

## The Linguistic Situation of Americans of Polish Descent in Texas

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### 1. Introduction

A diasporic people is one which has seen a substantial number of its members leave an identifiable homeland for a wide variety of geographically and culturally dispersed destinations.<sup>1</sup> This is a relative concept, since the proportion of an ethnic group in diaspora, the absolute number in diaspora, and the circumstances causing and maintaining this diaspora may vary greatly. Nevertheless, all diasporic peoples share a common problem: maintaining a distinct culture in an alien environment imposes great demands on the spiritual, social, and at times even physical energy of a people.

If we borrow the term “folkways” for the specific attributes of an ethnic culture (the traditions, rituals, and beliefs which distinguish this ethnic culture from others),<sup>2</sup> it is possible to say that ethnic identity is typically based on folkways. While one could claim membership in an ethnic group on the basis of ancestry alone, the likelihood of such a claim and its intensity is roughly proportional to the extent to which the folkways of that group are maintained. These folkways, in turn, perform two complementary functions: first, an *inclusionary* function in establishing a shared identity among members of this community; second, an *exclusionary* function in distinguishing this community as a whole from the surrounding one(s).

When the external social environment expects (or even demands) assimilation, that is the path of least resistance for a community in diaspora. The process of assimilation provides a fascinating opportunity to investigate the cultural or ethnic consciousness of a people. In particular, it is possible to reveal the structural fabric of this consciousness, which represents a subjectively perceived shared identity based on layers of interlocking traditions, beliefs, perspectives, and values. As these layers are peeled away, it is possible to isolate the various components of identity, determine what roles they play, and observe the extent to which they may be interdependent. Folkways may evolve in their content while continuing to perform the same functions in defining ethnic identity. Or, these very functions may evolve as the ethnic identity itself evolves: an ethnic group in diaspora may lose connection with the ethnic source and/or its sibling communities in diaspora.

Language is a salient component of ethnic consciousness. A shared language distinct from that of the surrounding culture(s) can be a powerful statement of shared identity vis-a-vis the outside. When members of an ethnic group in diaspora speak the language of their own community, they are doing more than transmitting information: they are simultaneously making a statement to each other of their shared ethnic identity as eloquent as any performance of a religious or folk rite.

Language as a folkway is capable of performing a very powerful exclusionary function: one may enjoy the food, song, or rites of an alien culture, but rarely is one capable of enjoying a conversation in a language which one does not know. Indeed, from the point of view of exclusionary function, language is the ultimate folkway. The exclusionary capability of language is so strong that it can turn against the culture which it nurtured: members of an ethnic community in diaspora who succumb to linguistic assimilation cease to command the folkway of language, and a fatal wedge is placed between them and their ethnic community.

However, while language death has an exclusionary effect with respect to communication,

this is not the only function of language: language can also perform a ritual function, in which it need not be understood at all. Language in its ritual function is often used quite deliberately as a powerful tool in many belief systems, both religious and political: prayers or slogans become mantras, leading one into a state of meditation, contentment, or excitement. Even as a language in diaspora ceases to perform its communicative function due to assimilatory pressures, sociological factors may lead it to continue to perform its ritual function, and indeed even undergo a renaissance in that function. This paper is devoted to just such a case.

## 2. The Texas Silesians

The Polish people are among the diasporic nations of the world. Over the course of the last two centuries, for various reasons and under various circumstances, Poles have left historic Polish lands for all the inhabited continents of the world. The discussion in this paper will focus on one community of Poles in diaspora, that of a Silesian community in central Texas now over 130 years old.

It is uncontroversial that the first permanent Polish community in the United States (including the first Polish Roman Catholic parish, the first Polish school, and the first Polish convent) was founded at the village of Panna Maria, Texas in 1854, under the guidance of Father Leopold Moczygemba.<sup>3</sup> This village and several nearby communities (e.g., Cestohowa, Kosciuszko, Pawelekville, Pulaski, St. Hedwig) were founded in parallel or soon thereafter by immigrants from Upper Silesia who arrived in several groups over the three-year span from 1854 to 1856. Some of these immigrants split off from the main thrust of settlement to form compact communities in existing villages, such as Bandera, Yorktown, and Victoria, as well as in the growing city of San Antonio. Hereafter, we will use the term “Texas Silesians” for the members and descendents of these immigrant groups, and “Karnes County” for the area of settlement (even though in fact the community spills over into nearby Wilson and Bexar Counties).<sup>4</sup>

The Texas Silesians were peasants in Poland, and they became farmers in Karnes County. Their community has remained primarily agricultural and primarily Polish, surrounded by the influences of other roughly contemporaneous European immigrants from Moravia and Germany, and the surrounding Anglo, Black, and Hispanic populations. The community of Texas Silesians has grown, but not rapidly, as young people who wished or needed to work for wages made their way to larger cities, especially San Antonio, where they succumbed to assimilatory pressure.<sup>5</sup> Significantly, the community of Texas Silesians was not the destination of any significant immigration from Poland after the original settlement, and it became vastly overshadowed by the large scale economic migration from Poland to the industrial Midwest and Northeast, which peaked some fifty years later.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the community is relatively homogeneous in terms of its linguistic and geographic origins within Poland, as well as its history in diaspora. As such, in one terminology of linguistic contact, the Texas Silesians represent a “Polish linguistic island” (*polska wyspa językowa*) rather than a “Polonia environment” (*środowisko polonijne*).<sup>7</sup> Language in a linguistic island develops on its own in isolation from the mother community and the surrounding community to a greater extent than does language in a Polonia community. The problem of maintaining a language as an ethnic folkway is particularly acute in a linguistic island situated in an assimilatory environment such as that of the United States.

## 3. The language of the Texas Silesians

What is the current (circa 1988) linguistic situation of the Texas Silesians?

There has been surprisingly little work on the Polish language spoken by the Texas Silesians. In addition to linguistic analysis of letters sent back to Poland by some of the original settlers, only two investigators, to my knowledge, have published the results of field work in the

community: F. Lyra and R. Olesch; over twenty-five years have passed since that work.<sup>8</sup> The following remarks, which make no claim to an exhaustive analysis of the subject or to utilizing a statistically significant sample, are based on field work and telephone interviews with present or previous residents of the Karnes County community of Texas Silesians.<sup>9</sup>

The picture of competence in the Polish language as a vehicle of communication among Texas Silesians raised in rural Karnes County is fairly straightforward. Roughly speaking, people over sixty (born around or before 1930) are likely to speak Polish; while the oldest speakers in this age bracket (in their eighties or nineties) may be second generation Americans, most are Americans of the third or even fourth generation. While all the informants I consulted speak English, some do so with a marked Polish accent, most noticeable in their inability to pronounce the dental fricatives, replacing them with the corresponding dental stops (cf. *ba[t]* ‘bath’ or *[d]ey* ‘they’), word-final devoicing (as in *goo[t]* ‘good’), and the simplification of the English vowel system.<sup>10</sup> People under fifty (born around or after 1940) are unlikely to speak Polish with any fluency, but they can sometimes understand it, as in the case of a young man in his upper twenties. In-between is a transitional age bracket: some people between fifty and sixty (roughly speaking) speak Polish, others do not. The basis for this distribution is simple: Texas Silesian children growing up after World War II were the first generation for whom English was the primary language of communication at home and at school; those growing up before World War II did not speak English at home, and may or may not have learned English at school. For example, a seventy-eight year old man reported that he learned English for the first time in (elementary) school; an eighty-eight year old woman said that she learned English only after the war, at the age of forty-five, and that she did so by listening to the radio; her husband (now deceased) never learned English at all.

As for the nature of the Polish spoken, it differs from “literary Polish” or Contemporary Standard Polish (hereafter, CSP) in several ways. First, one finds many of the traits characteristic of “American Polish” in any of its varieties.<sup>11</sup> For example, we find a) the simple quotation of words, which are used without inflection; b) the true borrowing of words, which are adapted to the Polish inflectional system; c) the derivation of new words by adding Polish suffixes to English words; and d) calques (loan translations). Examples of each of these phenomena, respectively, are the following: a) *w jednym rum* ‘in one room’, *dość broken* ‘somewhat broken’; b) *kara* ‘car, automobile’, *na karze* ‘by car’; c) *lajkować* ‘to like’, *dajlować* ‘to dial’, *rezajnować* ‘to resign’ (cf. CSP *rezygnować*); and d) *stary kraj* ‘the old country’ (no precise CSP equivalent). One also quickly notices the excessive use of English *well* as an expletive “crutch word.”<sup>12</sup> Phonological interference from English may also be observed, as in the pronunciation of *jeden* ‘one’ without releasing the dental stop ([jedn]), alien to CSP.

As is typical in a case of language erosion, morpholexical distinctions may be lost under the influence of (the absence of these distinctions in) the interfering language. For example, the distinction between determinate and indeterminate verbs of motion (e.g., *iść:chodzić* ‘to go’) is lost in *dzieci szły do amerykańskiej szkoły* ‘the children attended an American school’, which would be expressed in CSP as *dzieci chodziły*. The form *siedziacie* was used as an invitation to sit down; this form combines two interesting properties: 1) the lexical distinction between *siedzieć* ‘to be sitting’ and *(u)siadać* ‘to occupy a sitting position’ is lost, perhaps under the influence of English (which uses *to sit* in both senses); 2) the present tense indicative is used instead of the imperative (CSP *siedźcie*). It is not that the imperative is lost in general; it may be that the loss of the lexical distinction leads to the need for an imperative form which would be quite rare in Polish, and the hesitation leads to the avoidance of the imperative form altogether.

Also, subject pronouns are generally utilized (as in English) to a degree excessive for CSP: *my nie znamy go* ‘we do not know him’ (CSP: *Nie znamy go*); a result of the more frequent use of the pronouns is the occasional absence of the person marker in the past tense: *ja nie znała* ‘I(feminine) didn’t know (someone)’ (CSP *nie znałam*).

But more interesting than such typical features of American Polish or sporadic examples of language erosion are the distinctive characteristics of this linguistic island which can be traced to the Silesian dialect of the original settlers. Silesian characteristics of early letters from the Texas Silesians have been noted, and they more or less match what one might expect from the area of origin of the emigrants.<sup>13</sup> The field work of Olesch and Lyra tends to confirm this conclusion, but neither addresses the question directly in much detail. It is not the purpose of this paper to present an exhaustive dialect study. Rather, our goal in this section is to document the distinctive character of the Polish spoken by the Texas Silesians, and the ways in which this Polish differs from both CSP and from the American Polish of the Polonia communities elsewhere in the United States. With this purpose in mind, we record here some of the most salient features of the dialect which can be traced to its Silesian origin, based primarily on our own field work.<sup>14</sup>

In the following discussion, forms attested in the speech of Texas Silesians are rendered in a modified Polish orthography in square brackets, followed in parentheses by the corresponding CSP form in italics and English translation in single quotes.

### **Phonology.**

a) *Mazurzenie*. In Polish dialectology, the term “mazurzenie” designates the appearance of hard dentals (*s, z, c, dz*) in positions corresponding to the hard alveo-palatal fricatives and affricates (written *sz, ź, cz, dź*) of CSP. Mazurzenie is a typical feature of the Polish spoken by the Texas Silesians I have consulted (but see below). The following are some examples:

[z zesłego roku] (CSP *z zeszłego roku* ‘from last year’), [z mężem] (*z mężem* ‘with (my) husband’), [ruzańce] (*rózańce* ‘rosaries’), [cytam] (*czytam* ‘I read’), *jesce* (*jeszcze* ‘yet, still’), *męcylili go* (*męczyli go* ‘they were torturing him’)<sup>15</sup>

It is curious that some of the early letters from Texas Silesian settlers to the relatives they left behind do not exhibit mazurzenie, nor does the speech of one Texas Silesian analyzed in the literature.<sup>16</sup> It may be that the authors of the letters spoke with mazurzenie but knew how to spell in accordance with the literary standard. However, there are other phonological dialect features reflected in these same letters; why would literacy conceal mazurzenie but not these other features? Furthermore, what would account for the absence of mazurzenie in the speech of one speaker reported by Lyra?

It may be that some of the original settlers came from mazurzenie areas, but others did not. And in fact while the source area of the Texas Silesians is relatively compact, it includes both mazurzenie and non-mazurzenie dialects. Today the heart of this area (centered around Toszek and Strzelce Opolskie) comprises non-mazurzenie dialects, but it is not unlikely that mazurzenie dialects have receded in the 130 years since the immigration.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, it seems quite plausible that the bulk of the original settlers (from the core area) spoke mazurzenie dialects, but some spoke non-mazurzenie dialects.

b) *The reflexes of long and short [a]*. Vowel length was distinctive in Old Polish (as it currently is in neighboring Czech and Slovak); by the early sixteenth century, distinctions in length were either lost or transformed into qualitative distinctions. In Silesian dialects, this change took many forms; in some, short *a* ([ã]) remained the low vowel [a] (as in CSP), while long *a* ([ā]) was raised, backed, and labialized to [o]. This is the situation in Texas Silesian

Polish:

Historical [ǎ]: [jak] (*jak* ‘how’), [ryba] (*ryba* ‘fish’) [na] (*na* ‘on’)

Historical [ā]: [lot] (*lat* ‘years’, [igro] (*gra* ‘he/she is playing’), [downo] (*dawno* ‘long ago’), [jo] (*ja* ‘I’)

Before a tautosyllabic palatal glide [j], the vowel [a] is narrowed to [e] regardless of length: [nej-] (CSP *naj-*, the superlative prefix), [dej] (CSP *Daj* ‘Give!’), [tukej] (derived from *tutaj* ‘here’ by dissimilation of the two dental stops). This is not a productive phonological rule in the contemporary language; rather, it is a historical change observed in many Silesian dialects, the results of which have been morphologized. The Texas Silesian has no difficulty pronouncing the sequence [aj] in borrowed words (*lajkować* ‘to like’) or in ritual songs (“*Dajcie, dajcie, nie żałujcie!*” ‘Give (money), give, don't hold back’).

c) *Raising of the long vowel [ē]*. It is a characteristic feature of Silesian dialects to have transformed the quantitative distinction of long and short [e] into a qualitative one. While the short vowel [ē] remained the mid front vowel it was, as in CSP, the typical reflex of the long vowel [ē] that of the vowel [y] in CSP; this state of affairs is observed in Texas Silesian Polish: [tyż] (*też* ‘also’), [nażykać] (*narzekać* ‘to complain’).

d) *Nasal vowels and vowels before nasal consonants*. In the speech of the Texas Silesians, as in certain Silesian dialects, the vocalic nucleus of the front nasal (written e) is raised to [y] after a soft consonant, and lowered to [a] after a hard consonant: [pańyńć] (*pamięć*, pronounced *pańjeńć* ‘memory’); [bandże] (*będzie*, pronounced *bendże* ‘he/she will be’), [mocygamba] (*Moczygamba*, a surname). The vocalic nucleus of the back nasal (written a) is often pronounced by the Texas Silesians like the mid back vowel [o], as in CSP, but it may be raised and denasalized to give [u]: [su] (*sa* ‘they are’); [wyglundało] (*wyglądało* ‘it seemed’).<sup>18</sup> The historically short mid-vowels [e] and [o] are raised before nasal consonants to [y] and [u], respectively: [tyn] (*ten* ‘this one’), [potym] (*potem* ‘then’); [dum] (*dom* ‘house’).

e) *Labialization of [y] to [u] before the labial glide (spelled ł)*. The most frequently encountered examples are [buu], [buua] (*był* ‘he was’, *była* ‘she was’). This change was originally motivated phonologically only in tautosyllabic positions (e.g., *był*), and was extended in some dialects to heterosyllabic positions (e.g., *by-la*) by morphological levelling (i.e., analogy);<sup>19</sup> this morphological extension is observed in Texas Silesian Polish.

f) *Syncope of the labial glide (spelled ł) before the homoorganic vowel [u]*. The labial glide drops before the high back labialized vowel [u], but not before the mid back labialized vowel [o]: [dugo] (*dlugo* ‘for a long time’), but [głos] (*głos* ‘voice’). This is particularly noticeable in the frequently encountered surnames spelled *Dugi* and *Dugosh* (CSP *Długi* and *Długosz*).

g) *Diphthongizations*. Initial *o* is diphthongized to [uo] or [uu], as in [uun] (*on* ‘he’) and [uujęc] (*ojciec* ‘father’). The result of the diphthongization [y] -> [yj], widely attested among Silesian dialects, is found in Texas Silesian Polish, but not consistently: [wszyjstko] (*wszystko* ‘everything’), but [łysy] (*łysy* ‘bald’, also, a common surname).

The vowel [i], which will always occur after a palatalized consonant, appears to have undergone diphthongization to [jy] in some words: [łowjyli] (*łowili* ‘they were catching’), [pjiłka] (*piłka* ‘with a small saw’).<sup>20</sup> In fact, such forms are the result of two independent changes: 1) the vowel shift [i] -> [y] (necessarily after a palatalized consonant), and 2) the loss of palatalized labials with their concomitant replacement by the sequence of hard labial followed by the palatal glide [j]. This conclusion is suggested by the fact that while I have not found the diphthongization [i] -> [jy] described in the literature, each of the two changes just mentioned is

well-known in Polish dialectology; furthermore, this diphthongization is observed in Texas Silesian Polish only after labial consonants. This would be an odd condition for such a diphthongization, but it would be an automatic consequence of assuming that change (2) above is at work. What is curious is that I have not found evidence of the vowel shift [i] -> [y] anywhere except after labial consonants. It would be fascinating if we are observing the result of a phonological change interrupted at an early stage of its progress by emigration and frozen in that state as a set of morphologized facts. In the absence of more detailed information, however, this hypothesis must remain a speculation.

h) *Epenthesis of palatal glide*. In CSP, an epenthetic palatal glide is observed in a restricted context, as in *amerykański* ‘American (adj.)’, pronounced *amerykajński*. Such epenthesis is observed more widely in many Silesian dialects. Examples from Texas Silesian seem to be restricted to before the palatal fricatives (written *ś* and *ź*) and affricates (written *ć* and *dź*); examples include [dojś] (*dość* ‘rather’), [kojścuł] (*kościół* ‘church’), and [majće] (*macie* ‘you have’, from an early letter analyzed by Brożek and Borek, *Pierwsi Ślązacy ...*, p. 16).

### **Morphology**

There are several striking facts of verb conjugation in Texas Silesian Polish. For example, the third-person singular present tense verb forms found in [oni umią] ‘they know how’ or [dzieci nie rozumią polskiego] ‘the children do not understand Polish’ differ from the CSP forms (*roz*)*umieją* in eliding a syllable. This is the result of a re-interpretation of the stem-desinence boundary. The CSP forms are based on the disyllabic present stem [uńe-], to which the person/number endings are added, analogous to the common conjugation pattern exhibited by, say, *czytać* ‘to read’, with stem [czyta-]: [uńe-m], [uńe-sz], ... [uńe-ja] is parallel to [czyta-m], [czyta-sz], ... [czyta-ja]). But there are other possible models which can influence, and ultimately change, the conjugation of the verbs (*roz*)*umieć*. For example, *słyszeć*:*słyszają* ‘to hear’ could serve as a model of analogy for the relation *umieć*:*umią*, which entails the monosyllabic present stem [um-]: [uń-em], [uń-esz], ... [uń-a] (cf. such consonantal stems as *nieść* ‘to carry’: [ńos-ę], [ńeś-esz], ... [ńos-a]). In more abstract terms, Texas Silesian works from the underlying stem [uńe-], while CSP works from the underlying stem [uńej-]. I have not found this morphological fact mentioned in any of the general sources on Polish dialectology, but Olesch gives precisely the form *umią* (in his transcription, [um'un]) among the verb paradigms in the introduction to his glossary of the St. Anne Mountain dialect, spoken just west of where the Texas Silesians originated (*Der Wortschatz ...*, p. 46).

In the past tense of second conjugation verbs, an unusual alternation is observed. For example, gravestones clearly register the following forms: [urodził się] (CSP *urodził się*) ‘he was born’ and [urodziła się] (CSP *urodziła się*) ‘she was born’; the form [robjuł] (CSP *robił* ‘he was doing’) is cited in one of Lyra’s texts (*English and Polish in Contact*, p. 279). Forms attested in letters written by Texas Silesians in 1855 include [mówioł] (CSP *mówił* ‘he was saying’), [mówiołem] (CSP *mówiłem* ‘I was saying’), and [czynioł] (CSP *czynił* ‘he was doing’) (Brożek and Borek, *Pierwsi Ślązacy ...*, p. 16). Most likely these forms are explained as follows. The high front vowel [i] underwent labialization before a tautosyllabic labial glide [ɸ], becoming [o] or [u]; this change, like the analogous evolution of [y] discussed above, is attested in Silesian dialects. Phonologically, then, one should get forms such as [urodziół] (or [urodziuł]), but [urodziła] and [urodziłem]; the latter two forms, however, are not observed. A simple lexicalization of the new labialized vowel would give not only the observed [urodziłem], but also the form [urodziola], which is not observed. Rather, the [o]:[e] alternation of the historically nasal vowels *ą* and *ę* denasalized before the glide [ɸ] is adopted. The CSP vowel alternation in

[wziół], [wziółem], [wzięła] (written *wziął*, *wziąłem*, *wzięła*) has resulted from alternations in vowel length which have been transformed into alternations of vowel quality. This paradigm has been morphologized and extended to verbs in which it is not motivated by historical phonology: the phonologically motivated form [urodziół] has led to the morphological creation of the attested forms [urodziółem] and [urodzięła]. I have not found these forms in the literature on Polish dialectology, but if the analysis just proposed is correct, then they are the consequence of a phonological change of Silesian provenance, even if they represent a Texas Silesian innovation.

### **Lexicon**

A Silesian lexical feature of Texas Silesian Polish which arises almost immediately in conversation is the use of *rządzić* ‘to speak’ instead of *mówić*;<sup>21</sup> it is a frequent topic of humor as well: *Wy mówicie, a my rządzimy*. In one conversation, I asked a group of informants whether the nuns who taught Polish in their schools spoke standard Polish or the Silesian dialect, and as they thought about the answer and discussed it among themselves, the question was rephrased as whether the nuns *rządziły* or *mowily po polsku*. In relation to languages other than Polish, such as English (*amerykański*) or Spanish, the verb *mówić* is used. Thus, a lexical differentiation has taken place: *rządzić* means ‘to speak (like us, in the Silesian dialect)’, while *mówić* means ‘to speak (differently from us)’. The verb *mówić* is sometimes encountered in the sense ‘to say’, but in this meaning it competes with *powiadać*.

Other dialectal forms observed include *cera* ‘daughter’ (CSP *córka*), *dziocha* ‘daughter (affectionate, used for one's own daughter)’, *starzyk/starka* ‘grandfather/grandmother’ (CSP *dziadek/babcia*), *po połedni* ‘in the afternoon’ (CSP *po południu*), *tukaj* ‘here’ (CSP *tutaj*), and *igrać* ‘to play’ (CSP: *grać*). Several times I heard the phrase *mówić głęboko po polsku* ‘to speak Polish well’ in the sense of ‘to speak standard Polish correctly and elegantly’; conversely, in an English conversation with a Texas Silesian, I heard people described as speaking “deep Polish” or “deep Spanish” (“like in Mexico, not Tex-Mex”), in which this dialectal phraseologism has been calqued back into English.

There are isolated words in which Texas Silesians use German words instead of Polish words, such as *szpek* ‘bacon’, *ajzenban* ‘railroad’, *familia* ‘family’ (obviously supported by the English word).<sup>22</sup> Since such words are reported in Silesia and attested in early letters written by the Texas Silesians, it is natural to consider such usage inherited, rather than acquired from German immigrants in Texas. It is also common for Texas Silesians to say *ja* to mean ‘yes’, also presumably an inherited German influence (German *ja* ‘yes’, Polish *tak*; cf. English *yes* or, colloquially, *yeah*).

Texas Silesian Polish has been subject to the influence of CSP from several sources. First, the mass (if celebrated in Polish, and not Latin or English) and the texts of religious and traditional songs more closely resemble literary Polish than a Silesian dialect, although the archaic and artificial nature of such texts limits their impact on the spoken Polish. Second, some people in the area subscribe or have subscribed to Polish language newspapers published in the United States, especially in Chicago. Third, there was Polish language instruction in Karnes County until 1938, when the last of the local parish schools became public.<sup>23</sup> The precise situation up to that time varied and depended upon the village and year. There were parish schools in Karnes County in which the teaching medium was Polish until approximately 1930, at which point English began to be used as the teaching medium, with Polish language literacy instruction relegated to separate classes. The teachers (often priests or sisters) either were born in

Poland or were Americans of Polish descent (from the upper Mid-West: Chicago and Detroit). Obviously the Polish taught would not be the dialect of Upper Silesia, but rather CSP. The result was a clash of two dialects, one (CSP) more prestigious and public, the other more private and domestic. Furthermore, several informants I consulted spoke bitterly about how some sisters reacted harshly to the Texas Silesians for their dialect speech, in part because the sisters and the students often could not communicate. This dialect clash results in inconsistent reflexes of dialect features. For example, the absence of *mazurzenie* is sporadically noted. I recorded the following words from a speaker who exhibited many examples of *mazurzenie*: [szesnaście] (*szesnaście* ‘sixteen’), [pżyjeżdża] (*przyjeżdża* ‘he comes’), [szły] (*szły* ‘they were going’); an example of mixed reflexes in a single word is [życenie] (*życzenie* ‘wish’). Similar inconsistency is observed in the case of other features discussed above as well. It is not surprising in a situation of dialect clash that one also observes hypercorrection, which is the attempt by a speaker to produce a prestige form which in fact does not exist; an example I encountered is the form [szklep] (*sklep* ‘store’).

Thus, the Polish spoken today in Karnes County, like that undoubtedly spoken by many in Silesia today, results from a blend of a Silesian base and an admixture of literary Polish features sprinkled in seemingly at random. Curiously, this blend of language variants reflects an uncertainty of ethnic identity and an evolution in the function of language among the Texas Silesians. The remainder of this paper is devoted to these issues.

#### 4. Language as a folkway for Texas Silesians

In this section we address two related questions: a) What is the degree and kind of the ethnic identity of the Texas Silesians? and b) how is this identity maintained?

When a visitor appears in rural Karnes County and asks a Lysy, Dupnik or Mika if he or she is Polish, the answer is an immediate ‘yes’. And yet, the identification of these people with Poland is rather tenuous. Few have visited Poland beyond the ancestral Silesian lands, and there is little interest in doing so.<sup>24</sup> There is scant knowledge of Polish history and culture outside of folk traditions and the church. While my survey was hardly scientific, the results are consistent with what Rudolf Olesch discovered in the area during his research some twenty five years ago: “No one with whom [I] came into contact at Panna Maria had any idea of the geographical or national situation of the country from which his (her) greatgrandfathers or grandfathers had come”.<sup>25</sup> Polonia communities elsewhere in the United States were viewed as almost equally distant, based as they are in industrial areas and including few Silesians (although some contact with those communities was based on subscriptions to Polish language newspapers originating there). Furthermore, the relative stability and isolation of the Texas Silesians has led to an important network of family relations and even acquaintances, which has become a powerful element in their identity as a self-contained community.

The ethnic association of the Texas Silesians as Poles is better understood by viewing them in their ethnic setting: nearby are Blacks, Hispanics, and “Anglo-Americans”, the last group including not only the Poles themselves, but also fairly well-defined Moravian and German communities, as well as non-Hispanic whites. In this context, being “Polish” is the distinguishing feature of the Texas Silesians; if we look more closely at the Texas Silesians, however, they appear to be an ethnic island as well as a linguistic one, cut off from both the motherland (*macierz*) in Upper Silesia and from other Polonia communities. Simply put, the Texas Silesians view themselves primarily as Texas Silesians; being Catholics of Polish origin means that they share folkways with people outside their community, but this fact is of secondary importance to them. The differences are perceived as outweighing the similarities.

The question we now address is how this ethnic identity is maintained. We submit that ancestry is insufficient; the degree of ethnic identity is proportional to the extent to which ethnic folkways are maintained. In the case of the Texas Silesians, the most important folkways are a) the Polish language, and b) the Catholic church, including “rites of passage” which are based on church ritual, but secularized to various degrees. We will now consider each of these in turn, noting that in each case there is a complex interplay between “Polish” and “Texas Silesian” identities.

In a typical immigration scenario, the ancestral language is lost by the second or third generation, often depending upon whether the immigrant first generation itself speaks the language of the new land by the time that its children are being reared. But Polish among the Texas Silesians has lasted longer: in many cases, loss of the ancestral language occurs only by the fifth generation, sometimes by the fourth.<sup>26</sup> The reason is clear. Constituting a homogeneous community in an isolated rural environment, the Texas Silesians were subject to only weak pressure to acquire English; indeed, until World War II, the Spanish spoken by the Hispanic people in the area was often more useful to the Texas Silesians than was English. Thus, the Polish language was maintained as a folkway of Polish identity for purely communicative purposes. One informant told me that as late as the 1930's, when instruction in the parish school and later in the public school was in both English and Polish, English was used not because the students knew it, but rather to force them to learn it. Furthermore, the absence of later immigration from Poland ensured that both linguistically and culturally the Texas Silesians would become increasingly detached from Poland itself, including from their ancestral homeland in Silesia. One example of this was the surprising lack of detailed knowledge of family history more than one generation back. Thus, the ethnic identity of the Texas Silesians is almost exclusively synchronic and local: they are Polish in relation to their immediate neighbors, but there is little bond with either contemporary Poland or the Polish Silesia of their origins.

This situation would appear to be a prescription for language death. And this is indeed the case, with respect to the communicative function of the language. What is curious, however, is that the Polish language is enjoying somewhat of a resurgence, but in a new function: that of a language of ritual, which may or not be understood, but which serves as a statement of ethnic identity.

The Roman Catholic faith does not distinguish the Texas Silesians from their neighbors, as not only the Hispanics, but the majority of the descendents of Czech immigrants and many of the German immigrants are Catholics as well. And yet, while the Roman Catholic church establishment of the United States is not enthusiastic about “national churches”, whereby a given area may be served by several churches each catering to a different ethnic group, this de facto ethnic segregation exists. Thus, the Catholic churches in Cestohowa, Kosciuszko, Panna Maria, and St. Hedwig are attended almost exclusively by the Texas Silesians, while other Catholics in the area attend church at nearby Karnes City or Floresville. And while the mass is typically celebrated in English. Polish is used in two ways. First, the mass may be celebrated entirely in Polish under certain circumstances: either in the church on special occasions (e.g., Christmas) or outside the church on a regular basis, especially for the elderly (e.g., once a month in the Karnes City Nursing Home). Second, portions of the service (broadly construed) may be in Polish even as the mass and sermon are in English. For example, during Lent, “Gorzkie Żale” is sung in Polish before mass every Sunday, and the stations of the cross are recited in Polish once a week. Once a month hymns such as “Serdeczna Matko” are sung in Polish during mass. Other hymns may be sung in Polish on occasion as well, as are many Christmas carols (*koledy*). “Rites of

Passage”, such as baptisms, weddings and funerals, are also occasions at which traditional songs are sung in Polish.

While for the older Texas Silesians the Polish used in the church and in rites of passage is understood, the perspective of the younger generation today is different: their understanding of the language is weak at best. And yet, many have begun to learn Polish for the purpose of singing hymns in church.<sup>27</sup> One can only speculate about the reasons for this revival. It may be tied with a general revival of ethnic pride and identity in the United States; it may be linked with a certain linguistic competition with local Hispanics, who have access to Spanish language instruction in the public schools;<sup>28</sup> finally, the election of a Pole as head of the Roman Catholic church in 1978 might well play an important role in strengthening the ethnic consciousness of Poles throughout their diaspora. In any event, the Polish language is beginning to perform among the Texas Silesians a new function, unrelated to the everyday needs of communication: the Polish language has become an expression of ethnic identity. Thus, while language as a vehicle of communication has *excluded* the linguistically assimilated younger generation from their ethnic community, language as a vehicle of ritual now serves to include them. Even among the older generation which would consider Polish their native language, the function of the language has been evolving from being purely a medium of communication. It is significant that while in Cestochowa the “Senior Citizens” meet every Wednesday at noon and converse among themselves primarily in English, they prefer masses in Polish, and they say their rosaries, confessions, and prayers in Polish.

In sum, Polish among the Texas Silesians is coming to fulfill a function similar to that which Latin did in the Catholic Church. Of course Latin served to represent the church itself, or the sacred; Polish is serving rather to represent an ethnic culture, itself a blend of the sacred and the secular. In both cases, however, the language may or may not be understood, but it is used for a similar reason: as a statement by an individual that he or she identifies with a community, be it a sacred or secular one. The older generation of Texas Silesians even exhibits a dual identity reflected in a linguistic duality: their identity as Roman Catholics is expressed by their use of Polish as a ritual language, based on the standard (if often archaic) language; their identity as Texas Silesians is expressed by their use of Polish as a language of communication, based on a Silesian dialect with an admixture of American Polish features. There has been no serious attempt to revive the use of Polish as a medium of communication, but it is being maintained more actively as a medium of ritual.

There is an irony in the role of the church in language maintenance. While the Roman Catholic church in the United States is in principle opposed to national churches, young priests from Poland are being sent to Karnes County. The current priest of Panna Maria, Rev. Franciszek Kurzaj, is especially popular and respected in the community, not only because of his energy and youth, but because he was born in Silesia (in a village near Opole, not far from the ancestral homeland of the Texas Silesians). Rev. Kurzaj can speak both standard Polish and the Silesian dialect he was brought up with. The special bond between Rev. Kurzaj and his parishioners is more linguistic than cultural: simply the fact that the Texas Silesians can speak with him in their own dialect without being made to feel self-conscious makes them more comfortable with him. And yet the Reverend feels that his function is purely pastoral, serving all members of the parish, and that it is not his role to maintain the Polish language in Karnes County: his sermons are almost invariably in English, as is the mass (with the exceptions noted above). Furthermore, this young priest who arrived in the United States from rural Silesia two years ago is formally studying not only English, but Spanish as well.

The universal church must itself face the problem of communicative versus non-communicative functions of language: “national churches” may well serve to communicate better the church's message to the flock, but their very existence is a symbol which contradicts the theme of universality. As long as this paradox remains unresolved, the church will continue to play an ambiguous role in maintaining the ethnic identity of the Texas Silesians.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to discuss a dying linguistic island which is more complicated than the typical case. Because of the nature and environment of this island, the language has been maintained for at least two generations longer than is typical for a diaspora community. Furthermore, the Texas Silesians will constitute an ethnic island after their Polish language has ceased to exist as a medium of communication. However, ethnicity is based on the maintenance of the folkways of the given ethnic group, and language may constitute its most important folkway. Thus, language loss is a major blow to an ethnic island. In part because of its relative homogeneity and isolation, the community of Texas Silesians is unlikely to erode so quickly. As a vehicle of maintaining ethnicity, the Polish language is performing a new function: that of a medium of ritual. In this way, a language can continue to perform its role as an important folkway in an ethnic community even as the communicative need for it ceases.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank the Research Institute of the University of Texas at Austin and the East European Program of the Wilson Center for International Scholars for supporting various stages of this work. Joseph Liro of the University of Texas at Austin has made an invaluable contribution to this work by assisting me in my field work and by discussing many aspects of Polish religious and folk culture with me; my thanks also go to Michael Katz of the University of Texas at Austin for a helpful critical reading of the manuscript. I am also grateful to the following individuals for advice and direction in my field work in Karnes County, Texas: Dr. T. Lindsay Baker, Curator of History at the Fort Worth Museum of Natural History and Science; Reverend Franciszek Kurzaj of Panna Maria, Texas; Reverend Monsignor Erwin Juraschek of Cestohowa, Texas; and Colonel Frank Kajencki of El Paso, Texas.

<sup>2</sup>William G. Sumner, *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals* (New York: Dover Press, 1959; originally published in Boston by Ginn and Co., 1906). We adopt and apply the term “folkways” coined by Sumner while at the same time rejecting the behaviorist and often prejudicial nature of his discussion. For discussion of the traditions and identity of the Polish community in the United States from the point of view of its folkways, see Eugene E. Obidinski and Helen S. Zan, *Polish Folkways in America: Community and Family* (Lanham-New York-London: University Press of America, 1987).

<sup>3</sup>While this colony was preceded by individual Poles and even groups of Poles, it is difficult to speak of a Polish “settlement”, “colony”, or “community” before the arrival of the Silesians in 1854, and no even tentative candidate for such status has existed continuously until the present time; see, for example, Andrzej Brożek, *Polonia amerykańska, 1854-1939* (Warsaw: Interpress, 1977; republished in English translation as *Polish Americans: 1854-1939* by the same publisher in 1985), Rev. Miecislaus Haiman, *The Poles in the Early History of Texas* (Chicago: Polish Roman Catholic Union of America Archives, 1936); Rev. Wacław Kruszka, *Historia polska w*

*Ameryce: Początek, wzrost, i rozwój dziejowy osad polskich w Północnej Ameryce (w Stanach Zjednoczonych i Kanadzie)* (Milwaukee: Spółka wydawnicza Kuriera, 1905); and Richard Purcell, "Polish Immigration a Century Ago" *America* 50 (1934), no. 9, pp. 203-204. On the history of this community (with further references), see especially T. Lindsay Baker, *The Early History of Panna Maria, Texas*, Graduate Studies, no. 9, (Lubbock: Texas Tech University, 1975); idem, *The First Polish-Americans: Silesian Settlements in Texas* (College Station: Texas A & M Press, 1979), republished in Polish translation as *Historia najstarszych polskich osad w Ameryce* (Warsaw: Ossolineum, 1981); Andrzej Brożek, *Ślązacy w Teksasie: Relacje o najstarszych osadach polskich w Ameryce* (Warsaw: PWN, 1972); *The History of Panna Maria, Texas: The Oldest Permanent Polish Settlement in America, 1854-1987*, Panna Maria Historical Society, 1987 (revised version of Rev. Edward Dworaczyk, *Centennial History of Panna Maria* and Rev. Anthony J. Matula, *The Millenium History of Panna Maria, Texas: The Oldest Polish Settlement in America, 1854-1966*); Jacek Przygoda, *Texas Pioneers from Poland: A Study in Ethnic History* (Waco: Texian Press, 1971); and Maria Starczewska, "The Historical Geography of the Oldest Polish Settlement in the United States", *Polish Review* 12 (1967), no. 2, pp. 11-40.

<sup>4</sup>It is very difficult to establish reliable figures for the immigration of Silesians to Texas. T. Lindsay Baker (in *The First Polish Americans*) provides the following numbers: 159 colonists arrived in San Antonio on December 21st, 1854, comprising the first group (p. 24); in 1855, 700 persons passed through Wrocław on the way to Texas (p. 31); in 1856, one emigration agent alone transported 239 persons, all (with few exceptions) to Texas (p. 32); 500 Poles from Prussian Silesia were said to go to America that year, although not all need have gone to Texas (p. 32); after 1856, "the movement declined to merely a few individuals annually and then ceased entirely with the outbreak of the American Civil War" (p. 37). Brożek (*Ślązacy w Teksasie*, p. 18) estimates that under 1500 immigrants came to Texas from Prussian Silesia. Rural spin-off communities of the early settlers are found not only elsewhere in southeast Texas, but in Franklin County, Missouri (centered in Krakow) and, somewhat later, in Carson County in northern Texas (White Deer).

<sup>5</sup>A compact community of Texas Silesians had been formed on the southeast side of San Antonio within a few years of the arrival of the first group in Karnes County; T. Lindsay Baker notes that "[this] colony was able to retain its ethnic identity in the heterogeneous population of the city, and within just over a decade its members had established their own separate Polish Catholic parish" (*The First Polish Americans*, p. 27). There is no such community today.

<sup>6</sup>Later arrivals in Karnes County were limited almost exclusively to a small number of priests and nuns who served the community in the church and in the schools.

<sup>7</sup>Helena Zduńska, *Język polski górniczych środowisk polonijnych w Północnej Francji*. Prace Instytutu języka polskiego, no. 40 (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1982), pp. 9-14. Zduńska attributes the term "Polish linguistic island" to M. Malecki.

<sup>8</sup>See Andrzej Brożek and Henryk Borek, *Pierwsi Ślązacy w Ameryce: Listy z Teksasu z Płużnicy z roku 1855*, Komunikaty Instytutu śląskiego w Opolu, no. 80 (1967); *ibid*, *Jeszcze jeden list z Teksasu do Płużnicy z 1855 roku*, Komunikaty Instytutu śląskiego w Opolu, no. 116 (1972); Franciszek Lyra, *Polish and English in Contact*, doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1962, especially pp. 276-281; idem, "Język polski w najstarszych osadach w

Stanach Zjednoczonych”, *Zaranie śląskie* 28 (1965), pp. 562-566 (republished in Brożek, *Ślązacy w Teksasie*, pp. 232-237); and Rudolf Olesch, “The West Slavic Languages in Texas, with Special Regard to Sorbian in Serbin, Lee County”, in Glenn C. Gilbert, ed., *Texas Studies in Bilingualism: Spanish, French, German, Czech, Polish, Sorbian, and Norwegian in the Southwest*, *Studia Linguistica Germanica*, no. 3 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1970), pp. 151-162 (excerpts republished in Polish translation in Brożek, *Ślązacy w Teksasie*, pp. 238-43). As recently as 1940, the “Mother Tongue Census” concluded that there were 20,000 people in Texas who considered Polish their native language (Olesch, *The West Slavic Languages ...*, p. 153); the Texas Silesians constituted the bulk, but not all, of this number. A more recent study of the distribution, number, and origin of Polish speakers in Texas (Jan Perkowski, “A Survey of the West Slavic Immigrant Languages in Texas”, in Glenn C. Gilbert, ed., *Texas Studies in Bilingualism*, pp. 163-9) estimates that in 1970 there were less than 1,000 native speakers of Polish in Texas (p. 168).

<sup>9</sup>I wish to thank the following informants: Sister Mary Gerard, Vincent Dupnik, Rev. Julius Dworaczyk, Rosa Dworaczyk, Rev. Monsignor Edwin Juraschek, Pelagia Snoga Urbanczyk, and five anonymous residents of Cestohowa; Ben and Mary Lysy and Regina Sekula currently of Karnes City; Rev. Thomas Lysy of Kosciuszko; Henry Gawlik, Mary Mika, and Ela Snoga of Panna Maria; and three anonymous residents of Pawelekville.

<sup>10</sup>This striking fact of language maintenance among the Texas Silesians was observed by an earlier investigator: “The third generation Polish settlers in rural Texas still stand out as illustrious examples of Polish interference in their English” (Lyra, *English and Polish in Contact*, p. 29).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Witold Doroszewski, *Język polski w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki Północnej*, *Prace Wdziału I-go: Językoznawstwa i historii literatury*, no. 15 (Warsaw: Towarzystwo naukowe, 1938); Lyra, *English and Polish in Contact*; and Salomei Szlifsztejn, ed. *Z badań nad językiem polskim środiwisk emigracyjnych*: Biblioteka polonijna, no. 8, (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1981); analogous discussion of Polish as spoken in emigre communities in France is found in Zduńska, *Język polski ...*

<sup>12</sup> This feature is also recorded in a transcribed oral text published by Lyra (*Język polski*, pp. 564-565).

<sup>13</sup>See footnote 8 for references; on Silesian dialectology, see especially Stanisław Bąk, *Mowa polska na Śląsku* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1974); Kazimierz Nitsch, *Dialekty polskie Śląska*, 2nd ed. (Cracow: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1939); and Reinhold Olesch, *Der Wortschatz der polnischen Mundart von Sankt Annaberg*, *Slavistische Veröffentlichungen*, 11 (Berlin: Osteurope Institut an der Freien Universität, 1958).

<sup>14</sup>It is very difficult to match every Silesian feature of the Polish spoken in Karnes county with a dialect in the ancestral homeland of the Texas Silesians, as given in contemporary dialectology sources such as Bąk, *Mowa polska na Śląsku* and Nitsch, *Dialekty polskie Śląska*, and we will not attempt to do so. There are three primary reasons: 1) such sources are necessarily sketches, not complete descriptions of every village in Silesia; 2) the Polish spoken in both Silesia and that of Karnes County have undoubtedly undergone change in the last 130 years, and isoglosses have

moved; and 3) Polish in both Silesia and Karnes County is subject to a certain (sometimes considerable) amount of influence from the standard language.

<sup>15</sup>The common name Dworaczyk is usually pronounced Dwora[c]yk; the even more common name Moczygamba is often pronounced Mo[c]ygamba, although the non-mazurzenie pronunciation is common as well. When speaking with one resident about previous investigators of the community, I mentioned the surname Brożek and was insistently corrected twice that the name is Bro[z]ek. Before I realized that mazurzenie was so common among Texas Silesians, I was struck by the fact that Texas highway maps and signs refer to the village of *Cestohowa*; only later did I realize that this spelling reflects the pronunciation of the local residents.

<sup>16</sup>Brożek and Borek, *Pierwsi Ślązacy w Ameryce*, pp. 15-16; Lyra, *English and Polish in Contact*, pp. 277-280. Another letter, written in 1910, invariably represents CSP *ż* as *z*, while *sz*, *cz* and *rz* are usually preserved; e.g., *zyciemy* (CSP *życzymy* "we wish"); *jeszcze* ("yet, still"), *przy* ("in"), *człowiek* (CSP *człowiek* "person") (T. Lindsay Baker, "Z życia śląskich emigrantów w Teksasie: List Jakuba Moczygemby do Polski w 1910 r.," *Kwartalnik opolski* 23 (1977), pp. 58-75). Brożek and Borek view the replacement of *ż* by *z* as a consistent orthographic lapsus, leaving us with a consistent pattern of little mazurzenie in these letters taken as a whole. Lyra's fieldwork revealed mazurzenie in the speech of one Texas Silesian (Leon Pieprzyca), but not in that of another (Elias Moczygamba, now deceased); see *Język polski ...*, pp. 564-565, and *English and Polish in Contact*, pp. 277-280, respectively.

<sup>17</sup>Bąk, *Mowa polska na Śląsku*, pp. 72-74 and Map 6, after p. 48 for the current situation. The fact that mazurzenie dialects have receded and formerly included more of the source area for the Texas Silesians is apparent when the current situation is contrasted with that reported by Nitsch, *Dialekty polskie Śląska*. (summarized on p. 32 of Bąk, op. cit.).

<sup>18</sup>These examples are from the texts transcribed in Lyra, *Język polski ...*, p. 564, and idem, *English and Polish in Contact*, p. 278, respectively.

<sup>19</sup>Karol Dejna, *Dialekty polskie* (Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk: Ossolineum, 1975), p. 153; Stanisław Urbańczyk, *Zarys dialektologii polskiej*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Warsaw: Państwowe wydawnictwo naukowe, 1984), p. 21.

<sup>20</sup>These examples are from Lyra, *Język polski ...*, pp. 564-565.

<sup>21</sup>Nitsch, *Polskie dialekty Śląska*, p. 226 and Olesch, *Der Wortschatz ...*, p. 422.

<sup>22</sup>Lyra (*English and Polish in Contact*, pp. 259-60) provides a more extensive list of German borrowings of Silesian origin, based on his own field work.

<sup>23</sup>On the history of the schools of the Texas Silesians, see Baker, *The First Polish Americans*, pp. 114-125.

<sup>24</sup>There was a pilgrimage of fifty-four Texas Silesians to Poland in 1973, organized by Father John Yanta of San Antonio and the Polish American Congress of Texas (Baker, *The First Polish Americans*, p. 162). I interviewed one participant in this pilgrimage, a second-generation American now 82 years old, who spoke at considerable length about the excitement of meeting relatives in Silesia and staying in their homes; my efforts to elicit comments or reactions to Warsaw and Cracow (also on the itinerary) were not particularly successful.

<sup>25</sup>Olesch, *The West Slavic Languages* ..., p. 154.

<sup>26</sup>In contrasting Texas Silesians to other European immigrants, especially Poles, Brożek notes that “without fear of exaggeration one could say that the Upper Silesian peasants in Texas and their descendents have become the most persistent in maintaining the Polish language in the United States” (p. 18; translation mine).

<sup>27</sup>These choirs are organized by Mrs. Mary Lysy of Karnes City, who also teaches the singers the Polish language for the purpose of singing these songs. Mrs. Lysy was kind enough to show me videotapes of her choir, which performed for Pope John Paul II during his recent (September 1987) visit to Texas.

<sup>28</sup>This factor was suggested by several remarks made to me by informants. Lyra reports that in response to the question "Should Polish be taught in local schools?", one Texas Silesian replied "Yes, because the Polish people started this immediate vicinity ... Why can the children take Spanish in schools, and nothing in Polish? There was more religion spread in this vicinity in Polish than any other language" (*English and Polish in Contact*, p. 73).