

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION SUMMARY

TITLE	Forms of Address in Contemporary Polish Language. A Sociolinguistic Study
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Purpose and object of the dissertation

The main purpose of the study was to describe the current linguistic awareness of native speakers of modern Polish regarding the use of forms of address. The work seeks to complement the latest data in this research area.

The subject of the study is the contemporary Polish language after the political change in Poland, which took place in 1989. The study mainly discusses the spoken variety of standard Polish. Some parts of the thesis also deal with written language, especially in the context of interaction through the Internet. The descriptions focus on interpersonal communication.

Hypotheses

These are 5 hypotheses in this thesis. These are:

- 1) After 1989, the sphere of use of the form *ty* expanded and the way how Poles express politeness has been simplified;
- 2) The approach of common users of Polish to contemporary changes (the expansion of the sphere of use of first-name basis and the simplification of polite behavior) is neutral;
- 3) The meaning of age, position and gender as criteria for the choice of addressing forms have been changed – contemporarily Polish language speakers do not pay much attention to them;
- 4) Transition to first-name basis does not always mean the sign of permission to cross the border of privacy;
- 5) Describing Poles' awareness of the use of forms of address makes it possible to revise the model of Polish linguistic politeness in contemporary terms.

Research questions

In order to verify the hypotheses mentioned above, this dissertation has the following research questions. They mainly are related to the expansion of the use of form *ty* in contemporary Polish language:

- 1) What does it mean to use the form *ty*?
- 2) In what kind of conditions can the transition to the first-name basis occur?
- 3) What does the transition to the first-name basis mean?
- 4) How is the contemporary expansion of the use of *ty* perceived by Polish speakers (positively or negatively)?
- 5) What are the most important criteria for the choice of addressing forms for users of contemporary Polish?

Research methods

In this study four types of research were conducted. These are: analysis of texts from the National Corpus of Polish, a questionnaire survey, analysis of comments from LinkedIn and interviews. Considering the interdisciplinary character of the research topic, both quantitative and qualitative data were taken into account. Thanks to multiple steps of research, it was possible to gain an accurate overview of the linguistic awareness of the use of forms of address by contemporary Polish speakers.

Structure of the dissertation

The thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter is the Introduction, which includes a presentation of the research topic, the purpose and the object of the research, the hypotheses, the research questions and the plan of the study. The second chapter presents definitions of keywords, followed by a review of the previously published researches in the third chapter. Chapter four is a description of the four studies conducted within the scope of this dissertation, the results of which are summarized in chapter five, along with answers to the research questions. The final chapter, chapter six, concludes the whole dissertation by providing a perspective on further research. The individual chapters are described below.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter presents the choice of the research topic, the purpose and the object of the study. The hypotheses and the research questions are also described.

Chapter 2: Definitions of keywords

The second chapter mentions some of the research keywords and presents their definitions, which are adopted in the thesis. These are: *politeness*, *etiquette*, *linguistic norm*, *linguistic awareness*, *contemporary Polish language*, *democratization of language*, *business language* and *forms of address*. The description includes not only dictionary definitions, but also those provided by Polish researchers.

Chapter 3: Research review

This chapter includes a review of research on Polish forms of address. It first discusses models of Polish linguistic politeness, which form the basis of research on polite speech acts, including the use of addressative forms. Comparative studies and selected works related to language education in this research area are also presented.

The second subsection consists of an outline of Polish forms of address. The binary addressative system of the Polish language, symmetry and asymmetry in their use, as well as the historical changes in Polish addressative system are described. This demonstrates the richness of the literature on the research subject is.

The last part of the Chapter 3 presents current problems related to the use of Polish forms of address. Many linguists draw attention to the blurring of the boundary of formality. From the traditional point of view, an official communication situation involves the use of polite forms *pan/pani*, and the straight form *ty* indicates the informality of the situation. Nowadays, however, there is a blurring of this boundary, especially in business contacts. The misuse of mixed forms (the use of *pan/pani* in combination with a first or last name of addressee, the skipping of *pan/pani* in forms with titles) is also considered as pragmatic problems of contemporary Polish language. According to some researchers these problems reflect the influence of English-speaking culture. The expansive presence of the form *ty* in various spheres of social life is also described as a manifestation of the democratization or Americanization of Polish language. Contemporary changes in the ways Polish native speakers address others may also be influenced by the relatively new communication tool, the Internet. The problems mentioned above may cause discomfort in interaction between representatives of different age groups due to generational differences in linguistic awareness regarding the use of Polish forms of address.

Chapter 4: Description of studies

1) Analysis of texts from National Corpus of Polish

As the first stage of the research, texts from the National Corpus of the Polish were analyzed. The analysis was conducted by searching the corpus with two keywords *na ty* and *per ty* ('being on the first-name basis'), which made it possible to gain a general picture of the use of Polish *ty* reflecting on speakers' relationship. The analysis showed that the factors of addressing someone by *ty* in Polish can be as follows: benefit, pursuit of convenience and emotional bond. The factors can also coexist in a certain relationship. The analyzed texts also showed that the use of the form *ty* does not always imply consent to cross the border of privacy especially in situations where interlocutors are "ostensibly" on first-name basis just for benefit or convenience of communication. Additional elements such as drinking alcohol or contact with other languages, which may also have an impact on shaping the image of first-name basis relations from the perspective of Polish speakers, also appeared in the analyzed material. Further research therefore took into account the elements mentioned above.

2) Questionnaire survey

The next study was a questionnaire survey, which was completed by 430 people. A questionnaire with 33 questions was generated on webpage Ankieter.co.pl and shared on Facebook and via email. The questionnaire consisted of 4 sections. The first section contained questions on basic information about the respondents, such as age, gender, place of residence, education, language skills and experience of living abroad. The second section included questions on how to address family members, teachers and unknown children. The third section was related to the transition from the polite form to the first-name basis, and the fourth section inquired about ways to address others in the workplace. The survey included both closed and open questions, which made it possible to obtain not only quantitative but also qualitative data.

The results of the survey showed that the most important criteria for the choice of addressing forms for contemporary Polish speakers are hierarchy (age and occupation) and the formality of the situation. As secondary criteria can be mentioned the sense of distance, emotions (mostly negative), gender and types of relationships (family, social, etc.). It should be noted that the above-mentioned criteria intersect with another category – the category of community, sometimes referred to as the conceptual opposition: *one's own – stranger*. Each of speakers can treat his interlocutor in different ways (as a stranger or not), so this category can be a cause of discomfort especially in business contacts.

A difference was observed between various social groups. Older users of Polish are more careful about using the form *ty*, although this does not mean that younger people do not respect traditional values such as hierarchy or the formality of the situation. As for the difference between men and women, survey data suggests that men are more tolerant of the use of the first-name basis form in various situations. Contact with other languages, especially English, also influences linguistic awareness regarding the choice of Polish forms of address. Respondents with longer contact with English-speaking culture are more open to the direct form *ty*, but it should be noted that they are aware of the rules of politeness functioning in Polish society and follow them.

The results of the questionnaire survey proved that the contemporary Polish speakers care about the symmetry of adult relationships. Asymmetry occurs in interactions between a child and an adult, such as at school, in family, etc.

3) Analysis of comments from LinkedIn

The survey was followed by an analysis of comments from LinkedIn, an internet website which specializes in professional networking and career development. The 203 comments added to the survey, which was created on one of the users' profile of LinkedIn, were analyzed. It was related to the preference of Polish forms of address used in an interaction between a recruiter and a job candidate.

The analysis showed that the hierarchy and formality of the situation are important criteria also in the business sphere. However, it is worth noting that the criterion of community (*one's own – stranger*) is also important in interactions at work places. Some users of the site treat the interaction between the recruiter and the candidate as an interaction between "strangers," while according to some comments the recruiter is looking for a person who can be well adjusted to their job team and working environment.

According to the results of this study, many users distinguish between the rules for the use of Polish addressative forms and, for example, those for English-speaking culture. Polish speakers pay particular attention to the use of individual names as forms of address in their language. There were also comments suggesting a preference for the use of the direct form *ty* in the IT industry, which was taken into account in the last stage of the survey.

4) Interviews

The last part of the research consists of interviews given by 10 people (3 women and 7 men). The respondents work as IT specialists or their co-workers. The interviews were partially structured and in-depth. All of the questions concerned ways of addressing others in the

workplace. The survey was conducted by using a voice recorder and the Zoom platform, after which the respondents' answers were transcribed in MS Word and analyzed.

Analysis of the interview data showed that nowadays the use of the form *ty* to everyone in a company is becoming a new standard of organizational culture. Also, it can be said that a clear suggestion to transition to the first-name basis (form *pan/pani* to *ty*) is important, most often during job interview.

As suggested by the results of previous studies related to business contacts, an important criterion for the choice of addressive forms is the conceptual opposition of *one's own* – *stranger*. The border between “one's own” and “stranger” is defined on an individual basis, so treating a client or candidate as “one's own” straightaway from the first contact can be risky.

As a contemporary problem with the use of Polish forms of address, Polish researchers point to the inaccurate mapping of English-speaking custom by treating the Polish *ty* as equivalent to the English *you*. The interviews suggest that the widely used form *ty* in the workplace does indeed reflect the influence of English, but this is an influence of the increasing presence of that language in Polish professional environments, rather than a simple replication of foreign rules into Polish. Employees are sometimes forced to speak several languages during a single meeting, and in such a situation they choose the direct form of address in all languages in order to simplify communication, also in Polish.

Respondents' answers suggest that they pay less and less attention to the relation between formality of situations and types of Polish forms of address. However, some Polish speakers change the ways they address their colleagues, especially in the presence of outsiders. The change of addressive form in such situations also applies to the use of titles to people higher up in the professional hierarchy, in which not only full forms with *pan/pani*, but also its abbreviation is observed.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

This chapter summarizes the overall conclusions. The final answers to the research questions are presented, based on which the hypotheses mentioned at the beginning of the thesis were also verified.

Closing chapter

The last chapter summarizes the entire work and provides an outlook on further research.