

The language of life and death at Majdanek. Lexical-semantic study

Summary

This dissertation is a presentation and description of the vocabulary used by people staying in the Majdanek concentration camp and an attempt to compare it with the speech used by prisoners in other Nazi camps, especially Auschwitz. The Majdanek camp operated in German-occupied Poland during World War II. Over time, the prisoners staying there became a kind of closed, hermetic community, using a specific language - *Lagerszpracha*, i.e. camp speech, which became the subject of this dissertation.

The issues related to the camps are studied from various perspectives, not only linguistic, but also literary, psychological and sociological. However, the concentration camps (and the *Lagerszpracha* itself) remained out of the interest of researchers for a long time, including: due to the political situation in post-war Europe. Due to the fact that the Majdanek camp is less known than, for example, Auschwitz, not many publications have been written about it, especially in linguistics.

One of the goals of this dissertation was to introduce and specify the term "lagerszpracha", which is not clear for researchers of the language of World War II. The camp language was very diverse. It consisted of both multi-national elements (coming from different languages) and multi-varietal elements (coming from sociolects, e.g. criminal or prison jargon). In various studies, it is referred to by terms such as the *camp language*, *camp dialect* or *camp jargon*. It is also called *dialect* or *sociolect*. The work analyzed the terms mentioned above, based on which the following conclusions were drawn: the vocabulary used by concentration camp prisoners largely bears the hallmarks of a sociolect, so calling it a *camp sociolect* would be adequate. *Camp dialect* and *camp speech* are also appropriate terms. The last one is relatively comprehensive and often used in this dissertation.

The work uses the philological method, which involves the extraction of linguistic material from the analyzed texts. The linguistic material presented in the dissertation was obtained from sources that included both published and unpublished camp memories (found in the resources of the State Museum at Majdanek). The analyzed memories were not only written, but also spoken (audio and video recordings). The authors of these The texts were written by people who managed to survive their stay in the Majdanek camp.

The camp lexicon was presented in the main part of the work entitled Thematic dictionary of camp vocabulary, which was one of the main goals of the dissertation. The dictionary contains over 600 items, divided into the following thematic groups: names of places, names of people, names of items and facilities related to the everyday functioning of the camp, names of clothing and clothing items, names of camp events, torture, punishments and other activities, names of commands and warnings, names of diseases, names of food and drinks. The thematic field method was used to create the dictionary, because the thematic arrangement of entries allowed for a better presentation of the realities of the camp and the identification of semantic relations between individual linguistic units. In this and subsequent chapters of the work, the dictionary method was also used, which consisted in checking the notation of individual units (and their meanings) by specific dictionaries - both Polish and German. The certificates of lexemes and their meaning were also verified in scientific studies on the language of World War II.

The vocabulary used by prisoners carries a lot of information about what everyday life was like in a concentration camp. The inmates named the realities surrounding them. The collected linguistic material is dominated by the names of people and places. Prisoners in the camp performed various activities, some of them performed administrative functions, the camp authorities constantly monitored the actions of inmates, hence the numerous terms used in the camp for prisoners, SS men and supervisors. The camp lexicon on place names provides a lot of detailed information about the topography of the camp - the location of buildings and their appearance, the camp surroundings, passages, border zones and sanitary conditions in the camp. The collected material also allows us to determine what a typical day in the camp looked like, what punishments were imposed on prisoners and what work they had to do, what they ate, what illnesses they suffered from, but also how they tried to forget about the surrounding reality, at least for a moment, by creating various forms of artistic influence on fellow prisoners.

Formal and genetic analysis of the vocabulary used by the prisoners at Majdanek allowed for the identification of loanwords, neologisms of word formation and meaning, as well as simple lexical units taken from general Polish, characteristic of Majdanek, and complex units. The loanwords used by the prisoners came mainly from German, while individual units were taken from Russian, Italian and Latin. Word-formation neologisms were often created from the German language base, using formants such as *-ka* (*szrajberka*) or *-owa* (e.g. *sztubowa*), and were created through morphological adaptation as well as through adjective substantiation and ellipsis. Camp neo-semanticisms were the result of inmates' careful

observation of the surrounding world. These words were most often created on the basis of metaphor or metonymy. It is also worth mentioning the concretization of meaning, according to which many individuals had a very narrow and specific meaning in the camp, in contrast to their meaning known from freedom. Expressions and phrases also constitute a large part of the camp vocabulary. Among them, we can distinguish several groups of such connections in which a specific noun (e.g. *roll call*, *block*, *barracks*, *commando*, *field*) or a verb (*to go*) is repeated, which proves the strong need to name and differentiate various referents from the camp space

The main part of the work ends with an attempt at a comparative analysis of the camp speech used at Majdanek with that used in other Nazi camps. Nazi concentration camps were supervised by the Germans, therefore a significant part of the vocabulary related to the names of people belonging to the camp authorities and prisoners performing functions in the camp were similar. The names of diseases, food and drink were also mostly the same, e.g. at Majdanek and Auschwitz. Some designations had synonymous terms in different camps (e.g. the table on which punishments were administered was called *a piano*, *a goat* or *a box* at Majdanek, while in Auschwitz it was called *a bock*). Differences in the vocabulary used in different camps resulted from the way the camps were organized and the community staying there. Majdanek was distinguished by the fact that its area was divided into areas called *fields*, which was clearly reflected in the vocabulary used by the prisoners (e.g. *the expressions prisoner field, death field, women's field, first field*).

In Auschwitz, a similar area of the camp was called a section. The majority of the people staying at Majdanek were of Polish nationality, which made it easier for them to communicate, establish contacts, and support each other. There were so-called camp families at Majdanek, most often made up of female prisoners. Newly arrived people were called ducklings and then introduced to the camp reality by the camp sisters. A prisoner self-government, also known as the camp self-government, was also established at Majdanek. The creation of such forms of cooperation, bonds and interpersonal relations in the camp was something unheard of in other Nazi camps.

The conclusions from the conducted analyzes are presented in the Conclusion. The vocabulary used by prisoners at Majdanek and other camps is undoubtedly a testimony to what such places looked like, how the community there was treated and how they had to cope in order to survive. *Lagerszprache* in the Majdanek camp contains both many similarities and differences from the speech present in other Nazi camps. Research on the vocabulary used in various concentration camps should be continued, especially from a comparative perspective

and taking into account less known camps. This may lead to interesting conclusions.