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## Tradition — How to Talk about It, How to Pass It on? The Function of Language in Intergenerational Communication.

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**TRADITION — HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT, HOW TO PASS IT ON?  
THE FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE IN INTERGENERATIONAL  
COMMUNICATION**

**Abstract**

The article discusses the significance and function of language in the process of socialization/enculturation. The transmission of community-specific cultural contents is possible both by traditional means as well as using new solutions. The article presents numerous examples of conveying local and national traditions.

**Key words**

socialization/enculturation, tradition, cultural transmission, language, culture, education, reenactment

Tradition — as a set of assets, notions, practices and actions which are characteristic of a given community, reassessed in terms of value and passed on from generation to generation — is a watchword which frequently makes a young healthy person shudder with dislike. It is not something inherited from the ancestors in the genes, but something which needs to be learned in the process of socialization/enculturation. At present, enculturation is a relatively well-known term in anthropology. The popularisation of that notion was strictly linked to the development of anthropology as an independent scientific discipline, which sought for an alternative to the term of socialization, employed by sociologists and educationalists. Enculturation was intended as a more comprehensive term than socialization; it was to encompass more aspects, be more neutral and denote a broader dimension of “learning” culture. However, in view of the proximity between anthropology and sociology, I will employ the terms interchangeably, aware that in specific contexts the terms are not identical. The process of socialization consists, among other things, in supporting and channelling emotional and social development of children — the future, culturally competent individuals. This is the task we, the adults, face. One cannot help but wonder what conditions we create for the proper course of that learning. The key role in this socializing process, which also involves learning about tradition, belongs to the language of transmission. Its quality decides whether the process of historical-cultural education will succeed or fail. Since the human being is born unencumbered by any tradition or conversant with culture, being only equipped with predispositions to become a competent member of their group in the future — they have to submit to an appropriate process which will enable him to participate fully in culture. The fundamental feature of enculturation is that it takes places throughout the entire life of an individual, although the period of its most intensive presence coincides with childhood and early adolescence.

When discussing cultural shaping of the future generations one cannot ignore the issues associated with gender. Depending on the gender, the linguistic transmission, and therefore communication of cultural contents may be diversified, whether due to lexicon, voice intonation or the number of employed words. In contemporary cultures the role of language in the moulding of gender identity still plays a tremendous role. Upon receiving general cultural contents, a girl also obtains knowledge of the fact that she is a future woman; a boy learns that he is a future man. this generates a cultural consent to or expectation of self-restraint, subtlety, sensitivity on the part of girls and courage, strength and control of one’s emotions in boys. Naturally, this breeds stereotypes, which

are addressed by the milieus associated with feminist anthropology. On the other hand, enculturation of contemporary societies goes beyond the strict, gender-based division. Today, boys and girls may acquire the same skills and develop similar interests. Gender still remains a criterion of social division, yet it does not categorically determine certain behaviours. Here, greater emphasis is placed on affirmation of one's own preferences than gender-dependent cultural "predispositions".

Irrespective of the community in which we live — in which location around the world and at what level of technological advancement — tradition is passed on to the successive generation as crucial element of culture, which is virtually indispensable for the community's cultural survival. Tradition thus construed is associated with the fact that practicing it is in fact equivalent to being a member of a given community<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, there are frequent situations in which traditions are abandoned, or modified in a more or less conscious fashion. Among other things, it results from the fact that no community is static but changes depending on a range of circumstances, be it historical or environmental. Consequently, the cultural system may also be subject to change and transformation. Sometimes, modification of tradition is necessary in order to survive at all. In such a case it should be assumed that modified tradition offers greater cultural value than its disappearance. Presuming that the cultural system we partake in is a value in itself, it has to be concluded that active participation in it carries positive implications. By introducing tradition into play, the child makes a multidimensional contact with the surrounding world, thanks to which it enters the culturally entangled social reality. This enables the child to gain knowledge of culture, while the knowledge is conveyed precisely with tradition which "explains" facts about the group to which the individual belongs. "Such explanations (which usually amount to 'history' and 'sociology' of a given community) [...] are as much a tool of legitimisation as the ethical elements of tradition"<sup>2</sup>. One may therefore say that enculturation is principally adaptative in nature — the individual has to adapt their behaviours, actions and convictions to the cultural framework developed by previous generations.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Głowacka-Grajper, *Współczesność na usługach tradycji. Działania tradycyjnych i "nowoczesnych" liderów romskich*, [in:] J. Adamowski, J. Stych (ed.), *Tradycja dla współczesności. Ciągłość i zmiana 2: Tradycja w tekstach kultury*, Lublin 2009, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> P. Berger, T. Luckmann, *Spółeczne tworzenie rzeczywistości*, Warszawa 1983, p. 153.

In any community tradition may be a basis upon which the structure of social integration is built, which subsequently enables individuals to achieve goals which would have been unattainable on their own. This not only allows them to identify with a specific group, but also fosters positive self-esteem and favourable perception of their own community and respect for it<sup>3</sup>. From the group's viewpoint, observing tradition is thus associated with moral values as well. Practicing tradition is good, since in cultivating it, one relates to the "primordial" beginnings of one's group. Renouncing tradition is evil, inappropriate and undesirable, as thereby one negates the value of cultural heritage that connects the past and the present. Such premise engenders a situation where the traditional, the old, the former and ours is opposed to the modern, the current and alien. However, this opposition is not so clearly aligned in today's world. The notion of contemporaneity and modernisation also have their positive facets, associated with progress and development. At a certain stage, each generation is confronted with the old and the new. Both may equally well be perceived negatively or positively. This depends on a range of factors, e.g. the source from which the successive generations take the knowledge of their own culture and of the "legacy" of the previous generation. Every country has "dark" and glorious periods in its history. The former are usually disowned in culture, while the customs that emerged at the time are rejected by the succeeding generations. In turn, the descendants take as much as possible from the period of "greatness" while the traditions and customs of those days become a cultural canon for centuries to come. "In order for a society to survive, it has to have its members as well as experts — people who excel at certain things, leaving other activities to someone else"<sup>4</sup>. It follows then that enculturation may proceed at least in a twofold manner: within a family and in educational institutions.

In view of the intergenerational transmission "[...] it is not insignificant which institutions and how they influence the development of an attitude to the things past, present and future, since certain material or spiritual achievements of today will become a component part of the future social system [...]"<sup>5</sup>. In primary socialization, the information about tradition, the old and the current customs, the culture and its elements is conveyed chiefly by the parents; in sec-

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<sup>3</sup> M. Głowacka-Grajper, *Współczesność...*, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> R. Schultz, *Antropologiczne podstawy wychowania*, Warszawa 1996, p. 238.

<sup>5</sup> F. Ziemiński, *Wybrane problemy tradycji wychowania*, [in:] B. Dymara (ed.), *Dziecko w świecie tradycji*, Kraków 2010, p. 239.

ondary socialization the task falls to institutions, schools in particular. When drawing the picture of tradition the frequently used phrases include: “long ago”, “in those times”, “it has always been”, which are aimed at imparting a certain value and legitimise the adopted practices and actions.

The “times immemorial”, when a specific tradition was born, draw on the unquestionably value of such tradition, as long as it has remained unchanged<sup>6</sup>. The immutability of tradition is understood here rather in the context of inter-generational transmission than literal invariability. Throughout centuries, some traditions have been discontinued while other were developed and/or sustained depending on the fluctuating social context. It is a natural ramification of communication between the older and younger generation, between the living and the bygone ones — the communication may therefore be direct and indirect.

If tradition were to have the opportunity to “be observed” it has to be passed from generation to generation. As observed above, in every human community where the transfer takes place it is accomplished in the process of socialization/enculturation. Learning one’s own culture means acquisition of specific cultural competences, which in the long-term perspective enable those competences to be handed over to the next generations. In spite of appearances, the task is not an easy one, since it makes each generation responsible for the quality of conveyed cultural contents, including tradition. In intergenerational transmission, the difficulty lies in avoiding such consequences as in the game of Chinese whispers, where at every stage the message is distorted and falsified. Making the younger generations aware that the bulk of cultural achievement of their predecessors, which is not always properly received, is a foundation for development, a starting point of progress; for the time being, it obviates the prospective, unconditional rejection of tradition. Educational institutions, which chiefly serve that very purpose, are established to perform a specific socializing function: “[...] the basic task [...] of educational institutions is to ensure continuity and permanence of social-cultural entity through appropriate mechanisms of intentional socialization of individuals. The aim of educational institution is to guarantee that the existing store of culture will be preserved by passing it on to the subsequent generations [...] All societies create, or insti-

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<sup>6</sup> J. Kajfosz, *O językowym i kulturowym konstruowaniu tradycji*, [in:] J. Adamowski, J. Stych (ed.), *Tradycja...*, p. 81.

tutionalise education in order to socialize their next generations and to assure themselves cultural and social survival [...]”<sup>7</sup>.

In view of the fact that “[...] tradition is one of the basic methods of introducing the past and its cultural content into the present social consciousness, and represents a major element in awareness-related processes, by means of which history exerts an influence on the fates of societies and contributes to their shaping [...]” the manner in which those cultural contents are transmitted is of paramount significance<sup>8</sup>. What we receive as information about the world which surrounds us, moulds our specific perception of it.

In terms of teaching tradition, the choice of a method of communication may be of key significance for the success of socialization/enculturation process. In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to focus on the language, which performs a strategic role in interpersonal relations, and therefore in intergenerational exchange as well. My deliberations are concerned with the basic type of communicating cultural contents, spanning older and younger generations, namely a natural situation where there are “givers” and “recipients” of culture. A different situation is also possible, where the transmission of cultural contents does not involve children and the young, but persons who have undergone cultural formation. This applies to assimilation of immigrant or repatriate groups, yet this type of cultural transmission is exceptional. It is believed that communication by means of language is one of the most conspicuous and characteristic features of the human being, and therefore one of the most valuable traits<sup>9</sup>. In enculturation, the cultural contents are conveyed in the mother tongue. This aspect is vital for the subsequent stages of socialization of an individual. The first language, by virtue of being perceived as a tool, has the necessary, self-evident realistic quality. No other language learned afterwards will meet that condition in full. Even if one were to speak a foreign language fluently, it is probable that the emotional attitude will be associated with the native tongue. The situation looks normal with those persons, who were born to mixed marriages and simultaneously acquire language skills and thus cultural skills of different cultures.

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<sup>7</sup> R. Schultz, *Antropologiczne...*, p. 168.

<sup>8</sup> W. Korzeniowska, *Bogactwo i różnorodność tradycji w kulturze polskiej*, [in:] B. Dymara (ed.), *Dziecko...*, p. 71.

<sup>9</sup> M. Głowacka-Grajper, *Współczesność...*, p. 6.

Undeniably, in every “[...] human society, the most important system of signs is language, which may be defined as a system of vocal signs. Obviously, it is based on the human body’s characteristic ability for vocal expression. [...] growling, squealing, howling or hissing are not a language, although these forms of vocal expression may become linguistic in the extent to which they are included in the objectively accessible system of signs [...]”<sup>10</sup>. However interesting that may sound, we will be interested in the language defined in the traditional fashion: as a system of signs. After all, it should be remembered that in persons who cannot use speech due to a disability — the transmission of cultural contents takes place through other means of communication, such as the sign language, which nevertheless is still a system of signs.

Conveying cultural contents, and therefore teaching tradition by means of language may assume the form of a tale. Tradition told with passion and on top of that in a language that is comprehensible for the young people may be something exceptionally interesting. Both national symbols as well as lay and religious customs carry multiple layers of meaning, from explicative to symbolic. In Poland, great importance is attached to the symbolic of tradition which, representing a certain level of abstraction may be difficult to understand to a young listener. Explaining the roots of social phenomena, beliefs, rituals or superstitions, as well as providing them with a material dimension, makes the assignment of symbolic meanings easier. The key to successful transmission is getting the listener interested in the topic and linguistic preparation plays a leading role here. The most widely known patriotic poem for children — “Polak mały”, is taken to be the first step to elucidation of national symbolic, but repeating it like a mantra, besides automatic internalization, does not offer any explanation of the national colours and the emblem. Each of us has had the ‘pleasure’ of participating in a school celebration, nativity play or a children’s performance, when the young actors “ejected” the texts they have memorised. When asked about the sense and meaning of what they said, children most often fail to explain the point of their speech or utterances. In the education process itself there is tradition, though in a negative sense. This tradition does not presuppose the learning to think, but to reproduce. The above example of a patriotic poem, translated into the language of a child, may offer substantial cognitive and educational value. The “white eagle” is not only an abstract rhetorical figure but also a biological taxonomic unit, or in other words, a beau-

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<sup>10</sup> P. Berger, T. Luckmann, *Spoleczne tworzenie...*, p. 72.



tiful bird of prey threatened with extinction — dangerous and strong, and therefore it is found in our emblem. Thus we instil positive associations in the young minds and, more importantly, teach to look for rational justification for abstract symbols. *Marzanna*, thrown into the water with the coming of spring as a symbolic departure of winter, represents a similar case in point. It may be a straw-and-rag dummy and a coveted object for adolescent ‘pyromaniacs’, but it also may be an old Slavic or even Indo-European goddess of winter and death, which in the times of hardship was blamed for the hunger and cold. Such an explanation will make the young person set it on fire and throw it into the river, just as their ancestors did, but they will also know why they do it and will be aware of participating in the transmission of tradition.

Reducing tradition to abstract notion does not favour conveying it to others. Painting eggs for Easter has no chance with Play Station 3 or the numerous film channels... unless we convince the young generation that the painted eggs are not merely colourful bits of decoration but a symbol of renewing life, hope and spring — after all, in nature this is the time when birds lay eggs and brood. The fun element is by no means unimportant in conveying tradition. Painting eggs or folksy paper cut-outs are a splendid opportunity to let imagination run free. The motifs on the eggs and in the cut-outs obviously have their canon, but nothing stands in the way of including elements of fairy tales or even mass culture. Purchase of ready-made eggs or “made in china” Easter palms becomes a mere facade, a blown egg, which is doomed to oblivion. However, children will not easily forget a visit to an open-air ethnographic museum, where they have the opportunity to see the “genuine” painting of eggs. A similar role may be played by the elderly invited to the school, someone’s grandmothers or grandfathers, who will incite the imagination with their tales of the old days, or about specific manifestations of social and cultural life. In this context, the sphere of language is of paramount importance: the antiquated vocabulary may appear in a living, authentic fashion among the young, even if it is only during classes. This creates the opportunity of experiencing one’s own culture with the assistance of others; as Berger and Luckmann observed, “The most important manner of experiencing others is personal contact, which is a prototypical situation in social interaction”<sup>11</sup>. This results from the fact that “*Homo sapiens* is always and to the same degree a *homo socius*”<sup>12</sup>. The human is not capable of building

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<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 62.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 92.

a society on their own, without having previously attained knowledge about their group and acquired social-cultural competence.

Transmission of tradition should be based on two equal levels: (a) action and (b) telling/speaking. The level of action is chiefly providing an example, practicing tradition, demonstrating how things are done; active participation in the creation and consolidation of a cultural system. In turn, the level of telling/speaking is associated with instruction, explanation, and telling others about tradition and their own culture<sup>13</sup>. It seems that in transmission of cultural contents, the best effects are achieved through combination of these two levels, which does occur in almost all human communities during the process of primary and secondary socialization. Including action into telling and the other way around allows the young addressee to see, on their own as it were, the right values — important for the cultural survival of his group. Sustaining tradition in times when people often depart from it, favours perceiving one's own cultural distinctiveness in a positive light. Today, the tradition of sending holiday cards is in abeyance, supplanted by e-mails and text messages. However, this unique custom may be related in such a way as to encourage young people to create their own cards, with their wishes addressed personally to a specific person. Suggesting that one writes such wishes may not be sufficiently attractive, but when the action is combined with a tale that a holiday card was once an expression of someone's longing, love or friendship, that the arrival of the post was awaited with impatience, while the letters reached one only several times a year, that the colourful cards could be the most beautiful present — the interest in making it may be aroused. Modification of that tradition may also involve preparing holiday cards in an electronic version. Such solution would be chiefly addressed to young, internet literate persons, for whom the possibility of choosing any form and content of the wishes would be an weighty argument in favour of keeping that tradition alive. One should nevertheless draw attention to the fact that the contents of the wishes should be in line with the cultural system and tally with the moral values of a given group. It would be difficult not to notice the holiday wishes sent via e-mail or text messages which contain witty poems; the poems, copied and pasted reach thousands of successive addressees in an unchanged form. And although I think that modification of tradition is a natural phenomenon, or even an indicated one given

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<sup>13</sup> F. Ziemiński, *Istota i ewolucja pojęcia tradycja — dzieci i młodzież w świecie tradycji*, [in:] B. Dymara (ed.), *Dziecko...*, p. 240.

the development of technology — such solution has in my opinion little to do with maintaining tradition.

Another example of a very important and widespread Polish tradition is decorating the tree for Christmas. There is no doubt that it is practiced in the majority of Polish households and rather liked. Regardless of whether we opt for the “classic” look, with embellishments in many colours and form, or the “modern” one, i.e. following the current trends (only violet or gold decorations), the tradition creates a central, holiday-related spot at home. One may use the occasion to tell why a tree and not, let us say, a chair is decorated, and it would be worthwhile to weave in a related family story, if such exists. My daughter is told a story of my grandmother who, as a little girl during World War II, awaited each Christmas and the tree, despite the terrible circumstances and the fact that there was nothing to decorate the tree with. Besides the tree, the decorations and the presents, even waiting for that day represented a value. The time spent together, the Christmas stories and the solemn atmosphere were a successful alternative to the present ubiquitous consumerism. The joint signing of carols and talking about Christmas included those elements which characterise most utterances in human communities: (1) content, (2) emotional attitude towards oneself, (3) emotional attitude towards other participants of the conversation and (4) an appeal, wish or moral.

Talking about Christmas, one should not fail to mention the abundance of figures bringing Christmas presents in Poland. *Mikołaj*, *Gwiazdor*, *Dzieciątko* or *Dziadek Mróz* are the most popular. Children quickly stop believing in the magic of those figures, but the value which supports the preservation of tradition is explaining the reasons behind the diversity. The children from Małopolska who wait for *Dzieciątko*, will gladly listen to the tales about *Gwiazdor* from Greater Poland and Cuiavia or *Św. Mikołaj* coming into the house through the chimney.

The same mechanism may be observed while practicing other traditions: on Easter Monday, called “*lany poniedziałek*”, Poles celebrate the custom of *Śmigus-Dyngus*. In order to observe the tradition, it is sufficient for most to know when to sprinkle others with water (sometimes all too excessively). The important thing is that it happens on that particular day, while the reason why it is done is of lesser significance. There is no doubt that enculturation, or the specific adaptational process is an indispensable tool for an individual which enables them to function in their own culture. At this point, it should be noted that *śmigus-dyngus* in Poland varies greatly depending on the region. While *śmigus* is associated with sprinkling people with water, *dyngus* largely

meant sham flogging with twigs or osiers<sup>14</sup>. In certain areas of Poland the two were practiced together (Kashubia, Cuiavia). The shared feature of all kinds of *śmigus-dyngus* is the day when this custom is observed (Easter Monday) and probably its meaning: the flogging with twigs and/or sprinkling was supposed to ensure health and beauty, success with men to girls and fertility to women. It may be surmised that the meaning is associated with the very comprehensive symbolic of water.

The knowledge about lay traditions may also be conveyed through theatre, shows, stage performances at school. Just as the aforementioned nativity plays, such forms are widely popular with children. At the same time, the little actors may be told about tradition and history, so that they are more conscious of the roles they play, and thereby bolster the historical memory of the audience, most often consisting of parents. Children know princesses and knights, but not all know that armour was usually so heavy that the knight needed another person to put it on. This may be told and shown — not necessarily in a serious form. All kinds of poems, rhymes, counting rhymes, proverbs and guessing games will perform a similar function. As regards those, one should make certain beforehand that the child correctly understands all the words they have memorised.

Yet another element of tradition building and teaching history are historical re-enactments. The numbers of their aficionados steadily grows, including both active participants and the audience group. The dynamic and detailed shows are excellent means to convey content which most find boring when taught traditionally. The organisers of such re-enactments engender a situation where the very tale about specific battles and places which are important for the local community becomes a tradition. More and more frequently, when celebrating anniversary of local events, urban games are organised, where the participating young people have to demonstrate specific historical knowledge as well as communication and team-working skills. It seems that this new type of telling tradition is accepted by the young with particular willingness. Building historical memory by means of a contemporary tool such as historical re-enactment carries a range of risks as well. Nowadays, production of numerous gadgets and props to conduct a re-enactment may be a good idea for business. And as long as the economic aim of such production does not contradict the social goal, i.e. transmission of cultural contents, the activity is admissible. However, combining business with socially disapproved cultural contents arouses justified

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<sup>14</sup> Z. Przybylak, *Wielkanoc w polskim domu*, Poznań 2005, p. 34.

concern and opposition. Take for instance the manufacturing of Nazi artefacts, whose largest European producer is Poland. The deluge of Nazi objects may induce an unhealthy fascination with dangerous ideologies in a young person whose cultural development is not yet complete. It is therefore important that young people are provided with appropriate historical information, with the gadgets skilfully set in a cultural context.

Family photographs and film recordings are a splendid addition to the narratives about cultural traditions. Description of pictures is an excellent source of interesting stories: mother in a wedding dress, father on a motorbike or a great grandfather on a horse. Family stories told by parents and grandparents, combined with the symbolic and customs recorded via different media are embedded in children's memory and become an element of family tradition which is passed on from generation to generation.

Young people frequently complain that visiting museums, where the cultural heritage is gathered, is terribly boring. More and more often, museologists try to cater to the contemporary expectations, and the present-day exhibitions are more accessible to the visitors, e.g. through the opportunity to touch some of the exhibits. The exhibitions employ multimedia and the visitors do not experience boredom as their senses are constantly provoked by image and sound. The state-of-the-art manner of transmitting tradition is well represented in the recently created Museum of the Warsaw Uprising. Visit in such a place, where one may feel as if in the thick of those dramatic, wartime events, may provide an incentive to seek one's own assessment of history later on. Young people do not take active part in the recent, well publicised debates concerning the contradictory evaluations of the Warsaw Uprising. Visiting modern exhibitions, where history can be touched, where images and sound speak about tradition is undoubtedly one of the best methods of teaching history.

Young people may be prepared for a visit to the museum by being encouraged to create a collection of their own: post stamps, stones, boxes etc. Amassing "treasure" and the narrative concerning that collection, the discovery of new artefacts, the birth of stories, sometimes funny ones, may be an excellent introduction to visiting serious exhibitions, which after all did not spring from nothing: some exhibits were excavated, others were purchased, some were bargained for, acquired as a gift or inheritance. Young people will have the opportunity to approach it from a completely different perspective. Similar effect is achieved with the reconstruction of former settlements (Biskupin, Huta Szklana), or Poland's numerous open-air ethnographic museums, where the participants of the events organised by those museums may travel back in time

in a way: through clothes, furnishings and tools, buildings, food etc. Minting a coin, making a clay vessel, weaving a strip of fabric or baking bread according to a traditional recipe may be an incredible experience on the one hand, while on the other — through action and telling — an unforgettable lesson about old traditions. The matter conveyed here not only includes objects and cultural contents but more importantly, behaviours. Emulating those behaviours and “forwarding” them to the subsequent generations is a process of perpetuating culture.

The tangible and the mundane may also prove greatly effective in the transmission of cultural contents. In Polish culture, bread has immense symbolic potential. Children bring sandwiches to school everyday. Bread has been in evidence always and everywhere; it is the most frequently purchased, basic foodstuff. The fact may be made a part of the tale that bread (pancake-like) was a nutritional staple with old Slavs. Its popularity stemmed from the fact that at the beginning the flat bread was used as a plate on which the main meal would be placed<sup>15</sup>. This has not changed, since bread can be eaten with everything.

The successive generations provide us with the information about the knowledge of our ancestors. By adding our own contribution to that knowledge, we shape the image of our culture and society for the future generations. Naturally, it has to be remembered that today we are facing both intense cultural individualisation as well as unification. The former is a result of chiefly passive, inactive reception of information about culture — we develop ourselves but not the group; the latter stems from the widespread access to technology and intercultural contact<sup>16</sup>. However, one may attempt to interpret those issues in a slightly different manner. In my opinion, one can hardly agree with the thesis that technology favours cultural unification. I believe that in the positive dimension, technology enables personalization of universal solutions (e.g. personal settings, custom skins, avatars), but in the negative dimension leads to alienation (addicted gamers, geeks, hackers etc.) Unless the emergence of a community of alienated weirdoes may be seen as cultural unification.

Therefore, if we assume that our objective is cultural survival by means of practicing tradition, it is necessary to bridge the gap between one and the other

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<sup>15</sup> H. Lis, P. Lis, *Kuchnia Słowian. O żywności, potrawach i nie tylko...*, Kraków 2009, p. 211.

<sup>16</sup> P. Dahlig, *Teatr ludowy — rodowód i współczesność*, [in:] J. Adamowski, J. Stych (ed.), *Tradycja...*, p. 164.

aspect as part of intergenerational relationships. Reaching the young generation whilst teaching about culture is a difficult task. Resorting to the latest technology which facilitates imaging of the transmitted content is not sufficient. The language, or narrative combined with image may prove more efficacious. This may be notion related to “invented tradition” by Hobsbawm, who drew attention to the practicing of specific behaviours “[...] which once were a set of socially accepted or respected rituals and symbolic rules, conveying the memory of behavioural values and norms by repeating them, which automatically presupposes their link with the past [...]”<sup>17</sup>. Such “invented tradition” is a result of variedly motivated departure from specific customs, which does not mean that they are replaced by void. Their remnants, or certain traces, may become that bridge by means of which past and present may be connected<sup>18</sup>.

In the context of tradition, intergenerational transmission is conditioned by the cultural specificity of a given group. Still, regardless of whether the group concerned inhabits a village, lives from hunting, or dwells in a large city — the transmission remains exceptionally significant. In the course of their life, an individual encounters various elements of culture, including various traditions which may be variedly approached: as small or great ones. In adverse circumstances, the knowledge of their nature may pass by unseen, as it were<sup>19</sup>. Skilful use of language in narratives about the diversity of traditions is a key to effective intergenerational transmission. Especially today, we should pay attention to the potential risks stemming from speaking about tradition in an inappropriate manner, which features oblique statements or mental shortcuts. This applies to such situations as the anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald, or the 1920 Battle of Warsaw, which may reinforce stereotypes. Lack of information about the historical and social context of those times poses a threat that the division into “good” Poles and “bad” Germans and Russians will become more profound. In such situations, interdisciplinary cooperation of experts representing various fields is not to be underestimated. Shortage of such cooperation is poignantly exemplified by the turbulent post-war years and the frequent pogroms of Jews at the time. The dormant Polish anti-Semitism, particularly powerful among the peasants and workers, coupled with the hardships following the war, was

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<sup>17</sup> W. J. Burszta, *Antropologia kultury. Tematy, teorie, interpretacje*, Poznań 1998, p. 170.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 170.

<sup>19</sup> B. Dymara, *Tradycje, obyczaje i obrzędy w edukacji dziecka. Poliestetyczne przestrzenie edukacji*, [in:] B. Dymara (ed.), *Dziecko...*, p. 126.

justified in a misapprehended tradition. The repeated pogroms of the Jewish populace were provoked by the rumours of Polish children being kidnapped by Jews to make matzoh. Those allegedly “ritual” murders were an excuse for ethnic cleansing. The emerging state structures, intelligentsia and Catholic clergy all failed to fulfil their task in this case. Although members of intelligentsia timidly attempted to censure the recurring excesses, the church hierarchy did nothing to prevent them from happening. The potential impact of the clergy was demonstrated in Częstochowa by bishop Teodor Kubina, whose unyielding stance and explicit condemnation of false accusations of ritual murder levelled against Jews, prevented any tragic events in Częstochowa.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that most examples and solutions presented in this paper have already been successfully applied. This is very optimistic, since it permits one to expect that in the future such projects as experimental archaeology, workshops at the museums, or broadly taken participation in cultural life will develop and perhaps will become an alternative to young people vacillating between the computer and happening. Nevertheless, if this is to succeed, we must realise the tremendous importance of the quality of language, by means of which subsequent generations are reached. Presently, with the virtually unlimited access to enormous amount of information, it is difficult to expect from the younger generations that they will adhere to tradition only upon being told that it should be so. Without adequate explanation, without presenting arguments we will not reach the goal of practicing tradition. The contemporary intergenerational transmission is actually a negotiation — it requires that both “givers” and “recipients” of culture continually modify their reciprocal expectations. And since the cultural contents are primarily conveyed by means of language, the language should be flexibly adapted to the present-day requirements. “One of the most vivid manifestations of one’s integration with culture is gaining command of the language of one’s surroundings [...] language is [...] an image of certain social convention which is continuously perfected and modified, in keeping with the transformations taking place in the world”<sup>20</sup>.

Regardless of how the process of enculturation proceeds, it makes us interpret the surrounding reality through the prism of what we have learned: as children, as adults, as fully mature persons. At any stage, the knowledge acquired so far may be reassessed and the point of view changed. Hence, enculturation is a ceaseless process and tallies perfectly with the saying “you live and learn”.

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<sup>20</sup> R. Schultz, *Antropologiczne podstawy...*, p. 248.



**Magdalena Ziółkowska-Kuflńska**

**TRADYCJA — JAK O NIEJ MÓWIĆ, JAK JĄ PRZEKAZYWAĆ?  
FUNKCJA JĘZYKA W PRZEKAZIE MIĘDZYGENERACYJNYM**

**Streszczenie**

Artykuł ukazuje główne funkcje języka, które pełni w społeczności. Specyfika języka w procesie przekazywania treści kulturowych jest w ostatnich latach szczególnie istotna ze względu na współwystępowanie przekazów językowych z całą gamą zachowań kulturowych. Do najistotniejszych kwestii należy bez wątpienia sposób, w jaki kolejne pokolenia dowiadują się o tradycjach lokalnych oraz to, jak będą tę wiedzę pielęgnować i przekazywać dalej. W artykule pokazano konkretne przykłady tradycji, które niekoniecznie muszą wiązać się ze skostniałymi sposobami przekazów kulturowych, wręcz odwrotnie: powinny i mogą inspirować młode pokolenia do ich “nabywania”.