

## WORD IN A RELATIONSHIP – SOMEONE’S, FROM SOMEWHERE, WITH SOMETHING, IN BETWEEN

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**Summary.** The article discusses the meaning of the word in the psychologist’s work. The primary aim of the article is to emphasize how extremely important language is, how skilfully you can and should use it in professions other than those in which the word is the focus of interest. The specific objective of the article is to show that the word is much more than just a sign, as it resonates with its whole story. The words used in a conversation do not belong only to the person who utters them. Before they are spoken in a particular situation, they already exist. Thus, they carry a specific history of meanings, and hence their use is not accidental – because of the content which they have acquired by social agreement and tradition, and through personal meanings. And once the word is spoken, it starts belonging to someone else, namely the person who has heard it, at the same time remaining in the common space of the relationship. This is a relationship between the helper and the person receiving help, between the lecturer and the student, between researchers of the same and of different disciplines. Also, it is a relationship between the one who utters the word and all those whose experiences have built up its meaning.

**Key words:** relationships, helping relationship, word in a relationship, the meaning of the word

The word uttered has lost its weight, it does not seem to have a decisive influence on anything important (see: Kapuściński, 2013, pp. 29–33). Consequently, the one who speaks it does not do it carefully, and the one who listens does not pay attention to what he/she hears. There is also another aspect of the word’s situation in a conversation – its relativization has been somehow sanctioned. If we can almost always refer to a different perception or subjective truth, and if the word may mean nothing or everything (which amounts to the same thing), then it can be perceived

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as an attempt to cancel the social contract and tradition that define the meaning of the word through the scope and context of its use. The result of such an annulment is to negate the sense of all inquiry, and make conversation impossible<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, we strongly argue that the word can hurt, insult, and heal. Despite this discrepancy in the cultural treatment of the word, it occupies – or at least should – a special place in the psychologist’s work. It is because both the uttered and the unspoken words reflect the world of a man who turns to the psychologist for help. Therefore, the use of language by the psychologist requires that he/she be mindful and aware of the word<sup>3</sup>. However, the way of understanding what the word is and a sensitivity to its meaning are a consequence of not only a psychologist’s individual predisposition, but also teaching methods, which are in turn related to the commonly accepted research model. The word has unfairly lost its position, but the opposite should be true – the word should be given special consideration. It is because it exists before it is spoken and before it becomes someone’s, which means that at the moment of being uttered again, it is “coming” from somewhere – it has been used for many generations. It does not come transparent, it is not an empty sound, it comes “with something”. At the time of another use, it begins to belong to the speaker, gaining further shades of meaning, as well as to whoever hears it. And it stays in between, in their common space. And the latter – fortunately – seems to be unchanging.

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<sup>2</sup> I mean the conversation which is not just about transmitting or exchanging the simplest information, but in which both sides strive to understand each other as much as possible. In such a conversation, it is not possible to ask about the meaning of each word, there must be a kind of agreement that specifies the meaning so that not every interpretation can be possible.

<sup>3</sup> The aforementioned mindfulness and awareness, or rather their lack, do not come from nowhere. The widest context (i.e. cultural), in which the value of the word is lowering is not the only one. In psychology, the situation of the word is ambiguous, or even uncertain. The problems psychology has with its own identity, manifesting themselves in the return to its philosophical roots, attempts to identify with biological, or natural sciences, and elsewhere with humanities or social sciences (see: Kościelska, 2014) are combined with the problems concerning the meaning of the word. In addition, quantitative research is a paradigm so dominant in practicing psychology that Hobfoll (2006, p. 24, also Kuncewicz, Sokołowska, Kuncewicz, 2015) comments: “Measurements have become the essence of research, and statistics have replaced logical reasoning as a research method. [...] when there is a discrepancy between logic and statistics, the final conclusions are decided by statistical data”. Therefore, a person studying psychology constitutes his/her own thinking mainly by means of specialized terminology, statistical data and in the context of postulates of practice based on evidence (see: Spring, 2007; Thomason, 2010; Spring, Neville, 2011; Smółka, 2013). Considering the abovementioned approach, it is legitimate to ask about the chances that a psychologist shaped in this way, deprived of any language alternative, will be able to use everyday language when talking about difficult experiences of an individual (see: Janion, 1996). Our doubts seem to be justified. Many times – when dealing with people who have sought the psychologist’s help – can you hear a network of concepts as well as patterns of building sentences which are characteristic of the representatives of this profession.

**Word that is someone's.** In his autobiography, Jung writes about every patient's unique internal world and language – so unique that the therapist must find a new language of therapy for each patient (after: Yalom, 2003, p. 31). Different languages, often different dialects, prevents mutual understanding, but Jung means the differences which are nowadays referred to with the linguistic concept of "idiolect". Idiolect, or a set of language properties of a given person, only in the context of very personal conversations becomes a different language. The helping relationship is naturally based on conversations involving the confidential areas of the assisted person's life and it turns out that the psychotherapist and the patient<sup>4</sup> use different languages, because although they share their mother tongue, yet they have different "family dialects" and idiolects. In this situation, learning the other person's language by one of the parties is a prerequisite for communication. Due to the specificity of the helping relationship, the psychologist should be the one who must learn the language of the person with whom he works. And here comes, or at least should, the translation: 1) between the dialects and idiolects of participants in the helping relationship, and at the same time, 2) from the specialist language into the dialect/idiolect of the assisted person. Each attempt to understand another person is *de facto* translation, an attempt to agree on the meanings of words, and personal experiences behind them and related to them (Steiner, 2000, p. 86, see also Davis, 2012). The psychologist's task is not to teach the patient his/her language (neither professional, with a network of psychological concepts<sup>5</sup> and patterns, nor the personal one). A specialized network of concepts, however precise and unambiguous it seems, actually does not facilitate communication in the helping relation. Quite the contrary, it hinders and blocks understanding, not only in the assisted person, but also in the psychologist. What prevents understanding is the limitations of technical terms, which Bakhtin (2009, p. 406) points out: "Greek thought (philosophical and scientific) did not know terms (with foreign roots, in the sense of not belonging to the general language), or words with foreign or unconscious etymons. The conclusions from this fact are of utmost importance. Technical terms, including those of native origin, undergo a stabilization of meaning, their metaphorical force weakens, and the ambiguity and play on the multiply meanings of the word is lost. The extreme one-tonality of the term [...]". Therefore, the term cannot constitute an adequate explanation of many millennia of human experience, which are part of an individual experience and at the same time are made up of it<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Every time I use the term patient, client or an assisted person I refer to an adult.

<sup>5</sup> It is worth remembering that this network also contains concepts used in everyday language, but psychology assigns them different meanings and places in the perception of reality. The sound identity of words can give both parties the illusion of colloquiality, identity of meaning, and understanding.

<sup>6</sup> The need to simplify and mistaken objectivity involves the temptation to believe that the psychologist has a monopoly to make the human world more understandable. The best

The psychological term is no exception here. By using it to describe an individual experience, the psychologist in a way tears it from the community of experiences of many generations (even if the description is made only at the level of thought and remains unspoken). Thus, he/she enforces unambiguity, which gives neither the patient nor the psychologist space to seek the optimal meaning, best corresponding with his/her experience.

Patients often ask for help because they either cannot or do not know how to say what they have experienced (see: Grosz, 2014). In order to do it, they need appropriate words, as well as patterns for constructing a narrative that would skillfully draw on experience or give it the right dimension. A person receives a pool of these words and patterns from his/her parents. Words can also be found in literature, school life, and so on (see: Janion, 1996; Kuncewicz, Kruszewski, Zasim, 2016). Sometimes the pool of resources that could be used is insufficient. The reason might be that no one in the family, at school, or during the course of life (also the life narrated in culture) gave such a person an opportunity to learn the right words. In this situation, the psychologist may be tempted to “prompt” the patient with adequate words, thus doing something that no one has ever done for this person before. Then, too often, the psychologist or the psychotherapist does not help the patient to narrate his/her own story, but only tells this story for him/her. And yet it should not be the case that the patient adopts the psychologist’s wording; the latter is only to help him/her and encourage to look for the word. Two situations should be considered here. The first is when the patient does not have the word; the other when he/she has it, but it seems inadequate. In the first case, the question arises how to look for it and where, because if it is not there, then it must be taken from somewhere. Of course, the psychotherapist might provide encouragement, but the thing is that the patient will not find the word in the wilderness. So how can the former help the latter? It seems that it should rather be achieved by encouraging the patient to formulate broad descriptions, indicating areas and ways of searching, asking questions that help verify the adequacy of the word discovered and chosen by the patient. The value of words, their weight, and the degree of their adequacy is different. It seems useful to adopt Jasper’s distinction between signs and words. The former are, among others: arbitrary; clear, defined, and thus substitutable by other similar signs; unambiguous, and as such – “dead”, with finite meanings that are almost unaffected by transformations – they have neither background nor atmosphere. Therefore, they are unable to embrace human experience within their meanings. The word can be much more than the sign. Unlike signs, words have a wealth of meanings and develop in use; they are ambiguous, but they crystallize in context; they are irreplaceable and therefore to some

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belles-lettres or non-fiction describing the way of experiencing the world, in most cases also touches upon what is difficult for a person – what questions he/she asks himself/herself, how he/she looks for answers and how he/she deals with the situation when it is impossible to find them. For the psychologist, literature is a language alternative and a resource he/she can draw upon to help find the right word for the patient.

extent untranslatable (they do not have exact, semantically identical synonyms<sup>7</sup>), the way they sound matters a lot (Jaspers, 1990, pp. 204–207). The word is marked by the speaker's experience and for this reason the psychotherapist should pay special attention to it. Therefore, the situation when the patient has the word, but the psychotherapist considers it inappropriate, because in his/her opinion it is inadequate, raises doubts. The psychotherapist's disagreement is rarely expressed explicitly, but rather, for example, through the instruction: "look/let's look for another word" (meaning: better, more adequate, because the one used by the patient should – for some reason – be replaced with another). The word chosen by the patient to specify his/her own experience, is not accidental, and therefore both the patient and the psychotherapist should ponder over its meaning together. Especially when the word does not seem to be a reflection of this part of the patient's world which is already familiar to the psychotherapist. This apparent inadequacy may be superficial – it may be a reflection of an unknown part of the patient's world, which somehow combines with the reported experience<sup>8</sup>. And it might be this very word that will prove to be the key to understanding the difficulties encountered by the patient.

**Word that comes from somewhere.** By using the word, we "wake up, as it were, all of its previous history to resonate" (Steiner, 2000, p. 57). In each word you can hear the voices of the ancestors, from whom both the psychologist and the patient inherit the language<sup>9</sup>, thus acquiring a sense of belonging to a specific culture,

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<sup>7</sup> This applies even to words that seem to be semantically identical, but when we look at the contexts of their use, it turns out that we nuance the meaning of synonyms, and not that we use them interchangeably.

<sup>8</sup> I will try to explain this with an example. My interlocutor, describing the way of functioning his family of origin and the atmosphere prevailing in it, used the term "camp" several times. When I inquired about this word, he said that the word "drill" would be adequate too. However, when I asked which word better reflected his experience and feelings – he returned to the word "camp". We began to investigate where this word had come from. I asked him if he could explain its use; i.e. when he referred to this word, did he take into account any other experiences of his own, or perhaps those of his family or friends. It turned out that his relatives had been imprisoned in Soviet camps, and he himself was interested in the history of Gulag camps. The term "camp" in his case was a carrier of family history – the experiences of the preceding generations. It acquired an additional meaning, which, however, did not erase the previous ones – it was also proof of a certain continuity of experience. After all, if something important that changes life is experienced by, for example, a grandfather or father, it is also relevant for the next generation.

<sup>9</sup> I assume a situation in which both parties involved in psychotherapy, i.e. the patient and the psychologist, speak the same first language, i.e. when they are of the same nationality and grew up in the same country. This statement is particularly important in the case of immigration undertaken by young people. If young people decide to become parents and raise a child outside the country and after a few years they return to Poland – their fatherland – their child becomes an immigrant in a cultural sense (a similar opinion is expressed by Grzymała-Moszczyńska). Another tricky situation occurs when therapy is conducted in the

as well as shared knowledge, experience and valuation of cognitively captured reality, which has been collected in the language, transmitted by it, and passed on to future generations (Anusiewicz, 1990, pp. 281–282). Linguists refer to this entity as “linguistic picture of the world”<sup>10</sup> (JOS, see: Grzegorzczkowska, 1999; Tokarski, 2001). This is probably the most general/widest context of spoken words and sentences. It includes the historical-cultural context, comprising “the shared cultural base”, the sphere of cherished values, and the sphere of dialogue rules (“co-operation rules”), which belong to the ethics of the word. One of the elements of the context understood in this way is also the remembrance of the history of the word, or the traces of its previous use<sup>11</sup>. It seems to be the least conscious element of an utterance, although intuitively present. Obviously, each statement also has its own narrow context. If the word is used to describe behaviour – then the context is the situation and other words and sentences uttered. The word used is always embedded in different context levels, which are related to each other. The widest context is contained in the narrowest one, for example concerning who or what a given word can be referred to. “The word comes to its context from another context, with a fund of other people’s interpretations. The speaker’s own thought, taking the word in its possession, finds the old residents in it” (Bachtin, 1970, p. 306).

The context is a basis for identifying intentions and verifying the truthfulness of an utterance (van Dijk, 2003, p. 12), thus it can be a carrier of the general social function of language in a specific situation – binding and separating (Dunbar, 2009)<sup>12</sup>. On a micro scale, the family develops a specific dialect, thanks to which its members can be separated from other people and at the same time strengthen their bond. Words receive specific meanings, carrying family and personal stories and experiences. One could venture the opinion that every family creates its linguistic picture of the world, which is in contact with the nationwide, or collective picture

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patient’s native language, which is the therapist’s second language, with the patient being an immigrant and the whole process taking place in the therapist’s home country (Kitron, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> The concept of “linguistic image of the world” is one of the basic concepts of modern psycholinguistics, ethnolinguistics and cognitive linguistics, it also seems to be a platform for integrating all modern sciences about language (see: Pietrzyk, 2002, pp. 456–470). The interest in language as a subject of research and reflection is demonstrated by representatives of various disciplines and fields (including philosophers, linguists, psychologists, cultural anthropologists, neurolinguists, biolinguists), which obviously entails a wide spectrum of terminology, concepts and areas of research. The reader can find a comprehensive review of these concepts in the following articles: Kurcz (2005), Gut (2009), Kurcz, Okuniewska (2011).

<sup>11</sup> According to Bratkowski, misusing the history of the word is “the theft of words”. Pilch calls it “rogues’ hotchpotch”, which Bartmiński sums up with the remark that in such a “language game” credibility is at stake (Bartmiński, 2005, p. 342).

<sup>12</sup> Socially, within occupations, a similar function is performed by professional jargon, which on the one hand allows representatives of the same profession communicate with each other and at the same time “cuts off” those who do not belong to this group.

(JOS). Although this context is quite obvious for psychologists, they seem to forget that it concerns them too. "Forget" can be understood here as an unfounded belief that the language spoken by the psychologist can be neutral; that this language does not include their personal history. While listening to another person, the psychologist is often aware of the presence of some other people's voices, which he/she often identifies as the voices of the patient's parents, or significant others – people from the assisted person's immediate environment. It is seldom the case that the psychologist looks deeper, taking into account one, two or three generations back (systemic and intergenerational psychology).

And so, the psychologist's and the patient's common, distant progenitors participate in their meeting (thanks to this fact the language spoken is identified as the same), but also their closer ancestors – great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents (that's why the language identified as the same is different – a different dialect). When living, we get immersed in fresh experiences, equipped with the beliefs of our distant and closer ancestors.

**Word that brings something.** The work of the psychologist, and the language he/she uses presents yet another difficulty. In what and how he/she speaks, someone else's voice/voices can be heard. Psychologists often disregard these voices, which is wrong of them, as these are voices from outside our culture. Psychology is Americanized to a large degree. By transferring American terminology to Polish soil, the psychologist transfers the cultural context which does not match the patient's, or the client's, auto-narration, and, just as importantly, does not suit his/her own experiences either<sup>13</sup>. It is evident in the case of the personal pronoun I and seventeen psychological constructs related to the structure of the "self" in American psychology and the difficulty in translating these concepts. As Paweł Boski writes (2009, p. 213): "[...] it would be surprising if the privileged grammatical form of the first person singular in English did not result in an elevated psychological status of 'self' within Anglo-Saxon culture. [...] It should be assumed that language reflects a special meaning here, which culture gives to the subject and to many mental states in which it may be located, or mechanisms that control these states". The way of understanding a man and his relationship by the psychologist is dominated by Anglo-Saxon, or American culture. Transferring the patterns that do not fit into our culture can be harmful in specific situations, for example close relationships. A good example of such a foreign voice is that present in the term "emotional blackmail", which is the focus of an essay by Mary Besemeres (2007)<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> In this context, it is legitimate to ask about the truthfulness and honesty of the contact between the psychologist, who uses constructs which are culturally alien both for himself/herself and the patient.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Besemeres is the daughter of the eminent Polish linguist Anna Wierzbicka and John Besemeres. She is the co-editor of a book about people's experiences concerning bilingualism.

In her essay on the Polish phrase “mieć żal do kogoś” (“to have a grudge against someone”) and the feelings connected with this phrase, she writes that it combines emotional closeness with certain expectations towards the person’s beloved ones. In Anglo-Saxon culture, such expectations are referred to as “emotional blackmail”, and are regarded as distinctly negative. In Polish culture such expectations are not only acceptable, but even inscribed in a close relationship. The Polish phrase “mieć do kogoś żal” has no equivalent in English. Similarly, there is no Polish equivalent of “emotional blackmail”. Living in different languages and different cultures, a man must somehow deal with such differences in expectations and values. It can be argued that in Anglo-Saxon culture many people value personal autonomy more highly than emotional closeness (in the name of which someone could expect something from someone else that the latter does not want to do), but in Polish culture the opposite is true. By referring to such expectations as “emotional blackmail”, the psychologist grossly simplifies the complexity of the relationship and situation, limiting it to one dimension, or aspect. He/she imposes an entirely negative interpretation of the situation. He/she defines it negatively, leaving no room for a more diverse view. By “surreptitiously” ushering the context “through the back door”, he/she changes the assessment of events, accepts and imposes it without asking himself/herself why he/she does so, and without reflecting that he/she does so. While a bilingual person gradually and unhurriedly learns to deal with cultural differences present in words, the assisted person is not always able to do so, and may be vulnerable to these differences. The fact that the change of language is not trivial can be clearly seen in the research findings, which showed that the change of language influences the change of moral judgment (Geipel, Hadjichristidis, Surian, 2015a, 2015b). Taking into account the results of the studies mentioned above, it seems legitimate to presume that a discreet linguistic change also influences moral judgment<sup>15</sup>. Does the psychologist have the right to influence the assisted person in this way?

The network of psychological concepts that comes from Anglo-Saxon culture carries a different view of the world, alien to Polish culture. It is the history of other people’s ancestors, not ours. An attempt to transplant it (by introducing new concepts, or modifying the meanings already present) changes the linguistic picture of the world and imposes a different interpretation of it. If this happens at the widest context level, then it can be assumed that such are some historical regularities (the decision in this respect is worked out by society, or a specific language community) or cultural processes resulting for example from the translation of literature<sup>16</sup>. But if this transplantation takes place in the psychologist’s office, often at a critical moment of the patient’s life, it should be considered unethical. [There are also doubts

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<sup>15</sup> The studies referred to concerned, among other things, the assessment of the effects of incest.

<sup>16</sup> Such intervention in culture not only does not harm but fosters development (Deciejus, 1988; Zaleska, 2015).



about instilling an alien linguistic picture of the world into children and young people, while weakening that which comes from their own culture (see: Kunczewicz, Kruszewski, Zasiński, 2016).] A psychologist who is not aware of this attempted transplant and its possible consequences, and applies a culturally alien network of concepts to the assisted person's experience, reduces his/her own and the patient's view of the world (largely unconscious) to one perspective. He/she deprives it of a part that could potentially be of key importance to the helping process. If psychologists, or psychotherapists (who usually have a good command of a foreign language) were offered a stay and work in their field in a foreign country, many of them would probably have doubts, considering the possibility that cultural differences and linguistic nuances might hinder effective help<sup>17</sup>. Strangely enough, they do not show such reflection and prudence in the helping situation when they use a psychological language taken from and rooted in another culture. And doubts might (and perhaps even should) be aroused by the fact that "the impertinent self"<sup>18</sup> from American culture is currently becoming a model.

**Word that is in between.** Another problem is where the psychologist should take these adequate words from. What resources should he/she use to help the patient find the right words and patterns to describe their experiences? It seems that the best option is to search within what is common – in a truly "shared world", where common ancestors can be heard. Then it is possible to reach for the roots – collective, understandable and somehow "appropriate" (in the sense of being fitted, negotiable). The therapist can draw upon his/her family or personal language (however, special caution would be advisable here, because in this case there are no simple references to what is common). Searching through the general linguistic picture of the world (JOS) is to look for an element that will fit well with the world of the patient's experience, and will be the interface between two language contexts – social, and family and personal. This search is also to check, or verify, whether it really fits; whether what is translated and found best reflects the experiences and meanings given to it. Thus, since searching and translation are done in a relationship, therefore this process must leave scope for the patient, and give him/her a chance to confirm that the word is helpful, and adequately reflects the world of his/her experiences.

The postulate that follows from the above considerations is that the psychologist must be properly prepared in terms of language. When working with patients, psychologists need a lot of words and patterns – a vast reservoir to tap into and get inspiration for that puzzle, which is finally verified and confirmed by the patient<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> In this context, it is worth mentioning some interesting ideas formulated by Hunt and Swartz (2017) about the specificity of therapeutic work and relationship built in the presence of an interpreter.

<sup>18</sup> The term taken from the book by Hoffman (1995).

<sup>19</sup> "[...] in order to answer the call of Socrates: Know yourself and the question of Kant: What is man?, one should not limit oneself to an adequate definition, especially since such an

The psychotherapist should understand the cultural context of the language, and know the socio-historical context of assisted people's lives in order to be able to discover the personal meanings of their words. It is all the more difficult considering how limited the psychologist's readiness is to recognize the achievements in other fields (see: Yalom, Howes, 2013), especially if these achievements are, for some reason, inconvenient or demanding (the same pertains to representatives of other disciplines)<sup>20</sup>. However, the problem is that not only are psychologists eager to adopt the terminology of other disciplines, but they also distort it, which Ryszard Nycz (2012, pp. 29–30) comments, referring to literary notions: "[...] it can be said that the sooner they lose the attributes of their literary genealogy, the more easily they settle in their new environments. The effect of such interdisciplinary research is not so much the integration of results, but rather the deepening of a tendency to disperse". All this results in a terminological mess, which is difficult to accept. Furthermore, the concepts used, although meant to prove the speaker's wide reading and erudition, make communication difficult, or even impossible. On the other hand, a consistent use of psychological terminology, or appropriating, as it were, terms taken from another discipline would be disturbing. It is as if only one explanation was possible, as if there was only a psychological perspective. Psychologists should learn humility in the use of the word – abandon strictly technical terms (where possible), and carefully listen to the way words are understood and used within other disciplines. The word best serves communication when it can remain ambiguous (this ambiguity should be taken into consideration, not omitted).

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unambiguous and complete definition does not exist. One should therefore look for knowledge about man in the descriptions of the fates of mythical heroes, in the stories about characters from holy books, in ancient tragedies, in autobiographies or in novels. In order to understand what is really hidden in such expressions as: man is a rational being, religious, working, creating culture, enjoying life, free, responsible, but also subject to fate, it would be necessary to understand the story of Adam, Cain and Abel, Job, Gilgamesh, ponder over the tragedy of Antigone, read about the fate of Saint. Augustine, Søren Kierkegaard or the characters created by Fyodor Dostoyevsky" (Gadacz, 2000, p. 12).

<sup>20</sup> In his *Preface* to Fodor's book *The language of thought*, Piłat (2011) writes: "Fodor perceives philosophers who for decades have been trying to connect traditional metaphysical, epistemological and ethical questions with the achievements of contemporary cognitive psychology, neurophysiology, computer science, linguistics and other disciplines that make up cognitive science. Indeed, we are not doing very well. Like the armies occupying post-war Vienna, we focus not on a common goal, but on proving our point and outwitting the opponent, on tearing the gains and accusing others of punishable abuses. By using a deceit, we try to grab a somewhat larger area of discourse by giving the opponent false premises and claims [...] old philosophical dreams about a complete, rigorously justified picture of the world are over and we can only hope for a coherent narrative that will beat the others and be accepted".

Lack of this humbleness can be illustrated with the following exchange of opinions. More than 20 years ago Lazarus (1995) wrote<sup>21</sup>: “Wierzbicka suggests that I underestimate the depth of cultural variation in emotion concepts as well as the problem of language” (p. 255); “Words have power to influence, yet – as in the Whorfian hypothesis writ large – they cannot override the life conditions that make people sad or angry, which they can sense to some without words [...]. I am suggesting, in effect, that all people experience anger, sadness, and so forth regardless of what they call it [...]. Words are important, but we must not deify them” (p. 259).

Although the polemics between Lazarus and Wierzbicka concerns differences between languages in a strict sense, it well illustrates the refusal to have a reflection that would go beyond the language of one’s own field. Wierzbicka is right when she claims that people may feel similar – maybe even the same – states, feelings, or emotions. However, when these states are written down, spoken about, or defined by the word, they are assigned a specific history, meaning and connections. Words taken from/ originating in different cultures determine different understanding and associations.

As part of this exchange, Wierzbicka (2016, p. 31) aptly concludes: “Unfortunately, it happens that scholars who have decided not to pay attention to words and the differences between them in different languages, eventually fall into what they have so much tried to avoid, i.e. they begin to ‘deify’ words (of their own mother tongue), and consequently reify the concepts associated with them”.

It is noteworthy that the discussion between Wierzbicka and Lazarus concerns words defining emotions, which are used in research, didactics and psychological practice.

In the situation when no one in the patient’s family life, school – generally in everyday life – helped him/ her find words, or name his/her experiences; when this exchange platform was not created, a chance arises for the psychologist to display his/her professional skills. For this to happen, the psychologist’s intellectual and language capabilities should be as wide as possible. However, the problem is that, paradoxically, today’s world is “shrinking”. A fairly common belief that thanks to the knowledge of other languages we have access to other worlds and that our world is expanding, should be questioned. The curse of high specialization is to focus on one thing only. The linguistic poverty of specialized sciences promotes unimaginative effort and stifles intellectual ability (Jaspers, 1990, p. 225). Elaborating on Henry Michaux’s sentence: “Unused gift silts up other gifts”, Kłobukowski (2015, p. 91) says: “If we have talents that we do not develop, the other skills suffer as well [...] if we were to give ourselves more time in other areas that are interesting to us, we would be better at what we do professionally”.

This would seem obvious, but without reflection on this issue, we, as specialists, will remain useless, or of little use, to our patients.

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<sup>21</sup> For the whole discussion see: *Psychological Inquiry*, 1995, 6(3), 183–265.

## Recapitulation

The whole argument leads to one fundamental conclusion that without rethinking the notion of not only what the word is, but also where it comes from and what it brings, any attempts to understand man will be somehow mutilated (if that is at all possible) (Rosenzweig, 1998) and they will carry the risk of mutilation.

The voices present in the word – which has been repeatedly highlighted here – come from and represent a specific culture circle, which determines the meaning of the word. The awareness of this fact is particularly important for psychologists dealing with science and/or didactics, but also for practitioners who take advantage of scientific or scholarly achievements of others and foreign authors' publications. Therefore, we must not disregard this issue. Without trying to explore the vocabulary and various aspects of the culture that these words carry, without trying to hear voices present in it, we – specialists working with people – will not understand what we are reading; we will not understand the research results that have been presented to us, and thus we will partly get lost in the language. This loss can make the language turn into a jargon, completely unsuitable for reading or talking (Steiner, 1994, p. 66), because this special contract linking the word with the corresponding reality will be broken<sup>22</sup>.

*Translated by Małgorzata Bieleń*

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<sup>22</sup> This breach of the contract from Steiner's publication refers to the theory of deconstruction; here it refers to a specific situation.

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## SŁOWO W RELACJI – CZYJEŚ, SKĄDŚ, Z CZYMŚ, POMIĘDZY

**Streszczenie.** W artykule zostało przedstawione zagadnienie znaczenia słowa w pracy psychologa. Celem nadrzędnym jest zwrócenie uwagi, jak niezwykle ważny jest język, jak umiejętnie można i trzeba z niego korzystać w zawodzie innym niż ten, którego słowo jest przedmiotem zainteresowania. Celem szczegółowym jest wskazanie na słowo, które jest czymś znacznie więcej niż tylko znakiem, bo rezonuje w nim cała jego historia. Używane słowa nie należą bowiem tylko do tego, kto je wypowiada. Zanim wybrzmiały w konkretnej sytuacji, istniały wcześniej. Niosą więc ze sobą określoną historię znaczeń, a co za tym idzie, sposób ich użycia nie jest przypadkowy – ze względu na treści w nich zawarte na mocy umowy i tradycji społecznej oraz znaczeń osobistych. A gdy już słowo zostaje wypowiedziane, zaczyna przynależeć również do kogoś innego, do tego, kto je usłyszał, jednocześnie pozostając we wspólnej przestrzeni relacji. Relacji nie tylko pomiędzy pomagającym i wspomaganym, wykładowcą a studentem, badaczami tych samych i różnych dyscyplin, ale również wypowiadającego słowo z tymi wszystkimi, których doświadczenia budowały jego znaczenie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** relacje, relacja pomagania, słowo w relacji, znaczenie słowa

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