

## **How much truth is there in *a true Pole*?**

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### **Abstract**

The article is devoted to interpreting the image of *a true Pole* (re)constructed on the basis of the *National Corpus of the Polish Language* (NKJP) and Internet texts. The following issues were considered: stereotyping, evaluation, ideological thinking, profiling of terms, persuasive definitions, and approximation of meaning to answer the question contained in the title. The research has led to the conclusion that the concept of a true Pole can be considered on many research levels, and its use is associated with a specific ideological and/or axiological attitude.

### **Keywords**

*a true Pole*, stereotype, evaluation, ideological thinking, concept profiling, persuasive definitions, meaning approximation

## Ile jest prawdy w *prawdziwym Polaku*?

### Abstrakt

Artykuł jest poświęcony interpretacji – (z)rekonstruowanego na podstawie *Narodowego Korpusu Języka Polskiego* (NKJP) i tekstów internetowych – obrazu *prawdziwego Polaka*. Aby odpowiedzieć na pytanie zawarte w tytule, wzięto pod uwagę następujące zagadnienia: stereotyp, wartościowanie, myślenie ideologiczne, profilowanie pojęć, definicje perswazyjne oraz aproksymację znaczenia. Badania doprowadziły do konkluzji, iż pojęcie *prawdziwego Polaka* można rozpatrywać na wielu płaszczyznach badawczych, a jego wykorzystanie wiąże się z określona postawą ideologiczną i/lub aksjologiczną.

### Słowa kluczowe

*prawdziwy Polak*, stereotyp, wartościowanie, myślenie ideologiczne, profilowanie pojęć, definicje perswazyjne, aproksymacja znaczenia

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this text is an attempt to interpret the (re)constructed image of a *true Pole*<sup>1</sup> and to verify the following research hypothesis: the notion of a *true Pole* undergoes specific changes (within the framework of the so-called redefinition of the stereotype), is used in discussions based on ideology and axiology, and simultaneously belongs to the research planes of several disciplines.

The image of a contemporary *true Pole*, which has been reconstructed based on almost a hundred texts from the *National Corpus of the Polish Language* and selected statements by Internet users, shows a polarised image.

Let us briefly recall that a person defined by this term is: a Catholic, a nationalist, a patriot, holding Polish citizenship, recognising Polish as the language of the national community,

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<sup>1</sup> See the article entitled *Próba rekonstrukcji językowego obrazu prawdziwego Polaka (Attempt to reconstruct the linguistic picture of a true Pole)*.

hospitable, chivalrous, family-oriented, but also an opponent of evolutionism, socialism/communism, Nazism, liberalism; a nationalist convinced of the existence of enemies of Poland, prejudiced against representatives of certain nations, perceiving cultural and political threats coming from abroad; a person with a taste for coarse jokes, usually behaving too loudly or in an inelegant and uncultured manner, and moreover, stubborn (aggressive) in defence of his or her opinions, with complexes (also in the scope of lack of knowledge of foreign languages), prone to drunkenness, criticism, complaining, backbiting, indolence, intolerance, envy, egoism, jealousy, hypocrisy, offence, etc.

Taking the above into account, it is worth considering how such an image functions and with what it is potentially associated.

## 2. Interpretative categories and comments

Based on the review of the features included in the notions of *a true Pole* and *nation*, one can notice a convergence of explanations, especially on the cultural (cultural heritage, language, traditions, customs) or ideological (religion, patriotism, national symbols) plane.

Nonetheless, what is the reason for the **polarisation** of valued characteristics? What reflections arise in connection with the construction of the image of *a true Pole*?

### 2.1. Stereotype

Suppose we assume that the stereotypes are (Jerzy Bartmiński and Jolanta Panasiuk's definition) a set of particular features abstracted from the texts. In that case, they confirm the fixation of these in the consciousness of language users in a specific meaning and carry specific connotations:

they confirm consolidating certain features in the colloquial characteristics of the objects in question and including the features in the linguistic image of the objects, in the connotation of the words

that name them. [...] Sets of these features, internally organised in a non-accidental way, create linguistic and cultural images of objects, which since Walter Lippmann have been called stereotypes (Bartmiński, Panasiuk 1993: 363), a true Pole is an example of a classic stereotype. The above-mentioned researchers presented a set of characteristics resulting from ASA'90 research (ibidem: 380)<sup>2</sup>.

In the analysed material concerning *a true Pole*, the variants of the stereotype: pattern (*true*) and image (*typical*) are mixed, resulting from the fact that the language users in their texts assign the features without the key as mentioned above. These are spontaneous statements, not surveys.

Extralinguistic knowledge, which is drawn from one's own experience, and dictionary knowledge recorded in dictionaries interact with each other, resulting in a specific linguistic and cultural image of the named objects. Hence:

The object (subject) P (e.g., *a Pole...*) of x characteristics (a member of the nation, using Polish as the native language...), called with lexemes  $L_1$  (*a patriot...*) or  $L_2$  (*a xenophobe...*) having different linguistic connotations 'y' ('a man loving his homeland') and 'z' ('a man reluctant or hostile towards foreigners') receives a variant stereotype ( $S_1, S_2$ ) of partially differentiated content. The differentiation is connected to subjective evaluation.

## 2.2. Evaluation

Ambivalent connotationally and lexically evaluative judgements were noted in the group of indicated features. Let us use only a few examples, which will make the mechanism of reversing the sign of valuation depending on the judgments of the subject of valuation explicit:

**A Catholic** with his worldview, moral and social attitude connected with the adherence to Christian principles, which are

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<sup>2</sup> I write on this subject in detail in the article entitled *Próba rekonstrukcji językowego obrazu prawdziwego Polaka (Attempt to reconstruct the linguistic picture of a true Pole)*.

associated with the love of God and neighbour, mercy, striving for peace, and so forth, connotes positive valuation. He/she is a bearer of positive values, especially social ones (but also sacral – striving for sanctity, ethical – love of the truth), which is closed in the judgment formula:

X (a Catholic) is a D-bearer of W social, sacral, ethical

Such evaluation is characteristic for our cultural circle, i.e., the subject (of valuing) is usually a member of the community and recognises similar values.

In the collected material, there were examples in which a subject from the same cultural circle (also a Pole) confronts positive connotations with his/her own (negative) ones, i.e., the commonly accepted image of a Catholic has been eroded, specific actions, which are negatively evaluated, are indicated e.g.

[...] in my opinion, a "**true Pole**"<sup>3</sup> is the one who **listens to a priest** every Sunday,<sup>4</sup> and instead of using his/her reason and simply thinking independently, he/she lets himself/herself **be led like a silly little sheep** by its shepherd... [net. 1].

That is: human's actions (*he/she listens to the priest* = obeys him, *lets himself/herself be led*) are cognitively wrong since they deprive the object of independent thinking in favour of blind trust in the clergyman. The formula of an evaluative judgement has the form:

X (the fact that he/she listens to the priest, lets himself/herself be led) is Z W cognitive

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<sup>3</sup> Original spelling has been retained in quoted passages.

<sup>4</sup> There is the author's emphasis throughout the text.

In the example:

[...] **a true Pole** (or elsewhere: a true Irishman, Spaniard, etc.) can only be one who **believes in God** (net. 2);

it is about potentially generating conflicts, starting wars in the name of professed faith, which is ethically wrong. It can be clearly seen in the rest of the quotation:

In the fight for Poland (whether in defence against an invader or in an arch-righteous assault in the name of Polish super power status), it translates into the slogan "Beat whoever believes in God/ Beat who believes in god". Beat who? The one who does not believe in God – an apostate, a heretic, a blasphemer, even more so an unbeliever, and certainly a godless person, who by his/her very existence offends God (net. 2).

The subject's value judgement<sup>5</sup> closes in the formula:

X (the fact that he/she kills in the name of God, sees an enemy in the follower of another faith) is Z W ethical.

Noteworthy are the cases in which the author uses irony. It is deciphered on the basis of the context, or marked in the text by putting a given word in inverted commas, e.g.:

**A true Catholic** Pole would never accept that the bard Adam Mickiewicz, Jesus Christ and the Queen of the Polish Crown were really Jews. – Jews are few in Poland, but the attitude to Jews is as far from indifference as before the war [...] (NKJP 1)

Irony permanently reverses the mark of evaluation, and in the above example, the Catholic is valued negatively for his anti-Semitism. Such a Catholic is a non-Catholic (a human who

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<sup>5</sup> At the same time, if the subject were someone sharing the point of view of a true Pole, the sign of valuation would be reversed: X (the fact that he/she kills in the name of God, sees an enemy in the follower of another faith) is D W ethical.

loves his/her neighbour), so the following formula of value judgment can be proposed:

X (a Catholic who hates Jews) is Z-bearer W ethical

Furthermore, it cannot be excluded that the sender of the value judgement (the subject) represents another religion and/or belongs to another cultural circle. The negative evaluation is then also possible. Someone who is a Catholic becomes the enemy – the bearer of bad qualities.

Names of such understood values then become a label, sometimes even a stigma, which serves to identify in the relation "one's own – stranger", and in the other sequence unethical exclusion.

Similar relationships are noticeable in other names of carriers of qualities, e.g., a patriot, a nationalist.

Among the names of the bearers of negative features there are lexemes not only connoting negative evaluation, but also containing valuing elements in their semantic structure (the so-called semantic valuing), e.g., a xenophobe ('a human reluctantly or hostile disposed towards foreigners and foreigners' USJP), an anti-Semite ('an opponent, enemy of Jews' USJP), drunkard ('one who compulsively drinks alcohol, who gets drunk; an alcoholic' USJP) etc.

To sum up this part, the negative evaluation of a true Pole is a much more elaborate area and entangled in contexts than the positive evaluation (given explicitly). It may involve the so-called ideological thinking.

### **2.3. Ideological thinking**

Evaluation is a process characterised by subjectivity, subordinated to certain tastes or interests. Besides, as Mateusz Witkowski writes:

'Binary divisions such as "one's own – stranger", "we – they", "true – false" are, of course, the salt of any **propaganda** activity. Leaving

aside the aforementioned lists: we are constantly bombarded with opinions in which the representatives of various political fronts reach for the category of "truthfulness". Who, then, is this true Pole, the opposite of a spy and a dyed fox? This, of course, depends on the speaker's perspective. (net. 3)

Jadwiga Puzynina writes about the relation between values and ideology, pointing out that the notion of value is fundamental "for all ideologies, always based on certain values" (2008b: 17). It is critical to grasp the relationship of their interpenetration from the subject's perspective. An ideology is subject to evolution, and an equally important feature is a social group's adherence to it. At the same time, "the primary, defining subject is the social group, and the secondary subject is the individual who belongs to it, joins it, or even creates it. As long as some views are only proper to it, we will not call it an *ideology*" (Puzynina 2008b: 17).

The evolving image of *a true Pole*, identification with the features ascribed to him/her both by an individual and a community/social group, situates this concept in the field of ideologies, to be more precise – symbolic ideologies understood as mental schemes strongly influenced by emotions, and cognitively deficient, which are signed by individuals identifying themselves with them (Skarżyńska 2005, after Puzynina 2008b: 19).

The changes in the concept of *a true Pole* are illustrated by the process of the so-called ideological thinking, about which Mirosław Karwat writes as follows:

Ideological thinking is "thinking according to values". Emotions ascribed to specific values dominate here over reflection and critical analysis of phenomena. The desire for objectivity, for distance, does not arise here; it is replaced by a sense of the obviousness of views (perceptions and judgements) born of prejudice. In the subject's consciousness and in his/her way of communicating with others, the difference between the language of description, the language of values (judgements, patterns, ideals), and the language of norms (orders, prohibitions) is blurred. Social phenomena are perceived and presented not as such, but are immediately marked with



a mark of evaluation – positive or negative. [...] The consequence is a programmatic bias of interests and perceptions, selectivity of the image of phenomena [...], biased perceptions and messages addressed to others [...] (2008: 42).

We know from observation (and autopsy) how difficult it is to discuss with a person representing ideological thinking as he/she always knows better, adheres to the principle *my truth is "mine"* (= better), and confrontation with another point of view generates bad emotions and does not promise a factual discussion, but conflict, as in the examined material, e.g.:

In the previous years, depending on the needs and what they preached, the **most enlightened men of the Polish Church were called the Jews for beating**: Father Professor Józef Tischner, Bishop Józef Życiński, Cardinal Franciszek Macharski and Pope John Paul II. However, a **true Pole, Catholic, has never accepted the fact** that the bard Adam Mickiewicz, Jesus Christ and the Queen of the Polish Crown **were really Jews**. (NKJP 2)

**You Israeli stooge!** Mazowiecki can rule in the synagogue, not in Poland! (NKJP 3)

I'm not going to respect someone who hurts me – **because I've already once been ripped off by one who called himself a "real Pole"** and added "not to mess with the skins". (NKJP 4)

## 2.4. Profiling of concepts

The configuration of features in the image of *a true Pole* is subject to change, some withdraw, and others take their place. Their arrangement is motivated by individual needs, experiences, and values. In keeping a set of the same (or similar) traits, their internal structure is rebuilt, and **the rank** of individual aspects to which the traits refer changes. Moreover, there are shifts on the scale of *good – bad / plus – minus*. It affects the modification of meaning, the organisation of the components of meaning, revealing at the same time certain truths about the

subject and how he/she organises judgements about reality and its conceptualisation. The base idea is modified, in other words, it is subjected to a process called **concept profiling**, and this means that it has occurred:

a subjective (i.e., having its own subject) linguistic-conceptual operation consisting in the specific shaping of the image of an object through its inclusion in certain aspects (subcategories, facets), [...] within the framework of a certain type of knowledge and according to the requirements of a specific point of view (Bartmiński, Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska, Nycz 2004: 212).<sup>6</sup>

Profiling is the domain of discourse. The discourse assumes the presentation of someone's statements intentionally aimed at achieving specific communicative goals. For this reason, profiling is a tool frequently applied in ideological, political, and social disputes. At the same time, I adopt the way of understanding and the model of description present in Jerzy Bartmiński's works (and other relevant publications), i.e., conducted on two concretisation levels: a given (concrete) utterance and a social convention (with the possibility of repetition in various utterances), and anthropological, focused around the speaker, representing the subjective type of rationality of the sender of information in relation to his/her knowledge about the world and the system of values. The interpretation manner would also assume naming the elements constituting the image of *a true Pole* as facets, discovered through the analysis of the material (cf. Bartmiński, Niebrzegowska 1998: 214). The model was successfully used by Bartmiński while describing the changes in the stereotype of the German in Polish (Bartmiński 1998: 225-235). Apart from the changes within the bundle of features, one can see profiling at the level of the sender – the speaking subject. From the point of view of a particular worldview, negative features and valuations predominate in the texts of, e.g., *Gazeta*

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<sup>6</sup> Concept profiling has no single/unique definition. There are also at least two ways to apply the concept. I omit the one derived from American cognitivism.

Wyborcza (statements such as: *And finally, a unique candidate: he does strange business, goes bankrupt and comes out on top, drinks, swears, defends the Church, does not like Jews – in a word a 'real' Pole* (NKJP 5)), Polityka (e.g., *Against the Saxons and the Swedes, also against Russia. In short, against the whole world. A true Pole* (NKJP 6)), Newsweek (e.g., the very title of an article by Włodzimierz Mędrzecki: *Luters, Dandies, Traitors, Jews. Who can and who should not call themselves a “true Pole”* (net. 4), the OKO.press portal (e.g., “According to Kaczyński, Morawiecki and co., only those who support their politics and conservative, Catholic ideology are Poles. Who does not support them is not a Pole, and in a more robust version is a German. [...]” (net. 5)) – sources considered to be left-wing, liberal.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.5. Persuasive definitions

When emotional states are replaced or mistakenly interpreted as cognitive processes, we may be dealing with a persuasive situation. It is especially true for terms that are "burdened" with conceptual ambiguity and are emotionally neutral. It is then that an attempt may be made to specify or define them: *What is X?*, and create a persuasive definition. *A true Pole* is one of them. As Jakub Pruś writes:

[...] the evaluative term 'true' etc., probably due to its normative character, plays a different role than the traditional differentia specifica; its task is to influence the original meaning of the term so that it takes on the desired scope for further persuasion. The same is true of examples such as a reliable scientist or a normal man, or an authentic Christian – which Christian would want to be inauthentic, which normal man wants to be abnormal, and which scientist wants to be unreliable? (Pruś, 2019: 62)

The above judgment is also shared by other users of Polish. In the collected material, observations regarding the motivation for

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<sup>7</sup> It is based on observations of the collected material, but the issue requires separate research on more extensive source material.

the use of the expression in question were noted. For example, Kazimierz Piotrowski in a conversation with Jarosław Suchan openly signalled:

[...] the expression a True Pole is a **rhetorical expression**, not a descriptive one, because there are no true Poles, just as there are no untrue Poles. The point is to be fully aware of how we use this expression and for what purpose we do it (NKJP 7)].

An internet user (nicknamed<sup>8</sup> Antoni222 Sułek in the article *Instrukcja dla niezdecydowanych wyborców* (*Instructions for undecided voters*) notes:

Values can be implemented variously and no one is a "true" Catholic, a "true" Pole or a "true" Populist. **This is the sand that politicians pour into your eyes** so that you cannot see their true face or the true misery of their programmes (NKJP 8).

For those reasons, the composed bundle of features and the ways of clarifying/defining<sup>9</sup> them in the image of a true Pole resemble the construction of a persuasive definition. It is defined in the *Encyklopedia PWN* as:

a verbal statement in the form of a definition, in which the choice of expressions is determined by the intention to evoke (or change) a certain emotional attitude (belief, decision) (net. 6).

The intention of its use is emphasised by Charles L. Stevenson, writing that a persuasive definition gives a known word a new conceptual content but does not change its emotive meaning much, and it is applied (usually consciously) to change the

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<sup>8</sup> Nickname is used in Polish language programs to denote a pseudonym, login, identifier, etc.

<sup>9</sup> It is easy to confuse the construction of a persuasive definition with an attempt at clarification. A differentiating factor, i.e., the sender's intention, comes into play. If the intention of the language user is to change attitudes and judgements in the recipient, rather than a desire to gather facts, then we have an example of a persuasive definition.

listeners' preferences (2015: 21).<sup>10</sup> It should be kept in mind that the clearer the emotive meaning becomes, the more turbid the conceptual content of the word may be. As a result, emotional states are misinterpreted as cognitive processes (*ibidem*). Such a construction aims to redirect the preferences of language users, i.e., change the (degree of) acceptance of the described phenomenon. Thanks to the afore-mentioned opacity of the content, the change is felt as 'natural', and its results are easily fixed. In this way, the recipient is dissuaded from uncritical approval of a specific set of qualities while being induced to praise others, so their conceptual content undergoes a continuous **re-definition process** (2015: 21). Stevenson hints that persuasive definitions are often identifiable by the appearance of phrases such as 'in fact' or 'true'/'really' in a metaphorical sense, in the examples of charity, love, courage, where "charity" is not giving gold/money but understanding, true love is a communion of minds, and courage in everyday reality "defies public opinion, where the expressions of 'true' gain the persuasive power of 'being accepted'" (2015: 21).

Let us look at selected examples taken from the linguistic material studied. We will take one feature of a true Pole – patriotism. Stanisław Berenda-Czajkowski in his 2001 novel *Dni grozy i łez (Days of horror and tears)* writes:

[...] every true Pole must be **a soldier. Faithfulness** to the tormented homeland, "at any time and any day" [...]. (NKJP 9)

The left-wing<sup>11</sup> *Dziennik Trybuna* (Daily Tribune) of 28 June 2016, on the other hand, reads:

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<sup>10</sup> Stevenson is considered a precursor. In Polish research, Tadeusz Pawłowski developed the concept by presenting three types of persuasive definitions: 1. to change the scope of the definiendum, 2. to change the emotions, 3. to replace a previously used concept by another concept with a different emotional charge (1978: 228-238). Grażyna Solecka (2010) and Jakub Prus (2019) have also addressed this topic.

<sup>11</sup> See the term at <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/media/artykuly/449630,dziennik-trybuna-zniknie-zespol-odchodzi-z-redakcji-przez-zwolnienia-i-ciecia-pensji.html> [Accessed: 24.09.2020].

The most common variety of **patriotism assumes unconditional love for the homeland**, which is **understood sentimentally** as a familiar landscape, original cuisine, folk customs, etc., and ultimately the place where our ancestors were born and lived. This sentiment is guarded by the collective of true Poles, i.e., the ethnic element. [...] However, more interesting is **the pro-state patriotism**, which has a very short history in Poland. Representatives of this trend do not see Polishness in the graves of their ancestors, in the landscapes on the Vistula or in the aroma of bigos, but, for example... in **paying taxes**, which are getting increasingly expensive every year, or in **paying the bus fare**. (net. 7)

There is a clear redirection of the viewer's attention to a bundle of qualities other than the traditional (established) ones: the relevant contemporary qualities are paying taxes, validating tickets, etc., activities aimed at not stealing from the state, while it seems that the state is understood as a community – all Poles and their welfare.

Tadeusz Kwiatkowski also points to the possibility of changing the direction of evaluation or the content of entire value judgements, which is the domain of persuasive quasi-definitions (Kwiatkowski 2002: 402), i.e., procedures which enable re-evaluation. The re-evaluation, in turn, may consist in blurring and changing the evaluative meaning of the term being defined (cf. Pietrzak 2015: 62 et al.). A good example is the modifications related to the word *friend*. The word 'concubine' (to use Stevenson's example, 2015: 26) has become to some extent vulgar and unpleasant to our ears. The word 'friend', displacing the previous one, provided a convenient ambiguity as it partly retained its former positive meaning and thus became helpful in taking off the social odium from concubines.

Among the characteristics of *a true Pole* discussed in this text, a good exemplification material is to understand the word *a liberal*. In dictionaries, we find that it is a supporter of liberalism, an advocate of tolerance towards disapproved views, attitudes and other people's deeds or a political direction advocating the guarantee of individual freedom, national and religious minorities, etc. (cf. USJP). Such a meaning typically connotes

a positive valuation of the bearer of the feature named with this lexeme. On the other hand, Piotr Cieśliński in his article *Między nowym totalitaryzmem a nihilizmem aksjologicznym (Between new totalitarianism and axiological nihilism)* in *Gazeta Wyborcza* of 7.02.1997 indicates the possibility of extracting a different meaning by a specific type of language use and the reversal of the sign of evaluation:

Today 'we' are the true Poles and 'you' are liberals, enemies of Poland or even Europeans. (NKJP 10)

The liberal thus (re)defined is already evaluated negatively. It is accompanied by an extension of the negative valuation to the words constituting the immediate context: *Europeans*. One can clearly notice the manipulative potential of quasi-persuasive definitions, which Teresa Hołówka writes about:

They manipulate the meaning of a term, usually a not very clear, ambiguous term, lacking clear, paradigmatic uses, while creating the impression that either one is merely describing the accepted usage or revealing the 'heart of the matter' hidden in it. (2012: 61).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Ewa Masłowska describes the phenomenon of changing the meanings of certain words under the influence of the value system of a given social group using the concept of *secondary meanings* (1991: 181-185). Thus, we come to the conceptual category of *truth*.

## **2.6. Approximation of meaning**

Many texts have been devoted to the truth as a conceptual category (mainly philosophical). Among others, Jadwiga Puzynina (2008a) wrote about the importance of truth in linguistic communication, as well as about the multiple meanings of the word *truth*; Aleksander Kiklewicz (2017) mentioned the interpretative aspect of meaning and the understanding of content as a condition for the realization of the category of truth; Dwight Bolin-

ger (1973) stressed that truth constitutes the norm of linguistic communication, while Robert Pilat considers it the basis of all action (2009), and – as we well remember – Herbert P. Grice – as a condition for implementing the communicative principle of cooperation in terms of the category of quality:

"Try to make your participation such that it is truthful" and two more specific maxims:

1. Do not say what you think is false.
2. Do not say what you do not have due justification for. (1977: 89)

Meanwhile, Kiklewicz states:

However, the linguistic system works algorithmically, allowing the production (or reproduction) of constructions (messages) **useful for human** (especially **interactional**) activity regardless of whether they are true or false, appropriate or inappropriate, acceptable or unacceptable. [...] Since we can understand these expressions, they fulfil their function, while the fact that they are true or false does not impinge on the language system or the linguistic competence of its users (2017: 7).

*A true Pole* and the differences in understanding/defining it resemble the issues of correct/incorrect referentiality in the case of *nomina appellativa*, where referentiality can be quite complicated. It is, among other things, due to names with an undefined and subjectively conditioned conceptual content, such as *a banana* that has a fixed and defined conceptual scope, while *democracy* has a fuzzy scope as it depends to a large extent on the subjects' attitudes, political views, and shared ideologies (cf. *ibidem* 26). Our cognitive system is thus a kind of **medium for veridical interpretation**, because:

Truth does not mean the direct conformity of a sentence to **reality**, but conformity to the **image of reality** cultivated by communities, groups, or individuals. The recognition of anything as true or false is essentially based on our beliefs, partially verified in practice. Since beliefs belong to categories fixed in consciousness, they are



often overlooked in reasoning processes. We consider something to be true or false, not being fully aware of the fact that it is true or false for us, according to us, from our point of view (ibidem 34).

Thus, from this perspective, the image of *a true Pole* appears as an approximation of the truth, according to Kiklewicz's definition:

Approximation (or semantic diffusion) means underdetermination, underspecification of the meaning of linguistic units (words, sentences, texts), the blurred nature of the boundaries of lexical concepts, i.e., the lack of conviction of language users as to what content belongs to the scope of the unit's meaning and what not (2020: 10).<sup>12</sup>

Our extra-linguistic knowledge gives grounds to avoid large quantifiers as we realise that the sentence: *All true Poles/every true Pole is like that ...* (+ a bunch of features) is false, but true or at least highly probable is: *There are some true Poles who*

### **3. Conclusion**

The source of shaping the characteristics of a young true Pole may be patterns drawn from the surrounding reality, about which Jolanta Saacewicz writes as follows:

It is enough that he/she goes to a Polish school. It is enough that he/she sits in front of TVP, that he/she is surrounded by Catholic community and led by a real Polish priest, that he/she sees those monuments leading to heaven, that he/she soaks in the legend of 'Bury' and the Świętokrzyska Brigade, that he/she listens to Radio Maryja, that he/she hums disco polo and goes to the cinema to see 'Smolensk'! It is enough for him/her to be surrounded by Poland (net. 8).

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<sup>12</sup> In his monograph, the author gives examples of various types of approximation and their motivation, e.g., approximation of derivatives, names, axiomatisation, semantic phantoms, and many others (Kiklewicz 2020: 10-90).

In the summary of the previously quoted text, Jakub Żulczyk rightly notes that the axiologically polarised compositional elements of the image of a true Pole are:

[...] simply a clumsy attempt to catch the elusive, i.e., 'Polishness', that which is Polish, which can describe our merry nation. [...] a true Pole is someone who works hard while earning far too little. He/she is someone confused, distrustful and suspicious, because the state in which he/she lives guarantees him/her absolutely nothing, except another heist on his/her hard-earned change. I would also say that this is someone brave. Accustomed to poverty. Reasonable. In fact, tolerant, kind, and witty. Honest and articulate. In fact, whatever happens, I have in my heart the conviction that if there is a formula for a true Pole, it includes a kind of, broadly defined, being right, despite extremely unfriendly circumstances. And the conviction that it will be all right after all. All in all, I have the impression that this conviction is in us. After all, we are all True Poles. We all have our ghastly abstract language and Polish identity cards. And above all, we were born here. No one made us from a rubber-like product in a Chinese factory near Rzeszów (net. 9).

In her monograph entitled *Wśród stereotypów i tekstów kultury* (*Among stereotypes and cultural texts*), Małgorzata Karwatowska draws certain conclusions that are also relevant to the notion referred to in this text, namely, writing about **the stereotype**. She notes that it assumes the character of a label, provides the basis for deriving specific evaluations, facilitates the diagnosis of phenomena, contributes to the creation of social bonds, and constitutes a set of judgements about a part of reality (2020: 17-18).

Simultaneously, in the last twenty years (the turn of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries), there has been a clear tendency to redefine the notion along with the changing extra-linguistic reality, the dynamics of political and social transformations. Jolanta Panasiuk made similar observations about each stereotype:

[...] along with changes in language, changes in extra-linguistic reality, stereotypes may change, while the quality and direction of the changes need not be parallel (1998: 97).

When writing about moral criteria of contemporary discourse, Mieczysław Michalik takes up the issue of generalising, “juggling” facts depending on non-communicative aims. Therefore, the notion of *a true Pole* will be treated instrumentally as an element of **moral demagogy**:

In discussions about social reality, individual phenomena and facts are extremely often treated as general tendencies, raised to the rank of universal phenomena – a part taken for the whole. Almost every thesis can be “proved” that way, and every thesis can be supported by at least one fact, which is considered an exception confirming the rule. Such reasoning proceeds here according to the following scheme: “X is a thief (possibly also Y and Z), so all people (of a given community, group) are thieves” (1980: 164-165).

or moral **blackmail** or **discredit**:

It always serves to increase the emotional pressure on the recipients of such statements. It is also connected with moral blackmail – if someone does not support my demands, calls, warnings ..., they become morally suspect (Karwat 2006: 40).

The expression a “*true Pole*” may also be used willingly by someone who aims at discrediting the Other by attributing certain features to him/her or refusing to acknowledge other features,<sup>13</sup> a populist (when he/she mythologises the common wisdom of the “simple human” to gain supporters) or a **demagogue**, when:

appears from the position of “spokesperson and defender of the people”. If he/she emerges not based on 'one of us' [...], it takes place on the principle of a “true Pole” (respectively: a true Catholic, a com-

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<sup>13</sup> Mirosław Karwat writes more about various mechanisms of discrediting in the chapter *Plaszczyzny i kryteria dyskredytacji (Discrediting planes and criteria)* (2000: 135-154).

munist, an anti-communist), who warns against those untrue, tracks them down, exposes, and stigmatises them (Karwat 2006: 36-37).

The research conducted so far shows that the notion of a true Pole, which is standardly included in the stereotype, entails various interpretative possibilities. It shows features of profiling notions and clear definitions; it is an effect of ideological thinking and could be a tool of unethical manipulation, discrediting, while the category of truth has only the character of approximation. Therefore, it can be studied and described in various categories belonging to linguistics, sociology, and philosophy. And with the knowledge of other contexts – also another reinterpretation. If it is referred to in one, it gains a greater degree of approximation.

Finally, a reflection arises that when observing the use of a notion, we will not get much truth about it but a lot about its users, who often share the judgment: We consider as reasonable only those who are of our opinion.

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