

Język polski  
L-Ilsien Pollakk  
La lengua polaca  
A lengyel nyelv  
Lenkų kalba  
Língua polaca  
La lingua polacca  
Poljski jezik  
Polnisch  
Le Polonais  
Polska  
Πολωνική Γλώσσα  
Det polske sprog  
Polský jazyk  
Pol'ský jazyk  
Poļu valoda  
Poola keel  
De Poolse taal  
Puolan kieli

# The Polish Language



## Contributors:

The Polish text by ..... prof. dr hab. Walery Pisarek  
Czech translation by ..... Teresa Piotrowska-Małek  
Danish translation by ..... Andrzej Zalewski  
Dutch translation by ..... Agnieszka Bienias  
English translation by ..... Marta Usiekniewicz  
Estonian translation by ..... Aarne Puu  
Finnish translation by ..... Sirkka Ojaniemi  
French translation by ..... dr Wanda Jadacka  
German translation by ..... Andreas W. Meger  
Greek translation by ..... Przemysław Kordos  
Hungarian translation by ..... Ildikó Kozak  
Italian translation by ..... Maciej Jaskot  
Latvian translation by ..... Ieva Palaša  
Lithuanian translation by ..... dr Ana Romančuk  
Maltese translation by ..... Carmel Azzopardi  
Portuguese translation by ..... Agata Adamska  
Slovak translation by ..... doc. PhDr. Marta Pančíková, PhD.  
Slovenian translation by ..... Jasmina Šuler-Galos  
Spanish translation by ..... Magdalena Adamczyk  
Swedish translation by ..... Grażyna Tatar

Design by ..... Tomasz Korwin-Szymanowski  
Edited by ..... Agata Hącia

Published by The Council for the Polish Language  
Warsaw 2007

ISBN: 978-83-916268-2-5



**The Council for the Polish Language**  
ul. Nowy Świat 72  
00-330 Warszawa  
[www.rjp.pl](http://www.rjp.pl)



This publication has been partially founded by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage,  
the Senate of the Republic of Poland and Langenscheidt Polska



# The Polish Language

**W**ith 38 million speakers in Poland, 2 million elsewhere in Europe and around 8 million native speakers outside Europe, the Polish language is one of the 25 most commonly spoken languages of the world. It is one of the 10 most widely spoken languages in Europe and the sixth language of the EU according to the number of native speakers. It is used, with various degrees of fluency, by almost 50 million people. According to “Languages of the World”, Polish is spoken by citizens in 21 countries and is the mother tongue (first language) of 45 million people.

**O**ver 37 million native users of Polish live in Poland, where language minority communities constitute no more than 3-4% of society, i.e. less than 1 million people. According to “Europeans and their Languages”, 98% of Polish citizens claim that Polish is their native language, while members of the language minority communities are mostly bilingual, i.e. they also speak Polish. The members of the younger generation also usually read and write in Polish.

**P**olish – together with Czech, Slovakian, Kashubian, Upper and Lower Sorabian and Polabian (a dead language) - belongs to the West-Slavic subgroup of the Indo-European language family which, in turn, is divided into two subcategories: the *satem* and the *kentum* languages. *Satem* languages include Polish as well as other Slavic, Baltic and Iranian languages (cp. Czech *srdce*, Lithuanian *širdis*, Polish *serce* with English *heart*, French *cœur*, Greek καρδιά, Latin *cor* and German *Herz*).

**T**here are several features which distinguish Polish from the other West-Slavic languages, for example:

1. substitution of the former sonorant (syllabic) consonants *r* and *l* by *ar* and *ier* or *il*. (cf. Polish *sarna* ‘roe deer’, *kark* ‘neck’, *pierścień* ‘ring’, *wilk* ‘wolf’ with Czech *srna*, *krk*, *prsteň*, *vlk*);
2. the shift of the palatal consonants *t’*, *d’* and *r’* to the palatal affricates *ć*, *dź* and palatal fricative *rz*, respectively;
3. the regular, paroxytone stress and the absence of vowel quality and intonation (with the exception of expressive intonation).

Gwarzące różnym językiem narody



## Special Features of the Polish Language

**Phonologically**, Polish is noted for its limited number of vowels (represented by the letters: *a, e, o, u, i, y, ę* and *q*, with no distinction in vowel quantity and the rather large number of consonants, which often appear in clusters. Despite the relatively small number of vowels, the Polish language includes two which do not appear in any other modern Slavic languages and which are also rare in European languages. These sounds existed in the Proto-Slavonic period and are still used in modern Polish. They are the nasal *q* (contrary to the spelling it is a nasal *o* and not a nasal *a*) and *ę*. However, in spoken Polish the nasality sometimes disappears. At the end of the word *ę* is pronounced as *e*, e.g. *lubie cie* 'I like you' despite the spelling *lubię cię*, while *q* conserves its nasal character, e.g. *z taką ładną książką* 'with such a nice book'. Word-medially the two vowels retain their nasality only in front of fricatives (in spelling *w, f, s, z, sz, ż, ś, ź* and *ch*), whereas before other consonants (*p, b, d, t, c, dz, cz, dż, ć, dź, k*) they are pronounced as [e] or [o] respectively with a separate nasal consonant - labial, dental or palatal according to the consonant which follows. For example, *wąsy* 'moustache' and *węch* '(sense of) smell' are spelled and pronounced with a nasal vowel, but *ząbek* 'tooth' (diminutive), *zęby* 'teeth', *wędka* 'fishing rod' *pięć* 'five' are only spelled with the nasal vowel, but are pronounced *zombek, zemby, wentka, pieńć* respectively. When in front of *l* or *ł*, both *q* and *ę* lose their nasality, thus despite the spelling *wziął* '(he) took' and *wzięli* '(they masculine) took' the pronunciation is *wzioł* and *wzieli*.

The impression that a Polish text is full of consonants is mostly due to spelling. Sounds which cannot be rendered using the Latin alphabet are spelled using a digraph, e.g. the digraph *sz* and *cz* render the sounds *š* (English *sh*) and *č* (English *ch*) respectively. Some sentences are invented especially to amaze and frighten foreigners, such as:

*W gąszczu szczawiu we Wrzeszczu*

'In the clump of sorrel in Wrzeszcz.'

*Klaszczą kleszcze na deszczu.*

'The ticks are clapping in the rain.'

or

*W Szczecbrzeszynie chrząszcz i trzmiel brzmią w trzcinie.*

'In Szczecbrzeszyn the beetle and the bumble-bee are buzzing in the reeds.'

Surprisingly, the sentence:

*Mali po polu hulali i pili kakao.*

'The little ones capered around the field and drank cocoa'

is also a text in Polish.

**H**owever, it is not the pronunciation of *š* (English *sh*) and *č* (English *ch*), nor the cluster of the two *šč* (English *shch*) that are the most difficult for foreigners or speakers of other Slavic languages. The greatest difficulty lies in the distinction between fricatives: *s* (e.g. *sam* ‘alone’), *s’* (e.g. *sinologia* ‘sinology’), *ś* (e.g. *śmiech* ‘laugh’) and *š* spelled as *sz* (e.g. *szpilka* ‘pin’). The same applies to the affricates *c* (e.g. *cały* ‘whole’), *c’* (in loan words, e.g. *cito*), *ć* (e.g. *ćma* ‘moth’) and *č* spelled as *cz* (e.g. *czapka* ‘hat’).

**F**inal consonants are always devoiced, thus the pronunciation is [grat] despite the spelling *grad* ‘hail’. The situation changes if the word following the final consonant starts with a voiced consonant. In this case, the final consonant retains its voicing whereas a voiceless one becomes voiced. However, when the following word starts with a vowel or a sonorant (i.e. *l*, *r*, *m* and *n*), voicing or devoicing of the final consonant is subject to regional variation. Then, speakers of Polish adopt two different practices. In the North (Mazovia including Warsaw) devoicing occurs (e.g. *brat ojca* ‘father’s brother’, *brzek lasu* ‘the edge of the forest’), while in Małopolska, including Kraków, the final consonants are voiced (e.g. *brad ojca*, *brzeg lasu*). This phenomenon is called sandhi and is present in other languages, e.g. in British English.

**T**he word stress is regular, usually falling on the penultimate syllable (there are regular exceptions to this rule). The words are usually polysyllabic. Their length is due to the inflectional endings, as well as to the affixes added to modify the meaning of the word or to mark it emotionally.

**P**olish is an **inflected language**:

- the nouns, adjectives, numerals and pronouns have:
  - seven case forms (nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, instrumental, locative, vocative)
  - two numbers (singular and plural)
  - three genders in the singular
  - two genders in the plural
- the verb has various forms depending on the person, number, grammatical gender, tense, mood, voice and aspect.

**C**ompared to the Germanic or Romance languages, Polish has a complex **category of aspect**, which is considered derivational rather than inflectional. This acts as a form of compensation for a relatively limited range of tenses. Verbal prefixes and suffixes mark the perfective or imperfective aspect (e.g. *zrobić* ‘have done’ as opposed to *robić* ‘do’). They also mark other aspectual values, e.g.



zrobiłem  
zrobiłam  
zrobiłeś

zrobiłaś  
zrobiło  
zrobiliśmy

zrobiłyśmy  
zrobiliście  
zrobiłyście

repetition (e.g. *czytywać* ‘to read from time to time’), the initial stage of a process (e.g. *zaśpiewać* ‘(to start) to sing’), that something has become a habit (e.g. *rozpić się* ‘to become a drunk’), the short or long duration of an activity, e.g. *potaćńczyć* ‘to dance for a short while’ and *przetańczyć* ‘to dance through’, etc. It is the general opinion that aspect is the most challenging element of Polish as a foreign language.

**A**nother special feature of the Polish language is its **system of numerals**, which are inflected both for case and gender. Besides the cardinal and ordinal numerals, the language also has multiplicative, indefinite, fractional, manifold and collective numerals. **The form of the numeral is always dependent on the thing being counted**, thus Poles say: *dwa konie* ‘two horses’, but *dwaj chłopcy* // *dwóch chłopców* ‘two boys’, *dwie dziewczynki* ‘two girls’ and *dwoje dzieci* ‘two children’. The system is much simpler now than it used to be and forms such as *półtora* ‘one and a half’, *półtrzecia* ‘two and a half’, *półczwarta* ‘three and a half’ etc., as well as *samowtór* ‘just the two’, *samotrzec* ‘just the three’, *samoczwart* ‘just the four’ have ceased to exist.

**D**ue to complex inflection, **the word order in sentences is relatively free**. It does, however, have its restrictions not due to grammatical, but mainly to stylistic or logical factors. Therefore, it is possible to say *Ojciec czyta książkę córce*, *Córce czyta książkę ojciec*, as well as *Książkę czyta ojciec córce* or and even *Czyta książkę ojciec córce* ‘The father is reading a book to his daughter’. All the sentences above are grammatically correct and acceptable, although only the first does not need a special context to sound natural.

## **T**he Alphabet

As a result of its conversion to Christianity from paganism in the 10th century, Poland adopted the Roman rite (indirectly, through the Czech kingdom), thus becoming a part of the western world. This had a major and long-lasting impact on the language; the Latin alphabet was first used to record simple words, then sentences and finally whole texts in Polish. As early as in the 15th century a spelling convention was devised in order to record sounds which did not have Latin counterparts. The contemporary Polish alphabet has 32 characters, which are: Aa Ąą Bb Cc Ćć Dd Ee Ęę Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Łł Mm Nn Ńń Oo Óó Pp Rr Ss Śś Tt Uu Ww Yy Zz Żż Źź. Qq Vv and Xx appear in loan-words

zrobili  
zrobiły  
zrobiony

zrobiona  
zrobione  
zrobieni

zrobiwszy  
zrobiono  
zrobi się



## Linguistic Variants

In relation to the number of speakers, Standard Polish (or the Cultural Variant, also called the Polish Literary Language) is territorially quite homogenous. The present diversification is due more to social and professional factors and register differences. Currently, the most important phenomenon is the contrast between the official (public) register and colloquial (private) language. The dialectal differences are gradually disappearing, except among the rural population.

Based on both historical and linguistic grounds, the territory inhabited by Polish speakers can be divided into four dialectal zones, represented in the following diagram):



Of the four, only the Silesian Dialect is not limited to rural areas and is still in use. Despite its inner diversity there is a tendency to consider it a regional language. A variant of the Małopolan Dialect used by the Tatra Mountains' highlanders (the Podhalanian Dialect) is still widely used. Kashubian, which was once considered by linguists to be a dialect of Polish, has now been recognized as a separate regional language.

Wpadam do Soplicowa jak w centrum polszczyzny



## Linguistic consciousness

Since the 14th century the inhabitants of Poland have been aware of their linguistic identity – even then, they described themselves as the people of the Polish language (homines linguae Polonicae). In 1140, Jakub Parkoszowic, a Professor at the Kraków Academy, compared those people who strove to preserve and improve the language to the knights defending Poland's frontiers. Furthermore, printers in the 16th century claimed that their sole reason for publishing books in Polish was their love of the language.



This attitude towards their native language enabled Poles to maintain their identity during the partitions in the 19th century (between Russia, Prussia, and Austria). Most of the poets of that period identified their country with the Polish language. According to some studies, at the end of the 20th century, 92% of Poles considered the language to be one of the principal bonds within the nation; more importantly, this fact superseded that of a common history, territory, religion or even the State.

*A niechaj narodowie wždy postronni znają,  
iż Polacy nie gęsi, iż swój język mają*

## The History of the Polish Language

The Polish Literary Language derives from two West-Slavic dialects. One was used in the area of Wielkopolska (with centres in Gniezno and Poznań), which had been inhabited by the Polan tribe since the 10th century. The second was spoken by the Wislan tribe which settled in a region that later became Małopolska, with its centre situated in Kraków. Mazovia played a smaller role in the development of early Polish, although Warsaw was the seat of the royal court from the 17th century and the capital of the state from 1918.

The question of whether it was the Wielkopolan or the Małopolan dialect which was the base for the contemporary language has been a subject of discussion for many years. Currently, the consensus is that the influence of the two dialects varied according to the political dominance of either of the regions. Since the Polish state originated primarily from the Wielkopolan region, the first inter-tribal language had to emerge there. However, when Kraków became the political and cultural centre, as well as the seat of the royal court, the language was influenced by the regional Małopolan dialect. The Eastern lands played an important role in the development of the Polish language in the 18th and 19th centuries because, at that time, many of the prominent authors lived in that region.

The earliest Polish records date from the 12th century; these include proper names of people and places featuring in a Latin document from 1136. The oldest completed texts written in Polish are from sermons delivered in the second part of the 14th century. The oldest, longest, recorded text is a translation of a Latin Psalter dating from 1380. The first manuscript translation of the Bible dates from 1450. A printed version appeared over 100 years later, in 1561. The translator could already



Nie miecz, nie tarcza - bronią Języka,  
Lecz - arcydzieła!



make use of Jan Marmelusz's Latin-German-Polish dictionary published in 1526. The first Polish grammar, entitled *Polonicae grammatices institutio* was compiled in 1568 by a Polonised Frenchman, Piter Statorius Stojenski. 1661 saw the beginning of the newspaper *Merkuriusz Polski* published by the court – as was the French *La Gazette* which appeared 30 years earlier.

**T**he contemporary Polish language was shaped in the 16th century, mainly due to the poets and writers of that time: Biernat of Lublin (ca. 1465- after 1529), Mikołaj Rej (1505–1569), Jan Kochanowski (1530–1584) and Piotr Skarga (1536–1612). However, its uniformity is the result of the work of printers from Kraków and Silesia: e.g. Jan Haller, Florian Ungler, Maciej Wierzbęta, Hieronim Wietor, Maciej and Marek Szarffenberg.

**P**eople's linguistic consciousness has always been strongly influenced by revered writers, e.g. the poet, Ignacy Krasicki 1735–1801), and later Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849) and Aleksander Fredro (1793–1876). Later still Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916), and Bolesław Prus (1847–1912), also contributed to the general linguistic consciousness of the Poles. It would seem that it was the literature, the press and scientific publications that enabled the Poles to preserve their linguistic unity during the more than 120-year-period during which Poland was partitioned among Russia, Prussia and Austria. The impact of literature is not that strong in today's world, and the language changes result mostly from the influence of the media and advertising.

**F**our Polish writers have been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Henryk Sienkiewicz in 1905, Władysław Reymont in 1924, Czesław Miłosz in 1980 and Wisława Szymborska in 1996.



Z językać wszystkie mądrości  
Nauk wszelkich ich chytryści,  
Wszelka sprawa każdej rzeczy  
Przez język się zawsze toczy.



## The Influence of Foreign Languages

In the beginning, the Polish language developed together with other Slavic dialects. With time, it set out on an independent course, expanding its vocabulary by adding borrowings from different languages. The oldest loanwords date from pre-historic times and come from Iranian (e.g. *bóg* ‘god’, *raj* ‘paradise’) and Goth (e.g. *chleb* ‘bread’, *książę* ‘prince’). The Middle Ages (11th to 15th centuries) saw a wave of Czech, Latin and German borrowings. Czech and Latin loanwords related mostly to the Christian faith and the organization of the Church (e.g. *parafia* ‘parish’, *proboszcz* ‘parish priest’, as well as *kościół* ‘church’, *opat* ‘abbot’, *przeor* ‘prior’). Some of the words underwent phonetic changes to resemble the Czech, which was considered more elegant. This accounts for the forms *wesele* ‘wedding reception’ and *serce* ‘heart’ instead of *wiesiele* and *sierce*. From German, the language acquired technical and administrative terminology, e.g. *dach* ‘roof’, *cegła* ‘brick’, *burmistrz* ‘mayor’, *ratusz* ‘town hall’, *wójt* ‘alderman’.

The 16th century saw the increasing influence of Italian and French (e.g. *pałac* ‘palace’, *kapela* ‘a band of musicians’, *kalafior* ‘cauliflower’, *kasa* ‘till’, *opera* ‘opera’ and *adres* ‘address’, *bukiet* ‘bouquet’, *awans* ‘promotion’, *afery* ‘scandal’, *krem* ‘cream’, *parasol* ‘umbrella’). This influence was present until the end of the 19th century. The same century witnessed the impact of the languages of the Partitioning powers, especially in the areas of technical, legal and political vocabulary. The loanwords from German include for example: *obcas* ‘heel’, *szmenc* ‘scrap or junk’, *hebel* ‘plane’, *klajster* ‘paste’, *wajcha* ‘lever’, *kurort* ‘health resort’, as well as loan translations, such as *dworzec kolejowy* ‘railway station’ (cf. German *Bahnhof*), and *listonosz* ‘mailman’ (German *Briefträger*, lit. ‘letter carrier’). Russian influences, which continued into the 20th century can be seen in words such as *turma* ‘prison’, *zsyłka* ‘deportation’, *gulag* ‘gulag’, *łagier* ‘soviet labour-camp’, *kołchoz* ‘kolkhoz’, as well as in *dacha* ‘dacha’, *samowar* ‘samovar’ and *sputnik*. In the second half of the 20th century English became the main source of borrowings. This is particularly visible in the following domains: technical and scientific terminology (*serwer* ‘server’, *skaner* ‘scanner’ and *trend* ‘trend’), business (e.g. *biznes* ‘business’, *boom*, *leasing*, *menadżer* ‘manager’), sports (e.g. *aut* ‘out’, *gol* ‘goal’, *tenis* ‘tennis’, *walkower* ‘walk-over’), entertainment (e.g. *long-play*, *playback*, *song*) and daily life (e.g. *piercing*, *grill*, *hamburger*).

The Polish lexicon was also influenced by other languages, such as Arabic (e.g. *alcohol*, *alchemia* ‘alchemy’, *cyfra* ‘digit’), Ukrainian (e.g. *bohater* ‘hero’), Turkish (e.g. *janczar* ‘janissary’, *kajdany* ‘manacles’, *pantofel* ‘shoes/slippers’), Hungarian (e.g. *dobosz* ‘drummer boy’, *szataś* ‘shack’), Finnish (e.g. *sauna*), Spanish (e.g. *hacjenda* ‘hacienda’), Dutch (e.g. *majtek* ‘mate’), Icelandic (e.g. *gejzer* ‘geyser’), Japanese (e.g. *hara-kiri*, *karaoke*, *sake*), Norwegian (e.g. *slalom*, *fiord*), Swedish (e.g. *skansen* ‘open-air ethnographic museum’) and many more.

## Legal Status

In 1918 Poland regained its independence after 120 years of being partitioned. Almost at the same time the legal status of the Polish language was established: on the 31 July 1924 the Sejm passed an **Act** on the national and official language of the state and local administration. The act stated that “the Polish language was the official language of the Republic of Poland. It should be used at all levels of state and local administration, both in State and Foreign Service.” However, the act allowed the members of ethnic minorities the right to communicate with local administration in their own language. After the Second World War, the act was replaced by **adecree** (of 1945) similar to its predecessor, except that it passed over the rights of the language minority communities.

In 1997 the National Assembly adopted the new constitution of the Republic of Poland, which was the first ever constitution to state that “The Polish Language is the official language of the Republic of Poland” (Art. 27). Two years later, on 7 October 1999, the Sejm passed the Polish Language Act which, with some changes, is still obligatory to this day.

The major changes to be introduced were:

- the possibility of using a language other than Polish in commerce and in employment contracts (The Amendment to the Polish Language Act of 2 April 2004)
- and the possibility of using minority and ethnic languages in local administration in districts in which the users of the regional variant numbers more than 20% (The Ethnic and National Minority Act of 6 January 2005).

idę  
idziesz  
idzie  
idą  
idziemy  
idziecie  
idą  
idący  
idąca  
idące  
idąc  
szedł  
szła  
szli  
szły

Oto dom mój:  
cztery ściany wiersza  
W mojej pięknej ojczyźnie-polszczyźnie



## he Council for the Polish Language

**T**he Council was created in 1996 as one of the Task Force Committees of the Praesidium of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN). It comprises 38 members appointed for a four-year term of office by the President of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Half the members are linguists, whereas the other half comprises representatives from other disciplines, such as medicine, physics, and also people representing fields such as literature, the theatre or journalism. According to the Polish language Act of 1999, this body is an advisory body concerned with the use of the language. Its responsibilities include:

- presenting a bi-annual report to Parliament on the observance of the Polish Language Act;
- expressing opinions (on its own initiative or by order of Parliament) on the use of the Polish language in the media and commerce;
- establishing the rules of orthography and punctuation;
- in addition, the Council may be asked to give advice on all language issues by all public and social institutions, societies, schools, as well as importers, producers and commercial distributors.



Gdyby Ojczyzną był  
język i mowa



## Language Minorities

The language minority communities constitute no more than 3-4% of the citizens of the Republic of Poland. The largest groups are the speakers of German, Byelorussian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Kashubian, Czech and Slovakian. There is, however, a discrepancy between the numbers given by the minorities and those resulting from the 2002 national census (vide the charts below).

The number of major national and ethnic minorities and speakers of regional languages

Language	The number of speakers according to ethnic minority communities (in thousands)	The number of speakers according to the 2002 national census (in thousands)
German	300	147
Byelorussian	240	48
Ukrainian	220	34
Kashubian	53	5
Lithuanian	25	6
Slovakian	25	2
Czech	3	3

The National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Languages Act of 2005 acknowledges 9 national minorities (Byelorussian, Czech, Slovakian, German, Lithuanian, Armenian, Russian, Ukrainian and Jewish), 4 ethnic minorities (Karaims, Lemkos, Roms and Tartars) and the Kashubian community, which uses its own regional language. The number of representatives of the minorities ranges from several dozen (Karaims) to several thousand (Germans).

The governing bodies are legally obliged to support activities leading to the maintenance and development of the minority and regional languages.

Wiernie służyłem polskiemu językowi

## School teaching in national or ethnic minority languages and in regional languages

Language	Primary Schools		Secondary Schools		High Schools	
	schools	pupils	schools	pupils	schools	pupils
<b>Total</b>	<b>553</b>	<b>32 768</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>14 252</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1563</b>
Byelorussian	23	1766	13	1029	2	827
Greek	1	21	-	-	-	-
Yiddish	1	59	-	-	-	-
Kashubian	71	3640	17	614	2	170
Lithuanian	12	409	4	196	1	74
Lemkian	21	212	10	90	1	13
German	256	24 025	75	11 391	1	121
Romani	74	856	19	91	-	-
Slovakian	6	197	3	71	-	-
Ukrainian	88	1583	56	770	7	358

According to: Mały rocznik statystyczny Polski 2005, Warsaw 2005, p. 229.

Klaszczą kleszcze  
na deszczu



## Knowledge of Foreign Languages

According to the study entitled “Europeans and their Languages” (Eurobarometer 243, January 2006), 55% of Polish citizens know at least one foreign language well enough to hold a conversation, which is the EU average. In 2001, however, only 12% of Poles declared that they were able to hold a conversation in two or more languages. At that time the most popular language was Russian (23%), followed by English (16%), German (14%) and French (2%). The numbers relating to knowledge of a particular language do change; currently the rise of English is accompanied by a fall in Russian.

**A** study conducted by TNS OBOP shows that Polish society can be divided into 3 generations according to the level of language education: more than half the younger generation (14–34 years of age) claimed to have a knowledge of at least one language, whereas only two fifths of the middle-aged (35–54 years of age) and a quarter of the older generation (over 54 years of age) could claim likewise. It should be noted that knowledge of a foreign language is also connected with one's level of education, social status and place of living, e.g. it is almost universal among young professionals (in particular among those having managerial positions).



## Language Policy

**T**hree areas are distinguishable in Poland's language policy: the first concerns the Polish language, the second, the minority languages and the third, the learning of foreign languages.

**T**he Polish Language Act stipulates the aims, scope and means of the language policy in respect of the Polish language which is both the native language of most of the country's citizens and the official language of the state which, in turn, is a common good of all Polish citizens. The Act was passed by Parliament in accordance with the preamble:

- because Polish is perceived as being a basic element of national identity and one of the nation's cultural achievements;
- taking into consideration historical experience when the invading and dominating powers fought against the Polish language in order to deprive the people of their national identity;
- recognizing the need to protect the national identity against the process of globalization;
- recognizing that Polish culture contributes to creating a common, culturally-varied Europe, and its preservation and development is possible only through the protection of the Polish Language.



# Ć

## Daj, ać ja pobruszę a ty poczywaj

**T**hese reasons justify the following responsibilities (also mentioned in the Act):

- caring for the public use of the language and improving the abilities of its speakers as well as creating conditions for proper development of the language as a tool for communicating in all aspects of life;
- promoting knowledge of the language, and its importance in Polish culture;
- propagating respect for regional dialects and languages, as well as preventing their disappearance;
- promoting the language around the world;
- providing assistance in learning the language in Poland and outside its boundaries.

**I**n its policy towards the other languages of Polish citizens, the government is obliged to reinforce intercultural dialogue, in particular to support activities aimed at preserving and developing ethnic, minority and regional languages. The Polish state guarantees the right to:

- the free use of minority languages both in public and private life;
- the dissemination and exchange of information in minority languages;
- learning about, or in, the minority language.

**B**earing in mind the increasing number and quality of institutional and private international contacts, as well as the rapid growth in political, economic and cultural international cooperation on a European and global scale, the Polish state supports the learning of foreign languages at all levels of education in regular schools and adult education institutions. Thus, the age limit for the compulsory learning of a first and later a second foreign language is being systematically lowered. A good knowledge of a minimum of one foreign language is the legal requirement for civil servants.

---

**‘Let the neighbouring nations know that Poles do not  
honk like geese, but have their own language’**

**Mikołaj Rej (1505-1569)**



## Polish Language Institutions

The following are the major, all-Poland language institutions, which are legally bound to care for the quality of communication in Polish:

**Rada Języka Polskiego przy Prezydium Polskiej Akademii Nauk**

ul. Nowy Świat 72, PL 00-330 Warszawa, tel./fax: +48 22 657 28 89  
[www.rjp.pl](http://www.rjp.pl) e-mail: [rjp@rjp.pl](mailto:rjp@rjp.pl)

**Państwowa Komisja Poświadczania Znajomości Języka Polskiego jako Obcego**

ul. Smolna 13, PL 00-370 Warszawa, tel.: + 48 22 827 94 10, fax: + 48 22 826 28 23  
[www.buwiwm.edu.pl/certyfikacja](http://www.buwiwm.edu.pl/certyfikacja) e-mail: [certyfikacja@buwiwm.edu.pl](mailto:certyfikacja@buwiwm.edu.pl)

**Towarzystwo Miłośników Języka Polskiego**

al. Mickiewicza 31, PL 31-120 Kraków, tel.: + 48 12 632 63 58  
[www.jezyk-polski.pl](http://www.jezyk-polski.pl) e-mail: [artur.czesak@wp.pl](mailto:artur.czesak@wp.pl)

**Towarzystwo Kultury Języka**

ul. Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28, PL 00-927 Warszawa, tel./fax: + 48 22 552 24 00  
[www.tkj.uw.edu.pl](http://www.tkj.uw.edu.pl) e-mail: [j.porayski-pomsta@uw.edu.pl](mailto:j.porayski-pomsta@uw.edu.pl)

The main Polish academic institution researching into both contemporary Polish and the history of Polish is:

**Instytut Języka Polskiego Polskiej Akademii Nauk**

al. Mickiewicza 31, PL 31-120 Kraków, tel./fax: +48 12 632 87 13  
[www.ijp-pan.krakow.pl](http://www.ijp-pan.krakow.pl) e-mail: [IreneuszB@poczta.ijp-pan.krakow.pl](mailto:IreneuszB@poczta.ijp-pan.krakow.pl)

Other academic institutions researching into the Polish language are:

**Instytut Filologii Polskiej Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku**

pl. Uniwersytecki 1, PL 15-420 Białystok, tel.: +48 85 745 74 46; tel./fax: +48 85 745 74 78  
<http://hum.uwb.edu.pl> e-mail: [filolog@hum.uwb.edu.pl](mailto:filolog@hum.uwb.edu.pl)

**Instytut Filologii Polskiej Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego w Bydgoszczy**

ul. Jagiellońska 11, PL 85-067 Bydgoszcz, tel.: +48 52 322 98 39, +48 52 322 16 38, +48 52 321 31 80  
<http://ukw.edu.pl/uczelnia/strona.php?id=1> e-mail: [wydzhum@hum.ukw.edu.pl](mailto:wydzhum@hum.ukw.edu.pl)

**Instytut Filologii Polskiej Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego**

ul. Wita Stwosza 55, PL 80-952 Gdańsk 5, tel.: +48 58 523 21 00, fax: +48 58 341 16 66  
[www.fh.ug.gda.pl](http://www.fh.ug.gda.pl)

**Wydział Filologiczny Uniwersytetu Śląskiego w Katowicach**

pl. Sejmu Śląskiego 1, PL 40-032 Katowice, tel.: +48 32 256 24 02, +48 32 256 24 22  
<http://venus.fil.us.edu.pl/>

**Instytut Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego**

ul. Gołębia 16, PL 31-007 Kraków, tel.: +48 12 422 05 54, 663 13 34, fax: +48 12 429 28 65  
[www.polonistyka.uj.edu.pl](http://www.polonistyka.uj.edu.pl) e-mail: [wpuj@polonistyka.uj.edu.pl](mailto:wpuj@polonistyka.uj.edu.pl)

**Instytut Filologii Polskiej Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego**

Al. Racławickie 14, PL 20-950 Lublin, tel.: +48 81 445 43 20  
[www.kul.lublin.pl/1152.html](http://www.kul.lublin.pl/1152.html)



but  
buta  
butowi  
butem  
bucie  
buty  
butów  
butom  
butami  
butach

**Wydział Humanistyczny Uniwersytetu im. Marii Skłodowskiej-Curie w Lublinie**  
pl. Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej 4, PL 20-031 Lublin  
[www.umcs.lublin.pl/index.html?akcja=str&id=169&lang=1](http://www.umcs.lublin.pl/index.html?akcja=str&id=169&lang=1)

**Wydział Filologiczny Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego**  
ul. Kościuszki nr 65, PL 90-514 Łódź, tel.: +48 42 665 52 53, fax: +48 42 665 52 54  
[www.filolog.uni.lodz.pl](http://www.filolog.uni.lodz.pl) e-mail: [filolog@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:filolog@uni.lodz.pl)

**Wydział Humanistyczny Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego w Olsztynie**  
ul. Kurta Obizta 1, PL 10-725 Olsztyn  
<http://human.uwm.edu.pl/>

**Instytut Filologii Polskiej Uniwersytetu Opolskiego**  
pl. Kopernika 11, PL 45-040 Opole, tel.: + 48 77 54 16 003, fax: +48 77 54 16002  
[www.pol.uni.opole.pl](http://www.pol.uni.opole.pl) e-mail: [filpol@uni.opole.pl](mailto:filpol@uni.opole.pl)

**Wydział Filologii Polskiej i Klasycznej Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu Collegium Maius**  
ul. Fredry 10, PL 61-701 Poznań, tel.: +48 61 829 46 92-94, fax: +48 61 829 36 41  
[www.amu.edu.pl/index.php?linkid=1966](http://www.amu.edu.pl/index.php?linkid=1966)

**Wydział Filologiczny Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego**  
al. Rejtana 16 B, PL 35-959 Rzeszów, tel.: +48 17 872 12 05, +48 17 872 12 06  
fax: +48 17 872 12 86  
[www.univ.rzeszow.pl/wydzial\\_filologii.php](http://www.univ.rzeszow.pl/wydzial_filologii.php) e-mail: [dziefil@univ.rzeszow.pl](mailto:dziefil@univ.rzeszow.pl)

**Instytut Filologii Polskiej Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego**  
al. Piastów 40b, PL 71-065 Szczecin, tel. +48 91 444 27 13; tel./fax: +48 91 444 27 12  
[www.us.szcz.pl/hum\\_ifp](http://www.us.szcz.pl/hum_ifp) e-mail: [dorlew@univ.szczecin.pl](mailto:dorlew@univ.szczecin.pl)

**Wydział Filologiczny Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu**  
ul. Fosa Staromiejska 3, PL 87-100 Toruń, tel.: +48 56 611-35-10, tel./fax: +48 56 622-66-59  
[www.fil.umk.pl](http://www.fil.umk.pl)

**Wydział Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego**  
ul. Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28, PL 00-927 Warszawa, tel.: +48 22 55 20 428  
[www.polon.uw.edu.pl](http://www.polon.uw.edu.pl)

**Wydział Nauk Humanistycznych Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego w Warszawie**  
ul. Dewajtis 5, PL 01-815 Warszawa, tel.: +48 22 561 89 03  
[www.wnh.uksw.edu.pl](http://www.wnh.uksw.edu.pl) e-mail: [polonistyka@uksw.edu.pl](mailto:polonistyka@uksw.edu.pl)

**Wydział Filologiczny Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego**  
pl. Biskupa Nankiera 15, PL 50-140 Wrocław  
tel.: +48 71 343 30 29, +48 71 375 22 25, +48 71 375 25 13, fax: +48 71 343 30 29  
[www.wfil.uni.wroc.pl/](http://www.wfil.uni.wroc.pl/)

**Wydział Humanistyczny Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego**  
al. Wojska Polskiego 69, PL 65-762 Zielona Góra, tel.: + 48 68 328 32 38, fax: + 48 68 328 32 79  
[www.wh.uz.zgora.pl](http://www.wh.uz.zgora.pl) e-mail: [dziekanat@wh.uz.zgora.pl](mailto:dziekanat@wh.uz.zgora.pl)



On 22 February 2005 the Senate of the Republic of Poland passed a special resolution, thus making 2006 the Year of the Polish Language. Recognizing the fact that the Polish language is the fundamental element of Polish national identity and that it is one of the nation's greatest treasures, the Senate expressed the view that this special year would create favourable conditions for showing the enormous wealth and diversity of the Polish language, from the standard language to regional and rural dialects. In the Senate's opinion, as a result of Poland's accession to the European Union, responsibility for the Polish language has taken on a new, international dimension. Since Polish has become an official language of the European Union, not only is it necessary to promote and preserve its use in Poland, but also to promote knowledge about the Polish language and encourage people to learn Polish abroad.

Many seminars, conferences and congresses — both national and international — have taken place during the Year of the Polish Language. There have also been many competitions for oratory talent and recitation contests, as well as quizzes about the Polish language, and many other events, including countrywide public spelling competitions.

The Council for the Polish Language was invited to act as one of the Year's coordinating bodies. It also took under its wing several projects put forward by various institutions, aimed at popularising knowledge about the Polish language and promoting a healthy enthusiasm for it. One of these projects was the publication of this booklet about the Polish language, now and in the past, in the 20 official languages of the European Union.

The aim of this booklet is to popularize knowledge about the Polish language and to contribute to the flow of information about European languages and the sociolinguistic situation in EU countries, thus promoting the development of a plurilingual Europe with a rich linguistic heritage and one in which the inhabitants would have a certain ability to communicate in several languages, including the Polish language, which would comprise an integral part of this European diversity.

Prof. Andrzej Markowski  
Chairman of the Council for the Polish Language.

Warsaw, December 2006

Aby język giętki powiedział wszystko,  
co pomyśli głowa



Daj, ać ja pobrus  
wiedział wszystko  
mojej pięknej ojc  
ieńskim rumieńc



A niechaj narodowie  
wždy postronni znają,  
Iż Polacy nie gęsi,  
iż swój język mają



by język giętki p  
Polacy nie gęsi, i