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The linguistic landscape of modern Poland: a return to the future?

This article discusses modern Polish from the perspective of language policy. Both old and new phenomena are described in a broad perspective; however, it highlights the most recent and, in some sense, unique developments. Although the topic itself is extensive, the description presented here is limited by the formal requirements for a standard-length article as well as by existing sources and, last but not least, by the specific expectations of foreign readers.¹ As for the question of available data, it is worth mentioning that the most important statistics on language problems – i.e. national census reports, reports on knowledge of foreign languages as well as materials concerning population movement – are online with open access. While using selected quotations from these sources clearly makes sense, copying whole tables or graphs does not, as they are easily available. The range of information provided is also a sensitive issue as it should be appropriate to the knowledge of a virtual reader. In a publication addressed to an international audience, it can be assumed that what most of them know about Poland and Polish does not come from experience but from publications. Hence, their knowledge is likely to be deprived of historical or emotional connotations that could be indirectly referred to (e.g. the statement “not an easy history of Polish-Ukrainian relations” would probably be unclear to them, as unclear as similar statements concerning English-Scottish or English-Irish relations to most Polish recipients). For this reason, in this article, some basic information – in a sense obvious to Polish readers – is provided.

Although the notion of *linguistic landscape* used in the title of this article is not a scientific term defined in the research literature, it is clear enough because it encompasses the idea of joining together selected linguistic, social and economic elements in one description with reference to a communicative system. For the purposes of this article, it has been assumed that the relevant elements of the linguistic landscape include:

- a definition of language;
- a description of Polish, including its official status and selected traits;
- knowledge of foreign languages among Polish people;
- minority languages used in Poland;
- languages used in Poland by immigrants or migrants.

¹ The paper is based on a presentation at the meeting of the European Federation of National Institutions for Language (EFNIL) in Amsterdam, 2018.

All of these topics will be discussed in detail. The problem of minority languages in Poland has been the subject of much research, which is why most of the significant data can be found in existing literature (also in English).² Hence, what is discussed here is new phenomena, not ones that have already lasted for some time and are not changing. The former include the recently observed emancipation of language varieties in the Upper Silesia and Opole regions as well as the use of East Slavic languages, namely Ukrainian, Russian and Belarusian with their mixed forms of speech such as Trasiianka and Surzhyk. This article attempts to evaluate the condition of Polish as well as to answer the questions as to whether this language is currently in a phase of expansion, stagnation or decline and whether it is monocentric or is becoming polycentric.

At the beginning it is worth laying out a definition of language relevant to the field of language policy which differs significantly from the linguistic definitions popular in typical academic research (theories and/or schools of historical, structural, functional, generative and cognitive linguistics). Thus, I define language as “one of the information subsystems, which constitute a system of state administration and management. It enables interpersonal and social communication processes in the fields of administration, economy and culture; it also builds a community of its users, its prestige and economic potential” (Pawłowski 2015; Miodunka et al. 2018, 332).

What is interesting is that this subsystem has much in common with typical business entities. It is professionally managed, it requires innovations to succeed and it needs to be profitable. As regards the first aspect, existing ethnolects can be presented in a kind of “scale of being supervised”. Communities with no writing systems and with a poor internal organisation or hierarchy use languages which are unsupervised or supervised only to a small extent. Such ethnolects would develop in an uncontrolled and, so to speak, natural way. Communities using written, structurally complex and highly organised languages supervise them more strictly. Language management means that the development and transmission of a language from generation to generation is controlled by institutions, professionals (school teachers, academics, specialists in language terminology and onomastics – cf. Gajda 1999a, 1999b; Pisarek 1999; Pawłowski 2006, 2007) and prescriptive grammars.³ Such an approach is rooted in the Enlightenment belief that people have a right to “correct” products of nature if they decide that they are far from perfection and are not developing in the right direction. Spontaneous speech would be a good example of an activity which the rational mind can improve by

² Gudaszewski (2015), https://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/LUD_ludnosc_stan_str_dem_spo_NSP2011.pdf, <http://www.jezyki-mniejszosci.pl>, <http://inne-jezyki.amu.edu.pl/frontend>.

³ Apart from individual cases of secondary illiteracy or great disasters (e.g. the fall of the Roman Empire, spread over time), there is no known case of language regression, which would involve withdrawing an institutionally supervised writing culture and replacing it with fully natural oral communication with no writing.

the invention of writing, grammar, rules of communication, etc. The romantic approach associated with the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau is, however, different: civilisation has corrupted humans, who – affected by society – have lost their natural, primeval perfection. Yet, the development of language and the beneficial influence of writing on culture confirms the former conviction.

From this perspective, Polish is a strictly supervised language because the systems of education, guidance and supervision are highly developed, financed by the state and empowered by legal acts. What is crucial, due to historical experience – namely the Polish nation's loss of sovereignty at the end of the eighteenth century, the lack of state institutions over more than one hundred years and the indisputably pivotal role played by Polish in supporting the Polish people's national identity at the time when they were oppressed by Russian and German colonisers – high spending from public resources on Polish language management is accepted by the Poles. Finally, the innovation imperative is connected with various levels of technological and organisational support provided to communication processes. It results from globalisation processes, which have raised the status of language, turning it into a tool for strengthening a community's position in the world of competitive struggles for resources, wealth and – indirectly – safety. So, languages need technological support, which makes it possible to manage libraries and e-repositories, automatically translate texts, search for information, develop AI software, create human-machine interfaces, etc.

The economic perspective allows us to list profitable, economically balanced or loss-making languages. Profitable languages pay their users a kind of bonus. In other words, users of profitable languages have better chances of finding a good, better-paid job, which, in turn, encourages them to be taught as foreign languages in countries where lesser spoken languages are used. Economically balanced languages need financial support but the return on this investment is a well-managed state and linguistically homogeneous society. Finally, loss-making languages are not able to function without any help from the outside. Their users do not pass them on to younger generations, digital resources are not developed and literature is not (or seldom) written. It is only financial support from a state, private foundations or individuals that can stop their decline. All postcolonial European and some Asian (Chinese Mandarin) languages are profitable. Dividing other languages into categories is arguable, and the result of such a division is not stable because long-term investments in a language (or neglect) can change its status. Polish did not receive any state support in the nineteenth century and so, after 1918 (the regaining of freedom), it was very difficult to form, in a short time, the language of the Polish administration, legal institutions and army as for over one hundred years, they had used only Russian or German (cf. Sagan-Bielawa 2014). In turn, the establishment of Israel in 1948 had a very positive effect on Modern Hebrew – the new ethnolect formed from Biblical Hebrew and some European languages by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda – which, for a new community, has become a lively and

dynamic code of communication characterised by continuous change. What is more, giving Modern Hebrew the status of the official language in Israel caused a decline in Yiddish.

Taking political and linguistic conditions into account, Polish should be described as an economically balanced, monocentric language which is tending towards profitability and its general situation as good and stable. Polish is genetically related to its communicative and cultural environment because it belongs to the group of Indo-European Languages (West Slavic group), it uses the most common Western alphabet (Latin) and there are many lexical and structural loans in it, which makes it easy for foreigners to learn. Among other strengths of modern Polish, its social and territorial homogeneity should be mentioned. This results from the territorial changes after 1945, which entailed massive migrations of people and mixing of dialects or varieties. Polish has an official and, so to speak, titular status in Poland and, at the same time, is a community code which unites millions of Polish people living abroad with the Poles in Poland. As it is the greatest Slavic language in the European Union (with regard to the number of users and its territorial dissemination), Polish has many chances to become the interlingua of East-Central Europe and one of the communicative pillars of Europe (cf. Miodunka et al. 2018).

It is also worth noting that Polish is financially supported by the state, which provides free education from primary to tertiary levels, enables research and gives guidance. This guarantees the stability of culture based on the language, comprising publishing, theatre, film and creating digital products (e.g. games and e-sport environment)s. There are not only numerous Polish Studies institutes at universities but also two specialised institutes at the Polish Academy of Sciences (the Institute of the Polish Language and the Institute of Literary Research). Polish is legally protected and the whole language of administration and legal institutions is formally controlled. The Act on the Polish Language was passed in 1999 and since then it has been amended several times. Polish is also referred to in other Acts. Walery Pisarek lists six Acts which somehow regulate the use of Polish. It is sad, however, that the Constitution of the Republic of Poland does not list among the fundamental symbols of Polish identity (such as the emblem, flag, anthem, and sometimes the motto or principle), the Polish language (which is the case, for instance, in the Constitution of France). Article 27 of Chapter 1 says only that “Polish shall be the official (pol. *urzędowy*) language in the Republic of Poland. This provision shall not infringe upon national minority rights resulting from ratified international agreements”. There is a discrepancy between this statement and what is contained in the Act on the Polish Language, whose introduction includes the following statement: “[...] taking into consideration that the Polish language is a constituting element of the Polish national identity and national culture [...]”.

Technologies supporting the use of Polish should be highly esteemed. Although the process of digitising resources started relatively late (in comparison to the most

advanced European countries), it is efficient. This is evidenced by the stable and fast development of digital repositories and AI software used in automatic text processing. The National Corpus of Polish⁴ has been created and *Wielki Słownik Języka Polskiego* [*The Great Dictionary of Polish*],⁵ which has been integrated with digital corpus resources, is being created, as are subsequent electronic dictionaries of Old Polish⁶ and Latin⁷ (until the end of the seventeenth century, the second official language of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). Due to support from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education for the consortium CLARIN-PL, tools for automatic Polish language processing are being developed (such as syntax parsers, automatic summarisation systems, automated keywords generators, automatic speech recognition systems and rich lexical resources, including the biggest wordnet⁸ in the world). Unfortunately, the influence of the authors/publishing lobby together with the strict European personal data protection policy limit the development of the virtual sphere of language, both in the fields of research and teaching. It is impossible to work only with those texts whose copyrights have expired: in teaching Polish it is crucial to use modern Polish literature, which is practically impossible because it requires obtaining numerous permissions and paying considerable fees.

1. Foreign languages in contemporary Poland

As has already been mentioned, another element of the linguistic landscape described here is the Polish people's knowledge of foreign languages. Contrary to appearances, evaluating such competences across the whole of society is difficult and accurate data should not be expected. First of all, we should remember that the overall knowledge of a language is a combination of many skills, including speaking, listening, reading and writing. Language users have different levels of these skills and they can also vary with respect to a language type. There are, for instance, many people who speak a second language so well that they are considered bilingual yet they cannot write in this language. In addition, depending on the language, there are differences in the pace of development of particular competences. For example, people learning alphabetic languages often learn to speak and write at the same time, developing good communicative speaking and writing skills which, for instance, enable them to read daily newspapers. This is not possible in the case of ideographic languages, like Modern Standard Mandarin Chinese, with thousands of signs. Learning them takes many years of hard work and the skill of

⁴ www.nkjp.uni.lodz.pl/.

⁵ www.wsjp.pl/.

⁶ <https://sxvii.pl/>, <http://spxvi.edu.pl/>.

⁷ <http://scriptores.pl/elexicon/>.

⁸ <http://plwordnet.pwr.wroc.pl/wordnet/>.

reading is usually developed much later than the skill of speaking. Reducing such a complex competence like knowledge of a foreign language to one number or a simple description – e.g. the statement that “at least 50% of the population of country X know foreign language Y” – is taking the easy way out.

Besides, a person often has a subjective sense of knowing a given language, which usually contrasts with the relatively objective measures used in proficiency tests. A person using a foreign language rarely equates the level of their knowledge to a standard scale (e.g. from A1 to C2) and, answering questions about their knowledge, describes it as good, medium or none or says that they can take part in a conversation, understand some words and general meaning, read only specialised texts etc. The results of tests usually indicate levels different from the ones declared and the two levels can hardly be compared.

Yet another factor taken into account while discussing knowledge of foreign languages in society is related to so-called sociological variables, i.e. the age of speakers (different generations speak in different ways), the level of education (the more educated a person is, the more languages he/she might know), the place of living (city dwellers vs. country dwellers, the centre vs. peripheral regions) and social background (higher classes are expected to know foreign languages better than lower classes). Together with differences resulting from a language type, sociological variables make individual foreign language skills vary considerably. Without taking social variables into account, the statistically estimated average knowledge of foreign languages in any country will be unrelated to reality.

Finally, it is not clear what should be considered a foreign language. For example, it has been observed that statistical levels of foreign language knowledge in both post-colonial European countries and the ones which used to be part of federal states all of a sudden became very high. This was because suddenly the language of an occupier or of another nation with which a given nation had shared the territory of one state became “foreign” (like Russian in Lithuania, Latvia or Estonia, or Croatian and Serbian in the countries that once made up Yugoslavia, or Czech in Slovakia, or Bulgarian in Macedonia, etc.). Last but not least, population movement results in mixed marriages, which makes classifying a language as foreign or native even more difficult (how to treat the language of one of the parents when it is not official in the country they live in?). Summing up, the numbers given by statistical institutes (the Central Statistical Office in Poland; Eurostat in the European Union) or commercial organizations bring us only a little closer to the truth, even if there are numerous data sources. There is no institution that systematically monitors the situation in Poland, which makes any longitudinal study difficult to conduct. Only the latter would make it possible to discuss multilingualism from a wider perspective.

As will be the case for most countries, the level of knowledge of foreign languages in Poland is related to the history of the country. In the years after breaking free from Soviet domination in 1989, the foreign language skills of the

Poles were described as poor. This resulted from the very limited possibilities of ever leaving Poland (very low purchasing power of the Polish currency) as well as the lack of foreign-language media (there were no transboundary media, no internet or satellite TV, only the radio). The elderly generation, especially those born in the 1930s or earlier, knew some German from the time of the Nazi occupation of Poland, and younger generations had to learn Russian (starting in primary school until leaving certificate exams). These two languages were somehow the legacy of the war and the communist period in Poland's history. Additionally, high-school students learnt the most important foreign languages (English, German or French and sometimes Latin).

The situation changed in 1989, when Russian was removed from school curricula (in some schools it remained an optional subject) and was replaced by English and other Western languages. However, within a short space of time also German and particularly French were weakened by the expansion of English (Table 1). New foreign languages were introduced (e.g. Mandarin Chinese and Spanish). To fulfil the need for primary and secondary school teachers, foreign language teacher training colleges were established in the 1990s to educate future teachers of English, German and French (they were closed down after twenty years). So, whereas the Polish people's knowledge of German and Russian can be considered to be the legacy of World War II, the dismantling of the Eastern Block and processes of globalisation made Russian unpopular, weakened German and raised the role of English. Such subjects like Spanish, Italian or Asian languages began to be taught at schools and became popular. They practically displaced French and Latin, held in high esteem for hundreds of years in Poland.

Language	1986/1987 ¹⁰	1997/1998 ¹¹	2005/2006 ¹²	2017/2018 ¹³
Russian	83%	24%	5.3%	1.7%
English	6%	40%	76%	91.7%
German	8%	30%	17%	5.8%
French	2%	5%	1.5%	0.8%
Other	1%	1%	0.2%	

Table 1: Foreign language teaching/school leaving examinations in Poland 1986-2017⁹

⁹ Compiled on the basis of Pawłowska (2018) and Wróblewska-Pawlak/Strachanowska (2000).

¹⁰ Languages taught at primary and secondary schools (cf. Wróblewska-Pawlak/Strachanowska 2000, 103).

¹¹ Languages taught at primary and secondary schools (cf. Wróblewska-Pawlak/Strachanowska 2000, 104).

¹² Students' choice of languages in the final exam (pol. matura) (cf. Pawłowska 2018, 111-112).

¹³ Students' choice of languages in the final exam (pol. matura) (cf. Pawłowska 2018, 111-112).

Referring to the available data on multilingualism, it is possible to quote the results of numerous studies, which, however, should be treated very carefully. These sources can be divided into commercial and public. According to the Global Ranking of Countries and Regions, Poland takes eleventh place as regards knowledge of English as a second language (EF EPI – Index Proficiency Index) and, although more multilingual states in Europe and Asia (e.g. the Netherlands and Singapore) are higher up, Poland is ahead of Switzerland, Japan, France and Spain.¹⁴ In turn, the European Commission's report on multilingualism delivered in 2012 indicated that 50% of the Poles were able to communicate in an L2 (the EU average being 54%) and 22% in an L3 (EU average: 25%).¹⁵ The order of foreign languages was predictable: English 33% (EU: 38%), German 19% (EU: 11%), Russian 18% (EU: 5%), French 4% (EU: 12%), Spanish 1% (EU : 7%). This report contains many detailed data which are not necessary here as they can easily be accessed and interpreted. However, it is important to point out that although Poland was mid-field among other EU countries with respect to knowledge of foreign languages in 2012, the numbers quoted (except for knowledge of Russian, which is decreasing) are increasing with the constant development of foreign language education in Poland, supported by Polish people's access to foreign language media, the increasing number of foreign tourists visiting Poland as well as Polish people's visits to foreign countries, which they either tour or work in. So, although there are not any new data on the knowledge of foreign languages in Poland (except for occasional surveys), it can be assumed that its level is higher than before, and probably above the European Union average.

How to explain these changes in the foreign language skills of the Poles after 1945? Historically, Poland is one of the most multilingual countries in Europe. Until the end of the eighteenth century, Poland had a multi-ethnic structure, Latin being one of its important interlinguas. Ethnic groups in Poland included the Ruthenian and Baltic peoples (today the Belarusians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians and Lemkos). Poland was also influenced by the Armenian, Tatar and Ashkenazi Jewish cultures. When the country lost its sovereignty and was partitioned by Austria, the Kingdom of Prussia and the Russian Empire at the end of the 18th century, its lands were culturally colonised – Russified and Germanised. At that time, Poland existed as a sort of envisioned community in the minds of the Poles and not as a real state. Although this situation was hard (most material and intellectual resources of the nation were invested in maintaining Polish identity, not welfare), there was one advantage: due to the imposed system, the Poles had to speak (or at least understand) two or three languages. People living in the regions administered by Prussia or Austria, i.e. more or less today's Greater Poland, Lesser Poland and

¹⁴ Data for 2017, www.ef.pl/epi/ (last accessed 28.02.2019).

¹⁵ Eurobarometer report "Europeans and their languages", prepared in 2012. http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_fact_pl_en.pdf (last accessed 28.02.2019).

Silesia, had to speak Polish and German, whereas in Mazovia and Eastern Poland, Polish and Russian were spoken. Such a situation was, on the one hand, typical of all colonised countries, yet, special, on the other hand: it is typical to impose the dominant language of the colonisers upon the colonised; what was untypical in the case of the Poles was that their national identity got stronger. At the time of the partition, Polish literature and lexicography were developed,¹⁶ which, much later, helped contribute to the rapid development of Poland after 1918. Despite a very difficult economic situation and hostile neighbouring countries, which did not accept all the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, there were enough educated, multilingual human resources in Poland to build a modern state in a relatively short period of time.

It would be naïve to think that historical experiences wholly determine the present day. However, it is no exaggeration to say that multilingualism is part of Polish history and that the quoted numbers will continue growing, possibly reaching 75% of the Polish population being able to speak two languages, the native one – L1 and a foreign one – L2.

2. Minority languages in contemporary Poland

The third element of the linguistic landscape of modern Poland is – following the already accepted definition – minority languages. Describing them – in particular, determining the number of their speakers, assessing their skills and characterising them in sociolinguistic terms (their average age and level of education as well as the potential for the development of their community) – is difficult. Not only typically linguistic parameters, similar to the ones discussed while analysing knowledge of foreign languages, should be taken into account, but also emotions should be considered, which make some people deny their ethno-national origins or, else, claim such origins against objective evidence.

Although there are numerous data sources on minority languages in Poland, reservations about them are valid. Generally these sources can be divided into three categories: (1) national censuses or other public studies of a similar scope and method; (2) declarations made by various societies founded by socio-cultural minorities; (3) the results of academic research. Here again, it should be made clear that, despite some deficiencies, the most reliable data sources are the censuses conducted by the Central Statistical Office of Poland, i.e. Poland's chief government agency charged with collecting and publishing statistics relating to the country. They embrace the whole or a vast part of Poland's population and they are systematic and methodologically coherent. Because questions about language and ethno-national self-identification have been included since 2002,

¹⁶ The greatest dictionaries as well as most of the Polish literary canon were created precisely at that time (cf. www.leksykografia.uw.edu.pl/).

national censuses will soon enable longitudinal studies, describing the dynamics of the studied phenomena over time. Declarations issued by societies associated with ethno-national minorities usually include unreliable data because they do not aim to reveal the actual situation but to create an image which would enhance the need for higher subsidies from the native state (if it exists) or the government of Poland. One blatant example of such a falsification was the discrepancy between estimates and real data on the German minority in the 2002 census.¹⁷ Finally, academic research is generally methodologically correct; however, its aim is usually very detailed, limited to a small territory, age group or specific problem. It can also happen that apparently impartial researchers identify with their object of study too closely when trying to achieve a presumed result (for example, to prove that some ethnic group or a minority language really exists although there is no real evidence for it).

The definition of a minority is another disputable issue. Two approaches are acceptable: legalistic (linguistic minorities are groups that can be distinguished according to the law existing in a given country) and factual (ethnic minorities exist because they declare that they exist or their existence is apparently objectively observed). The discrepancy between the findings resulting from these two approaches is huge, which can be observed when comparing data from the portal Ethnologue with official sources provided by individual states. Taking Poland as an example, this portal provides the information that Prussian still exists in Warmia and Masuria (50 speakers) although it became extinct in the 17th century, and it also mentions the mysterious language called Silesian Lower (alternate name Upper Schlesisch – sic!) as having some 12,000 speakers and described as “Different from Upper Silesian, a dialect of Polish”.¹⁸ A completely false piece of information is the claim that there are over 7,000,000 speakers of Standard German (as an L2) in Poland, namely in the regions of Lower Silesia and Opole: “L2 users: 7,300,000 (European Commission 2012)”.¹⁹ Actually the problem is that it is more than the entire population of both voivodeships.

¹⁷ The size of the German minority in Poland declared in the 2002 census (152,897) was only three-quarters or half the number given by estimates which indicated 200,000 or even 300,000 people identifying as German. Interestingly enough, even today the web portal of the *Verband der Deutschen Sozial-Kulturellen Gesellschaften in Polen* (vdg) provides the following information: “Like any other minority, the German minority in Poland is difficult to assess but it is assumed that there are about 300,000 people” (www.vdg.pl/pl/o-nas/zwiazek/vdg, last accessed 29.01.2019). Some contradictions can be found in German literature too. According to the document regarding German minorities in the world, prepared by the *Institut für Deutsche Sprache* for the *Bundestag*, there were 1.1 million Germans in Poland in 1983 (*ger. deutsche Staatsangehörige*) (Born/Dickgießer 1989, 15).

¹⁸ www.ethnologue.com/language/sli.

¹⁹ www.ethnologue.com/country/PL/languages (last accessed 02.04.2019).

In our case, the first approach (legalistic) is preferred as being the most reliable according to which minority languages in Poland have been defined as languages spoken by the minorities listed in the *Act on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional language* of 2011. This act lists one regional language (Kashubian, 240,000 speakers), nine national majorities (46,800 Belarusians; 1,300 Czechs; 7,900 Lithuanians; 147,800 Germans; 3,600 Armenians; 13,000 Russians; 3,200 Slovaks; 51,000 Ukrainians; 7,500 Jews) and four ethnic minorities (314 Karaims; 10,500 Lemkos; 17,000 Roma people; 495-3,000 Tatars). This list does not include migrants and immigrants, however.²⁰ Because some of these minorities use or can use their own languages, it has been assumed that their numbers approximately equal the numbers of speakers of their languages.²¹

In addition, there are many data collections and descriptions of minorities as an outcome of academic research. The portal Ethnologue has been already mentioned; there is also the data provided by the UNESCO (“UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger”, before: “The Red Book of Endangered Languages”). One of the most reliable and factually rich resources is the portal “Poland’s Linguistic Heritage”, created and supervised by Tomasz Wicherkiewicz from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.²² It does not only include descriptions but also vast source materials as well as a rich bibliography on particular languages or dialects in Poland. It should be stressed that the above-mentioned resources only fulfil an informative function; they simply register some facts. They do not have any legal powers and do not affect language reality in the way that legal tools do. For this reason, this paper relies solely on official legal acts, databases and publications of the Central Statistical Office of Poland (in particular, the results of national censuses).

Another – interesting although not so important – problem to be considered here is connected with the territories in which minority languages are spoken in Poland. If we look at the map of Poland (Fig. 1), we can see that linguistic minorities exist on the fringes of the country, near the borders. Such a situation is common in Europe and results from historical processes of forming nations and states: a homogenous administrative political centre expands and gains control over more and more distant territories; the more distant these territories are, the more difficult their cultural and linguistic assimilation becomes. Whereas the eastern and southern borders of Poland leave no doubts, there are no minorities on the western fringe. However, they can be found inside Poland (on the east-west axis). This

²⁰ Detailed data on the languages used by people in Poland, including migrants, is provided by the Polish census of 2011 (<https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechnie/nsp-2011/nsp-2011-wyniki/struktura-narodowo-etniczna-jezykowa-i-wyznaniowa-ludnosci-polski-nsp-2011,22,1.html>).

²¹ These numbers do not refer to Poles who acquired a given language at school or at university and who use it in professional situations (e.g. translators, teachers).

²² <http://inne-jezyki.amu.edu.pl/Frontend/>.

results from the territorial changes in 1945 after the USSR, Great Britain and the USA – responsible for the new geopolitical reality – agreed on the new Polish borders during the Teheran and Yalta Conferences. Roughly speaking, the former western Polish border was, for several centuries, (i.e. more or less since the sixteenth century) where the minorities in question (mainly German and Kashubian) can be found today. So, the rule which says that a titular language is dominant in the centre of a monolingual state whereas minority languages exist on the fringes also applies in this case.

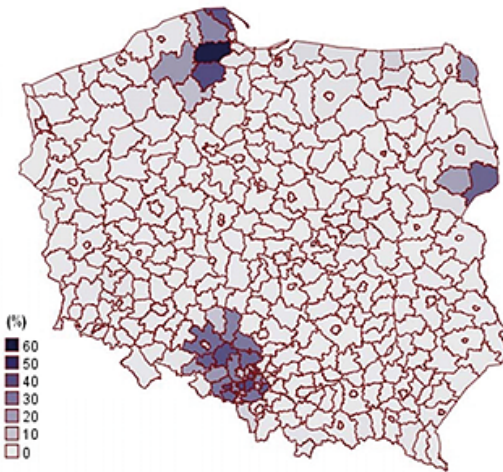


Fig. 1: The groups of ethnic-national identifications other than Polish (2011)²³

With reference to the linguistic situation of Poland today, minority languages are not important in communication because Polish is dominant throughout the country. Their presence in the public sphere is more symbolic than practical and does not interfere with the use of Polish. In those regions where two or more languages are spoken, different communities live together in harmony and no significant conflicts arise. As happens in other places in the world, some regional languages become commercialised (e.g. Kashubian is a tourist attraction in Pomerania). The cultural-communicative profile of Poland can be characterised as mono-ethnic and monolingual. This monolingualism results from the changes caused in Central Europe by World War II. Political treaties signed by the victorious powers tore Eastern lands off Poland and gave it Silesia, Pomerania, Warmia and Masuria in the West and North. For a time this removed Ruthenian languages from Poland (today Belarusian, Ukrainian, Lemko and Rusyn) or even specific eastern accents

²³ <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechno-nsp-2011/nsp-2011-wyniki/struktura-narodowo-etniczna-jezykowa-i-wyznaniowa-ludnosci-polski-nsp-2011,22,1.html>.

(Lvov, Vilnia and Polesian speech). Equally importantly, Jewish languages present in Poland until the war also disappeared due to the massive extermination of the Jews as well as the subsequent emigration of the survivors to the newly established state of Israel.

From a certain perspective, such a state of affairs is sad: today the Republic of Poland – the “heiress” of centuries-old traditions of multiculturalism and, together with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the pioneer of the modern European Union²⁴ – has, due to wars, ethnic cleansing and exterminations conducted by its neighbouring countries, become almost totally mono-ethnic and monolingual and has lost the potential benefits derived from the richness of cultures, languages and religions. On the other hand, however, looking at the problems faced by multinational or federal states, e.g. the former USSR, the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, former Czechoslovakia, but also the Kingdom of Spain, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, or the Kingdom of Belgium – one can say that Poland has avoided internal conflicts and provides its inhabitants with a chance to build a homogenous, safe, and economically strong community.

3. Changes in the linguistic landscape of Poland: the case of Upper Silesia

The linguistic landscape described above is stable and if it changes, this change is slow. Such evolutionary processes include, for example, the gradual increase in the number of people speaking English and the decrease in the number of people who know Russian or less expansive western languages, such as French or German. The situation of most minority languages is stable (the number of speakers or territories where they are spoken have not changed). In recent years, however, there have been some phenomena which do not conform to the evolutionary concept. In a relatively short time, in the regions of Upper Silesia and Opole, the idea of raising the status of Upper Silesian dialects and turning them into ethnic languages has been promoted, whereas throughout the country, in the last three or four years, some languages of Poland’s eastern neighbours, mainly Ukrainian, have appeared.

As far as the question of Upper Silesian dialects is concerned, a few facts should be referred to from the recent history of Poland. In the 2001 National Census, approximately 57,000 people (of the total Polish population of approx. 38,500,000) declared that they used “Silesian” at home. Within ten years, this number increased greatly and the 2011 National Census indicated that there were

²⁴ On July 1, 1569, the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania established a real union, known as the Union of Lublin. The Union of Lublin brought a multinational state to life which can be considered a prototype of modern federal states as well as of the European Union.

over half a million (530,000) people declaring that they spoke “Silesian”.²⁵ These facts are significant and deserve an explanation. This article is basically devoted to the problems of language policy (with the emphasis on language); however, because the discussion of the “Silesian language” is closely related to politics, some political and legal aspects cannot be omitted.

The history of the eastern part of Silesia (Upper Silesia, Opole Silesia, Cieszyn Silesia) is complex and includes long periods of dependency on its neighbouring countries (Prussia, Poland or Czechoslovakia), which results in a relatively strong regional identity and an unstable sense of national identity, at least in some parts of the population in the region. Yet, if cultural identity, so popular in recent years, has become an immanent aspect of a “Europe of small fatherlands”, their prospective political autonomy is more controversial and belongs to the field of real politics. In the 1990s, political currents appeared in Upper Silesia which declared exactly such goals. The separatist ambitions of the organisations aiming to form a Silesian identity – different from Polish, German or Czech – were not revealed directly but attempts were made to legalise the so-called “Silesian nationality”²⁶ and to reconstruct the political autonomy of Upper Silesia (which existed between 1918 and 1939). The very name of the largest socio-political organisation of this kind (The Silesian Autonomy Movement), officially attempting only to protect the cultural heritage of this region, is a kind of political proclamation (“The Silesian Autonomy Movement is a purposeful society. The primary aim of this organisation is revealed in its name. The Silesian Autonomy Movement supports the autonomy of Silesia within the mature decentralisation of the Republic of Poland”).²⁷

The activities, whose real, although not necessarily declared, aim is separatism, do not comply with the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, in which Article 3 declares that “[t]he Republic of Poland shall be a unitary State”. This eliminates not only separatism but also extensive regional autonomy, known from, for instance, Spain, which nowadays consists of administrative units called *comunidades autónomas*. The Polish authorities have been especially sensitive to attempts to extend regional autonomy, which can be explained by the fact that, in the past, the most difficult moments in the thousand-year history of Poland were connected with internal divisions resulting from inner weakness and the violent policies of

²⁵ In the 2011 National Census 436,000 people declared their first national-ethnic identity as “Silesian” and 847,000 declared it as their first or second identification.

²⁶ The Supreme Court of Poland claims that “belonging to a nation that does not exist cannot be declared” (“nie można deklarować przynależności do narodu, który nie istnieje”) (www.sn.pl/sites/orzecznictwo/orzeczenia2/III%20SK%2010-13-1.pdf).

²⁷ “Ruch Autonomii Śląska jest stowarzyszeniem celowym. Priorytet organizacji wpisany jest w nazwę. RAŚ dąży do uzyskania przez Śląsk autonomii w ramach dojrzałej decentralizacji Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej” (<http://autonomia.pl/cele-ruchu-autonomii-slaska>, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/silesian_autonomy_movement).

neighbouring states. The first experience of this kind was the division of the country into independent feudal principalities in 1138-1320 by *Bolesław III Krzywousty* (the *wry-mouthed*). The subsequent period of unification under the rule of the Jagiellonian dynasty is called the “Polish Golden Age” by historiographers. However, in the centuries that followed, the kingdom was gradually weakened by a faulty legal and administrative system, which advanced Polish noblemen’s state interests at the expense of the interests of the state. This weakness of Poland intensified in the eighteenth century, when Polish independence ended. The Partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, conducted by the Russian Empire, Austria and Prussia in 1772, 1793 and 1795, erased Poland from the map of Europe until 1918. But by 1939, Poland had been invaded by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, which again divided the country into two occupation zones. The general conclusion that results from Poland’s traumatic historical experience is obvious: elites (historians, politicians) but also average citizens perceive extensive regional autonomy as a threat to the country’s unity and security. This conviction should be simply acknowledged as it is determined by the long historical experience of this part of Europe.

Today, it is difficult to say whether the linguists and activists promoting the idea of turning Upper Silesian dialects into a language were interested in politics, financial benefits (obtaining high state subsidies) or whether what they did was purely idealistic. For sure, their endeavours did not comply with the Polish legal system, evoked anxiety about maintaining the state’s unity and, as such, met up with resistance from the Polish authorities. This anxiety was also justified by the experiences of other states, which teaches that for autonomists throughout the world one’s own language is not only evidence of one’s separate cultural identity but is also a tool to be used in political projects.²⁸

However, there seem to be other aspects of this problem when viewed from a distance. Historical Silesia is a vast region, encompassing Lower Silesia, Opole Silesia, Upper Silesia and Cieszyn Silesia as well as parts of Lubusz Land (pol. Lubuskie) and Opavian Silesia. The historical capital of the Silesian region is Wrocław, situated in Lower Silesia, while Katowice (the capital of the Upper Silesian Voivodeship) is a relatively young city, which was not granted official status until 1865). Today, for the first time in history, almost the whole of Silesia lies within Poland’s borders. The places in which inhabitants address their “Silesian” ethnic distinctiveness are actually only a small part of the entire region; similarly, demographically speaking, half a million people out of 8.5 million inhabitants of the whole historical region declaring that they use “Silesian” is not

²⁸ Such processes have been observed in multi-ethnic or multinational states. European examples include the disintegration of Austria-Hungary, Prussia, Russia, the USSR, Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia (Wright 2000, 31-59).

particularly significant. Additionally, only ca. 50% of the Silesian Voivodeship, where the sense of a distinctive identity among its inhabitants is strongest, is located on historically Silesian territories.

Can such facts influence the way this situation will be perceived in Poland? Rather not. Opinions on the dialects used in the eastern parts of the Silesian region have always varied, which is nothing unusual in such situations in Europe. Some researchers recognise a dialect continuum there (significantly deformed by the massive migrations in the nineteenth century) with a mild diglossia characterising some parts of the population. At the same time, Upper Silesian activists talk about a different language belonging to the culture of a distinct ethnic (or even national) group, which allegedly differs from the Poles due to its strong work ethic, love of the family and of the fatherland.²⁹ Some paradoxes of the situation described here will, thus, remain unsolved and a polarisation of opinions will continue. However, from a linguistic point of view, this case is interesting and exemplifies changes in the linguistic landscape of modern Poland which are worth paying attention to.

4. Changes in the linguistic landscape of Poland: the case of Eastern languages

The last important element influencing the linguistic landscape of modern Poland is the East Slavic Languages brought to this country after 2014 by political or economic emigrants, mainly from Ukraine but also from Belorussia and other post-Soviet states. This phenomenon is relatively new, dynamic, and is occurring throughout the country. Unfortunately there are no or few verified representative data on the linguistic attitudes and behaviour of the migrants from the East (see Levchuk 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2018). One of the reasons is that the population of this group of migrants is rather unstable as some people regularly travel to Ukraine (or Belorussia) and back and some Ukrainians try to legalise their stay in Poland while for others, Poland is only a stop on the way to the West, i.e. the countries of the so-called “Old Union”. So, even the results of sociological surveys are not quite reliable as they always only relate to a particular community at the time when the research was conducted.

In such a case, the rules of academic research allow the use of indirect information, derived from other available data, even if they are only indirectly connected with language and communicative behaviour. For example the presence of Ukrainian and other Eastern languages in the public sphere can be estimated on

²⁹ These characteristics can hardly be taken seriously as the inhabitants of all regions of Poland respect their families, land and work, and if not, this results rather from their social background (e.g. city dwellers vs. the rural population). Such myths, however, have been distributed in the public sphere for quite a long time (www.tolerancja.pl/?narodowosc-slaska-279,,,2, http://www.montes.pl/montes27/montes_09.htm).

the basis of the number of Ukrainian immigrants in Poland and their plans to settle down (the number of requests for a residence permit). It can be further assumed that in such cases acquisition of Polish by a national group of a similar culture does not take more than a few months (the majority of first-generation migrants live in a state of diglossia, or even triglossia³⁰). It can also be assumed that those migrants who obtained permanent residence permits or have been granted Polish citizenship master Polish at least well, if not very well.

The data which can help determine the number and status of Ukrainians in Poland (and indirectly the number of Ukrainian or Russian language users) can be found in the following sources:

- 1) Official reports of various ministries (particularly the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Poland³¹ and the Ministry of the Interior and Administration³²);
- 2) Reports of The National Bank of Poland;
- 3) Reports of some central institutions, such as the Office for Foreigners³³ and the Centre for Education Development;³⁴
- 4) General and specialised media sources (press, portals).

The ministries listed under 1) deal with the social situation of immigrants (work permits, health insurance) as well as with administration (residence permits, citizenship). The data they provide are in the form of public reports, which are usually fully reliable.³⁵ However, they concern only those foreigners whose situation is, so to speak, regular; data on accompanying family members or workers in the grey zone are not included. Some inaccuracies may also result from the fact that today Ukrainian visitors to Poland do not need a visa (what is registered is their crossing the border) and they only need their employer's declaration to find employment (the number of actually used permits is usually lower than the number of permits granted). Besides, some visitors study or take up small, unregistered jobs.

Research into Ukrainian immigrants has also been conducted by the National Bank of Poland. Its interest in immigrants results from the fact that Ukrainian workers have become a significant part of the Polish financial market and the whole business sector. The bank has published one report so far entitled "Obywa-

³⁰ In the case of migrants from the East, deciding on the proportion of the two languages skills is problematic and would require additional research (cf. Levchuk 2015, 2016a, 2018).

³¹ www.gov.pl/web/rodzina.

³² www.gov.pl/web/mswia.

³³ <https://udsc.gov.pl>.

³⁴ www.ore.edu.pl.

³⁵ Reports on foreigners working in Poland can be found at: <https://archiwum.mpips.gov.pl/analizy-i-raporty/cudzoziemcy-pracujacy-w-polsce-statystyki>.

tele Ukrainy pracujący w Polsce – raport z badania” [*Ukrainian citizens working in Poland – a research report*] (2018).³⁶ It includes unique and rich information about the number of Ukrainians who have obtained work permits or permits to stay in Poland, the regions from which they came to Warsaw and Lublin (other regions have not been researched), their education and motivation to immigrate.³⁷ Besides, what is absolutely unique, the National Bank of Poland’s report discusses Ukrainian immigrants’ social profiles. The language question was not raised though.

Especially valuable information is provided by the Office for Foreigners and, partially, by the Centre for Education Development. The Office for Foreigners monitors the situation of all foreigners in Poland and has the most reliable information resources at its disposal³⁸ (although probably not all of them are made public), whereas the Centre for Education Development concentrates on problems that foreign students may have at school.³⁹ Finally, general press sources are usually unreliable as they aim at provoking sensation instead of providing information or valuable generalisations. (For instance, according to the strongly nation-oriented media, Poland has become a victim of the “invasion from the East” whereas according to the liberal media, workers from the East are rescuing the Polish economy, which is likely to collapse soon after they have left.) There are, however, journals and portals specialised in the economy which sometimes provide valuable information.

The data listed in points 1, 2 and 3, i.e. the various documents produced by central institutions, should be considered most reliable while general media materials should be regarded as secondary. According to the data from the sources mentioned above, Ukrainian citizens form the largest group of immigrants in Poland (Fig. 2). In 2017, 585,439 Ukrainians entered the country, which comprised 86% of all immigrants; the second largest group was the Belarussians (42,756) and the third the Moldavians (7,803).⁴⁰ The estimated number of Ukrainians in Poland in 2018 was about two million. It was initially predicted that their numbers would raise to about three million in 2019; however, the plans of the Germans to open their market to Ukrainian employees may slow down this increase.

³⁶ www.nbp.pl.

³⁷ www.nbp.pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci_2018/obywatele-Ukrainy-pracujacy-w-Polsce-raport.pdf.

³⁸ <https://udsc.gov.pl>, use the descriptor Ukraina.

³⁹ For example, the report *Dzieci obcokrajowców w polskich placówkach oświatowych – perspektywa szkoły* [*Foreign children in educational institutions – a school perspective*]. Prepared by dr hab. Krystyna Bleszyńska. Warsaw (2010): ORE.

⁴⁰ www.bankier.pl/wiadomosc/Eurostat-Polska-przyjmuje-najwiecej-imigrantow-w-UE-7622719.html.

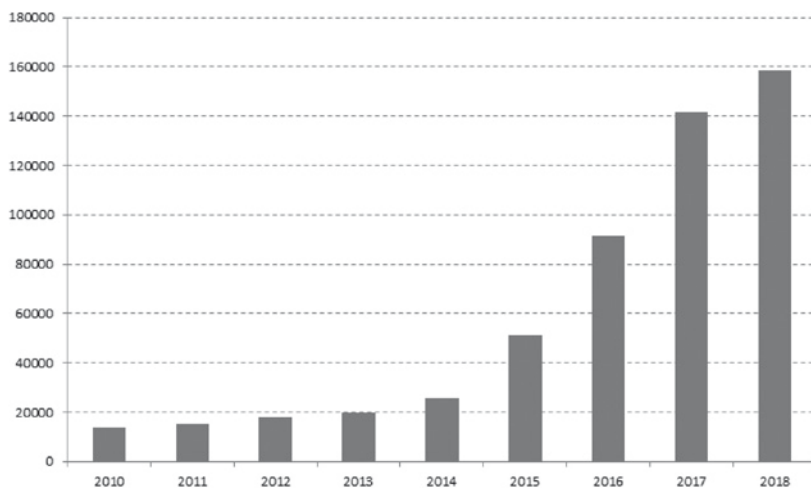


Fig. 2: The number of work permits for Ukrainians in Poland⁴¹

Such a massive influx of Ukrainians into Poland was met with positive reactions from Polish institutions and – with a few exceptions – from society as a whole. In 2018, my empirical research conducted into a representative group of public and commercial institutions showed that Ukrainian had become one of the languages of communication with customers, sometimes outrunning German (academic institutions, banks) and Russian (banks) (Table 2). In addition, many cities appointed representatives for the Ukrainians and established special offices to help this group of immigrants. The Polish government and certain universities give scholarships to young people arriving from the East. Ukrainian is visible in cities, mainly in advertisements and small ads and on information posters (Fig. 3).

	English	Russian	Ukrainian	Chinese	German
Universities	96%	29%	18%	13%	4%
Banks	61%	6%	28%	–	–
Public transport in cities	100%	31%	12%	–	92%
Voivodship offices	75%	63%	31%	–	31%
Insurance companies	26%	7%	7%	7%	7%

Table 2: Foreign languages in public communication in Poland⁴²

⁴¹ My own calculations based on data obtained from the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Poland.

⁴² Representative sample for research conducted in 2018.

As has been already stated, the linguistic structure of the latest wave of Ukrainian emigration in Poland has not been fully accounted for and is undergoing rapid changes. However, on the basis of my own observations, I can say that representatives of this national group speak Russian or Ukrainian and sometimes both languages. Migrants from the eastern regions of Ukraine may know Ukrainian worse but then they speak Surzhyk, i.e. the mixture of Ukrainian and Russian (cf. Bracki 2009). Practically, after a relatively short time spent in Poland, all Ukrainian immigrants speak Polish well, with the exception of those who form isolated, closed groups (for example, construction teams). Some Ukrainians also speak Western languages, which they had learnt either in Ukraine or at Polish universities. The last factor affecting language distribution is the Polish origins of some immigrants from Ukraine and Belarus: they speak Polish when they arrive because they learned it in their home environment.

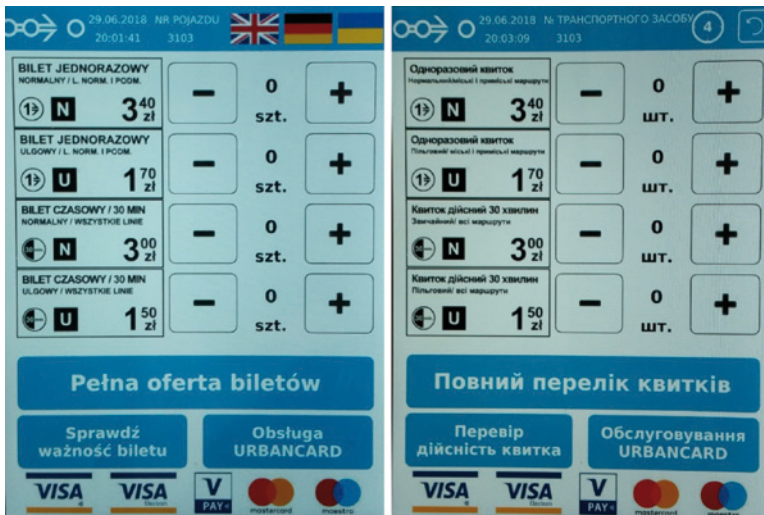


Fig. 3: The Polish and Ukrainian versions of the interface of a ticket machine in Wrocław

The image of the most recent wave of Ukrainian immigration to Poland remains unclear because – as already mentioned – there has been no systematic research into this group’s linguistic behaviour. On average, however, taking different parts of Poland into account, this image is rather positive. So, attempts to explain this phenomenon are worthwhile, especially as, until 1989 and even later, official propaganda discreetly supported the negative image of a Ukrainian man in the minds of the Polish public, blaming the entire Ukrainian nation for the ethnic cleansing and genocide of the Poles (the so-called “Volhynian slaughter”) carried out by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army together with the local civilian population in 1943.

As regards historical questions, the friendly attitude of most Poles towards the Ukrainians results from rejecting the barbarian principle of the collective responsibility of nations, which makes people settle accounts with children for the crimes committed by their parents. In addition, most Ukrainian immigrants in Poland are young people, unaware of gloomy episodes from the past, who have positive attitudes to Poland and the Polish. Although they affirm their identity, they accept the customs and rules of the country which admits them and appreciate the values of Western civilisation which they encounter in Poland. The historical religious division (the Eastern Orthodox Church vs. the Catholic Church) has lost its meaning because modern societies are becoming secularised.⁴³ The new situation, in which the old Polish-Ukrainian conflict is not artificially supported by propaganda, fosters the social integration of eastern immigrants in Poland.

The full success of Ukrainian emigration is due to economic, political and cultural factors. In the economy, the crucial role has been played by the attractiveness of the Polish labour market and the sense of security. Since such factors are obvious and easy to identify, they have already been described in numerous papers.⁴⁴ As far as political arguments are concerned, what has acted as a strong catalyst for effective Polish-Ukrainian collaboration, which enables the integration of all immigrants from the East in Polish society, is a shared fear of Russia's striving to regain influences in Central Europe.

The most complex factor – requiring a more comprehensive description – are arguments referring to culture understood as a space of codes and values shared by all Central European nations. This community was formed a long time ago. The ancestors of today's Poles, Ukrainians and Belarusians lived in one state for several hundred years. However, mistakes made by the great feudal aristocracy (so-called magnates) who, until the eighteenth century, had ruled over the vast eastern territories – especially no investment in education, no respect for local people's aspirations and no attempt to solve substantial social inequalities – together with invasions carried out by neighbouring states led to rigid divisions and ethnic-religious conflicts, whose tragic apogee was reached in the first half of the twentieth century. Now, these divisions are being healed as immigrants, who get to know Polish reality, gradually reject the Soviet stereotype of a “Polish

⁴³ Most Ukrainians are members of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which achieved autocephaly in 2019 and became independent of the Patriarch of Moscow; the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (the so-called Uniate Church) recognizes the primacy of the Pope. Thus, in contrast to Russia, in the case of Ukraine, religion does not evoke anti-western sentiments.

⁴⁴ In this case, the arguments are always the same: “for the same kind of work a Ukrainian worker would get much less in his/her own country than in Poland and that is why he/she chooses Poland”. However, this liberal-democratic discourse is sometimes interfered with by anti-Polish discourses, especially visible in the social media. Their aim is to antagonise the two nations by intensifying incidents and abuses which sometimes occur in the work of emigrants (very bad social conditions, too low salaries, employers' poor attitudes towards their workers, etc.).

lord” looking down at humble people. Similar customs and languages, much the same anthropological traits and – what is very important – the centuries-long experience of living in the same state make the hundreds or thousands of Ukrainians and Belarusians who come to Poland every year feel at home and integrate with Polish society. Modern Poland – democratic and egalitarian, although still bearing the burden of the past – is inclusive and welcomes its new citizens.

This is nothing strange because eastern languages and accents as well as customs and religion contributed to the culture and prosperity of the state (Kingdom of Poland, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) for many centuries. Today, these factors are responsible for a general acceptance of eastern immigrants in Poland: many Poles (especially from western and central *vivodeships*) treat them as their countrymen and rightful citizens, not strangers who have come to take their jobs away. This would never happen without shared cultural codes and common history.

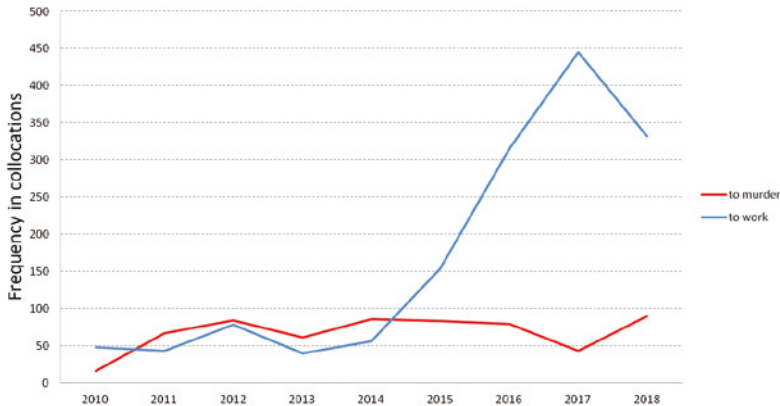


Fig. 4: Semantic fields MURDER and WORK in collocations of the lexeme “Ukrainian”

To illustrate changes caused by this recent emigration from the East, research (Fig. 4) has been carried out into the semantic field of collocations with the lexeme *Ukrainiec* ‘Ukrainian’ in Polish-language open-internet texts from the period 2010–2018. The chosen collocations are two opposite dominants of the image of a Ukrainian in Poland: a historical one, related to the massacres of Poles in Volhynia (the lexemes *mord* ‘murder’ and *mordować* ‘to murder’), and a modern one, related to the Ukrainian presence on the Polish job market (the lexemes *praca* ‘work’ and *pracować* ‘to work’).⁴⁵ The result is surprising: until 2014, when Ukrainians started coming to Poland after Euromaidan, *Ukrainiec* appeared almost as often in collo-

⁴⁵ To monitor the internet, the tool MONCO, created by the consortium CLARIN-PL, was used (<http://monco.frazeo.pl>).

cation with the lexeme *praca* as with the lexeme *mord* (the latter even slightly more frequently). Since 2015 the profile of the semantic lexeme *Ukrainiec* has been rapidly changing. The modern aspect, highlighting the role of Ukrainians as members of the job market, integrated in society, has become dominant. This historical change should be considered very positive.

5. Conclusion

Summing up, the situation of Polish is good: the language is stable and is developing in a favourable legal, educational, academic and technical environment. As a result the number of its users is increasing. There are more and more electronic resources and natural language processing tools for Polish.⁴⁶ The situation of the few minority languages in Poland is equally stable and mostly uncontroversial (this also applies to German, which has a relatively high number of speakers and before 1989, i.e. in “communist” times, was treated with suspicion by the authorities). The phenomena that have become more dynamic in recent years are: the emancipation of varieties (especially Upper Silesian ones, unfortunately related to political demands) and the arrival of a great number of speakers of eastern languages (Russian, Ukrainian, and, to a lesser degree, Belarusian, Surzhyk and Trasianka). Knowledge of foreign languages in Poland is improving although the change in its profile is worrying (Russian as well as French and German, i.e. the languages rooted in Polish history, are being gradually replaced by English, so that they may soon become threatened with disappearance as an L2). It is possible that in the near future 75% of the inhabitants of Poland will speak at least one foreign language. This tendency somehow follows the centuries-long tradition of multilingualism in Poland, broken in 1945 for the time span of three generations.

The greatest linguistic changes in Poland after 1945 include the unprecedented language unification and its subordination to communist rule during the totalitarian era and, after 1989, a reverse process, i.e. the appearance of minority languages in the public sphere together with the renaissance of dialects and regional varieties. A special phenomenon in the sphere of communication practices in Poland is the return of the languages of Poland’s eastern neighbours together with Polish with an easily detectible eastern accent. This is exactly what the metaphor “return to the future” used in the title of this article refers to. The coexistence of Polish and so-called “Ruthenian languages” (today, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Rusin, Lemko, Boyko, etc.) was something very natural in Poland for hundreds of years, evidenced in numerous archival records, literature and old recordings. This was broken in 1945, yet is being revived today, although in new, friendly conditions. The time is different and a beautiful myth of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – the state

⁴⁶ Most of the tools of the automatic processing of Polish have been developed by the CLARIN-PL consortium (<http://clarin-pl.eu>).

where many languages, denominations and ethno-national groups coexisted in relative harmony – should be left among other myths (cf. Bömelburg 2016). But the oxymoron in the title is used to indicate that in modern Poland – within its new borders, belonging to NATO and the EU, respecting the principles of western democracy – traces of eastern culture have returned, with thousands of people speaking with a melodious, soft accent, the same that we can hear in the recordings of Józef Piłsudski (co-founder of the modern Polish state in 1918) and that could be heard in the speech of Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and other prominent figures from the pantheon of Polish culture. The amalgam of past and present is forming, before our very eyes, a new and richer linguistic space in Poland.

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