

The Language of the Mute Strangers: The Ambivalent Position of the German Language in the Late Medieval Polish Kingdom

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Many sociologists and historians agree that an important part of the process of the formation of ethnic and national identities in the Middle Ages consisted of determining “us” in opposition to those who were called “them” / “Others” / “strangers”: those who did not belong to the community of “us.” To achieve this, several indicators of otherness were used. Physical appearance (even facial expressions) and clothes, gestures and behavior which diverged from those that the community perceived as “our own” and “normal” could trigger the process of exclusion.¹ Undoubtedly, language was also a powerful determinant of otherness, as a foreign tongue, even a “foreign” accent or pronunciation, could be enough to label someone as a stranger, starting the process of othering. What an individual or a community will do with this label – try to communicate with a stranger anyway, or abort the act of communication – depended on the (sometimes very complex) situational setting, which included knowledge of this “foreign” language, previous contacts with its users, a general attitude towards “others,” etc. The social history of language provides many examples of ambivalent or changing attitudes towards “the languages of the strangers,” of its development from rejection to tolerance or acceptance, at least in some segments of social communication.² One of these examples is the ambivalent position of the German language in the late medieval Kingdom of Poland.

- 1 This phenomenon, previously studied as “xenophobia,” is now often described as “nativism” or an act of “othering”: “stigmatizing of difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus the motive for potential discrimination.” See Ian Peter Grohse, “Nativism in Late Medieval Norway. Scrutinizing a Theory,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 42 (2017): 219–44; Jean-François Staszak, “Other / otherness,” in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, eds. Rob Kitchin and Nigel Thrift (Oxford: Elsevier, 2009), 43–47, at 43. The presentation of the complete scholarly literature concerning the issues discussed in this article goes far beyond the editorial limits set. Fortunately, much of it is provided in the other contributions to this volume.
- 2 Among the attempts to develop a new discipline at the crossroads of linguistics and medieval history, the social history of language offers probably the most interesting research questionnaire. Its goal is to investigate the functioning of language in the mono- and multi-lingual

This problem has been studied before, in the framework of the difficult Polish-German relations.³ On both sides, generations of scholars, formed by the hardships of the nineteenth century's *Kulturkampf*, and then by the atrocities of the Second World War, defined the concepts of *lingua* and *natio*, and quite often used them as synonyms. This resulted in the dominant view of the "eternal clash" between a German and a Polish element, allowing a simplification of the much more complex medieval realities.⁴ Nevertheless, to modern scholars of social communication this part of Europe offers interesting material for the comparative study of the interactions between different speech communities.⁵

From the perspective of the medieval experience of otherness, to the Poles the strangers *par excellence* (whatever this term meant exactly in the medieval period) were the "Germans."⁶ In the West and South Slavic languages they were called *Niemcy* (*němž*, *Němcy*, *Nemcy*, *Nemci*, *Nijemci*). This designation, appearing in the written sources from the ninth century onwards, means 'those who are mute', 'those who cannot speak', more precisely 'those who cannot speak

communities of the past, taking into account tools of communication, mechanisms of memory, and ways of contact with the written word. See Peter Burke, "The Social History of Language," in his collection *The Art of Conversation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 1–34, and many later works published by this author.

- 3 The development of the historical discourse on both sides of the Polish-German frontier (in many aspects mirroring each other) is presented in the series "WBG Deutsch-Polnische Geschichte." See especially Norbert Kersken and Przemysław Wiszewski, *Neue Nachbarn in der Mitte Europas. Polen und das Reich im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2020). From the earlier literature, see for instance Thomas Wünsch, *Deutsche und Slaven im Mittelalter*. The forthcoming publication of the conference on "German and Poles in the Middle Ages – the Perception of the 'Other' and the Presence of Mutual Stereotypes" (24–26 May 2018), held at the German Historic Institute in Warsaw, will certainly result in a new seminal publication.
- 4 One of the most important attempts to introduce a different approach was that of Piotr Górecki, "Assimilation, Resistance, and Ethnic Group Formation in Medieval Poland: A European Paradigm?" in *Das Reich und Polen. Parallelen, Interaktionen und Formen der Akkulturation im hohen und späten Mittelalter*, eds. Alexander Patschovsky and Thomas Wünsch (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2003), 447–76.
- 5 From the regional perspective of medieval East Central Europe, the position of German, and other languages, is discussed in Anna Adamska, "Latin and Three Vernaculars in East Central Europe from the Point of View of the History of Social Communication," in *Spoken and Written Language. Relations between Latin and the Vernacular Languages in the Earlier Middle Ages*, eds. Mary Garrison, A.P. Orbán and Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 325–64. (with the presentation of the older scholarly literature); Katalin Szende, *Trust and Authority: Pragmatic Literacy and Communication in the Royal Towns of Medieval Hungary* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), chapter 4.
- 6 Cf. e. g. Len Scales *The Shaping of German Identity: Authority and Crisis, 1245–1414* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012).

our language.⁷ It reveals the primordial idea of “our” language as the “proper” “human” language, an idea identifiable in many parts of the world. This term is clearly exclusive and contains a strong element of dehumanization: those who cannot express themselves comprehensibly are in fact not entirely human. Here, it confirms awareness of a strong boundary between the Germanic and Slavic languages which could be located, towards the end of the first millennium, between the rivers Elbe and Oder.⁸ In the period between the year 1000 and 1200 this boundary shifted considerably eastward at the expenses of the so-called Polabian Slavs (Wends).⁹ At the same time, the general character of the term *Niemcy* shows that the Slavs did not make any distinction between the various Germanic tribes and their linguistic identities at the time.¹⁰

It seems that in the early Middle Ages, the awareness of linguistic strangeness between the two communities was expressed in a way that was rather normal for relations between difficult neighbors, marked as they were by political rivalry and often by military confrontation as well. In Bohemia, which was also exposed to expansion from the West, the chronicler Cosmas of Prague already emphasized the haughtiness of the Germans and their disrespect for Slavs

7 “[...] суть въ ны въшли учителя мнози крѣстьяни из Влахъ, и из Грькъ, и из Немьць, учаще ны различь, а мы Словени проста чадъ и не имамъ, иже бы ны наставиль на истину и разумъ сказать, то, добрей владыко, посьли такъ мужъ, иже ны испратвить въсяку правьду [...]” Lehr-Splawiński, Tadeusz, ed., *Żywoty Konstantyna i Metodego* (Warsaw: Alfa, 2000), 106.

8 One would disagree with the opinion that medieval sources “remained relatively silent on the problem of language” (Claire Weeda, “Ethnic Identification and Stereotypes in Western Europe, circa 1100–1300,” *History Compass* 12 (2014): 586–606, at 589). The sources which discussed in this chapter reflect an awareness of the existence of the linguistic border between the Germanic and Slavic languages as well as of their shifting. For other parts of Europe, see e. g. Paul Meyvaert, “Rainaldus est malus scriptor Francigenus’ – Voicing National Antipathy in the Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 66 (1991): 743–63, at 755; Gerhard Fouquet, “Kaufleute auf Reisen. Sprachliche Verständigung im Europa des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts,” in *Europa im späten Mittelalter. Politik – Gesellschaft – Kultur*, eds. Rainer Schwinges, Christian Hesse, and Peter Moraw (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2006), 465–88, at 471.

9 See e. g. Christian Lübke, “The Polabian Alternative: Paganism between Christian Kingdoms,” in *Europe around The Year 1000*, ed. Przemysław Urbańczyk (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2001), 379–89; Thomas Kempke and Christian Lübke, “Polens Nachbarn im Nordwesten: Das Land zwischen Niederelbe und Oder im 12. Jahrhundert,” in *The Neighbours of Poland in the nth Century*, ed. Przemysław Urbańczyk (Warsaw: DiG, 2002), 61–88.

10 The distinction is also absent in Polish medieval sources, and consequently in this article as well, especially with respect to the oral communication. The question of the extent to which Germanic peoples distinguished between themselves in terms of language at the end of the first Millennium goes beyond the scope of this article.

and their language in the early twelfth century – unfortunately without giving any details.¹¹ On the other hand, when ascribing to the Germans “innatam teutonicis superbiam” [the pride innate to the Teutons], the Slavic chronicler did not differ from French, English or Lombard authors who used to express equally severe opinions, cultivating negative ethnic stereotypes and prejudices towards “Germans.”¹²

In early medieval Poland, chances to get in touch with the language of the “mute strangers” were rather limited. One may expect some familiarity with German within the social elites. The acquisition of the German language was forced by the brutal tenth-century custom of taking the offspring of Polish dukes as hostages to the imperial court.¹³ In the following centuries, this was replaced by the “softer” practice of marriages of the members of the ruling Piast dynasty with aristocratic ladies from the Empire.¹⁴ Quite often warriors from the German areas were serving Polish rulers as well.¹⁵

However, the only German-speaking people whom an average inhabitant of the Polish lands might meet (apart from those who were living in the frontier areas) were merchants, prisoners of war who were compelled to agricultural labor and – more importantly – missionaries and priests in the developing structures of the Church. Eleventh- and twelfth-century sources (such as the account of Helmold of Bosau and the lives of St. Otto of Bamberg) provide

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- 11 Cosmas Pragensis, *Chronicon Boemorum*, ed. Bertold Bretholz (Berlin: Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 1923), I, 40, 73.
 - 12 The opinions have been collected with others by Horst Fuhrmann, “Quis Teutonicos constituit iudices nationum? The Trouble with Henry,” *Speculum* 69 (1994): 344–58. This author quotes the opening of a chapter in the influential monograph on the subject with the significant words: “Medieval Europe did not love the Germans” (James Westfall Thompson, *Feudal Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928), 360). The development of stereotypes about Germans was, of course, mirrored by the spread of (often negative) opinions in German texts about Poles and the Slavs in general (see e. g. Andrzej Pleszczyński, *The Birth of a Stereotype: Polish Rulers and Their Country in German Writings, c.1000 AD.* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).
 - 13 One such hostage was Duke Boleslas Chrobry, sent to the Ottonian court in 973 as warranty for a peace treaty. See Stanisław S. Sroka, “Bolesław I Chrobry (Wielki),” in *Piastowie. Leksykon biograficzny*, ed. Stanisław Szczur (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1999), 24.
 - 14 Norbert Kersken, “Heiratsbeziehungen der Piasten zum römisch-deutschen Reich,” in *Fernhändler, Dynasten, Kleriker. Die piastische Herrschaft in kontinentalen Beziehungsgeflechten vom 10. bis zum frühen 13. Jahrhundert*, eds. Dariusz Adamczyk and Norbert Kersken, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015), 79–107.
 - 15 Tomasz Jurek, “Die Migration deutscher Ritter nach Polen,” in *Das Reich und Polen*, eds. Patschovsky and Wunsch (2003), 243–76, at 245 ff.

strong evidence that many of these clergymen learned the Slavic language in order to reach the new believers.¹⁶

The *real* issue of German-speaking strangers arose as the result of the significant waves of migration from the West after 1200. This complex phenomenon – widely discussed in the scholarly literature as the *Ostsiedlung* – saw the foundation of new towns according to German law or German colonization.¹⁷ It continued until the early sixteenth century and reached the territories of today's Ukraine and Bielorrussia. Most relevant in the immediate context is its first stage, which came to an end before 1300. In the thirteenth century, large groups of migrants of various social origins from the German lands (and some from Flanders) settled in Poland. Poland was at the time divided into a dozen larger and smaller principalities, ruled by members of the Piast dynasty. The exact numbers of these newcomers, however, still in dispute among historians,¹⁸ are not as immediately significant as the fact that they were offered much better living conditions by the landowners (rulers and bishops) than the Poles.

The process progressed with remarkable speed. It started just after 1200 in Silesia and already in the 1250s reached the region of Cracow. It clearly provoked unhealthy feelings among the indigenous population. The conviction that “*they* take over everything” became exceptionally strong among the

- 16 Helmold von Bosau, [Helmoldus Bozoviensis], *Cronica Slavorum*, eds. Johann M. Lappenberg and Bernhard Schmeidler (Hannover: Hahn, 1909), Lib. 1, cap. 84, p. 164; S. *Ottonis Episcopi Babenbergensis vita Prieflingensis*, eds. Jan Wikarjak and Kazimierz Liman, *Monumenta Poloniae Historica*, n.s. VII/1 (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1966), 6–7; Herbord, *Dialogus de vita s. Ottonis episcopi Babenbergensis*, ed. Jan Wikariak (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1974), 197. See also Dariusz A. Sikorski, “Die Rolle der Geistlichen ausländischer Herkunft in der polnischen Kirche des 10.–12. Jahrhunderts,” in *Fernhändler, Dynasten, Kleriker*, eds. Adamczyk and Kersken (2015), 241–62.
- 17 From the abundant literature, see recently Ernst Eichler and Heiner Lück, eds., *Rechts- und Sprachtransfer in Mittel- und Osteuropa. Sachsenspiegel und Magdeburger Recht* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008); Inge Bily, Wieland Carls and Katalin Gönczi, *Sächsisch-magdeburgisches Recht in Polen: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Rechts und seiner Sprache* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011); Sébastien Rossignol, “Doit-on encore parler de colonisation allemande au Moyen Âge? Réflexions sur l'historiographie récente concernant l'Europe du Centre-Est aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles,” *Revue historique* 680 (2016): 905–40.
- 18 Some German scholars have even talked about half a million settlers coming to Silesia only between 1200 and 1241! (Josef J. Menzel, “Anfänge und Verlauf der deutschen Besiedlung Schlesiens im Mittelalter,” in *Anfänge und Entwicklung der deutschen Sprache im mittelalterlichen Schlesien*, eds. G. Keil, J.J. Menzel (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1995), 1–12, at 9). By contrast, Polish historians tend to give estimates of several tens of thousands (e. g. Izabela Skierska, *Obowiązek mszalny w średniowiecznej Polsce* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2003), 182–89; Tomasz Jurek, “Fremde Ritter im mittelalterlichen Polen,” *Questiones Medii Aevii Novae* 3 (1998): 19–49.)

members of the local elites: knights and clergymen.¹⁹ This confrontational attitude colored the sources so strongly that it is easy to overestimate the success of the go-ahead migrants who started to get the best positions at princely courts (especially in Silesia), in town councils and in cathedral chapters. They ate and dressed in a different way, they worshiped God in a slightly different way,²⁰ and above all they spoke a foreign language which was becoming ever more present in public life. This ill-feeling was balanced, however, by numerous examples of peaceful assimilation of the newcomers, for instance through the widespread practice of mixed marriages which can be traced among the social elites.²¹

The informal coexistence of the Poles with the “mute strangers,” who by now were often becoming neighbors daring to make their own political choices, became ever more complicated at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.²² Towards the end of a long process of the feudal dismemberment (1138–1320), the Polish principalities became encircled by hostile German-speaking states: the March of Brandenburg,²³ the State of

- 19 An overview of the tensions is given in Benedykt Zientara, “Nationality conflicts in the German-Slavic Borderland in the 13th–14th Centuries and their Social Scope,” *Acta Poloniae Historica* 22 (1970): 207–27. On the various political choices made by the Polish ecclesiastical elite, see Maciej Maciejowski, *Orientacje polityczne biskupów metropolii gnieźnieńskiej 1283–1320* (Kraków: Avalon, 2007).
- 20 The differences concerned in the first place the length of the fasting period before Easter and the unequal duration of the veneration of saints considered as “national” or “local.” In Polish sources, the seventy-day fast was presented as ‘invented’ already in the late tenth century by St. Adalbert, the martyr-patron of the kingdom (R. Michałowski, “Die ‘nationale’ Interpretation des Christentums im frühmittelalterlichen Polen,” in *Language of Religion – Language of the People. Medieval Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, eds. Michael Richter, Ernst Bremer, Jörg Jarnut and David J. Wasserstein (Munich: Fink, 2006), 357–72); Izabela Skierska, *Sabbatha sanctifices. Dzień święty w średniowiecznej Polsce* (Warsaw: Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2008), 162.
- 21 Tomasz Jurek, “Married to a Foreigner: Wives and Daughters of German Knights in Silesia During the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century,” *Acta Poloniae Historica* 81 (2000): 37–50. On the prospects for the assimilation of incoming peasants and town dwellers, see Benedykt Zientara, “Die deutschen Einwanderer in Polen vom 12. bis zum 14. Jahrhundert,” in *Die deutsche Ostsiedlung des Mittelalters als Problem der europäischen Geschichte*, ed. Walter Schlesinger (Sigmaringen: Reichenau-Vorträge, 1975), 333–48 at 339–40.
- 22 This was particularly visible in the turbulent period of the reunification of the Polish kingdom during the first two decades of the fourteenth century. Urban elites, mostly of Germanic origins, opted for the alliance with Silesia and the Kingdom of Bohemia which finally gained control over numerous Silesian principalities.
- 23 Antoni Czacharowski, “Die Neumark – Gestaltung einer regionalen Einheit hinter der polnischen Nordgrenze im Mittelalter,” in *Nationale, ethnische Minderheiten und regionale Identitäten in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, ed. Antoni Czacharowski (Toruń: Universitas Nicolai Copernici, 1994), 151–59.

the Teutonic Knights in Prussia,²⁴ and the Kingdom of Bohemia, where the German language became as important as the Czech tongue. The influx of foreigners, particularly intense in the period 1300–1305 following the coronation of Venceslas II Přemyslid as king of Poland, was seen by a considerable part of the indigenous population as a foreign occupation.²⁵ It is from this period, and from the subsequent decades of heavy military struggle against the Teutonic Knights, that the richest evidence comes of the violent confrontation between the two linguistic communities.²⁶ Curiously enough, it was precisely this evidence that formed the Polish collective imagination in the modern period, contrary to the much more complex and multi-faceted historical realities.

The actual functioning of various forms of German in the Polish lands can be analyzed on two separate levels: on that of spoken and on that of written language. One may wonder how intense the oral communication between Poles and Germans was in the urban environment, where the two linguistic communities had most opportunities to come into contact with one another.²⁷ The binding elements were firstly, in a purely physical sense, the limited space within medieval towns, and secondly, the two communities being subject to the same laws. Social stratification, however, discouraged the learning of one another's language. In the Polish towns, in fact, the first generations of German merchants and craftsmen did not function as a separate

24 From the abundant literature on the State of the Teutonic Knights, see most recently Roman Czaja and Andrzej Radzimiński, eds., *The Teutonic Order in Prussia and Livonia. The Political and Ecclesiastical Structures 13th–16th centuries* (Toruń: Universitas Nicolai Copernici, 2015).

25 Ivan Hláváček, "Dreisprachigkeit im Bereich der Böhmisches Krone: Zum Phänomen der Sprachbenutzung im böhmischen diplomatischen Material bis zur hussitischen Revolution," in *The Development of Literate Mentalities in East Central Europe*, eds. Anna Adamska and Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 289–310; Tomasz Jurek, "Der Einfluß Böhmens auf das geteilte Polen im 13. Jahrhundert," in *Böhmen und seine Nachbarn in der Premyslidenzeit*, ed. Alexander Patschovsky (Ostfildern: Falk, 2011), 161–201. The new Bohemian dynasty of the Luxemburgs renounced its claims to the Polish throne only in 1335.

26 The conflict with the Teutonic Knights has been most recently discussed by Paul Milliman, *"The Slippery Memory of Men": The Place of Pomerania in the Medieval Kingdom of Poland* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

27 Many scholars indicate multilingualism as one of main marks of pre-modern urban culture. See e. g. Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska, "Introduction," in *Uses of the Written Word in Medieval Towns: Medieval Urban Literacy II*, eds. Marco Mostert and Anna Adamska (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 1–18, at 11; Maria Selig and Susanne Ehrich, eds., *Mittelalterliche Stadtsprachen* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2016). This phenomenon is confirmed by multiple contributions in H.-J. Bömelburg und N. Kersken, eds., *Mehrsprachigkeit in Ostmitteleuropa (1400–1700). Kommunikative Praktiken und Verfahren in gemischtsprachigen Städten und Verbänden* (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 2020).

ethnic group, as did their countrymen in many cities of Western and Northern Europe.²⁸ But they did usually occupy the top rungs of the social ladder in Poland.²⁹ This meant that they lived in the “better” parts of the town, married among themselves, and cared for the preservation of their own social and ethnic identities. The latter certainly included fidelity to their mother tongue in many areas of life.³⁰ It seems that the most intense linguistic contact with Polish-speaking town dwellers took place in the domain of urban law and economy, literally ‘at the market’, where, as real-life experience of all times and places teaches, no extensive knowledge of buyers’ and sellers’ languages is necessary to trade successfully.³¹ In matters connected to urban life – its institutions, law, crafts and commerce – the developing Polish vocabulary smoothly absorbed hundreds of German words, as did Czech and Hungarian.³² A rather peculiar confirmation of practical bilingual communication between the Poles and the “mute strangers” is an account from early 1250s, found in an enumeration of miracles performed by St. Stanislas, one of the main patron saints of Poland, who was by then being officially canonized. The story goes that, after a German-speaking woman from Cracow prayed for the saint’s

28 For instance Justyna Wubs-Mrozewicz, “Interplay of identities: German settlers in late medieval Stockholm,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 29 (2004): 53–67. Cf. Arved Nedkvitne, “Linguistic Tensions between Germans and Natives in Scandinavia Compared to Eastern Europe,” in *Uses of the Written Word*, eds. Mostert and Adamska (2013), 87–97.

29 Best known in this respect is the urban elite of Cracow. See Marcin Starzyński, *Das mittelalterliche Krakau. Der Stadtrat im Herrschaftsgefüge der polnischen Metropole* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2015).

30 On the issue of the multiple identities and linguistic choices of the ethnic minorities in late medieval towns, see e.g. Wubs-Mrozewicz, “Interplay of Identities,” Wubs-Mrozewicz, “Rules of Inclusion, Rules of Exclusion. The Hanseatic Kontor in Bergen in the Late Middle Ages and its Normative Boundaries,” *German History* 29 (2011): 1–22; Andrew Brown, “Cities, Nations and Divine Service: Identifying Spanish Merchants in Late Medieval Bruges,” *Urban History* 44 (2017): 166–87; Milan Pajic, “Xénophobie et interaction. La communauté flamande de Colchester (1351–1367),” *Revue du Nord* 3 (2016): 509–31.

31 The importance of economic contacts for the success of the oral communication between various linguistic communities was also emphasized in other areas, especially for the crusaders’ states in the Middle East. The linguistic relationship between the Latin settlers and the indigenous population in many respects resembles what we know from East Central Europe (Kevin J. Lewis, “Medieval Diglossia: The Diversity of the Latin Christian Encounter with Written and Spoken Arabic in the Crusader County of Tripoli with a Hitherto Unpublished Arabic Note from the Principality of Antioch (MS, AOM 3, Valetta: National Library of Malta, no. 51 v.),” *Al-Masāq* 27 (2015): 119–52, at 131).

32 See e.g. Agnieszka Bartoszewicz, *Urban Literacy in Late Medieval Poland* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), chapter 4; Szende, *Trust and Authority*, chapter 4.

favor, he appeared to her in a dream and *in German* explained to her what to do in order to venerate him properly.³³

This evidence of effortless switching between languages is contradicted by many sources mirroring the linguistic conflict which became visible already in the 1280s and escalated towards the turn of the fourteenth century. The parish churches became a first battlefield. According to the strategy of pastoral care and religious teaching *in vulgari*, German-speaking newcomers were entitled to confess and to listen to sermons in their own tongue, provided by the priests who arrived with them.³⁴ The intensity of migration, initially in Silesia and the urban settlements of Lesser Poland, caused the Polish language to be pushed out of the Sunday service, resulting in conflicts with the local clergy, and in growing anger among the Polish ecclesiastical hierarchy. Jakub Świnka, the impetuous archbishop of Gniezno, expressed his bad feelings against the Germans at the most unexpected moments (for instance during a royal coronation), calling them “dogs’ heads.”³⁵ Further, in 1285, he complained to the pope about the wickedness of the settlers, but he also adjusted the ecclesiastical law “for the promotion and the preservation of the Polish language” (*ad*

33 “Sequenti autem nocte cum ad matutinalem horam surgeret et oraret et filia sua Willebertha dormiret, vidit hominem venerabilem ante se stantem et lingua Theutonica sibi dicentem: ‘Adelheyta, sicut dictum est tibi in Novo-loco a matrona illa veneranda, vade et die Troiano custodi, et ipse annunciet episcopo, ut ossa mea levet de pulvere, quia satis iam iacui in terra, et lavet ea vino et aqua et ponat ea in vase mundo super terram’” (Wojciech Kętrzyński, ed., *Miracula S. Stanislai* (Lviv: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1884), 306). Records of miracles, integral to the processes of canonization in the second half of the thirteenth century, provide valuable evidence for the study of ethnic relationships in contemporary Cracow (cf. Aleksandra Witkowska, “The Thirteenth-Century Miracula of St. Stanislaus, Bishop of Kraków,” in *Procès de canonisation au Moyen Age: Aspects juridiques et religieux / Medieval Canonization Processes: Legal and Religious Aspects*, ed. Gábor Klaniczay (Rome, 2004), 149–63.)

34 Legislation from the ecclesiastical province of Gniezno concerning this issue is discussed in detail by Skierska, *Obowiązek mszalny*, 172–89.

35 “Ille autem Petrus [the chronicler’s mistake with the name], Gnysnensis archiepiscopus, qui regem coronaverat, tam acer Theutunicorum emulus erat, quod ipsos solum canina capita nominare solebat. Cum enim dominus Johannes, Bruxnensis episcopus, in ecclesia Gnysnensi coram rege latino eloquio elegantissime predicasset, idem archiepiscopus regi dixit: iste optime predicasset, si non caninum caput et Theutunicus esset.” (*Chronicon Aulae Regiae*, *Fontes Rerum Bohemicarum* 4, ed. Josef Emmler (Prague: Nadání Františka Palackého, 1888), 81–82). On animal insults, see e. g. Trevor Dean, “Gender and Insult in an Italian City: Bologna in the Later Middle Ages,” *Social History* 29 (2004): 217–31, at 226–27; Marie Malivanková-Wasková, “Zvíře jako prostředek dehonestace ve středověku a raném novověku. Hlava skopová, nemecký pes, vul a svatý Šebestián,” in *Clovek a svet zvierat v stredoveku*, ed. Daniela Dvoraková et al (Bratislava: VEDA, 2015), 53–73.

promotionem et conservationem linguae Polonicae): he promulgated this in synodal statutes which had to be observed in the whole ecclesiastical province of Gniezno, and therefore also in the Silesian diocese of Wrocław, most tormented by ethnic and linguistic tensions.³⁶ This new law required priests to recite together with their parishioners, in Polish, the *Credo*, the *Pater noster*, and the *Ave Maria* during the Sunday service. Local church authorities had to appoint as parish priests only clergymen who knew Polish well, while all communities of canons and monks were compelled to read the hagiographical account of the life of St. Adalbert, the main patron of the Polish kingdom. These measures did little to help settle the conflict about the language of preaching immediately, especially in the larger towns. Only from the 1420s onwards can one notice a move towards pacification of the spirits and the will to compromise in this respect. In Cracow, the main urban parish of St. Mary offered sermons in German; St. Barbara's church, nearby, in Polish, while some other churches simply employed two preachers. Similar solutions were gradually adopted in smaller towns as well.

In the second decade of the fifteenth century, German also returned as the generally accepted instrument of spoken communication in the streets of the Polish capital.³⁷ Rich evidence from the earlier period (especially from c.1300–1340) clarifies why it would have been all but impossible to reach a compromise at an earlier stage. From the period between 1300 and 1340 comes a wave of both narrative texts³⁸ and documentary records³⁹ testifying to intense

36 *Schlesisches Urkundenbuch*, ed. Winfrid Irgang, vol. 5 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1993), n. 170, 135–40. The abundant literature on this source has been summarized by Skierska, *Obowiążek mszalny*, 175 ff.

37 Anna Adamska, "Away with the Germans and Their Language? Linguistic Conflict and Urban Records in Early Fourteenth-Century Cracow," in *Uses of the Written Word*, eds. Mostert and Adamska (2014), 65–85, at 84.

38 Especially interesting are the Annals of Cracow cathedral chapter, the so-called Annals of Cuyavia and the poem called the Song on the Cracow *Vogt* Albert. See the editions: Zofia Kozłowska-Budkowa, ed., *Rocznik kapituły krakowskiej*, *Monumenta Poloniae Historica* n.s. 5 (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1978); August Bielowski, ed., *Rocznik Kujawski*, *Monumenta Poloniae Historica* 3 (Lwów: Akademia Umiejętności, 1878); Henryk Kowalewicz, ed., "De quodam advocatione Cracoviensi Alberto," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 56/3 (1965): 125–38.

39 Very valuable material for our subject can be found in the records of the three trials before the papal judges: the trial against Jan Muskata, the bishop of Cracow, who openly backed Bohemian-German rulers in 1306–1308; and two trials between the Kingdom of Poland and the Order of the Teutonic Knights, in 1320–1321 and 1339 respectively. For the editions, see respectively: Jan Ptaśnik, ed., *Analecta Vaticana*, 1202–1366, *Monumenta Poloniae Vaticana* 3 (Cracow: Sumptibus Academiae litterarum, 1914); Ignacy Zakrzewski, ed., *Lites ac res gestae inter Polonos Ordinemque Cruciferorum*, vol. 1 (Poznań:

ethnic and linguistic tensions. However, contrary to older historiography, contemporary Polish scholarship admits that the hostility against the German population and its language – or rather accusing Germans of plotting to exterminate the Polish language and its users⁴⁰ – was an intentionally deployed political tool. It was developed by the political camp around Duke Vladislas the Short (*Łokietek*, ‘the Elbow’) which was composed mainly of members of the diocesan ecclesiastical elites and of the lower nobility.⁴¹ The best-known measure directed against the language of the “mute strangers” was the banishment of written German from the municipal records of Cracow. This happened after the revolt of the German citizens (the so-called “revolt of *vogt* Albert”) against Duke Vladislas in 1311–1312.⁴² The possibility of mass slaughter of those among the German-speaking town dwellers who were unable to pronounce four words correctly in Polish speaks to the imagination of some scholars.⁴³ However, one may doubt if such a spectacular act of violence, triggered by linguistic factors, really did take place, considering that the manuscript tradition of the only account of this alleged “linguistic test” is very late (from the sixteenth century), while contemporary sources strongly suggest that the ruler himself was fully in control of the administration of justice.⁴⁴ On the other

sumptibus bibliothecae Kornicensis, 1890); Helena Chłopocka, ed., *Causa Junivladislaviae et Brestiae-Cuiaviae anno 1320–1321 acta, Lites ac res gestae inter Polonos Ordinemque Cruciferorum*, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Ossolineum, 1970).

- 40 This argument supported xenophobic actions and attitudes also in Western Europe. See especially Len Scales, “Bread, Cheese and Genocide: Imagining the Destruction of Peoples in Medieval Western Europe,” *History* 92 (2007): 284–300.
- 41 Zientara, “Foreigners in Poland in the 10th–15th Centuries: Their Role in the Opinion of Polish Medieval Community,” *Acta Poloniae Historica* 29 (1974): 5–28, at 20, and, even more strongly, Sławomir Gawlas, “Człowiek uwikłany w wielkie procesy – przykład Muskaty,” in *Człowiek w społeczeństwie średniowiecznym*, ed. Roman Michałowski (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1997), 391–401, at 391–93.
- 42 Adamska, “Away with the Germans,” *passim*.
- 43 The comparative analysis of xenophobic violence triggered by a sort of linguistic test forced on foreigners, as proposed by Len Scales and pursued by Erik Spindler, puts an interesting light on the events in Cracow in 1312 (Scales, “Bread, Cheese, and Genocide,” *passim*; Erik Spindler, “Flemings in the Peasants’ Revolt, 1381,” in *Contact and Exchange in Later Medieval Europe: Essays in Honour of Malcolm Vale*, eds. Hannah Skoda, Patrick Lantschner, and R.L.J. Shaw (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2012), 59–78.) However, the words chosen to be pronounced here – “*koto*,” “*miele*,” “*soczewica*,” “*mtyn*” (“a wheel,” “grinds,” “a lentil,” “a mill”) – can hardly be described as evoking “precisely the sorts of taken-for granted solidarities or everyday domestic artefacts which distinguish the natural and known from the artificial and foreign” (Scales, “Bread, Cheese, and Genocide,” 286). In the first place, they were words difficult for non-native speakers to pronounce correctly.
- 44 Sources presented by Adamska, “Away with the Germans,” 76–79. Cf. Scales, “Bread, Cheese, and Genocide,” 288–90.

hand, in periods of exceptionally high political tension, Polish sources (from both the early fourteenth and the early fifteenth century, before the battle of Grunwald/Tannenberg) readily noted episodes of “Germans” using their language as a weapon to try to humiliate their Polish interlocutors in direct personal encounters. Such a situation took place, for instance during a rather dramatic episode in the attack of the army of the Teutonic Knights on central Poland in 1332. In the little town of Sieradz, the prior of the local Dominicans had begged the leader of the army, in Latin, not to burn the church. But this knight (who was also a monk), answered *in Pruthenico* ‘I do not understand,’ and gave the order to start the fire.⁴⁵ A similar act of linguistic manipulation on the level of oral interaction can be witnessed in the story of the *bona fide* trial between the Kingdom of Poland and the Order of the Teutonic Knights. The sentence in the trial was pronounced in 1409, just before the so-called Great War. It was pronounced by the Bohemian king Venceslas of Luxembourg, acting as judge during a solemn gathering in Prague, in German. The Polish ambassadors, although they all knew this language very well, got up and left the room, because his choice of language offended their king and country.⁴⁶ Both episodes clearly show the mechanism of aborting an act of oral communication even before it started by a deliberate choice of language that seemed highly inappropriate to one of the parties.

At this point one might ask which language was proposed as an appropriate tool of oral communication by the Poles? In both cases this was Latin, the language of the Church, of written culture, and also of diplomacy.⁴⁷ The role of the Latin language as a weapon in Polish hands will become even clearer when we pass to the position of German in written communication in the late medieval Polish kingdom. Developments in Silesia are intentionally excluded from this discussion because, from the early fourteenth century onwards, this region took a different path; it became part of the Kingdom of Bohemia and was fully integrated into the German lands.⁴⁸

45 On the fate of the Old Prussian language under the rule of the Teutonic Knights, see Terje Mathiassen, *Old Prussian* ed. John Ole Askedal (Oslo: Novus, 2010).

46 Both episodes are discussed in detail by Anna Adamska, “Latin and Three Vernaculars,” 339–40.

47 See e. g. Thomas Haye, “Die lateinische Sprache als Medium mündlicher Diplomatie,” in *Gesandtschafts- und Botenwesen im spätmittelalterlichen Europa*, eds. Rainer C. Schwinges and Klaus Wriedt (Ostfildern: Falk, 2003), 15–32.

48 The growing dominance of German in the pragmatic literacy of Silesian principalities is discussed in detail by Tomasz Jurek, “Język średniowiecznych dokumentów śląskich,” *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 111 (2004): 29–45 (summarized in German as “Die Urkundensprache im mittelalterlichen Schlesien,” in *La langue des actes. Actes du XI^e Congrès international de diplomatique (Troyes, jeudi n-samedi 13 septembre 2003)*, online at <<http://elec.enc.sorbonne.fr/CID2003/jurek>>).

As far as written communication is concerned, the language of the “mute strangers” in its two variants (as Middle High German and Middle Low German) functioned in the Polish lands mainly in specific segments of pragmatic literacy. In contrast to Bohemia and Hungary, a separate tradition of entertainment literature in German for the lay elites did not develop, with the exception of thirteenth-century Silesia. In the late Middle Ages, the Polish royal court and aristocrats had access to the highlights of European literature (such as the *Alexandreida* or the *Historia Apolonii regis Tyri*) through the intermediary of the Czech language, before they were translated into the native tongue in the early sixteenth century.⁴⁹ As far as religious texts were concerned, there is some evidence of possession and use of the Psalter in German (quite understandably, in towns).⁵⁰ This modest application to literature and religion was balanced by the extensive use of German as the language of urban law and as *Kanzleisprache* ‘language of the chancery’ in many municipal scribal offices. Its persistence and usefulness was proven, for instance, by the developments in Cracow mentioned above: administrative German, abruptly banished from the municipal records in favor of Latin in 1312, started to reappear gradually in the second half of the fourteenth century, initially in the by-laws (*Willkür*) issued by the city council.⁵¹ A recent meticulous analysis of the Cracow *Kanzleisprache* enables one to draw the conclusion that this was the universal register of High Middle German, which contained rather few dialectal elements, although some different linguistic habits of clerks of foreign origin (mainly from Silesia) can also be identified.⁵² Much more interesting than the use of the language by well-trained municipal notaries, however, is the fact that many town dwellers used German to record their private business and legal actions. Almost two thousand wills were made in German by inhabitants of Cracow in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Especially precious are cases where two versions of the same will survived, that is, when a burgher appeared at the municipal chancery with their own handwritten draft of a testament and the notary copied it into the city register with some corrections. This is proof that, in the urban environment, different registers of German – the spoken and the

49 More on this, with bibliographical references, in Adamska, “Latin and Three Vernaculars,” 340–41.

50 Bartoszewicz, *Urban Literacy*, 376.

51 Adamska, “Away with the Germans,” 84.

52 Józef Wiktorowicz, *Krakauer Kanzleisprache: Forschungsperspektiven und Analysemethoden* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2011). For a comparative perspective, see Albrecht Greulle et al, eds., *Kanzleisprachenforschung: Ein Internationales Handbuch* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012).

written, bureaucratic ones – were developing.⁵³ It also means that the descendants of the former immigrants retained their native language.

Undoubtedly, German functioned as the *lingua franca* of urban culture; it was, among other things, the preferred language for business correspondence.⁵⁴ On the other hand, some evidence can be found that its use in the domain of pragmatic literacy was not unique. The main reference text of urban law, the *Sachsenspiegel*, which circulated in Polish lands in several manuscripts from the 1250s onwards, was translated (or rather transferred) into Latin twice in the fourteenth century, and the ability to read the text was not the only reason for these translations.⁵⁵ Curiously enough, the alternative option to written German was not the indigenous vernacular, but Latin. This choice was caused primarily by the relative immaturity of written Polish: as yet it lacked equivalents for certain Latin words. For several reasons, Polish started to emancipate itself as an efficient tool for written communication only from the 1420s.⁵⁶ However, the fidelity of Poles to Latin also had a psychological basis. This was revealed in the reply of a Polish state official to a letter in German, sent by his counterpart from the State of the Teutonic Knights in the second decade of the fifteenth century: “sicuti mihi scripsistis litteram nuperrime, illam nullo modo intelligere potui, pro eo, quod non est scripta idiomate communi totius mundi, puta in latino [...]” [I couldn’t understand what you said to me in your letter, Sir, because it was not written in the common language of the whole world; that is, in Latin].⁵⁷ This sarcastic remark was a small but rather smart revenge for all the humiliations and defeats which the Poles believed they had experienced at the hands of the German-speaking strangers over the centuries. In this one sentence, the order of the world was being shaped anew. It was not the Poles, usually seen by the pretender crusaders, the Teutonic Knights, as a barbaric tribe, who were the barbarians, but rather those who abandoned the most noble language of religion and culture for a mere vernacular.⁵⁸

53 Detailed analysis and bibliographical references in Bartoszewicz, *Urban Literacy*, 205–11.

54 On the main languages of mercantile contacts in late medieval Europe, see e. g. Kurt Weissen, “Ci scrive in Tedesco! The Florentine Merchant-Banker Tomasso Spinelli and his German-Speaking Clients,” *The Yale University Library Gazette* 74 (2000): 112–25.

55 Zygfryd Rymaszewski, *Łacińskie teksty Landrechtu Zwierciadła Saskiego w Polsce: Versio Vratislaviensis, versio Sandomiriensis, Łaski* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwa Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1975). See also Anna Adamska, “Expressing serious matters in an appropriate language: On the translations of the *Sachsenspiegel* for urban communities in 14th-century Poland” (forthcoming).

56 Adamska, “Latin and Three Vernaculars,” 346–52.

57 *Codex diplomaticus Vitoldi magni ducis Lithuaniae, 1376–1430*, ed. Antoni Prochaska (Cracow: Sumptibus Academiae literarum, 1882), §508, p. 247.

58 On the use of the vernacular in the written culture of the Order of the Teutonic Knights, see e. g. Jürgen Sarnovsky, “Buchbesitz, Bibliotheken und Schriftkultur im Mittelalterlichen

This essay has presented only a very general picture of the function of the German language as an indicator of Otherness outside the German lands. A closer look might lead to the conclusion that episodes of open linguistic hostility were in part generated by the political elites, composed of rulers and lords in search of a collective enemy.⁵⁹ Among town dwellers, one of the groups in society that interacted most often with the “mute strangers” in everyday life, the view of this language was much more ambivalent. It is clear that, in the towns, the German language was detaching itself from German ethnicity, becoming a useful *Verkehrssprache* or *lingua franca*.

So far, the tensions have been stressed that led to the ambivalence with which speakers of Polish considered the German language. Yet there were also situations in which the linguistic and ethnic tensions between speakers of German and Polish could ease: when *both* were regarded as strangers by another. Such a situation arose in the south-eastern part of the Polish kingdom, called Red Ruthenia. In this region, intensely colonized *iure Theutonico* from the 1350s onwards, the indigenous inhabitants were mainly of Ruthenian origin, and, more importantly, they belonged to the Orthodox Church and used Cyrillic script. In a setting such as this, Germans and Poles were identified, first of all, as members of the same Catholic community, navigating together the realms of Latin script.⁶⁰ In Red Ruthenia, religion and its accompanying script formed a common denominator between Poles and Germans. This was instrumental in no longer seeing the old others as strangers – even if they did not speak *our* language.

Preussen,” in *Mittelalterliche Kultur und Literatur im Deutschordensstaat in Preussen: Leben und Nachleben*, eds. Sieglinde Hartmann, Gisela Vollmann-Profe, and Jarosław Wenta (Toruń: Universitas Nicolai Copernici, 2008), 291–308.

59 A collection of examples of the same political strategy in the medieval West can be found in Scales, “Bread, Cheese, and Genocide.”

60 Andrzej Janeczek, “Ethnicity, Religious Disparity and the Formation of the Multicultural Society of Red Ruthenia in The late Middle Ages,” in *On the Frontier of Latin Europe: Integration and Segregation in Red Ruthenia, 1350–1600*, eds. Thomas Wünsch and Andrzej Janeczek (Warsaw: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 2004), 15–45; Andrzej Janeczek, “Urban Communes, Ethnic Communities, and Language Use in Late Medieval Red Ruthenian Towns,” in *Uses of the Written Word*, eds. Mostert and Adamska (2014), 19–35.