the media communication space, and new text forms (e.g. hyper-text). The change has also effected communicational systems and the roles of senders and recipients, new graphic habits have emerged (script and language become visualised), and politeness conventions have evolved.<sup>6</sup>

Contemporary digital media are of particular importance for people. According to Eugeniusz Wilk, communication in the digital world requires a new communicational competence, only a small fragment of which is linguistic competence in its traditional understanding:<sup>7</sup> electronic media “appeal [...] rather to the holistically understood perceptive abilities than only to linguistic competences. Therefore, we are dealing with a new kind of communication, which requires somewhat different receptive abilities.”<sup>8</sup> Wilk referred to the new form of communicational competence as type II tele-literacy. It enables non-linear and interactive reception and (co)creation of open text, with a distorted hierarchic organisation, and a considerable degree of freedom.<sup>9</sup>

The communicational competence necessary to function in digital media is not inferior to the competence specific for traditional forms of communication. It is simply different. It should not be perceived in terms of a decline but rather as a challenge for linguistic education, which has to prepare pupils for communicating in the modern world: “Today, we need to create open systems focussed on the future, i.e. on children, of whose skills we are now the least aware, but for whom we must ensure access to various opportunities.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, a linguistic curriculum should include “mediatised” sender and recipient communication skills – we should not only subject them to a cognitive consideration, but also to enhance

6 U. Żydek-Bednarczuk, “Dyskurs medialny”, in: *Przewodnik po stylistyce polskiej. Style współczesnej polszczyzny*, E. Malinowska, J. Nocoń, U. Żydek-Bednarczuk (eds.), Universitas, Krakow 2013, pp. 186, 191. According to Małgorzata Marcjanik, in today’s world one is not faced with a revolution in terms of linguistic etiquette, but rather with an evolution related to cultural and social processes: democratisation, as a result of which etiquette forms are being simplified (the youngest generation uses extremely simplified etiquette acts which contain the minimum amount of politeness); globalisation, which entails the imitation of Western cultural models (etiquette borrowings from English enriching teenager slang); computerisation, resulting in the mechanisation of politeness-related behaviour in order to achieve an immediate state of things (“focus on quick and efficient achievement of politeness-related communication goals, without considering the personal characteristics of a recipient, as well as without revealing the characteristics of the sender”) (M. Marcjanik, “Zmiany w etykiecie językowej ostatnich lat XX wieku”, in: *Zmiany w publicznych zwyczajach językowych*, J. Bralczyk, K. Mosiołek-Kłosińska (eds.), Upowszechnianie Nauki – Oświata „UN-O”, Warsaw 2001, p. 82).

7 E. Wilk, *Nawigacje słowa. Strategie werbalne w przekazach audiowizualnych*, Rabid, Krakow 2000, p. 52.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30 and the following.

10 M. Mead, *Kultura i tożsamość. Studium dystansu międzypokoleniowego*, trans. J. Hołówka, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2000, p. 128.

them in terms of their practical applications, while experience-based knowledge<sup>11</sup> should be assigned the dimension of explicit knowledge.

In today's world, people live not only in the world of the media, but also in a variant and discursive melting pot, a special kind of multiverse, and a multitude of discursive communities, and in many "languages."<sup>12</sup> A discursive community is a group of people which includes the participants of co-activity and co-communication in a specific area of human behaviour:<sup>13</sup> "A discursive community possesses a set of its own communicative goals, norms, and mechanisms. It utilises a specific array of genres or their variants. It can even have its own language or a variant of a national language, but it can utilise various languages;"<sup>14</sup> it typically includes a certain situation and communication set and a set of communication and linguistic means (including special lexis or etiquette forms).<sup>15</sup> According to Stanisław Gajda, we should learn how to live in that melting pot, including how to communicate "with ourselves" and with others, both the members of our community and with the members of other communities, sometimes distant, i.e. alien or hostile.<sup>16</sup> That should be yet another task/challenge of linguistic and communication education. And I am not referring to the acquisition during lessons of various discursive or stylistic variants (most of which pupils can/will acquire through their own experience), but rather to highlighting the diversity of the variants of a language, and to defining the principles of using those variants. Pupils today cannot be convinced that there exists only one universal variant of literary Polish, though, of course, it still deserves a central point in linguistic education.

The process of lowering the standards of verbal communication and its consequences have become a real challenge for Polish teachers. Those consequences include, e.g. the progressive replacement of the literary language with the general variant of the language; the spread of the colloquial variant which has become multifunctional, thus becoming an inter-dialect; interferences as a result of which stylistic/variant hybrids form; the phenomenon of anti-culture speech and the spread of the so-called negative communication full of various forms of aggression; primitivism and linguistic kitsch; and insensitivity to linguistic correctness.

One particularly disturbing phenomenon is the spread of aggressive attitudes towards other people, which carries also a linguistic and communication dimension. More often than before people refer to a crisis of language, and one symptom

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11 Knowledge acquired by a pupil within the process of linguistic and communication socialisation, implicit and intuitive.

12 S. Gajda, "Nowe społeczności dyskursywne a edukacja komunikacyjna", in: *Zmiany w publicznych zwyczajach językowych*, J. Bralczyk, K. Mosiołek-Kłosińska (eds.), Upowszechnianie Nauki – Oświata „UN-O”, Warsaw 2001, p. 10.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

of that is the brutalisation of linguistic behaviour in all types of contact. It consists of, e.g. the use of language as a weapon for fighting one's opponent, not through ethical persuasion or factual and logical argumentation, but through verbal abuse depriving recipients of their dignity, intended to hurt them, and, in extreme cases, to destroy them. Aggressive and malicious language is not intended to help reach an understanding but to create a conflict; it violates ethical boundaries, and it misrepresents the image of others and the world. It is the language of hatred, intolerance, and rejection.<sup>17</sup> On top of that, the dominance of aggressive linguistic behaviour over constructive criticism not only spreads onto the linguistic and communication competences of young people, but it also triggers, in the school context, much more serious ramifications, as it is being accepted as a lifestyle:

The aggressive mode of living, including the use of language, has become an intentional measure for achieving dominance over an addressee of a communication and coercing them to activities expected by the sender [...] Their sensations are no longer valid nor are they considered. Thus, aggression transforms from a negative quality to one which is desirable, appropriate for an energetic and enterprising person. Until recently it has been considered as a positive value in communities which remained in conflict with the society, whereas now it has started to be treated in a similar manner by a portion of the social elite.<sup>18</sup>

The notion of aggression has acquired an ambiguous connotation: negative on the one hand, as it is associated with a whole host of linguistic devices (e.g. malicious epithets, abuse, insults, nicknames, curses, and vulgarity), and positive on the other, since it is the outcome of a semantic shift, with the assignment to the notion of such positively viewed qualities as pugnacity, wittiness, and resourcefulness.<sup>19</sup>

As Anna Jasik's research has shown, aggressive behaviour in non-official and casual contacts are common in pupils' jargon, while the array of intentions behind the application of verbal aggression is extensive and varied in terms of linguistic devices.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, schools dumb down the discussed problem to

17 Cf. J. Puzynina, *Słowo – wartość – kultura*, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, Lublin 1997, and A. Dąbrowska, A. Nowakowska (eds.), *Język a Kultura*, vol. 17, *Życzliwość i agresja w języku i kulturze*, Wydawnictwo UWr, Wrocław 2005.

18 H. Satkiewicz, "Językowe przejawy agresji w mediach", in: *Język w mediach masowych*, J. Bralczyk, K. Mosiołek-Kłosińska (eds.), *Upowszechnianie Nauki – Oświata „UN-O”*, Warsaw 2000, p. 33.

19 M. Rzeszutek, "Agresja w świadomości młodzieży", in: *Język a Kultura*, vol. 17, *Życzliwość i agresja w języku i kulturze*, A. Dąbrowska, A. Nowakowska (eds.), Wydawnictwo UWr, Wrocław 2005, pp. 238–239.

20 A. Jasik, "Wyzwiska, obelgi, pogrózki w gwarze uczniowskiej (próba typologii gatunkowej)", in: *Język a Kultura*, vol. 17, *Życzliwość i agresja w języku i kulturze*, A. Dąbrowska, A. Nowakowska (eds.), Wydawnictwo UWr, Wrocław 2005, p. 261.

vulgarisation, not noticing the complexity of aggression as a problem which is not only linguistic, but also socio-cultural.

One has to learn communication behaviour. It is necessary to discover the forms in which one expresses each emotion and feeling and the related attitude towards others. Each new form of communicating emotional content related to social relations learnt helps one enrich the relationships with others and it helps develop empathy. [...] It is necessary to introduce into curricula politeness training which would include education related to that attitude of communicational behaviour.<sup>21</sup>

Within the process of linguistic education, it would be also beneficial to focus on some receptive skills centred around the ability to recognise acts of linguistic aggression, which sometimes can be expressed in an extremely subtle manner, e.g. through irony, sarcasm, or mockery. This includes the phenomenon of anti-etiquette, which is defined as “linguistic behaviour formally matching the realm of politeness yet fulfilling the function of insult.”<sup>22</sup>

Apart from negative communication, a Polish school teacher should be alarmed by linguistic primitivism, which can be defined twofold: as a language which does not meet the accepted standards, and as a simple and inferior language. In the case of the former it consists of, e.g. jarring in terms of the personal or social sense of the beauty of speech, violation of the limits of linguistic good taste: the use of insults within a public space, starting discussions on forbidden topics which are considered embarrassing, controversial, unpleasant or immoral<sup>23</sup> and in a demonstrative manner,<sup>24</sup> as well as the diffusion of so-called linguistic kitsch,<sup>25</sup> which consists

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21 T. Smereka, “Agresja i życzliwość w zachowaniach komunikacyjnych”, in: *Język a Kultura*, vol. 17, *Życzliwość i agresja w języku i kulturze*, A. Dąbrowska, A. Nowakowska (eds.), Wydawnictwo UWr, Wrocław 2005, p. 78.

22 S. Kowalski, “O sejmowej etykiecie”, in: *Zmiany w publicznych zwyczajach językowych*, J. Bralczyk, K. Mosiołek-Kłosińska (eds.), Rada Języka Polskiego przy Prezydium PAN, Warsaw 2001, p. 86.

23 A. Dąbrowska, “Zmiany obszarów podlegających tabu we współczesnej kulturze”, in: *Język a Kultura*, vol. 20, *Tom jubileuszowy*, A. Dąbrowska (ed.), Wydawnictwo UWr, Wrocław 2008, p. 175.

24 “The reduction of the area of taboos is supported by the so-called striptease culture (understood both literally and figuratively), by the shifting of the line of what is private, related to, e.g. the widespread use of cellular telephones, the growing popularity of tabloids locked in a fierce battle for readers, and the openness of public figures (actors or singers) when they discuss their private matters verging on exhibitionism. The phenomenon is referred to as the confession culture.” (ibid., p. 176)

25 Jerzy Bralczyk and Grażyna Majkowska listed three variants of linguistic kitsch in the media: sentimental-pretentious kitsch (specific for women’s magazines), pseudo-intellectual kitsch, and pseudo-emotional kitsch (J. Bralczyk, G. Majkowska, “Język mediów – perspektywa ak-

of pandering to the tastes of recipients to win their favour.<sup>26</sup> Linguistic primitivism is also visible in the instances of the violations of social conventions of linguistic and communication behaviour, including conversation and politeness conventions, and in the decline of social and personal linguistic sensitivity. A liberal approach to the use of language by oneself and others, indifference to the violations of standards and conventions, and the acquisition of behaviour which is ethically and aesthetically reprehensible seems for many today natural and acceptable.

A Polish schoolteacher must indicate the undesirable phenomena occurring in the acts of social communication to pupils, discuss and evaluate them, and thus shape the pupils' awareness and attitudes. Otherwise they may become models of communicative interactions deemed worthy of imitating. That means that apart from the normative focus of Polish language lessons, the notion of a culture of expression/speech which promotes good models of linguistic and communication behaviour should be stressed, and that particular meaning applies to linguistic up-bringing, a goal of which is to shape attitudes which will block linguistic behaviour contrary to the still applicable conventions of social communication.

The spread of linguistic primitivism in the latter meaning, i.e. as simple and inferior language, is related to some of the main tendencies in contemporary culture, i.e. the turn to spoken language, and the diffusion of the so-called spokenness into all areas of social communication,<sup>27</sup> for which the typical kind of language is the situational one immersed in the direct context of here and now (instead of the language of abstraction), deficient linguistic code (limited), and the colloquial variant as an interdialect capable (seemingly) of satisfying all communicational needs.<sup>28</sup> Yet, one should bear in mind that in itself the cultural turn towards the spoken language does not have to entail any negative outcomes for the linguistic and communication education of the ascending generation, as long as speech will be fulfilled at the level of written language. However, that is not the case. Studies have shown that the phenomenon of functional illiteracy, i.e. the inability to "cope in situations requiring communication using the written word even though a person had mastered the skills of reading and writing",<sup>29</sup> is becoming ever more common, and the so-called new textual rule is spreading, which means that people transfer onto written texts the spontaneity of speech, the texts become more interactive and

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sjologiczna", in: *Język w mediach masowych*, J. Bralczyk, K. Mosiołek-Kłosińska (eds.), Upowszechnianie Nauki – Oświata „UN-O”, Warsaw 2000, p. 45).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>27</sup> A. Skudrzyk, *Czy zmierzch kultury pisma? O synestezji i analfabetyzmie funkcjonalnym*, Wydawnictwo UŚ, Katowice 2005, p. 137.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. J. Warchała, A. Skudrzyk, *Kultura piśmienności młodego pokolenia*, Oficyna Wydawnicza WW, Katowice 2010.

<sup>29</sup> A. Skudrzyk, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

situational, the tendencies to include abbreviations and simplifications are becoming widespread, language is taking the form of a hybrid carrying the characteristics of the written and oral varieties,<sup>30</sup> hypotaxis is replaced with parataxis, and thematic lines are replaced with thematic fields.<sup>31</sup> Writing ability also entails different mental matrices, which condition abstract and discursive thinking, based on texts as wholes built of judgements connected using logical relations. That is the so-called written style of thinking, which significantly influences the manner of constructing and perceiving both written text and oral utterances.<sup>32</sup> When language becomes a barrier which limits a person, a Polish teacher should particularly focus on developing and perfecting the skills of speaking and writing within the rules of writing, as well as of reading and listening to texts developed within those rules. Priority should be assigned to that traditional task of Polish philology education.

One more process present in contemporary culture influences the composition of the linguistic and communication competences of the young generation: its mediatisation and the turn towards the visual. In the iconosphere the world is displayed while in the logosphere it is described. In both cases visual perception is triggered, yet its course is different. The reception of a verbal text is a process with a linear structure, which leads to the reproduction of the internal logical organisation between the meanings accumulating in a hierarchical manner. The core of a message is uncovered gradually, the global entirety of a text at the semantic level cannot be grasped at a single glance, as it happens with images. The reception of iconic texts is characterised by: polysensoricity, a frame-by-frame clipped vision of the world, which is disintegrated and fragmented, without logical links between the elements which form the visual whole.<sup>33</sup> It is a process which requires less intellectual effort from a recipient; one which is quicker, but which is also considerably more superficial. Therefore, due to the focus on the iconosphere and a limited contact with longer verbal texts, the younger generation finds it increasingly difficult to receive a linear verbal text, and a text without pictures closes before these younger readers/listeners. Problems with perception also translate into problems with creating (developing) coherent, complex, linear verbal texts, the semantic and formal internal structures which begin to resemble a collage of equally important fragments in a random order connected with each other only through a hypertext.

A Polish teacher should counter any undesirable models of out-of-school linguistic and communication socialisation from the point of view of *bene dicendi*, the perfect model. The priorities of linguistic and communication education should include not only the already mentioned written language (e.g. the structure of

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30 Ibid., p. 48.

31 J. Warchała, A. Skudrzyk, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

32 A. Skudrzyk, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

33 J. Warchała, A. Skudrzyk, *op. cit.*, p. 259.



the written text and the linguistic skills at the level of syntax), but also to intensify work towards the development of linguistic competences (systemic linguistic skills) at the level of a developed code (as a reaction to the decline in linguistic competences which is visible in the fact of perfecting only a limited code). In the contemporary cultural and linguistic situation, a Polish teacher has to become, to some extent, a teacher of Polish as a foreign language.

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It seems prudent to agree with Urszula Żydek-Bednarczuk's opinion that "the tasks which modern education faces require the development of new and the transformation of the old communicational and linguistic competences,"<sup>34</sup> while bearing in mind the need to protect that which is durable, valuable and universal in the traditional forms, models and principles of verbal communication. That is a difficult task for education lawmakers, authors of curricula and textbooks, and for teachers, who mostly belong to a generation raised in a completely different cultural and communication reality, for as noted by Margaret Mead: "the imagination of adults, even when seemingly unrestricted, tightly holds on to things it knows from the past."<sup>35</sup> That "older generation in developed countries controls the means which young people need to accelerate their development."<sup>36</sup> They control education, which is focussed mainly on reproducing culture and, in the case of linguistic education, the conventions of communicational behaviour accepted by the generation of adults. Thus, the process of education occurs to some extent in detachment from actual reality. The problem seems to have a large impact on the linguistic and communication education during Polish lessons.

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34 U. Żydek-Bednarczuk, "Nowe aspekty kompetencji komunikacyjnej", in: *W trosce o dobrą edukację*, A. Janus-Sitarz (ed.), Universitas, Krakow 2009, p. 56.

35 M. Mead, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 106–107.

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## Edukacja językowo-komunikacyjna na lekcjach języka polskiego w czasach zmiany kulturowej

### Rozważania o programie

#### *Streszczenie*

W artykule mowa jest o wyzwaniach, jakie stawia XXI wiek przed edukacją językowo-komunikacyjną w zakresie języka polskiego jako ojczystego. Autorka wyraża przekonanie, że socjalizacja nie może wyręczać edukacji, stąd jednym z najważniejszych celów kształcenia językowego w zakresie języka ojczystego staje się zaspokojenie potrzeb językowo-komunikacyjnych uczniów, wynikających z przeobrażeń kulturowych dokonujących się we współczesnych świecie. Nowe zadania, z którymi powinien zmierzyć się nauczyciel polonista, to rozwijanie tzw. nowej kompetencji komunikacyjnej, umożliwiającej komunikowanie się w świecie zdominowanym przez media, w tym media cyfrowe, oraz przeciwdziałanie procesowi obniżania się standardów werbalnego komunikowania się, w tym agresji werbalnej oraz prymitywizmowi języka.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kontekst kulturowy i komunikacyjny, socjalizacja językowa, kształcenie językowe

## Linguistic and communication education at Polish lessons during the times of the cultural change

### Musings on the curriculum

#### Summary

The article discusses the challenges posed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in terms of linguistic and communication education in terms of teaching Polish as the mother tongue. The author posited that socialisation cannot replace education, which is why one of the major goals of linguistic education in terms of the mother tongue is to satisfy the linguistic and communication needs of pupils resulting from the cultural transformations happening in the modern world. The new tasks which Polish teachers face include the development of the so-called new communicational competence, which enables communication in a world dominated by the media, including digital media, and to counter the process of lowering the standards of verbal communication, including verbal aggression and language primitivism.

**Keywords:** cultural and communication context, linguistic socialisation, linguistic education

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