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## The sociological context of research into language of villagers

In 20 years' time, the border between the European Union  
and Russia will be uninhabited land  
(Trusewicz 2006, 9)

**Abstract:** The article is an attempt at presenting the context of the linguistic situation in rural areas. New findings offered by sociology, geography of the country and other disciplines dealing with rural areas indicate clearly that contemporary dialectology requires methodological re-orientation. As a consequence, there is a growing need of referring to a language spoken by inhabitants of rural areas rather than a traditional dialect. There is also growing awareness of the value of local culture and an imperative to cultivate it, accompanied by an urgent need of compiling own dictionaries of dialects.

**Key words:** dialect, language of villagers; rural sociology; contemporary dialectological research.

**Abstrakt: Socjologiczny kontekst badań języka mieszkańców wsi.** Artykuł podejmuje próbę szkicowania kontekstu współczesnej sytuacji językowej wsi. Przywołane nowe rozstrzygnięcia socjologii, geografii wsi – i innych dyscyplin zajmujących się obszarami wiejskimi – jednoznacznie wskazują na konieczność zmiany orientacji metodologicznej współczesnej dialektologii. Konkluzją powyższego jest coraz wyraźniej rysująca się potrzeba mówienia o języku mieszkańców wsi miast o tradycyjnej gwarze. Wzrasta też świadomość wartości lokalnej kultury i potrzeby jej kultywowania. Coraz częściej jest też odczuwana potrzeba zestawiania słowników własnej gwary.

**Słowa kluczowe:** gwara, język mieszkańców wsi, socjologia wsi, współczesne badania dialektologiczne.

It comes as no surprise that rural areas are undergoing rapid changes in land management and the related transformation of the rural population. Some processes have been observed for a long time, others are the sign of the latest time.

The quotation which serves as the motto is a conclusion of an article written by Iwona Trusewicz and published in “Rzeczpospolita” daily, entitled *Tylko bociany wracają* (Only storks come back). The text with this telling title includes other statements, for example:

Polish maps still feature villages which in fact no longer exist. Every year more villages are depopulated. Uninhabited land is emerging along the Polish border between the Union and Kaliningrad Oblast. (...)

Irene van den Linde, a Dutch journalist, knows the eastern border of the Union like the back of her hand. In 2003, it took her and Nicole Seger, a press photographer, ten months to cover 20 thousand km of the borderline of the new united Europe. On 1 May 2004, the day of the Union's enlargement, Irene and Nicole presented in Rotterdam the results of their journey, a book entitled *The end of Europe. Meetings on the new eastern border (Het einde van Europa: ontmoetingen langs de nieuwe oostgrens)*.

The journalists reached the most remote small towns, villages and hamlets in Finland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, Slovakia and Hungary. The Dutch women first visited Poland and the border between Poland and Russia. Later on they moved to Podlasie, the Lublin area and the Bieszczady Mountains.

"In each country, be it the affluent Finland or the poor Slovakia, we saw the same thing, the intensifying process of abandonment", said Irene van den Linde. "These areas are facing slow death, depopulation" (Trusewicz 2006, 9).

How is this information of any interest to a dialectologist? Let me add that the "depopulation" of rural areas is not typical of only the so-called eastern wall where, even following Poland's accession to the European Union, there have been abandoned farms while the local population consists of mainly elderly people representing the post-working age generation. This trend is confirmed by some information presented by the media; for example, in 2006 in Poland, 45 localities were removed from an official register mainly because of complete depopulation<sup>1</sup>; similar phantom localities are scattered all over the country.

Should this statement, referring in fact not only to the borderland areas, be accepted indiscriminately? "The process is irreversible. People, especially young ones, leave borderland villages because there is no work there once collective farming ceased to exist. In 20 years' time, the border between the European Union and Russia will be uninhabited land" (Trusewicz 2006, 9).

In order to create a full picture, let me refer to a statement which provides a slightly broader context for the reporter's conclusions, based on research carried out by experts in rural issues:

In Poland, a new and interesting phenomenon has emerged, namely migration of city dwellers to the country. This has been confirmed by research into the directions of migration in the communes neighbouring with Warsaw and Lublin. In 1999, the communes in a direct vicinity of the two cities had a positive migration balance while the inflow was mainly from the city. In areas located further away from Warsaw and Lublin, the migration balance was typically negative. (...)

On the other hand, in the peripheries of the country (especially in eastern Poland), depopulation continues in villages although the rate has declined against the 1970s and 80s. The

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<sup>1</sup> As covered by "Fakty" news on TVN, 08.01.2007, 07:26 p.m.

migration balance in these areas is typically negative and the population leaving villages tends to choose big cities” (Bański 2006, 53)<sup>2</sup>.

In the light of the unambiguously acknowledged changes to the population and the generational structure in large areas of Poland, dialectology needs to adopt an equally unambiguous methodological attitude. Otherwise, we may be tempted to identify research into dialects with specific linguistic archaeology; in this situation, dialectology may become an extremely diachronic discipline. With reference to the areas in danger of depopulation, the activity may centre mainly on reconstructing the linguistic past while the research will be based exclusively on the previously collected documents or reconstruction thereof by means of archived material obtained from the locals who, following migration, settled in new areas. While in contemporary Slavic studies there have been examples of reconstructing former “linguistic areas” as is the case with villages located near Chernobyl<sup>3</sup>, this should not mark the beginning of a new dialectological specialisation, namely documenting the language spoken by inhabitants of abandoned human settlements.

Dialectology is a discipline of linguistics based primarily on direct contact with pure speech of the inhabitants of geographically identified rural areas. Even casual observation of contemporary rural areas provides evidence that the approach to the research object needs to be re-appraised against the previous recommendations. For transparency purposes, let me refer to the rules followed by the first Polish atlas-related research. The standards of selecting the interlocutors were defined by Mieczysław Małecki and Kazimierz Nitsch at the beginning of their work on *Atlas językowy polskiego Podkarpacia (AJPP)*:

The prerequisites of the informants were as follows: 1) born in a specific village; 2) permanent residence there; emphasis was placed on tracing people who did not leave their native villages or were absent for a short time; (...) 3) the right age, preferably between 45 and 65; (...). 4) if possible, illiterate; in general reading books rarely. 5) The county’s head officer’s and other inhabitants’ opinions that the person in question ‘talked like a farmer, as we do’ which in a large majority of cases proved true; 6) relative intelligence and a possible skill of story-telling because then an individual handles the questionnaire better than a daft person even if he speaks only a dialect (AJPP, part II, 18).

Some of the recommendations for the setting should be deemed anachronistic; others are increasingly more difficult to fulfil. It is impossible for contemporary inhabitants of rural areas not to be in touch with the world as they are not completely settled; rare book readers are even harder to find even if the general language affects speakers in ways other than through books.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. the figure placed there: “Figure 6.9. Origin of residential building construction investors as per building permits issued in 1995–2000 in the Lublin area”.

<sup>3</sup> See for example *Говірка села Машеве Чорнобильського району*, ч. 1–3, Київ 2003, ч. 4, Київ 2005.

Respecting the rules of traditional dialectology may lead automatically to the discipline's crisis; the waning research interest and dwindling numbers of young scholars are alarming.

A dictionary and a language atlas must not be the ultimate achievement of dialectology<sup>4</sup>. By accepting this assumption one also needs to accept the end of dialectology as a living discipline of science. Pursuing dialectology does not need to be limited to following phenomena in a diachronic context.

Therefore, what determines the required change to the methodological approach in dialectology?

The contemporary economic transformations bring about in a natural way changes to the demographic structure of the country and the way of farming. It is assumed that Polish villages are over-populated, too many locals are dependent on work broadly related to farming. In these circumstances, one needs to expect not as much a continued outflow of inhabitants of rural areas but changes to the employment structure. The mono-vocational nature of the rural population is increasingly slipping into oblivion.

A detailed example is provided in the form of data presenting the demographic structure and the size of the specific farms in a single village submitted to intense research carried out by the Institute of Polish Dialectology at the Poznań University. These are the characteristics of Bukówiec Górny in Włoszakowice commune, Leszno county:

Number of inhabitants: 1636 (...) including 824 females, 812 males. The village's geodetic area: 1585 ha (...). Number of households: 323. Farms: 263 (including) 1–2 ha – 99, 2–5 ha – 68, 5–7 ha – 23, 7–10 ha – 25, 10–15 ha – 30, 15 ha – 18” (NJ 2006, 2).

In this large village, there is less than a hectare (approx. 0.97 ha) of “geodetic area” per inhabitant; more than a half (167) of the farms have at their disposal less than 5.0 ha which is below the average for the entire village of Bukówiec Górny (6.02 ha).

Traditional farming is no longer the source of livelihood for a large majority of the local population. The same holds true for other regions in the country. In Polish rural areas<sup>5</sup>, too many people are employed in farming. Bearing in mind the indicator per 100 ha of agricultural land, “the existing level of employment in Polish farming is reminiscent of the levels in other European countries from 30–50 years ago (e.g. in France in 1970 the density indicator amounted to 22, in Germany to 7.8)” (Jezierska-Thöle 2006, 65).

Observation of world trends leads to an assumption that the indicator will decrease. Let us take a look at the latest statistical data applicable to Poland and a majority of European countries.

<sup>4</sup> More on the subject in Sierociuk (2005).

<sup>5</sup> In 2002, the size of the rural population in Poland varied from 28.6% (Lower Silesia) to 59.4% (Subcarpathia). In Wielkopolska the indicator amounts to 42.3%; data provided by [Bański 2006, 44-45].

Country	Urbanization – rural areas (in %)	Employment structure – agriculture (in %)	GDP production structure – agriculture (in %)
Poland	38	16	4
Ireland	40	6	5
Finland	39	4	3
Switzerland	33	4	2
Austria	33	12	2
Italy	33	4	2
France	25	4	3
Spain	22	6	4
Dania	15	4	2
Germany	12	2	1
UK	10	1	1
Holland	10	3	3
Slovenia	49	12	3
Serbia	48	3	16
Romania	47	35	13
Slovakia	42	4	4
Ukraine	33	20	18
Lithuania	33	16	7
Bulgaria	31	10	12
Belarus	29	11	9
Russia	27	10	5
Czech Republic	25	4	3

Source: *Wielki encyklopedyczny atlas świata*, Wydawnictwo PWN and “Gazeta Wyborcza”, Warszawa 2006.

The above table leads to a conclusion that soon, more changes will affect rural areas in Poland and other countries. While the share of rural population in the general demographic structure of Poland does not differ much from many EU countries, the level of urbanization is among the lowest. However, there are distinct differences in the employment structure: 16% of professionally active Poles work in agriculture<sup>6</sup>. The EU average is approximately 75% lower. The observed trends suggest that in the nearest future, rural population will be professionally more diverse. Agricultural production is also bound to change with prevailing mass production farms. The transformation of the agrarian structure will result in rapid changes to agricultural production and exchange of the major tools. Even now carts are rarely used by farmers on a daily basis in some regions, not to mention horses. Irrespective of the size of the farm, more and

<sup>6</sup> J. Bański wrote: “The share of inhabitants of rural areas employed in farming varies between 33 and 35% in Lubusz and West Pomerania regions to over 70% in Świętokrzyskie and Subcarpathian and 80% in Lublin and Podlaskie regions. Employment in agriculture can also be determined on the basis of the number of people working per 100 ha of agricultural land (...). The percentage is the highest in the provinces most fragmented with respect to agriculture, namely: Lesser Poland, Subcarpathian, Świętokrzyskie; it is the lowest in the north and the west of the country” [Bański 2006, 58-59].

more frequently farmers use the latest equipment; as a result of access to the Internet, they can follow the regularly updated weather forecasts which facilitate field work planning; this knowledge, in turn, allows to better use the increasingly complicated tools and pest control<sup>7</sup>. Needless to say, all this changes the language beyond recognition.

Rural populations tend to follow the rules established in a liberal and democratic society “whose members (...) are not bound by identical, common goals but general, ordering rules like for example the price system informing about goods deficit” (Kromka 2006, 126).

Contemporary rural areas are not free from the impact of the crucial processes like globalisation which, according to sociologists, “in a sociological sense indicates (...) progressive “uprooting” of human activity, the vanishing importance and bond-forging power of specific time-and-space action contexts and social references, the growing importance of “remote activity” which is also possible owing to new forms of communication and information channels. (...) Finally, globalisation also means in-depth “transformation” of culture, its traditional bases of knowledge, forms of expression and prevailing rules of rationality, caused primarily by a revolution in information and communication technology and the related trans-cultural processes of diffusion” (Sterbling 2006, 42).

The impact of global processes on the language of the inhabitants of specific regions has been a subject of interest of scholars, including linguists (*Глобализация* 2006; Нешименко 2006).

In this situation, should dialectology be interested in a language spoken by a community with a dramatically different linguistic and cultural profile? Is it not time to realize the need for research into this new communication structure? Equally importantly, it is no longer a traditional dialect but a language spoken by inhabitants of new rural areas.

Migration of the rural population intensified in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; since 1945, the process has affected all parts of Poland, to a varying degree. On the one hand, the inflow resulted from forced resettlement shortly after WWII. On the other hand, it was a natural exchange of people resulting from familial contacts (incl. marriages with partners from outside one’s own village). Depending on the intensity of these movements, in one way or another immigrants affected the language spoken by the locals or immigrants acquired the locals’ habits and communication behaviour. Contemporary dialectologists cannot disregard this large part of inhabitants of contemporary rural areas.

The linguistic consequence of these processes enforces a different look at the tasks faced by contemporary dialectology.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. press information: “Farmers from Wielkopolska can make use of the [www.agrometeo.pl](http://www.agrometeo.pl) weather forecast portal. It is intended to help them to organise farm work. It offers data on the weather updated every 10 minutes with emphasis placed on a three-day forecast. The website was created in cooperation between the Poznań Academy of Agriculture and the University of Warsaw. ‘Modern farming does not stand for peasants with wagons. The website makes it easier for farmers to forecast changes in the weather or prepare for an invasion of pest’, said Prof. Janusz Olejnik from the Faculty of Agrometeorology at the Academy of Agriculture in Poznań” (“Dziennik”, 9–10.06.2007, p. 9).

Sociologists have also changed their methodological orientation. The related transformations are at the basis of a conviction that the traditional perception of “country sociology” should be replaced by “rural areas sociology” (Gorlach 2004). More and more frequently, these “rural areas” are the destination of people previously living in cities. At the same time, in rural areas the number of groups professionally not related to (traditional) farming is growing.

On the other hand, a large part of the rural population is employed far away from the place of residence. This phenomenon, typical of economically highly developed societies, is increasingly common in Poland. In sociology, this employment-related mobility is referred to as circular migration which has become “the prevailing feature of life in rural areas although the social type of the migrants has changed. After WWII, the development of Western Germany was underpinned by moonlighting farmers (farmers-cum-workers) commuting every day to the nearest city where, in most cases, they worked as unskilled or semi-skilled labourers while their wives minded the farms” (Vonderach 2006, 24). This “professional” group of farmers-cum-workers was also popular in Poland and the language they spoke was analysed by Marian Kucała in a book with a telling title: *O słownictwie ludzi wyzbywających się gwary* (The vocabulary of people getting rid of their dialect) (Kucała 1960).

To a large extent, circular migration of rural populations stems from the development of the automotive industry.

In the early 1960s, as the standard of living improved, the popularity of cars grew and consequently changed the mode of operation of migrants (...); a majority of them started to commute to work in the city in their own cars. The number of regular commuters increased as a result of the accelerating structural changes to agriculture. The number grew also because car owners who did not have farms could work in the city and live in the country thus putting a halt to depopulation. Many villages with disappearing farms, accompanied by growing professional mobility of its inhabitants, started to act as “dormitories” for circular migrants (Vonderach 2006, 24).

While this is an account of the situation in Germany, it is becoming more and more frequent in rural areas in Poland.

The questionnaire, distributed for the purposes of this article<sup>8</sup> among the inhabitants of Bukówiec Górny, confirms the above statements. The questions answered by grownups included ones pertaining to the phenomenon under discussion:

Does your family’s income come solely from the farm you own?

yes: 11 no: 51 (no reply: 4)

Does any of your family members work outside Bukówiec?

yes: 50 no: 12 (no reply: 4)

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<sup>8</sup> The questionnaire, filled in by 66 individuals, was distributed in April 2007 during the 11<sup>th</sup> dialect contest held in Bukówiec Górny.

The replies, presented against the data on the village provided earlier, are hardly surprising. Owners of small farms need to look for alternative sources of income outside their place of residence.

Research into the language spoken by the inhabitants of rural areas needs to take into account many different extra-linguistic factors affecting the communication structures<sup>9</sup>. In his book, Jerzy Bański (Bański 2006) presents various data which prove very useful in field research. Researchers should know the percentage of the inhabitants not involved in farming as early as at the stage of preparations (Bański 2006, 60); the numbers are lowest in the eastern provinces and highest in the west of Poland. Of importance will also be the knowledge of the spatial diversification of agriculture (Bański 2006, 78–119) on the basis of which we can exclude cultivation of the sugar beet and plan research in large parts of the following provinces: Lodz, a large majority of Masovia, Świętokrzyskie, Silesia, Lesser Poland etc. On the other hand, ample material can be expected in Greater Poland (Wielkopolska), the Opole region, the Kuyavian-Pomeranian region and the southern part of the Lublin area (Bański 2006, 86). Important factors affecting the living conditions in the country: housing, rural infrastructure, spatial organisation, land use etc. (Bański 2006) largely impact the content and nature of the local vocabulary. These factors affect the local phonetic, syntactic and other systems (not only idiolects) indirectly, by access to the press, the radio, TV and the Internet. On the other hand, local water and sewage facilities largely influence the vocabulary related to housing space management, hygiene, meal preparation etc. and lead to an assumption that the once indispensable wells will disappear.

This combination of various factors affecting the rural linguistic environment brings about an important change to the nature of the transformation. In its approach to linguistic changes, traditional dialectology mainly centres on observing the limits between dialectal areas. A case in point are maps illustrating Zenon Sobierajski's opinions on the modifications of the range of some lexical features in Wielkopolska (Sobierajski 2003) where, following presentation of the former and the existing range of the words *pyrki // pyry*, the "direction of the expansion of vocabulary" is indicated (Sobierajski 2003, 78)<sup>10</sup>. In an unambiguous way, it suggests a dialectal change consisting in a shift in the isolex. Z. Sobierajski wrote: "As a result of changes to the vocabulary following WWII, Wielkopolska, an area where the word *pyrka* definitely prevailed in the Inter-war period, turned into a mostly three-synonymous area i.e. an area where three words exist as alterations: *pyrki // kartofle // ziemniaki*. Only the dialects of north-western Wielkopolska have remained immune to the words promoted by the media, *kartofle* and *ziemniaki*. It refers to a narrow strip of the former borderland between Poland and Germany and the borderland between Wielkopolska and Pomerania up to the line connecting the towns/cities of Międzyrzecz, Szamotuły, Czarnków, Chodzież and Bydgoszcz" (Sobierajski 2003, 79). However, contemporary field research carried out with view of the major sociological factors at play (especially the informants' age) (Sierociuk 2003) clearly indicates a different nature of the processes taking place in that area, namely changes to the local language structures occurring not only on the

<sup>9</sup> I took notice of these conditions earlier in (Sierociuk 2000).

<sup>10</sup> See also similar signage on the maps.

peripheries of a specific phenomenon; mass media impact equally the peripheries and the centre of the traditional dialectal area. Observations of a language spoken by different generations of large parts of populations from specific villages are evidence of significant lexical abundance (less so with respect to the grammar) confirmed in this area. The diversity of synonymous sequences is to a large extent affected by the respondents' generation affiliation (Perkowska 2007; Graf 2007).

In these conditions, traditional vocabulary is going out of use; more and more frequently, in order to document it researchers need to refer to the informants' memory. It is therefore no accident that in a majority of villages in Wielkopolska, the vocabulary referring to the *potato* and, for example, the *well*, represents vocabulary of former times.

The conditions presented here strongly impact the change in rural populations' perception of the world; slowly, the gap between the living conditions in the country and the city is narrowing. Nevertheless,

education remains an important feature differentiating the rural and urban populations (...). The disproportion in education is better reflected by the "rural society's" education structure: in the country, secondary and above-secondary education is twice less frequent than in the city (26.7% vs. 52.3%) which means that less educated groups prevail. In the country, people with primary education represent the biggest group (38.3%); in the city it is groups with secondary and post-secondary education (Halamska 2007, 375–376).

Bearing in mind the generally poorer education, does the rural community fail to appreciate its language? This question is of importance in the context of a nearly universal approach to treating dialects as an inferior, corrupt language. Lamentably, this attitude is shared by a large part of local influential circles, including teachers, especially teachers of Polish. Students of Polish philology corroborate this view indirectly by demonstrating their attitude towards folk language and culture. The misguided care for "correct speech" at the expense of dialects is after all a demonstration of the failure of the "liberal arts elites" to understand the major historical and linguistic processes, the process of shaping a national language.

However, it seems that we are witnessing a revival of regional self-awareness, an act of forging a bond with the local culture and language. In the Institute of Dialectology of the Poznań University we receive a growing number of requests of assistance in compiling dictionaries of local dialects (Sierociuk 2006). This is a very specific cooperation offer made in an informed way with the aim of registering possibly all the linguistic elements by a community's members.

Bearing in mind that Wielkopolska dialects have a very poor lexicographic documentation (Reichan, Woźniak 2001, 41; Karaś 2011, 293), there is an urgent need of supplements. In cooperation with the local communities, with schools in the lead, we have made an effort of preparing (and publishing) thematic dictionaries, according to formerly established editorial rules. Sets of vocabulary of a specific thematic field are to be repeated in various parts of Wielkopolska (initially we are planning compilation of 3-4 dictionaries). The intention is to enable comparative analyses of an entire dialect, at the same time providing an opportunity to shed light on the complexity of the

lexical and semantic relations taking place in a specific section of local vocabulary. A lexical questionnaire with 600–800 questions is circulated in the field by interested pupils while supplementary research is carried out by members of the Institute of Dialectology of the Poznań University. As a result, the phonographic archive gains typically 30–40 hours of recordings of contemporary dialectal material. In some villages, due to the specificity of the local dialect, the research is carried out regularly for a longer time. Consequently, in Bukówiec Górny we have documented more than 200 hours of detailed conversations about various areas of country life; lexicographic documentation compiled in Dąbrówka Wlkp. is nearly as impressive. The assumed concentration of field research on concrete subject areas, taking into account the fact that the respondents represented different generations (Sierociuk 2003), poses excellent opportunities for explaining both the complexity and the course of linguistic processes taking place in the country (Sierociuk 2007).

Following the concept, several dictionaries have been edited (Dragan, Woźna 2014; Giera, Jańczak 2005; Kobus, Gniazdowski 2018; Kobus, Stępień 2018; Osowski 2018a; Osowski 2018b; Osowski 2020; Sierociuk 2019). Interestingly, presentation of these lexicons facilitates cooperation in the field in other villages; often conversations end with declarations of the “we want our dictionary, too” type.

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It seems that the attitude of country folk to their language has gradually evolved towards a greater interest in it and care for preservation thereof. Time will show how constant this trend will be and what territorial range it will have. Nevertheless, the regional dictionaries published to date (Wronicz 2006) and the growing interest in dialect contests are good omens. The questionnaire distributed in Bukówiec Górny during the 9<sup>th</sup> contest of dialects included questions which shed light on the scale of the phenomenon. The replies provide an unambiguous picture confirmed by observations made in other villages in Wielkopolska:

Do you think that organising dialect contests is desirable?

yes: 58 no: 3 no opinion: 5 (no reply: 2)

Do you think that dialects should be cultivated?

yes: 64 no: 2 no opinion: 0 (no reply: 0)

Do you often use dialectal words?

often: 29 rarely: 28 I try not to use: 9 (no reply: 0)

When do you speak a dialect in a conversation?

at home: 29 + 23<sup>11</sup> with neighbours: 8 + 23 in the city: 3 + 10 (no reply: 3)

Are you ashamed of using dialectal words?

I'm ashamed: 0 I'm not ashamed: 41 + 4 I don't pay attention to it: 22 + 4 (no reply: 0)

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<sup>11</sup> Since in this point, several options were marked in total, I present them in an order: the first were the replies marked as exclusive, followed by replies containing several options.

Do you think that a dictionary of the dialect spoken in your village should be compiled?  
yes: 60 no: 1 no opinion: 5 (no reply: 1)

The credibility of the above data is confirmed by the friendliness that accompanied each conversation with the inhabitants of Bukówiec Górny. Their keen interest in dialectological documentation and the dictionary to be edited makes the work a joint venture while nearly every more important language form (less frequent or out of circulation) is accompanied by a comment of a competent user.

The fragmentary sociolinguistic characteristics of Bukówiec Górny is only an example of a modest verification of the sociological conditions of contemporary dialectological research indicated here. In the Institute of Dialectology of the Poznań University we are certainly aware of what determines our actions. However, we think that this is not in contradiction to the existing premises of dialectology. On the contrary, it poses new research opportunities (Sierociuk 2005). Just as the general conditions of living in the country are changing, so is the language spoken by the rural population; dialects have ceased to be the major way of expressing thoughts. By observing the various forms of oral communication taking place in the country, researchers should realise that they are not dealing with traditional dialects but a complex structure of the language of the rural population\*.

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\* This is an updated version of the first printing: *Socjologiczny kontekst badań języka mieszkańców wsi*, [in:] *Gwary dziś. 4. Konteksty dialektologii*, J. Sierociuk (ed.), Poznań 2007, pp. 325–336.

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