

Anna Dąbrowska

## Multilingual education in Poland

### Streszczenie

Tekst poświęcony jest krótkiemu omówieniu wielojęzyczności w Polsce. Jest to wprawdzie kraj w przeważającej mierze jednojęzyczny, niemniej jednak żyje w nim kilkanaście mniejszości narodowych i etnicznych, mających zagwarantowane prawo posługiwania się swoimi językami i prowadzenia w nich edukacji szkolnej. W pewnych wypadkach dopuszczalne są również dwujęzyczne nazwy miejscowości (napisy na tablicach informacyjnych). W artykule porusza się też problem nauczania języków obcych w państwowym systemie edukacyjnym (rosnąca liczba uczących się języka angielskiego, zróżnicowany rozkład geograficzny preferowanego drugiego języka obcego), a także nauczanie języka polskiego imigrantów i obcokrajowców. Wskazuje się na istniejące akty prawne sprzyjające wielojęzyczności – zarówno krajowe, jak i międzynarodowe.

In this paper, the following problems are discussed:

- National and ethnic minorities in Poland,
- Legal status of minorities and minority languages,
- Languages of minorities as auxiliary languages – bilinguality of a part of Polish citizens,
- Minority education,
- Immigrants,
- Teaching foreign languages at Polish schools,
- Foreign students at Polish Universities and Academies,
- Teaching Polish as a foreign language.

In its history, Rzeczpospolita Polska (Republic of Poland) was inhabited by various national and ethnic minorities; however, the number of those minority groups was changing in different periods. This trend has been falling for 200 years, which is presented in table 1 below:

Time (period)	% of ethnic and national minorities
Before 1795 (Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth)	40%
1918-1939 (two decades between World War I and World War II)	33%
After 1945	3%

Table 1: Percentage of national and ethnic minorities inhabiting RP in different periods

The table clearly shows that since the end of World War II first of all as a result of border shifting, migration and holocaust Poland has become basically a one-nation country and as a consequence of this almost a monolingual country. Currently there are 9 national minorities<sup>1</sup> in Poland: Belarusian, Czech, Lithuanian, German, Armenian, Russian, Slovak, Ukrainian, Jews, and 4 ethnic minorities:<sup>2</sup> Karaim, Romani, Lemko and Tatar.

### Legal status of national and ethnic minorities in Poland

The legal status of minorities and their languages is stipulated both in internal national legal acts and international ones. The minorities' right to maintain and develop their own languages, customs and traditions as well as to develop their own culture is guaranteed in the following acts and documents:

- The RP Constitution: in the article 35,<sup>3</sup>
- *Act of National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Language* from 2005, also ratified by Poland on 12 February 2009,
- *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* from 1992.

According to findings arising from the National Census of Population and Housing from 2002 the following numbers of Polish citizens speak the following minority languages:<sup>4</sup>

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#### <sup>1</sup> Article 2

1. A national minority, as defined by this Act, shall be a group of Polish citizens who jointly fulfil the following conditions:

- 1) is numerically smaller than the rest of the population of the Republic of Poland;
- 2) significantly differs from the remaining citizens in its language, culture or tradition;
- 3) strives to preserve its language, culture or tradition;
- 4) is aware of its own historical, national community, and is oriented towards its expression and protection;
- 5) its ancestors have been living on the present territory of the Republic of Poland for at least 100 years;
- 6) identifies itself with a nation organized in its own state.

<sup>2</sup> An ethnic minority, as defined by this Act, shall be a group of Polish citizens who jointly fulfil the following conditions:

- 1) is numerically smaller than the rest of the population of the Republic of Poland;
- 2) significantly differs from the remaining citizens in its language, culture or tradition;
- 3) strives to preserve its language, culture or tradition;
- 4) is aware of its own historical, national community, and is oriented towards its expression and protection;
- 5) its ancestors have been living on the present territory of the Republic of Poland for at least 100 years;
- 6) does not identify itself with a nation organized in its own state.

(*Act of National and ethnic minorities and the regional language from 6 January 2005*).

<sup>3</sup> “The Republic of Poland shall ensure Polish citizens belonging to national or ethnic minorities the freedom to maintain and develop their own language, to maintain customs and traditions, and to develop their own culture.

National and ethnic minorities shall have the right to establish educational and cultural institutions, institutions designed to protect religious identity, as well as to participate in the resolution of matters connected with their cultural identity” ([www.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/konst/angielski/kon1.htm](http://www.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/konst/angielski/kon1.htm))

<sup>4</sup> The table comes from the I Report for the general Secretary of the Council of Europe on Poland's execution of rules set out in the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages;

National and ethnic minorities	Declared use of a national minority language, ethnic minority language or regional language at home
Belarus	40,226
Czech	1,226
Karaim	–
Lithuanian	5,696
Lemko	5,605
German	196,841
Armenian	321
Russian	794
Slovak	794
Tartar	9
Ukrainian	21,055
Jewish	243 (Hebrew – 207; Yiddish – 36)
People using the Kashubian language at home	52,665

Table 2: Official data related to the number of people speaking minority languages or a regional language:

Poland is almost monolingual (Polish remains an official language and minority languages may serve as auxiliary languages alongside Polish provided that certain conditions are fulfilled) and minorities can use their languages, of course. It is guaranteed in the Act of national and ethnic minorities and on the regional language (6 January 2005). In Poland, there are 30 communes (*gminas*) where auxiliary languages are used (in 22 – German, in 5 – Belarusian, in 3 – Kashubian, and in 1 – Lithuanian). They are only those communes in which minimum 20% of inhabitants belong to national or ethnic minorities. Such a possibility exists in 51 communes. The first commune of this type was entered into the Official Register of Communes in 2006<sup>5</sup>. In over 40 communes proper names are given in two language versions, for example Szymbark (Polish) – Szimbark (Kashubian), Puńsk (Polish) – Punkskas (Lithuanian), Kolonia Biskupska (Polish) – Friedrichswille (German).

At primary schools, in the school year 2009/2010 children learnt the following minority languages (i.e. languages of national and ethnic minorities):

<sup>5</sup> From the I Report for the general Secretary of the Council of Europe on Poland's execution of rules set out in the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages: 48.

	Language	Number of pupils of primary schools		Number of pupils in grammar schools (gimnazjum)		Number of pupils in upper-grammar schools	
		2009/2010	2010/2011	2009/2010	2010/2011	2009/2010	2010/2011
1.	German	23,885	23,473	7,948	6,756	60	83
2.	Kashubian	8,158	8,945	1,193	1,349	201	187
3.	Belarusian	1,421	1,346	859	823	787	752
4.	Ukrainian	903	897	513	477	309	266
5.	Other	770	711	306	306	114	114

Table 3: The number of children learning minority languages at given types of schools in a school year 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 (Source: Education and Upbringing magazine 2009/2010, 87)

Figures presented in Table 3 show a decreasing number of learners at higher levels of education. Moreover, it is clearly observed that the largest number of children and teenagers refer to those learning German – schools where this language is taught represent more than 46% of schools where languages of national and ethnic minorities as well as regional language are taught. In 1,169 educational entities, in a school year 2009/2010, 55,004 children learnt minority languages. The example of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship – schools with minority languages. In more than a dozen of schools (primary, grammar and upper-grammar ones) languages of the following four minorities are taught: Ukrainian, Lemko, German and Romani). 205 pupils learn Ukrainian, 80 pupils learn Lemko, 26 learn German and just one pupil learns Romani (special grammar school located in Kamienna Góra). At various schools, from one to a few dozens of pupils learn minority languages.

A minority language can be chosen as a topic for the General Certificate of Secondary Education Exam (matura); however, such choice is not popular; in 2009 only 1/3 of secondary school leavers chose this option.<sup>6</sup>

Minority languages are also taught at University levels under philological studies. Let us take as an example Pedagogical University of Kraków, where there is a special major – Russian Philology with the Rusyn-Lemko language. Further teachers for pedagogical work with Lemko can be prepared there. The next examples are: Kashubian philology at the University of Gdańsk and post-graduate studies in a field *German as a foreign language and as a minority language in mono- and bilingual education* at University of Opole.

In Poland – as in other countries – the problem of multilingualism is connected not only with national and ethnic minorities. The next group of people residing in Poland are immigrants for whom Polish is not their mother tongue. Since the day when Poland joined EU and then the Schengen Group it has been attractive among citizens from so-called third countries. According to research done in 2008 (immigrants in Poland) 131 countries of immigrants' origin were identified. The largest numbers of them were from

<sup>6</sup> In 2009 only 364 pupils chose a minority language as a topic – Belarusian 240, Ukrainian – 89, Lithuanian – 25 and Kashubian – 10. Those data show that it is not a popular topic for matriculate on examination.

Ukraine (26.6% of the total number of immigrants); quite a large number came from Belarus (9.2%) and China (4.2%). Languages into which the questionnaire used in the research was translated may serve as a suggestion related to the number of immigrants of various nationalities. Those languages were: English, Russian, German, Vietnamese, and Chinese.

The huge scope of work which Poland should undertake can be confirmed by results of the above-mentioned research showing that more than 30% of immigrants had problems with communicating in Polish.<sup>7</sup> Language and integration-oriented courses are more and more frequently organized. They are run first of all under various EU programmes. There are also organizations providing their assistance to immigrants staying in Poland. One of them is Foundation *Ocalenie (Rescue)* that in a period 2009-2010 carried out the MutliQulti project, under which among others Polish language courses were offered. Representatives of countries from the Caucasus, Arabic countries, African countries and finally from the Eastern Europe participated in that programme.<sup>8</sup>

Some of those immigrants are people temporary staying in Poland employed by international companies, in which English the most frequently remains a dominant language. Those employees are as a general rule well educated and hold executive managerial positions. They do not constitute a group of people intensively learning Polish due to the fact that English remains the main language in their working environment.

In Poland, as in other EU-countries, foreign language education is compulsory. The first foreign language begins to be taught to pupils seven years old, and instruction lasts at least 6 years. Similarly to other countries also in Poland English is the most frequently chosen foreign language (in European countries it is the first language taught in all types of schools). As compared to a period 1999/2000 the percentage of those learning English in Poland substantially increased: from 46.9% to 86.2% in 2009-2010 (by over 39%). German is the second foreign language to be chosen by Poles who then choose Russian and French respectively. Degrees of this popularity are different in various parts of Poland – the largest differences can be observed between Western and Eastern voivodeships. In Western voivodeships, percentage of pupils learning German is between 47%-59% and in case of Russian about 1%. In Eastern voivodeships the case is definitely different: 12% learn Russian and 22%-23% learn German.

One of the ways to learn foreign languages is to attend bilingual classes. In Wrocław voivodeship, there are almost 20 (exactly 19) grammar and upper-grammar schools with bilingual classes. The majority of these are based in Wrocław, but there are also schools located in Kłodzko, Wałbrzych and Zgorzelec. English – as can easily be guessed – is the dominant language (987 pupils at 8 schools), then the following other languages can be classified accordingly: French (412 pupils) and German (300 pupils) – each one at three schools, Spanish (269 pupils at 2 schools), English or German (102 pupils at 1 school) and Italian (58 pupils at 1 school).

International Baccalaureate Diploma (international GCSE) can be obtained at 9 secondary schools in Poland. Schools with such an offer are based in bigger towns: Gdańsk, Gdy-

<sup>7</sup> [www.egospodarka.pl/36792,Imigranci-w-Polsce-2008,1,39,1.html](http://www.egospodarka.pl/36792,Imigranci-w-Polsce-2008,1,39,1.html).

<sup>8</sup> [www.ocalenie.org.pl/?page\\_id=2639](http://www.ocalenie.org.pl/?page_id=2639).

nia, Poznań, Kraków, Wrocław, Warsaw and Lublin. All admitted pupils at those elitist schools must prove their fluency in English as all lessons are given in that language.

Since 1990 more and more foreign students have been studying at Polish universities and academies of which a large number come from the Socrates-Erasmus Programme. They are offered Polish lessons, from which a large part of them benefit. In 2009 17,000 foreigners studied at Polish universities and academies.

For many years (or even centuries) Polish has also been taught as a foreign language. The intensiveness of this activity has been changing over various periods of time. Since important political and economic changes occurred (1989, 2004 – Poland became an EU member state) a strong increase of interest in learning Polish as a foreign language has been observed. Centres for learning Polish as well as schools of Polish language and culture (both operating for many years at Polish universities) and finally intensively developing private schools create a strong basis for this growth. Preparation and introduction of the Polish certification system corresponding with *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) has been secured. Since the day when the state exam in Polish as a foreign language was introduced (i.e. starting from May 2004) until the end of 2011 – 2,886 people have taken it. For a less used language this result should be considered good or even very good.

## Conclusions

1. National and ethnic minorities are sparse in Poland and the state respects their rights to cultivate their own cultures and languages. Poland ratified relevant EU documents (e.g. European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages) and introduced appropriate legal regulations.
2. Young people in Poland speak at least one foreign language better and better – first of all English, which corresponds with introduction of compulsory foreign language training at schools, universities and academies of various types and levels.
3. More and more foreign people study in Poland – some majors are taught in English; numerous international students attend Polish classes.
4. The status of Polish has strengthened as a result of introduction of the state certified exam in Polish as a foreign language in 2004.

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