

German-Polish Border: Language Contact and Language Use on the Example of Forms of Address of Polish Vendors from Słubice Bazaar

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W obliczu postępującej globalizacji, w szczególności w tzw. strefie Schengen, pojęcie granic podlega redefinicji. Granice narodowe ulegają procesom dyfuzji, co może prowadzić do transgranicznej hybrydyzacji (cf. Mezzadra & Neilson 2013: 61). Powyżej opisane zjawiska skłaniają mieszkańców terenów przygranicznych do określenia swojego stosunku wobec języka sąsiada, a częstokroć do przyjęcia postawy otwartości wobec zintensyfikowanego kontaktu językowego Polaków i Niemców. Niniejszy artykuł stawia sobie za cel zdefiniowanie niektórych zjawisk językowych występujących po polskiej stronie granicy polsko-niemieckiej. Autorka pragnie przeanalizować, w jaki sposób położenie przygraniczne umożliwia bądź nawet wspiera pewne formy komunikacji polsko-niemieckiej, które nie byłyby możliwe w innych miejscach. Wychodząc z założenia, iż regiony przygraniczne są miejscami z olbrzymim potencjałem dla stworzenia Trzeciej Przestrzeni (Bhabha 2007), także tej językowej, autorka podejmuje próbę analizy strategii komunikacji występujących na granicy polsko-niemieckiej (wybór języka, zmiana kodu językowego) w oparciu o sposoby nawiązywania rozmowy przez polskich sprzedawców z bazarów przygranicznych.

Keywords: German-Polish bilingualism, German-Polish borderland, German-Polish communication strategies, German-Polish language contact

1 Introduction

The German-Polish cohabitation in Central Europe has several centuries of tradition. During this time, the German-Polish area has experienced times of peace, but also was put to the test by changing power relations. The claims for land that were often at the bottom of the conflicts resulted in (world) wars and sometimes led to changes of borders. This was also the situation after World War II, when the border between Germany and Poland was redefined. In accordance with the decisions of the Yalta Treaty, 1945, Poland lost its land in the Eastern Provinces and got the Eastern German territories, Pomerania, Lebus Land and Silesia as compensation. The new border was located on the Oder and Neisse Rivers (cf. Wąsowski 2009: 15–17).

The consequence of drawing the new borderlines was floods of immigrants, resettling from East to the West. Subsequently, the resettlements removed almost all people of German origin from the new lands of western Poland. For almost all of the next fifty years the border with Germany was impermeable and its redefinition based on strict separation of lands and people led to a fossilization of cultural and communication boundaries.

From the linguistic point of view, the German-Polish borderland is characterized by the lack of linguistic continuity, and above this, in consequence of the above-mentioned historical disturbances, by the total lack of minorities, resulting in a monolingual¹ society.

Poland joining EU structures in 2004, and the opening of national borders after the ratification by Poland of the Schengen Treaty in 2007, caused not only an intensification of exchange of trade and services between Poland and Germany but also forced the inhabitants of the borderland to redefine relations with their neighbors. The removal of state borders is particularly well evidenced in the so-called “twin cities,” or “divided cities,” where the free movement of people, and thus linguistic contact, is an everyday practice. Such places are exposed to linguistic diffusion processes, often leading to cross-cultural and cross-border hybridization (cf. Gracia Canclini 1999: 34; Mezzadra & Neilson 2013: 61).

The following paper tries to describe some of the forms of language contact taking place currently on the Polish side of the German-Polish borderland. It refers to the samples collected in one border town in 2003 and eight Polish border towns and villages in 2014² located along the border directly opposite the German neighboring town/village on the other side. This illustrates the German-Polish linguistic *borderscape*³ based on the communication forms used by Polish vendors.⁴

2 Borderlands as a Focus in Contemporary Research

While analyzing the changes in the economic, social and linguistic permeability of the German-Polish border, it is not possible to overcome the significant role of globalization processes through which borders are proliferating and creating a heterogeneity of time and space (cf. Mezzadra & Neilson 2013: 61f.). Perera writes about *borderscapes*

¹ Meant as the lack of a multilingual society that is often the result of the cohabitation of numerous ethnic minorities usually living in borderlands. Competences in foreign languages (leading possibly to individual multilingualism) or recent immigrants were not taken into consideration here.

² Polish locations with over 1,000 inhabitants.

³ Suvendrini Perera (2007: 206f.). The explanation of the *borderscape* idea takes place in section two.

⁴ Contemporary research (2013–2015) is being financed by the German-Polish Science Foundation (cf. DPWS). The research study was carried out using quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative study consisted in recording the forms of address of Polish vendors in eight border markets (bazaars). In addition, some small talk with the inhabitants of these towns (380 audio recordings) in the form of short questions in German (e.g. asking directions) was conducted and recorded. Moreover, the qualitative study consisted in eight guided interviews with Heads of Educational Departments of municipal councils (in eight towns) relating to the local language policy. A quantitative study in the form of questionnaire surveys was carried out in Polish educational institutions. The control sample was 71 schools and kindergartens that constituted 74% of all educational institutions teaching German and/or cooperating with a German partner in the Polish border region. The subject of this analysis makes only a part of the qualitative study. The evaluation of the data from the questionnaire survey was carried out using the SPSS statistical program.

as zones in which “different temporalities and overlapping emplacements as well as emergent spatial organizations” take place (2007: 206f.). These *borderscapes* are a *fabrica mundi*,⁵ in which “borders are involved in making or creating worlds” (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013: 30).

An important approach in defining the utility of cross-border processes is the concept of borderlands as laboratories. Gasparini (1999/2000) and also Gracia Canclini (1999) understand borderlands not as peripheries but as the centers of several global processes. Borders allow the observer to change the scale of observation. The analysis of the transition processes of multiculturalism and multilingualism observed at the micro-level can also be implemented at the macro-level. In the case of my study, the borderland can be considered as a “language laboratory” which exemplifies language contact between two nations and cultures. Consequently, the analysis of the linguistic processes of borderlands is conducive to forming generalizations on this subject at a supranational level.

In my paper I analyze the linguistic contact taking place on the Polish side of the German-Polish border. It should be noticed that the language relations are asymmetric in the German-Polish borderland, and there is a great discrepancy according to the number of inhabitants learning and speaking the neighbor’s language in favor of Poles learning and speaking German. Even if more and more of German inhabitants notice the need or advantage of learning Polish, the asymmetry of linguistic behavior is still evident (cf. Bień-Lietz & Vogel 2008; Damus 2009; Jańczak 2013).⁶ This does not mean that every Pole is fluent in German, but there is a wide group of people with basic language skills or communicative competence trying to communicate in German.

Kimura who carried out research on German-Polish communication strategies in a border region based on the example of the Słubice-Frankfurt (Oder) twin town analyzed the most common patterns of language choice mainly in formal communication and concluded that the most usual communication between Germans and Poles takes place either symmetrically, in each of the mother tongues with translation into the other language respectively, in the *lingua franca*, English, or in an asymmetric manner, using German as the language of communication (Kimura 2013: 115). As a result of my observation of the communication patterns of German-Polish inhabitants of the border region (especially on its Polish side), two forms of communication can be considered as predominant: the asymmetric solution of using German as the language of communica-

⁵ Mezzadra & Neilson (2013: 30) refer to the renaissance term used, among others, by Giordano Bruno.

⁶ It should be noticed that many inhabitants of this region are monolingual, showing no need for communication with the neighbors living on the other side of the Neisse and Oder rivers. A monolingual communication strategy is widespread, especially on the German side, but still also present on the Polish side. There are also special groups of people with basic communication skills, working mostly in the service sector. The motivation to learn the neighbor’s language is commonly an instrumental factor in language acquisition.

tion, or a mix of German and Polish (resulting in a majority of cases from the insufficient knowledge of German among Poles, rather than from the idea of a shared language as proposed by certain transborder activists, as suggested by Kimura, who described the idea of a “ślubfurt language”⁷). In both cases, we are looking at Poles speaking either German or mixed language, the opposite version is rare, although not nonexistent.⁸

This phenomenon is related with the fact that a lot of Polish inhabitants of border regions work in the service sector devoted to German customers. Due to the fact that a lot of services have very competitive prices compared to Germany, Polish hairdressers, restaurateurs, dentists, pharmacists, vendors and other service workers try to attract German customers using their communication skills. Other than in formal situations, the symmetry of communication is not the supreme goal for the above mentioned groups of people.⁹

3 Linguistic Contact – Cross Border Relations?

While analyzing the linguistic contact taking place on the German-Polish border, one should refer to the category of the *Third Space* by Bhabha (2007). This concept convincingly reflects some of the phenomena of German-Polish language contacts. Bhabha’s theory builds on the assumption that a new idea is created from old ideas, cultures, values, and even in new ways. This overlapping of old values and ideas leads to hybridization.

On the German-Polish border different forms of linguistic behavior can be observed. One of these is switching between or even blending two contact languages, which can be considered as a communication form referring to the idea of the *Third Space*, but also that of the *borderscape*, mentioned in the previous chapter.

In the literature, we can often find a distinction between different types of switching, namely code-switching and code-mixing. The boundary between these two terms is quite relative and depends on the criteria used to define them.

⁷ Kimura (2013: 115, 121), while giving an example of rare, alternative communication patterns, invokes communication in “ślubfurt language” as a mixed language.

⁸ Kimura underlines that the knowledge of the neighbor’s language on both sides of the German-Polish border is very limited, but in the case of Poles the limitation reaches the ability of expressing information in German, and in the case of Germans, knowledge is limited to single polite forms, such as “welcome” or “thank you” (Kimura 2013: 113).

⁹It is important to add that Kimura’s research was primarily devoted to the examination of communication strategies in formal situations (meetings of German-Polish cooperation groups, municipal councils, university members etc.). The situation changes, in my observation, when analyzing communication strategies in society.

While sociolinguistics focuses on the communicative aspects of code change, linguistics concentrates on its intra- and inter-sentential functions (cf. Banaz 2002: 61). Jungbluth (2012) presents the wider definition of a possible switch of language code. She distinguishes three levels of switching: *code-switching*, *code-mixing* and *blending*. The term *code-switching* indicates intra- and extra-sentential switching, whereas the term *code-mixing* refers to intralexical switching. The third phenomenon is *blending*, meant as the “overlap of lexical and grammatical features” of both contact languages (Jungbluth 2012: 57). Jungbluth links the emergence of grammatical and lexical forms of two contact languages to the creative potential of the *Third Space*. Blending entails an interspace of two opposite processes, one of creative renewal, but at the same time of the possible loss of meaning (Jungbluth 2012: 61).

In the next section I will analyze chosen examples of forms of address of Polish vendors offering their products at the local border markets.¹⁰

4 Forms of Address and Communication Strategies of Polish Vendors Based on the Example of the Border Bazaar in Słubice

Słubice and Frankfurt (Oder) occupy a central border location. Moreover, this twin town is located on an important transport route connecting Warsaw and Berlin. After the collapse of communism and the opening of borders, the previously divided towns began the slow process of working out common cooperation strategies. New possibilities of work and everyday activities were created for the inhabitants of both towns, but for various reasons were used primarily by the Poles.

The border market in Słubice, also called the city bazaar, was set up in 1991 and offered 1,200 stalls.¹¹ The first examination of the linguistic behaviors of Polish vendors took place in the bazaar at the end of 2003.¹² In 2014, the research was repeated in Słubice and also in other Polish bazaars¹³ with a border location. The audio data collected in 2003 was recorded with an audio tape recorder, and the later research in 2014 using an Olympus LS-3 recorder. The transcription was made using the EXMARaLDA software. While observing the verbal behavior of Polish vendors, one has the impression that many of them are communicating in German. A more detailed analysis shows, however, that although German dominates the language choice, in reality, the vendors tend to mix

¹⁰ See Bauman (2001: 57–77) for more information on the formulaic language of selling.

¹¹ The number of stalls was drastically reduced to 450 after a fire in 2007. The bazaar was consequently rebuilt and modernized (cf. Bazar Miejski w Słubicach).

¹² The study of forms of address (Ger. Anredeverhalten) was made by Jańczak, Majchrzak and Naudziunas (unpublished).

¹³ It has to be mentioned that the bazaars do not exist in all border towns any more. The general condition of border markets is very bad, because they are being replaced by discount stores (tempting German customers not only with low prices and German speaking staff but also a closer location). The era of the bazaars that began in the border towns in the early 1990s will soon be over.

both languages, Polish and German (the knowledge of which mostly remains on a very basic level, with very limited lexicon and grammar).

When analyzing the following examples, we can see that code changing is a common phenomenon, although its degree is different in all the cases presented. Many vendors begin their invitation in both languages before switching directly to German, as the following example shows:

Verkäufer: Proszę bardzo, bitte schön (Pause) Putenlachs, Schweinelachs, Gänsebrut ((gemeint –brust))
 Se Part Se Part N N N
 Pl.-----Pl. Ger.-----Ger(?).
 geräuchert, bitte schön! (Pause) Das ist Gutenlachs ((gemeint Puten-)), das - Schweinelachs.
 Part II Se Part DP V N DP N
 Ger.-----Ger.(?)-----Ger.

Example 1¹⁴, Bazaar Słubice, 2014

The first example shows that some of the keywords used by the salesman are repeated wrongly (as if without understanding?): “Putenlachs” and “Gutenlachs” and some are actually a phonetic mimesis of the German words: “Gänsebrut” instead of “Gänsebrust” (goose breast). This fact, together with the absence of finite and infinite verbal forms suggest a very limited and instrumental “knowledge” of German. This observation seems to be a general one. The most common communication form observed in the greetings is language mixing. In most cases the switch takes place on the extra- and intra-sentential level, hence as code-switching. An example of such behavior is presented below:

Kunde: Kleines Körbchen, konkret rund.

Verkäuferin: A rund?!, • ja, nie ma, • ganz kleine, nie, i andere kleine, • ja, mit Henkel ohne Henkel. •
 Con Adj Se Ne V Adj Adj Se Con Adj Adj Se Prep N Prep N
 Pl. Ger.----Ger. Pl.-Pl. Ger.---Ger. Pl.-Pl. Ger.-----Ger.
 Ohne Henkel auch ist, nie, kleine, • ale obły.
 Prep N Adv V Se Adj Con Adj
 Ger.-----Ger. Pl. Ger. Pl.----Pl.

Example 2¹⁵, Bazaar Słubice, 2014

¹⁴ Vendor: Here you are, here you are (pause) turkey, fillet of ham, pork fillet of ham, goose breast ((inaccurate pronunciation through consonants modification, B.J.)) smoked, here you are! (pause) That is turkey fillet of ham ((inaccurate pronunciation through consonants modification, B.J.)), that pork fillet of ham.

¹⁵ Customer: Little basket, precisely round.

Vendor: And round, yes, there are no, very small ones, isn't it, and other small ones, yes, with handle without handle. With handle also is ((sic!)), isn't it, but cylindrical.

Interestingly, the saleswoman speaks about baskets using the German declination endings (for the adjectives “kleine” – “small ones”, “andere kleine” – plural “other small ones”) assigned for the plural forms but at the same time using the incongruent finite form of the verb “ist” – 3 pers. sing. (“to be”) and in Polish the incongruent declination ending for the adjective “obły” – masc., sing. (“cylindrical”). Moreover, there is syntactic disorder, caused by the violation of the verb position in the phrase “Ohne Henkel auch ist” (“with handle also is”) that seems to be an interference from Polish “Bez rączki także jest,” with the emphasized word “also.”

In many cases the code change occurs on the intra-lexical level as code-mixing, or even as a blending of grammatical and lexical features. When analyzing the following phrases, we see that the intensity of code-switching is different in each example, but in all three cases code change on the intralexical level also occurs:

Bitte liebe Frau, bitte gucken, **Lachsschinetschken** bitte.
SE Adj N SE V IMG SE
Ger.-----Ger. Ger.:Pl. Ger.

Example 3¹⁶, Bazaar Słubice, 2003

Example three seems to be uttered in German. In the fourth example, too, the code change takes the form of a reduplication of the invitation: “bitte schön.” The rest of the utterance again seems to be spoken in German:

Proszę bardzo, bitte schön, **Käseschinetschken**, Lachsschinken, ja bitte. (.) Was wollen Sie, bitte?
Se Part Se Adv IMG N Se Se IP V PP Se
Pl.-----Pl. Ger.---Ger. Ger.:Pl. Ger.-----Ger.

Example 4¹⁷, Bazaar Słubice, 2003

In the fifth example, we see several instances of code switching:

Proszę bardzo, proszę, tu jest serek, szyneczka, bułki, (.) co dziewczynki, alles
Se Part Se Adv V N N N IP N IndP
Pl.-----Pl. Ger.
mniam mniam, no co potrzebujemy? Serek? Nic? Nic? Tylko nur lachen? No **Szynken!**
Adv Adv Part IP V N IndP IndP Part Part V Part IMG
Pl.-----Pl. Ger.--Ger. Pl. Ger.:Pl.

Example 5¹⁸, Bazaar Słubice, 2003

¹⁶ Here you are, dear madam, look please, rolled fillet of ham ((dimin., B.J.), here you are.

¹⁷ Here you are, cheese ham ((dimin., B.J.)), rolled fillet of ham, yes here you are. What would you like?

¹⁸ Here you are, here you are, here is cheese ((dimin., B.J.)), ham ((dimin., B.J.)), buns, (.) well girls, everything yummy, so what do we need? Cheese ((dimin., B.J.))? Nothing? Nothing? Only laughing? So ham!

After the use of vocative: “co dziewczynki,” the sender begins to speak German, then, after the onomatopoeic description of tastiness, continues in Polish, and after the reduplication of the particle “only,” switches to German again. In all these cases, we find examples that indicate not only code-mixing but even actual blending. The Interlinear Morphemic Glossing ‘Schynk-en’ (example 5) was created not through the simple use of a bound morpheme ascribing masculine gender (which would suggest code mixing), but we can see the convergence with the Polish form of this noun in the accusative with the nasal ‘ę’ as a final sound.

Szynk-en: Dt. **Schink-en** (masc. acc. sing.)

Pl. **Szynk-ę** (fem. acc. sing.)



Blending

The other examples also show the overlapping of grammatical and lexical features:

Käseschinetschken – Compound: Käse + schinetschken (cheese + ham)

Lachsschinetschken – Compound: Lachs + schinetschken (salmon + ham)

schin – etsch- k-en: Ger. **Schin-k-en** (masc. acc. sing.)

Pol. **Szyn-ecz-k-ę** (fem. acc. sing., ecz – infix with a diminutive function)



Mixing + Blending

The latter examples prove that code-mixing or even blending of lexical and grammatical features of words in the speech of Polish vendors are quite common phenomena. A preliminary analysis of the recordings made in other locations confirms the above described phenomena. The vendors tend to use mixed language¹⁹ as their common communication strategy.²⁰ When analyzing the forms of address of Polish vendors, we can see some symptoms of the gradual emergence of two contact languages that confirm the existence of the linguistic *Third Space* in communication in the border region.

¹⁹ Due to the fact that this form of communication is not only used in Słubice / Frankfurt Oder I would not call it the “słubfurt language,” as Kimura (2013: 115, 121) did. See also FN 7.

²⁰ Unlike Kimura’s study, the analysis of forms of address used by the vendors shows that mixing languages is the most common form of communication. The difference in the findings might be a result of the different approach taken.

5 Conclusions

This paper is an attempt at defining some phenomena in German-Polish language contact and language usage taking place on the Polish side of the border. It is an undeniable fact that the border location enables and even favors certain communication forms not possible in other locations, especially in twin towns. The everyday movement of inhabitants creates the need for language acquisition – due to the economic discrepancy especially for the Poles, who are still competing for German customers.

The analysis of the empirical material confirms the assumption that border regions are a place with great potential to create a *Third Space*, including a linguistic one. The study of the forms of address used by Polish vendors in Słubice bazaar shows that some groups of people living and working in the border region use special communication strategies to establish contact with their German neighbors. These strategies not only rely on the use of German as the language of communication, but particularly rely on frequent code-change, leading to a mixing or even merging of Polish and German. This linguistic behavior of the Polish vendors demonstrates that borders are involved in the creation of new ideas. The linguistic phenomena and language contact in German-Polish *borderscapes* need further examination.

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Appendix – Notation

Adj	Adjective	Part	Particle
Adv.	Adverb	Part II	Past participle
Con.	Conjunction	PP	Personal pronoun
DP	Demonstrative pronoun	Prep	Preposition
IMG	Interlinear Morphemic Glossing	V	Verb
IndP	Indefinite pronoun	Se	Sentence equivalent
IP	Interrogative pronoun		
N	Noun	Pl.	Polish
Ne	Negation	Ger.	German