

POLISH DIALECTOLOGY AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE CHANGING LINGUISTIC SITUATION IN VILLAGES – EARLIER RESEARCH AND A NEW DESCRIPTION OF DIALECTS IN NEW CONDITIONS (OUTLINE OF THE PROBLEM)¹

Lenkų dialektologija ir besikeičiančios kalbinės situacijos kaimuose iššūkiai – ankstesni tyrimai ir naujas tarmių aprašymas naujomis sąlygomis (problemos aprašymas)

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ANNOTATION

Dynamic changes in the linguistic situation in Polish villages necessitate a different approach to the role of dialects in linguistic research. Until now, dialectology has exposed two factors: rurality and geographic differentiation, but it has remained independent from sociolinguistics. Today, dialectology focuses on generational, situational and gender diversity of dialects, that is, on strictly sociolinguistic factors. Dialectology in the new linguistic conditions of the Polish village has evolved into a sub-discipline of sociolinguistics, utilising sociolinguistic methods.

KEYWORDS: dialectology, sociolinguistics, Polish dialects, dialects in a new social situation.

ANOTACIJA

Dinamiški kalbinės situacijos pokyčiai Lenkijos kaimuose reikalauja kitokio požiūrio į tarmių vietą lingvistiniuose tyrimuose. Iki šiol dialektologija išskyrė du veiksnius: kaimiškumą ir geografinę diferenciaciją, tačiau ji liko nepriklausoma nuo sociolingvistikos. Šiandien dialektologija daugiausia dėmesio skiria tarmių kartų, situacinei ir lyčių įvairovei, t. y. griežtai sociolingvistiniams veiksniams. Dialektologija naujomis Lenkijos kaimo kalbinėmis sąlygomis tapo sociolingvistikos subdisciplina ir naudoja sociolingvistinius metodus.

ESMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: dialektologija, sociolingvistika, lenkų kalbos tarmės, tarmės naujoje socialinėje situacijoje.

This article aims to discuss the history of Polish dialectological research and to present a possible new approach to describing the linguistic situation in rural Poland. As it turns out, for various reasons, the old methods and research cannot be continued in practice.

¹ I have already covered this topic in two articles (Rak 2021, 2023).

Bearing in mind that contemporary Polish dialectology is in a certain regression, I present here mainly theoretical remarks.

AN OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF POLISH DIALECTOLOGICAL RESEARCH

The beginning of scientific dialectology in Poland is marked by the publication of Lucjan Malinowski's book, *Beiträge zur slavischen Dialektologie. I. Ueber die Oppelnsche Mundart in Oberschlesien* (1873). Of course, earlier dialects were also addressed, but the works published at that time were typically of a fragmentary nature. Around L. Malinowski, who was a professor at the Jagiellonian University and secretary of the Linguistic Commission of the Academy of Arts and Sciences, the first scientific school in the Polish territories was established in the complete sense of the word, whose representatives began to appreciate phonetic research using a modified notation that reflected the pronunciation of words. Of course, this was a simplified notation, far from the Slavic alphabet we use today.

Malinowski's students included Jan Bystroń, Stanisław Dobrzycki, Wojciech Grzegorzewicz, Władysław Kosiński, Szymon Matusiak, Roman Zawiliński and Kazimierz Nitsch. The most important achievements were those of Nitsch, who is widely regarded as the father of Polish dialectology. The rest of Malinowski's disciples actually limited themselves to descriptions of the dialect of one village, a small region or one dialect feature. The image of Polish dialectology was entirely changed by Jan Karłowicz's *Dictionary of Polish Dialects* (1900–1911) and the syntheses prepared by K. Nitsch (1915 [1957]).

During the interwar period (as in Malinowski's time and for the first two decades of the 20th century), the main centre of dialectological research in Poland was Krakow, and more precisely, the Jagiellonian University and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences. In Warsaw, in the interwar period, a dialectological school was established, centred around Witold Doroszewski and oriented towards synchronic-sociological (statistical) research, the direction of which was set by the article *Mowa mieszkańców wsi Staroźreby* [*Speech of the Inhabitants of the Village of Staroźreby*] (Doroszewski 1934), considered, among others, by Milka Ivić (1975: 82), as a groundbreaking work for sociolinguistics. Today, this school is represented by Halina Karaś.

After the Second World War, on the one hand, research focused on linguistic geography was continued (two all-dialect atlases were created at that time: *Mały atlas gwar polskich* [*Small Atlas of Polish Dialects*] edited by Kazimierz Nitsch and Mieczysław Karaś (MAGP); and *Atlas gwar polskich* [*Atlas of Polish Dialects*] by Karol Dejna (AGP)); and, on the other hand, lexicographic work was intensified. Thus, it is no coincidence that the 20th century in Polish linguistics is referred to as the century of dictionaries. At that time, *Słownik gwar polskich* [*Dictionary of Polish Dialects*] PAN (Polish abbreviation: SGP PAN), *Słownik gwar Ostródzkiego, Warmii i Mazur* [*Dictionary of Dialects of Ostróda, Warmia and Masuria*] (SGOWM) and *Słownik gwar śląskich* [*Dictionary of Silesian Dialects*] (SGŚ), which continue to this day, began to be published. Of the larger lexicographical projects, *Słownik gwar kaszubskich na tle kultury ludowej* [*Dictionary of Kashubian Dialects against the Background of Folk Culture*] by Bernard Sychta (SychSGK) has been completed. The 21st century has so far been marked by dictionaries in which an ethnolinguistic approach is straightforward, e.g., *Słownik gwary orawskiej* [*Dictionary of the Orava Dialect*] (KąśSGO) and *Ilustrowany leksykon gwary i kultury podhalańskiej* [*Illustrated Lexicon of the Dialect and Culture of the Podhale Region*] (KąśILG), by Józef Kąś; *Ilustrowany słownik gwary i kultury spiskiej* [*Illustrated Dictionary of the Dialect and Culture of the Spisz Region*] by J. Kąś and Maciej Rak (KąśRakILG), *Słownik gwar Lubelszczyzny* [*Dictionary of the Dialects of the Lublin Region*] by Halina Pelcowa (PelSGL), and *Słownik gwary i kultury Kujaw* [*Dictionary of Dialects and Culture of the Kuyavia Region*] edited by Zofia Sawaniewska-Mochowa (SGiKK).

It is worth noting that Polish dialectology did not fall behind in comparison with other branches of linguistics. Achievements of structuralism were used to describe the phonological system of dialects (e.g., Karaś 1965; Laskowski 1965; Dejna 1973; Reichan 1980). More widely, when dialects became more and more disintegrated, sociolinguistic factors began to be taken into account (e.g., Dunaj 1986; Kurek 1990; Kaś 1994). Finally, researchers turned to ethnolinguistics (e.g., KaśSGO; KaśILG; KaśRakILG; PeISGL), which, in Polish conditions, is cognitive in nature.

According to K. Nitsch, the basic goal of dialectology, i.e. the description of the geographical differentiation of language, has been replaced today – in connection with the dynamic socio-economic and demographic changes that occurred in the Polish village after WW II – with other specific goals: 1) the protection of disappearing dialects and their revitalization; 2) the study of the directions of changes taking place at all levels of the language used in villages; 3) the description of each element originating from dialect, taking into account its manifestations in all possible texts.

The former practical goals outlined and pursued by K. Nitsch, the preparation of a complete and detailed general dialect dictionary and an accurate atlas of Polish dialects, have lost their scale. Thus, Polish dialectology has lost impetus, a fact that researchers have been aware of at least since the 1970s, as evidenced by a rich literature that exposes the variability and heterogeneity of the code used by villagers. Willingly or unwillingly, sociolinguistics is increasingly coming to the fore here, and as a consequence, dialectology is actually functioning as its sub-discipline.

In view of the comments in the previous paragraph, one can ask a question that is also part of the title of this article: what could the new methods of dialectological research look like? The answer should be preceded by two clarifications: the first concerns the linguistic situation in the Polish village and the approach dialectologists take to changes; and the second examines the research experience of other disciplines that also address the broader issue of folklore.

LINGUISTIC SITUATION IN POLISH VILLAGES

The contemporary Polish village, compared to the town of the early 20th century (as is well known, observations of the village language of that period were the basis of K. Nitsch's research and his definition of dialectology), differs in the following respects:

1. The type of economy is different. The vast majority of villagers do not make a living from cultivating the land, which means that, among other things, they commute to larger towns or cities, engage in agro-tourism, work locally in non-agricultural occupations, earn money abroad, or live off pensions. In addition, farming is different: the tools and machinery used a century ago today can only be found in museums, which is why iconography plays such an essential role in the dialect dictionaries created in the 21st century, as lexis is increasingly diverging from reality. Villages have been electrified, sewerage and water supply systems are almost the norm, and access to the media and to the Internet is virtually the same throughout Poland. In this way, the boundary between the village and the city – that is, what was one of the foundations sustaining the traditional understanding of dialectology – is blurring.

2. The social class of peasants no longer exists. At most, we can speak of modern villagers as descendants of peasants. Apart from them, people are living in villages (their number and age depend on various factors, especially the natural qualities of the area and the distance from urban agglomerations) who have moved from the cities. This is what should be used to explain the slow but successive decline in the urbanisation rate in Poland. As a result, everything that dialectologists, ethnologists and folklorists used to describe has been severely eroded, including dialects, a peculiar axionormative system, a type of folk religiosity, agrocentrism, folk customs, and verbal folklore. It is impossible for villagers to – for the sake

of preserving folk culture and dialect – give up the achievements of civilisation and education, and to condemn themselves to live in a village museum voluntarily.

3. Polish dialects are becoming disintegrated at all levels (e.g. loss of mazuration (e.g., *czekać* instead of a dialectal *cekać*, *szkoda* – dial. *skoda*, *żaba* – dial. *zaba*, *jeżdżę* – dial. *jezdze*); disturbance in old long vowels (e.g. *ptak* – dial. *ptok* or *ptouk*, *śnieg* – dial. *śniyg* or *śnig*, *koń* – dial. *kón* or *kłyń*) and nasal vowels realization (e.g. *wąs* – dial. *wons* or *wos*, *idę* – dial. *ide* or *idem* or *idym*, *ręka* – dial. *rynka* or *ronka* or *reka*); loss of typical dialectal vocabulary (e.g., dialectal names for engagement: *namowiny*, *nomowiny*, *nomówniny*, *rajynie*, *rynkowiny*, *umówniny*, *zrynkowiny* are replaced by one nationwide word *zaręczyny*); the displacement of dialectal word formations by nationwide ones (e.g., *biały* – dial. *bialasty*, *czerwony* – dial. *czerwonasty*; *rzemyczek* – dial. *rzemyszek*). They are best preserved in Silesia and the southern part of Lesser Poland (Podhale, Orava, Spiš), but even here, there are clear interferences with general colloquial Polish, which have been described for almost thirty years. We have been hearing about the disappearance of dialects for at least 150 years, and dialectologists still have something to do in the field, apart from working on previously collected materials. Dialects, like any living language, evolve, and this process cannot be stopped.

4. The three points above apply similarly to both those parts of Poland that were within the country's borders before 1945 and those that were annexed as a result of the Yalta and Potsdam agreements.

THE ISSUE OF FOLKLORE AS SEEN BY OTHER DISCIPLINES

The issue of folklore has been described from various perspectives, including sociological, ethnographic, demographic, anthropological (physical anthropology), economic, legal (agricultural law), political, and statistical (agrarian statistics). If we examine the scientific publications that fall under these disciplines, we notice something that distinguishes them significantly from dialectological works. They are oriented toward the present, and this is also evident in the scope of the research area.

Eighty years after the end of World War II and the change of Poland's borders, dialectologists still attach far greater importance to the dialects of Lesser Poland, Silesia, Greater Poland and Mazovia. On the other hand, the post-German western and northern areas (i. e. the Lower Silesian, Lubuskie, West Pomeranian Voivodeship, the western-northern part of the Pomeranian Voivodeship, and the north part of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship) have been labelled the new mixed dialects, in which, as assumed, the process of integration is taking place. However, this is not the case at all.



Figure. The range of Polish dialects within Poland's borders

The dialectological map of Poland, as we know it, was established by the post-war work of K. Nitsch. The isoglosses – understandably – could not pass from the area of pre-war Poland to the territories to which, after 1945, the Polish population from the Eastern Borderlands and other parts of the country, as well as Lemkos and Ukrainians displaced during the “Vistula” action, flowed in a virtually uncoordinated manner. The MAGP therefore decided to omit these regions.

Other disciplines that also address the issue of folklore have framed the study area differently. However, let’s start from the interwar period. Two atlases were produced at that time in Krakow, Mieczysław Małecki’s, Kazimierz Nitsch’s *Atlas językowy polskiego Podkarpacia* [*Language Atlas of the Polish Podkarpacie*] (AJPP) and Kazimierz Moszyński’s *Atlas kultury ludowej w Polsce* [*Atlas of Folk Culture in Poland*] (AKLP). The former covered the broader Podkarpacie region (including data from the Lemko region). The AKLP, in turn, covered the entire territory of the interwar Polish state, including areas inhabited by the Ukrainian and Belarusian populations. Both atlases were created simultaneously.

After the war, the MAGP and *Polski atlas etnograficzny* [*Polish Ethnographic Atlas*], ed. by Józef Gajek (PAE), were published. However, a clear discrepancy is evident between these works. The MAGP includes only 7 points on the post-German territories as a sample, “representing Polish centres in the Ukrainian, Belarusian and Lithuanian areas the populations of which moved to the recovered western territories after the war”. *Polski atlas etnograficzny* [*The Polish Ethnographic Atlas*], in turn, “covers the entire area of the Polish state, and thus the lands that returned after World War II”. An attempt to overcome this situation was the two-volume *Mały atlas językowy województwa gorzowskiego* [*Little Language Atlas of the Gorzow Voivodeship*] (MAJWG). It turned out, however, that the application of the methods developed by K. Nitsch for the description of material much more complex than traditionally understood dialects did not bring the expected results. Instead of isoglosses, the phenomena on the maps were arranged in the form of isolated points. Despite these inconveniences, MAJWG provides us with some insight into the actual linguistic situation in the Lubuskie region, about which we learned much more later from the already cited Anna Zielińska’s *Mowa pogranicza. Studium o językach i tożsamościach w regionie lubuskim* [*Borderland Language. A Study of Languages and Identities in the Lubuskie Region*] (2013).

As a consequence of the approach outlined above, ethnographers (as well as sociologists, demographers and statisticians) describe the whole of Poland within its current borders, while dialectologists focus on the dialects of Lesser Poland, Mazovia, Greater Poland and Silesia, showing the changes taking place in these regions. The post-German territories, on the other hand, are viewed from the sociolinguistic and communicative perspective.

WHAT COULD NEW DIALECTOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF THE POLISH VILLAGE LOOK LIKE?

First, it is necessary to accept a new approach to dialectology that is no longer perceived as the study of linguistic geography, but simply as the study of the language of the village, especially the language of those people who have lived in a particular place for generations. The last requirement, however, is not a *condicio sine qua non*, as we can notice that, in a rural environment, newcomers sometimes adopt the dialect and the local way of life. Thus, it turns out that it is no longer necessary to search for the oldest informants because, in practice, their accounts are either a residual picture of what has irretrievably passed away (or at best is passing away) into history, or they are often stories heard from their parents or grandparents, according to the principle: *people used to say that way, but today they longer say it like that*. This type of speech mainly reveals a passive vocabulary.

Second, because:

- 1) We continue to derive information on Polish dialects mainly from works for which material was obtained from people born in the late 19th century;
- 2) There are still areas on the map of Poland that are poorly studied in terms of dialectology;
- 3) There is a need to repeat the research after several decades to indicate the extent and direction of change based on it;
- 4) The acoustic description of dialects is promising.

It is worthwhile to carry out extensive descriptive research across the country from scratch. Of course, this is not an easy task. In practice, it would consist of the preparation of a very large, representative database of recordings, which, after appropriate processing, would form a corpus of Polish dialects, postulated already eleven years ago by Halina Karaś. In this way, we would obtain reliable information on how people actually speak in Polish villages, as the research actually concerns spoken Polish.

Taking into account the particular complexity of the linguistic situation in the territories that were incorporated into Poland after 1945, it is worth applying the method of describing linguistic/communicative communities, which Anna Zielińska (2013) practised in the Lubuskie region.

Third, major dialectological projects that will not be implemented can be replaced by others, both nationwide and regional, specific ones. The former, for example, includes the (still poorly recognised) topic of regionalisms. A breakthrough study in this regard, and one that also refers to dialectology (as is well known, some regionalisms originate from dialects), would be an atlas of regionalisms. As far as dialectological regional projects are concerned, we already have several dictionaries with a more recent approach to dialect lexis, e.g., Lesser Poland (SGM), Silesia (SGŚ), Lublin (PełSGL), Podhale (KąśILG), Orava (KąśSGO), Spisz (KąśRakILG), Kuyavya (SGiKK), and a series of Greater Poland regional dictionaries. As one can see, some regions, such as Podlachia and Suwałki, still require further study. As for detailed research, there is undoubtedly a lot of work to be done in the field of vocabulary and dialect syntax.

Fourth, the second life of dialect can be seen in broadly understood cultural texts, including literature, film and ‘disco polo’ songs. Interest in the first kinds of texts was set by Stanisław Dubisz’s book *Stylizacja gwarowa w polskiej prozie trzydziestolecia powojennego [Dialect Stylization in the Polish Novels of the Thirty Years after the War]* (1986). Dialect stylisation in film is discussed by Monika Kresa (e.g., 2019), while the lyrics of ‘disco polo’ songs were characterised from a linguistic and cultural perspective by Bogusław Skowronek and Natalia Zborowska (2021). Even at first glance, these songs show many parallels with traditional verbal folklore, especially love songs (building parallel literal and figurative images, using the same props and similar metaphors). Dialects also appear on the Internet, which is the subject of the study.

Fifth, a separate topic is dialect literary output, which is practised primarily by authors from Podhale, Orava and Spisz. A look at this literature from the perspective of lexical statistics makes it possible to distinguish a dialect literary style different from the colloquial and artistic styles described by Jerzy Bartmiński (1990). The artistic style is derived from the colloquial one, and the literary style from both, while operating with a greater number of recon-dite vocabulary.

Sixth, dialectology should respond to social expectations, which are manifested, among other things, in the form of revitalising dialects for the activities of regional folk dance and song groups and different types of performances. Regarding the social expectations placed on dialectologists, it is essential to capitalise on the opportunity presented by Poland’s ratification

in 2011 of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Such heritage, of course, includes dialect.

Seventh, strengthening dialectology in methodological and material terms can be achieved by drawing on the discipline's historical roots. There are still manuscript works in the archives that can change our view of the history of Polish science. Important remarks on the methodology of dialectological research can also be found, for example, in the letters written by K. Nitsch.

Eighth, we can change the public perception of dialectology by popularising its achievements on the Internet. This is served, for example, by the portal *Dialekty i gwary polskie. Kompendium internetowe* [*Polish Dialects. An Online Compendium*] edited by H. Karaś². The need for such popularising activities is confirmed by the results of a survey of perceptual dialectology carried out within a group of students of the Faculty of Humanities (non-philologists) at the University of Szczecin. The answers obtained reveal and confirm that respondents who are not philologists see the dialectological map of Poland quite differently.

A suggestion outlined in this way could result, for example, in a new atlas of Polish dialects that also takes into account new, previously unknown designations. Of course, this is not an easy task. After all, our decisions are rooted in a great tradition of dialectological research, which I briefly outlined in the first part of this article.

FINAL REMARKS

Undoubtedly, dialectological studies should encompass the entire territory of Poland. However, since the post-German areas and those that belonged to the Republic of Poland prior to 1945 have distinct linguistic situations, the description of the village language must take this into account. In relation to the western and northern lands, the best seems to be the approach proposed and implemented by A. Zielińska, i.e. looking at communication communities that continue the dialects and traditions of the areas from which they came, or – if they have not changed their place of residence (I am talking about the Polish population living in the eastern provinces of the German state, which were incorporated into Poland) – continue pre-war linguistic and cultural relations.

As for the areas that were within the borders of the Republic of Poland before 1945, it seems justified to undertake descriptive studies. It turns out (cf. the remarks from the section *Linguistic situation in Polish villages*) that the disintegration of dialects is already so advanced that instead of searching for traces of older dialect features, i.e. conducting retrospective research, it is better to simply note and describe the current features of the dialect understood as the language of the countryside. Since dialectology is connected with folklore, new research should also be aimed at recording new realisations of the artistic style of the dialect. For this reason, the spectrum of research will include, for example, party and disco polo works. Even a cursory comparison of texts of traditional verbal folklore (e.g. Bartmiński 1974) and disco polo song lyrics reveals many similarities in terms of subject matter (mainly love), symbolism, parallelisms and vocabulary (e.g., the presence of short pronominal forms: *me* (*moje*), *twe* (*twoje*), *swe* (*swoje*), *mego* (*mojego*), *twego* (*twojego*), etc.). Since the tradition of describing spoken language in Poland dates back to the 1970s (see e.g. Dunaj 2019), the developed methods can be successfully applied to material recorded in rural areas.

The postulates presented in this article, particularly the descriptive account of the language of villages throughout Poland, would enable us to break the deadlock in dialectological research.

² <http://www.dialektologia.uw.edu.pl/index.php>.

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POLISH DIALECTOLOGY AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE CHANGING LINGUISTIC SITUATION IN VILLAGES – NEW METHODS IN NEW CONDITIONS

Summary

Dynamic changes in the linguistic situation in Polish villages necessitate a different approach to the role of dialects in linguistic research. Until now, dialectology has exposed two factors: rurality and geographic differentiation, but it has remained independent of sociolinguistics. Today, dialectology focuses on generational, situational and gender diversity of dialects, that is, on strictly sociolinguistic factors. Dialectology in the new linguistic conditions of the Polish village has evolved into a sub-discipline of sociolinguistics, utilising sociolinguistic methods.

With that in mind, it is worthwhile to carry out extensive descriptive research across the country from scratch. Of course, this is not an easy task. In practice, it would consist in the preparation of an extensive, representative database of recordings, which – after appropriate processing – would form a corpus of Polish dialects. In this way, we would obtain reliable information on how people actually speak in Polish villages, as the research actually concerns spoken Polish. Taking into account the particular complexity of the linguistic situation in the territories that were incorporated into Poland after 1945, it is worth applying the method of describing linguistic/communicative communities, which Anna Zielińska (2013) practised in the Lubuskie region.

Major dialectological projects that will not be implemented can be replaced by others, both nationwide and regional, specific ones. The former, for example, includes the (still poorly recognised) topic of regionalisms. The second life of dialect can be seen in broadly understood cultural texts, including literature, film and ‘disco polo’ songs. A separate topic is dialect literary output, which is practised primarily by authors from Podhale, Orava and Spisz. A look at this literature from the perspective of lexical statistics makes it possible to distinguish a dialect literary style different from the colloquial and artistic styles. Dialectology should respond to social expectations, which are manifested, among other things, in the form of revitalising dialects for the activities of regional folk dance and song groups and different types of performances. Strengthening dialectology in methodological and material terms can be achieved by drawing on the discipline's historical roots. We can change the public perception of dialectology by popularising its achievements on the Internet. A suggestion outlined in this way could result, for example, in a new atlas of Polish dialects that also takes into account new, previously unknown designations.