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“GERMAN LOANWORDS ARE THE CORE OF THE MASURIAN DIALECT!” DIALECTAL MASURIAN GERMANISMS IDENTIFIED THROUGH FIELD RESEARCH AND PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATION

Keywords: German loanwords, Masurian dialect, lexical borrowings, language contact, language shift, Germanisation, language death.

ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings from a linguistic field study conducted in 2019–2024, aimed at documenting the dynamics between three language codes – German, Polish and the Masurian variety. Furthermore, the research obtained a significant portion of the German loanwords within the Masurian dialect, a Polish-based linguistic variety traditionally spoken in former East Prussia. Historically rooted in Polish, the Masurian dialect underwent significant lexical borrowing from German, particularly due to deep cultural contacts, its neighboring location, extensive colonization from the 14th century, and Germanisation efforts, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries. Through qualitative research, including semi-structured interviews and participant observation, numerous lexical and phraseological units were identified, demonstrating a notable German influence predominantly in vocabulary related to everyday objects and domestic life. The collected data reveal regional variations in dialect retention, with southern Masurian counties showing greater preservation of Polish-Masurian vocabulary, contrasted with more Germanised northern regions. The contemporary linguistic landscape is characterized by passive dialectal knowledge among the older generation, categorized as “rememberers”, who retain lexical memories without actively using the dialect in daily communication. This paper argues that these linguistic remnants reflect historical social dynamics and contemporary identity formation processes, contributing to ongoing debates on dialectal preservation and regional linguistic identities.

1. INTRODUCTION. THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT: THE EMERGENCE AND DISAPPEARANCE OF MASURIAN DIALECTS OVER THE CENTURIES

The title of this paper is derived from a statement made by one of my informants, who regarded the abundance of Germanisms as one of the defining features of the Masurian dialect. In this study, I have endeavored to demonstrate that the descendants of Masurians still retain and actively use a considerable number of German loanwords.

In this paper, I aim to present the most compelling examples of vocabulary and phraseology collected from the descendants of pre-war Masurians. From several hundred words and phrases recorded, I have selected those with German influences for the purpose of this study. The lexical data were obtained primarily through interviews conducted during fieldwork, as well as telephone conversations and online correspondence with selected participants. It is important to emphasize that dialectological knowledge was not the primary objective of this research; however, these linguistic findings provide a valuable supplement to the study, confirming at least the partial survival of some lexical and phraseological units among the descendants of the indigenous Masurian population.

The Masurian dialect, a gradually vanishing set of subdialects, constitutes part of the Masovian dialectal continuum and was traditionally spoken by the inhabitants of the region known as Prussian Masuria – located in the southern part of former East Prussia. Prior to the Teutonic conquest, this area was inhabited by Old Prussian groups, including the Sasins and Galindians, as well as the Yotvingians (Okulicz-Kozaryn, 1997, pp. 25–36). The territories of the Sasins and Galindians were likely sparsely populated even before the arrival of the Teutonic Knights, primarily due to intertribal conflicts and skirmishes with neighboring Masovia.

The conquest of Prussia, though periodically interrupted by several uprisings, lasted from the second decade of the 13th century until the early 14th century. By the first half of the 14th century, colonization of the western Masurian region – including Nidzica, Działdowo, Dąbrówno, and parts of the Ostróda district – had commenced (Białyński, 2019). Settlers from both Germany and Poland, as well as Old Prussian internal migrants, established themselves in the newly conquered lands. However, as Janusz Małek (2020) observes, the Polish element only gained prominence in the 15th century, when the availability of German settlers diminished. The inhabitants of Masovia and the Chełmno region, coming from areas characterized by low soil fertility and overpopulation, provided a significant demographic reservoir for this migration.

Until the fall of the Teutonic Order's state and the establishment of Ducal Prussia, the process of colonization encompassed most of southern Masuria, including the areas surrounding present-day Szczytno, Pisz, and Ełk, as well as extending slightly further north towards Mrągowo. Subsequently, in the 16th century, internal colonization contributed to the predominance of people of Slavic origin in the regions of Giżycko, Olecko, and Węgorzewo (Białyński, 2002; Białyński, 1996; Białyński, 2001; Białyński, 1993). In the 16th and 17th centuries, the areas around Ostróda and Olsztynek also underwent assimilation; however, a distinct dialectological unit developed there – the

non-Masurian dialect of Ostróda. Despite this dialectal distinction, some scholars, such as Jan Sembrzycki (1889b, p. 127), regarded these areas in the 19th and early 20th centuries as belonging to the Masurian ethnos. This classification aligned with the contemporary definition of Masuria, which encompassed the East Prussian territories inhabited predominantly by a Lutheran population of Polish origin.

The demographic expansion of the Masurian people was disrupted by the increasing Germanisation of education, a process that began in the 1830s and intensified after 1870 (Martuszewski, 2001; Gollub, 1934, p. 7). Additionally, the assimilation of the Masurian population into the German nation gained momentum in the 19th century. Beyond the influence of education, key factors contributing to this assimilation included economic development (Małłek, 2020), and the introduction of the railway system in Masuria (Weinreich, 1911), which facilitated mobility across the newly unified German state. Other significant factors were: military service, particularly during the Franco-Prussian War and the First World War; large-scale migration to the industrializing region of Westphalia; the absence of Masurian self-governance; the relatively small intellectual elite; and the involvement of certain segments of the Lutheran clergy in the Germanisation process.

It should be noted that, despite the Polish origins of both the Masurian dialects and the majority of the region's inhabitants, Masuria remained a peripheral borderland community with a distinct founding myth. Kurt Obitz identifies two key historical events in this regard: the plague epidemic, and the Polish-Tatar invasion led by Gosiewski in 1656 (Obitz, 2007). However, the vast majority of Masurians did not develop a Polish national identity. More frequently, they identified as Prussians or Prussian Masurians (Braun, 1926, pp. 189–190). Wojciech Kętrzyński also acknowledged this phenomenon, which appeared to be confirmed by the overwhelming support for East Prussia in the 1920 plebiscite. A significant source of apprehension among Masurians – further amplified by pro-German activists such as Max Worgitzki – was the fear that annexation to Poland would bring increased Catholic influence and pressure to bear on their predominantly Lutheran community. The experiences of the First World War, coupled with the solidarity of German "protector" cities that played a key role in the rapid reconstruction of war-damaged Masuria, further reinforced the region's attachment to the German state. Historically, Masurians displayed unwavering loyalty, first to the rulers of Prussia and later to Germany.

Despite the aforementioned sociolinguistic factors, the position of literary Polish, alongside the predominantly oral Masurian dialect, remained relatively strong – at least until the plebiscite period. The process of assimilation in the 19th century was particularly evident in areas such as Węgorzewo, Kętrzyn, and Gołdap, where the use of German expanded, and by this time it had already become predominant in districts such as Ostróda and Olecko. Nevertheless, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the proportion of the population communicating in Polish-Masurian remained close to 90% in counties such as Szczytno, Nidzica, and Pisz (Belzyt, 1996, pp. 35–71). The distinct features of Masurian speech attracted early linguistic researchers, including

Jan Sembrzycki (Sembrzycki, 1889b), Wojciech Kętrzyński, and Martin Gerss (Chojnowski, 2020, p. 25).

Literary Polish, albeit in a slightly archaic form, remained well preserved and continued to be actively used, particularly in religious contexts. Older editions of the Bible, such as the Gdańsk Bible, were commonly read, and a staple of the home libraries of Masurian *gburs* (farmers) was the Prussian religious songbook, written in Polish but printed in Gothic script (Jasiński & Małek, 2017).

A distinct phenomenon in 19th-century Masuria was the emergence of a regional press, which was either published in literary Polish with some Masurian elements (as seen in *Mazur*, a periodical from Szczytno) or in a particular Masurian standard version of literary Polish. The primary advocate of this regional standard was Martin Gerss, a long-time publisher of *Gazeta Lecka* and the *Royal-Prussian Calendar*. Gerss was often criticized for employing a linguistic style that combined literary Polish with archaisms, Masurianisms, and Germanisms (both lexical and grammatical). However, he defended his approach, arguing that such a linguistic form facilitated comprehension for Masurians. Moreover, he strongly advocated for the right to use regional linguistic forms in print (Chojnacki, 1952, pp. 158–159).

Official district circulars, known as *Kreisblatt*, were also published. These were printed in Polish, incorporating Masurian and German elements similar to those found in Gerss's publications. Additionally, Germanisation-oriented periodicals, such as *Pruski Przyjaciel Ludu*, were disseminated. The latter was criticized not only for its ideological stance but also for the so-called “corrupted” language, as it was suggested that its authors lacked proficiency in Polish and produced poor translations from German. Although this issue falls outside the primary scope of this article, it is worth noting that the presence of Masurian vocabulary and Masurianised Germanisms in such publications suggests that the translators of the originally German-language articles or official announcements must have had some command of Polish. However, they were most likely members of the Masurian community who were not fluent in the literary standard of nationwide Polish. Due to their linguistic exposure and lived experiences, they used a distinct regional variety of Polish and, in spoken communication, most likely the Masurian dialect as well.

During the interwar period, the sociolinguistic situation in Masuria changed significantly, particularly to the detriment of both Polish and Masurian. The post-plebiscite atmosphere was marked by anti-Polish resentment, making the publication of Polish-language periodicals increasingly difficult. Polish-Masurian religious services were progressively replaced by German-language services, with participants in the former (as well as speakers of Masurian) being primarily older members of the community (Neumann, 1931). Germanisation efforts were particularly targeted at school-age youth, sometimes resulting in intergenerational language conflicts within Masurian families. However, as I have learned from interviews conducted with members of the Masurian community, in most cases, older family members passively accepted this linguistic shift. They continued to use the Masurian language among themselves but addressed

their children and grandchildren in German, which the younger generation primarily acquired through schooling.

The post-war period brought significant territorial changes – Masuria became part of the Polish state for the first time in history (with the exception of the Działdowo region, which had been annexed to Poland after the First World War). This new political reality was a source of numerous conflicts. Resettlers from the former eastern territories of Poland, particularly those from Masovia, regarded the Masurians as Germans. The perceived German ethnic character of Masuria – often reinforced by religious differences (Poles being predominantly Catholic and Masurians largely Lutheran), extensive Germanisation in linguistic, cultural, and national identity terms, Masuria's strong electoral support for the NSDAP, and the active participation of many Masurians in the Second World War – led to widespread discrimination. The principle of collective responsibility was frequently applied, with little consideration for the nuanced personal histories or affiliations of individual members of the Masurian community. This situation contributed to the Masurians' reluctance to accept Polish citizenship through the so-called nationality verification process, and led to successive waves of emigration to Germany (Belzyt, 1998). A population of approximately 80,000 Masurians immediately after the war had dwindled to only a few thousand by the end of the Polish People's Republic (Sakson, 1987).

The intense ethnic conflict, discrimination, harassment, and derogatory remarks referencing Masurians' alleged Germanness contrasted with the Polish authorities' and intelligentsia's insistence that Masuria belonged to the Polish nation and that the Masurian ethnolect was merely a regional variety of Polish, no more distinct than other regional dialects. This dual pressure led to a sense of disillusionment among some Masurians – not only towards Polish national identity in its broader, nationwide sense but also towards their own Masurian identity, which was being "appropriated" by the Polish national movement (Rogall, 1992). Many Masurians, despite knowing the Masurian language, deliberately chose to use German as a means of asserting their distinctiveness from Poles and contesting the new socio-political reality in Masuria.

Some Masurians who were more inclined towards assimilation sought to stabilize their lives under the new sociopolitical conditions by abandoning characteristic dialectal features – particularly Masurian vocabulary, German loanwords, and distinctive phonetic and grammatical traits. As my interviews revealed, young Masurians who aspired to remain in Poland often made significant efforts to master literary Polish, sometimes even surpassing their ethnic Polish peers in their eagerness to learn the standard language. They took pride in their linguistic competence and their ability to speak and read Polish fluently and without errors. Consequently, exposure to Masurian dialectal elements was relatively limited among generations born in the Polish People's Republic.

Individuals born between 1945 and 1970 generally belong to the category of so-called "rememberers" (Grinevald & Bert, 2011, pp. 42–52) – people who are able to recall individual Masurian elements that were once used within their communities and by older family members but who are no longer capable of conducting fluent conversations in

the dialect. Nevertheless, they represent a valuable source of information on both past and contemporary linguistic ideologies and attitudes towards Masurian dialects, as well as the post-war persistence of particular lexemes, morphemes, and phonemes within the Masurian community.

2. FIELD RESEARCH: ELEMENTS OF MASURIAN LEXIS AND PHRASEOLOGY IN LIGHT OF THE FINDINGS

The research I conducted for my PhD thesis, with the support of the National Science Centre's grant, involved over 50 semi-structured and unstructured interviews with descendants of the indigenous population of Masuria living in Poland. The study focused on linguistic practices, linguistic biographies, and, to a lesser extent, language attitudes and ideologies. Although the research was conducted as part of a broader study aiming to examine the sociolinguistic factors in the dynamics between three language codes: German, standard Polish, and Masurian, the semi-structured interviews often shifted to the topic of Masurian and its characteristics. In order to obtain additional information about the interviewees' command of Masurian, I decided to use three methods: testing active memory by asking the interviewees to recall some words and phrases in Masurian from various topics; testing passive knowledge of Masurian by presenting several examples of Masurian words and noting whether the interviewee could identify them; and conducting broader consultations (including via the Internet and phone calls) with those who demonstrated the best command of Masurian. Additionally, some of the attested words and phrases were used by my interviewees spontaneously (especially by the elders) during the interview as a part of their everyday mixed code practices. This research was complemented by participant observation, carried out both during field-work trips and within virtual spaces, particularly in Facebook groups of individuals who identify as Masurian or who have an interest in Masurian-related topics.

Among my interviewees, the most characteristic features of those categorized as rememberers or even "ghost speakers" (as defined by Grinevald & Bert, 2011, p. 46–52) were found in middle-aged and older individuals. No significant gender differences were observed, but the geographical origin of their families played a crucial role. Some degree of passive knowledge of Masurian was retained among respondents from the counties of Działdowo (a case which I will not discuss in detail here, as it is the subject of a separate paper), Nidzica, Szczętno, Pisz, and Elk, as well as, to a lesser extent, Ostróda. In contrast, respondents with ancestral roots in the counties of Mrągowo, Giżycko, Olecko, and Gołdap provided fewer recollections of the Masurian dialect, as their linguistic memories were predominantly centered around German, which had served as the primary language of communication within the Masurian community, especially in pre-war generations. This regional variation aligns with the conclusions of previous scholars and with German statistical data, which indicate that northern Masurian areas underwent the most extensive Germanisation as early as the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Belzyt, 1996). Furthermore, past research has established that the percentage

of German loanwords varied across counties – the northernmost Masurian areas exhibited the highest degree of German influence (Dubisz, 1978, p. 235).

This material serves as a rare contemporary record of the gradually disappearing Masurian dialects. It may also be of use to dialectologists and scholars of Masuria as supplementary data or as a starting point for further analysis. Wherever possible, I have attempted to provide an approximate district location for each lexical and phraseological unit. However, for the sake of anonymization, I have refrained from offering further specification.

While fully acknowledging the diversity of Masurian dialects, as well as the genetic distinctiveness of the Ostróda dialect (which I have included within the Masurian cultural sphere due to the identity-based self-perception of my Ostróda-origin interlocutors), I have ensured that a minimum localization criterion is met, providing at least the county of origin for each contributor of a given lexical or phraseological unit.

Abbreviations:

Counties: Dz – Działdowo County (only the historically Masurian parts); Elc – Elk County; Giż – Giżycko County; Mrąg – Mrągowo County; Kętrz – Kętrzyn County; Nidz – Nidzica County; Olc – Olecko County; Ostr – Ostróda County; Pisz – Pisz County; Szcz – Szczytno County; Węg – Węgorzewo County. Wider ranges: MWsch – East Masuria; MZach – West Masuria; OgMaz – common throughout the whole region.

Phrase	Meaning	Location and variants	Etymology or explanation of the German influence
abszrejbować	to write off	Nidz	abschreiben
ancug, ancuch	men's suit	OgMaz; -ch Elc	Anzug
bata	boat	OgMaz	Boot
bana	train	Nidz	Bahn
banaraum	waiting room at the railway station	Mrąg	Bahn + Raum
banof	railway station	Dz	Bahnhof
blaza	informal: football	Dz	Blase
bombony	candy	Elc, -óm-, -ón-	Bonbon
bouch	bacon	Elc	Bauch
bradwana	oven-pan	Szcz, Mrąg	Bratpfanne
brele	glasses	Elc	Brille
brotmaszina	bread slicer	Elc	Brot + Maschine
bretki	rolls	Elc, -é-	Brötchen
buchta	1. bay of a lake, 2. a type of roll, 3. compartment for calves in a barn	1 and 2 Pisz, 3. Dz	Bucht

Phrase	Meaning	Location and variants	Etymology or explanation of the German influence
buksy	pants	OgMaz	Low German buxen
buterfasa	butter churn	Elc -å-	Butter + Fass
bysióng	1. railway embankment, 2. gorge	1. Dz, 2. Elc	Bischung
cejtnnek	newspaper	OgMaz	Zeitung
cug	train	OgMaz	Zug
draszować	to thresh	MWsch, also dre-	dreschen
dybzak	pocket	Elc, Szcz, Nidz	Dieb + Sack
fejrować	to celebrate	Nidz, Elc, Szcz	feiern
fejrować sie	to burn	Dz, Elc	Feuer
flejszmaszina	meat slicer	Elc	Fleisch + Maschine
fogla dostać	to go crazy, lose one's mind	Ostr, Dz, also: fugla dostać	Einen Vogel bekommen
fuchcić	to smoke	MZach, Ostr.	Fucht
gasthouz	inn, guesthouse	Elc, -å-, declension forms: -z- (ex. gen sg gasthouzu)	Gasthaus
gbur	farmer, usually quite wealthy	Elc, Nidz, Szcz. Elc: bg- (sic!)	gebür
glaska	glass	Elc, Ndz, Szcz	Glass
grycwurszta	blood sausage	Elc	Grütze + Wurst
faryna	sugar	Elc, Pisz	Farinzucker
fasa	barrel	Elc	Fass
felowny	defective	Dz	fehlen
flekować	to patch	Dz, also flikować	flecken; flicken
foca	vulgar: female genital organs	Szcz	Fotze
haluga	ice hole	Elc	Höhlung
harki	rake	Ostr	Harke
Hedka, Hedusia	Hedwig (name)	Pisz	Hedwig
hékłować	to crochet	Nidz, Szcz, Elc	häkeln
hemda	suit shirt	Ostr	Hemd
iść na wander	of young people's night walks in the countryside: to go for a walk	Pisz	wandern
jublować	to feast	Giż, also: ziublować	jubeln

kafa	coffee	Pisz	Kaffee
kafeja	coffee	Elc	Kaffee
kapuca	hood	Elc	Kapuze
kara	wheelbarrow	OgMaz, also Elc k'äri (tant. pl)	Schubkarre
karbonada	pork chop	Pisz	Karmonade
kazarnik	landless, wage earner living in a small house	Nidz	Kaserne
kejtrować sie	to wrestle	Ostr, Dz	Köter
ketować	to lock	OgMaz, also kietować	Kette
kikse	cookies	Elc	Kekse
klejdzik	dress	OgMaz	Kleid
klić	slack-baked cake	Elc	klitschen
kliciowaty	of cakes: sooty	Elc	klitschig
knakać, knakować	to crack nuts	Kętrz, Mrąg	knacken
knapny	small	Mrąg	knapp
koło	bicycle	OgMaz	Rad – pol. koło
koprak	big pot	Elc, -åk	Kopper
kracka	hoe (gardening tool)	Dz, Nidz	Kratze
kracować	to weed or loosen the soil using a hoe	Dz, Nidz, also kracko- wać (Dz)	Kratze
kuch	cake	Nidz, Szcz, Dz, Elc	Kuchen
lefelka	teaspoon	Elc	Löffel
lofrować	to wander around; to go on dates	OgMaz	laufen
madrować	to mess with some- thing; to break some- thing	Szcz	maddern
mejs	corn	Elc	Mais
mieć głód	to be hungry	Elc	Hunger haben
mojn	hello!	Ostr, Mrąg, Szcz	Moin
muszkebada	sugar	Pisz	East Prussian musche- bade
myca	hat	OgMaz, Elc pl mycy	Mütze
na borg	on credit	Dz, Nidz	auf Borg
oberhabki	a surplus of treats, something good	Elc	Ober+haben
pelki	unpeeled cooked pota- toes	Mrąg	Pelkartoffeln

Phrase	Meaning	Location and variants	Etymology or explanation of the German influence
pikiel	pimple	Kętrz	Pickel
plachander	a gossiping person	Pisz	East Prussian: plachandern
plata	1. stove with a hob, 2. humorously: a short, but wide woman	Szcz	Platte
pluma	plum	Elc, Szcz, Nidz	Low German Plum
race	rats	Elc	Ratte
radiski	radishes	Elc	Radieschen
rébi	ribs	Nidz, Szcz	Low German Rebbe
rufnónć	to call by a phone	Ostr	rufen
siepka	ladle spoon	Szcz	Scheplöffel
sklapować	to fold a chair; to make a sandwich	unlocalised	klappen
smakować za zięncéj	to want more (esp. of some dish)	Nidz, Dz	Schmeckt nach mehr
szachtelek	box	Szcz	Schachtel
szauerek, szauer, siauer	shed	MZach, Ostr	Schauer
szlisel	key	Ostr	Schlüssel
sznabel	1. beak, also in phraseologism <i>trzimać sznabel</i> – to shut up (stop talking), 2. brat, rookie	Ostr	Schnabel
sznelka	milk soup (with crumbled bread)	unlocalised	schnell
szneka	snail-shaped yeast roll	Dz, Nidz, Ostr, Pisz	Schnecke
szpada	spade	Elc -å-	Spaten
szparować	to spare	Nidz, Szcz, Elc, -å- Elc	sparen
szparowny	frugal	Elc	sparsam
szpeka	bacon, speck	OgMaz, Elc -k'a, also masc. szpek	Speck
szpelować	to rinse	Pisz	spülen
szpirkle	greaves	Mzach	East Prussian Spirkel
szrejbować	to write	Nidz, Dz	schreiben
szruber	scrubbing brush	Nidz, Szcz	Schrubber
sztramny	elegant, great	Pisz	stramms

sztula	sandwich	No loc., also: klapsztula	Stulle
szypa	flat shovel for grain	Elc, Nidz, Dz, Szcz	Schippe
szypa	ship	Elc	Schiff, Low German Schipp
ślachtuz	slaughterhouse	Pisz	Schlacht+Haus, Low German Huus
śpargle	asparagus	Nidz	Spargel
śpindel	kitchen ice pick	Pisz	Spindel
śpliter	shrapnel, chip	Szcz	Splitter
śport	sport	Elc	Sport (phonetic influence)
tanenboum	Christmas tree	Szcz	Tannenbaum
tanta	aunt	Nidz	Tante
tej	tea	Szcz	Tee
teja	tea	Elc	Tee
tesarz	carpenter	Elc tésász	Tischler
topek	chamber pot	Dz	Topf
tumlować się / tómlować się	of children: playing, wrestling while making noise	Nidz, Dz	tummeln sich
tyna	barrel	Elc	Tonne
unterózy	long johns	Elc, Szcz, Nidz, Dz	Unterhose
wanca	bedbug	Dz, Nidz	Wanze
waszkuchnia	room in the house where one washes clothes and takes a bath	Szcz	Waschen + Küchewwe
wecować	1. to grind, e.g. a razor, 2. to rub with great force, wipe	1. Pisz, 2. Dz, Nidz	wetzen
westa	suit vest	OgMaz	Weste
Westfale	Westphalia	Dz, Szcz	Westfalen (ending -en interpreted in Masurian as plural)
wurztą	sausage	Elc	Wurst
Zabina	Sabine (name)	Elc	Sabinne (with Masurian /z/, not Polish /s/ in the beggining)
Zaksy	Saxony	Elc	Sachsen
zagować	to saw	OgMaz	sägen
zasancować się	to make trenches	Szcz	Schanze

Phrase	Meaning	Location and variants	Etymology or explanation of the German influence
zbuksować się	to defecate	Szcz, Mrąg	Low German buxen
zofka	sofa	Elc	Sofa with /z/, not /s/ as in Polish
zoki	socks	OgMaz	Socke
zorgować	to take care of something; to stockpile	Elc, Dz, Nidz, Szcz	sorgen
zorterować	to sort	Szcz	sortieren
zydłungi	workers' houses on the outskirts of a village	Elc	Siedlung
zégier	clock	Elc	Seiger

3. DISCUSSION

The presented material (132 units) consists mostly of well-assimilated German loanwords, both grammatically and phonetically, originating from High German (e.g., *zortérować*, *sznabel*, *rufnóć*) and Low German (*szlachtuż*, *pluma*, *buksy*). This extensive incorporation of Germanisms into the everyday speech of Masurians – persisting to an extent even today – demonstrates the high permeability of German lexical influences, resulting from historical exposure to the German language in educational, public, and official settings, as well as within domestic environments.

Certain phonetic traits identified in the material also provide insights into the preservation of specific features of Masurian dialects, such as mazuration and an imbalance in the degree of fricative palatalisation (*ś/sz'/sz*), which may also reflect German influence. Additionally, the German diphthong /ai/, written *ei*, was pronounced as /ei/ by Masurians (e.g., *cejtunek* ‘newspaper’), while the same /ei/ pronunciation applied to /oi/ (spelled as *eu* in standard German), as in *fejrować* (to burn), derived from German *Feuer* (fire). Both features were borrowed from local East Prussian German dialects.

The majority of German loanwords that have persisted in the memories of my interviewees are concrete nouns related to everyday life. The borrowings encompass a wide array of semantic fields, including domestic life, agriculture, transportation, clothing, and cuisine. Over 70% of the presented material consists of nouns; verbs are represented by 20% of the material and less than 5% are adjectives.

Although the collected material encompasses a diverse range of topics, several principal thematic categories of German loanwords can be distinguished. These include food and kitchen (24%), agriculture and tools (9%), clothing and accessories (8%), household and furnishings (8%), and transportation (6%). Notably lower proportions are observed for vocabulary related to nature and the environment, as well as terms referring to parts of the body or more traditional areas of social life, like religion. An

examination of the vocabulary presented in the Table reveals that German loanwords are primarily retained in the domains of daily life (*profanum*), including food items, agriculture, household objects, and practical tools. Terms such as *bata* (boat) or *wurza* (sausage) indicate that German loanwords predominantly concern tangible objects closely related to everyday life and domestic activities. This corresponds with the data from Masuria obtained by Polish dialectologists after the Second World War, which was also outlined by later dialectologists such as K. Sobolewska (Sobolewska, 2014, pp. 94–100) and K. Rembiszewska (Rembiszewska, 2015). The lexicon also reveals socio-economic nuances through specific terms reflecting status, profession, or lifestyle. For example, *gbur* (wealthy farmer) and *kazarnik* (landless wage earner) articulate socio-economic stratifications within the Masurian community. The analyzed lexical material distinctly reflects socio-cultural phenomena and technological innovations characteristic of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Particularly prominent are loanwords associated with developments in transportation and industrialization, exemplified by terms such as *bana* (train), *banof* (railway station), and *koło* (bicycle). These borrowings indicate the transformative impact of the railway network expansion and growing mobility within rural East Prussian communities. Similarly, lexical items like *brotmaszyna* (bread slicer) and *flejszmaszyna* (meat slicer) illustrate the integration of mechanical household appliances, emblematic of technological modernization and evolving domestic practices. Furthermore, expressions such as *cejtunek* (newspaper) and *gasthouz* (inn, guesthouse) underscore changing social dynamics, increased literacy, and more frequent communal interactions fostered by the modernization processes.

The vast majority of the German influences in the presented material can be identified as proper lexical borrowings with adjusted morphology and phonetic realizations. However, it is also possible to identify phraseological calques (e.g., *mieć głód*, *smakować za ziencój*), hybrid formations (e.g., *waszkuchnia*, *dostać fogla*), and phonetic borrowings (e.g., *Zabina*, *śport*).

Notably, the dialectal distribution of Germanisms varies geographically, reflecting the historical processes of Germanisation. Northern Masurian areas like Giżycko, Olecko, and Gołdap exhibit fewer Masurian dialectal elements due to earlier and more extensive Germanisation processes compared to southern areas (e.g., Nidzica, Szczytno, and Pisz).

Furthermore, the lexical influence is evident not only in direct borrowings but also in semantic shifts, as seen in expressions like *fogla dostać* (to go crazy), derived from German idiomatic usage. Such phraseological borrowings demonstrate deeper cognitive integration and a sustained linguistic interchange between Masurian and German.

A significant portion of this material has already been confirmed in previous studies (Rembiszewska, 2015; Rembiszewska, 2010; Szatkowski, 2023), particularly in *Słownik gwar Ostródzkiego, Warmii i Mazur* (Stamirowska, 1987; Stamirowska, 1991; Stamirowska & Perzowa, 1993; Perzowa & Kołodziejczykowa, 2002; Perzowa & Kołodziejczykowa, 2006; Sobolewska & Kołodziejczykowa, 2014; Sobolewska, 2018; Sobolewska, 2021) and its associated archives, as well as in non-professional Masurian dictionaries (Kruk, 2013; Donder, 2011). In these cases, the inclusion of particular

lexemes serves as confirmation of their vitality and continued presence in the linguistic memory of Masurians with whom I have interacted in recent years. However, I have also documented words and phrases that have not been attested in other sources, or have only been sparsely attested, such as: *wanca*, *zbuksować sie*, *tumlować sie*, *śpindel*, *śpargle*, *knakać*, and more...

It should also be emphasized that when German and Polish educated elites (including scholars, politicians, national activists, and writers) historically debated the status of Masurian people and their speech, particularly during the era of linguistic purity ideologies and later also ethnic purity doctrines, such explicit indicators of cultural intermingling and linguistic influence were met almost exclusively with condemnation and depreciation (Bolck, 1818; Rauschnick, 1817; "Od Mazur", 1865; Gerss, 1903; Smólski, 1900; Sembrzycki, 1889a). Today, however, the numerous German loanwords – often atypical in other linguistic varieties derived from Polish – attest to the region's complex historical past. Moreover, these borrowings may now serve as markers of regional identity, alongside "native" words of Masovian origin or those formed following the establishment of a distinct Masurian community. The Masurian variety, once a stigmatizing and unpopular one, has undergone some efforts of revitalization, *inter alia* via the Internet, or books and dictionaries (Sobolewska, 2019a; Sobolewska, 2019b; Rembiszewska, 2020).

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„Germanizmy są solą gwary mazurskiej!” – Dialektalne germanizmy mazurskie zarejestrowane podczas badań terenowych oraz obserwacji uczestniczącej

Słowa kluczowe: germanizmy, gwara mazurska, zapożyczenia leksykalne, kontakt językowy, zmiana językowa, germanizacja.

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł przedstawia wyniki badań terenowych prowadzonych w latach 2019–2024, których celem było udokumentowanie dynamiki łączącej trzy kody językowe – niemiecki, polski oraz gwarową mazurszczyznę. Dodatkowym efektem badań było zarejestrowanie ponad stu gwarowych germanizmów stanowiących część mazurskiego zasobu leksykalnego. Gwary mazurskie wywodzące się z mazowieckiej polszczyzny uległy intensywnemu wpływowi języka niemieckiego, co było skutkiem długotrwałych procesów wymiany międzykulturowej, sąsiedztwa, wreszcie kolonizacji niemieckiej oraz nasilających się działań germanizacyjnych, szczególnie w XIX i XX wieku. W badaniach jakościowych, obejmujących wywiady półstrukturyzowane oraz obserwację uczestniczącą, zidentyfikowano liczne germanizmy leksykalne, które w większości odnoszą się do konkretnych przedmiotów codziennego użytku i życia domowego. Wyniki badań wskazują na różnorodność regionalną w zakresie stopnia przyswojenia germanizmów, przy czym najbardziej widoczne są one w południowej części Mazur, w przeciwieństwie do północnej części Mazur, w której co prawda historycznie używano większej liczby germanizmów w obrębie gwar mazurskich, te jednak zachowały się do czasów współczesnych głównie w formie szczątkowych wspomnień. Obecnie lekt mazurski w sytuacjach codziennych używany jest okazjonalnie głównie przez osoby starsze, określane jako „rememberers”, które zachowały wspomnienia pojedynczych elementów leksykalnych bez aktywnego posługiwania się mazurszczyzną na co dzień. Artykuł wskazuje, że te językowe relikty są świadectwem historycznych przemian społecznych oraz współczesnych procesów kształtowania się tożsamości regionalnych, wpisując się w szerszą dyskusję na temat zachowania dialektów oraz regionalnej różnorodności językowej.