

POLISH INTERNET LANGUAGE – SELECTED FORMS

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Abstract

One of the most interesting phenomena observed in the Polish language today is the unquestionable, non-rigorous ability of the language to adapt to the latest social trends like the development. This article provides an overview of the selected most network communication' important forms of linguistic expression of contemporary Internet Polish language in the communicative aspect. The basic formations and structures used by Internet users are characterized and the current state of the Polish language of online communication is presented, paying attention to the less and less noticeable disproportions between communication in the Internet space and traditional interpersonal communication. The excerpted forms, based on the well-known and completely new abstract units of the dictionary system, allowed a synthetic analysis of an interesting linguistic and communicative phenomenon, which is the marriage of both traditional and new-fangled structures of the Polish language with modern and flexible forms of digital network communication.

Key words: Internet communication, Internet sociolect, language forms, Polish Internet' language, dictionary system

1. Introductory remarks

Recent years have highlighted information technologies and social media as well as their impact on the Polish language. Various forms that help people communicate in different ways, such as social networks (Facebook), microblogs (Twitter), photo and video sharing (Instagram), and communication (WhatsApp) have greatly improved social interaction and information sharing. These apps help in expansion – discovering unlimited connections and exchanging information and opinions, and so foster language changes as well. “It follows that the possibilities offered by social media nowadays could also be linguistically rewarding for users, be they students or educators, as these media interactions are bound to take place either within the same linguistic communities or across different ones” [Slim, Hagedh, 2019, p. 57].

The enormous amount of the Internet vocabulary cannot be accurately and comprehensively described, because it is incredibly changeable and flexible. Nevertheless, a thorough language' observation is necessary in the face of changes constantly taking place in the Polish language today. To characterize the language used in Internet communication it is necessary to look at it from a broader perspective, the perception of the language user in general. The phrases used, new language functions, innovative linguistic creations, seemingly integrated with the Internet vocabulary, everyday Polish lan-

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guage, merging with it and infiltrating it. As rightly noted by Jan Grzenia, “the relationship between the two is based on symbiosis” [2016, pp. 90–97]. The focus of research interests in this article is shifted to the Internet’s linguistic functions, presenting the “Internet language” itself as an environment for the emergence and strengthening of new forms and structures – because “translating the world starts with language” [Dąbała, 2020, p. 190] and, surely, “Language not only creates our reality, but it undoubtedly reflects the latest developments. It continually shows all the changes of customs, economics, culture, and politics” [Piechnik, 2017, p. 42].

The Internet language as a discursive sphere is very heterogeneous, changing stylistically, genealogical and normatively. The dynamics of it is extremely effective. David Crystal years ago introduced a specific category to describe the Internet language and called it *netspeak* which is understood as “an alternative to the expressions [...] ‘Internet language’, ‘electronic discourse’, ‘cyberspace language’, ‘computer communication’ and other similar localization [...], although each relates to different implications” [2007, pp. 17–18]. Today, when talking about *netspeak* (and also *cyberspeak*, *webspeak*, *chatspeak* etc.), we should primarily focus on the relationship between what is spoken and written because this specific language form cannot be classified into a typical structure spoken or written. As Sali A. Tagliamonte says: “Formal writing is generally monologic, whereas speech is generally dialogic” [2016] and so this is the phenomena of Internet language. “There is a positive relationship between everyday language and the Internet language. Most of the messages posted on the Internet by its’ users are based on colloquial Polish. It is this variety that determines the linguistic shape of Internet communication in its unofficial version. On the other hand, certain linguistic phenomena that arose on the Internet permeate the colloquial variety of the Polish language [Urzędowska, 2019, pp. 120–121].

We should remember that the Internet language today covers the entire communication process and creates new models: communication (*one-to-one*), disseminating (*one-to-many*) or universal (*many-to-many*) [Łosiewicz, 2018, p. 143]. “Efficient use of the linguistic forms of CMC undoubtedly requires special communication competence and user activity. For this reason, there is more and more talk about cyberliteracy [...] which every member of society should acquire today at least on a basic level [Kamińska, 2011, p. 50]. These new models, on the other hand, are directly connected with new perspectives. Therefore the Internet space should be considered in two aspects: wider – relating to the entire network, thus all its users (this allows them to feel anonymous, also in the linguistic perspective), and a narrower – including websites that the user uses daily, places where he is signed in, where his internet friends know who he is also in real life. These two views foster the creation of connections between users. They also influence the creation of unique (and later representative) linguistic and communicative compositions that become separate entities thanks to the Internet.

2. The phenomenon of humour in the Internet language

Contemporary communication technologies are a medium that allows to register and analyze human messages and products in a new way [Ochwat, 2015, p. 38]. An important feature of the media language, including the Internet, is its expressiveness. The communication method, the language, and all other forms of communication are primarily intended to attract the attention of recipients. The media language and the form of media coverage are developing particularly dynamically, and lots of the forms and methods of distribution make the emergence of newer and newer content due to the need to cope with the viewership and audience criteria [Szul, 2009, p. 7].

The Internet language is a special object of research, if only due to the fact that its users often try to achieve the effect of a language joke. Due to Magdalena Kamińska: “... the intangible nature of cyberspace allows participants to play roles, play with lan-

guage, create and use visual representations more freely than in real life" [2011, p. 29]. Humour is a certain mental disposition that includes many aspects: "cheerfulness and laughter, but also the ability to separate them from seriousness, mental acuity, showing and reading emotions, the ability to construct and understand irony, and many others" [Ranoszek, 2017, p. 34] – a skilled reader will quickly judge whether they are intelligent, thought-provoking jokes, or rather simple, repeated and well-worn 'chestnut' jokes. The multitude of online humour implementations provides not only short statements but also narrative forms [see Ranoszek, 2017]. There is no doubt the Internet users often create temporary creations that perform a ludic function, and sometimes also serve to persuade. Humour is an important interpretation of language in terms of attracting attention – undoubtedly, the ability to amuse others is a proof of intellectual efficiency and an indicator of social competencies, which favors the relaxation of a tense situation and affects the popularity of a given person [see Miller, 2001], and also proves the social dimension of convergence media. New media no longer depends only on the audience, which is a passive recipient, but on expansive users creating new, blurred categories.

Interestingly, in terms of humour, which manifestations are visible in any virtual form of linguistic expression are often global in nature. As Magdalena Hodalska writes: "Pictorial jokes taking the form of witty mini-stories, universal and understandable across borders, are reproduced and disseminated by hundreds of thousands Internet users who create their own narratives [...] in every corner of the world" [2020, p. 35].

3. Selected forms of the Internet language

The Internet language structures described here are not only verbums or individual lexemes but whole new structures, often multidimensional. Short messages on the Internet usually are posted synchronously. Therefore the Internet language has created many abbreviations and characters that replace both verbal and (perhaps unexpectedly) non-verbal content in communication. It can be said that the Internet has created new pictograms in modern language, although according to some researchers, this tendency makes the language shallower rather than enrich it [Wrycza, 2008, p. 47].

3.1. Acronyms

According to the opinion of Alicja Naruszewicz-Duchlińska: "striving for the economy of language is considered one of the essential features of internet communication" [2004, p. 75]. One of the most obvious expressions of this drive towards economics is the use of extensive abbreviations systems. They appear in synchronous forms (e.g. instant messaging), but also asynchronous (e.g. comments on Facebook). They were created mainly to simplify the language and reduce the amount of text transferred, although Andrew Hales and his co-authors believe that a significant factor influencing the formation of acronyms is also the need for group identification – the type of secret, confidential knowledge associated with the ability to read certain Internet abbreviations holds back the possibility of "entering the circle of interested people" [see Hales, Williams, Rector, 2017] is an evidently exclusive function [see Kamińska, 2011]. So we note forms commonly known, often also from general language (e.g. abbreviated names of institutions – e.g. *UPJP2* or *WHO*), but also endemic, perhaps quite mysterious for an ordinary language user (*ZTCW* 'z tego, co wiem' – as far as I know, *BRW* 'Bóg raczy wiedzieć' – only God knows). It can be said that regular Internet users, visitors to various forums, or fan pages on Facebook, should know the extensions of acronyms used by co-interviewers. Understanding abbreviations is one of the elements that distinguish Internet users as a particular social group.

Internet users are continuously creating new acronyms. Some of them are quickly gaining in popularity, especially those that funnily refer to reality, e.g. *YOLO* – 'you only live once' – in the Polish version popularized in an extremely intelligent way by the admin-

istrators of the *nadwyraz.com* website as *WŻTR* ('Wszak żyjem tylko raz' – after all, I only live once from A. Mickiewicz's *Song of the Philarets*). The life span of the less common ones is short, in fact, occasional. It is noticeable that when it comes to using Internet abbreviations, the Polish user is more likely to use acronyms from the English language. New, Polish abbreviations are often also connected to their English counterparts – often created as a joke, a word game of Internet users (e.g. *MSZ* 'moim skromnym zdaniem' means "in my humble opinion"², not the 'Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych' – Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Most of the abbreviations appearing on the Internet are units composed of the first letters of the words included in the meaning of the abbreviation (*ASAP* 'as soon as possible', *GMTA* 'great minds think alike', *OMG* 'oh my god', *KC* 'kocham Cię' – I love you, *OCB* 'o co biega' – what's going on). Also, there are units created as a result of shortening one or a group of words (both from Polish and English), e.g. *3MAJ* SIĘ (hold on), *CZE* (from 'cześć' – hello), *DOZO* (from 'do zobaczenia' – see you), *NARA* (from 'na razie' – see you), *NET* (Internet), *OCOCHO* (from 'o co chodzi' – what's going on), *PZDR* (from 'pozdrawiam' – greetings), *SIEMA* (from 'jak się masz' – how are you), *2DAY* (today), *2U* (to you), *4U* (for you).

Acronyms have become one of the representative components of the Internet users' language, but not only within social media. Interestingly, more and more new acronyms are also created in the Internet as a scientific practice [Pottegård et al., 2014]. It is therefore a testimony to the international nature of network communication. It is worth remembering that the very name of the portal – Facebook – has its acronym: fb (sometimes FB), in Polish there is also the name *fejs* (the way Polish people pronounce *face*).

3.2. Pidgin language

Another feature of the discussed language is the use of pidgin Polish. Pidgin languages (such as Spanglish or Russenorsk) are transitional forms of official languages, with simplified morphology and syntax, often being a combination of several languages, belonging to the group of vehicle languages (whose primary function is communication between populations of different languages, especially in the trade or diplomatic contacts). Pidgins are supposed to support communication. They do not replace the native language of users but unite social groups that use different languages daily. Therefore the pidgin language can be called temporary, arising in a rush of communication [see Hlibowicka-Węglarz, 2017, p. 26].

The emergence of pidgin Polish forms is often accompanied by new, specific means of expression – related to the inventiveness and linguistic intention of specific language users, as well as a favorable social context. And this very distinctive feature is transferred by Internet users to the language of communication on the Internet. The Polish language is mainly connected here with English – vocabulary, syntax, inflection, and phraseology. In principle, every area of grammar can be loosely transformed. And this does not raise doubts (or even misunderstandings) among language users, but it is gaining popularity. An illustration of pidgin Polish on the Internet are, for example, the following combinations: *for ju wszystko!* (everything for you), *chyba dżołk?!* (I think it's a joke), *ogarniam buksy* (I'm organizing my books).

3.3. Hashtag

A relative element of communication on the Internet is the creation of hashtags, like single words, abbreviations, and even entire phrases preceded by the # sign (hash). The main role of hashtags is to group entries on one topic in order to find them better. However, in the media culture "the hashtag has become something more. It began to act

2 Also used as IMHO.

as a carrier of symbols and monologues, and in a specific context it was also used as a tool for introducing potential changes in real reality. It is a kind of meta-commentary that, in a short form, carries a large amount of information and locates many interpretative contexts" [Przyborowicz, 2014, p. 91].

Since 2009, each word preceded by # is automatically made available on the Internet as a hyperlink to that category. "A hashtag is a kind of message, a certain key that allows information to be grouped. It was popularized by Twitter users, and then 'mastered' by Instagram and Facebook" [Styś, 2017, p. 300]. For Internet users, it is a great help in obtaining information. Thanks to the # sign, you can find other statements associated with one slogan, but it is also a phrase that may contribute to mobilizing users to act outside the Internet – "the message then gives an impulse to express views within the virtual community [...]. It also becomes a tool for introducing changes" [Przyborowicz, 2014, p. 92]. "People describe their pictures only by tagged words. They no longer use sentences" [Piechnik, 2017, p. 44].

Hashtags are used on the Internet not only for direct communication, but also as links to advertising campaigns – which is a very effective marketing tool (e.g. T-mobile campaign: #nocontract, Audi: #Progressis or – how current in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic – #stayathome or #kwarantannatime). Preceding any word (keyword) with the # sign allows you to search for similar terms written in the same way within one social medium (or more broadly, in all search engines – #blacklivesmatter, #notmypresident.). People have created lots of hashtags with meanings that do not exist in a natural language. This is all the more an example of creativity, humour and, above all, the uniqueness of the Internet language. Thanks to this, hashtags are an extremely convenient tool for political, but also popular (or maybe pop-cultural) communication – they are used to build relationships in social media between politicians or people from the world of culture with the recipients [see Adamska, 2015]. Moreover, thanks to the contextual nature of these posts, hashtags have become excellent carriers of irony and jokes (e.g. #ktozabrałweekend, #zostawcieBatonika!). So we can say that "hashtags, initially introduced to allow users to structure and organize content, have developed into a complex communication pattern in social media" [Rauschnabel, Sheldon, Herzfeldt, 2019, p. 11].

3.4. Meme

When describing a meme in the context of the Internet language, it should first be emphasized that the form itself is not linguistic, but rather a mixed message. Meme is not a new concept; belongs to memetics, the theory of cultural evolution. From the linguistic perspective, it is a kind of e-sign, a "cultural gene" or rather a set of cultural ideas transferred by semiosis, which must be understood as "an evolutionarily improved form of the procedure of imitation and remembering" [Kamińska, 2011, p. 60].

The form of communicating with the help of memes is extremely popular among Internet users because it fits in a short form of creating information on the Internet. Memes take various forms: an image, a photo, a website, a hyperlink (including a hashtag), a phrase, or a single word. Undoubtedly, today the strength of this form lies in its effective impact on the broadly understood social opinion.

It is necessary to separate "memic" solutions from a linguistic perspective. Even a cursory analysis of a few random memes allows us to see a great coherence of this form of linguistic communication in the social aspect – we can see a tendency to joke, to speak freely, often incorrectly, to use colloquial Polish. Meme makers want to convey their information quickly and accurately, a joke – that's why these forms are often so short, they punctuate specific situations. This perceptible tendency to be ironic, seen not only within memes but typical for the Internet language in general, often oscillates around the fine line between intelligent wordplay and crossing the barrier of objectively understood linguistic correctness or culture. Undermining the rules of correctness is a

specific feature of memes – fun, laughter, defiance that destroys the existing order. As Agnieszka Niekrewicz rightly notices: “The analysis of the correctness of the internet memes language has shown that deviations from the norm can have a twofold character: typical mistakes or deliberate actions aimed at the depreciation of the hero, ridiculing incorrect spelling and pronunciation, playing verbally, perhaps also expressing rebellion, and sometimes after simply resulting from the implementation of the adopted convention” [2015, p. 237].

3.5. Emoticons and emoji

According to Aleksandra Róžańska: “The role of facial expressions in expressing emotions is important in non-verbal speech, in *the face to face* contacts. In media communication, emoticons fill the gap of speech without words” [2018, p. 196]. Additionally, they explain some meaning of the content itself. It can therefore be said that a graphic smile (smiley) is an integral component of online discussions, just like a smile and a sincere, open attitude in a real conversation.

The use of emoticons is another element that favors the shortening of the notation, as well as the expression of certain non-verbal codes by these conventional signs. It is not possible to express what we present non-verbally during the conversation in writing e.g. to wink when we want the recipient to understand the joke or to not take our words seriously. Perhaps this is why Internet users have so eagerly accepted the proposal to insert emoticons into their statements, which help to show the emotions accompanying writing. So emoticons have become a natural element of online communication, just like acronyms; they are an inseparable element, especially direct communication – chats and posts (or comments) on social networks.

4. Chances and dangers

Over the last few years, the Internet has become a very useful and effective tool, which in an extremely fast manner made it possible to find the necessary information, expand knowledge, provide entertainment, and even make purchases, make payments, or make new friends between people. It can be said that the Internet has even revolutionized social communication, creating a space for establishing relationships that have so far been difficult or impossible – and this is especially true during the covid-19 pandemic, when a large part of interpersonal contacts had to move to the cyber space.

A question may be asked – what impact, building communication between people on the Internet, has on the language condition and its standards. Of course, although the author of these words believes – like many researchers, especially the Canadian professor Sala A. Tagliamonte [Tagliamonte, 2016] – that there is no degeneration in the use of contemporary grammars (and language in general). It should be emphasized, however, that there is a general belief among many linguists that the Internet and its language versions may have a negative impact on the value and position of the language in general, and even ultimately lead to lower standards, seeing the reasons for the increased use of electronic communication in everyday communication. In addition to the undoubted many advantages of social communication via the Internet, it also has certain dangers – the risk of language distortion caused by high economy and unimaginable speed of communication.

The way Internet users write down their thoughts makes the writing itself iconic. Writing on the Internet becomes a product intended not to be read, but to be watched, which in turn may lead the user to think that he is only looking at the message but not hidden behind the other person’s speech (as is the case in direct communication) [Gajda, 2000; Labocha, 2004]. Colloquial Polish has spread on the Internet and has become the dominant variant of the language, especially in the conversational type. This is due to the

massiveness of internet communication and the lack of actual institutions sanctioning the norms that would describe the form and quality of communication. The simplest errors that can be noticed in the correctness of the Internet language (resulting from the speed of writing) are, for example: no capital letters, no diacritics, notation with errors (often unintentional, and therefore not intentional), no punctuation, violation of grammatical and stylistic standards. "The statements of Internet users – especially on social networks, forums, chats or during games – resemble monologues, dialogues or polylogs, which are characteristic of the variety of spoken words: they show the dominance of single sentences, with a simple structure, often incomplete and broken" [Wierzbicka-Olejniczak, 2014: 130]. This obviously influences the issues of correctness – which is difficult to talk about in the context of the Internet language [see: Urzędowska, 2015].

5. Summary

By describing selected structures based on the language of Internet users, it is undoubtedly concluded that the contemporary Polish language has a completely new inter-media dimension, and above all, it is conducive to express communication. The Internet multiplies the possibilities of contact. Thanks to the Internet, everyday life "acquires an intensity unprecedented before. Face-to-face contacts are enhanced with attention from mobile phones, instant messaging, social networking, and blogs. The physical space of direct contacts overlaps with the digital space for the flow of information, content, and emotions, which can always be connected with the use of portable gadgets" [Halawa, 2010]. The Internet, as (still) a new medium, essentially influences the shape of language, both in terms of stylistics and grammar, because Internet users create new, individual means of expression, freely (though not always correctly) using language. On the other hand, modern technologies are undoubtedly a space in which there is no lack of a ludic sphere – jokes, sarcasm, linguistic jokes, so skilfully created by Internet users. The forms of the linguistic word known today on the web can be updated, changed, and improved tomorrow. What is noticeable and important is the obvious desire of Internet users to be brief. Saving time and costs of communication are significant arguments in formulating statements on the Internet. Web users, wanting to communicate quickly and with the least effort, use many available methods of shortening their statements, both graphically, such as: acronyms, acronyms, memes, emoticons, and lexical: hybrids, contamination, complexes. On the one hand, the maximum shortening of statements fosters the dynamics of the discussion, and on the other hand, it negatively affects linguistic correctness.

Shortening, and thus encrypting statements on the Internet is also favored by the humour mentioned here, which often becomes a starting point for Internet users in creating new statements. Internet expert Hu Yong says that "humour works as a natural form of encryption" [Larmer, 2011]. The content of each statement is also associated with "different situations, because experiences are individual and unique, and humour is directly related to creativity" [Ostanina-Olszewska, Majdzińska-Koczorowicz, 2019, p. 4].

An inquisitive analysis of communication in the media is an increasingly interesting aspect necessary for research in the face of changes that are taking place today in such fields of science as sociology, psychology, linguistics, literary studies, anthropology ... According to Bogusław Skowronek [2013; 2014], there should be a new linguistic sub-discipline – media linguistics, which would focus on various research problems, such as the model of communication in the Internet, typological diversity of messages on the Internet, the ontological language status, the concept of text and hypertext, netiquette, language economization, the use of various codes [see Kita, 2016, pp. 113–114].

Due to the inevitable digital progress, new technologies, and changing forms of communication, the so far "analog" user becomes "digitized". He is looking for new ways to objectify language, simplify it, internationalize it in order to improve and simplify

communication and contact. Linguistic matter is intertwined with communicative, and sometimes even agency, journalistic. Progressive internationalization – not only in the linguistic aspect, but perhaps above all in social terms, so common in the network environment, is today, on the one hand, indispensable and, on the other hand, necessary for reliable research and description.

In conclusion, it should be said that communication on the web is not uniformed and very variable. There is no attention to detail in this linguistic space. Rules are often broken unconsciously – though not always. And – however when studying the language of the Internet you should be open to new forms it brings – it should also be remembered that the task of linguists is to care for the correctness of the language in every sphere and to make new standards that would help Internet users find themselves in this space linguistically.

Newer and newer structures of linguistic expression must arise simultaneously for the development of communication tools. The language – both in traditional spoken Polish and in its new internet representation, must flexibly adapt to the requirements of the era.

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