

Populist Discourse in the Polish Media

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9. The ‘Us–Them’ Antinomy: A Category of Grammatical Person in the Polish Language and its Function in Populist Discourse¹

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Introduction

In Polish, the person is a grammatical category of verb inflection, including first, second and third person singular and plural.² The category of person (often classified as a verbal category – see Bańko, 2004, p. 166; Nagórko, 2002, p. 138) includes primarily personal forms of the verb which form the conjugation paradigm of *verbum*.³ This category also includes personal pronouns and – indirectly – possessive pronouns.⁴

Some linguists, e.g. A. Nagórko (2002, pp. 138–139), include first, second and third person pronouns in this class, but it is difficult to agree with this classification. It is Nagórko herself who associates the meaning of pronouns with the roles of sender (1st person singular and plural) and receiver (2nd person singular and plural), and it seems that this emphasis on the process of communication should be consistently maintained. In this approach we can notice the different character of third person pronouns in Polish (compared to 1st and 2nd person), shown in traditional classifications of pronouns, where they are consistently included in demonstrative pronouns, such as *ten, tamten, ów* (roughly equivalent to *this* or *that* in English), etc. (see Klemensiewicz,

¹ The content of the chapter is an extended version of the chapter that was published in Polish: see Wrzeźniewska-Pietrzak and Kołodziejczak (2020). The literature review focuses on the Polish papers analyzing ‘us–them’ antinomy in the context of Polish language in order to familiarize non-Polish speaking readers with a methodology and findings of the Polish studies.

² It should be noted here that not all verbs in Polish can be conjugated. Apart from the class of verbs changed by the person, there is a class of non-inflected verbs in Polish, e.g. *trzeba, można, warto, należy* (all meaning ‘one needs to’, i.e. with no specified grammatical person) (see Saloni, 1974).

³ We do not discuss here verbs in the past tense, whose endings in Polish provide information on the sex of the speaker, or receiver, or the person that is the object of a given statement.

⁴ According to Polish linguist J. Bralczyk, possessive pronouns referring to the first person “do not concern me as much as ‘I’. They do concern me, but somewhat from the outside” (quoted in: Łysakowski, 2005, p. 29). We must, however, acknowledge the presupposition within a possessive pronoun. By using the forms *nasz, nasze* (*our* or *ours*) as a modifier, the speaker provides information on the existence of a ‘we-community’ (cf. Łysakowski, 2005, pp. 39–40). That is why in this chapter we do not include the category of possessive pronouns, as they assume the existence of a community that is already determined by the use of the personal pronoun *my* (*we*) or implicated by the ending of a verb in the first person plural.

1984), whose meaning is updated each time by the context of the statement. This approach clearly indicates the non-personality of pronouns related to the third person resulting from the absence of the actual third person in communication situations when the third person pronoun is used.

In communication, the use of the first person singular refers primarily to the sender (speaker), while the second person singular and plural refer to a single or collective receiver (addressee) (see also Łysakowski, 2005, p. 21). The definition of the grammatical person by R. Grzegorzczkova (1993, p. 453) indicates that it “updates the statement by referring a given situation to the participants of the dialog; one form distinguishes a situation when the sender of the statement is also the performer of the activity, another form refers to the receiver, while yet another describes a situation where neither the sender nor the receiver is the performer of the activity but is someone (something) else” (cf. also Tokarski, 2001, p. 166; Okopień-Sławińska, 1977, p. 47).

In this sense, the third person is sometimes described as a non-person (see Łysakowski, 2005, pp. 20–21). It is usually used to denote the object of a statement (cf. Okopień-Sławińska, 1977, p. 47) and indicates someone (something) we are speaking about. The third person (both singular and plural) is a kind of protagonist of the sender’s statement, and therefore does not participate in the communication and has no voice (their words may be quoted by direct or reported speech). Moreover, the third person may (although it does not have to) be definite and unambiguously identified in a given statement (cf. Lyons, 1975, p. 306). It is worth noting that in Polish (similar to English) the third person pronouns *on, ona, oni, one* (*he, she, they*) make it possible to emphasize the distance between the speaker and those they are talking about. This distance makes it easy to associate these pronouns with negative valorization, and use them to build a situation of exclusion, otherness, or even enmity.⁵

This is not always the case, as is exemplified by the Polish honorifics used by the speaker to emphasize the different status of the sender and the receiver. The third person, when expressed in third person verb forms in combination with the lexemes *pan, pani*⁶ (in plural – *państwo*, roughly – *Mr and Ms*), becomes a receiver whose status is usually not negative, with the sender emphasizing the receiver’s considerable rank or social status. For this reason, linguists classify Polish honorifics as the second person (see Huszcza, 1996; Łysakowski, 2005, p. 21).

The situation is slightly different for the category of persons in the plural, associated with the notion of a group, not an individual, so the speaker is not automatically a “personification” of the applied plural form. As argued by A. Nagórko (2002, p. 138), personal forms in the singular and plural are different lexemes, exemplified by the different roles of individual pronouns. Nagórko (2002, pp. 138–139) explains: “The first-person (‘I’) is unique; however, ‘WE’ is not a mere collection of ‘I’s. Equation: ‘WE = I + I + I...’ would be nonsensical. ‘WE’ means ‘I + someone else’ or ‘I + YOU’. Similarly, YOU in the plural is not a duplication of an individual addressee, but an indication of a group of

⁵ It is often visible in studies on the functioning of language in the political sphere, where the opposition ‘us vs. them’ becomes ‘friend *versus* enemy’.

⁶ A similar function may be played by the words *towarzysz* (*comrade*) or *obywatel* (*citizen*), combined with the third person.

people including the addressee: YOU means 'YOU + others' (cf. also Tokarski, 2001, pp. 166–167; Łysakowski, 2005, p. 42).⁷

The communicative use of the first person plural most often indicates the construction of a group; a community characterized by common values (or constructed as common) and views. The so constructed community is highly ambiguous. It may appear in two distinctly different forms – one including the receiver (where *we* includes the speaker and the singular/plural *you* – the addressee(s) of the statement), and the other form excluding the receiver (where the sender constructs the community, but places the receiver outside of it).⁸ This ambiguity of *we* makes it possible for the sender to freely shape a group of *swoi* (which can be roughly translated as *ours*, *our kind*, *our group*, *our community*), or to change the understanding of *us* within a single statement (which turns out to be a characteristic feature of statements by Polish populist politician Paweł Kukiz, the leader of Kukiz'15; see Kołodziejczak and Wrześniewska-Pietrzak, 2017; cf. Łysakowski, 2005, pp. 52–59). For this reason, to quote T. Łysakowski: "The first person plural is traditionally considered to be the most effective in terms of persuasion (...), which may be associated with the fact that it is the most ambiguous and opaque, and that you can use it to include, transpose or hide anything, and then deny everything by distorting the meaning that we originally ascribed to *we* (or pretended to ascribe)" (Łysakowski, 2005, p. 35).

The category of person is not only valorized by number, but also by the relation between the speaker and receivers, or the presence or absence of a link between the community and the subject (cf. Okopień-Sławińska, 1977, pp. 44–45). Individual personal forms must be concretized in each statement, but the semantic specification of individual forms is not obvious, predictable and unambiguous. Therefore, they are only different fillings of equal semantic possibilities within a given form" (Okopień-Sławińska, 1977, p. 44).

The figurative use of the category of person (excluding the first person singular – 'I') should also be indicated here. The metaphoricality of meanings, most strongly used in constructing the meaning of 'us', is defined as a transposition based on conventionalised concretisations (conditioned by sociolinguistic considerations, such as belonging to a specific group – e.g. *pluralis maiestatis* or *pluralis modestiae*),⁹ or occasional ones used in poetic works (see: Okopień-Sławińska, 1977, p. 45 and p. 50) or specific communication situations (*pluralis benevolentiae* – uniting, *pluralis commo-dii* – condescending, *pluralis simulatus* – manipulative, *pluralis coniuncturalis* – bathing in someone else's glory, *pluralis adulatorius* – ingratiating; see more: Łysakowski, 2005, pp. 46–59). A. Okopień-Sławińska (1977, p. 46) rightly points out that: "The transposition of personal forms is in conflict with their usual uses, because they attack and transform one of the elementary semantic components of a given form: an

⁷ A. Okopień-Sławińska, in her discussion of the different meanings of *my* and *wy* (*we* and *you* plural) argues that the correct reading of communication roles behind these linguistic forms requires "semantic complementation" (Okopień-Sławińska, 1977, p. 44).

⁸ In Chinese there are two different forms for *we* – 'inclusive we' and 'exclusive we' (Łysakowski, 2005, p. 41; cf. also Lalewicz, 1983, p. 269).

⁹ A. Okopień-Sławińska also includes here the use of the third person in honorifics or as a derogatory form, which justifies including such pronouns as honorifics related to the second person (Okopień-Sławińska, 1977, pp. 45–46 and pp. 55–56).

indicator of quantity or an indicator of the communicative role.” They are a kind of grammatical metaphor, whose “mechanism (...) of action always consists of multiplying the meaning of the applied form by imposing on it functions proper to the primary personal form in a given communication situation, but superseded and at the same time represented by the applied form. This procedure makes it possible to enrich the social characteristics of personal relations by introducing complications, nuances and various perspectives in the attitude of the speaker towards himself or herself and others” (Okopień-Sławińska, 1977, p. 49).

It should be stressed here that the mechanism of so-called grammatical metaphoricization described by the researcher is a tool held by the sender – the speaker. It is that person who becomes the decision-maker and creator of actants present in the communication situation, which in the further part of the chapter will allow us to show the correlation between this ‘power’ and the populist construction of sender/receiver relations in the populist discourse. However, both psychologists and linguists point out that in this opposition (‘us–them’), defining the first segment of the opposition (‘us’) by the participants of the communication is much more important (see Łysakowski, 2005, p. 35). It allows them to determine further relations between the participants of the discourse, in accordance with the assumptions of psychologists who confirm that “the notion of ‘us’ is an important system of reference for social categorization, and its scope decides who is included or excluded from *us*” (Grzelak and Jarymowicz, 2000, p. 121).

The aforementioned characteristics of a grammatical person, and the associated class of personal pronouns in Polish, show that the main axis of antinomy is connected with one of the most important categories in Polish, the ‘swój–obcy’ opposition (‘native–stranger’, synonymous to ‘us–them’¹⁰), characteristic for the culture and the social and political life of Slavic nations (Bartmiński, 2014 p. 33). This opposition is indispensable for identity construction. It allows forming various types of collective identity by looking for similarities or differences between the subject and a given social group. In social (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk, 2004, p. 338) and cultural analyses (including ethnolinguistic research), the ‘us’ *versus* ‘them’ antinomy is seen as one of the most significant categorization frameworks (Bartmiński, 2014, pp. 32–33),¹¹ and is strongly axiological.

This binarity of both oppositions (‘us–them’, ‘native–stranger’) reflects the processes responsible for constructing identity, and in the broader context for building so-called ‘identity politics’.¹² The polarity of these relations corresponds to the manner of defining individual or collective identity: by specifying one’s own characteristics (positive identity), and/or the values that create the difference, specifying the excluded (negative identity). These processes show two directions inherent in the very process

¹⁰ The choice of the term (‘native–stranger’ or ‘us–them’) depends on the choice of analysis. When analysis concerns the structure of language (with structuralist approach as the point of departure), authors prefer ‘us–them’ (i.e. ‘my–oni’). When analysis concerns semantics, researchers usually prefer ‘native–stranger’ (i.e. ‘swój–obcy’).

¹¹ In analyses of the language of politics, it is often the basic element that is subject to research (see Nowak, 2002; Zdunkiewicz, 1987, pp. 610–620; Sałkowska, 2013; Markowka, 2013).

¹² As C. Offe (1998, p. 122) writes, “The politics of identity-based difference is an increasingly prominent feature of increasing segments of the contemporary world, developed and developing alike.”

of identity construction, which are often essential in the conscious construction of one's own image of *me/us*, which is complete when the two areas are defined: the area of 'us' and 'the other', 'strange', 'excluded'. This identification (by applying labels, stereotypes, etc.) may be performed by the speaker or by the external individual or group.

J. Bartmiński emphasizes that the opposition 'us–them' is not binary but gradual, as shown by the following lexical units in Polish: *przyswoić sobie* (*assimilate something*), *oswoić coś* (*familiarize something*), *wyobcować się* (*alienate*), all suggesting a process (Bartmiński, 2014, p. 34). This gradual character of the opposition is the Polish notion of 'the other', which is not axiologically negative in itself.¹³ The difference perceived by the members of a given social group and the sender is not given a negative sign, but becomes a characteristic with an axiological value (positive: *the other* as the partner in a dialog; negative: *the other* becomes a stranger; neutral: when between there are no relations between the speaker/group and *the others*) (more: Wrześniewska-Pietrzak, 2017, pp. 86–91).

According to linguist A. Pajdzińska (2001, p. 34), the 'us versus them' opposition is the most important conceptual category in Polish. Referring not only to Polish, she argues that "the notion of *swójskość* (*familiarity*) is usually treated as obvious and self-evident. Its positive valorization is revealed by linguistic facts. *Swój człowiek* (*our man*) denotes the person seen as one coming from the same circles, and is therefore trustworthy and positive. *Swój* used as a noun (meaning *our one, of our kind*) implies someone we know, from the same environment, or even the same family or country.¹⁴ In Polish *swój* may even imply 'human' or 'associated with humanity'¹⁵ – one of many examples of anthropocentrism, the most distinct concretization of *swójskość* (*familiarity*). Anthropocentrism, found in many languages, may be seen as a natural consequence of the fact that the language is a human creation. Because it was created and used by people, it comes as no surprise that it shows the world in the eyes of man, a man-oriented world where it is most crucial to define 'human' versus 'non-human'" (Pajdzińska, 2001, pp. 34–35).

This anthropocentrism, together with the 'swój–obcy' ('us–them'), overlaps with another conceptual 'category', 'blisko–daleko' ('close–distant').¹⁶ *Swójskość* (*familiarity*), evaluated positively, refers to all that is *close, ours* (something that we/I can

¹³ In his research on the multiculturalism, similar observations were made by M. Golka (2010, p. 164), who argues that: "approach to otherness or strangeness does not exhibit the features of binary thinking (...) because it is not merely a simple opposition 'me–other' or 'us–others' (...). Especially now, in modern times, it hard to find a typical member of a separate group and its culture, and affinity and degrees of identification change under the influence of many factors, especially the unprecedented scale social mobility."

¹⁴ J. Bartmiński (2014) points to the semantic ambiguity of vocabulary definitions of *swój* (*native, ours*) and *obcy* (*strange, alien*). The common denominator is the social and spatial context of these words, especially in the derivative *swójak* (*our man, a guy from here*). This ambiguity was confirmed by the questionnaire survey conducted by that linguist.

¹⁵ According to A. Pajdzińska (2001, p. 35) this is confirmed by the verbs such as *oswajać* (*to be tamed*) which may mean "to lose a wild character, to get used to living among people, to serve people."

¹⁶ J. Bartmiński (1993, pp. 23–48) notices the concurrence of these oppositions in the formation of the notion of *ojczyzna* (*homeland*).

identify with). *Obcość* (*strangeness*) or *inność* (*otherness*) reflects all that is distant, foreign; the more distant it is and the more different from me/us,¹⁷ the more distinct is the negative valorization. The overlapping of these two antinomies shows the correspondence between spatial valorization ('close–distant') and the evaluation of a person or thing that the speaker locates in space.

The grammatical opposition 'my–oni' ('us–them') in the conceptual framework 'swój–obcy' ('our man–stranger') is therefore also a perceptual and cognitive form. Its semantic content and context, as well as the way it is used in communication, depends on the speakers and the role that they construct for themselves in their discourses.

The 'Us–Them' Opposition in Populist Political Discourse

Even a cursory review of public discourse shows the high frequency of references to 'swój–obcy' ('our man–the other') constructed using linguistic forms referring to the personal antinomy 'us–them'. It is especially seen in the statements of senders whose goal is to convey views, argue with values or theses of interlocutors. It is therefore present in each text that can be ascribed a persuasive function. This opposition is significant for the sender because, for the assumed receiver, it becomes a certain interpretative framework, a signpost for the intended meaning of the statement. This framework is somewhat sought, expected by the receiver, to be able to establish if the sender is 'swój' ('our man' with a similar worldview) or 'obcy' ('a stranger' with the opinion that the receiver cannot possibly agree with). The point of contact on this route between the sender and the receiver influences the entire relation between the participants of the discussion.

Public discourse, especially in the sphere of politics, is governed by its own specific rights. The characteristic feature of this communication with primarily persuasive functions is to avoid the category of the second person plural, although it is a natural figure of the collective receiver in the dialog (see Bralczyk, 2007, p. 151).¹⁸ Polish linguist J. Bralczyk explains this absence of the second person plural in communication he labels as "propaganda communication" in the following way: "(...) in an antagonistic relation, and with no full confidence by the society in the government, the natural opposition 'us–them' appears. This opposition is also present on the other side: for those in power, the citizens are also 'them'. However, it is natural that those in power cannot use this 'them' publicly. They even cannot use the form *you* which seems to emphasize the alienation of power" (Bralczyk, 2007, p. 151).

These observations show how important it is for the political discourse to create a relation between the sender and receivers, with an inclusive 'us' encompassing also those receivers that the sender tries to convince to vote for him/her. This inclusive and unambiguous meaning of *us* (and also verb forms in the first person plural) cannot be assumed *a priori*. *We* may be specified in various ways, and also its form assumes ambiguity and non-obviousness (cf. *Pluralis politicus* discussed by Łysakowski [2005, pp. 54–59]).

¹⁷ The more the speaker is distancing from that *other* or *alien* phenomenon or person.

¹⁸ The use of the second person plural is possible when *we* (*you*) does not related to the audience but to 'them', 'the excluded'. This form can be termed an *ostensible you* (cf. Łysakowski, 2005, pp. 68–69).

The constitutive features of populist political discourse are the speaker's reference and identification with 'the people', in opposition towards 'the elite' (often expressed as anti-elitism), and exclusion of 'out-groups' (cf. e.g. Jagers and Walgrave, 2007, pp. 322–324; Stanley, 2009, p. 95; Deiwiks, 2009, p. 2). It needs to be emphasized here that political communication, including populist, reformulates this opposition and simplifies it by emphasizing its binarity. There is nothing 'in-between' in populist communication, there is only 'us' or 'them'; there is nothing in the sender's vision of the world which cannot be placed in this framework (cf. Mudde, 2007, p. 295).

The binarity of this opposition clearly separates these two components. They exist on two opposite poles as something totally different, but can only be distinguished by the reference to the other one. In political discourse, the aforementioned constitutive elements of populism (and their various combinations) provide semantic content of the conceptual structure of 'us–them'. It must contain not only a construct of the community, characterized as 'the people', but most importantly imply the connection between the community and the speaker, a populist politician. Moreover, the speaker clearly indicates the excluded 'out-groups' – 'them', either 'the elite' or 'the others' (Mudde, 2004, pp. 541–563). Axiologization is important here, where 'the people' are seen as a positive force, the embodiment of good and virtue, while 'the elite' or 'the others' personifying all evil.

'The people' in modern Polish is usually presented as *obywatele* (citizens) or *naród* (the nation) (or even in individualized forms 'each Pole', 'each Polish citizen') as opposed to everything that is not 'the people'. This axiological mechanism can be either vertical ('the people' *versus* 'the elite') or horizontal – where individuals or institutions are deemed a threat to 'the people' by the populist sender (e.g. refugees, ethnic or religious minorities, foreign capital) (Moroska, 2010, pp. 26–27; cf. Meny and Surel, 2007, p. 15). This simplification of the worldview and values is filled by populist senders with various content (depending on the cultural, political and individual circumstances). They use the threads of anti-pluralism, anti-elitism (often taking the form of anti-intellectualism, see Mudde, 2007, p. 144) or anti-institutionalism (Markowski, 2004, pp. 11–32), which can be seen as the permanent components of the simplified populist view of the social world.¹⁹

In populist discourse, 'the people' is not only presented in opposition to all 'out-groups', but also to the general status quo, thanks to which "populists can define themselves not only through something they advocate, but through the opposition towards other people and things" (Moroska, 2010, p. 27; cf. Laclau, 2009). Importantly, this antagonistic relation of 'the people' and 'the elite' or 'the others' makes 'the people' ambiguous (Szacki, 2007, p. 10; Meny and Surel, 2007, p. 41), because it can be defined by either negating 'the others' or 'the elite' (cf. Bennett and Pfetsch, 2018, p. 246). A populist sender may give 'the people' various masks, in accordance with the sender's intentions.

These considerations are supposed to show the insufficiency of using the aforementioned three indicators as the only determinants of populist discourse. The linguistic form of 'swój–obcy' ('native–stranger') is only one of many persuasive means which

¹⁹ For the examples of previews studies on these features in the Polish political context please check: Wrześniewska-Pietrzak, and Kołodziejczak, 2017; 2018.

should not be assigned to populism. In other words, the strict connection between populism and persuasion is mostly a correlation and not a dependence. For example, there may be populism without persuasion, e.g. if the sender genuinely believes in the ‘populist ideology’, then his heartfelt need to ‘serve the people’ makes the question of ‘persuading the people’ obsolete.

Persuasion as an effective linguistic strategy serves to “obtain a real influence on the thinking or actions of the receiver – not directly but implicitly, so that the statement is seemingly not dominated by the wish to influence the receiver” (Barańczak, 1983, p. 31). It is widespread among populists, but it cannot be automatically assigned to a populist statement. The symptoms of persuasion in populist discourse (or any other, for that matter) are characteristic rhetorical mechanisms described by S. Barańczak, such as: (1) emotionalization of reception, (2) construction of shared world and language, (3) simplification of values, and, finally, (4) mechanisms of no alternative (Barańczak, 1983, pp. 33–35). The strength of connection between these linguistic means and populism can be seen when we confront persuasion (which releases the receiver from the obligation to engage in autonomous intellectual activity) with the characteristics of ‘the people’s leader’ – a demagogue who “is a rather sloppy disciple of a sophist, but does not have to try too much, because he addresses not those people whom he would have to confuse with a perverse logic, but those who prefer to live rather than think, believe rather than know and examine, they also prefer to ‘decide’ to do what is suggested to them” (Karwat, 2006, p. 16).

Therefore, our position is that the definition of populism should include more constitutive features than currently included. Following Wiles (2010), we argue (as we did in our previous research – see Wrześniewska-Pietrzak and Kołodziejczak, 2017) that populism can be defined by: (1) the central position of idealized people in the constructed vision of the world, (2) the opposition to ‘out-groups’ (‘the elite’ or ‘the others’), (3) simplification of the linguistic vision of the social world, (4) the presence of a leader who plays the role of a real or self-appointed *vox populi*, and (5) the high understandability of the statement which makes it accessible to the largest possible number of viewers.²⁰

The features listed here are indispensable for the populist discourse, but their intensity may vary, depending both on the linguistic means used by a given sender and on extra-linguistic factors such as political circumstances (especially the specificity of contemporary liberal democracy) (Meny and Surel, 2007), and on the individual way in which the sender interprets the category of ‘the people’ and implements the individual vision of the political role of ‘the voice of the people’.

Although the populist syndrome is formed by all the aforementioned components, we must emphasize the correlation between the ‘we–they’ opposition and the simplification of the worldview (see Skarżyńska, 2001). Even more importantly, the *sine qua non* is the role of the populist leader that they themselves construct in their statements (implicitly or explicitly). This constructed image contains information on the relation

²⁰ In his research on the characteristics of populist discourse, K. Ożóg also mentions the specific axiological system, emotional character of texts, use of irony and rhetorical questions, arbitrary definitions, using the colloquial style (Ożóg, 2006, pp. 206–216; Ożóg, 2005, pp. 325–334). Some of these elements can be included in our categories, e.g. axiological system, colloquial style or emotionalization, are part of the lingual vision of the world which we define according to the assumptions of cultural linguistics.

of the populist leader with the receiver(s) that are included in the 'we' category.²¹ It is an unalienable element of the discursive order that cannot come into existence without a populist sender.

Therefore, the category of 'the people' cannot be treated as a constitutive feature of populism if it is not accompanied by a simplified worldview and a specific relation between the sender and receiver (Bralczyk, 1999, p. 82).

Conclusions

Researchers of populist discourse draw attention to the existence of four forms of populism: (1) *empty populism* characterized by the presence of a reference to 'the people', (2) *anti-elitist populism* containing not only references to 'the people' but also anti-establishment slogans, (3) *excluding populism*, which distinguishes such elements as: reference to 'the people' and excluding 'out-groups' other than 'the ruling elite', and (4) *complete populism* with all the aforementioned characteristics (see Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Taggart, 2000). However, the results of quantitative research presented and discussed by A. Stępińska and K. Adamczewska (2017) indicate these variables are too broad as constitutive features (see also chapter 2 of this publication).

Is a category of 'us' essential for populism? Or is the additional reference 'the people' necessary for a given statement to be defined as populist? The results of this research on populist discourse in Poland provide an interesting insight. It turns out that the reference to 'the people', a feature deemed constitutive for populism in many studies, is not necessary. A populist sender may be completely convinced to be acting on behalf of 'the people', and therefore does not have to use this reference each time. Instead, the sender may supplement it with other elements that are deemed more effective in separating 'us' from 'them'. By referring to the opposite features of the 'out-groups', the sender constructs a community in opposition to the common enemy, a construct which is essential for filling the 'us-them' framework. The sender does not need this image to be too detailed to 'pull the strings' and create a discursive space with a strong sense of difference between 'us' and 'them'.

Due to the fact that the 'us-them' antinomy is a common feature of political communication in general, it is difficult to consider it a distinctive indicator of populism. A more important facet is the position and role of a populist leader who constructs this antagonistic and simplified worldview, and at the same time implies his/her dominant role in this vision. The dependence of populism on the semantic content of linguistic forms is confirmed by Y. Mény and Y. Surel (2007, p. 34), who emphasize that "populism is an empty package, which may filled with a variety of content." This would explain the chameleon-like ability of populism to adapt to a variety of political contexts. The multifaceted and changeable nature of populism, with seemingly fresh albeit quite similar forms, seems to be the most important factor behind its political success worldwide.

²¹ Our analysis of the language used by Paweł Kukiz show that his self-image as a leader includes domination, either in the relation politician-receivers (within the 'us' category), and also in the relation politician – other politicians, enemies of the Poles, 'them' (Kołodziejczak and Wrześniewska-Pietrzak, 2017).

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