Sociolinguistics in selected textbooks used for teaching Polish as a native language in a primary school

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Abstracts
The text is an effort to present a change which took place at the turn of centuries in teaching Polish as a native language. It is, first of all, about a new sociolinguistic perspective in teaching Polish which appeared at schools. The author analyses four selected series of textbooks used for teaching Polish in a primary school. Special attention was paid to activity books, which are analysed with regard for presence of situational exercises that make students analyse communication situations and their typical language behaviours. They also make them create effective utterances adequate to a specific context. The conducted research shows that a communication perspective is not represented well in school textbooks. Activities focusing on development of communication competence are rare, they are scattered or separated from other language actions. Thus, they do not fit into a general textbook concept, and they often are only a decoration required by the core curriculum.

Key words: communicative competence, language teaching, Polish language teaching, sociolinguistic, textbook

Introduction
In the 90s of the 20th century a change, which could be called “a communication turn”, started in the didactics of teaching Polish as a native language. After a long period of structuralism, softened sometimes by functionalism, some new tendencies started to appear which supported teaching the language as a tool for communication, and not only as a structure. This approach resulted directly from the following linguistic fields: pragmalinguistics and sociolinguistics. Actions at a grass-roots level (Szymańska, 2015), not resulting from top-level ministerial influence, managed to reach more common awareness and they found their own place in the core curriculum for a reformed school. The provisions, which appeared at that time, paid attention to the necessity to teach a communication skill in diverse communication situations and
to develop communication competence. One of the basic school responsibilities was to “support students’ communication abilities and introduce them to the world of culture, especially through: shaping the ability to speak, listen, read and write in diverse situations of private and public communication, important especially for a life in a democratic country of citizenship culture; development of students’ language interests as a part of cultural legacy (Core Curriculum..., 1999).

It was also reflected in descriptions of students’ achievements after primary school, which included: “Talking to real and imagined listeners, with clear intentions, taking into consideration diverse situations, roles and interpersonal contacts (official and unofficial ones). The terms, which appeared in this context (communication situation, communication competence) refer directly to sociolinguistic fields. The provisions from the turn of the centuries were changed in the successive core curricula. The communication language aspect was deleted in the successive curricula and they started to go back to a structural presentation. However, it seems that some sociolinguistic and pragmalinguistic perspectives are still present in teaching, which can be noticed in textbooks for teaching Polish as a native language at the primary school level.

**Sociolinguistic studies versus communication teaching**

Sociolinguistics is the study related to linguistics and sociology, as the name clearly suggests. In literature we can find two names which are used: sociolinguistics and language sociology. However, there are opinions that the first term should cover only those studies with sociology as a starting point, and the second term should include the ones of more linguistic character. Grabias (2001, p. 15) characterises this phenomenon as follows: “The framework of the discipline, despite the strong development of the studies in recent years, is far from definite conclusions. Even the basic notions, such as ‘sociolinguistics’, ‘language sociology’, ‘social linguistics’ or ‘ethnography of communication’ are sometimes interchangeable, and sometimes they fall within different, separate for each notion, scopes of meaning. Thus, the subject of the studies is vague. The outlines of scientific penetration are still blurring. But sociolinguistics is not an exception. It often happens with other disciplines created on the borders of different fields. According to Fishman, sociolinguistics covers only a small part of the whole range of studies on language sociology. It is a kind of knowledge on the rules of language behaviours: “Sociolinguistics, constructing a model of social language behaviours, touches only some microprocesses and it applies, first of all, the methods elaborated by linguistics. At the same time, sociological description of language communication refers to macrostructures, and thus, its research
perspective and methods presenting different phenomena are closer to sociology, history, anthropology and ethnography” (Grabias, 2001, p. 61).

According to some linguists, sociolinguistics is a field of linguistics which is supposed to study the role of the language in a society and also to analyse the relations between the language and the social structure. Benveniste (1980, p. 27) shaped a rule of implication which presents the relations between the language and the society: “Society creates the language and the language creates society, at the same time”. This rule shows, on one hand, that the language is a social creation with group origins, and not individual ones; and on the other hand, the language is a tool for communicating and interpreting reality. Grabias writes: “...the language can be treated as a mirror of social life, but this mirror reflects human cultural activities, first of all” (2001, p. 29). We can summarise it saying that the subject of interest of sociolinguistics is the language, speech as a kind of social action, and especially dependence of speaking and language behaviours on conditions and situations, not directly related to the language, where communication takes place. Communicating refers to an act of communication with its all components: sender/speaker, receiver, message, context. In case of sociolinguistics, not only speaking is interesting, but broadly defined language behaviours.

Sociolinguistics studies communication in the social context so language varieties functioning in different social groups are important. Constructing a classification of Polish language varieties, researchers consider “social and territorial coverage of language phenomena (national language = general language: city dialects), information channels (spoken language: written language), functions of varieties (language: colloquial, artistic, scientific, journalistic, administrative styles, etc.), their social origins (jargons, community dialects, professional styles)” (Grabias, 2001, p. 78). Special attention is paid by sociolinguistics to city dialects and sociolects, associated to some social groups related by a special kind of bonds (miners, sportsmen, hunters, soldiers, etc.). However, it is not focused on detailed description of language phenomena. The things which are more important are the characterisation of social groups and the bonds connecting their members, as they are the starting point for identification of the language variety and its place in the communication process. However, abilities to distinguish language varieties and their adequate usage depending on a situation are crucial for teaching the language. It should also be remembered that individuals are not limited to only one language variety. They can use different languages, dialectics, styles and registers.

In the context of communicative language teaching, sociolinguistic studies on
language styles and varieties are also important. It means, first of all, awareness of different stylistic varieties of Polish language, and an ability to distinguish them and to adjust a communication style. The speaker should be able to:

- recognize a social status of the listener,
- take into consideration the place and time of the conversation,
- select the right language variety,
- decide on an information channel,
- adjust an appropriate kind of the utterance.

Therefore, the styles are a natural cultural context for the utterance. Sociolinguistics treats a style as a factor which makes the utterance different, both in individual and social dimensions. We can say that, in this case, the studies on the style are conducted in two different ways. On one hand, the attention is focused on indicators typical for the language of the specific social group, and on the other hand – on the elements which make the individual styles different. Labov (1972) called this diversity a social and stylistic variety.

However, one should remember that communication takes place in a specific social situation and in interaction with other participants of social life. Thus, the knowledge of social roles and patterns of behaviours ruling the interaction are crucial. The ability to distinguish (accepting) the roles and adjusting behaviours to the role and the situation is acquired by the members of the community in the process of socialization. One of the elements of the process is also the school, with its all actors and stages (Janowski, 1995).

In the interaction theory, a situation is defined in a narrow way – a group of physical conditions, or in a broad way – a repeated system of all the interaction elements. No matter how we understand it, we can distinguish “the obligatory components determining a specific behaviour (e.g. spatial limitations – behaviours can be perceived only in space which can be controlled by sight or hearing or sight and hearing at the same time) and optional components, customizing the process (e.g. movement activity, voice timbre)” (Grabias, 2001, p. 255). Additional components of the interaction can be social components, which are typical, permanent elements preserved in social awareness, some gestures often related to rituals (e.g. a prayer, a football game) or outfits. All the mentioned elements, recognised by the participants of a specific situation, let them understand the context and adjust the rules of behaviour. The broader the experience of interaction participants is, the better understanding of essential and less important components is. Thus, adjusting behaviours (also the language ones) to the situation is also better and more predictable.

Finally, it should be emphasised that sociolinguistics does not eliminate
language description and it does not reject the concept of language system. After all, description of language structures helps to record the changes which take place in the language, describe and interpret any social language diversity. However, there are also important differentiating issues. First of all, one of them is the study material, which – in case of structuralism – is the language as a system, and for sociolinguistics – it is speaking, social speech practice. It is mainly interested in language diversity at the level of sociolect and idiolect, it studies the language in the context of social life and culture, contrary to structuralism which is focused mainly on the system and describes the language separated from any social context.

From the point of view of the communication concept, the most important elements of using the language appear to be the following:

- **speaker/listener** – the function expressed with an outfit, gestures, way of speaking,
- **context** in which communication takes place,
- **message** – adjusting it to the speaker/listener; styles and language varieties.

The educational obligation, indicated by the core curriculum, was connected to organization of such lesson activities which would allow students to develop the following abilities:

- **determine the social role of the speaker/listener,**
- **analyse the situation in which the conversation takes place,**
- **build an utterance adjusted to the context and the role, which is correct and effective.**

**Sociolinguistic perspective in textbooks for language teaching**

Twenty years have passed since the first efforts were taken to construct educational materials, taking into consideration a communication perspective. The core curriculum and textbooks have been changed several times since then. Every time the importance was emphasised that learning the language should mean communication, although the provisions were more and more general. In what way is the direction indicated by the core curriculum implemented in textbooks? Is it implemented at all? What kinds of exercises, aiming at development of communication competence, can be found in textbooks-language activities? How many of such exercises can be found there? These are the questions which are to be answered by the conducted analysis.
The research covered selected textbooks, most often used at schools, among 16 ones approved for use at schools\(^1\). The analysis of the contents of the activity books has shown that the authors care especially about providing and testing knowledge on language structures. The greatest number of activities, used in the textbooks, refer to description and classification of structure elements. It is very rare when the knowledge on grammar is presented in a functional way, emphasising its value in language practice. Many activities are devoted also to learning text competence. There are numerous exercises which are grouped in separate subsections of the textbooks. They cover many examples of practised forms of utterances, transformation exercises and suggestions of tasks which can be done individually. The authors often take advantage of good patterns. They use methods of teaching language competence (Dyduchowa, 1988), and especially the method of analysis and creative imitation of patterns, as well as the method of norms and instructions. They also apply suggestions taken from the textbook series, “To lubię!” for language education (Mrazek & Steczko, 1994, 1995, 1996; Mrazek, Potaś, & Steczko, 1999; Mrazek & Potaś, 2000, 2001) and “Nowa sztuka pisania” (Kłakówna & Wiatr, 2006). However, none of the analysed textbooks has tried to combine writing skills with exercises which are strictly linguistic.

A careful analysis of the selected textbooks has shown that activities aiming at development of communication competence are only a small part of all the exercises presented in the hundreds of pages. Eleven textbooks, covered by the research, included only 63 exercises of this type (see Tab. 1).

Two textbooks present them in separate sections: „Jak się porozumiewać?” (“How to communicate?”) (Wojciechowska, Marcinkiewicz, 2013); „Komunikacja” (“Communication”) (Krawczuk-Goluch, 2012). In others, they are scattered, although most often they accompany writing activities (invitation, announcement, etc.), indicating natural context where these forms are used.

It is also interesting to analyse a quantitative arrangement of situational activities\(^2\) in case of individual grades. As you can see in the chart below, the greatest number of exercises with communication perspective can be found in

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1 The textbooks with a subtitle “study on the language” or “grammar” were not considered. It was accepted as the declaration which referred to the concept of the textbook.

2 I use the conventional name “situational exercises” for the activities which make students pay attention to the speaker/listener, their social roles, and also adjusting the message to the context.
textbooks for the 4th grade (37 exercises), and in case of older students, the number is getting smaller: 5th grade – 15, 6th grade – 13 (see Chart 1).

Tab. 1.: Activities aiming at development of communication competence in the selected textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTBOOK</th>
<th>SITUATION speaker/listener</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>„Słowa na start!” Podręcznik do kształcenia językowego 4th grade, part 1 and 2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Słowa na start!” Podręcznik do kształcenia językowego 5th grade</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Słowa na start!” Podręcznik do kształcenia językowego 6th grade, part 1 and 2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Czarowanie słowem” 4th grade, part 1-5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Czarowanie słowem” 5th grade, part 1 and 2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Czarowanie słowem” 6th grade, part 1 and 2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Język polski. Odkrywamy na nowo” 4th grade</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Język polski. Odkrywamy na nowo” 5th grade</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Język polski. Odkrywamy na nowo” 6th grade</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Język polski. Między nami” 4th grade, part 1 and 2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Język polski. Między nami” 5th grade, part 1 and 2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Język polski. Między nami” 6th grade, part 1 and 2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>63</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Analysing these kind of exercises in individual textbooks, we can see that the highest number can be found in the textbook series called „Między nami”, which includes 18 exercises in case of all grades. In the textbooks of the series called „Czarowanie słowem” we can find 11 exercises; „Słowa na start! – 7, and the series called „Język polski. Odkrywam na nowo” includes only 3 exercises (see Chart 2).
Chart 1: Situational exercises (according to the grades)

Chart 2: Situational exercises (according to the type of an exercise)
And what do the situational exercises in the textbooks look like? Usually they refer to simple, everyday situations which can happen to children: greetings, gratitude, compliments. The suggested actions are focused on:

- naming participants of communication and identifying its goal, e.g.:
  “Look at the situations presented in the pictures and decide who is expressing attitude to whom and for what.”

- adjusting the utterance to the situations, the speaker’s and the listener’s roles, e.g.:
  I “Read the utterances and decide who could use them”
II “Read the following sentences and join them with the situations, speakers and listeners”

3. Przeczytaj poniższe wypowiedzi i dopasuj je do sytuacji, nadawcy i odbiorcy.

A. − Cześć! Panie profesorze! W imieniu całego grona chciałbym złożyć szanownemu profesorowi wyrazić ogromną wdzięczność za okazaną nam pomoc.
B. − Wiktorze! W imieniu wszystkich kolegów dziękuję za wszystko, co dla nas zrobiłeś.

III “Look at the pictures and write short utterances. Adapt them to the situation and the listeners”

identifying roles on the basis of non-verbal signs, e.g.:

“Who are the people presented in the photos. Write their professions and decide what makes you think that.”

Tab. 2: Styles and their varieties in the selected textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXTBOOK</th>
<th>style/varieties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>„Słowa na start!” Podręcznik do kształcenia językowego 4th grade</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>„Słowa na start!” Podręcznik do kształcenia językowego 5th grade</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Słowa na start!” Podręcznik do kształcenia językowego 6th grade, part 1 and 2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Czarowanie słowem” 4th grade, part 1-5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Czarowanie słowem” 5th grade, part 1 and 2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Czarowanie słowem” 6th grade, part 1 and 2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Język polski. Odkrywamy na nowo” 4th grade</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Język polski. Odkrywamy na nowo” 5th grade</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>„Język polski. Odkrywamy na nowo” 6th grade</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>„Język polski. Między nami” 4th grade, part 1 and 2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Język polski. Między nami” 5th grade, part 1 and 2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Język polski. Między nami” 6th grade, part 1 and 2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the fields interesting to sociolinguistics is the style and their varieties. This category is also important for teaching communication competence. Joining the message with the situation was already presented by the above instructions. Apart from them, in some textbooks we can find sentences aiming at distinguishing official and unofficial styles. They appear in the context of letters and compliments (see Tab. 2).

It proves that working on distinguishing official and unofficial styles in utterances (spoken or written ones) seems to be important only to some of the authors who decided to create separate exercises for this purpose.

One of the important elements of colloquial speech are also idioms. This issue can be found in all the textbooks. However, none of them treats idioms as a component influencing the stylistic character of the utterances. The suggested actions are focused on explaining the meaning of the individual examples.

**Conclusion**

The analysis of the textbooks shows that the authors have tried to adapt materials to the requirements of the core curriculum which emphasises the necessity to develop communication competence. The influence of the tendencies accompanying the first core curriculum from 1999 is clearly noticeable. However, it should be noticed that exercises focused on a communication aspect, relations between the speaker/listener, between the situation in which the communication takes place and the message itself (in the text it is called a situational exercise) are rather rare in the textbooks. They are only an additional, supplementary element in the whole process of language teaching which traditionally refers to structuralism. Usually they are also unnaturally separated in the textbook structure which additionally emphasises lack of cohesion in the textbook concept.

The conducted research confirms an assumption that, although there have been some changes in teaching Polish as a native language, structuralism is still dominant and describing, instead of using, the language is still the basic activity of students during Polish lessons in primary schools. This attitude is noticeable in the structure of the textbooks, which show already in their contents (sections with the names of individual elements of language structures, referring to descriptive grammar) the real educational concept, as well as the things and the point of view which are the most important for them. All these things are confirmed by activities which most often consist on underlying, indicating, transforming, in isolation from any real context. Stylistic differences are not very important during lessons, either. Only official language variety is one of the
scheduled subjects. Apart from this, the textbooks pay attention to the things, such as comparisons and metaphors, with no information that they can also be used in everyday communication, as well as certain grammar structures which are isolated from an utterance.

Communication situations and some adequate language behaviours are present most often in textbooks for the 4th grade. The created situations refer to greetings, compliments, and also the differences resulting from the status, gender, and age of the participants of the communication. This is where students’ communication problems are over for the authors of the textbooks. It is important that students know how to say “hello”. The further conversation seems to be uninteresting for all of them. Working on the language exercises from the textbooks does not have to result in the fact that the students’ utterances will be correct with respect to their linguistic part, because the exercises are isolated from the context of the specific utterance.

Finally, it should be noted that the perfect context for the presented textbooks would be the series “To lubię!”. It is the only textbook on the Polish educational market, which is focused on cultural and language education, completely subordinated to the communication concept of teaching the language. However, because of their different structure, the textbooks cannot be compared (Szymańska, 2014). The provided activities are fully subordinated to communication situations which are close to students at a specific development level. The exercises which are focused on language observation also result from the offered situation and they lead to using the language (in its oral or written form) in a similar context. Mutual dependences, cohesion and relations do not let us separate individual exercises from the holistic project.

However, observation of the reality which surrounds us, of the students with their virtual world with limited contact with behaviour patterns, also the communicative ones, let us guess that paying attention to development of communication competence shall become the necessity in close future

References


**Textbooks**


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