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LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL CHANGE. PUBLIC COMMUNICATION, NATION, AND IDENTITY¹

Dramatic transformations in Poland after the fall of communism and the country's thorny path to democracy provide fascinating material for reflection and study of language in its relations to politics and social change. A review of communist newspeak, followed by the breakdown of monopoly on public speaking, the beginning of the language of the opposition, finally developing into various styles of Solidarity, serve as a backdrop for an analysis of the post-communist speech developing in diverse, occasionally opposite directions, affecting all levels of linguistic reality at different speeds, with varying intensity and degree of immunity to external manipulation.

Key words: public communication, rhetoric, public language, identity, social change

Change, evolution of language and its connection to historically meaningful events have been a topic of interest to linguists and sociologists for a long time. They were attempting to study it in a number of variants, as – for instance – a specific case of links between culture and politics, language, social awareness, public communication and power. A change in the external reality makes an imprint on language, on the linguistic image of the world – such affirmation, while today to a large extent banal, remains still true. The difficulty lies in the rather slow pace of the linguistic change conditioned by many diverse factors, social transitions do not simply leave their reflection on the system of language or on styles of discourse – some levels of language are very resistant to change, others more rapidly register

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transformations in the social awareness. Years ago, Emil Benveniste formulated such a hypothesis in a somewhat more general manner:

“When historical development is examined, it becomes clear [...] that language and society evolve separately. Language remains the same, unchanged, during the most profound social upheavals. Since 1917, the structure of the Russian society became – to say the least – thoroughly transformed but nothing comparable happened in the structure of the Russian language.” (See Benveniste, 1980, p. 28; also Benveniste, 1977 and mainly Benveniste, 1966)

According to this eminent linguist, language and society are two different semiotic systems, complementing and interpreting each other. Language makes it possible for society to exist in a symbolic and real manner, facilitates articulation of needs and imaginings, group consolidation, a sense of belonging, finally – contributes to the creation of identity. Language – according to Benveniste – becomes the means to interpret society. This term *interpretant* – also means that language describes and conceptualizes both, social and individual experience, allowing self reflection and articulation of life experiences. Suggesting that language change occurs slowly in comparison to social change, Benveniste understood language as a system in the sense used by Ferdinand de Saussure: a linguistic system in its ethnic, hierarchically ordered variety. On the level of basic binary oppositions defining the operating rules of a phonetic system, the Polish language did not change for years, still, social change impacted our language in the area of style, phraseology, in idiomatic expressions, in the social existence of the so-called winged words. In short: in public communication. I would like to offer a few comments on these changes. I’ll focus on what happened to public speaking after 1989, starting from the previous situation i.e., public communication during the years of the People’s Republic of Poland.

Language of communists

There are usually many varieties of the language of power. Many ways of expression, many styles to which the people in power attribute a defined efficiency, co-create this language. The language of power exists always in a concrete socio-linguistic context reflecting a social situation in a given time and place. Its official bureaucratic variety may be its dominant form. It was the case in Russia from 17th to the early 19th century. Or, it could be the “new-speak”, as in Poland during the times of the PRL (Uspienski, 1985; Głowiński, 2009). In such cases, the system of social communication was being constructed from commands defining “what was permissible to say” and “what was forbidden to say.” From the point of view of people in power it was a cohesive system and the only one possible. In fact, it remained only a postulate, because in the linguistic practice, several varieties of

opposing ways of communication existed. The language of power identified in time its main enemy, the language of the opposition. Clearly defined and precisely named, the image of the enemy differentiates this genre of public communication from among other ideologically neutral communication styles. In the classical version of the “newspeak,” like in the style of official documents, the “authority” or the “institution” are the ones speaking. From the point of view of Bakhtin’s understanding of communication, speech, word, pronouncement, are always “someone’s,” “someone else’s,” “heard before,” hence “expressed by someone” (this concept is so well known that it should not require an attribution in a footnote). The Polish version of the newspeak is the language of the ruling party and so the “only proper way of speaking.” As seen from the perspective of the so-called average user of the Polish language spoken in the discussed period, it is the official language, the model when it comes to public expression. It is the official style, compulsory in given social situations. The speaking agent here is in fact “no-one” or “an official representative,” who has certainly a name, when speaking publicly, but has no individual traits for the recipients.

The newspeak is usually discussed in categories of appropriation and unification of the general language, but in my view, as a quasi-language (using again Głowiński’s terminology) it could be examined in the categories of alienation: the late 1970s and 80s in Poland witnessed a gradual, ongoing process of deconstruction of the newspeak being displaced by the opposition styles of communication. The authorities during this period strive to modernize the newspeak, making its own efficiency dependent on this language created by them but in fact not modifiable. This process leads to a sociological differentiation of the experience world into “ours” and “theirs” (“authorities,” “commies,” “they”) and to a corresponding specialization of speaking styles and its moral assessment. On the level of basic communication conventions, according to which speaking styles fall into specific categories, appears a dominant divide of “public” – “private,” i.e. an opposition ruling social communication also today. Clearly, no-one says in private what is being expressed in interviews, in “stage” appearances (television, academic lecture, and radio or press interview). This divide in the 1970s and 80s gained in Poland a special semiotic value. Another layer of contrasting concepts was being imposed on the opposition “private” – “public:” the “written” and the “said,” identified with “speaking to oneself” and “speaking what was dictated.” Let us evoke the following classifications of verbal behaviours: “he speaks from notes, so says what they told him to say, he is a liar, like all of them” and “he speaks without notes, so he says what he thinks, spontaneously, truly” (like Wałęsa and his advisors during the Gdańsk Shipyard strikes in the 80s). Not only language as a whole is able fulfill the function of an interpreter of social behaviours but this role could also be assumed by style and manners of speaking, even communication customs that in time become representative of attitudes, opinions and beliefs.

The language, speech, style, individual manner of speaking, less frequently – idiolect, are usually described from the point of view of their internal specifics, linguistic (syntax, semantics, rhetorical strategies) and as keywords of social meanings of speech.

“It is considered as a sign which – if properly interpreted (i.e. treated not only as direct information but also its premises) – can tell us much (about social awareness, technique of power, etc.)” (Głowiński, 2009, p. 12)

The newspeak explains reality, creates an image of the world composed of simple oppositions and suggestions about problems that would allow to overcome temporary difficulties of power. A false image, uniform and homogenous. This manner of official speaking will gradually erode and fragment into many “languages,” communication styles that proliferate and perceptibly diversify during the recent years.

The change begins in fact from gradual destruction of the language monolith. In different kinds of the newspeak, it served mainly the goals of propaganda as an instrument of persuasion, expression of ideas promoted by the authorities, as one of many ways to influence social awareness. It was a method of manipulation (Bralczyk, 2001). The language of propaganda, the official language which existed alongside private communication usages, strongly influencing them, interpreted the world in categories of order, gradual fulfilment of social needs and plans for the future, thus creating an illusion of reality. The newspeak strived to transform speech into “nomenclature,” or code whose signs represent reality, describe events and actions in an explicit manner, attributing to them at the same time constant symbolic values. PRL propaganda at various times and in different degrees attempted to transform the official language into a unifying system, with little hope of success due to the nature of language as a semiotic system (I allude here to the famous thesis of structural linguistics that language is not nomenclature, i.e. an ensemble of terms describing reality always in the same manner. See De Saussure, 1991).

Those who study the newspeak see the main principles of its functioning in the realization of a range of attributes of style and composition. Poetics of the newspeak is defined by the basic characteristics of this style of public speaking. First, all varieties of the newspeak strive to clearly impose an assessment of things and matters spoken of, i.e. they create an image of the world using precise evaluations, based on: “this is good – this is bad,” non acceptable, so fated to become a target. Second, the PRL propaganda (as indeed any propaganda) tends to achieve persuasive efficacy through defining a spectrum of elements suitable for public communication (and this is a specific quality of the newspeak), through excluding some themes, people, styles as taboo. Third, in relation to the just named tendency, the linguistic taboo, linked with the prohibition of speaking about certain matters or events, transformed speaking into magical statements. And finally fourth, the quasi-language constructed in this manner described the world in a perfectly arbi-

trary way, indifferently, shaping the general language, i.e. also the image of reality, according to ideological guidelines (Głowiński, 2003, pp. 12-33).

The breakdown of communist monopoly on public speaking

This is how (basically) functioned the language of power during the 1960s and 70s – the official language, state-building, clearly distinguished from casual, everyday speech. The 1980s and 90s bring a gradual destruction of the monolithic model of social communication, communication between the power and society, and within the society between groups of which it was composed – the model tentatively imposed by the PRL propaganda. This is the time (as was said before) of a gradual and continuously progressing collapse of a model of social communication, a particular model according to which the language of power functions in totalitarian regime. The monophonic and one-dimensional configuration operating until that time (“the party speaks, the society listens and executes”), when a single stable way of communication, allegedly corresponding to the stability of the political configuration, derails. What in fact occurs is that the power and the opposition speak in different languages. The opposition’s speaking styles shed the character of privacy when it becomes representative of social interests.

The change of strategy by the authorities shows in various attempts of correction of the models of communication accepted until then. These modifications are supposedly implemented by attempts to return to a scrupulous observance of ritual functions of “our” (party) language, full of pathos and slogan (We have one Poland,” “Socialism is historically irreversible”), or, through various modernising strategies, such as “scientification,” quoting scientific concepts to analyse events, using the “propaganda of success” or, depending on needs, “propaganda of failure.” Statements by representatives of power began to display a strategy of a declared need to build a new “common language,” appropriate to a changed social situation.

General Jaruzelski expressed it most openly at the XX Congress of PZPR (Polish Unified Workers’ Party): *The goal is to understand each other, to speak the same language.*

Evidently, the choice of such strategy is dictated by the awareness that real communication has been broken. The language of dialogue becomes also a *symbol and instrument of national renewal*. It is also connected to the declared process of civic empowerment, pluralisation, and democratization (Bralczyk, 2003, p. 15).

The power attempts in various ways to make its language credible and, by the same token, to find a social space where speaking in this style would “in a new way” create an identity for those who use this kind of speaking. These largely inefficient strategies lead in fact do the disintegration of the “classical model” of the newspeak into a range of types and variations (Głowiński, 2009, pp. 128-151). It is a process parallel to polarization of attitudes in the camp of power which by then ceased to be a monolith.

Language of the opposition

When power lost its communication monopoly, the “language” of opposition begins to leak into the realm of public speaking. Oppositional expression constitutes itself as a conscious negation of the language of power. It breaks communications monopoly of the newspeak, builds its own models of social communication. It is not so much a reversal of previous norms, official manners of public speaking but rather creation of new models. During PRL, power spoke in monologue, the opposition builds a discourse based on the principles of dialogue. On the level of elementary semiotic conventions, the language of the opposition is being shaped as a live speech, spontaneous and personal. The new speak in its model form was treated as a programmed and ideologized language. Constructing a public statement as a reflection of thought rather than of a binding ideology is a defining criterion for the will to break the monopoly of power. Public speaking is considered as an act of an autonomous individual, as an articulation of original thoughts rather than imposed ideological beliefs. Social speaking is supposed to be a sign of social awareness of a given group. It is preferable to speak inaccurately, with little eloquence but true to one’s convictions, than speak well but what (for whatever reason) is expected. In contrast to the world created by the newspeak, reality that is revealed in the discourse of the opposition is neither totally binary, nor univocal. In the order of articulated ideas and manners of speaking, there are various possible assessments of events. The meanings of words and particularly loaded phrases are being established from scratch (e.g. defining the adjective “democratic,” stripping it from meanings and connotations acquired in expressions from the PRL years, such as “democratic socialism”), while semantic manipulations typical of the newspeak consisted in subjecting meanings to a determined, single assessment. There is a tendency to bring back the basic functions of expression as a marker for thought and means of persuasion. Lech Wałęsa’s speaking style provides a model form for these tendencies, both as president of “Solidarność” and later, as President of the Republic of Poland:

“(...) it is a spontaneous language, full of external signs of spontaneity, such as numerous deictic elements, i.e. indicating the circumstances of speaking as well as solecisms, so original at times, that many rhetoricians would die for them; inconsistencies and self-contradictions banishing all suspicions of fabrication, backbreaking phraseological combinations and peculiar metaphors, never encountered before: all invalidating in advance any claims of manipulation.” (Bralczyk, 2003, p. 39)

Opposition is supposed to speak in an authentic, non contrived manner. Its voice is addressed to anybody who has had enough of the existing order (a typical slogan from this period says: “We understand everybody”). This manner of social

communication must be the opposite of the ritual and the arbitrary. Decisions, activities, and steps are to be discussed, meanings need to be clarified and determined in such a way that the meanings of statements relate not to ideology but to the reality in its present form; that they shape the world of acceptable and understandable connotations. That they restore the natural functions to social communication.

Return of freedoms

The years when the speech of the oppositions was being born deconstruct the basic function of an *interpretant* attributed to ethnic languages. In its fundamental role, the Polish language becomes limited to an indicator of national affiliation, while the function of building various social identities is assumed by strategies and styles of communication, more or less ideologically correlated. As a nation can be perceived in the form of a constellation of interest groups, so a language may be interpreted as a mixture of communication styles and conventions, more or less structured, reflecting affiliations and social divisions.

On the level of social communications, political freedom quite simply translates into freedom of expression. It is a phenomenon observed a long time ago but still present. Freedom of expression leads usually to multiple conventions of public speaking, to multiple communications strategies and to their polarization; to a reactivation of still functional or to development of new rhetorical strategies. We may be usefully reminded that rhetoric became a communication strategy as a result of ownership disputes conducted in a situation of assured freedom of expression. On the other hand, rhetoric as a social practice can only develop and exist in democratic societies (Barthes, 1970). Authoritarian power, and totalitarian even more so, tend to prevent articulation of views different from those they promote. They eliminate dialogue as a principle of social interaction; replace it with monologue, a language that describes the world using terms-labels of judgemental character.

The years following 1989 in Poland are a time when rhetorical strategies and of rhetoric as a strategy of social communication in public speaking were being reborn. Not always in an ideal form, often even faulty but showing the occurrence of communication in a democratic social space. Democratization opens up potential for an emerging freedom of expression – still another obvious statement difficult to invalidate. Rhetoric of public speaking occurring in its variations after the year 1989, had no affinity with a homogenous model of expression, to one recognized convention. We differ in this respect from other democracies re-emerging or constituted anew and from their conventions of public speaking. Thus for instance in parliamentarianism in African countries, in its version installed after Nelson Mandela took power, British tradition became the main model for public speaking in that area of social life (Salazar, 2003, pp. 54-67). In Poland no connections were being made either to models of public expression from the period between the wars (Rataj, 1998), or – in a clear manner – to practices known in Western countries.

Polish public speaking is among all situational, spontaneous, and shifting. It occurs as a result of conventions developed by successive government teams and from models fixed in the language of successive parliamentary oppositions. It correlates obviously with views on political efficiency, with strategic goals of groups and parties. On the semantic level, it forms a constellation of diverse slogans and formulas appealing to given beliefs ("Let's separate the past with a thick line," "Nice or death"), but in the space of rhetorical strategies and connected with them semi-otic behaviours it constitutes a serious regrouping of formerly binding customs. In contrast with the convention of public speaking during the inter war period, social communication at the summits of power (and within its scope) loses the ability to create norms in a positive sense of the term. The pre-war Sejm, in spite of disputes and quarrels, still remained a model for speaking of the intelligentsia (or possibly – specifically for literary speech. Precisely in that social space were born conventional verbal behaviours which were copied in less official speaking. The Sejm of the IIIrd and IVth Republic of Poland absorbed freely models of casual and even of private speaking, with syntactical and semantic properties of this style, pseudo-original metaphors and strategies for ruining of political opponents using all kinds of aggressive rhetoric. Parliamentary communications by politicians while maintaining superficial conventions of politeness ("High Chamber!" [Members of the House], "Mister Speaker!", specific conventions of parliamentary speaking (interpellation by an MP, voice in a discussion, project of a law) become anti-models of sophisticated linguistic behaviour. In its less official but widely distributed version, in television programs of opinion, political speaking and even social interaction take the form of argument treated as a fundamental basis for social debate (Mazurek, 2006).

Typologically, hence from a significantly simplified perspective in the context of attitude towards traditional models, we can distinguish two fundamental varieties of today's public speaking. I will call them the "language of Wałęsa" and the "language of Mazowiecki."

The first one constructed in relation to the customs of local community, individual idiolect, and cultural customs in a world where the speaker is anchored. The second of the two styles of public speaking named symbolically after well known Polish politicians is formed in relation to speech conventions known from history and considered as verbal behaviours binding in public social situations. The first variety is closer to the customs of private communication, the second usually lies far from them.

Both varieties create image of the politician as a public figure. Both are used here as names for certain tendencies, sociolects, and not to describe an idiolect of a concrete person: Lech Wałęsa, a unionist and politician, or Mazowiecki, the Prime Minister, as it was done in a linguistic diagnosis expressed by Jerzy Bralczyk. Both varieties develop mainly in opposition to the language of power during the times of the PRL. The one and the other result from discussions, from disputes conducted when the democratic opposition was being formed; it was composed –

as we know – of people from diverse social environments. The variety called here the “language of Wałęsa” is the expression of a tribune of the people. It is a spontaneous situational speaking, full of amazing rhetoric, but not always successful or gripping; full of colloquial expressions, casual formulas. This simply sketched form of public speaking has many kinds and variations. I would like for instance to attribute to the same order of sociolinguistic behaviours the language of Lepper who maintaining the rule of leaning towards his own idiolect is at the same time strongly oriented towards producing a propagandistic effect (according to what the advisors of this politician imagine as such effect). But this is decisively vulgar speech (“listen, I wonder how can you rape a prostitute?”), low party speech. It is useful to add that during the first five years of the 21st century, public speaking becomes very strongly oriented towards styles of media communication about political facts, towards models constructed and broadcast by journalists.

The style of public speaking called here the “language of Mazowiecki” is not so much a sociolect opposed to the previous one, but rather a construct of public verbal behaviours strongly anchored in the tradition of sophisticated Polish language, and – if it may be so defined – in the manner of intelligentsia speaking about issues crucial for the country, for society. It is a language oriented towards persuasiveness in, most of all, rational argumentation and very rarely emotional. Speech in which metaphors have solid motivation, like in the famous Mazowiecki’s phrase about the thick line and the past, or like (another instance of the same linguistic phenomenon) in the apt formula used by Bronisław Geremek to describe the rule of PiS (Law & Justice): “It is a mindless practice of politics.” I see variations of precisely this style of public expression among others in appearances and interviews of Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Bronisław Geremek, and Jerzy Buzek. Somewhere in between these tendencies, I would situate Adam Michnik’s public speaking. He expresses himself like an intellectual and guardian of democratic values but adopts occasionally the style of a tribune of the people (for the details see Kloch, 2006, pp. 67–116).

Law & justice: Return to dichotomy

The discussed tendencies coexisted for a long time without a clear preference on an equal footing as styles of speaking, strategies of public communication, to a certain degree correlated with political orientations. When “Law & Justice”[PiS] takes power in 2005, an acute polarization of political parties and speaking style occurs. Authoritarian discourse begins to dominate appropriating language as an instrument of the party propagandistic activity and as a tool of exercising power. During PiS rule, the view of reality as ordered by the simple and binding dichotomy of “us” and “them” returns to the public speaking expressing the official position of power. Language is here primarily a tool used to influence society, it serves to create a lens through which the world is seen as concurring with the party vision and with the interest of power. Such tendencies in public speaking lead to an idea

of the enemy who is anyone on another side than “us,” who has different views. The enemy “inflames” [jątrzy], “harms” [szkodzi], “conspires” [spiskuje], “spoils” [psuje] “cheats” [mataczy]. The enemy acts most of all to prevent us (the authorities) to implement programs and plans that are surely valuable and right. The resulting image of the world contains the concept of conspiracy, collusion; reality seems to be controlled by hostile forces that must be overcome. The language of power separates for semantics of the ordinary Polish language, from casual, private speaking. This type of public speaking shapes meanings according to propagandist premises. This affirmation may be illustrated by the well known gaffes and cases of linguistic clumsiness of the leaders of PiS, e.g. “We are standing here, they there, where were standing the ZOMOs [notorious riot police].” Or – “Yells and tears will not convince us that white is white and black is black.” Public pronouncements shape intentional meanings according to the rhetoric aimed at a direct effect: “post-commune” [postkomuna] means in this language all who are against our party. Michał Głowiński, an astute critic of this type of speaking, said that such discourse of power seems a brush away from totalitarization of language, it brings back to mind practices of the newspeak, and finally, in a manner characteristic for authorities from the PRL period, it attempts to subordinate the language, to appropriate the language for itself.

“The rule of power over the language, fortunately not yet complete, is revealed as it grants itself the right to impose on words and expressions desirable meanings, semantic scopes, and also axiological factors. (...) It is particularly obvious when the speech of aggression gains a dominant position. Hardly surprising then that Prime Minister Kaczyński’s speech at a party meeting in Gdańsk (October 1, 2006) provides particularly eloquent examples. Curiously, its passages are reminiscent of PZPR [Polish United Worker’s Party] leaders’ speeches, in particular those of Władysław Gomułka, during the so-called ideological campaigns. Comparing all those who are on the opposite side to the ZOMOs exemplifies this emphatically” (see Głowiński, 2009, p. 215; see also *Degeneracja...*, 2009, p. 26).

PiS’ party discourse did not produce oppositional versions of public speaking, at most, it initiated processes of return to models of classical language of the intelligentsia in reaction to the lowering standards of public speech. Fairly stable conventions of public speaking take root when one party rules sufficiently long to be able to impose definite styles of speaking or connect them lastingly to certain linguistic habits. It is a privilege and a defect of totalitarian power that dominates as a system influencing the social order. Such situations prompt the creation of oppositional styles and communication conventions, opposed to the language of power, in the political and sociolinguistic sense of the phenomenon. “Languages” of social membership generate then styles of speech suitable for them. They produce occasional semantics. For instance, in “Solidarity speaking,” the term “power,” as a common noun, and at the same time, a term charged ideologically, means acts decidedly disadvantageous for society. Semantically constitutive attributes of the

term “power,” described within this world view, are: “wicked,” “asocial,” “organic,” and “immutable.” Contrary to the official declaration of the rulers, “power” exists in order to secure self-interest, perennity, and in order to act against the interests of the ruled (people, society), i.e. “us,” to exist against the aspirations and values of the nation. Such meaning has been given to the noun “power” by the oppositional, “Solidarity” social discourse (Kowalski, 1990, pp. 33-44). An entirely different meaning has been attributed to the same noun by the party discourse of the PRL era (Głowiński, 1993). Public speaking shapes in this manner social images but also mirrors them in everyday thinking. Authoritarian language appears usually in the space of various communications conventions, it attempts to annex them, what endures. For a certain time, various styles and manners of speaking coexist. One of them may achieve a total victory over the others but necessarily: the loss of power by PiS is linked to a marginalization of speaking styles that have an affinity with the times of PRL and with models of public speaking that prevailed then.

Marginalization of this style of speaking is not accompanied, unfortunately, by an elimination of the language of aggression from politics. Verbal aggression becomes in the recent years a dominant style of public communications. It manifests itself in quarrells, disputes, insinuations, accusations, slander – in a word, through a fight or war (as some prefer to say) with political opponents. This is not an argument about who is right, when those now in power need to persuade the opposition to collaborate, but it is such style of communication which in its fundamental determinants aims at convincing the electorate that the opposition harms (“us,” “you,” “the state,” “the homeland,” “the country”). And it must be destroyed. In the 1990s, the language of parliamentarianism was equally brutal as in the last decade and yet, the disputes concerned most of all values, ideas, their importance for the future of Poland; today, they are an element of political strategies serving to maintain party influence.² Argument as a model of public communication allegedly reveals the truth about reality when polarized reasons are confronted; in fact, it is way typical for the media to make the televised current affairs spectacle more attractive. It clearly refers to models practiced by certain American media (Tannen, 2003).

Rhetorics and identity

The language of politics promotes phraseological expressions, most often ephemeral, unless they enter into the social usage and acquires a secondary meaning, like the “thick line” from Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s Sejm speech; it became in media discourse a “thick stroke,” which altered the sense of this phrase. The expression “thick stroke” became a formula describing a political position that was a target for accusations,

² Mariusz Janicki, a journalist, proposed this thesis at the panel “Language of Polish politics after 1989,” organized in Warsaw by the Polish Senate, within the program The Year of Polish Democracy, in collaboration with the academic publisher PWN [Polish Scientific Publishers] and TVN24, on October 27, 2007, at the seat of the Polish Senate.

charges, political polarizations. In the public discourse of the recent years, this expression defines different historical perspectives and related political concepts than those intended by Mazowiecki. Phrasemes and winged words existing for a certain time in public communication reveal social beliefs circulated and promoted through these formulas. You could say that they function as synecdoche of political events. They take the form of proverbial expressions and formulas, universally known and repeated in various political contexts. Like the notorious slogan “Balcerowicz must go,” discussed by authors of the dictionary of Polish political language in the recent years:

“(...) a political meeting slogan difficult to attribute accurately (allegedly authored by Andrzej Lepper), chanted many times during anti-government confrontations (e.g. in the period 1995-1999). It expresses dissatisfaction of certain social layers (mainly industrial and rural workers) with the results of systemic reforms introduced in 1990 by Leszek Balcerowicz who was then the Minister of Finance in Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s government (the so-called *Balcerowicz’s Plan*).” (Zimny & Nowak, 2009, p. 33)

Style along with its phrasemes and idioms reflects a given ideology, relates to it, allowing speakers to recognize each other and identify within groups and beliefs. It is an emblem of community, it creates an illusion of belonging – “being with” and “being in.”

Conclusion

Politicians’ speech fills quite a large area of public language, an area seen by all, “enhanced” by the media, to use a journalistic term. It creates a world of opposite values. The multitude of its variations is the result of social changes that occurred after 1989. A weak referentiality of this diversified speech is its dominant property. Commentators agree: in public statements people speak “against someone” or “for” the speaker himself. Public speaking in recent years fulfils phatic and pragmatic functions, much less frequently serving content-related matters. In this situation, language may be justifiably defined as displaying a referential weakness. Multitude of styles, “languages” roughly mirrors the chaos of ideas. Benveniste would say: there is not one “interpretant” but a range of fragmentary interpretations connected to social changes, to polarization of positions and aspirations. Peirce’s category of “interpretant” is a fairly complex concept. Eco says:

“Interpretant is not an interpreter (even if such confusion occurs occasionally in Peirce’s writings). Interpretant is what guarantees validity of the sign, even in the absence of interpreter. According to Peirce “interpretant” is that what the sign creates in the “quasi-mind” that we call interpreter.” (Eco, 2009, p. 73)

In my opinion, the category of interpretant could be sociologically useful. Multitude of conventions and styles of public speaking corresponds to social and ideological diversity. Linguistic models appear and vanish, contribute to the ideological identity of a group “here and now.” They contribute to the creation of the space of public discourse, shape the everyday consciousness of the participants of culture; they enter into the daily life and shape the national identity also by participating in popular culture (Edensor, 2004; Bauman, 2008).³ Language as a whole remains an indentifying feature of nationality, although to a smaller degree. Outside, vis-à-vis others we use various languages, depending on the situation, country, necessity, ability (with English being a dominant but in its basic form). Within, inside a linguistic community (i.e. an ethnic language), the role of the *interpretant* is assumed by style, mainly in its semiotic function. It seems (recalling Polish sociological thought), that nation remains chiefly a cultural community, a society integrated ideologically (Wydaje się, odwołuję się do tradycji polskiej myśli socjologicznej, że naród pozostaje przede wszystkim wspólnotą kulturową, społeczeństwem zintegrowanym ideologicznie; Ossowski, 1984). In this type of social integration, language may be one of its defining features but social or ideological beliefs may just as well dominate identity. As can be seen in today’s Belgium where Flemish social identity is built on linguistic features, while in Wallonia it refers to groups of interest (an unpublished study under my direction: Jansen, 2009). It is undoubtedly an influence and a side effect of integrative processes in Europe seen on the level of basic semiotic tendencies in action facilitating continuity of culture: tendencies towards an increase of homogeneity opposed by aspirations to diversity (Łotman, 1989).⁴

Language identifies affiliation but it does not necessarily in an absolute manner. As a system it assumes its basic fundamental functions towards society, yet, building an internal group identity is also influenced to a growing degree by diverse styles of public speaking, formulas and slogans serving as a magnet to groups of interest. While social change naturally affects public speaking, it manifests itself mainly in the order of *parole*, in the Saussurian meaning of the term; it leaves an imprint above all in the layer of words’ meanings, on the level of semantics and phraseology. Styles and speaking conventions correlate with beliefs, become signs of value, in the sense given to this term years ago Florian Znaniecki. The expression “homeboy” [“ziomek,” “ziomal” – compatriot], free of the connotation it acquired during the PRL times (“ziomkostwa rewizjonistyczne” – revisionist refugee groups, Landsmannschaft, Bund der Vertriebenen), returned to the Polish usage in its sub-cultural variety characteristic of hip-hop slang and became part of the concept of “homeland.” (Bartmiński, 2006, pp. 178-186).

³ The author indicates an important influence of popular culture in shaping identity and mediating between what is local and what is global.

⁴ In Łotman’s opinion, these are the two basic tendencies facilitating perpetuation of culture and a sense of identities felt by its participants.

Social change affects semantics and phraseology of a language quite rapidly but requires much more time to influence its syntax and significantly more when it comes to phonetics. Language reacts to change more slowly than those who try to introduce social change and in order to do that attempt also to influence language.

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