

Jiří Muryc

University of Ostrava, Czechia
jiri.muryc@osu.cz
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2721-6093>

Jana Raclavská

University of Ostrava, Czechia
Jana.Raclavska@osu.cz
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2789-5820>

Multiculturalism of the Cieszyn Silesia Borderland and the Identity of an Individual

Discussions on ethnic identity of an individual living in a bi- or multicultural environment should start from clarifying fundamental concepts, i.e. ethnicity and identity, their mutual interactions and relations, and the concept of the so-called linguistic awareness¹. Reference sources in humanities view *ethnicity* as one of key properties of the human being which demarcates a special place for an individual or a social group in the world that surrounds them. More objective and subjective features go along with these properties. At the centre of the Slavic concept of ethnicity one can traditionally find the roots (a certain tribe or peoples), a homogeneous community of homeland and traditions, language and culture, as opposed to the Western vision of “civic” ethnicity resulting from the very fact of affiliation to one state as well as to political and legal systems². It is in the interest of

¹ W. Chlebda, *Fatum i nadzieja. Szkice do obrazu samoświadomości językowej dzisiejszych Rosjan*, Opole 1995, p. 20–22.

² S. Brouček, J. Cvekl, V. Hubinger, *Základní pojmy etnické teorie*, „Český lid” 1991, no. 4 (78), p. 241; L. Šatava, *Jazyk a identita menšin. Možnosti zachování a revitalizace*, Praha 2009, p. 14–21.

the ethnic group to have its own language and country. The objective determinants of ethnic affiliations include the area (land), language, economic system and the attitude towards the environment; whereas the subjective ones embrace attitudes, customs and habits, and the entirety of values (resulting from the world view, ideology, or religion). Throughout history, in Trans-Olza (*Zaolzie* in Polish; the Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia) we could witness the presence of the Polish, Czech, German (or Austrian) nationals and – to a lesser extent – the Jews, Slovaks, Ruthenians and Vlachs. This multinational character of the area manifested itself in the mid-nineteenth century when local communities of Cieszyn Silesia began to differentiate significantly. The sense of the cultural distinctiveness of the local Pole from the local Czech and the local German did not mean, however, an identification with the Polish national collectivity³. Yet, there was a sense of separation among the residents of Cieszyn, which resulted, for instance, from varying political fortunes of their motherland, and partly also from religious denominations (a significant number of Protestants lived in the area). This distinctiveness was further enhanced by a specific vernacular that developed in isolation from its roots⁴, and a specific culture. At that time (i.e. in the mid-nineteenth century) a need emerged to answer questions about identity: who am I? Where do I come from? The answers to these questions are by no means simple⁵. Tadeusz Paleczny claims that “One of the most important domains of identity formation (...) is the family environment. Family bonds, kinship, physical and mental closeness, common genetic background, the same culture, including religion, language and codes of symbolic communication are the grounds on which the most important “core” elements of identity are formed and constructed”⁶. A person born into this world in a certain specific national and civic community naturally becomes its member⁷. In the course of individual development, this person establishes ties with individual representatives of this community through language which performs an important integrating function as it brings together its users and gives them the sense of unity. This language

³ S. Ossowski, *O ojczyźnie i narodzie*, Warszawa 1984, p. 101.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁵ J. Raclavská, I. Bogoczová, *Multietniczność Śląska Cieszyńskiego oraz jej przejawy w języku i kulturze*, [in:] J. Szarlej, B. Tomalak (eds.), *Dokąd zmierzasz humanistyko?*, Bielsko-Biała 2020, p. 111.

⁶ T. Paleczny, *Sociologia tożsamości*, Kraków 2008, p. 24.

⁷ R. Naruniec, *Kłopoty z tożsamością mniejszości narodowej*, [in:] I. Masojć, R. Naruniec (eds.), *Tożsamość na styku kultur*, Vilnius 2008, p. 67.

also has a representative function since it distinguishes a given group from other communities⁸. A language that is recognised and identified by the individual as their native language can therefore be understood as one of important factors shaping the sense of identity. It will therefore be necessary to analyse linguistic relations in Cieszyn Silesia from the historical perspective.

The attempts to clarify the development of the linguistic situation in Cieszyn Silesia from the historical perspective seem to emphasise facts that shall be discussed below. Until the second half of the fourteenth century, the Duke's chancery office, churches and schools used cosmopolitan Latin as it was common in other European countries. Later on, along with the development of cities, crafts, trade and the onset of German colonisation, we can observe the German language penetrating into various types of official communication and toponymy. Similarly, the loss of political ties with Poland – due to that fact that King Casimir the Great relinquished the rights to Silesia and due to Silesia's coming under the rule of the House of Luxembourg and then the Habsburgs – intensified the influence of German⁹. One hundred years later, state administration offices, including those operating in Cieszyn, started using the Czech language. After the defeat of the Bohemian estates in the Battle of White Mountain, the importance of this language decreased. The German language started to prevail again, with Latin being predominantly used in certain circles as a result of the Counter-Reformation regulations¹⁰. The next stage in the development of the linguistic situation in Cieszyn Silesia is the period from the mid-eighteenth century until 1920¹¹. An important event which actually meant the expansion of the Czech language not only to the state administration, but also to schools, was the establishment – in 1782 – of a new administrative unit in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the so-called Moravian-Silesian Governorate with its capital seat in Brno; the Governorate's task was to govern Cieszyn Silesia. Cultural and political events of 1848 are considered a breakthrough in the history of this area as they played an essential role

⁸ G. Balowska, *Tożsamość jednostki na pograniczu etnicznym*, [in:] I. Masojć, H. Sokółowska, (eds.), *Tożsamość na styku kultur II*, Vilnius 2011, p. 74.

⁹ J. Labocha, *Polsko-czeskie pogranicze Śląska Cieszyńskiego. Zagadnienia językowe*, Kraków 1997, p. 12.

¹⁰ K.D. Kadłubiec, *Z dziejów polszczyzny cieszyńskiej (zarys problematyki)*, [in:] „Prace Filologiczne” 1992, no. XXXVII, p. 448.

¹¹ J. Labocha, *Polsko-czeskie...*, p.12.

in the formation of national awareness of the wide local population and in strengthening the position of the standard Polish language, especially its written form – the literary Polish language¹².

Another fact affecting linguistic relations, but not only, in Cieszyn Silesia was the 1920 decision of the Council of Ambassadors concerning the region's division into the Polish and Czech parts. From that moment on, Trans-Olza as a part of Cieszyn Silesia began to develop under different conditions than the rest of the area. According to official data, in 1921 Trans-Olza was inhabited by 177,626 Czech nationals, 68,369 Polish nationals and 23,005 German nationals¹³. After World War II, Trans-Olza returned to the Czechoslovak Republic, which had an impact on linguistic relations, and above all on strengthening the position of the Czech language in all domains of life. Internal migrations, new settlement processes, changes in the ethnic structure and the influence of mass communication result in the fact that the Polish language in this region has been gradually losing dialectisms in favour of bohemisms in all language domains¹⁴. The number of the locals declaring themselves Poles has been also decreasing. Currently, 26,802 inhabitants of the Czech Republic have a sense of belonging to the Polish nation only, and 11,416 persons have a sense of belonging to the Polish nation along with another declared nationality (data from the 2021 census)¹⁵.

Before the division into the Polish and Czech parts, Cieszyn Silesia covered an area of approx. 2,280 km². Its northern border used to run (and it still does) from the mouth of the River Olza to the River Oder on the west through the areas close to the towns of Strumień and Pszczyna (northwards of Strumień and southwards of Pszczyna, to be precise) towards the confluence of the Rivers Vistula and Biała in the east. The eastern border runs through Bielsko near the Klimczok and Barania Góra Mountains (at the source of the River Vistula) southwards, whereas the southern border goes along the peaks of the Moravian-Silesian Beskids near Mosty, Jabłonków, Górna Łomna and Stare Hamry. Importantly, the western border of

¹² Ibid., p. 12–13.

¹³ J. Szymeczek, *Wstęp*, [in:] I. Kufová (ed.), *Mniejszości narodowe na Śląsku Cieszyńskim dawniej i dziś*, Český Těšín 2001, p. 16.

¹⁴ K.D. Kadłubiec, *Z dziejów polszczyzny...*, p. 455.

¹⁵ Data taken from the Czech Statistical Office: <https://www.czso.cz/csu/scitani2021/narodnost> [access: 01.02.2022].

historical Cieszyn Silesia is the River Ostravica (a right tributary of the River Oder). Out of 2,280 km² of the area, approximately 1,280 km² (56%) was located in Czechoslovakia after the 1920 division. The eastern part of the Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia, known as Trans-Olza (exactly 805 km²), was annexed to Poland in October 1938, while the remaining 480 km² – in the Frýdek state country or in the vicinity of Slezská Ostrava – still remained in the Czech or Czechoslovakian hands¹⁶. A few months later, after the outbreak of World War II, this area became a part of the German Reich and remained one until 1945. Since the Second World War, each part of the formerly unified region has returned to the states they formerly had belonged: the Polish part to the Republic of Poland and the Czech part to Czechoslovakia. The latter part, i.e. the Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia, changed its state affiliation in 1993 when, after the collapse of Czechoslovakia, it became a part of the Czech Republic.

From the aforementioned division of Cieszyn Silesia, the Polish and Czech ethnic and language boundaries – not to be identified with the state border – have been systematically shifting to the east, towards the border with Poland¹⁷. Nevertheless, Trans-Olza has retained its character as a multilingual and multicultural area.

Living in this particular environment undoubtedly affects the mentality and personality of the individual, and may cause dilemmas such as, for instance: Am I a Pole, Czech or Silesian¹⁸? Tadeusz Paleczny says that people from such places “are no longer sure of their cultural affiliation as it becomes multiple, ambiguous, and multi-contextual. People are Silesians in certain situations, Poles in others, and Europeans in yet some other contexts”¹⁹. A resident of the Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia, i.e. Trans-Olza, is a Czech citizen, regardless of their nationality, roots, language of instruction at primary or secondary schools he or she has attended or is attending at the moment. They have been living in the Czech Republic since they were born, they have interpersonal contacts, get education, employment, medical care and use a variety of other services. For this person, what is

¹⁶ Z. Ondřejka, *Jazyk příhraničního mikrosvěta. Několik poznámek k nové publikaci*, [in:] „Těšínsko” 2015, no. 1 (58), p. 109–120.

¹⁷ T. Siwek, *Česko-polská etnická hranice*, Ostrava 1997.

¹⁸ Paleczny defines the phenomenon of being subject to various cultural influences with concurrent domination of traditions as „diverse culturalism” or „cultural diversity” (T. Paleczny, *Sociologia...*, p. 32).

¹⁹ T. Paleczny, *Sociologia...*, p. 32.

most important is all that is happening in the country which ensures all civil rights and safety and which generally determines the quality of life²⁰. If we consider only that part of the Trans-Olza community that declares its affiliation to the Polish ethnic minority, a deep respect for the Polish nation and Poland can be noticed. However, when crossing the already non-existent state border that persons says that they are going to Poland. A Pole in Trans-Olza demonstrates features typical of borderland people, being an alternative to persons living in the heartland who do not need to confront themselves with members of other ethnic groups. There is no need to ponder about who he or she is, who the others are. This psychological comfort does not exist on the borderland. People are subject to ongoing intercultural interactions here; they must be vigilant and careful and often have to stand up for such inherent values as, for example, their mother tongue. The standard Polish language is a symbolic language in Trans-Olza, and its task is to emphasise the fact that, apart from the Czech majority, the indigenous Polish minority also lives here. This very minority that often speaks the Czech language sometimes even better than they speak Polish, and this minority has the right to Polish signage in public places (offices, institutions, railway stations and stops, street and square names, or even shops, etc.). It is obvious that bilingual signage is not intended to help the members of the Polish minority find their way around the area, since the differences between the Czech and Polish signage are usually minor or none as it is in the case of the already mentioned street names – see *Masarykovy sady / Aleje Masaryka, (ul.) Dvořákova / Dvořaka* etc²¹.

However, the bond with the Polish nation ensures internal and intra-group coherence for Poles living in the Czech part of Cieszyn Silesia. Their orientation towards the Polish nation and its values distinguishes them from the Czech majority. Schools have been the polarising factor for the local community. While a Czech school student focuses on the Czech nation, culture and language for the rest of their lives, a graduate of the Polish school adheres to different values. However, they, too, may – affected by individual life experiences (e.g. through a marriage with a Czech national) – change their previous pro-Polish orientation to the pro-Czech one. Mo-

²⁰ I. Bogoczová, M. Bortliczek, *Potoczny język Polaków na Zaolziu dziś*, [in:] K. Czajkowski, A. Zářický (eds.), *Stopami Poláků v českém/rakouském Slezsku, Śladami Polaków na czeskim/austriackim Śląsku*, Częstochowa 2016, p. 287–305.

²¹ J. Raclavská, I. Bogoczová, *Multietniczność Śląska...*, p. 119.

reover, pupils and students in Polish schools learn the Czech language and Czech literature intentionally and systematically from the same textbooks and in the same volume as their Czech peers; they must pass their final school-leaving examination (*matura* in Polish) in Czech following the same rules as in any Czech school. It is true that they have some knowledge about important events concerning the entire Polish community, and at school they were familiarised with the canon of Polish literature; some of them even consider the Polish language (and not the Těšín/Cieszyn dialect) as their mother tongue, which does not prevent them from feeling more freely in the Czech language and culture. We can see this phenomenon working in practice by following, for instance, various discussions on social media.

Despite the great popularity of the local dialect, Czech prevails in official contacts among the Trans-Olza native inhabitants. As the majority code, Czech often permeates the communication of members of the Polish ethnic community. It is quite understandable, as Czech is inherently the majority language and thus it dominates all communication domains (public and official ones in particular), and therefore it has appropriate development conditions where and when the basic communication code is Polish or a dialect, although it does frequently have dialectal or regional features. On the other hand, the range of functions of the Polish language is largely limited in the area under study. Its status and prestige are being maintained by a relatively far-reaching network of primary and secondary schools, Polish minority organisations (e.g. the Polish Cultural and Educational Association or other members of the Congress of Poles in the Czech Republic), minority press, radio and TV programmes, theatres, Polish libraries and churches (church services conducted in Polish), etc. The scope of the use of the Polish language is therefore limited to official or public situations, and this standard Polish language is not really applied here in practice except for those clearly outlined above situations in terms of time, space and importance. Obviously, this does not apply to a relatively small number of persons who declare they belong to the Polish ethnic community and who use Polish as a tool to unambiguously and explicitly define their identity²². Even in public communication, dialects are used and it is the

²² J. Grygar, *Jazyk jako nástroj sociální diferenciacie. Poznámky k jazykové situaci ve Stonavě na Těšinsku*, „Lidé města. Revue pro etnologii, antropologii a etologii komunikace” 2003, no. 9, p. 47–80.

Trans-Olza dialect that can be heard and seen in the utterances of language users, regardless of their declared nationality.

The above data were confirmed in the research conducted²³ and in interviews with persons who have a sense of belonging to the Polish nation. The research shows that the local population (regardless of their ethnicity, age, or education) is aware of the differences in the use of particular language codes depending on the function. The research that has been conducted among students of the Secondary School with Polish as the Language of Instruction in Český Těšín for nearly twenty years corroborates the fact that the basic private communication code of Poles in Trans-Olza (used for contacts with family, friends or colleagues) is the dialect. However, the dialect also makes its way into official communication (e.g. at school). Further, the dialect is the language code that students have mastered best out of the above-mentioned languages. The research participants also admitted that in Poland, exactly outside Silesia, they sometimes feel uncertain when communicating in Polish. This is not surprising, since the dialect is naturally acquired by its speaker, whereas the acquisition of the knowledge of the standard language is a gradual process (in “artificial” Czech-speaking conditions), hence the communicative uncertainty of the sender may arise.

Currently, in Trans-Olza the most frequently used code is the standard Czech language, and in informal communication – the Těšín dialect²⁴. Standard Polish is the second official language. Its functionality and social significance are substantially limited in this area and only create a kind of symbolic ramifications for local communication²⁵. Irena Bogoczová notices that the Czech language plays an important role in Trans-Olza, but “cultural Polish is a symbolic and festive language through which Poles manifest their national affiliation and ethnicity”²⁶.

Research on national self-identification among students of the Polish Studies at the University of Ostrava has shown that graduates of schools with Polish as the language of instruction in the Czech Republic feel closer to the Těšín dialect or the Polish language, and they feel they are Poles, Poles

²³ E.g. I. Bogoczová, *Dvojazyčné dítě v menšinové škole*, „Český jazyk a literatura” 1998, no. 9/10, p. 230–233; J. Muryc, *Jazyková kompetence bilingvního obyvatelstva v české části Těšínského Slezska*, [in:] J. Štefánek (ed.), *Bilingvismus. Individuální a společenský bilingvismus*, Bratislava 2005, p. 43–50.

²⁴ J. Labocha, *Polsko-českie...*, p. 125.

²⁵ J. Muryc, *Obecné a specifické rysy polsko-české jazykové interference na českém Těšínsku*, Ostrava 2010, p. 18.

²⁶ I. Bogoczová, *Jazyková kompetence dvojazyčných žáků na Těšínsku v oblasti současné polské spisovné i nespisovné slovní zásoby*, „Studia Slavica” 2006, no. X, p. 200–207.

from Trans-Olza or Silesians, less often they feel Czech, yet they never view themselves as Europeans. Czech school graduates most often feel Czech (which was expected), and they rarely perceive themselves as Europeans or Silesians. In one case, a Czech school graduate speaking Czech at home said that he felt Polish²⁷.

Despite the declared self-identification with the Polish or Polish-Trans-Olza ethnicity, not even one of the research participants replied that they participated only in the Polish cultural life of Trans-Olza. The situation is different in the case of students who declare their affiliation to the Czech nation and the Czech language or dialect as their mother tongue. These persons admit that they participate in the Czech cultural life in Trans-Olza, and potentially in the cultural life of the entire Czech Republic. Only one person out of the above-mentioned is interested exclusively in the Polish cultural life of Trans-Olza. This situation mainly results from the fact that the Polish community in the Czech Republic for a long time has been closing itself inside its own group, looking with distrust at Czechs taking part in Polish events²⁸. Today the situation is changing: Czechs are increasingly often not only passive, but also active participants in the Polish cultural life. The previously observed phenomenon is confirmed here, namely, the spaces that give a chance to multicultural societies can ensure their comprehensive development which is based on tolerance, willingness to get to know others, and thus to broaden knowledge. As Andrzej Sadowski²⁹ put it, a multicultural society is an open society that is prepared to capitalise on the achievements of other cultures and – as he remarks – “there are no special problems related to this”³⁰. The future will show whether the multicultural society of Trans-Olza will be such a community.

²⁷ Research conducted in 2018 in all student groups of the Polish Studies.

²⁸ The research study was conducted in 2018 in all student groups of the Polish Studies at the University of Ostrava.

²⁹ A. Sadowski, *Socjologia wielokulturowości jako nowa subdyscyplina socjologiczna*, „Pogranicze. Studia Społeczne” 2011, no. XVIII, p. 19.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

Jiří Muryc, Jana Raclavská

Wielokulturowość pogranicza a tożsamość jednostki

Jednym z ważnych czynników spajających grupę etniczną jest język. Z tego punktu widzenia należy podkreślić, że na terenie historycznego Księstwa Cieszyńskiego mogliśmy w przeszłości odnotować obecność członków narodowości polskiej, czeskiej i niemieckiej, a w mniejszym stopniu żydowskiej, słowackiej, rusińskiej i wołoskiej. Historia polityczna tego regionu była niezwykle ciekawa – zmiana obywatelstwa nie była niczym niezwykłym, a co za tym idzie, zmieniał się również język mówiony i urzędowy. Na przestrzeni wieków jako języków urzędowych używano łaciny, niemieckiego, czeskiego i polskiego. Jeśli chodzi o obecne użycie standardowych odmian języka, to formalnie używa się czeskiego, polskiego i w mniejszym stopniu słowackiego. Pod względem dialektów grupa ta należy do południowej podgrupy dialektów śląskich, których większość znajduje się na terenie Polski. Dialektem tym posługują się okoliczni mieszkańcy zarówno narodowości polskiej, jak i czeskiej. Oprócz gwary innymi używanymi formami językowymi są standardowy język czeski (jest obowiązkowym przedmiotem w szkołach polskojęzycznych), standardowy język polski jako kod komunikacji pedagogicznej w miejscowych szkołach polskich, język czasopism mniejszości polskiej; w języku polskim wystawiane są również sztuki na polskiej scenie Teatru Cieszyńskiego. Język polski używany jest na imprezach organizowanych przez organizacje polskie oraz na polskich nabożeństwach kościelnych. Gwara (zachodnio)cieszyńska jest prawdopodobnie najbardziej rozpoznawalnym kodem komunikacyjnym i pełni funkcję naturalnego, powszechnie używanego języka. Jej używanie nie jest uwarunkowane wiekiem czy pochodzeniem etnicznym. Generalnie mieszkańcy tego obszaru są dwujęzyczni i w zależności od sytuacji komunikacyjnej wybierają odpowiedni kod językowy. Tożsamość etniczna nie może być jednak wyprowadzana tylko z użycia języka, choć tożsamość językowa jest jednym z jej ważnych elementów. W przeszłości mieszkańcy czeskiej części Śląska Cieszyńskiego odczuwali potrzebę podobną do tej, jaką mają mieszkańcy innych regionów przygranicznych o charakterze wieloetnicznym, wielokulturowym i wielojęzycznym – konieczność samoidentyfikacji. Obecnie sytuacja jest inna – czeska większość nie odczuwa potrzeby podkreślania swojej etniczności, a polska mniejszość, dzięki polskim szkołom, organizacjom, procesom demokratyzacji i uczestnictwu w polskim życiu kulturalnym, deklaruje polską narodowość, ale podkreśla swoje specyficzne pochodzenie regionalne.

Słowa kluczowe: Śląsk, Cieszyn, Czeski Cieszyn, Zaolzie, tożsamość, wielokulturowość, Polska, Czecho

Keywords: Silesia, Cieszyn, Těšín, Zaolzie, identity, multiculturalism, Polish, Czech