

*(С)тратити язык што то значыт, што то творит.*

*Лемківське выгнаня з языка*

*Losing a language: What it means and what it does to speakers.*

*Lemkos expelled from their own language*

I admit that this time, my report will not put together wider, general perspectives, analysis, or concepts about the basis of the Lemko language, only statements in the form of illustrative material, taking examples carried by and surviving through members of the contemporary Lemko community situation, of its own language, as it is alienated like it is not its own, buried, destabilized, sad, tragic, etc. It is registered with emotion and understanding, rational cultivation of the community, cultural, mental situation, as it currently finds itself. Lemkos, as a community, through a few, individual members of this community.

I collected the illustrative material in times necessary for this report, research talks and interviews with individuals, living in the so-called “чужыні” [“exile”], that is, in the formerly German territory in Lower Silesia, where they (or their ancestors) were taken in 1947; in the Lemko homeland, where a small part of the Lemko community now lives; and in Western Ukraine, in L'viv and Ivano-Frankivsk oblasts, where Lemkos taken in 1945-46 “to Russia” now live. I also used other good illustrative material from my own

research, contacts, and the interview responses and opinions of Lemko people, who I have observed and recorded for many years. The material presented here from research cannot be gathered statistically. The number of people with whom I carried out interviews is not greater than 50, and the subjects chosen were not very accidental, because I chose subjects from different linguistic positions. The age of the subjects was from 20 to 95 years, of different levels of education, living in villages or cities. Thus, the spectrum of illustrative examples is broad, diverse, and rewarding, even if it is statistically unconfirmed: a composite and symptomatic picture of the linguistic condition, opinions, and emotions. My questioning was not from a questionnaire; I asked each subject what was individually possible. Rather, they had the form of talks-discussions more than interviews with questions and answers.

### **The Lemko language - situation, status**

The Lemko language was never a language of community advancement. It was a functional language, serving cultural and economic spheres, and thus it developed - as the language of a mountain people, living from shepherding and farming - which could easily develop its lexicon and its grammatical structures. The major impetus for the development of the Lemko language, especially in its written form, was the Eastern Christian Church, first

Orthodox, then Greek Catholic, and finally both of them. It was the only institution brought to them as their own, forming the consciousness of themselves with endonyms like Rusnak, Rusyn, Rus' [Русь], ruskij [рускій], compared with Polish [Поляк, польскій].

In its oldest forms, the Lemko language was written in the Cyrillic alphabet in all cultural-civic areas and traditions, even though there was little writing and history behind its development. In the political-community situation in which the Lemkos found themselves, knowledge of writing was advanced perhaps only in church spaces, which created the community of “man and priest.” From the middle of the 19th century, the language built itself, in addition to the territory and belonging to Eastern Christianity, as the basis of Lemkones. The written language, the first books - in Church Slavonic, from the time, mainly from 1911, when the newspaper *Lemko - A Gazette for the People* [«Лемко – газета для народа»] phonetically wrote the people's language, began to bring about the formulation of ethnic consciousness and the emancipation of Lemko aspirations.

This situation has not changed, to the present. The language signifies Lemko consciousness both internally, and externally - Lemko is recognizable mainly in personal discussions. Therefore the experience of community values, their participation in them and

their use, as they are carried, are, to the present, accepted as possible only in the native Lemko language. But also negatively, thanks to stigmatization, persecution, and ridicule that Lemkos experienced, it developed on the basis of linguistic differences.

During the communist period, when Lemkos were subjected to complete assimilation, their language maintained itself mainly in families, at home. In April 1989, the first organization after the deportation was created - the Lemko Association [Стоваришчя Лемків]. Since 1991, it has formally operated in schools, teaching the Lemko language, from 5-year-olds up to the secondary school matriculation exams; from 2001 to 2017, Lemko philology was taught at the Pedagogical University of Kraków. Further, literature, media and journalism, and educational activity have grown in this language. On one hand, there is clear, implicit development of processes, and on the other hand, we have the scene before us of how the Lemko language is removed or disqualified from categories of endangered or highly endangered languages, because it shrinks itself, dissolving between generations of direct activity within families.

In 2001, the Lemko language was declared as a native language by 5,605 citizens in the Polish Census, which means almost everyone who declared Lemko nationality (5,850). However, in the 2011 census, a great disproportion was visible

between those declaring Lemko nationality - 9,640, and Lemko language - 6,279. This means that 1/3 of conscious Lemkos do not consider the Lemko language as their native language.

In Ukraine, no statistical results about the Lemko language were possible to see, because to the present, it has not been recognized as a minority language, nor have Lemkos / Rusyns been recognized as an ethnic minority.

### **Generalizations from the talks-discussions**

Since it is not possible to look at my results in a statistical way, some generalized observations from the answers obtained may be formed.

1. In all answers collected, there is **consciousness of the barriers**, within which the Lemko language finds itself - maintained through its carriers, its Polonization or Ukrainization, and infrequent transfer to children. The older generation sees this most pessimistically; they think that the Lemko language must be at home, in the family, and if it is not, that means that it will die out: “our language is dying.” The most optimistic, paradoxically, are those who do not speak Lemko with their children, “because they are children and this way they'll learn, and they'll be Lemko, when they're older,” or those, who did not learn this language from their parents,

only in school or from textbooks, and they know that this possibility exists, so according to them, the lack of activity within the family is not as much of a barrier to the language. “In the academic field, in which I studied and now work, it's a good condition.” “The language will not die, because after all, there are more kids that Barbara is teaching now.”

2. In all, without isolating the responses of **deported Lemkos** it is pointed out as an action, which at the highest level poured the native language and its degradation into itself through people. “That's why they deported us, so that we wouldn't exist. They stopped us.” “There, in the village, there were a lot of people, so we were all united - the whole village, the whole village was Lemko, the future would be Lemko, and everyone would come together, I think, that we wouldn't have needed the Polish language.”
3. Beyond the most often mentioned reasons: **fear of harassment** (one of the subjects spoke about an earlier time, when a stranger became cruel only because he identified him as a Lemko); **fear of ridicule, of losing work, impossibility for advancement, or worse** from it. “He (grandpa, who received a good plot of land from the government, and then quickly assimilated) told me, that he really didn't want to admit, because how would he admit to it, that he was from

Berest, because it would immediately be that there were Ukrainians there, UPA, and so on. He didn't want to go there, that (...) some neighbor from Berest, met him in the land of exile [Lower Silesia] and she said 'good day' to him. My grandfather was with some work colleagues, and he pretended that he didn't know her - that she was some stupid woman, what was she saying.” “I know that in my family, it is and still is something like, that it is a flaw, and they don't want the kids to be defected.”

Often, it causes **shame for one's differences**. Those who spoke to their children at home in Polish interpreted this as taking care of them, so that the children would not have problems in preschool, school, so that they would not be made fun of, so that they would understand the language at school, and so that their teachers and classmates would understand them. “So that the child would be treated better at school, he must know the Polish language well. And so that he would learn, he had to be taught, and so he is learning Lemko.” “I know this case, where at home there was not even a word in Polish and the 6 year-old boy went to school, to kindergarten and not even a word of Polish, and then when he was 15 years-old, he had some words, too. And the children laughed at him, with these words they teased him, and so the problem (...) how

children laugh at different children, that is not very comforting.”

There is also communication present in respondents **of the lesser status, lower quality of the Lemko language**. More than 30 years ago, I heard from an older Lemko woman, who spoke with her grandchildren in Polish, “only to the pigs in Lemko.” Today, her granddaughter (already herself the mother of three children) is happy, that she “didn't want to be a dinosaur,” the Lemko language is not interesting to her, nor is it useful. Now in the interview I recorded the opinion of a genetically 100% Lemko woman, a student (who did not bring the language from home), that the Lemko language is not useful to her, because it is impure and not self-propelled, it's very similar to Polish and it only changes endings; besides this, it lacks a lot of words.

4. Practically every one of the respondents acknowledged that **the Lemko language should be saved**. Most people, mainly of the younger generation, took their thoughts about language revitalization to the school system, however linking it to the school. There were some who called attention to awareness, which occurs in the family, but also at church. Educated persons, mainly younger ones, saw possibilities in



revitalization and noticed that there was already an experiment to make it visible.

5. In the end (with the exception of 4 people in Poland and 2 in Ukraine), all the others considered that children, whose parents did not transfer the native language in natural ways **really lost out and parents did them a great injustice.** The injustice is mainly that they ended their access to the entirety of familial traditions and emotions, as they are tied to native language. “I think that a great injustice is done to those children and to the whole community system, such as it still functions with us, but through such actions its functionality is diminished, and children lose the values system, as it would normally develop.” “School can provide intergenerational activities, but it can't replace it. When I was little, I didn't feel that it was as important as it is, maybe it can be learned, but school doesn't give that (...) Lots of kids miss out, the whole world is recognized in the language. I can say what I lost - many cultural sayings, from the most simple to those like religion. But nobody described the world to me in Lemko, I lost all of that, because that world sees differently than how it is described in Polish, Ukrainian, or Russian ... I would really like to raise children in the Lemko language. I'm just scared, that since I was raised in the Polish language, that in the middle

there will be such a big gap that I won't know it. At that time, I won't realize other possibilities. I'll assume that there are not other possibilities. I determine it like this, and that's it.”

“A lot is lost, because a very large part of one's consciousness is lost (...) Familial cohesion is lost. I think that I lost a lot.”

6. Did these people have **regret towards parents**, that they did not transfer language to them?

“I don't know if I have regret, or that feeling, because I really love my family, but I know that everything could have been seen a bit differently... Luckily, I had that need within myself... In our house, nobody spoke badly about Lemkos, quite the opposite, they said that we were Lemkos.”

“I had some regret, but now I don't, because I understand how that happened.”

“I am a bit regretful that my grandfather never spoke to me in Lemko.”

This is how people, who thought about their loss of language, taught themselves and returned to the language, speak.