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Żyd, Żydzi, Żydzy, Żydki – stereotypes and judgments ingrained in the Polish language

Introduction

The world that surrounds human beings is colourful and multidimensional – from the early beginnings a man was forced to observe his surroundings; such observation was reflected in the language. Not only the inanimate world, but most of all contacts with other people, very often of different origins, influenced the perception of reality. Images and descriptions of people from other nationalities created through the ages of Polish history were shaped together with our country's political, cultural, social, and religious contacts. Due to alliances, wars, marriages, dynastic and country interests a certain image of people of other nationalities or religions was created in the consciousness of Polish people. The fact whether such contacts were peaceful, or whether they were characterized by a growing reluctance, had an influence on the emergence of phrases, in Polish, referring to close neighbours (close due to neighbourhood, geographical situation or socio-economic contacts). The Poles (similar to other nations – Peisert 1992: 209–210) – apart from describing themselves as a tolerant nation – could (and still can) very bluntly call people with whom they were co-existing for ages. Our neighbours from the East *Rosjanin/Rosjan-ka/Rosjanie*, are very often referred to pejoratively – *Cep, Bolszewik, Kałmuk, Kacap, Ruchol, Rusek, Sowieci, Wielki Brat*¹. Our neighbours from the West *Niemiec/Niemka/Niemcy* are also colloquially called in a negative sense, i.e. *Adolfki, Hitlerowcy, Gestapowcy, Niemiaszki, Niemiachy, Szwabcy, Szkopy*, neighbours from the South – Czech and Slovak, which we had friendly contacts with, are called *Pepiki, Pepiczki, Knedle, Knedliczki*. While bad judgements – mirrored in the vocabulary, phraseology and proverbs – about our eastern or western neighbours could be the result of historical events unfavourable for Poland (lasting

¹ Names of nationalities given by the author in this article, will be treated as proper names that is why will be capitalized.

ages fights for land, annexation, occupation), the reluctance towards nations living in the close neighbourhood (Gypsies or Jews) on our land are of a more complicated nature – the reasons for reluctance were religious “difference”, different culture, very often incomprehensible customs and the way of life. The longer the period of co-existence of different nations on Polish land, the more superstitions, negative opinions, which were mirrored in the language of our ancestors and unfortunately last in the language until now.

The article will focus on expressions and stereotypes functioning in the Polish language and referring to Jewish nationality. It can be noticed that the word *Żyd* ‘Jew’ and its derivatives do not carry a negative meaning, only for a small group of Poles. Maria Peisert (1992: 216), points to it by writing: “*Żydzi*, *Żyd*, *Żydówka*, are names both neutral as well as carrying a negative meaning. That depends on a communicative situation and context. The name is also used as a nickname”. It is difficult not to agree with such an opinion as in both everyday, ordinary conversations, as well as official communication (the media) the word *Jew* is most commonly used as an offensive word, showing the inferiority of a person called this way. Through the analysis of examples the author will try to show stereotypes and judgements associated with such names as: *Żyd*, *Żydzi*, *Żydy* or *Żydki*. The article tries to answer a question whether – apart from changes and political correctness, the Poles say (and think) about Jews only with contempt or maybe the situation has changed at least a bit?

The history reflected in names...

If we go through the history of co-existence of the Polish and Jewish nations on Polish land it will appear that paradoxically – contrary to what is very often reflected in our opinions – the Poles were a nation, who friendly welcomed Jews migrating from Western Europe. From the end of 11th century until mid 17th century the Republic of Poland hosted, among other European nations, the greatest number of Jews. It was the result not only of minor – comparing to other countries – persecutions, but mostly because of legal regulations (passed in the second half of 12th century), which provided Jews with personal protection, community government and the freedom to trade (*Wielka Encyklopedia PWN*, vol. 30: 570). The improving financial situation of Jews (especially at the times of Kazimierz Wielki) was one of the reasons for a growing reluctance towards this nation and apart from its strong social position the discrimination was becoming more common. Together with the economic fall of cities (mostly inhabited by Jews) in the 17th century this group became poorer and its numerous representatives moved to Ukraine, where they mostly traded – that is when such verbal etiquettes as *Żyd-lichwiarz*, *Żyd-arendarz* entered Polish language (such etiquettes can be found for example in a proverb

Co Żyd to arendarz (...karczmarz, ...lichwiarz) or Kochajmy się jak bracia, liczymy/rachujemy się jak Żydzi (*Nowa księga przysłów polskich 1969–1978*), which got stuck to Jews. The worse perception of the nation led to the first anti-Jewish demonstrations – in 1648 during Chmielnicki Uprising about 100–125 thousand Jews were murdered, more than hundred years later during the slaughter at Humań about 50 thousand were murdered. The Four Years' Sejm, which in 1792 passed a law concerning personal inviolability for the believers of Jewish faith (*neminem captivabimus nisi iure victum*), noticed the worsening situation of Jews and tried to solve the problem of this nation. After the third partition, due to the fall of the Republic of Poland, the situation of Jews has changed: there were strong tendencies to germanise and assimilate them in Prussia and Austria, in Russia numerous restrictions concerning personal freedom were introduced forcing Jews to live only in so called: settlement areas (areas of the former Republic of Poland and south-west part of Russia).

In the second half of the 19th century the word Jew still carried a negative meaning – e.g. in *Słownik wileński* next to this entry there were such definitions as:

1. Człowiek wyznania Mojżeszowego, starozakonny, Izraelita.
2. = fig. wzgardzony wyrodek społeczeństwa.
3. = fig. handlarz, kramarz.
4. = fig. lichwiarz, chciwiec, skąpiec, sknera, zdzierca.
5. = fig. (w pisaniu) plama, nakapany atrament (np. *zrobili żyda*) (1861, part. 2: 2277).

After regaining independence (1918) there were many anti-Jewish demonstrations, which were stronger and stronger especially in the late 30's, e.g. in 1936 an Act on restricting the ritual slaughter was passed, "ghetto benches" were introduced (1937) it was a regulation allowing Rectors of universities to appoint special places, which could be taken by students of Jewish origin (*Żydzi w Polsce. Dzieje i kultura* 2001). The period of war was a time of mass murder on the territory of Poland – the authorities of Nazi Germany exterminated people of nationalities which were considered, according to them, as not a pure race i.e. Jews, Gypsies, and Polish. During this period (1939–1945) only about 50–80 thousand Jews survived massive murder.

After WWII it was impossible to rebuild this nationality in Poland – the rise of Israel and political persecutions that started later (1968) forced Jews to emigrate (during a census in 2002, only 1133 people admitted they were Jews – data from: *Wielka Encyklopedia PWN*, vol. 30: 571). At the end of 60's strong feelings of reluctance towards people of Jewish nationality were reflected not only in speech but in popular, at that time, slogans (e.g. *Syjniści do Syjonu*). Such feelings also influenced the consolidation of existing, negative associations. The notion *Jew* – referred not only to "a believer of Jewish faith" but "the descendant of a nation, in ancient times living in Judea, considering itself

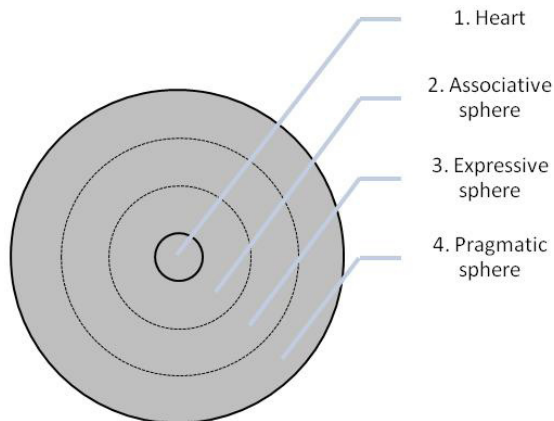
a nation originating from Abraham and the patriarchs" (*Słownik języka polskiego* 1968: 1472). When we have a careful look at the dictionary definition we may notice that the use of term "considering itself" shows a fluent border line between the description of reality (which should be included in every academic paper – and that's what *Słownik języka polskiego* is) and its assessment. The choice of a lexeme "considering itself" implies that "the others" are of a different opinion, that such judgement is not a justified one. It can be seen that in this phrase, expression of having no judgemental meaning becomes *de facto* a judgement of a certain value.

The participation of Jews in the difficult history of Poland did not help them bond with the Poles – due to economic, social, religious factors Jews remained outside Polish society and a growing reluctance towards them intensified the intolerance, which meant not only discrimination at schools or offices, but most of all it could be seen in everyday language. Thus through ages only words with a pejorative connotation appeared in Polish: *Żydy, Żydki, Żydziaki, Żydłaki, Żydziska, Moški, Icki, Judasze, Cybuchy, Parchy, Pejsy, Jude*. There was also a number of derivatives from the word Jew which carried a negative emotional attitude. These were e.g. forms such as *Żydsko, Żydura* or *Żydowa* "a wife of a Jew" (Karłowicz 1911: 452). Such words as *Żydaszek, Żydowina, Żydzioł* (Karłowicz 1911: 452) were frequently used. These words, apart from being created with the use of affixes characteristic for diminutives, are ironic. When we add a numerous group of idiomatic expressions, proverbs, which function in the Polish language for ages, it appears that the way of describing Jews in Polish is very extended and stereotypical (in *Nowa księga przysłów i wyrażen przysłowiowych polskich* there are 266 main entries for the word *Jew* and twice as many varieties – only *God* has more – 550 main entries and *woman* together with *baba, białogłowa, niewiasta* – 350 main entries, Świerczyńska 1996).

A stereotype of Jew in contemporary Polish

Because of many factors which through ages influenced the Polish language, a stereotype of a person of Jewish nationality was created – new words included elements referring to the notion, associations and culture. It is worth focusing attention (cf. Chlewiński, Kurcz 1992) that apart from numerous historical and social changes the stereotype of Jew is invariable, still with a load of emotion and having a generalizing character, leading very often to a simplified look at people being referred to in such a way. Moreover, a common use of a stereotypical judgement makes it being understood without the need to explain the phenomena.

Fig. 1. Noun language stereotype

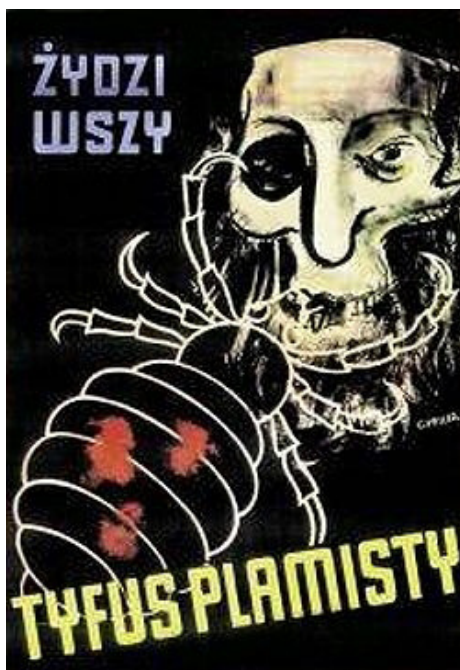


Source: Sawicka 1998: 150

1. **Heart** – includes characteristics basic for the notion of *Jew* and referring to it i.e. “a member of a nation originating from ancient Judea, with a sense of identity formed on the ground of shared religion, traditions and customs”.
2. **Associative sphere** – which points to traits, recorded in people’s consciousness, referring to the notion of *Jew* and at the same time refers to other elements of reality not connected with language.
 - 2.1. **Appearance** (noticed by senses): *thinness, ugliness, a beard with sidelocks, black or red-haired, long, hooked nose, black gabardine, yarmulke, dirt.* Characteristics strongly associated with Jews point to his *typically Semitic or Jewish look*, and even *olive complexion*. These refer to “permanent”, in people’s consciousness, elements of appearance, i.e. beard – *taka uroda, jak u Żyda broda*, sidelocks – *Żyd Żydowi pejsów nie urwie* and point to parts of clothing typical for Jews – *yarmulke, black gabardine*. Characteristic appearance associated with Jew is described by other designatum – a name is transferred to a different group of words on the basis of joining some meanings: *żydy* are also black (from the colour of their gabardine) patches on a freshly-whitewashed wall or smudges on a clean glass. In the consciousness of older people *Jew* is still a black blot in a notebook. The dirtiness associated with Jews in stereotypes – besides such compounds as *brudny/a Żyd/Żydówka, śmierdzący/a Żyd/ówka* (website GW, dated 03. 05. 2009) – combines on the base of metonymic exemplification of appellative change such as: *żydówka* in a sense of “pimple” (Masłowska 1991: 33). Due to the fact that dirt was associated not only with skin diseases, but with worms and lice, in Polish some pro-

verbs were created: *chwali się jak Żyd parchami* or idioms i.e. *robactwo żydowskie* (A joke *Dlaczego szarańcza nie zezre Żydów? Bo to ten sam gatunek robactwa!*), *Jewish lice* and associated with it description of the nation – *Scabs*. It seems that the popularization of the last association which implies that Jew is “dirty, wormy louse-infested” can be connected with a Nazi propaganda, which used it as a way to belittle Jewish nation (cf. illustration 1).

Illustration 1. Nazi propaganda poster from 1942



- 2.2. Traits of character:** *smartness, cunningness, greed, meanness, insistence, scrupulosity, self-interest, having no scruples, hypocrisy, cowardice, solidarity with own nation, cleverness, piety.*

A stereotypical Jew is clever, this trait of character is not associated with the whole nation but with cunningness and cleverness in business and becoming richer at someone else's expense: *gdzie chłop traci, tam się Żyd bogaci; Anglik (Francuz, Włoch) wymyśli, Niemiec zrobi, Żyd sprzeda, Polak głupi wszystko kupi; Kiedy bieda, to do Żyda; kiedy nędza, to do księdza; kiedy trwoga, to do Boga.* Greed is also typical for Jews: *ma Żyda w kieszeni, dlatego Żyd bogaty, że żyje z cudzej biedy i straty, dziewczyny rosną jak żydowski procent czy kochajmy się jak bracia, a liczymy się jak Żydzi or handlujmy jak Żydzi, a liczymy się jak Niemcy, hypocrisy Żydowi chrzczoneму i wilkowi chowanemu nie wierz.*

In the stereotype of Jew one can also see a strongly associated feature, i.e.: supporting one another within the nation thus there are such proverbs as: *stoi jak Żyd za Żydem* or *Żyd Żydowi pejsów nie urwie*.

Within associations referring to Jewish traits of character we can observe the process of creating metaphors: *Jewish pushiness (insistence)* is the base for calling the fruit of burdock (commonly known as bur) *Jews* or *Jewish lice*, because of their “clinginess” to a person or animal. That is why the meaning of a lexeme *Jew* is widened. The lexeme compares traits of character (or features connected with physical appearance of a person belonging to this nation) with the feature of a plant.

- 2.3. **Likes:** a superficial knowledge of Jewish everyday life is probably a result of knowing only a few features within this category. Certainly in Polish the tendency to associate Jews with eating garlic and onion is strong in people’s consciousness (e.g. a proverb *co kto lubi, co kto woli, świnia śmiecie, Żyd cebulę*), it is also mirrored in some Polish dialects where garlic bulb is called *Jewish apple*.
3. **Expressive sphere** points to ascribing some values to Jews. By analysing features strongly associated with Jews it can be noticed that a negative attitude towards this nation is dominating. It can be seen in such augmentative forms as: *Żydy, Żydzisko, Żydówka, Żydtak* or ironic diminutives *Żydek, Żydzina*, which are associated with negative traits of character. This sphere overlaps with the associative sphere (that confirms G. Lakoff concept, 1986: 42), such attributes as *żydówka* “pimple”, *Scab* “Jew”, are evaluative and refer not only to physical features, but are very expressive in character.
4. **Pragmatic sphere** – refers to beliefs and customs, which in the language reflect characteristic features. It is preserved in Polish consciousness and proverbs: *kosherness – traci czas, kto szuka wieprza u Żydów* or *ma wzięcie jak świnia w żydowskim domu*; *piety connected with Sabbath – czekać czasu jak Żyd szabasu* and associated with this time *Sabbath candles* and many more customs.

Summary

The notion *Jew* and its derivatives as well as other names created on the base of metaphorical transfers function in the Polish language from the 11th century. It is not strange that the sphere of stereotypical judgements is so developed as it is a result of new social, economic occurrences and the fact that Jews were a group assimilated with native people only to a certain extent. Colloquial, referring

to stereotypes, ethnical names exist in Polish for ages, we Poles are not unique considering this fact, each nation creates such names: French call English *les ros-bifs* (or *rosbeefs*), Italian – *les ritals*, Spanish – *les espinguains*, German – *les schleus*, *les boches*; Americans call Jews *Kike/Kyke* or *Joo*, Blacks – *Nigger*, *Niger*, *nig*, *nigor*, *nigra*, *nigre* (Caribbean), *nigar*, *niggor*, *niggur*, *nigga*, *niggah*, *niggar*, *nigguh*, *niggress*; Italian – *Wop*, *Dago* etc.

Through ages the stereotype of Jew in the Polish language not only gained a new meaning, but became a base for new words, idioms or proverbs, it gave the opportunity for the rise of new areas of reality not connected with language. Not only ordinary users of the language but great Polish thinkers and poets took part in such creation (Janion 2008). Stereotypical names used for Jew/Jews became with time names-labels characteristic for newspeak and were created according to a certain pattern (cf. Kochan 1994: 87): *X to Y* (*Aleksander Lebidiew to zyd panie michnik, powtarzam, zyd nie Rosjanin*) or *X is Y* (*Ludwik Dorn jest Żydem*) or *X looks like Y* (*on wygląda jak żyd (nie tylko z wyglądu ale i z sposobu zarabiania czyli szukać przekrećić i sporo zarobić*). It has to be remembered that the stereotype functioning in Polish was not opposed by a picture of a Jewish culture. Conventional thinking and speaking is a tendency which is very difficult to fight with as it concerns not only each speaker of a language – general use, searching for a simplified picture of a surrounding reality and certainty (without seeing appropriate meaning) is characteristic for people. It is easier to accept someone else's judgement and opinion functioning in people's consciousness than search for own answers.

The last 25 years opened us to this difficult problem in our history and maybe that is why it is spoken more often and louder about mechanisms of reluctance, superstitions, which distorted the picture of Jews in the eyes of Poles, words and stereotypes which create a negative picture of Jewish nation. More and more often opinions such as: "Today's Polish anti-Semitism means mainly inscriptions on the walls, contemptuous in everyday Polish meaning of the word *Jew*, writings of Leszek Bubel and full of hatred radio features in Radio Maryja, or *Nasz Dziennik*. It is no longer toothless anti-Semitism, with old, virulent and haggard face. Anti-Semitism is waiting for an opportunity to come back to life" (Kubiak 2008). It is difficult not to agree with such an opinion since apart from the fact that Poles consciousness is getting more mature, we are surrounded by inscriptions *Jews*, *Jude* (illustration 2.), the Star of David with a name of a football club written in it (illustration 3.) or vulgar jokes about Jews.

It has to be remembered though, that next generations, brought up surrounded by such events and hearing words "it is a Jew" uttered with contempt will consolidate what we today consciously call a stereotype. It has to be remembered that still exists a large group of people who believe such words, repeat and propagate them.

Illustration 2. „Komora Żydy Gaz” (original) and swastika

Such inscriptions and elements can be found on many facilities in Poland



Source: website <http://www.nowiny24.pl/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081118/REGIO-N00/217257743>

Illustration 3. Inscriptions of Lodz walls – “fight” between fans of football clubs ŁKS and RTS



Source: website <http://www.mmlodz.pl/artykul/tag/zamalowywanie-napisow-lodz,t.html>

Alina Cała in her book *Wizerunek Żyda w polskiej kulturze ludowej* (1992: 9) wrote: "There are two forms of superstition; everyday »dormant«, downgraded to the role of half-serious sayings, which gets naughty children under control (*jak będziesz niegrzeczny, to przyjdzie Żyd i cię zabierze*), in times of a collapse of social or economic order it regains its full foreboding load". That actually is a warning for each of the Poles – in spite of creating a new picture of Jews in our consciousness and language, at some point there will be someone who will use the reluctance lasting ages and will refer to what is stereotypical, strongly emotional and valuing, something that frees from the cognitive effort.

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Summary

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Żyd, Żydzi, Żydy, Żydki – presupozycje i sądy utrwalone w polszczyźnie

Otoczający człowieka świat jest wielobarwny i wielowymiarowy – od zarania dziejów to, co było wokół nas, skłaniało do obserwacji i wywoływało refleksję, znajdując tym samym odzwierciedlenie w języku. Na nasze postrzeganie rzeczywistości wpływ miał nie tylko świat nieożywiony, ale przede wszystkim kształtowały go kontakty z innymi ludźmi, często odmiennego pochodzenia. Polacy – mimo samookreślenia się jako naród tolerancyjny – potrafili (i nadal potrafią) bardzo dosadnie określać nacje, z którymi przez wieki przyszło im współżyć. I tak wkoło nas pełno było/jest Ruskich, Szwabów i Żydów. O ile złe sądy – mające odzwierciedlenie w słownictwie czy frazeologii – o naszych wschodnich czy zachodnich sąsiadach wynikać mogły z różnych, niekorzystnych często dla Polski wydarzeń historycznych (wielowiekowych walk o ziemię, zaborów, okupacji), o tyle niechęć do nacji żydowskiej miała bardziej złożone podłoże. Zauważyć można, iż słowa „Żyd”, „Żydzi” tylko dla garstki Polaków są neutralne. Niezwykle rzadki to przypadek, gdy człowiek jakiejś narodowości określany jest wyłącznie wyzwiskami – bo przecież z taką sytuacją mamy do czynienia w wypadku naszych starszych braci w wierze.

W swoim referacie autorka ukazuje sądy utrwalone i presuponowane we współczesnej polszczyźnie, wiążące się z nazwami: Żyd, Żydzi, Żydy czy Żydki. Artykuł jest próbą odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy nadal – mimo zmieniających się czasów i politycznej poprawności – Polacy mówią (a zatem i myślą) o Żydach wyłącznie pogardliwie, czy może ta sytuacja choć trochę się zmieniła.

Keywords: stereotypes, pragmatics, categorization, metaphorical transfers, Jew (stereotypy, pragmatyka, kategoryzacja, przekaz metaforyczny, Żydzi)