

The situation of modern language learning and teaching in Europe:

POLAND

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Introduction

Roughly speaking, teaching of modern languages in Poland may be divided into three areas:

- formal teaching of foreign languages in primary and secondary schools
- formal teaching of native tongues for national minorities, taught as a separate subject alongside Polish. All other subjects are taught in Polish.
- informal teaching and learning of foreign languages out of school.

As concerns formal teaching of languages in schools, some explanations concerning the system of Polish education should be added. Education is compulsory at the primary level, which starts at the age of seven up to the age of fifteen (grades 1-8). However, although it is not compulsory, 96% of six-year-olds attend the called zero grade, which comprises preparation for reading and basic mathematical notions. At the age of 15, young people pass to the secondary level, which, roughly speaking, consists of three types of school: secondary general, secondary technical and basic vocational. The last-mentioned type does not provide a full secondary education.

One foreign language is compulsory in primary schools, while two languages must be studied in secondary general school. In secondary technical and basic vocational schools one language is compulsory.

Primary level (grades 1-8)

The moment of starting compulsory language teaching in primary schools is not precisely defined but depends on the availability of teachers and the head's decision. Generally, there is a shortage of teachers for English and German, although for English the shortage is more acute. In the majority of schools, however, foreign language teaching starts in grade 5.

In general, four languages are taught in primary schools: English, German, Russian and French. The distribution is as follows:

Russian	40%
English	34%
German	22%
French	4%

Altogether, the number of the pupils studying a foreign language on the primary level is around 1,800,000.

Textbooks and materials

There is no nation-wide curriculum for languages and no fixed number of teaching periods per week which also depend on the head's decision. This makes the development of materials for this particular level very difficult. Publishing companies, however, base their work on certain traditions of teaching which are still followed in schools.

Russian

Thus, in the case of Russian there is still no competition on the materials market, as one set of textbooks is used in all schools. This is a modern set, developed two years ago according to a methodology based on communicative needs. The introduction of these textbooks was accompanied by frequent workshops for teachers, who were mostly used to traditional, old-style books and needed information and training. Having been compulsory for everybody and neglected by the majority of pupils and parents, Russian suffered from a negative image; materials thus have to be particularly attractive. Only recently the attitude towards Russian has begun to change and the usefulness of this language for various types of contacts has been realized. This will likely mean new research in teaching methodology and a wider range of materials on the market.

English

For English the situation is the opposite: there is a multitude of both foreign and local materials on the market, for pupils as well as for teachers. The market share of foreign publishers is, however, far bigger than local publishers' market share. This is due to a certain longing for native-developed books and to the marketing expertise of foreign publishers which the local publishing companies did not have. Marketing activities were always connected with workshops and other types of training for teachers, whose ambition it became to use foreign materials. These materials are often not adapted to local needs or to teachers' command of the language but, as teacher training colleges' graduates gradually enter the school system and start their teaching careers, this situation is bound to improve. Also, local materials are beginning to be more and more recognised and appreciated by teachers whose needs they often meet far better than materials developed abroad.

German

As in the case of English, both local and foreign material is available for teachers of German. There are fewer primary school pupils who take up German, depending on the geographical location of the school (the nearer the German border, the more pupils and their parents choose German). Many foreign and local publishers operate on the market for teaching materials, although local publishers possess a greater market share.

French

In the case of French, the situation is different. Only a small percentage of primary school pupils study French, and the distribution of schools offering French is very uneven in geographical terms. As a result, it is not very profitable to publish materials for primary French either for pupils or for

teachers, and no local publisher has undertaken this job. Textbooks are purchased from French publishers and only workbooks and teacher's guides are adapted to local needs. This is to say nothing about supplementary materials which simply do not exist on the market. The low ranking of French in the preferences of primary school pupils stems from the fact that for professional and career purposes English and German are far more useful. If pupils do take up French, the decision is often made by the parents who for reasons of tradition or some family purpose want their child to speak French.

Other languages generally are not formally taught on the primary level.

Secondary level

On the secondary level the map of languages is more diversified. Apart from the four above-mentioned languages Spanish and Italian are encountered, particularly in secondary general schools in big cities. The most popular language by far is English, with German and Russian coming second and third. Most pupils in basic vocational schools, however, study Russian.

There is a wide range of local and foreign materials available for English and German, and competition between publishers in this field is strong. Also in the case of French the market offers some choice, although this is not so diversified. For the teaching of Russian, materials are developed mostly by local publishers, with some competition among suppliers. As concerns materials for other languages, the print-runs are small and, in the absence of attractive profit margins, the choice is limited.

As in primary schools, there is no nation-wide curriculum for languages in secondary schools. Work on developing curricula has started, however, and these may be adopted for school use within the coming year, making the work of publishers a good deal easier.

Language provision for ethnic minorities

As concerns the teaching of ethnic minority languages in Poland, there are six officially recognized minority groups whose native tongue is formally taught in schools. These are the following:

- Byelorussian
- Ukrainian
- Lithuanian
- Slovak
- German
- Caschubian

Most often the native language is taught as an additional subject alongside Polish because the limited population makes it difficult to create separate schools for ethnic minorities. Moreover, if pupils want to continue their

education in higher-level institutions, they need to have their basic education in Polish. The statistics are as follows:

Byelorussian

- 43 primary schools with additional teaching of Byelorussian
- 2 secondary general schools with additional teaching of Byelorussian

Lithuanian

- 6 primary schools with instruction in Lithuanian
- 1 primary bilingual school
- 3 primary schools with additional teaching of Lithuanian
- 1 secondary general school with instruction in Lithuanian
- 1 basic vocational school with instruction in Lithuanian

Ukrainian

- 4 primary schools with instruction in Ukrainian
- 48 primary schools with additional teaching of Ukrainian
- 4 secondary general schools with instruction in Ukrainian
- 20 inter-school groups of primary and secondary school pupils as well as adults studying Ukrainian

German

- 111 primary schools with instruction in German

Slovak

- 2 primary schools with instruction in Slovak
- 12 primary schools with additional teaching of Slovak
- 1 secondary general school with additional teaching of Slovak

Caschubian

- 2 bilingual primary schools
- 1 general secondary school with additional teaching of Caschubian

Textbooks and materials

Generally speaking, only textbooks for the Byelorussian, Ukrainian, Slovak and Lithuanian minorities are published. In the near future it is planned that also textbooks on the history and geography of their native countries should be available. These textbooks are purchased from the publisher by the Ministry of National Education and given to the pupils free of charge. As concerns the German minority, textbooks are created by their associations in

cooperation with educational institutions in Germany. Books for the very small Caschubian minority are created by the Caschubian Association in cooperation with Gdansk University.

A generally accepted principle in developing textbooks for national minorities is that authors should themselves be members of the minority and preferably teachers who are familiar with the needs and difficulties of pupils. However, this creates a number of problems, as authors are often not prepared for the task, their work requiring many reviews, consultations and substantial language revision. The language of the minorities is often different from the standard accepted in the mother country, with much interference from Polish. In many cases, it is difficult for publishers to find a solution acceptable to all concerned.

Language learning outside the school system

As concerns out of school courses, these are practically unlimited. They are organized by various language schools, cultural institutes, embassies, associations, etc. As long as there are clients, organisations are free to teach whatever language they wish. Of course, there may be a problem with materials for rare languages. These are then imported from the country of the target language or prepared by the teacher or teachers involved.