

Mgr Damian Gocół

UMCS Lublin

e-mail: damian.gocol@gmail.com

## Linguists towards Oral History Texts. Changes within the Meaning of the Term and Research Possibilities<sup>1</sup>

There are numerous definitions of oral history, for this term is understood differently. Oral history is called: *discipline*<sup>2</sup>, *field of study*<sup>3</sup>, *method*<sup>4</sup>, *theory*<sup>5</sup>, *faculty of historiography*<sup>6</sup>, *social movement*<sup>7</sup>, *interpretation event*<sup>8</sup>, *collection*<sup>9</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> The article is an expanded and revised version of the paper *Linguist towards oral history texts* (International Conference “Oral History in Central-Eastern Europe: Current Research Areas, Challenges and Specificity”, 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> September 2015, Lodz).

<sup>2</sup> *Oral History*, [in:] *The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*, Columbia: Columbia University Press 2013, [online]. Available on the Internet: <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/oral+history> [accessed: 30 November 2016].

<sup>3</sup> *Oral History: Defined*, [online]. Available on the Internet: <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/> [accessed: 30 November 2016].

<sup>4</sup> G. Smith, *The making of oral history*, [online] 11 September 2015. Available on the Internet: [http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/oral\\_history.html](http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/oral_history.html) [accessed: 30 November 2016]; J. Hoopes, *Oral History: An Introduction for Students*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1979, p. 5; *Oral History: Defined*, op. cit.; W. Kudela-Świątek, *Odpamiętane. O historii mówionej na przykładzie narracji kazachstańskich Polaków o represjach na tle narodowościowym i religijnym*, Kraków 2013, p. 73; A. Niderla, *Historia mówiona jako metoda badawcza*, [in:] *Historia mówiona w świetle nauk humanistycznych i społecznych*, red. S. Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska [et al.], Lublin 2014, pp. 25–51.

<sup>5</sup> G. Okihiro, *Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History: A Reconnaissance into Method and Theory*, “Oral History Review” 1981, No 9, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ohr/9.1.27>, pp. 27–28.

<sup>6</sup> M. Kurkowska-Budzan, *Historia zwykłych ludzi. Współczesna angielska historiografia dziejów społecznych*, Kraków 2003, p. 186; Eadem, *Antykomunistyczne podziemie zbrojne na Białostocczyźnie. Analiza współczesnej symbolizacji przeszłości*, Kraków 2009, p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Eadem, *Historia...*, p. 178.

<sup>8</sup> P. Filipkowski, *Historia mówiona i wojna. Doświadczenie obozu koncentracyjnego w perspektywie narracji biograficznych*, Wrocław 2010, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> *Oral History*, [in:] *Oxford Living Dictionaries*, [online]. Available on the Internet: [https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/oral\\_history](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/oral_history) [accessed: 30 November 2016]; *Oral History*,

*study*<sup>10</sup>, *narrative*<sup>11</sup>, *story*<sup>12</sup>, *account*<sup>13</sup>, *information*<sup>14</sup>, *source of knowledge*<sup>15</sup>, *interview*<sup>16</sup>, *conversation*<sup>17</sup>. Though it may seem demanding to categorize this field of human activity, the researchers agree with what the oral history process is, namely it consists of recording the stories about the past, archiving them and analyzing the collected material<sup>18</sup>.

The multiplicity of the abovementioned terms results from the interdisciplinary nature of oral history. Various representatives of often distant disciplines are concerned with it. Different categorizations illustrate alternative research objectives and distinct points of view. However, not only do scientists collect, archive and analyze oral accounts about the past but the media and cultural institutions often take similar actions as well. This is particularly evident in the post-communist countries, where the development of research on oral history was inhibited. In the times of Soviet domination in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the regime could only accept one, Marxist interpretation of history. Therefore, gathering the memories of the past was a subversive activity in which solely underground

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[in:] *MacMillan Dictionary*, [online]. Available on the Internet: <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/american/oral-history> [accessed: 30 November 2016]; J. Moyer, *Step-by-Step Guide to Oral History*, [online]. Available on the Internet: [http://dohistory.org/on\\_your\\_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html](http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html) [accessed: 30 November 2016].

<sup>10</sup> *Oral History*, [in:] *Oxford Living Dictionaries*, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> R. Grele [et al.], *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York: Praeger Publishers 1991, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Oral History*, [in:] *MacMillan Dictionary*, op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> *Oral History*, [in:] *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company 2013, [online]. Available on the Internet: <http://www.yourdictionary.com/oral-history> [accessed: 30 November 2016].

<sup>14</sup> *Oral History*, [in:] *Oxford Living Dictionaries*, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> Cz. Borowik, *Audiowizualna epoka*, [in:] *Historia mówiona w świetle etnolingwistyki*, red. S. Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska, S. Wasiuta, Lublin 2008, pp. 17–20.

<sup>16</sup> R. Grele, *Directions for Oral History in the United States*, [in:] *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, eds. D. Dunaway, W. Baum, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Lanham: AltaMira Press 1996, pp. 62–83.

<sup>17</sup> R. Grele [et al.], op. cit., p. 7; E. Paclawska, *Zróżnicowanie gatunków mowy w tekstach historii mówionej*, [in:] *Historia mówiona w świetle etnolingwistyki*, op. cit., pp. 47–62; P. Filipkowski, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Currently, the process of oral history is dominated by two tendencies. The first aims to record, archive and process the narratives (to publish entire accounts or select fragments embedded in a larger work, e.g. a reportage). It is mainly the domain of the media and cultural centers. The second trend aims to record, archive and analyze (and interpret) the narratives. I wrote more about this in the article *Kreowanie systemu wartości w reportażu radiowym. Na podstawie materiałów Studia Historii Mówionej Polskiego Radia Lublin*, [in:] *Media a wartości*, cz. 5: *Człowiek w mediach*, oprac. red. M. Gabryś-Sławińska, K. Pilipiuk, Biała Podlaska 2016, pp. 105–116.

organizations or journalists engaged by publishing collected relations in the West<sup>19</sup>. In such cases, oral history was often used in practice, but not subjected to any theoretical reflection.

When writing about oral history, I will describe it as a *research trend* for it is a term with wide and neutral meaning. The term does not suggest subordination to a particular discipline, for example history or historiography, and also considers the interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary nature of the oralists' studies. It does not mean that the remaining terms are completely inadequate. They, however, focus only on other aspects of the issue. The meaning of some is too wide, for example *social movement*. In the other cases, the intersection of meanings occurs. Not every *method* or *conversation*, for instance, is oral history. While flipping through the general list of terms used to name oral history, we can see that there are two clear interpretations of the term. On the one hand, it is seen as an organized and interdisciplinary research activity (discipline, field of study, method etc.). On the other hand, it is a natural and spontaneous action of a person who talks about their past (story, relationship etc.). Jerzy Bartmiński drew attention to this issue by claiming that we should distinguish between "organized" and "extempore" oral history. The former is an interdisciplinary research trend, the latter – a spontaneous response to the needs of every human community, which aims to confirm its identity through a story about their own past<sup>20</sup>. In the next part of the paper, I will focus on the first meaning, so when I use the term *oral history*, it is the organized form that I have in mind<sup>21</sup>.

The purpose of my article is to demonstrate how linguists can use the texts of oral history in their studies. This is a very interesting issue, considering that linguists had developed a methodology of oral history before it gained an institutionalized form<sup>22</sup>. The beginnings of collecting oral accounts are associated with

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<sup>19</sup> More on this topic: D. Kałwa, *Historia mówiona w krajach postkomunistycznych. Rekonesans*, „Kultura i Historia” [online] 2010, nr 18. Available on the Internet: <http://www.kulturaihistoria.umcs.lublin.pl/archives/1887> [accessed: 30 November 2016].

<sup>20</sup> J. Bartmiński, *Historia mówiona – interdyscyplinarna i wieloaspektowa*, [in:] *Historia mówiona w świetle nauk humanistycznych i społecznych*, op. cit., pp. 10–11.

<sup>21</sup> I skip at this point the question if a distinction of "extempore" oral history is actually needed. Firstly, we have numerous names of spontaneously created stories that already exist in science, for example narration, story. Secondly, the use of the term *oral history* in two senses can lead to referring in the same way to the material and the method of its research, which can be misleading.

<sup>22</sup> It is impossible to indicate the clear date of the creation of oral history as research trend, but I think that the beginnings of its institutionalization can be found in the 40s, when first research centers devoted only to this issue were created in the United States. Rough caesura can be 1948 when the Columbia University established the first oral history research center. More on this topic: A. Nevins, *Oral History: How and Why It Was Born*, [in:] *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, op. cit., pp. 29–38; R. Grele, op. cit., pp. 62–81; M. Sobczyk, *Teoria i dzieje historii mówionej*, [in:] *Historia mówiona w świetle etnolingwistyki*, op. cit., pp. 21–30.

the fascination with folk nature, and the origins of this trend can be traced back to the ideology of European Romanticism. The scientific interest was focused mainly on folklore. In Poland this type of activity developed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, with special merits in this field ascribed to Oskar Kolberg, the author of monumental work *Lud. Jego zwyczaje, sposób życia, mowa, podania, przysłowia, obrzędy, gusła, zabawy, pieśni, muzyka i tańce* (*Folk. Its Customs, Lifestyle, Language, Stories, Proverbs, Rituals, Witchcraft, Games, Songs, Music and Dance*). Bartmiński claims that oral history has become a new name for the old practices of dialectology, the study of folklore and ethnolinguistics<sup>23</sup>. It should be noted that the representatives of these disciplines gathered oral accounts in order to study culture and language understood widely, but this type of communication also includes the stories about the past. When a new research trend appeared, which was oral history, scientists drew attention to other aspects of the collected stories. David K. Dunaway noted that each of these disciplines uses different methods and has different purposes, while oral history became their specific link just in the 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when it actually gained interdisciplinary nature. The researcher also stressed that the approach of these disciplines to oral accounts is radically different from the historiographical analysis because historians “ignored performance, narrative, audience, and focus on factual content”<sup>24</sup>. It shows the fundamental difference in the approach to the analyzed material between historical and anthropological sciences. Richard Dorson, who wrote about the differences between historians and folklorists, recognizes that the former pay attention primarily to the content (i.e. what we talk about), and the latter – to the form (i.e. how we talk) of communication<sup>25</sup>. Piotr Filipkowski used Dorson’s distinction to characterize all the disciplines involved in oral history studies. He distinguished two methodological approaches to oral accounts<sup>26</sup> – *historical*, which focuses on content, and *sociological* (in my opinion, the term *anthropological* would be more accurate), which draws attention to the form of expression. Linguistics could be assigned to the second group, although it must be noted that it is not a discipline focusing only on the formal side of the accounts – similarly history does not focus solely on the content. In this distinction, the spacing of research emphasis is more important rather than forming an impassable borderline.

As I have mentioned before, the research process of oral history is based on recording, archiving and analyzing oral accounts. Now I will explain how the

<sup>23</sup> J. Bartmiński, *O wartościach słowa mówionego*, [in:] *Historia mówiona w świetle etnolingwistyki*, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> D. Dunaway, *Introduction. The Interdisciplinarity of Oral History*, [in:] *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, op. cit., pp. 10–12.

<sup>25</sup> R. Dorson, *The Oral Historian and the Folklorist*, [in:] *ibidem*, pp. 283–291.

<sup>26</sup> P. Filipkowski, op. cit., pp. 22–23.

work of linguists engaged in oral history is characterized at each of these phases. The experience of linguists with recording dates back to the creation of first audio recorders. Technological development has allowed for much more detailed record of oral accounts than in the case of graphic methods. Thanks to this, researchers can note many characteristics of speech which are specific to the oral variety of language. The elements such as accent or tone often give a specific character to the account, allow for a new interpretation of the narrative and give us additional information about the narrator<sup>27</sup>.

Because listening to the whole account anew each time when a new analysis is undertaken would be a big hurdle for researchers, transcription of the text became a necessity. Narratives are often provided by unqualified subjects, therefore, linguists had the dilemma of how accurate the transcription should be. Not all researchers approached the problem in the same way. The most accurate transcription was required by dialectologists. There was the need to find all the specific phonetic elements in the text. For this reason, they chose to use a phonetic alphabet, which would enable them to write those elements down. Ethnolinguists could afford a little less specificity. They used a semi-phonetic transcription based on the traditional alphabet. In this type, all the syntactic, morphological and lexical peculiarities are still accurately reflected<sup>28</sup>. This notation is used *inter alia* in Pracownia "Archiwum Etnolingwistyczne" UMCS (the institution established by the Department of Textology and Grammar of Contemporary Polish Language at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University) in Lublin. A considerable collection of records relating to both Polish folklore and oral history has been collected in this department<sup>29</sup>. The transcription has often two versions. The first is called "raw text", which is linguistically true to the oral account. By contrast, "standardized text" takes the form of a script that is ready for publication. All the linguistic errors and repetitions characteristic of oral accounts are deleted in this notation and some phrases are replaced by synonyms. Standardized text must be intelligible for an unprepared reader. It is worth mentioning that in the case of raw text, the use of prosodic or paralinguistic characteristics, for example gestures, is marked in the transcription. These elements (prosodic and paralinguistic) are usually described in square brackets since no separate signs for their designation were adopted in the text. All the accounts gathered in the "Archiwum Etnolingwistyczne" are cataloged and described according to the following formula<sup>30</sup>:

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<sup>27</sup> See: M. Marczevska, *Językoznawca wobec „oral history”*, [in:] *Historia mówiona w świetle nauk humanistycznych i społecznych*, op. cit., pp. 137–138.

<sup>28</sup> J. Bartmiński, *O wartościach...*, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> More on this topic: A. Bielak, *Możliwości systematyki materiałów historii mówionej*, [in:] *Historia mówiona w świetle etnolingwistyki*, op. cit., pp. 63–80.

<sup>30</sup> Source: the materials of Pracownia „Archiwum Etnolingwistyczne” UMCS.

Project name RT (the recording tape) UMCS (evidence number)

**RT UMCS**

**Recording place:** .....

**Recording date:** .....

**Who recorded:** .....

**Transcription of the text:** .....

**Transcription of the melody:** .....

**Storage medium:** .....

**Protocol number:** .....

**Informers:** 1. Name and surname

Date and place of birth

Place of live

**Themes of recordings**

**Section of storage medium**

**Table of contents**

In the IFP UMCS (The Institute of Polish Philology of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin), a unique methodology of research of oral accounts has been developed as a result of years of folklore, dialectological and ethnolinguistic studies. The employees and students of the university for numerous years have been collecting oral accounts, which are gathered in the aforementioned “Archiwum Etnolingwistyczne”. The researchers from IFP UMCS are also contributing substantially to the development of the concept of linguistic worldview. This conception give us a new approach to text and established in it the conceptualization of reality, which also corresponds with Western cognitivism. The results of the studies are presented, among others, in the so-called “red series”<sup>31</sup> and the magazine “Ethnolinguistic” (“Etnolingwistyka”)<sup>32</sup>. While writing about the analysis of oral accounts, I will allude to the achievements of the researchers from Lublin.

One of the key features of the texts of oral history is their orality. The verbal form of language differs significantly from the graphic variety and the researchers

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<sup>31</sup> The series has been appearing since 1981, when a monograph entitled *Pojęcie derywacji w lingwistyce* was published (red. J. Bartmiński, Lublin 1981). Until today, 35 volumes and analytical bibliography of articles have been published.

<sup>32</sup> “Etnolingwistyka” has been published since 1988 as a scientific journal of linguistics, anthropology, culture and cognitivism.

of oral history have been drawing attention to it from the beginning<sup>33</sup>. Linguists distinguish a series of characteristic features of the oral language variety, which have a substantial influence on the form of the texts of oral history:

- 1) Audibility – information is transmitted by audio channel. Speech sound often shows us the emotions of the speakers and allows them to diversify the modality of expression. Valuable information for the researcher may be voice breakdown and significant pauses. In the oral variety of language, important functions are assigned to the prosodic subcode – vowel quantity, melody, power, pace, rhythm and timbre.
- 2) Gestures – in contrast to the written variety of language, a person can support themselves with gestures. If a recipient does not have an idea about it, the speech can be incomprehensible.
- 3) Dialogism – oral communication is clearly aimed at interaction with other people, building bonds between the partners in conversation. Oral accounts should be analyzed in the context of the communicative situation in which they arise.
- 4) Situationality – the form of oral communication depends on the situation. Researchers can gather a lot of information from the surroundings of the speaker. An example would be the analysis of proxemics code, that is the observation of the distance between partners in communication.
- 5) The individual nature of communication – oral expressions are more subjective than written ones<sup>34</sup>.

It should be emphasized that correct identification of individual characteristics of speech depends on the method of recording the material. If we have access only to the audio recording, the possibilities of description and interpretation of audibility and gestures may be limited. We have no access to the image, so we lack important data. We do not see the gestures, pauses or voice breakdowns that can be

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<sup>33</sup> The approach to oral sources in oral history also underwent significant changes. Until the 60s, they were considered as complementary to written sources. With the spread new research trends in Europe, the British researchers began to argue that the oral sources are more reliable than written (see: P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past. Oral History*, Oxford–London–New York: Oxford University Press 1978, pp. 91–137). On the other hand, in 1979 Alessandro Portelli drew attention to the fact that it is impossible to introduce a simple distinction between the reliability of oral and written sources. He stressed that it is more important to study the formal shaping of the text and the specific vision of the world related to it (see: A. Portelli, *What makes oral history different*, [in:] *The Oral History Reader*, eds. R. Perks, A. Thomson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London–New York: Routledge 2006, pp. 63–74).

<sup>34</sup> J. Bartmiński, *O wartyściach...*, pp. 14–15. It is worth adding that the insights of Bartmiński on the characteristics of oral language variety confirm and develop the hypotheses of Portelli, who argued that oral texts about the past are characterized by audibility, narrativity, subjectivity, specific reliability, subjective view, the multiplicity of points of view (see: A. Portelli, op. cit., pp. 64–73).

associated with certain statements. The video recording seems to be more accurate, but it has drawbacks, some of which include poor sound, light and composition<sup>35</sup>.

Oral communication is not only a specific form of language use, but also an interesting cultural phenomenon. Walter Ong, among others, notes the influence of orality on the development of civilization and culture<sup>36</sup>. Stanisława Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska stresses that oral communication is one of the fundamental factors which builds community and helps to shape the culture and axiological system<sup>37</sup>.

The basic material of oral history is a recorded conversation with a witness of the past. The researcher must meet the speaker, which constitutes a direct interaction. In case of a “face-to-face” conversation, a specific communicative situation occurs. Its different elements have to be considered if we want to reconstruct the subjective or collective view of the events which are told by the narrator. Correct identification and analysis of the characteristics of oral expression allows the description of identity and memory (both private and public)<sup>38</sup>.

Similarly to ordinary conversation, in case of oral history studies the interchangeability of roles occurs. However, in an open or biographical interview the speaker is mainly a narrator, not a researcher. The latter should withdraw so as not to interfere with the speech of the witness of the past, which often turns into an extensive monologue<sup>39</sup>. Oral expressions are characterized by subjectivity and egocentricity. Bartmiński claims that material of this kind clearly illustrates the subjectivity of the narrator. He even mentions a distinct research field of oral history, the so-called subject field. The researcher also emphasizes the role of ethnolinguistic methodology in the analysis of subjectivity as it draws attention to the most important aspects of speech, which should be considered in any linguistic description. These are: the conceptualization of events by narrators, the point of view and interpretation perspective<sup>40</sup>. The last two terms require explanation because they are defined differently in the literature. *The point of view* is a “subject-cultural factor, which decides on the way of talking about the subject, including the categorization of the subject, the choice of onomasiological base for creating its name, the choice of its name, the choice of the characteristics that

<sup>35</sup> J. Hay, *Case Study: Using video in oral history – learning from one woman’s experiences*, [in:] *Oral History in the Digital Age*, eds. D. Boyd [et al.], Washington, D.C.: Institute of Museum and Library Services 2012 [online]. Available on the Internet: <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/using-video-in-oral-history/> [accessed: 1 March 2017].

<sup>36</sup> See: W. Ong, *Oralność i piśmienność. Słowo poddane technologii*, przeł. J. Japola, Lublin 1992.

<sup>37</sup> More: S. Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska, *Wzorce tekstów ustnych w perspektywie etnolingwistycznej*, Lublin 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Private and collective memories combine complex connections. More on this topic can be read in M. Wójcicka, *Pamięć zbiorowa a tekst ustny*, Lublin 2014.

<sup>39</sup> P. Filipkowski, op. cit., pp. 26–27.

<sup>40</sup> J. Bartmiński, *Historia mówiona...*, p. 16.



are predicated about the subject in specific expressions and fixed in meaning. Thus, the point of view adopted by a speaking subject operates as a group of directives shaping the content and structure of words and whole expressions, giving also a basis to identify genres of speech and language styles<sup>41</sup>. In contrast, *the interpretation perspective* includes “a group of properties of the semantic structure of words, correlated with the point of view, which, at least to some extent, results from it. By identifying these properties, the recipient of an expression comes to recognize the point of view<sup>42</sup>. Different individuals may perceive past events in different ways, assign alternative characteristics to the same objects, prioritize them differently or emphasize different aspects of the same designatum. This is obviously reflected in the language.

In the analysis of oral narratives, little attention is often paid to the recipient, who in this case is usually the researcher. However, his mere presence affects the shape of the narrative. The narrator lives in the society and is aware of certain recipient expectations. That is why they adjust the form and content of the story to their interlocutor. If they talk with a young person, they often adopt the attitude of a teacher, if with representative of a scientific institution – they adopt the attitude of a petitioner. As a result, two different researchers can obtain different narratives of the same event from one person.

A particularly interesting component of expression for a linguist is the message itself. I understand it widely, not as a mere over-organization or the form. In my further considerations, I will draw attention to the issues of content. Of particular importance in the area of oral history research is the problem of authenticity of events which the narrators speak about. Of course, for linguists, the verification of facts is not as important as it is for historians. The task of the former is not so much the reconstruction of the past, but its conceptualizations established in the language. The category *language worldview* may be helpful as it is “preserved in the language, differently verbalized interpretation of reality, possible to be recognized in the form of group of judgments about the world<sup>43</sup>. The elements of worldview can be reconstructed by the analysis of various language data – lexical, morphological and syntactic. Worldview always must be “somebody’s” – it can be a vision of the world of an individual, a group or a nation. Earlier, I drew attention to the subjectivity of oral accounts. An interesting issue is the relationship between individual accounts and the worldview of the group to which an individual belongs. To what extent are these views similar? The manner of telling depends largely on the community. Throughout life, we learn specific schemes of speech and thought and repeat established stereotypes. Maurice Halbwachs has already noted that “people think by structures<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> Idem, *Językowe podstawy obrazu świata*, wyd. 2, Lublin 2007, p. 78.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, pp. 78–79.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> M. Halbwachs, *Spoleczne ramy pamięci*, przeł. M. Król, Warszawa 1969, p. 125.

The vision of the past as an area of ongoing discussion, which, depending on the point of view, may be differently interpreted, makes the concept of history relativized, while memory becomes an increasingly popular category<sup>45</sup>. Linguists more often pay attention to the way of expressing the narrator's own identity, search in the texts for the exponents of subjectivity, familiar/alien oppositions or specific narrative schemes<sup>46</sup>.

The study of contact sphere is also a source of much information for linguists. There are established schemes of communication. Contact must be started, supported and finished in an appropriate and understandable manner. In language, there are special elements which have phatic function. In the process of communication, it is also influenced by external factors, but they are closer to the sender-recipient sphere than contact. Marzena Marczevska mentions age, social group, nationality, education, the place of residence, profession, religion, sex<sup>47</sup>. The last factor is especially worth pointing out. Men and women talk about themselves differently. According to psychological studies, men put themselves in the center of events and talk mainly about their own activities. Women tend to set aside their own person<sup>48</sup>. This thesis was also confirmed in my research<sup>49</sup>, which does not mean, however, that such division is without exceptions.

The way of coding information involves the use of certain linguistic conventions. We study the language signs and rules of combining them. These features could be used in different ways in everyday communication. The language users must correctly encode and decode the information. The ignorance of the rules, low linguistic competence or common inattention may lead to misunderstanding. It is worth mentioning that interlocutors influence the shape of conversation and,

<sup>45</sup> More about the category of memory in language: M. Wójcicka, op. cit.; A. Pajdzińska, *Pamięć jako wartość*, [in:] *Człowiek wobec wyzwań współczesności. Upadek wartości czy walka o wartość?*, pod red. J. Mazura, A. Małycki, K. Sobstyl, Lublin 2007, pp. 253–261; W. Chlebda, *Szkice do językowego obrazu pamięci. Pamięć jako wartość*, „Etnolingwistyka” 2011, t. 23, pp. 83–98.

<sup>46</sup> See also: A. Niderla, *Kategoria SWÓJ – OBCY w relacjach historii mówionej (na wybranych przykładach)*, [in:] *Historia mówiona w świetle etnolingwistyki*, op. cit., pp. 81–86; D. Gocół, *Opozycja swoi/obcy w relacjach radomskiego Czerwca '76*, [in:] *Tekst – gatunek – dyskurs na przełomie XX i XXI wieku*, red. J. Szadura, Lublin 2012, pp. 135–152; Idem, *Tożsamość narracyjna. Na podstawie relacji biograficznej Piotra Prussa*, MA thesis prepared in the Department of Linguistics of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University under supervision of prof. Anna Pajdzińska, Lublin 2013; Idem, *Odkrywanie narracyjnej tożsamości w relacjach historii mówionej (na podstawie narracji Haliny Górskiej)*, [in:] *Historia mówiona w świetle nauk humanistycznych i społecznych*, op. cit., pp. 121–132; J. Bartmiński, *Historia mówiona...*, pp. 9–24.

<sup>47</sup> M. Marczevska, op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>48</sup> K. Stemplewska-Żakowicz, *Koncepcje narracyjnej tożsamości. Od historii życia do dialogowego „ja”*, [in:] *Narracja jako sposób rozumienia świata*, pod red. J. Trzebińskiego, Gdańsk 2002, pp. 81–113.

<sup>49</sup> D. Gocół, *Opozycja swoi/obcy...*, pp. 135–152.

at the same time, also select certain acts and genres of speech. For instance, the conventions of anecdotes and confessions are different. The manner of telling can differ with respect to the expression of subjectivity, the degree of emotionality or abstraction. The accounts also vary in intention and function<sup>50</sup>, which makes them a wide field of research for pragmatics.

To sum up, a wide area of research is opened for the linguists dealing with oral history. The research process can be divided into three distinct phases. The first is recording. Only after gathering the accounts, must the linguist make methodological decisions that may influence the quality of their later research. It is primarily about the manner of making interview and the choice of data medium. The second phase of the research is archiving the collected material. From the point of view of linguists, the most important issue is the choice of an appropriate way of transcribing the text. Earlier, I have listed three possible forms of transcription: phonetic, raw semi-phonetic and normalized semi-phonetic. At the third phase of research, linguists make the most difficult choices. An analysis of accounts encompasses many diverse research fields typical for each communicative situation. Contractually, we call them "the fields" of: sender (the study of the manners of expressing subjectivity, point of view or perspective of interpretation), recipient (the study of the impact of conversation partner to shape the narrative), context (the study of the text and situational environment of expression), message (the reconstruction of conceptualization of reality by analyzing language data) and contact (the study of the sender-recipient relation). Linguists study both the form (lexical, morphological, syntactic elements of the speech), and the content (judgments about reality).

## Streszczenie

### **Językoznawca wobec tekstów historii mówionej. Zmiany w rozumieniu terminu i możliwości badawcze**

Autor porusza w artykule problematykę definiowania historii mówionej i analizowania relacji ustnych z perspektywy językoznawcy. Prezentuje różne podejścia do tego prądu badawczego, które obecnie dominują w różnych naukach. Następnie ukazuje przekształcenia, jakim ulegało rozumienie historii mówionej od lat czterdziestych XX wieku do dziś. Wskazuje na specyficzne korelacje między historią mówioną a językoznawstwem oraz podobieństwa i różnice między nią a etnolingwistyką, folklorystyką i dialektologią. Artykuł kończy przegląd możliwych pól badawczych, które mogą interesować językoznawcę w tekstach historii mówionej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** historia mówiona; językoznawstwo; ustność

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<sup>50</sup> J. Bartmiński, *Historia mówiona...*, pp. 17–18.

## Summary

In the article, the author discusses the problem of defining oral history and analyzing oral relations from the perspective of linguists. He presents different approaches to this research trend, which is currently dominating in different sciences. He shows the transformation of the understanding of oral history from the 40s of the twentieth century to today. The author indicates a specific correlation between the research trend and linguistics as well as points to the similarities and differences between it and ethnolinguistics, folklore and dialectology. The article concludes with an overview of the research areas that could be of interest for a linguist dealing with the texts of oral history.

**Keywords:** oral history; linguistics; orality

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