

Environmental Discourse in Public Debates in Poland: Relativization, Exclusion and Acceptance¹

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ABSTRACT

The perception of ecology in Poland has evolved significantly over the last two decades. These changes in social consciousness are caused mainly by the media which offer a wide coverage of diverse ecological issues, shaping ecological attitudes both at the global as well as the local level. The process results in the appearance of a social community sharing similar convictions and consequently in the appearance of a speech community using a specific discourse. The aim of the paper is to show the way in which environmental discourse penetrates the hegemonic discourse of the media and how it is represented in it. The material analyzed comes from major Polish newspapers (the broadsheets *Rzeczpospolita*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, and *Dziennik*, and the tabloid *Fakt*) and contains news items illustrating the three basic principles which seem to rule environmental discourse in the public debate in Poland: relativization, exclusion and acceptance. The paper concludes with more general speculation of whether the reconstruction of these rules may contribute to better understanding the complicated relations between the central and peripheral fields of discourse in particular cultures.

Introduction

The perception of ecology in Poland has evolved significantly over the last two decades following the democratic changes. A major shift can be observed in social consciousness since ecology is no longer perceived as merely a branch of science, but rather as the expression of rudimentary human needs: the future of the humankind and life on the Earth in general. Ecologists tend to be recognized as activists fighting for the protection of the environment rather than as academics secluded in their laboratories (Sztumski, 1999; Ostolski, 2009).

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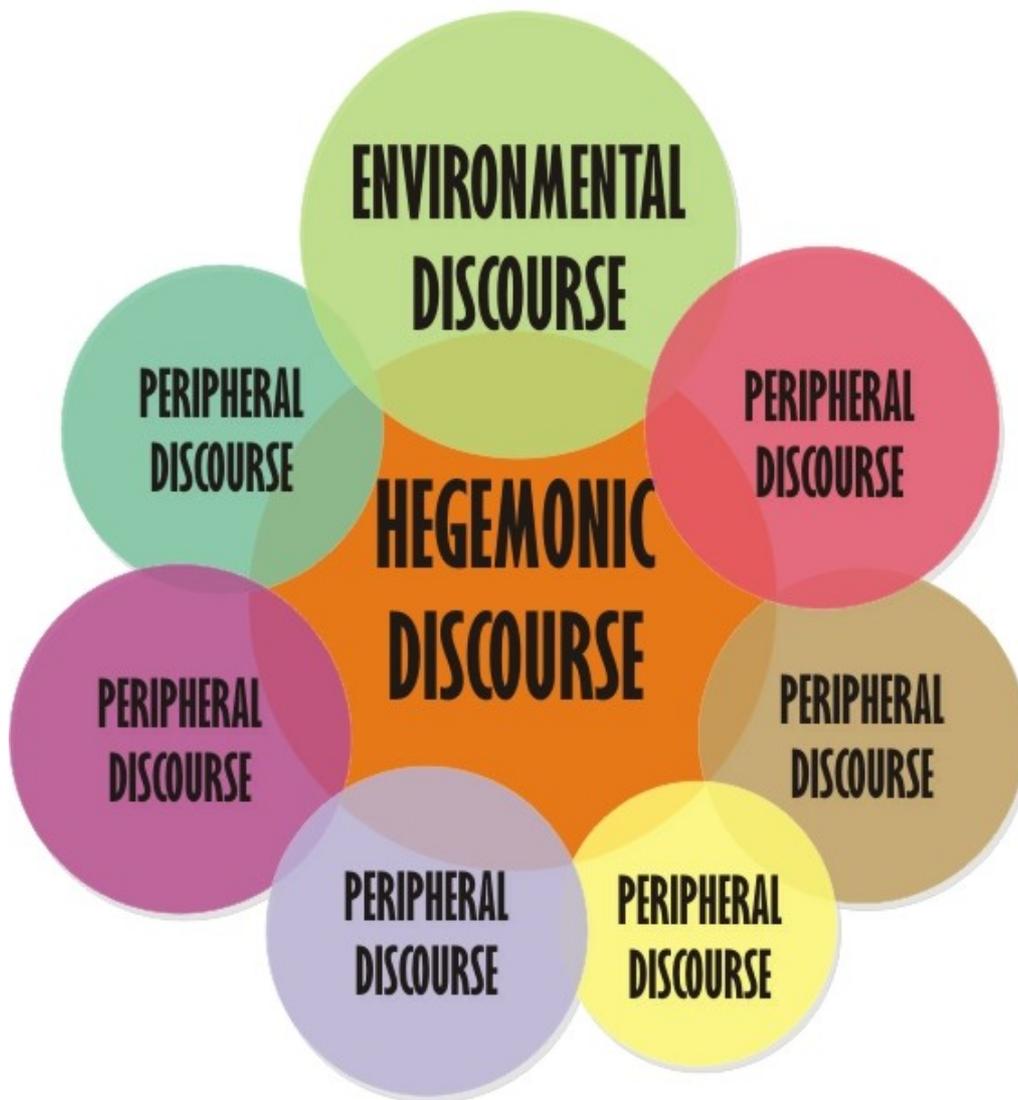
These changes in social consciousness may be triggered either by generally understood threats to the future of civilization, which have a significant impact on living conditions, or by the popularization of ecology by various people or organizations actively contributing to the public debate. In addition, global media offer a wide coverage of diverse ecological issues ranging from air pollution, the ozone hole, civilization diseases, genetically modified food, population growth, global warming and climate change to endangered ecosystems and species of fauna and flora (West et al., 2003), shaping ecological attitudes both at the global and local level. Although environmental topics are not (and never have been) at the top of the agenda in Polish public debate², the process results in the appearance of a social community sharing similar convictions and consequently in the appearance of a speech community using specific discourse.

Since the concept of discourse remains ambiguous and is subject to numerous debates, for the purpose of this paper discourse is understood in the post-structuralist sense as a complex of communicative forms of behavior, typical of a specific community in terms of language use and the social context, in the sense that the community functions in the environment of other competitive communities which have elaborated their own forms of discourse³. This competition means the ability to exert impact on the central field of discourse in a given culture comprising the discourse of media, the sphere of popular semiotics, signs and socially accepted utterances which prevail in the system of cognition and interpretation based on the common-sense perception of the world as well as popular forms of expression (Kloch, 2006: 14). This picture of communicative activity defines the hegemonic discourse of the media as a 'sphere of relative consensus' (Allan, 2004: 68-69) which is not 'given' but is rather subjected to constant evolution in the public debate confined to its own limits, yet at the same time open to other peripheral discourses⁴. These complex relations are presented in the diagram below:

² No particular quantitative research can confirm this general statement, but in a smaller scale on the example of the Onet.pl Web portal's agenda it has been proved in the paper *Dyskurs ekologiczny w debacie publicznej* (Steciag, 2008). Translation available: http://sm.id.uw.edu.pl/Numery/2008_4_35/steciag.pdf

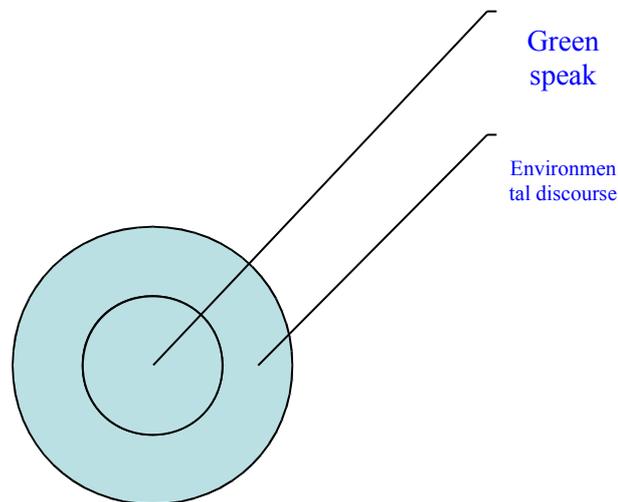
³ The competition regards the attaining of hegemony in describing the world through the appropriation of signs and, what is more, the trend and encouragement of others to accept a certain way of thinking. Communication, in this case, is about the clashing of different discourses in the negotiation of meanings, especially regarding the relationships between the users of signs and the signs themselves (connotation understood as the pragmatic one). This kind of communication activity Jean-Francois Lyotard calls 'general agonistics': "He treats the pragmatics of discourse under the rubric of "general agonistics" rather than communication or structure: "To speak is to fight, in the sense of playing, and speech acts fall within the domain of a general agonistics"' (Plonowska-Ziarek, 2001: 98)

⁴ It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the shape of contemporary public debate(s) which is perceived differently depending on particular approaches (Wright, 2008: 21-43), although the post-modern approach considered here treats public debate(s) as "social practices, which means that while they have discursive moment, they are not simply discourse" (Fairclough, Chouliaraki, 1999:137)



The environmental discourse can be conceived of fairly narrowly as having specific characteristics which make it different from other forms of communicative behavior and which are restricted to the speech community of people who are interested in ecology and who describe the world by means of their own system of cognition and interpretation. Its distinctive features comprise a high level of awareness of ecological issues, generally understood as the appropriate attitude of people towards the natural environment based on specialist knowledge as well as strong beliefs, and the system of values which function as the driving force for their activity (Papuziński, 2006: 33-40). Broadly understood environmental discourse, in which the subject matter seems to play the primary role, can be defined as ‘the entirety of texts (seen as separable and structured sequences of written or

spoken utterances), in which the relation between humans and the natural environment is defined publicly, i.e. in the media, or in which the effects of human activity on the environment and its repercussions on humans are discussed' (Jung, 2001: 271). For the purpose of distinguishing between the two spheres, the center of the discourse (narrow meaning) is referred to as 'greenspeak'⁵:



Since the aim of the paper is to show the way in which the environmental discourse penetrates the hegemonic discourse and how it is represented in it, for the purpose of the discourse analysis conducted here the broader meaning of the concept has been applied. The material analyzed comes from major Polish broadsheets (*Rzeczpospolita*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Dziennik* and tabloid *Fakt*) and contains news items illustrating the three basic principles which seem to rule the environmental discourse in the public debate in Poland: relativization, exclusion and acceptance.

⁵ The term 'Greenspeak', coined to cover "all the ways in which issues of the environment are presented" (Hare et al., 1999: VII) is sometimes applied authors using the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis marked negatively as an effect of 'greenwashing' (Alexander, 2008: 54) and understood as "special type of anthropocentric language which represents nature in a harmless and euphemizing way, glossing over the problems humans have caused" (Fill 2002: 23). In this paper it functions in more neutral meaning as language/discourse of people respecting nature's needs and interested in protecting nature against human invasion. According to already established Polish tradition the term for discriminating nature language is 'ecospeak'.

Relativization

The principle of relativization reduces the ecological projection to merely one of numerous options in the interpretation of the reality. It is manifested mainly in news items presented in the objective mode and situating the sender outside the presented fragment of the reality (a construed informative scene), which is expressed by the objective and perceptual ‘conceptualizer – object’ relation, in which the conceptualizer is not the subject of perception. It is followed while presenting ecologists in antagonistic communicative situations in which their arguments are contrasted with those of others or vice versa, which in turn weakens the level of assertiveness and strengthens relativism i.e., particular situations can be perceived differently by various groups while the arguments presented by the ecologists reflect their own cognitive systems rather than objective evaluation. This is particularly well visible in leads which highlight the information and are reduced to the presentation of the argument and antagonism (including its essence). While the information structure may vary depending on how the addressee’s attention is focused, the following elements function as *new to the hearer*:

- predicates expressing communicative activities e.g.:

Protest przeciwko polityce energetycznej rządu **przeprowadzili** członkowie ekologicznej organizacji Greenpeace. (Rzeczpospolita, 04.07.2007)

The protest against new solutions in the power industry **was organized** by members of Greenpeace, a pro-ecological organization.

Awantura o projekty osiedli Dom Development i spółki PKO. Nie ustają protesty ekologów przeciwko inwestycji przy ul. Raławickiej 107. (Rzeczpospolita, 23.07.2007)

Row on the design of *Dom and PKO* developments. Ecologists continue their protest against the investment plans at 107 Raławicka street.

- arguments aimed at either party of the antagonistic communicative situation:

Ratusz planuje 11 nowych parkingów. – Będą puste, tak jak te, co już są – twierdzą **ekolodzy**. (Rzeczpospolita, 14.11.2007)

The Town hall supports the construction of 11 new car parks – they will stay as empty just like the previous ones – claim **the ecologists**

Ekolodzy twierdzą, że były dwie awarie, **PERN** – że tylko jedna. Eksperti ostrzegają przed kolejnymi wyciekami. (Rzeczpospolita, 19.12.2007)

The ecologists report two instances of breakdown, **PERN** being only one of them. Experts warn that further leakage cannot be excluded

Aktywiści ruchu ekologicznego wzywają do wstrzymania budowy domu meblowego Ikea w południowym Izraelu. Twierdzą, że szwedzka spółka zdevastuje dziewicze wydmy. **Ikea** odrzuca oskarżenia. (Rzeczpospolita, 17.07.2007)

The ecology movement activists call for the ban on the construction of the IKEA centre in southern Israel. Reportedly, the Swedish company will damage natural sand dunes. **IKEA** rejects the accusations.

Interestingly, irrelevant of which of the participants of the argument is given priority in the linear sense, no semantic or syntactic hierarchy can be observed in the leads i.e. the entire composition scheme, based on conflicting arguments, is realized by simple and coordinate sentences which do not manifest any forms of superordinate or subordinate relations. The very same formula is maintained in the remaining fragments of news items, which results in the excessive use of predicates expressing communicative activities (frequent use of introductory reporting verbs or *verba dicendi*) of strong emotional markedness.

Thus ecologists *protest, accuse, appeal*, sometimes *suggest* (changes) or *claim* authoritatively that something is true - these are their normative forms of communicative behavior as seen from the perspective of the hegemonic discourse, that is forms which are compatible with the newly arising language use expressing the social consensus concerning communication on given topics (Steciąg, 2009:208-209). The environmental discourse appears to assume features of propaganda imposing a specific (ecological) or 'alien' perspective upon the perception of the reality (Grzmił-Tylutki, 2000: 27). Its image is shaped by repeated and easily memorable connotations functioning as clichés, which by nature are biased, enhancing stereotypical thinking. The category of the actors of communicative acts i.e. 'ecologists', constitutes its first element. The simplification consists in the permanent use of the plural, which triggers specific connotations. Thus ecologists appear to be a uniform and nameless group of activists of the green movement, which (and this is the second element of

the stereotype) eagerly takes part in the public debate, and assumes the position of the reviewer or the critic of current events. This negative interpretation of factual information is expressed in the pragmatics of their communicative behavior. It turns out, however, that it constitutes only one of the potential options; it is not internalized by the discourse of the media, which reveals the alienation of the ecological perspective in perception of the world. The collocation 'ecologists protest' occurs to be particularly expansive in the formation of popular opinions and not only does it stigmatize the pragmatic potential of the environmental discourse but it locates it in the sphere of 'justified controversy' i.e., far away from the center of the hegemonic discourse.

Exclusion

The tendency is strengthened in another type of narration, often referred to as *identity narration* (Sparks et al, 1992), typical of tabloids and increasingly more popular in reports, in which the sender is located within the 'informative scene' rather than outside it. Being emotionally involved, senders identify themselves with the receivers while establishing or reconstructing broken social bonds within the community. Their specific task consists in creating a sender-receiver community of 'common people' based on popular knowledge, common sense, stereotypes, labeling, stigmatizing or social myths which typically resort to the division into *us* (the sender-receiver community) and *them* ('bad government', 'corrupted millionaires', 'capricious pop-stars' etc.) and consequently in the 'black and white' reception of the world controlled (in the cognitive sense) by the receiver. This form of narration particularly well embodies the second principle of the functioning of the environmental discourse in the public debate i.e., exclusion or relocation to the periphery of the media discourse or to the sphere of deviation.

The simplest and the most precise, yet not the most frequent (Steciag, forthcoming) way of implementing such relocation consists in juxtaposing 'common people', representatives of the sender-receiver community, with 'bad ecologists' (the negative attitude being expressed directly by the use of stigmatizing neologisms such as 'eco-freaks' or 'eco-terrorists'), e.g.,

SKANDAL!

Ekooszołomy burzą domy

Aż 30 osób spod Wrocławia może stracić swoje domy. Dlaczego? Bo dla ekooszołomów ptaki i drzewa są ważniejsze niż dorobek życia wielu rodzin. I dlatego kazali urzędnikom zmienić przebieg trasy ekspresowej S5 pod Wrocławiem. (Fakt, 02.10.2008)

SCANDAL

Eco-freaks demolish houses

As many as thirty people may lose their houses. Why? Birds and trees are more important than the possessions of numerous families according to some eco-freaks who insist that the route of the currently constructed S5 motorway near Wrocław has to be changed.

SUKCES FAKTU!

Ekoterrorysta pokonany

A jednak ekolodzy mają sumienie! Dramat mieszkańców, którzy mieli stracić domy, przekonał ich w końcu, że ludzie są ważniejsi od ptaków. (Fakt, 03.10.2008)

‘FAKT’ WINS,

Eco-terrorists finally defeated

Even ecologists seem to share human feelings. The tragedy of families who were on the verge of losing their houses eventually convinced the Greens that people are more important than birds.

TO STRASZNE!

Kwiatek ważniejszy niż życie ludzkie

Odurzeni zapachem miodokwiatu krzyżowego ekolodzy dopięli swego. Obwodnica Augustowa szerokim łukiem ominie dziewicze torfowiska Rospudy. (Fakt, 26.03.2009)

HORROR

Plants more important than the human life

Ecologists dazed by the fragrance of the musk orchid finally got their way. The Augustów ring road will bypass the virgin peat bogs of Rospuda.

Such texts (interpreted news items) are usually constructed around one repeated pattern of structure and information:

TOP HEADLINE: usually ostentatious in terms of aesthetics, announcing yet another ‘daily apocalypse’ or demonstrating ‘the power of the sender-receiver community’ performs the function as *old to the hearer* in the information structure of the text.

Headline: makes the topic issue more specific by means of buzzwords, labels and stigmas (*new to the hearer*).

It is significant that both the contents as well the information structure of leads are schematic: at the beginning (that is at the first cognitive plan) both the essence of the conflict as well its victims are described (usually as semantic patients subjected to actions, processes or phenomena, with whom the sender identifies, and at the next stage ‘the actors’ i.e. ecologists (usually semantic agents who control actions) occur. This strong communicative convention is related to the process of extension of the meaning of the word ‘ecologists’ by ascribing to it the role of ‘actors’ in various contexts of use. This semantic evolution can also be observed in further parts of texts in which more detailed information about ‘actors’ is introduced by means of the quantification ‘**all** because of’, e.g.,

Niestety, na razie zablokowano projekt o nazwie Mose, który przewiduje budowę śluz. **Wszystko przez** protestujących ekologów. (Fakt, 2.12.2008)

Unfortunately the Mose project of sluice construction has been temporarily suspended. **All because of** the protesting ecologists.

Dlaczego zamiast pomagać rolnikom, ministerstwo woli polepszyć życie kurczaków? **Wszystko przez** ludzi nazywających się ekologami. (Fakt, 25.09.2008)

Why, instead of helping farmers, does the Ministry opt to improve the living standard of chickens? **All because of** people who describe themselves as ecologists. (September 25th, 2008).

Widmo podwyżek wisi nad Polską. **Wszystko przez** ekologiczne normy narzucane nam przez Brukselę. (Fakt, 9.12.2008)

Higher prices haunt Poland. **All because of** the ecological norms imposed by Brussels.

Subsequently, ecologist-agents are described by means of characteristics which make them different from ‘common people’, which means that they assume anti-anthropocentric

perspectives in their perception of the world. To put it simply, their view is presented as the reversal of the 'natural' hierarchy in which the man and his well-being is of supreme value. This simplification excludes ecologists, understood as a discourse community, from any wider communicative community founded on the principles of the common and popular view of the world.

The exclusion is manifested not only by forming oppositions between *us* (common, good people) and *them* (alien and bad) but also by being selective while quoting ecologists, whose position is not expressed by them but is rather subjected to interpretation within the sender-receiver community, e.g.,

To już kolejny pomysł ekooszołomów w sprawie reklamówek. Kilka miesięcy temu ruszyła przecież wielka kampania zachęcająca do pakowania zakupów w tzw. torby ekologiczne. Niektóre kosztowały nawet po kilkanaście złotych. Nic więc dziwnego, że klienci nie rzucili się na nie, a efekt jest w sumie taki, że niektóre sklepy zaczynają wycofywać te drogie ekotorby. Skoro nie poszło z Polakami po dobroci, to trzeba ich do kupowania ekotoreb zmusić – pomyśleli sobie pewnie ekolodzy. I właśnie realizują swój plan. (Fakt, 5.11.2008)

Yet another idea of eco-freaks on plastic bags. A few months ago a great campaign on ecological packaging took off. Some of the bags cost as much as a dozen PLN. No wonder customers never rushed to buy them and in result some shops are planning to withdraw eco-bags from their offer. If you cannot make it with Poles for their own good, right, let's make them buy eco-bags – the ecologists must have thought. They are just about to implement their strategy.

This feature most distinguishably differentiates between the identity and objective narration, in which ecologists are frequently quoted directly (which is manifested in the variety of the forms of their communicative behavior).

The application of the mechanisms of exclusion results in presenting ecologists as antagonistic in their relation to 'common people', subjected to negative evaluation at the level of expression, which affects both the stylistics ('eco-freaks', 'eco-terrorists') as well as composition ('agents'). What is more, they do not function independently i.e., as a discourse community participating in the public debate, they are excluded from any wider community of 'common people' and hence deprived of the right to voice their opinions. In result, there is no space for debates which assume the highly acceptable anthropocentric worldview or

instances of communication breakdowns which might introduce relativism or cognitive dissonance.

Acceptance

The two forms in which the environmental discourse functions in the public debate, namely relativization and exclusion, are dominated (in terms of discourse strategy) by antagonism. The third one, acceptance, can be characterized by its relative absence as well as the empathic attitude consisting in the assumption of pro-ecological perspectives in the perception of the world as well as the reference (often rhetorical) to the wider and vaguely specified community of 'the concerned' who observe and evaluate negatively changes in the natural environment. Senders identify themselves with the group while constructing 'information scenes' in which they participate, which in turn is typical of identity narration. This is particularly well manifested in the use of the inclusive 'we' and the possessive adjective 'our' in headlines:

Co godzinę **tracimy** trzy gatunki roślin i zwierząt
Ekolodzy budują arkę (Rzeczpospolita, 25.05.2007)
Every hour we lose three flora and fauna species
Ecologists are constructing the ark

W Polsce żyje ich tylko 50
Ratujmy rysie nizinne (Dziennik, 7.08.2008)
There are only 50 of them in Poland
Let's save the lynx

Nasze morze można jeszcze uratować
Bałtyk umiera (Dziennik, 23.06.2008)
Our sea can still be saved
The Baltic Sea is dying

Acceptance can be observed in the leads whose information structure is reduced to presenting the ecological issue (subject/object of the information) formulated by the representatives of

the community of *the concerned*, with no other interpretation juxtaposed (hence with no attempts to introduce any relativism), e.g.,

Za kilka lat miasto zamieni się w betonową pustynię - alarmują mieszkańcy Gliwic, przerażeni postępującą wycinką drzew. (Gazeta Wyborcza, 25.01.2007)

Within a few years the city will become a concrete desert, warn the residents of Gliwice threatened by the progress of cutting trees in their hometown.

Już tylko 50 rysi nizinnych żyje w północno-wschodniej Polsce. Wciąż padają ofiarą kłusowników i cywilizacji, bo budowane drogi coraz gęściej przecinają lasy, w których żyją te dzikie koty. Ekolodzy apelują o to, by wzorem państw zachodnich tak projektować szosy, by rysie mogły swobodnie przemieszczać się między puszciami. (Dziennik, 7.08.2008)

Only 50 lynxes have survived in north-eastern Poland, endangered by poachers and civilization threats such as motorway construction or deforestation of the areas which are their home. Ecologists appeal for western patterns to be followed where roads are routed in a way which allows lynxes to migrate freely from one forest to another.

Ornitologowie biją na alarm: wróble - jeszcze do niedawna jedno z najbardziej popularnych ptaków w Polsce - mogą wyginąć. Ogólnopolskie Towarzystwo Ochrony Ptaków szacuje, że w ciągu ostatnich siedmiu lat liczba wróbli zmniejszyła się aż o 14 proc. Obecnie jest ich zaledwie - według najczarniejszych prognoz - 2,5 miliona. (Dziennik, 25.06.2008)

Ornithologists warn that the sparrow, until recently the most widespread bird in Poland, is endangered with extinction. According to the estimates of the Polish Society for the Protection of Birds, the number of sparrows has been reduced by as many as 14% over the last seven years. At present there are as few as 2.5 million of them, according to the most pessimistic estimates.

In case of longer leads (see examples 2 and 3 above), specific information concerning the ways of overcoming the problems is presented in the initial sections. And it is at this point, that the sender's empathy, manifested in the teleological nature of environmental discourse (Harre at al. 1999:7), is manifested in the way the issue of 'time management' is presented. Insofar as antagonistic attitudes are concerned, the time factor is of secondary significance since the 'conflict scene' is construed simultaneously at two levels (for and against), whereas if specific texts follow the acceptance model, both references to the past as well as to the

future are made. The present and the current state retain the status of the point of reference which has its roots in the past but at the same time defines future objectives. The correlation of the cause-effect and temporal relations (e.g., phrases which have gained context dependent evaluative characteristics such as ‘in a few years’, ‘only’ or, ‘until recently’ preceding the presentation of the issue as well as the forces following it) enriches the ecological projection of the reality in terms of internal order and cohesion and presents it as the rational construct which can be subjected to interpretation.

Anchoring this projection in the popular and anthropocentric view of the world, on which the media discourse is based may lead to cognitive dissonance or axiological chaos in the situations in which the protagonists of the message represent the world of nature, equipped with human features comprehensible in the context of the discourse. One of the most popular stylistic devices used in the texts following the principle of acceptance consists of anthropomorphism i.e., one can read in the above mentioned fragment on the ‘extinctions of sparrows’:

Na tym nie koniec **wielkich kłopotów wróbla**. **Ten maluch jest ze swojej natury domatorem** - przez całe życie nie odlatuje dalej niż na kilometr od miejsca, w którym przyszedł na świat. Oznacza to, że jeśli spotykamy **Elemelka** na balkonie czy parapacie, **jest on naszym sąsiadem**. I tylko w naszej okolicy może szukać pożywienia. Przez lata go dokarmialiśmy, przyzwyczajaliśmy do tego, że **może na nas liczyć**. (...) Do wyginiecia wróbla, według najnowszych hipotez, przyczynia się również jego **wrodzone tchórzostwo**. (...) **Maleńki ptaszek** przegrywa z problemami niesionymi przez cywilizację nie tylko w Polsce. (...)

Yet this is not the only **problem of the common sparrow**. **These baby-birds tend to be homebodies** – throughout their lives they never fly away further than one mile away from the place of their birth. This means that if we encounter **Elemelek** on our balcony, **there are our next-door neighbors**, who can find food in our estate only. We kept feeding them, so they treat us as their mates and **they count on us**. (...) They are endangered by extinction due to their **inborn cowardness**. (...) **The tiny bird** loses when confronted with civilization problems both in Poland as well as abroad. (...)

Anthropomorphism is manifested not only in ascribing human features to birds (cowardness, being a homebody) but also to the forms of behavior (count on somebody). The specific use of anaphoric techniques is also worth noticing: the use of positively marked superordinates

referring to popular experience (sparrows – baby birds) as well subordinates (sparrows – little sparrows - ‘Elemelek’ in Polish stories for children) or quasi-anaphoric epithets (the tiny bird). In the news item ‘Let us save the lynx’, the name the species is used interchangeably with the superordinate ‘the wild cat’ as well as with the quasi anaphoric epithet ‘the perfect predator’; or in other texts ‘the hare’ tends to be replaced with the culturally marked ‘the grey’; the Atlantic Puffin is referred to as the ‘Sea Parrot’, and the Amazon Jungle as ‘The green lungs of the Earth’, the Baltic sea is subjected to personification in such grammatical metaphors as ‘The Baltic dies’ or ‘Killing the Baltic’.

It is significant that the variety of anaphoric techniques used for the purpose of the referential identification of objects is not related to the anthropomorphized ‘objects’ of information only but also to other characters occurring in particular texts. This defines yet another characteristic distinguishing between the empathic message and the antagonistic one. The antagonistic approach requires explicit labels, which make the community of ecologists uniform (ecologists as the activists of the pro-environmental movement) and stable characteristics (ecologists are agents), with the very same lexeme being used in various contexts (which in turn gives rise to the stereotypical form of ‘protesting ecologists’ as one of the elements of language use). Yet the texts based on the principle of acceptance take advantage of various labels for naming professionals, scientists or activists involved in pro-ecological movements which range from broadly understood *experts, scientists, environmentalist* to specialists in their own areas: *ornithologists, biologists, oceanographers, physicists or representatives of specific pro-ecological research centers and organizations*. This diligence in identifying the spokesmen of pro-environmentalist movements performs a specific function. It seems to be used as a tool supporting the status as well as the credibility of information on ecology. While referring to scientists, the sender wishes to show that the community-based interpretation of the reality as perceived by ‘the concerned’ is correct or simply true. Hence specific forms of presenting the environmental discourse are used which consist in avoiding forms of communicative behavior which express *protest* or *opposition* (typical of the antagonistic approach) and replacing them by more neutral ones such as: *say, inform* or *explain* or occasionally more intensive ones which point at future threats e.g. *warn*. It is vital to make the perspective of ‘the concerned’ credible, as it diverts from the popular standard in which people and their social environment constitute the primary focus of attention.

Hence the texts constructed on the basis on the principle of acceptance create a new image of the environmental discourse, different from the ones presented above. Ecologists are

presented as experts who describe the reality as it is (assertion) or as it will be (reliable scientific hypotheses). Their interpretation is not subjected to relative judgments but it is rather internalized by the community of 'the concerned' as cohesive and rational. The discourse appears to be empathic, in the sense that the stylistic devices used (including anthropomorphism) activate the tendency, typical of the mass audience, to identify oneself with the protagonists of the news item (Thompson, 2001: 192). This may however lead to some form of axiological chaos since the protagonists are representatives of both animate and inanimate nature equipped with human features.

In conclusion, it could be observed that the environmental discourse, just like other forms of minority discourses, occupies little space and is presented in a distorted way (Mrozowski, 2001: 219) in the hegemonic discourse of mass media described often as the discursive machine producing meaning. The reconstruction of the three principles that seem to govern the use of the environmental discourse in the public debate in Poland (i.e. relativization, exclusion and acceptance) may contribute to better understanding and organization of the complicated relations which exist between the central and peripheral fields of discourse in particular cultures.

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