



**PROLang PGR Seminar
Polish Language
4pm, Tue 7th March
The Masaryk Room, SSEES**

Event Chairs: Shaun Foley and Dagmara Grabska

Titles of Presentations, Abstracts and Speakers' Bios

Ola Sidorkiewicz, University of Oxford

Talk title: Stefan Themerson and Maria Kuncewicz in Search of a New Language

Abstract: Stefan Themerson (1910-1988) and Maria Kuncewicz (1895-1989) were Polish artists and authors who produced a significant part of their literary oeuvre in emigration. Apart from their extensive literary production, Themerson was involved in avant-garde filmmaking and publishing, whereas Kuncewicz was a trained singer and pianist. In their works, they problematised the experience of emigration, as well as the relationship between major and minor literatures and cultures, often reflecting on the difference between 'universal' and 'national' art. Moreover, both experimented with writing in foreign languages and with self-translation. They saw it as a mode of gaining productive critical distance towards their native culture, referred to by Themerson as the

desire to pierce through the ‘associational thicket’ of nationally charged language, and by Kuncewicz as an attempt at escaping ‘doctrinal ghettos’. In this paper, I analyse Themerson’s novel *Bayamus* (1949) in which he introduces his concept of Semantic Poetry as a mode of seeking a ‘universal’ expression, as well as Kuncewicz’s *Tristan* 1946 (1967), a post-war rewriting of the medieval story, which utilises the language of myth as a mode of ‘universal’ communication. Themerson’s Semantic Poetry and Kuncewicz’s variation on the chivalric romance are, I argue, experimental efforts aimed at finding a new literary language which transcends the traditional binary of ‘universal’ and ‘national’.

Bio: I am a DPhil (PhD) candidate at the University of Oxford, interested in the intersections of language (and translingualism) and national identity, particularly in émigré writing. I work on twentieth-century literature, currently focusing on works by Stefan Themerson, Józef Czapski, and Maria Kuncewicz. In the past, I worked comparatively across English, French, German, and Polish modernist literature. I am also the co-convenor of the Oxford Comparative Criticism and Translation (OCCT) Discussion Group, as well as of the Polish Studies Working Group, also based at the University of Oxford.

Marianna Leszczyk, University of Oxford

Talk title: “The Torment of Description”: Object, Text, and Intermediality in Zbigniew Herbert

Abstract: Known primarily for his poetry, the Polish writer Zbigniew Herbert was also the author of a rich prose oeuvre, consisting of essays, cultural criticism for the press, and above all, a trilogy of travelogues thematising his journeys in Western Europe: *Barbarian in the Garden* (1962) *Labyrinth on the Sea* (1973, published posthumously in 2000), and *Still Life with a Bridle* (1993). Occupied with the tension between language and material reality, Herbert used his travel essays as a space to wrestle with the question of how to translate his encounters with past civilisations and his experience of art into writing. Taking a close look at Herbert’s description of an ancient Minoan artefact, the *Hagia Triada*

sarcophagus, this paper will interrogate both this fundamental question of intermedial translation and Herbert's subjective approach to it. I will begin by pointing out how Herbert presents himself as engaging in the practice of ekphrasis in a highly self-aware manner, and then move on to problematising this seemingly transparent relationship between author, text, and object. Discussing various pitfalls of the ekphrastic process, such as the privileging of subjective experience, the slippage from description to interpretation, and the claiming of authority over the object's message, I will present a more complex picture of Herbert as intermedial translator of art than he is creating of himself.

Bio: Marianna Leszczyk is a DPhil (PhD) candidate in Classical Reception at the University of Oxford. Her doctoral research analyses the presence of classical antiquity in the prose of Zbigniew Herbert, with a focus on Herbert's essays on travel and culture. Reading Herbert's engagement with antiquity through the lens of reception theory, Marianna interrogates questions of intermediality, representation, and the relationship between a Polish author and the Graeco-Roman heritage. Her other academic interests, similarly, cutting across antiquity and modernity, include trauma studies, cultural hybridity, and points of friction in cultural and historical narratives. She is also the co-convenor of the Polish Studies Working Group based at Oxford.

Justyna Mackiewicz, University of Birmingham

Talk title: Polish as a tool in researching cognitive phenomena.

Abstract: Out of Our Minds (OOOM) is a Leverhulme-funded project set up in 2017 by Professor Dagmar Divjak and Petar Milin. Its aim is to create a step-change in research on language and language learning by capturing the linguistic knowledge adult speakers build up when they are exposed to a language in natural settings. Today it is a dynamic team gathering 14 multidisciplinary scholars; PhD students, post-doctoral researchers and professors speaking 9 different first languages and working towards the same goal: improving the way foreign languages are learned and taught. Based on the extensive research carried by the OOOM

project team over the past couple of years, I will argue why linguistics should not be the science of English. I will explain the role of Polish language in research and understanding of some cognitive phenomena. I will also show how studies exploring morphologically complex languages such as Polish as designed, conducted, and what we've learned about memory for language so far from this strand of research.

Bio: Dr Justyna Mackiewicz is Research Associate in Language Learning at University of Birmingham and part of Postdoctoral Research Associates for Out of Our Minds

Dr Justyna Mackiewicz is a postdoctoral Research Associate at the Department of Modern Languages, University of Birmingham. She holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of York.

Her main research interests are in international students' language and literacy skills, development of language and literacy skills in university students from a variety of linguistic backgrounds over time, and linguistic factors that impact academic achievement. She is also passionate about Open Science and Reproducible Research practices.

Sebastian Hanek, Jagiellonian University

Talk title: In search of one's space in language - gender-related crises in Polish communication sphere.

Abstract: The problem of the primacy of the masculine gender in the Polish language has been raised since the interwar period. After attempts to gradually accustom language users to feminatives in the years 1918-1939, the censorship and newspeak of the People's Republic of Poland times effectively discouraged them from using feminine forms. After the political breakthrough in 1989, this issue became the subject of linguists' consideration again, but in the face of a number of socio-cultural problems that arose after the fall of the Iron Curtain, they ceased to be a priority. Currently, it is difficult to find a place in the Polish language not only for women, but also for all people who do not identify with the binary gender division.

In my paper, I intend to outline the historical and cultural background of the problem of linguistic patriarchy in the Polish language, and then I will discuss individual groups affected by this problem and analyse individual strategies for dealing with it. In the presented analyses, I devote a special place to the problems of omitting women and non-binary people in the language, and the main conclusions are the assumptions of inclusive communication strategies.

Bio: Sebastian Hanek, MA – PhD student of the linguistics programme at the Jagiellonian University Doctoral School in the Humanities, auxiliary employee at the Department of Communication Theory of the Faculty of Polish Studies of the Jagiellonian University, Polish philologist, cognitive linguist, and researcher of the discourse of non-heteronormative communities, passionate about cultural changes in private and public discourse.

Anna Stanisz-Lubowiecka, University College London

Talk title: Language of Liberalism. Liberal Language Ideology as a Pro-Democratic Resistance Strategy in the People's Republic of Poland (1970–1989)

Abstract: In my PhD dissertation entitled ‘The Polish Language and Political Ideologies. Language Ideologies in Linguistics Discourse in Poland from 1970’, I look at metalinguistic discourse produced by linguists and scholars of language representing related disciplines in the arts and humanities and social sciences in three different periods: communist authoritarianism, liberal democracy building, and competitive authoritarianism. I argue that in all these periods, linguists have used metalinguistic discourse to promote language ideologies that have supported or challenged different political ideologies and regimes. In communist authoritarianism, linguists promoted a liberal language ideology to oppose the communist regime. In liberal democracy building, they produced a cluster of nationalist, standard and purist language ideologies to construct national identity in the period of socio-political transformations. In competitive authoritarianism, linguists once again

promote a liberal language ideology to oppose the far-right populist party and defend liberal democracy.

In this talk, I will look at linguistics studies on communist propaganda produced by oppositional scholars in the last two decades of state socialism in Poland. I will argue that the analysis of the language of communist propaganda in this discourse should not be assumed to be 'objective'. Rather, this critical analysis constituted a powerful political resistance strategy, which only superficially focused on language alone and ultimately promoted liberal democracy. By applying extralinguistic liberal democratic values in their description and analysis of language, oppositional liberals formulated and propagated a liberal language ideology, and developed proposals of the ideal language of liberalism. I will argue that language ideologies are variants of political ideologies which explicitly discuss language, but implicitly make normative statements about the political system. My study shows that in the 'East', domestic liberals played an important role in the breakdown of the regime and in the shaping of a new democratic reality afterwards.

Bio: Anna Staniszlubowiecka is a fourth-year PhD student at UCL SSEES funded by CEELBAS DTP. She is supervised by Professor Jan Kubik and Professor Riitta Valijarvi. In her interdisciplinary PhD project entitled *The Polish Language and Political Ideologies. Language Ideologies in Linguistics Discourse in Poland from 1970*, Anna looks at how language ideologies have been used to promote different political ideologies in Polish recent history. She pursues her PhD, having completed a master's degree in general Linguistics and Comparative Philology at the University of Oxford as well as an MA in Applied Linguistics and Intercultural Communication at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków (both with the award of distinction). In May 2022, Anna was awarded SSEES Excellence Scholarship and in June 2019, she was a UCL finalist in the Three Minute Thesis competition. Anna is a Postgraduate Teaching Assistant at UCL SSEES and a member of BAAL (Language Policy SIG), BASEES and Polish Studies Group.