

The language of the political discourse in post-totalitarian Poland

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Introduction

There are a few spots in course-books of history of philosophy, which – for many generations now – have raised anxiety and consternation in students. Some examples of them are the following: Zenon paradoxes, the logical decomposition of the sentence: *The present king of France is bald.*, Plato's attitude towards poets. Let us dwell a little longer on the last of them.

Everyone who has read *The Republic* by Plato knows that in Book III and Book IX the author included a severe and radical criticism of imitating arts, especially poetry, with Homer in the lead. These fragments have, for many centuries, raised a lot of commotion, controversy and misunderstandings. Plato was accused – at the best – of inconsistency (himself being a poet at heart, he fought against poetry and himself – applying rules of the poetic language: reported speech, dialogue, etc. – he condemned them¹), at the worst – of low motives like envy or jealousy. It was not until the 20th-century studies into the language and culture of the ancient Greece were conducted that the question of what Plato had really meant was explained. The studies began with advancing the so-called 'Homeric thesis'² and were, initially, carried out in a narrow egalitarian circle of classical philologists. Later on, however, they expanded to cover a much broader scope and, finally, revealed the essence of the difference between the language of Homeric poetry and that of the ancient philosophical discourse. A voice of paramount importance in this trend was the book by Eric A. Havelock³ entitled *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge/Massachusetts 1963).

In Poland, results of studies and discussions were made known thanks to the synthetic summary contained in the interest raising text by Alfred Gawroński under the title "Dlaczego Platon wykluczył poetów z Państwa?" ("Why did Plato exclude poets from *The Republic*?")⁴. The analysis of the results of studies which were presented there indicates that Plato, as a matter of fact, meant an exceptionally vital thing: he criticized the language of the poetic language of his epoch, as well as the function performed by it in fixing and transferring, throughout time, the established canon of models which were constitutive for culture, for the fact that it had ceased to have a positive function and had become a braking factor that made

¹ R. Palacz, *Klasycy filozofii*, Warszawa 1988, p. 37.

² See: Z. Abramowiczówna, "Najnowsze kierunki w badaniach homeryckich", [in:] K. Kumaniecki and J. Mańkowski (eds), *Homer*, Warszawa 1974.

³ E. Havelock (1903-1988), born in London, he worked in Toronto, and from 1947 – in Harvard (for some time he held the post of Director of the Institute of Philosophy there). He was the author of, among others, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences*. Princeton 1981, and *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present*. Yale University Press 1986. He claimed that the pre-Platonian language of philosophy was not "merely the question of style, but of essence" (Wikipedia). According to him, Plato's ideal state was a project of transformation of Greek society (primarily through educational institutions) with the aim to adjust it to the requirements of the developing literacy. For that reason he had to radically break off with the traditional knowledge and ways of its passing – with the 'tribal encyclopedia', as he dubbed Homer's works.

⁴ "Teksty" ("The Texts") 1980 (reprinted in the book under the same title in 1984). It was not until 2007 that the Polish translation of "The Preface to Plato" by Havelock appeared – see: E.A. Havelock, "Przedmowa do Platona", translated by P. Majewski, Warszawa 2007.

the further development difficult and which did “harm to the souls of listeners”. It happened so due to certain features of that discourse.

Why did Plato exclude poets from The Republic?

Milman Parry⁵ showed that “the style of Homeric poetry is a typical one of oral poetry composed without the knowledge of writing and making use of the system of traditional ready-made expressions. This is a formula-based style, where the poet operates not with a selection of separate words, but with formulas fit for repetitive situations, persons, events.”⁶ (by the way, this style of repetitive formulas was imitated by, e.g., A. Mickiewicz in the battle scenes of *Pan Tadeusz*⁷). The “formular style – as Parry claimed – assumes the skill of using a complicated composition technique which facilitates fixing of the text in the memory and protects it against alterations in each subsequent transfer,” which is important “in non-literacy cultures”⁸. In 1963, E. Havelock’s book appeared, “which revolutionized our understanding of Greek philosophy”⁹. The reason for the revolution “is showing the relations between the technique of oral transfer and its form, and even the content. [Prior to that] historians had accepted in the interpretation of early Greek literature and philosophy assumptions and notions applied only to cultures based on literacy. That was a mistake.”¹⁰

Havelock claimed that “Socrates’ and his disciples’ attitude was first of all an attempt at increasing the power of influence of the language”, and Gawroński added “and reaching, through the language, the universal values, especially in the domain of ethics”¹¹. Studies proved that “Greeks [...] still for a long time following the discovery of the alphabet were forced to use the technique of oral transfer, requiring particular methods of composition and reception that differed substantially from methods dominating in literacy-based cultures”¹². What Homer and the likes of him made was a continuation of the oldest form of cultural transfer we have known. The oldest form of ‘formalized’ knowledge were ‘magical spells and ceremonial formulas – perhaps the first instance of a monological text which – by its nature – does not admit the possibility of explanations, questions or answers from the receiver [and] in its very own build itself is a unidirectional transfer [...], its authority consists exclusively in the power emanating from the fact of its uttering”. The “belief in supra-discursive establishing power of the word, which was present in charms, in pre-philosophical cultures, attained its expression in ritual poems of great civilizations of antiquity.”¹³

The following are the priorities of the formula-based style:

- a) Fixing, in the memory, of works containing knowledge exceeding everyday needs;
- b) Techniques of oral transfer: rhythmic forms, various mnemotechnical endeavours.

⁵ He lived in the years 1902-1935, got killed in Los Angeles as an accidental victim in a street shooting, half a year before M. Schlick was shot down. He was a philologist who “in the 1920s marked out a totally new trend in the studies in Homer” (A. Gawroński: “Dlaczego Platon...”, p. 39). His son, Adam, published the postmortem volume under the title *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, Oxford University Press 1971.

⁶ Z. Abramowiczówna, „Najnowsze kierunki w badaniach homeryckich”, [in:] K. Kumaniecki and J. Mańkowski (eds), *Homer*, Warszawa 1974.

⁷ See: A. Opacka, *Ślady oralności w ‘Panu Tadeuszu’ Adama Mickiewicza*, Katowice 1997.

⁸ A. Gawroński, op. cit., p. 40.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 41.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 43.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 43.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 47.

Therefore, then, “the main task of poetic composition was not to induce an aesthetic experience, but to fix the lecture in the form fit for remembering”, the lecture containing culturally-significant content. “To the Greek poetry was a Great Encyclopedia, that is why the range of its influence was so extensive”¹⁴.

Features of the oral transfer:

It must be expressed in an ‘elevated speech’, subjected to “rules of rhythm and selection of words, quasi-ritual formulas of composition of sentences, formalized manner of beginning and finishing the transfer. These features [...] form a psychic barrier which makes it impossible for the listener to apply to the text such logical requirements that he has got accustomed to in a talk [and] evokes the impression that there also exists some other logic, more noble and more mysterious than the logic of [colloquial] dialogue, such that one needs to be submissive towards it (e.g. the logic of ‘obvious obviousness’ – K.W.). If the language of elevated speech is additionally a language different from the colloquial one [...], its ability to control minds becomes even greater.”¹⁵

In some oral cultures the content of transfer was identified with its form. “The word of an elevated speech in those cultures is primarily a voice which blends with sense [...] and thanks to that takes on a unique force, exceeding the verbatim meanings of sentences.”¹⁶

The issue of emotional engagement: “in order that the text would play its pedagogical role [...], it was necessary to use procedures leading to emotional participation [...] that would provoke in listeners the process of emotional self-identification [...], excluding reflection and critical distance. [...] Reflection and critical distance were the most dangerous enemies to the oral (pre-literacy) culture.”¹⁷

The innovatory features of Plato’s discourse and Plato’s dialectics

In the times of Plato, “the Greek citizen [...] realized daily that there were contentious matters which could not be settled by means of the formular style or prestige of elevated speech. It appeared that it was solely discussion that was fit for the purpose [...] and also the colloquial language, in which questions and answers, paraphrases and grammatical transformations cross one another [...]. It is only against the context of social life and political institutions that we can understand Socrates’ irony and Plato’s vehement attack on poetry and poets.”¹⁸

“The contemporary reader finds it hard to realize the fact that Plato found himself right in the centre of a conflict between the culture of oral transfer and the culture of writing. The former was still a dangerous enemy in Plato’s times and barred the way to the influences of Plato’s dialectics founded on a completely different use of language, [since] it refers to inter-subjective rules that reveal themselves only in an exchange of sentences between equal partners. Inquires [by Socrates and Plato] always take their beginnings in the question [because questions] raise abilities of critical nature in the interlocutor and do not impose any solutions apart from those that [interlocutors accept in common]. An exchange of sentences is the essence of Socratism and Plato’s dialects, while the culture of elevated speech requires submission: silent listening-in or offering [such answers that are imposed by the formular competence] (p. 58-59). [...] Plato proposes, to the Greek culture, a new type of raising that

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 44.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 49-50.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 53-54.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 59.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 56-57.

shapes persons capable of wondering, of meditating, of calculating, of cognition independent of sensual stimuli,”¹⁹ of experiencing a surprise and reflection.

Parry’s and Havelock’s research ideas were continued by Walter J. Ong²⁰, whose basic message reads (according to Józef Japola) as follows: “the way of communicating with others influences the way of thinking”²¹. He claimed (following Havelock) that transformations in the technique of communication lead to transformations and revaluations in the manner of thinking, in the consciousness. The object of the studies conducted by Ong and members of his school is the relation between “technology of word” and “the noethics of orality or literacy”²².

In the history of the Mediterranean civilization, Ong distinguishes three “noethic modules”: primary orality (before Plato), literacy (before the technological revolution in the media), secondary orality (currently). In each of them there reign different rules of construing an utterance, which bring about determined effects in the structure of the average receiver’s consciousness. Ong made use of the categories and tools for examining literature and styles of its reception, which he had worked out himself, yet they can also be applied to describe the language of political discourse as a tool of not only communicating with society, but of carrying out determined (intended?) transformations within the structure of social consciousness as well. This is not, obviously, anything new – as early as in the times of Socrates it was realized how powerful a tool of forming collective views and imaginings a well-applied language is: also the totalitarian systems of the 20th century made use of rich means of political propaganda in a conscious and professional way. It is even the more advisable to analyze typical examples of construing public utterances by politicians of the Third Republic of Poland in order to check how features that are characteristic of the technology of word, which dominate in the time of secondary orality, are reflected in them and what influence they may have on their reception by society.

The secondary orality is something like a synthesis of two former modules (primary orality and literacy). Ong wrote²³: “I have called the kind of orality, with which we are living today, secondary orality. This is the orality induced by the radio and the TV; it is not independent of writing and printing – on the contrary – it depends on them completely” [p. 245]. Our communication practice is governed “in many ways basically by primary oral culture, although to a lesser or greater extent shaped by a contact with today’s secondary orality”, and its virtue is the fact that it “sometimes provides non-analytical shortcuts into the depths of human matters” [p. 246-247]. [...] In the primary orality culture, education consists in identification, participation, entering the act, feeling the kinship with heroes of culture, keeping with them – not on some analysis” [p. 248].

The most important features of the secondary orality, according to Józef Japola:

- the word (= the sound) is an event, and the language – a means of acting,
- the word represents authority, power; that who is saying is mightier and more important than that who is listening (see: Japola, p. 40),

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 58-61 ff.

²⁰ Walter Jackson Ong (1912-2003), a Jesuit from Kansas City, professor of English studies and humanities, the author of the longest doctoral dissertation at Harvard (1,700 pages). In the last years of his life he developed the thought that interpretation of non-verbal behaviours is finally determined by the manner of understanding the message by the receiver.

²¹ J. Japola, *Tekst czy głos? Waltera J. Onga antropologia literatury*, Lublin 1998, p. 13.

²² Ibidem. Compare also: W. Ong, „Piśmienność i oralność w naszej epoce”, [in:] W. Ong, *Osoba, świadomość, komunikacja. Antologia*, selection and translation: J. Japola, Warszawa 2009, p. 253.

²³ W. Ong, *Literacy and Orality...* (relevant pages have been indicated in the square brackets).

- the basic component of consciousness is memory that needs to be continuously cultivated,
- thoughts are expressed through schemes, repetitions, agglomerations of words, proverbs and calques, standard thematic situations (ibidem, p. 41),
- an important role in shaping the communiqué is played by sound effects of the utterance (alliterations, assonances, rhythmisations, refrains, accents, intonation),
- there do not occur analytical frameworks, there dominates additive style (argumentation through accumulation of examples or multiple repetition of the same theses, not by making reference to reasoning),
- oral narration is close to the people's world and close to their lives (ibidem, p. 42),
- oral texts are inclined both agonistically and emphatically, and in this way they generate the division into 'ours' (empathy) and 'the enemies' (verbal aggression),
- oral thinking is of the situational character, makes reference to activity associations (inclines to acting), not to objective imaginings, hence the more abstract (does not incline to thinking), (in this context Marcel Jousse says about "verbal-motorial culture" (ibidem, p. 43),
- oral texts have an educational influence through delivering concrete personal models of heroic and simple features, clear-cut characteristics, with an ostentatious and schematically simplified division into the good and the bad.

On the basis of these differentiated features of oral communication one can be tempted to reconstruct the presupposed virtual receiver²⁴: that is somebody who is deeply submerged in the world of everyday life, experienced at using mental cross-cuts, simplifications and stereotypes²⁵, not reaching for tools of intellectual analysis in order to evaluate life situations, susceptible to emotional arguments, exemplary ones, inclined to believe external authorities, not one's own common sense, evaluating people upon a superficial impression, but fixing in the memory the first evaluation, acting impulsively under the influence of stimuli currently influencing it. Such is the ideal addressee of the utterances formulated in the sense of secondary orality.

Poland against the European background

The European culture, since the time of the Athenian democracy, has been turning more into the culture of literacy, and less and less into that of orality. Written texts are playing a greater and greater role as instruments of construing the collective consciousness and remembrance. We can say that in the first centuries there was an acute rivalry between the styles of the oral and written transfer; history has handed down to us both the pictures of influential speakers (Demosthenes, Cato) and information on the formative function of 'cult' texts: works by philosophers, poems by Homer, Lucretius, Virgil, diaries by Julius Cesar, the Holy Bible, esoteric texts, etc. Anyway, rhetoric as the art of fine and effective (in the sense proposed by J.L. Austin) speaking still triumphed for a long time at least in St Augustine's times – as we are informed by his biography. However, the closer we come to modern and contemporary

²⁴ In the sense of Głowiński; see also by the same author: "Wirtualny odbiorca w strukturze utworu literackiego", [in:] *Studia z teorii i historii poezji*, Warszawa 1967.

²⁵ Cf. R.D. Cialdini, *Wywieranie wpływu na ludzi. Teoria i praktyka*, translated by B. Wojciszke, Gdańsk 2010, p. 20-25.

times, the greater the role is played by writing (for a whole number of reasons which one can read about in Havelock's and Ong's works).

In countries devoid of national sovereignty and thus – of the right to shape the space of public communication and imagination in the mother tongue, the role of written text becomes the greater. It is because the imposed foreign language, as the official means of expression, becomes a carrier of negative associations (as an everyday reminder about the fact of being subdued), and the 'speech of the heart' is pushed into the private areas (family, local). Together with other elements of ethos and tradition it is becoming an important tool of storing family moral, customary and cultural values, but gets stopped in its development and remains merely a cultural *skansen*. The case is quite different when it comes to writing.

The Poland of a few last centuries offers a particular instance of this kind of situation²⁶. A distinctive rise in the role of writing in the Polish culture had followed still before the loss of independence, to be exact – from the moment of establishing the national literature which contributed substantially to the formation and popularizing of the uniform model of the Polish language and the all-national language, a link between regional dialects (the language of M. Rey and J. Kochanowski). Yet, Piotr Skarga (1536-1612) was J. Kochanowski's peer (1530-1584) and the historic role of the former, as the king's (at the court of Sigismund III Waza) and parliamentary preacher proves the great significance of the spoken language already at that time. Another strengthening of the influence of written texts occurred together with the Enlightenment (the new phenomena in those times were mass-circulation editions of newspapers, magazines and brochures), one can also say that the severe political crisis in the Republic of Poland, paradoxically, affected the growth in the importance of the written word, since outstanding reformers of the then public life reached for the pen more often than they appeared on tribunes to deliver speeches. The whole of the enlightened part of the society would read works by S. Konarski, S. Staszic, H. Kołłątaj, the Śniadecki brothers. We know that those actions did not prove helpful and despite the reformers' efforts Poland lost her independence, having managed to announce – in print – the historic text of *The Constitution of the Third May* (another important text of the day was *Uniwersał polaniecki [The Universal of Polaniec]* of 1794). In the times of the partitions, the only joy of the subdued nation was the written word (apart from evenings in the apprentices' hall and Singing Societies), and – if one is to believe historians – the Polish national consciousness matured, solidified and survived in those times exclusively thanks to literature – beginning with the bards of the Romanticism and ending with "comforting the hearts" with H. Sienkiewicz's *Trilogy* and "confessions of others' sins" written down by S. Wyspiański.

A significant break in the history of Polish public and cultural life were the years following the regaining the independence, when the fourth generation born in captivity was given the historic chance of speaking in their own language about their own matters. The theme worthy of separate examination (and certainly investigated by linguists) is the sudden blossoming of 'the parliamentary speech' of the 20-year-long Interwar period (however, I would rather discuss this question on another occasion). Shortly afterward, there followed the tragic time of the Nazi occupation, when the Polish culture again had to step underground, and then the queer years of the quasi-freedom under the control of the Big Brother. The times of the People's Republic posed a great challenge to the Polish language as the carrier of content and values that conserve, create and develop – or also destroy and degenerate – the culture. A lot

²⁶ "Each nation has got a different political history, and the Polish nation has experienced a turbulent and hard history in the last two centuries, so no wonder that the share of the language in the political life has been of particular nature and – for some reason – even surprising." (I. Bajerowa, „Język jako polityczna wartość w dziejach narodu polskiego”, [in:] *Postscriptum Polonistyczne*, No. 30, 1999, p. 2).

of things were under way at that time (but again let me not run on this here now). One needs, however, to say at least that in the Poles' popular feeling (at least of those who are proficient at using the Polish language as their mother tongue and possess enough intellectual skills to have something to talk about) one of the deepest and most clearly felt changes that occurred along with the fall of the Communism in 1989, concerns the liberation of the word. In the times of the People's Republic the word was closely controlled and censored, and the free word – was persecuted at every step; as a result of that, each Pole capable of thinking was splendidly trained to use the "Aesop's speech". Now the skill has ceased to be needed and almost, from day to day, it was possible to say practically everything. Today, from the perspective of over twenty years since that memorable breakthrough it is worth asking the question: What have we done ("we, the people") with this "wretched freedom of the word"? An especially important area of making use of this freedom is the language of political discourse, since what is happening there is transferred directly onto the quality of inter-human relations within the whole society – beginning with those that take their roots in the culture of communicating. This culture needs models. As it was said, in the time of captivity, the models were drawn from literature and they were ones of high quality, yet – along with the increase in the rate of transformations – they become anachronism even the faster. In the model of social life being realized in our country at the moment, literature plays a marginal role; if we draw models from the cultural life, we are far more willing to use the language of dialogues from favourite films (*Rejs*, *Seksmisja*, *Godfather*, etc.), lyrics of songs by leading bands, as well as phrases that are made popular by the TV (the most popular models are provided by sports commentators, newly-created authorities like Kuba Wojewódzki, participants of programmes enjoying the largest viewing public at prime time, such as *Taniec z gwiazdami* (*Dance with Stars*), but also by politicians who are only too eager to embrace the time allocated for broadcast). A new unprecedented phenomenon and, indeed, hard to compare with anything in the past is the level of implicitness of the political discourse, and even more than explicitness – more like ostentation rather (or as some experts dealing with the media say – theatricality). Hence, a fairly obvious conclusion follows that in the culture of political life shifted towards showbusiness there is occurring a particular revaluation of the language which is turning into a tool serving to achieve completely different goals from those that result from the social status of the politician's profession.

The 200 years that preceded the talks of the Round Table was the time which favoured dominance of the writing culture (in its modern version), because this type of culture is inclined to immortalizing (and petrifying) the content and values popularly considered to be constitutive for the collective identity, and the times of the Partitions, occupation and the People's Republic were periods of fighting for the identity of the national culture and tradition. An interesting parallel with the history of the USA can be mentioned here: Walter Ong writes that "the United States was built on literacy. Written documents – *The Declaration of Independence* and *The Constitution* – are of the key importance to our sense of national identity in the way – as much as I know – that does not have its equal in any other nation throughout the whole history"²⁷. At the same time, in Poland, *The Constitution of the 3rd May* was passed and written down, yet it was not the records that shaped the modern form of political culture which became the key texts for Poles, constituting the sense of identity, but subsequent works of grand literature of Romanticism and Positivism.

A special position was taken by the language of public discourse (including the political one) in the People's Republic: the then reality led to an acute and exceptionally unambiguous depolarizing of society into those who were 'for' and those who were 'against'. To belong to

²⁷ W. Ong, *Osoba, świadomość, komunikacja...*, p. 240-241.

the latter meant declaring the support for the traditional God-and-homeland ethos, that is acting to 'save from oblivion' the heritage of the past (N.B. which was undergoing the process of mythologization with time) and assuming the attitude of survival over time that was impossible to precisely determine, towards equally mythical and glorious future. The present was perceived in this optics as a transitory, temporary state which had to be lived through in suspension, in the name of veneration of the past and concern for the future. On the other hand, the attitude – at least officially – on the part of those who were 'for' did not differ very considerably (on the contrary it was fairly similar), since the 'state-building' doctrine of socialist development postponed the present (of all the temporal ranges) the most. A model citizen of the socialist state was a fighter for a better future which needed building at the cost of the present, and an important instrument to legitimize the 'socialist values' was making reference to the progressive elements in the historical tradition. In this forceful historiosophic vision, the present day became a grey Cinderella devoid of any significance.

The situation changed radically on the threshold of the sociopolitical system transformation, one of the spectacular determiners of which was regaining the present time and shortening of the perspective of perceiving matters and things connected with it. One can see here a clear correlation with the different character of the function of orality and literacy – according to W. Ong, "in the 19th-century America literacy was still looked on as subordinate to the oratorical skill, [...] preparation for oral performances of a person who acts publicly. The oratorical strength and literary style almost became synonymous."²⁸ Here, an analogy to the times of the People's Republic comes to mind: there also the style of utterance of public persons (politicians, journalists, activists of management, etc.) was nearly slavishly modeled on determined language canons characteristic of writing, and burdensome and uncommunicative in speech. Celebrities of the time of communism did not as much speak as they delivered speeches, and the rhetoric of the speeches was so artificial and pretensional that the effect remained far away from the intended one (boredom or amusement instead of solemnity and respect).

Still, writing also plays an autonomic role – it is a generator and carrier of the 'high culture': "without writing, simply, the mind cannot engage in the kind of thinking that is unknown to the primitive oral cultures [...]. Without writing the mind can not create notions in the type of 'history' or 'analysis', 'culture' or 'civilization' [...] In the world of creative imagination, writing turns out necessary to create frameworks of human life, dubbed plot [*action*] by Aristotle. The Greek drama, which was the first to bring in such a precise organization [of action] in the West is – in the Western cultural circle – the first verbal genre fully controlled by writing: the plays staged were an oral rendering the written compositions. [Writing] turns out absolutely indispensable to create organized narrations on the human world."²⁹ By contrast with these functions of writing, "speech emerges out of unawareness, supported by unconsciously organized grammatical structures which can never be wholly brought out onto the surface of consciousness (as representatives of structuralism and transformational grammar maintain). Speech is ordered by the whole structure of a person [whereas] writing depends on consciously thought-over rules."

Another dichotomy: writing "is based on absences which are brought down to peculiar artificiality. [If] I want to write a book, I must be alone in order to communicate. One must acknowledge complete unnaturalness of such a situation"³⁰, while oral communication is taking place (in natural conditions) publicly, in the presence of the communicating parties ,

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 239.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 242.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 243.

and thanks to this ‘complementing’ the verbal message is executed ‘on-line’ with relevant elements of dialogic situation (the surrounding, context, non-verbal signals, mood, etc.).

The spoken language, as a tool of oral culture, born in the secondary succession, after the period of dominance of writing, in a natural manner, takes over determined functions, being other than the written language does. The key issue seems here the change of the distance and range of influence. The written word has been engaged to fix (for the generations to come) the content popularly regarded as important, and the majority of it concerns large groups and human communities, as well as it can boast of the virtue of timelessness. In the spoken language, on the other hand, it is better to express content of the local and temporal significance of interest to a limited circle of interlocutors. Therefore the themes of talks far more frequently concern somebody else’s individual or particular and current needs and interests; it can be accepted that each (statistical?) user of the spoken language is a lot more familiar with the vocabulary going round this content than with terms that are characteristic of writing.

Features of the language of politics

The language of politics is a linguistic variation (version, type) of the Polish language, just like the students’ or thieves’ slangs³¹. “The authors of texts that we classify as the language of politics, are politicians, people connected with them (advisors, spokespersons, experts) and journalists³², that is people belonging to a relatively narrow egalitarian environment. This is not, however, an environmental language, as its peculiar feature is the fact that receivers are all people: “texts which are realizations of the language of politics are meant, as intended by their authors, to reach possibly the broadest masses of society [...]; if there occur hermetic political texts, it is a case of ‘an error of trade’, usually caused by succumbing to linguistic fads and snobberies”³³. It is also the intention of the senders that this language should transfer especially vital content, indeed – constitutive to the whole community of users – this connects the language of politics to that of Homeric poetry. “Also each [sender] speaks on behalf of society, whereas in order to push their standpoint through, they are allowed to avail themselves of all means [including] invectives, insults, affronts.”³⁴ Therefore, we are not surprised at the fact that every day we come across the following phrases in politicians’ utterances: “bats of Solidarity”³⁵, “heroes of the Styrofoam ethos, the Government are whacking fools”³⁶, “the MPs of Wiejska Street performed like political coffin bearers”³⁷, “You must have heard the loud steps while you were speaking. That was common sense going away”³⁸, “nobody can refuse to give him the floor and he uses it to talk twaddle”³⁹.

It can be attempted to achieve the same intended goal by extremely contrasting methods; thus, the contrast to the populist language, illustrated with above-listed instances is offered by ‘elevated speech’, where the significance of the communicated message is underlined by

³¹ Cf. B. Walczak, “Co to jest język polityki?”, [in:] J. Anusiewicz, B. Siciński, *Język polityki a współczesna kultura polityczna*, Wrocław 1994, p. 15.

³² Ibidem, p. 16.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ E. Kołodziejek, „Językowe środki zwalczania przeciwnika, czyli o inwektywach we współczesnych tekstach politycznych”. Idem, p. 69.

³⁵ The well-known and popular slogan of the day coined by Ryszard Zając of *Głos Wodzisławia*.

³⁶ The phrase coined by Janusz Korwin-Mikke for which he was awarded ‘Silver Mouth’ in the contest by the National Radio Channel Three and the magazine *Wprost*.

³⁷ The utterance by Andrzej Szczypiorski.

³⁸ Leszek Miller turning to Vice-President Kern during a parliamentary debate.

³⁹ A comment by J. Staniszkis about President Lech Wałęsa in front of cameras of the Polish TV.

using unique phrases or syntax, a more or less skillful impressing listeners with difficult words or intricate sentence structures (instances to follow later on).

An attempt at summarizing the above-listed features of political discourse was undertaken by, among others, Krzysztof Skiba, who wrote in his feature: “Wishing to win popularity, [politicians] have simplified their language to such an extent that now a lot of them speak with the language of an illiterate villager or a town hooligan. Castration of sophisticated vocabulary and yielding to the fashion of ‘communicativeness and clarity’ of message do not always yield satisfactory effects. For many seasons the so-called round speech, that is smooth talk about nothing (A. Kwaśniewski) had turned successfully effective in politics. For the last few years we have witnessed a number of linguistic fashions, the hits being the ‘jesting-philosophical’ style (Lech Wałęsa) and ‘patriotically-stuttering’ (Prelate Henryk Jankowski); also the ‘emotional-vulgar’ style was in fashion (Andrzej Lepper), ‘soldierly-literary’ one (Ludwik Dorn), or ‘lawyer’s-flowery’ one (Zbigniew Ziobro). The fascination with the ‘glasshouse-loving’ style (Donald Tusk) is passing away. At the moment it seems good to mix a simple language with a sophisticated style. A representative of this trend is Jarosław Kaczyński. The word used by him recently, ‘annihilation’, has made a big career. The leader of the Law and Justice is able to speak crudely, yet he also implies that in his life he has not only read a recipe for apple-pie ... thanks to Kaczyński we have had an opportunity to open old dictionaries.”⁴⁰

Jadwiga Burda claims that “numerous ways of speaking about political issues result from polarization of the political stage and political parties’ endeavouring to create specific, individualized linguistic manner of perceiving the reality”⁴¹: this drive towards distinguishability of particular individual styles was also noticed and described by K. Skiba in the feature cited above. Nevertheless, following the evolution of the language of political discourse in Poland one can notice that these individual features gradually fade away for the sake of more and more frequently accepted models of styles of communicating the content to mass receiver, due to which it is more and more difficult to distinguish the sender upon the features of linguistic transfer. I will try to point to a few common features of this kind.

The language of politics plays different functions from that of everyday communication or that of science, too. The descriptive function and the informative one are reduced in it to the indispensable minimum (only in order that the listener should understand what is being said to him), whereas persuasive functions are greatly expanded⁴². The language of politics is not a tool of communication between the sender and the receiver, but a tool of fighting for power, for its retaining, for imposing on the mass receiver a set attitude towards the reality, for exclusive deciding about axiological preferences⁴³. To achieve this goal politicians delight in reaching for vocabulary that is strongly and implicitly invested with emotions⁴⁴, e.g.

⁴⁰ K. Skiba, *Wprost*, No. 51/52, 2008.

⁴¹ J. Burda, „Rola emocji w populizmie (na przykładzie języka polskiej polityki po roku 1989)”, [in:] W. Kochmańska and B. Taras (eds), *Od miłości do nienawiści. Językowe mechanizmy kreowania emocji*, Rzeszów 2010, p. 105.

⁴² Jadwiga Burda writes: “Texts relating to the political sphere are a special instance of persuasive texts” (J. Burda, paper cited, p. 107), and Irena Kamińska-Szmaj adds: “they serve to make receivers undertake actions in compliance with the sender’s intention, change their attitudes and behaviours, accept given views or ideas, accept the world of values postulated by the sender” (I. Kamińska-Szmaj, *Słowa na wolności...*, p. 8).

⁴³ Cf. P. Brzozowski, „Język polityki jako podstawowe narzędzie działania politycznego i nieodłączny atrybut władzy w świetle produkcji prawdziwościowego”, (in:) *Dialogi Polityczne* No. 1, Feb. 2003.

⁴⁴ Stanisław Barańczak writes that the emotionalization of reception is one of the most important mechanisms made use of in political propaganda. See: S. Barańczak, “Słowo – perswazja – kultura masowa”, (in:) *Twórczość* No. 7, 1975, p. 44.

‘commushes’ instead of ‘communists’, ‘dark-ages squares’ instead of “‘Christians’, ‘educatish’ instead of ‘intelligentsia’, ‘noise-makers’ instead of ‘radicals’, ‘pampers’ instead of ‘young right-winged activists’, ‘Balcerowicz’s mafia’, ‘communist informer’, ‘red spider’, etc. In politicians’ utterances, there appear also extended narrations which evoke, in listeners, certain emotions, like: “now I am dodging about, pressing, squeezing, calling prosecutors, calling police – Men, the nation is crying! Men, they are robbing Poland!”⁴⁵

To a large extent this language plays the educational function in relation to the numerous mass of receivers. In view of the power of persuasion and the broad range of influence, the language of politics exerts a strong influence on society, since it shapes the culture of speaking and thinking by referring to (in a more effective way than we can think) to the features of consciousness of contemporary man, formed by the given cultural situation (compare Ong’s, Cialdini’s analyses, etc.).

Politicians have a very broad access to receivers by means of various media (mainly the television and the Internet), thus, they are playing a vital role in popularizing linguistic standards and fixing mental schemata. A strengthening of this influence is a high level of agreement between norms and standards of politicians’ language with verbal behaviours of another significant opinion-shaping group – celebrities. In recent past there was a clear clash between linguistic awkwardness (often exceeding limits of compromise) of the highest-rank representatives of the people’s power (Władysław Gomułka, Zdzisław Grudzień, Jan Miłogódc, Richard Nieszporek and others) and linguistic perfection of the media people (unforgettable patterns of the beautiful spoken Polish language performed by such masters as: Irena Dziedzic, Jerzy Waldorff, Wiktor Zinn, Szymon Kobyliński, Jan Suzin, Lucjan Kydryński, Jeremi Przybora). Today, this contrast does not exist: the public personages, to whom we listen most frequently, represent a comparable level of language culture. The place of the above-mentioned masters of the word is being taken over, in the TV, by people of the type of Kuba Wojewódzki – so like master so man. Public utterances of contemporary authorities (or idols more like it, since there no authorities any more) represent the level that the following examples illustrate: “shitty turbulence”, “jelly in the pants”, “throw texts out of the a--“, “I am f--ing good in all respects”, “I’ll be lying with my a-- up and won’t give a damn for it”, “You can’t sculpt in shit”, “Hey, Saleta [Przemysław Saleta – a kick-boxing fighter] pull at the flute” (Doda). Imported from abroad: “In my sports discipline there occur deaths but not too serious” (Alan Minter, a boxer); “I am for the death penalty ‘cause the criminal must learn a lesson for the future” (Britney Spears)⁴⁶. For comparison, a few utterances by our domestic politicians: “This is an anonymous letter, though signed with the first name and the surname” (A. Lepper); “I have always supported men of work: old-age pensioners, pensioners and the unemployed” (the same); “Nobody is going to convince us that the white is white and the black is black (J. Kaczyński); “What can we still botch up Sirs? What can we still botch up?” (M. Goryszewski); “Stop talking rubbish in streets and do join wise people” (L. Wałęsa); “Once I thought that journalists drink more than politicians. Yet, since my husband became a journalist, it has turned out that politicians drink more” (Nelly Rokita).

Contrary to utterances by celebrities, the language of politicians is characterized by a higher degree of exclusiveness – in the sense that politicians take delight in monopolizing their discourse, trying to invest their own appearances with the asset of absoluteness and unshaken character, which admits no discussion or even interpretation other than that assumed in

⁴⁵ A fragment of a longer speech delivered by Lech Wałęsa during the meeting with workers of Gdańsk Shipyard in 1991.

⁴⁶ The examples are taken from the article by Grażyna Kuźnik, “Podczas show uszy więdną”, (in:) *Dziennik Zachodni* of 20 November, 2009, p. 28.

advance (“Only my death or personal resignation will make choosing a new President of PiS possible” J. Kaczyński said at the press conference on 9 March 2009).

Seizing the position of one holding the monopoly in the discourse, with time, goes hand in hand with creating himself by the speaker as somebody who is exceptional, stands high above common people; there are sometimes echoes of the poet-bard motif in these creations, someone who carries away and leads the whole nation, a man of a ‘higher species’, whose destiny cannot be guessed by anyone (*cf.* Leibnitz’s letter to Tsar Peter in Bad Pyrmont), or the motif of a mythic demigod – someone who is exempt from ‘regular’ classifications or one who dominates over others in an evident way. Here are relevant examples: “I am not a common man, I am the Minister of National Education,” (from the speech delivered by Roman Giertych at Parliament); “It’s impossible not to like me,” (an interview with R. Giertych, *Angora* of 26 August 2007). It also happens that the sense of one’s own exceptionality finds its expression even in unconsciously made, yet not chance, lapses, such as the utterance by Józef Zych: “Ladies and Gentlemen, it is not for the first time that I have erected [it] here,” on having said which he made a pause while there came loud laughter from the MPs present in the hall; or J. Kaczyński’s words: “We have marked out the road an we will push forward along it,” (the listeners’ reaction was similar to that in the previous case).

The speech of a bard is an act of ‘prophetising’, that is a monologue that does not allow objecting, on the principle – no answer whatsoever, and even – any interpreting. In this speech there echo ultimately determining formulas such as: *Magister dicit* (Master Polycarpus Talk to the Death) or *Dixi et salvavi anima mea*. J. Kaczyński frequently provides examples of ultimative utterances (e.g. “You understand that the power of my arguments is such that you have no chances,” – uttered to Aleksander Kwaśniewski during the debate on 1 October 2007) . Any attempt at undermining, defending or deriving undesired conclusions from the Bard’s Speech is treated as ‘Lese-Majesty’, and a justification of this ultimateness is calling (without having asked first) the Will of the Nation. Jerzy Bralczyk writes, “in the system of information monopoly [which individual parties or – ultimately – the political class as a whole try to seize – note by K.W.], the receiver to a greater and greater extent became a category of the world perceived in a wished-for fashion or even a created one. It appeared as an utter admirer of the authorities’ dealings, which was accentuated, among others, by the dominance of the inclusive ‘we’ in the texts – to include the sender and the receiver. The following examples illustrate the point: “society wants”, “Poles do not wish”, “the nation doesn’t need you”, “the subdued society demands”, “we want to be wise with the wisdom of the whole society” [...]. “In the monopolized language it is always the sender who decides, it is he who establishes meanings and names, evaluates and assesses. It is also him that creates the virtual receiver, while the real one – for his own good – has to identify with the sender. The advantage of the sender over the receiver can be called the ‘loudspeaker syndrome’.”⁴⁷

It must be stressed, however, that in search of the most effective road to subduing the soul and the mind of the receiver (identified with the potential voter), politicians sometimes reach for methods that are in extreme opposition to the above-discussed ones, feeling that in a real situation of political pluralism the drive towards monopolizing the discourse can prove ineffective. Therefore, some politicians instead of the ‘loudspeaker syndrome’ display the ‘stage syndrome’ in order to draw attention to themselves. One can point here to not as much concrete instances as certain personages of the public life, who more or less successfully create themselves to be showmen: the first place in this peculiar ranking list is for sure taken by Janusz Palikot, yet elements of “controlled (though not always successfully) pranks” were

47 J. Bralczyk, *O języku polskiej polityki lat 80-tych i 90-tych*, Warszawa 2003, p. 69, 78, 90 ff.

also present in public appearances of Leszek Miller, Andrzej Lepper or Ludwik Dorn. Another example of politicians endearing themselves to their potential voters presents itself in attempts to call on their common descent and in underlining their common fate resulting from the same roots. This strategy recalls the mechanism of inducing empathy in receivers: we are with you, we are our own, and the enemies are those other ones. For instance, the utterance of Piotr Gadzinowski: “The most democratic form of communicating is the metro. It is us, people from the province – as each of us comes from the country – who use the metro,” and the utterance of Chairman J. Kaczyński in Zambrów on 27 February 2009, which was similar in its spirit: “My family comes from Zambrów, the one whose surname I bear, that is my father’s. And with Łomża the surname is connected, which I bear after ... which I do not bear, but my mother’s surname. ... I have come to you because I have to be everywhere in Poland”.

A trick frequent played and belonging to the category of ‘making friends’ (read: ingratiating oneself) with the receiver is application of the anticipated listener’s language, even including vulgarisms. Examples: “the backward should go to the reserve” (a candidate for president), “infantilism and caddishness”, “Mr MP – you are lying through your teeth”, “the Government want to pat the budget”, the use of words like: ‘buddies’, ‘scamps’, ‘scoundrels’, ‘mongrel puppies’, ‘insects’, ‘snowmen’⁴⁸.

In contrast to the above mentioned phenomena, celebrative and non-casual language of politics is used as elevated speech⁴⁹, which is underlined by both non-verbal ways (solemn attitude, articulation, gestures, anticipation of subordination form the listeners, etc.) and – for instance – through a selection of lexis and style. It is important to give an impression that the one who is speaking, that is a politician, rises beyond the common crowd due to his/her extraordinary virtues, is somebody special, a hero, does not fall into ‘regular’ classifications. In the beginnings of the Third Republic of Poland there still used to appear formulas containing solemnity and stateliness, e.g. Jan Olszewski: “I have full awareness of great solemnity of the moment, when I am standing before the first independent Parliament of the Third Republic”. Yet the style devalued itself fairly quickly, to a great extent due to undesired associations with an artificially pumped-up language used by the representatives of the authorities in the epoch of the Polish United Workers’ Party. As a result politicians were forced to look for other solutions. Enriching the lexis with difficult, unfamiliar words, which do not belong to the realm of colloquial speech proved relatively simple and surprisingly effective. Here are some examples: ‘de-agenturalization’, ‘sattelization’, ‘co-habitation’, ‘impeachment’, ‘fixing the fiscal policy’, ‘a programme targeting the group of educatish’ (L. Dorn about *Szkoło Kontaktowe* - the TV interactive programme); sometimes the words used are of such a high level of difficulty or uniqueness that the very user himself does not understand them (Gosiewski: “a Filipino woman” instead of ‘philippic’, “the founder of scouting, Edgar Allan Poe”, “the airport in Kielce will be a *benefis* to the city”; R. Giertych: “My grandfather taught me *respecta* for the uniform” [in TVN 24]). Another technique is a ritual repetition of the same formulas (the famous “Balcerowicz has got to go away”, now paraphrased by critics of the Government formed by the Citizens’ Platform and changed into “Balcerowicz had to come back” .

48 I am citing examples as included in: J. Bralczyk, op. cit., p. 74-77.

49 “In the consciousness of receivers there exists the need [...] for a model of utterance, significant, more official, hence somehow stylistically alien,” Prof. Bralczyk observes (op. cit., p. 70). Probably, there occurs the same mechanism here, which Alfred Gawroński describes with reference to pre-literacy cultures: “the word of the elevated speech in those cultures was – primarily – the voice that blended with the sense [...] and thanks to that it gained a force (unique in its kind) that went beyond the literal meaning of sentences.” A. Gawroński: *Dlaczego Platon wykluczył poetów z Państwa ...*, p. 53-54.

A clear borrowing from the arsenal of means of the primary oral culture is the presence of mnemotechnical elements in the political discourse. They serve the purpose of better memorizing and fixing of the content (as well as the person of the sender) in the minds and consciousness of receivers. Examples here include use of rhymes: “For good or mean Nowak will win”, “Each woman Pole votes Olek [Aleksander Kwaśniewski]”, “Heads or tails, I choose Leszek [Lech Wałęsa]”, “vote your fate”, “you’ve got your own free will – support people not symbol”, rhythmization of speech that can be observed during broadcast of parliamentary sessions, election conventions and other public appearances of politicians, making references to fixed phrases and proverbs (not always correct): “we woke up with our hand in the chamber pot” (Prelate Jankowski), “Poland resembles a cart that is sinking in mud” (L. Wałęsa), “Comrades Rag-Wearers”, “we’ll let you leave but just in socks only”⁵⁰, “a brave heart in a shapely chest” (L. Miller about A. Jakubowska)⁵¹; invading the memory by means of an unexpected use of the language that breaks away from the accepted standards: “lordly whopping lie becoming a carouser made rich and a common scoundrel raised onto the summits of power”⁵²; neologisms: ‘falandization’, ‘labudism’, ‘jaskiernization’ (derived from the surnames of politicians, ‘clientism’ (which has been quite popular now), ‘pestering’ (L. Dorn about a TVN reporter).

Finishing this (obviously) incomplete, selective presentation, I would like to repeat the words by Irena Bajerowa: “the language has an unusual power: it can lift man on mounts of glory, but it can push man down into a precipice of humiliation and contempt; both – man and a nation. Because the nation has its own language, which is the property of the nation and also of the state, and which participates in its vicissitudes, in its victories and defeats. The language is also a national value, a factor that cements the nation and the state. Hence, it is a political value, as well”⁵³. In view of this value and of the necessity to protect it “a return to the fundamental role of the function of the language, caring for its culture and clarity of utterance become, indeed, a moral imperative”⁵⁴. Pondering over means of repairing the language, especially that used by politicians in public situations, must – however – take into account the cultural context, in particular – the power of influence of elements of secondary orality, whose influence on the shape of the political discourse in Poland fell within my humble endeavours to prove.

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52 An official statement about the Prime Minister holding the post: J. Bralczyk, op. cit., p. 74-77 and 103.

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