Online Journal Modelling the New Europe
No. 46 / December 2024
https://neweurope.centre.ubbcluj.ro/

DOI: 10.24193/OJMNE.2024.46.01

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LANGUAGE AS A TOOL OF ENFORCED ETHNIC CONVERSION IN A BORDER SPACE WITH THE EXAMPLE OF TRANSELSIA (ZAOLZIE SILESIA)

ABSTRACT: *Poland is a unique country in Europe, as it changed its geographical location after the Second World War, leaving large Polish groups in other countries. Since 1989, there has been an intensification of contacts between kin-state and foreign compatriots. Foreign compatriots are a heterogeneous group, as only a part of the population remained in the former USSR (Latvian, Lithuanian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Russian and Kazakh republic), while in Czechoslovakia (Transelsia) the local population did not undergo mass migration, but there were changes in their ethnic identification. Investigating the contemporary determinants of ethnic identity seems important from an academic perspective, and this is what this study is devoted to: consisting of in-depth interviews, questionnaires and observations. Using Transelsia as an example, the author describes the reaction of the former majority in the region to the assimilation pressure, which was carried out, among other things, through the introduction of the Czech language into the public space. In the Transelsia area, the presence of the Polish language is not identical in all parts. In the following considerations reference was made to: topographical names, names of public facilities, Polish-language education, as well as names of service points, shops and workshops. Based on the analysis of the data obtained from the in-depth interviews, questionnaires and observations, it was assessed that the hypothesis adopted in the study was confirmed. The state language has become a tool for forced ethnic conversion, and bilingualism itself also has a hidden dimension, with content used to impose Czech identity (e.g. bilingual street names whose patrons are historical figures with anti-Polish and nationalist involvement). Currently, an area of rivalry between Polish and Czech circles in Transelsia is theTeschen dialect, which the Czech side wants to use as an argument in the historical justification of its rights to the region.*

KEYWORDS: Polish minority; Teschen; Transelsia (Cieszyn Silesia); ethnic conversion; Poles in Czech Republic; ethnic relations; Polish-Czech Borderland.

1. Introduction

The democratic changes in Central Europe that took place at the turn of 1989/1990 brought the issue of foreign compatriots back into the public debate in the former Eastern Bloc countries. This new situation was a great opportunity for a new, sympathetic arrangement of mutual relations between states, as well as majority and minority groups. These should have taken into account the right of national minorities to preserve their distinctiveness. However, contrary to the expectations of the international community, it was not possible to avoid ethnic conflicts that turned into bloody battles and even ethnic cleansing (Balkans, Caucasus). R. Brubaker in the mid-1990s identified specific flashpoints at borderlands in the former Eastern Bloc (Brubaker 2009: 108, 109, 160). Ethnic conflict should be understood as the 'cultural incompatibility' of groups, coupled with a sudden rise in their ethnic consciousness (Roessingh 1996: 17). Ethnic

consciousness, is a state based on the recognition of a community of origin, affinity and culture, has an exclusive dimension and is narrowed down to the community group only. Awareness of common ethnicity is linked to the concept of nationalism through actual or implied ethnic ties (Cornell 1998: 37). Nationalism itself is based on the principle of organising and maintaining a sovereign state (Cornell 1998: 34). Ethnic identification is an essential part of human identity. It is formed through a political process and exists in conjunction with a geographical area. The main carrier of identity remains the belief in one's difference, as well as the attachment to traditions and values that make up the culture and are deeply lived in the minority group (Jenks 2016: 94-95). In the former Eastern Bloc countries, it was not so much the growth of ethnic consciousness per se that played a greater role, but precisely the possibility of manifesting one's ethnicity, sometimes approaching nationalistic attitudes. The processes described above also accompanied the Polish minorities that emerged as a result of the territorial changes in Central and Eastern Europe.

2. From majority group to national minority

After the end of the Second World War, Poland was moved to the West (Holzer 2002: 89). This involved a massive transfer of Polish and Jewish populations from the Soviet Union to Poland in 1944-1950 and 1955-1960 (Siedlecki 1987: 234, 237; Żaroń 1990: 350; Kersten 1974: 90; Czerniakiewicz 1987: 31; Ruchniewicz 2000: 255; Latuch 1994: 54; Hut 2014: 26, 36) and at the same time with the transfer of the Ukrainian and Ruthenians, Belarusian and Lithuanian populations to their native republics of the USSR in 1944-1947 (Misiło 1996: 5; Mironowicz 2000: 32). At the same time, the 1937 border line was restored in the Polish-Czechoslovak borderland, but no resettlement action was carried out (Dusan, Prokop, Krol 1992: 124).

The geographical transit of the Polish state had the effect of leaving many thousands of Polish groups in the areas of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. Both states were multi-ethnic in character and had long experience of nationality policy in their area in the interwar period (Savin 2017: 48, 50, 56; Kotljarchuk 2017: 67,71; Ivanov 2014: 40; 1993: 8-9; Gąsior 2021: 1282). Both countries also had numerous Polish minorities living in dense settlement areas from their inception.

In their dominant majority, the Poles living in the areas that were part of Poland in the interwar period were recognised by the Soviet and Czechoslovak authorities as citizens of these states. Due to the existing wider political conditions, this resulted in the incorporation of Poles into the Soviet and Czechoslovak societies. At the same time, the Polish communities in the USSR (Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan) were, as it were, excluded and cut off from Polish society, with the appearance of respecting minority rights being maintained in Wilna and Lemberg through the existence of Polish-language

education and the press (Hut 2014: 106). In Czechoslovakia, due to the border location of the area of compact Polish residence along the border line, as well as a different kind of bilateral Polish-Czechoslovak relations, there were better conditions for nurturing a separate non-Czech identity. Soon after the end of the Second World War, the Polish Cultural and Educational Association (PZKO) was organised, Polish-language publications were published and minority education existed (Zahradnik, Ryczkowski, 1992: 128). Family contacts and even the ownership of farms by owners from both sides of the border, who went to the other country for field work, were also of great importance.

Numerous Polish minorities remained in areas that were outside Poland after the Second World War. The authorities in the USSR and Czechoslovakia met the needs of Poles to cultivate their ethnic identity to varying degrees. It can even be argued that in both countries efforts were made to carry out processes of unification to the majority group, as reflected in statistical data from subsequent population censuses (Siedlecki 1987: 320-327; Zahradnik, Ryczkowski 1992: 178,179; Hut 2023: 102).

3. Theoretical perspective and state of research

Language plays a key role in the functioning of social groups. It unites and divides, opens or closes the cognition of the ‘new’. In a word, it can be a useful or harmful tool (Waltman, Haas 2011: 33; Lustig, Koester 2006: 27). The negative impact of language on social relations has been recognised in essayists who have developed J. Galtung's scientifically grounded 1969 concept classifying structural and personal violence (Gay 2018: 33; Galtung 1969: 173).

In the present discussion, I will focus on the hitherto unexplored issue of language as a tool of violence, which was (and is) used to marginalise a minority non-native-speaking group in Transelsia. The issue of Transelsia is quite well researched by historians (Szymiczek 1938, Jarosz 1910, Gąsior 2020, ethnographers (Michalska 2001, 2006, linguists (Kadłubiec et al. 2016, Greń 2007, Bogoczova 2018), educators (Lewowicki 1994a, 1994b, Grabowska 2021), and political scientists (Zenderowski 2021, Hut 1997). However, the consideration of the perspective of language as a tool of violence has not yet been analysed in the available studies, and it seems to be a cognitively interesting issue all the more so because we are dealing with a unique area. Both this uniqueness and the specific methodological assumptions will be presented in the following sections.

In the following part of the considerations, we will focus on the situation of the Polish minority in Transelsia, as this is a group that has continuously inhabited the same area for generations and has not been subject to a forced change in its structure through the loss of a layer of educated and economically stronger

people - as in the case of Poles in the USSR - due to the war (Januszewska-Jurkiewicz 2001: 39; Tołczyk 2009: 183; Piotrowski 2004: 9; Bukowiński 2016: 141). Although the Polish community in Transelsia changed as a result of war losses, participation in the armed forces and the point extermination of the civilian population, apart from post-war changes in the case of a few villages that were liquidated in order to develop the economic infrastructure, it did not experience such a profound transformation as the communities in the former USSR (Zahradnik, Ryczkowski 1992: 99, 140-142; Polish Cultural and Educational Union 1987: 14; Brnovjak, Jez, Lipovski 2021: 160-161). Thus, it seems cognitively interesting to examine the factors that triggered the process of ethnic conversion.

Such factors may include the (non-)presence of the mother tongue of the ethnic minority in the public space of the borderland. This is all the more important as it is precisely the language of the ethnic minority that plays a key role in the preservation of a distinct ethnic identity (Łodziński 2015: 130). It is of great symbolic importance in the mutual perception of the dominant and minority group, but also in the strengthening of ethnic identity (Sobecki 2007: 72; Jordan, Macha, Balode, Krtička, Obrusnik, Pilch 2021: 94, 100).

The minority language can be present in different dimensions in the border space and include:

1. topographical names (village name boards, signposts, street name boards),
2. names of public facilities (offices, schools, hospitals/health centres, community centres),
3. names of service facilities (shops, service outlets),
4. relations between a member of the national minority and the office,
5. language of local celebrations,
6. the language of private conversations between members of the national minority.

The presence of the national minority language in the public space is of exceptional importance, as it ‘formalises’ the existence of the national minority, giving it an ‘officialness’, official dimension, a confirmation from the state that it accepts the existence of the minority group and signals to the majority group in the area the presence of the national minority (Jordan 2004: 220-223). The literature even includes the term ‘flagging’ of reality, which refers to the marking of space, the development of a sense of ‘being at home’, the creation of one's ‘places of significance’ and ‘ceremonial cultural points’ (Łodzinski 2016: 223, 225). The importance of the process of ‘flagging’ reality additionally gains importance in the area of the former Eastern Bloc countries, where, until the turn of 1989/1990, apart from the multi-ethnic states (USSR, ČSSR, SFRY), the problems of national minorities did not receive much attention (Łodziński 2016: 224).

Legal regulations in the EU Member States specify the conditions that should be met for a national minority language to appear in public space (Jonas 2023: 1; Szymeczek 2021: 121). The most common condition for bilingualism is the size of the minority group in the overall population structure of the

administrative unit. However, due to local circumstances, this requirement does not have to be strictly observed. All the more so as bilingualism is a beneficial phenomenon and improves human competence (Bertelle 2011: 242-243; Study 2009: 6).

The results of research conducted so far in Polish national minority communities allow us to conclude that:

1. language is not the only determinant of ethnic identity,

2. the Polish minority, as a collective, does not use/does not know literary or colloquial Polish,

3. the Polish minority, as a community, most often communicates in the Teschen dialect with a large number of Czech accretions.

It is the aforementioned unfamiliarity with the Polish language among the Polish minority that creates a complicated situation in the region, as Polish is redundant in day-to-day contacts (Bogoczova 2019: 15). Among Polish minority communities are dominated by the historical Teschen dialect and practically the only places of contact with literary Polish are: Polish-language schools (Grabowska 2021: 218) or services in Polish in Catholic and Evangelical churches. Elsewhere, Czech is the dominant official language. The Polish-language school in Transelsia is a symbol of polarisation and orientation towards Polish culture and language (Bogoczova 2021: 171). The importance of the presence of the Polish language in official contacts was argued as early as the 19th century during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy by the author of a folk handbook for the preparation of official writings (Dabrowski 1898: IV).

In the Czech part of historical Teschen Silesia, in Transelsia, the Polish minority language is present in the public space in selected places, but its dialect variety, used in everyday informal contacts by a large part of the population, is also increasingly common (Bogoczova 2018: 77-79). It has two forms of diacritical notation: using Polish or Czech characters.

4. Methodology and data

The above findings made it possible to decide on the desirability of investigating and expanding the knowledge of the linguistic situation in Transelsia, in the context of linguistic violence. For the purposes of the study, a research hypothesis was formulated, which assumed that the linguistic aspirations of the Polish minority are not sufficiently and identically satisfied in the Transelsia area, and that the presence of the Czech language, as well as the Teschen dialect, is a tool for forced ethnic conversion and ethnic unification in Transelsia. For the analysis of the collected research material, indicators were also defined. It was assumed that the study itself should consist of five elements:

1. in-depth interviews with persons involved in Polish minority activities and implementers of Czech historical policy in Transelsia,

2. questionnaires with randomly selected people in the Transelsia region of Teschen,

3. participatory observation,

4. vetting of selected sites.

At the same time, an analysis of the content of the television programmes of Czech Television from Ostrau and the radio programmes of the Polish Editorial Office of Czech Radio from Ostrau was abandoned. These programmes have a symbolic meaning and, although the image is transmitted to the whole of the Czech Republic, they are not opinion-forming, but rather an audiovisual chronicle of events.

Prior to the research, a list of respondents was drawn up (members of Polish organisations, directors and teachers of Polish-language schools, editors of Polish-language newspapers, director of cultural institutions) and a place was selected for the survey (market square, main street, railway station), whether there are any annual celebrations planned in the region, and villages were randomly selected for vetting (Trzyniec, Jabłonków, Mosty koło Jabłonkowa, Bystrzyca nad Olzą, Wędrynia, Tyra, Cierlicko, Stonawa).

For this purpose, an exploratory study was organised (27-29.1.2023) and a research stay, during which a proper study was carried out (19-25.4.2023). In the research proper, 21 face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted (after the research scout, the questionnaire was abandoned), 51 questionnaire surveys were conducted, newspaper content was analysed at the Documentation Centre of the Congress of Poles in the Czech Republic, one meeting/event was attended in the Transelsian part of Teschen and 8 villages were vetted. The gender proportion of respondents was maintained in the research. 20 persons of Polish nationality and 1 of Czech nationality took part in the interviews, in the questionnaire: 14 persons of Polish nationality, 17 persons of Czech nationality, 3 persons of Silesian nationality, 17 persons of undetermined nationality.

5. Marginalisation of a national minority language and ethnic conversion in the light of research

Since the establishment of the Czechoslovak administration in Transelsia in 1919, the Polish language in the public space was replaced by the state language, Czech. With the passage of time, the Polish language became less and less important. Promotion in the social structure and on the labour market, as well as dealing with formal matters involved the Czech language (Nowak 2012: 342, 482). For many, this meant in practice a departure from the Polish language and Bohemianisation. With the shrinking of the minority group, the role of the Polish language was further marginalised. The circumstances of these processes were described

by the research participants in their statements. In the following section, the results of the study will be presented - while maintaining full anonymity of the respondents.

6. Relevance of topographical names

Topographical names (village name boards, signposts, street name boards), in the opinion of the respondents, play an important role, in a way confirming the equality of the ethnic groups living in the area. According to a survey participant: *We have, next to the Czech ones, Polish village name boards. There used to be none of that. There were only Czech ones. Now they have to treat us as equal citizens of the village.* (...) *There was a lot of discussion before they hung these boards. Everyone got used to the fact that they were only Czech. Some Poles were afraid of these Polish boards so as not to irritate the Czechs. People don't feel confident* [W 03]. In the survey, some respondents made similar comments: *Polish signs should be there. We are the same people as the others [A 08], and another person added: For Poles it is very important that there are these plaques. It helps us to keep our identity* [A 11]. Another respondent stated: *Parents said that they used to forbid such things [plaques], but now it has changed and they can be* [A 17].

The presence of non-state language aroused resistance and resentment among the majority group - most often as: 'redundant' and 'unnecessary'. One person participating in the survey stated: *The Polish language on the plaques makes some residents very nervous. I can no longer remember how many times we cleaned the name plates of our village in Polish. We even tried to think of some way to make it more difficult to destroy these plaques: we covered them with transparent film or covered them with an anti-graffiti substance* [W 08]. The circumstances surrounding the destruction of the place name boards in Polish were also described in another interview: *At the beginning it was terrible. Practically all the time they were destroying village name plates, but now it is calm. They seem to have got used to it, but you can see on a sunny day that the plaque with the Polish name is tarnished - this is from those cleaning chemicals.* (...) *In Teschen [the Czech part] they also tried to destroy street name plates in Polish, but they have also calmed down now* [W 12]. Survey participants also mentioned such incidents in 11 cases: *Destruction of Polish name plates used to be more frequent. Now everyone has got used to it* [A 32]. Another respondent stated: *My parents told me that everyone in the family was very happy when these inscriptions in Polish [on the entrance signs] were introduced. Especially my grandfather was happy when he talked to the Czechs* [A 33].

There were also more neutral and even opposing voices among the respondents. One respondent said: *the situation for us, here, as a minority, does not depend on the boards after all. They used to ban them, and there were more Poles. You can see it every day. It used to be that the whole bus or train spoke only ours*

[Teschen dialect], and now there is Czech everywhere [W 18]. Another respondent to the questionnaire stated straightforwardly: *Polish signs are unnecessary, because after all all the Poles here learned Czech at school and speak Czech* [A 47], and another stated: *Let there be a Polish minority, but why these placards? One can be Czech or Polish regardless of the placards* [A 20].

The permissibility of bilingual village and street signs did not appear until the mid-2000s and initially aroused strong emotions. Nowadays, the inhabitants of Transelsia have become accustomed to the presence of the Polish language on place-name signs, and there are even voices advocating trilingualism and supplementing Czech and Polish signs with signs with names in the Teschen dialect. The attractiveness of the dialect form is high, as exemplified by the development of a map of the village of Wędrynia/Vendryně with topographical names in 'Silesian dialect' (with Polish diacritics). The issue of trilingualism, or perhaps the replacement of the literary Polish language with the Teschen dialect, is likely to come up more and more frequently in public debate in the region. All the more so as such a formula is more acceptable to the Czech inhabitants of Transelsia, who are very keen to emphasise their distinctiveness from their Polish identity.

7. Relevance of the names of public buildings

The Polish language on public buildings highlights the hetero-ethnicity of the area. Facilities managed by the local government (town hall, municipal office, Polish-language educational facilities: kindergarten, school, gymnasium, community centre, library) have bilingual information boards. Other public facilities managed by local government companies or state institutions only have signs with Czech names (e.g. branch of Česká národní banka, Česká pošta, Nemocnice AGEL Český Těšín, a.s.). Against this backdrop, the attitude of the Czech Railways (České dráhy), which introduced bilingualism as a standard, is surprising. This uniqueness is best illustrated by one of the statements obtained during the interview: *What surprised everyone the most was the attitude of the Czech Railways, which put Polish names next to Czech ones at railway stations, and even - which was already a surprise to everyone - they announce trains in Polish, and there are also inscriptions in Polish on the tickets. And this is not the case with everyone. There are local authorities who build their political capital on blocking our* [the Polish minority's] *expectations* [W 09]. Flattering opinions about Czech Railways (České dráhy) were expressed by all interview respondents. They emphasised that the decision to introduce the Polish language in station names, station announcements and bilingual tickets came as a surprise. This state of affairs is very well reflected in the statement of one interviewee*: Whenever I wait for a train to* [place name] *with my Czech classmates I see how surprised they are by the announcements in Polish* [A 02]. However, Czech respondents (75%) questioned the validity of

announcements and ticket printing in Polish: *There are no announcements in Czech at the station in Teschen, and here is the Czech Republic. Poles understand Czech* [A 044]. This is a significant statement, as its author expects symmetrical treatment of tourists and the national minority, thus ignoring the incomparability of the situation.

The boards with the names of the town and village offices, as well as the hours of operation, were bilingual in all the villages visited. However, it should be emphasised that while in the case of towns the inscriptions were identical to those in Poland (town hall), a different standard applied to the names of municipal offices. In Poland, it is accepted that the description on rural offices is 'gmina office' (urząd gminny), while in Transelsia 'gmina office' (urząd gimny) is given. This is due to the adoption of a different declension case. Both forms are correct, nevertheless this minimal difference has a symbolic dimension - the use of Polish, but not according to the standard adopted in Poland, but according to the historical rules used during the partition period in the Austro-Hungarian area.

In the opinion of the respondents, bilingualism in the form of information boards on municipal and communal offices was preserved, while residents' matters are dealt with only in the official language (in writing) and sometimes in dialect (conversation). The conditions of this situation were described by the survey participants in their statements: *We could probably use this right to bilingualism, but I don't think everyone knows Polish well. It is easier to write in Czech...* [W 01]. Another person stated: *More than once you can hear people talking "in our language" in the office, but that's in the villages. After all, they know each other and everyone there speaks it, so there is no need to speak Czech* [W 17]. Against this background, the statement of another person, who stated: *You can probably write to the office in Polish, but they would probably give an answer in Czech, so it doesn't make sense. Also you would probably have to wait longer for a reply* [W 15]. And another respondent added: *Our people are not used to it. I don't think they know that you can do that. At the office, at the doctor's, at the police... everywhere you automatically switch to Czech, unless people know each other, then they speak 'in our language* [W 02]. One of the interviewees stated directly: *The Czech state pays civil servants so they have to work in Czech. It is like that everywhere* [A 27].

The opinions of the interview and survey respondents confirmed that perhaps the representatives of the Polish minority would be able to have the formalities in offices done in Polish, however, two barriers stand in the way: the habit enforced by years of experience, which resulted from the systemic removal of the Polish language from the public space during the period of Czechoslovakia, and the insufficient knowledge of the Polish language by the Poles from Transelsia, especially in the area of specialist and legal vocabulary. As a result, in offices Polish plays only a symbolic role and has no practical significance.

The statements of the survey respondents confirmed the marginalisation of the national minority language in offices. Although in the symbolic sphere the rights of the national minority are respected, as a

result of previous practice over many years the Polish language has been permanently removed from official procedures and there is no indication that this situation will change in the future.

8. Polish-language education and its importance for the Polish minority

Unlike in the inter-war period after World War II and today, there are only public Polish-language educational institutions in Transelsia. Kindergartens and minority schools are maintained in towns and villages where applicants apply, and there is a Polish-language gymnasium in the Transelsian part of Teschen (in addition, Polish-language classes are organised in secondary vocational education where necessary). According to those interviewed, it is the Polish-language educational institutions that play the main role in maintaining identity. One person employed in the education sector stated: *School has always been a mainstay of Polish identity. At home people speak 'our language', and at school children have contact with the literary language. And with the living Polish language, because schools cooperate with Poland. They go on exchanges, on trips. This is even seen by Czech parents, who sometimes consciously choose to be taught in our* [Polish-speaking] *establishments, because they think that mastering Polish will be useful for their children in the future* [W 04]. Another person stated: *Now I hear that it is more and more common to speak "our language" there* [in schools]. *It used to be that teachers were more careful to speak only Polish, because it was known that at home everyone spoke dialect* [W 17]. In contrast, another respondent noted: *Now on the street outside the gimpel* [gymnasium] *you can meet students talking to each other in Czech. It used to be unimaginable, but now it is more and more often* [W 11]. This situation was summed up by another participant in the survey saying: *the Polish language is disappearing. There are fewer and fewer children in schools because fewer children are being born in general. (...) Another issue is children who come from mixed families and speak Czech at home with their father and Polish with their mother. It's up to the individual at home* [W 07]. Important statements were made by teacher respondents: *We want young people to speak Polish properly. We have cooperation with schools from Poland. This is the only place where children can learn Polish, because at home it is different* [W 02].

Survey respondents knew that there was Polish-language education in the region. They had acquaintances of Poles from Transelsia or their parents had graduated from such schools, while 7 people were graduates of these schools. The graduates stated simply: *School is the basis. Whoever wanted to, learned the Polish language and culture* [A 41] or *Without a Polish school we will be lost in Zaolzie* [A 01]. In the survey, one respondent assessed: *I remember my school and my teacher very well. She demanded a lot from us but we owe a lot to her. I think that if it were not for her many people would not be involved in*

the work of PeZetKaO [PZKO] *today* [A 03].

It is worth noting that the respondents highly valued three advantages of Polish-language education: the involvement of teachers, a higher level of education and the possibility of continuing education in Poland. According to the respondents, this commitment and higher level is determined by the low enrolment in minority schools. In spite of this, the number of pupils in Polish-language schools has declined in subsequent years and, over time, some of them have been closed down. A large proportion of them remain in uncertainty as to whether the next year's intake will allow a class to be organised. An accepted solution, which is justified on economic grounds (the unprofitability of organising a class for 1-2 pupils) are collective schools, which are supposed to meet the needs of the inhabitants of localities where minority establishments have been closed down. However, according to respondents, this is a rationale for choosing a Czech-speaking school: *It is known that if you have to drive your child to another village then some parents will choose a Czech school. Particularly small children endure the transportation badly and parents, in order to have peace of mind, send them to a Czech school, and later such children already go through Czech schools to the end* [W 11]. The problem of declining interest in Polish-language schools is unsolvable. Parents are more likely to choose education in Czech-speaking schools for their children. One respondent assessed this as follows: *I often meet people who went to* [Polish-language] *school with me and I see them picking up their children from a Czech school. I even ask them: why do you send your child to a Czech school when you have ours in the same building? And they don't answer anything* [W 13].

Polish-language schools today operate freely and without restrictions, unlike in the inter-war and post-war periods. The Polish minority is not economically persecuted for enrolling their children in Polish-language schools - and such activities were common in the period 1919-1938. In spite of this, statistical data show that interest in Polish-language education in Transelsia is declining from year to year - and it is not just a matter of nominal data, that a few more pupils arrived in the following year than in the previous year, but of systemic conditions. Potential stakeholders find education in the Czech language more valuable, and this means that in the following years, the debate in Polish minority circles in the late spring and summer is dominated by a discussion of the number of pupils. This, in turn, determines that not a single new Polish-language school has been organised for years and the survival of the existing ones has to be constantly fought for. After 2000, it seemed that perhaps the interest in education in the Czech Republic of children from Poland or children of Polish labour migrants in Transelsia would result in an influx of Polish-language schools, but this is not the case. In numerous cases documented in interviews, children from Poland are enrolled in Czech-speaking schools in Transelsia (especially historical villages separated by the border line).

It can be concluded that without Polish-language schools, children would not learn Polish, because at home they mostly speak the Teschen dialect or Czech. The number of pupils in Polish-language schools is

therefore a proxy for the future size of the Polish minority, and the smaller the minority, the less important its demands will be and the marginalisation of the minority language will petrify.

9. National minority language in other public facilities

In Transelsia, public facilities include: hospitals and doctors' surgeries, religious buildings and community centres and libraries. They play an important role in the life of local communities. However, people usually go for medical assistance out of necessity, being in a critical health situation, while attendance at church, theatre or library is by choice.

The public hospitals and outpatient clinics in Trzyniec and Teschen in Transelsia are signposted in Czech, while the staff very often speak Polish and the Teschen dialect. The use of medical services is a unique situation that is often accompanied by stress and nervousness. These are circumstances that determine that if the respondent does not know the doctor then they communicate in Czech. In this case, there is a practical reason for this, as it allows for an accurate understanding of the diagnosis. Both the Polish patient and the Polish doctor are better able to use medical terminology in Czech. One respondent commented as follows: *I prefer diagnosis in Czech because I don't know all those Polish words. Influenza, fracture I know, but there are words I don't know* [W 04]. Another respondent stated: *No one would think of speaking Polish at the doctor's, that's a fact. Doctors do not know Polish* [W 13].

A special situation is the reception of patients from Poland, in public or private facilities. In such places it happens that even the medical staff comes from Poland. Against this background, gynaecological clinics that perform abortions for Polish nationals for a fee play a special role. One such facility operating in Transelsia in the village of Stonawa is entirely geared towards providing services to Polish citizens: the website is only available for IP numbers from Poland and is blocked on the territory of the Czech Republic. During the interviews, however, respondents did not comment on abortion clinics, while the survey collected 6 statements on this topic, and a field vetting and review of the websites of selected hospitals and clinics was also conducted. In the survey, people mainly reported the presence of Polish nationals in gynaecological wards: *You can see these cars in the car park in Stonava. Everything from Poland* [A 19] and*: Sometimes I wondered why Poles come to our hospitals but a colleague told me* [A 23].

In Catholic churches and Evangelic churches in Transelsia, the Polish language is common. Some of the churches have inscriptions above the entrance with quotations from the Holy Bible in Polish (e.g. the Catholic church in Wędrynia, the Evangelical church in Bystrzyca nad Olzą), Polish is also present on notice boards, in breviaries and religious pictures. Alternating services are held in Polish and Czech. Several priests

from Poland minister in the Catholic parishes in Transelsia. Regardless of their ethnic origin, they speak fluent Czech. One respondent assessed their priestly ministry as follows: *Our priest has mastered Czech very well. He is able to communicate with everyone. There are no problems in our church* [W 11]. Social activities organised by the individual parishes are conducted for common groups, without ethnic-linguistic division: *There are different children at the „fara"* [vicarage] *in the summer. They get along with each other* [W 19].

During the survey, it was also obtained that language issues still play an important role in the region and that there is even a latent rivalry on this level: *In many places where there have been recent renovations or restorations there were Polish inscriptions, and after the renovation Czech ones appeared. This happens at wayside shrines or on old monuments, where names are changed from Polish to Czech on the plaques, e.g. Józef to Josef* [W 16]. This situation was also confirmed by another person: *Name changes often concern families who recognised themselves as Czechs and their ancestors died* [during the IIWW], *as Poles. The families decide* [W 18]. In order to prevent the replacement of original inscriptions on historical religious sites in the future, the Congress of Poles cell keeps records and documentation of such sites.

Theatres, cultural centres and libraries operating in the region have information boards in both languages (teatr/divadlo, dom kultury/kulturní dům, biblioteka/knihovna). Their activities are bilingual. There are Polish and Czech stages at the theatre located on Ostravská Street in the Transelsian part of Teschen. Performances are regularly staged in both languages. The interviewee stated: *This theatre has been operating for many years. The Czechs envied us that there is a historical theatre in Teschen in Poland and wanted to have something in their part too. As a result, we have our own stage and performances are staged in Polish* [W 01]. Another person added: *Now it doesn't matter as much as it used to, but everyone knows that there are performances in Polish and people go to these shows* [W 16]. The Poles from Transelsia are proud to have their own theatre (stage) and the presence of professional actors: *It is very important that there is this theatre of ours. It is a symbol so that Polishness is also associated with culture, artists and art* [W 06]. The Teschen Theatre, moreover, fulfils the role of a venue for important events. This facility, built after the war, is not only bilingual in the sphere of artistic activity, but also all the information boards inside are bilingual. The Polish Stage of the Teschen Theatre is the only professional Polish theatre operating outside Poland.

In community centres and libraries, local community meetings are organised and themed activities are held. Cultural centres in rural areas are based on community activities and do not even have their own management, but are supervised by municipal officials and local community activists. Their programme of activities is varied. They host amateur theatre performances, dance shows, annual balls and meetings with writers, scholars or travellers. One respondent stated: *We do annual events, balls but also meetings. An inn*

operates normally. Polish is spoken at celebrations but every day at the inn information is in Czech [W 17]. Among the cultural houses, a special role is played by the Polish Houses/ PZKO Houses, which are located in many Transelsia villages. They primarily serve Polish organisations, but they are also used for anniversaries and private celebrations and, due to high maintenance costs, for commercial catering activities.

An important social role is played by municipal and community libraries, which provide access to fiction but also to handbooks and specialist publications. Importantly, they hold collections in both Czech and Polish. The Polish-language collections include Polish-language publications published back in Czechoslovakia by publishers from Czechoslovakia. This limited and made them independent of book imports from Poland. Respondents emphasised the importance of libraries with collections in Polish: *The most important is the library in Karwina. There is a lot going on there* [W 15]. They also appreciated the availability of Polish books: *There are a lot of books in Polish in our library. Nowadays, not everyone has time to read, but if someone looks for it, they will find it* [W 07]. At the same time, respondents expressed concern about libraries: *Now everything is online. Libraries have lost their importance. There are interesting meetings at our place, but what it will be like in the future is unknown* [W 08].

The situation of the Polish language in public facilities is extremely varied. In medical facilities, the Polish language is virtually non-existent, except in places geared towards Polish patients. The situation is completely different in religious facilities, where the position of the Polish language is well-established and results from tradition - Polish is treated equally and appears in written and spoken form, and the same is true in the theatre, as well as in cultural centres and libraries. However, this does not mean that the Polish-Czech linguistic rivalry has been extinguished, as there are situations that reflect the vitality of this rivalry on historical objects.

10. The language of the national minority in the names of shops and workshops

The situation of the national minority is evidenced by the presence of its language in commercial and service establishments. During the period of the communist economy there were regulations that enforced bilingualism. Nationalised trade used inscriptions in Polish in the areas where national minorities lived. In this way, the presence of the minority language was made independent of subjective decisions. It was a solution imposed within the framework of a totalitarian state, but it nevertheless fulfilled its function - especially in comparison to the period after 1990, when private shop or workshop owners gave up inscriptions in Polish. Respondents attributed this to the local ruling elite. Among the respondents' statements, there were voices that directly pointed to the attitude of the authorities as a factor that determined

the disappearance of the Polish language: *Under Czechoslovakia, you could see inscriptions in Polish: those of "towary mieszane/ smíšené zboží", restauracja / restaurace or the stołówka/ jídelna. Now everything is in Czech, because the private owner decides, and if he sees that there are no Polish signs with the name of the village, why should he make Polish signs in his place? The authorities don't get involved* [W 03]. Another person added: *Only the Vietnamese in Teschen are really bilingual. They don't fight with the Polish language. Right behind the border crossing there is a whole street of shops with Polish signs* [W 12]. Respondents also pointed to changes in the ownership of shops: *When there was a private owner it was his own decision, but now shops are closing down because they can't stand the competition with supermarkets. There is no bilingualism in supermarkets, everything is in Czech. There are no Polish customers either, but they used to come. Now we go shopping to Poland* [W 09].

Respondents did not have much to say about workshops because, as one person stated: *Now they are not profitable and they are closing down. Nobody is going to fix things when it's cheaper to buy online or in a supermarket* [W 17], and another person emphasised: *They used to keep an eye on that* [Polish subtitles], *but now nobody pays attention to the subtitles just the price* [W 13]. The latter statement may even serve as an illustration of the current situation, but perhaps an additional complicating factor is the issue of branding/commercial branding: *The local people consider Czech industrial goods to be better and do not want to show Polish inscriptions* [W 01].

Participants in the survey sometimes perceived the disappearance of inscriptions in Polish, but as these were largely young people, born after 2000, they had no way of comparing the situation during the existence of Czechoslovakia with the current state. One person interviewed said: *Everyone knows what is in the shop and what they want to buy. There could be subtitles in Polish but they are not needed* [A 49]. In the group of respondents, only one person categorically stated that shop signs should also be in Polish: *Where Poles live the subtitles should be in Polish. For us it is important, because Poles from Poland come to us* [in Transelsia] *and later they are surprised that there are some Poles here. Such inscriptions would be useful, because maybe someone would wonder why they are here... Well, but there are not many of them...* [A 12].

The issue of the presence of the Polish language in the names of shops and service outlets is currently not treated as a field of dispute and confrontation. For the most part, respondents to the interviews and questionnaires probably considered private trade and services to be outside the sphere of ethnic rivalry. As was evident from the selected statements, there is a strong distinction among Transelsia residents between the area of obligations of state or local government institutions and private business activities. During the course of the research, one grocery shop was encountered on the Teschen-Cierlicko road, which even had the Polish name 'Zagłoba' (Onufry Zagłoba, a literary character, a novel by the Polish writer H. Sienkiewicz). Our own observations during the research also allow us to conclude that while shops - mostly

grocery shops - sometimes have bilingual signs, it is the service outlets and workshops that have signs in Czech. In this case, the explanation could be the unfamiliarity with the specialised technical vocabulary in Polish and the abandonment of describing the point in Polish.

11. Language of local celebrations

During the research it was found that the language of local celebrations depends on the organiser and the participants. The region does not have a very deep tradition of organising mass celebrations related, for example, to the history of the state. Harvest festivals, music festivals, folklore events or small-scale gatherings of individual professional communities are most common. Harvest festivals and the largest folklore event 'Gorolski Święto' are dominated by the Teschen dialect and Polish language. This is also how they are perceived by the local communities: At the harvest festival, the local language is spoken, in ours [Teschen dialect]. *Sometimes it is necessary to say something in Czech for the sake of correctness, but the dialect still dominates. In Polish, the guests from the consulate in Ostrava or from the Polish Senate will say something* [W 17]. Another person added*: There used to be more Polish and now there is more dialect. It is difficult to speak Polish because rarely does anyone speak Polish without Czechisms, so people prefer to speak our language* [W 03]. According to another person, the annual August Gorolski festival has changed: *It's very different now than it used to be. A lot of guests and bands from abroad come to Jabłonków. Not only from Europe, but also from other continents* [W 07]. Harvest festivals and folklore events make direct reference to local traditions, the past and experiences. The Polish minority also organises the PZKO Festival in Teschen in Transelsia. It is an open celebration with a rich cultural offer, which is intended to bring the PZKO closer to the general public, not only as a group of 'recipients', but also as a 'donor' for the entire community of Transelsia, without distinction of ethnic categories.

Other celebrations - especially those of a historical nature - are of moderate interest. They are generally dedicated to tragic events of the past - the crimes in Stonawa and Żywocice and the crash of Polish airmen in Cierlicko. These commemorations are bilingual. Celebrations organised by Czech circles - the annual Legionářský mars in July, dedicated to the consolidation of the Czech presence in Transelsia are held exclusively in Czech and are organised in opposition to the Polish minority in the region. One survey participant stated: *I don't know why they do it. I guess to inflame the situation. They put up a monument to spite the Poles* [W 11]. The monument to General J. Šnejdárek in Bystrzyca nad Olzą was erected without consulting the municipal authorities in 2012. Its founders have not revealed themselves. Gen. J. Šnejdárek was blamed for war crimes in 1919.

An event with a youth and general music character is the 'Dolanski Gróm'. Organised since 2010 by the Karwina Branch of the PZKO in June, it is very popular. Popular music stars from the USA, Western Europe, Poland and local rock bands are invited. The number of commercial sponsors of the event has been growing for several years, including České dráhy CARGO, ČSOB Pojišťovna or the producer of the popular Radegast beer. The organisers also receive financial support from: Consulate General of Poland in Ostrava, the Polish Foundation Helping Poles in the East, the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the Moravskoslezsky Region. The event is dominated by Polish (ensembles from Poland) and dialect, but also Czech (for Czech-speaking participants) and English (for other participants). Overall, it can be considered that 'Dolanski Gróm' is a modern musical event, attracting a large number of participants. It has its place in the calendar of cultural events in the region. Respondents recognised the importance of this event in their statements: [Dolanski] *Gróm is very popular, and not only among Poles. You can listen to good music. It is worth being* [W 11]. Another person added: *They invite stars from Poland and whole families come. You can listen to bands from your youth. Recently there was Lady Pank. There are also novelties or classics from* [Western] *Europe*. (...) *A few people got together in Karwina and made a nice festival* [W 02].

However, the participants in the survey did not identify this event as an event organised by the Polish minority. In fact, it could be argued that cultural ventures as they understood them tended to include historical or folklore events, while a modern, mass event was considered 'local', natural and without organisational or ethnic affiliation. This attitude applies mainly to survey respondents who declared an identity: Polish, Czech or refused to provide information.

12. Language of dealing with official matters

The Polish language - and even more broadly Polish identity, in the region are treated in connection with the past. The ancestors were Polish, they spoke Polish, they nurtured their culture and identity, but nowadays there are new circumstances, the environment functions in an ethnic Czech state and one has to adapt to these conditions. The effect of this approach, is to place the whole 'everyday life' in the Czech state. This involves retaining one's identity only for close family or social contacts, while social functioning takes place in the Czech language and according to the norms accepted in Czech society. This means that dealing with formal matters - despite the possibility to do so - is done in Czech. It is also relatively rare for Poles to use the possibility to write personal data in documents according to the rules of Polish spelling (writing first names, but also depriving female surnames of the ending -ová).

During the interview, respondents stated: *We do not use the existing possibilities. I do not know a person*

who speaks Polish at the office or at the doctor's [W 08] or *When I talk to my friends I am surprised that they have not changed their names to the Polish notation. Sometimes these are also difficult issues, as the parents are of different nationalities* [W 17]. Another person added: *The young speak Polish poorly. It is better with the dialect but she has a lot of Czechisms now, so when something needs to be done they speak Czech* [W 17], and another stated: *Our* [minority] *society speaks Polish poorly. They use a lot of Czechisms. They are ashamed of the fact that they went to a Polish school, and today they cannot speak Polish without mistakes, so they switch to Czech. It is easier that way* [W 03].

The attitude of the representatives of the Polish minority in Transelsia causes the conviction in the consciousness of the group that it is possible to use Polish when dealing with official matters to disappear. At the same time, the managers of central and local government offices do not maintain and develop in their employees the competence to deal with matters in Polish, justifying it by the economics of the operation, as no letters in Polish are received. Such an attitude among the representatives of the Polish minority is probably due to the belief, established in the past, that an official - a representative of the Czech state, will show more favour to an inhabitant of the region who is Czech.

One respondent [W 12] added that the marginalisation of the Polish language in the public space is partly a result of the passivity of Polish communities. This view was expressed by another respondent [W 19], who stated that Polish circles insufficiently enforce their rights. It should be noted that, although some respondents emphasised the insufficient actions taken by representatives of minority organisations (the Congress of Poles in the Czech Republic, the Polish Cultural and Educational Association) or local government officials originating from the Polish minority.

13. Conclusions

The hypothesis adopted in the study was confirmed through the statements of respondents (interviews, questionnaire), participatory observations and vetting of selected villages in Transelsia. In fact, nowadays the Polish language in Transelsia has been marginalised and does not play an important role in interpersonal communication, both for the general population of Transelsia people and for the Polish minority. Specialised language (medical, technical, legal) causes particular difficulties among the Polish minority. Respondents do not use it intuitively and are simply afraid to directly translate words known from Czech into Polish.

The state and municipal authorities fulfil their tasks to a sufficient extent, allowing citizens of the Czech Republic of Polish nationality to satisfy their needs in terms of: education in Polish at pre-school, school and secondary level. To this end, the maintenance of Polish-language educational facilities (repairs, heating,

equipment) and teaching posts (approximately 200 in the region) are subsidised. In selected towns, bilingual local naming has been introduced (Teschen, Trzyniec, Jabłonków), and in two of them, bilingual street names have been introduced (Teschen, Jabłonków), but in Teschen they are placed on one board, while in Jabłonków on two. In smaller towns, bilingualism is implemented to varying degrees - in Olbrachcice even the descriptions of bus stops are bilingual. This situation confirms the continuing conflict over language and identity in the region.

However, bilingualism still has a hidden dimension, which goes beyond the simple translation from Czech into Polish. A significant role is also played by hidden symbolism, which a visitor will not understand. For example, the Polish-language gymnasium school in Transelsian Teschen is located on P. Bezruč Street. He was a Czech writer who argued strongly in his poetry that Silesian Poles are in fact polonised Moravians (Czechs) and should be made aware of their true identity. In the opinion of two survey respondents, making a Czech nationalist the patron of a street with a Polish-language secondary school is a provocation directed against the Polish minority (W 02, W 17, W 20). An example of good practice is the decision of the state railway operator, České Dráhy, A.s., to introduce bilingualism throughout the region - from announcements to station names to the ticket blanks.

In the light of the above findings, it can be assumed that - despite the existence of a legal basis - there is no uniform action of local authorities in the field of bilingualism and many decisions depend on the decisions of local decision-makers. Often the authorities support the Polish minority or at least make some concessions to it, but systemic solutions are still lacking. These actually hinder the Polish minority (and are perceived as such), but also the local authorities, making them vulnerable to criticism from both sides.

The introduction of the Czech language widely in Transelsia since 1919 and the simultaneous removal of the Polish language from the public space formally established the primacy of the Czech language. Polish became a less useful language, attesting only to a person's identity. At the same time, this assessment can also be questioned, as the declaration of identity in the interwar period was rather connected with participation in Czech organisations and associations and enrolling offspring in Czech schools, but not with a change of language. Residents, regardless of ethnic affiliation, spoke the local Teschen dialect. The enforced ethnic conversion therefore resulted not so much from the exclusion of the Polish language from public space in general, but precisely from this ‘flagging’ of space as an area conquered, dominated and owned.

The struggle of Polish communities for the presence of the Polish language in public space has lasted for more than a century. Despite some successes, it should rather be regarded as a failure. Initially in competition with state institutions, and after 1989/1990 with the pace of change being too fast. The Polish minority environment did not manage to adapt to the changes taking place and missed a convenient moment

in the early 1990s when the new authorities were interested in gaining public support.

The period since the historical separation of Teschen Silesia into two parts can also be measured by the number of generations brought up in the new conditions. Four generations of Poles in the Czech state created their own identity. It was based on regionalism and identification with the Czech state. This process was reinforced by hetero-ethnic relationships in Transelsia and the integration of representatives of the Polish minority into the 'Czech world'. Identification with the local - and more broadly with the nationwide identity.

The Polish language, which is disappearing from the public space, is increasingly being replaced by the Teschen dialect. This is most often the case in everyday contacts - between family members, in peer and social groups, but also during various regional celebrations. Its former function - interpersonal communication - is acquiring a symbolic formula. It is intended to emphasise familiarity and locality, the connection with the Teschen region, its history, places and people. Cultural events are organised on both sides of the Teschen border, where participants speak the Teschen dialect. These are not only perceived as a formula for preserving one's own local identity, but are also of great interest to tourists. Nowadays, Teschen dialect in Transelsia has also become a field of Polish-Czech rivalry. As customary and 'unregulated' speech, it is written - also in public space - with Polish or Czech diacritical marks and is enriched with more or less Polish or Czech words. It can be assumed that in the coming decade it is the Teschen dialect in Transelsia that will become the field of Polish-Czech rivalry.

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