

ETHNOLINGUISTICS
FOR ANNA WIERZBICKA'S JUBILEE*

Professor Anna Wierzbicka, since 2004 an honorary doctor of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, has maintained intense academic and personal contact with Lublin ethnolinguistic circles for many years. The degree of indebtedness of Lublin ethnolinguists to Anna is hard to measure. Her jubilee is a good opportunity for all associated with the journal *Etnolingwistyka/Ethnolinguistics* to express their appreciation for Anna's outstanding achievements, as well as their gratitude for scholarly inspirations and keen interest that Professor Wierzbicka has displayed over many years.

Those academic and personal contacts date back to the times of the unforgettable Professor Maria Renata Mayenowa (1910–1988), Wierzbicka's mentor and academic supervisor. Maria Renata inspired a series of scholarly discussions, held throughout the 1960s and 1970s (often at her hospitable Warsaw apartment at 1 Sandomierska Street) with the participation of many young researchers: Anna Wierzbicka, Teresa Dobrzyńska, Andrzej Bogusławski, Zygmunt Saloni, Zofia Zaron, Irena Bellert... Years later, those discussions crystallised into several publications, among them my book on the language of folklore (Bartmiński 1973) and the idea of the Dictionary of Folk Stereotypes and Symbols (SSSL 1996–).

In the years 1961–1972, while working at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, Anna Wierzbicka became known as a syntactician with original ideas (cf. her 1966 book on the syntactic-stylistic system of Polish Renaissance prose and a series of excellent papers on word order, hypotaxis, subjectless sentences, and nominal constructions in the development of the Polish language), an expert on issues of general linguistics (Wierzbicka 1965), and stylistic nuances (Wierzbicka and Wierzbicki 1967). Her publications from that period have remained

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relevant to this day and, thanks to reprints in the so-called “green series” of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press, are constantly being used in academic pedagogy at Lublin's Department of Polish Philology and in many academic centres in Poland.

During the Warsaw stage of Anna Wierzbicka's career, an especially significant period were the years 1969–1972, when the scholar's interests embraced linguistic semantics and opened new vistas for innovative intercultural research (cf. Wierzbicka 1969 and especially the 1972 monograph *Semantic Primitives*).

However, the most creative stage in Anna's professional life began after she left Poland in 1972 and started teaching and researching at Australian National University in Canberra. The pivotal idea of her work, the concept of the alphabet of human thought, comes from European linguistics, notably Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) and Andrzej Bogusławski (born 1931), but its theoretical and analytic development, the ideas of linguistic “semanticism” and anthropocentrism, the recognition of linguistic universals coupled with the cultural specificity of languages, and above all with the idea of Natural Semantic Metalanguage and minimal grammar as tools for intercultural analyses, took place in the 1980s and 1990s in a series of outstanding books, published first in Sydney and then by top global publishing houses, mainly by Oxford University Press.

Six books published in the Warsaw period¹ were followed by almost twenty monographs in English, each of which immediately became an outstanding scholarly event. The following volumes appeared successively:

- 1980. *Lingua Mentalis: The Semantics of Natural Language*. Sydney: Academic Press.
- 1980. *The Case for Surface Case*. Ann Arbor: Karoma.
- 1984. *Mały portret języka polskiego dla młodzieży w krajach anglosaskich*. Adelaide: South Australian Department of Education.
- 1985. *Lexicography and Conceptual Analysis*. Ann Arbor: Karoma.
- 1987. *English Speech Act Verbs: A Semantic Dictionary*. Sydney: Academic Press.
- 1988. *The Semantics of Grammar*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- 1991. *Cross-cultural Pragmatics: The Semantics of Human Interaction*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. [2nd edition, revised and extended, 2003]

¹ The books from the Polish period are: Wierzbicka 1965, 1966, 1969, 1971, 1972; Wierzbicka and Wierzbicki 1967. While in Australia, Wierzbicka also authored books in Polish: Wierzbicka 1984, 2017 (as well as many articles). Some of her English works have been translated into Polish, cf. Wierzbicka 1999, 2002, 2006, 2007.

- 1992. *Semantics, Culture and Cognition: Universal Human Concepts in Culture-specific Configurations*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 1996. *Semantics. Primes and Universals*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 1997. *Understanding Cultures through their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, Japanese*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 1999. *Emotions across Languages and Cultures. Diversity and Universals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 2001. *What did Jesus Mean? Explaining the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables in Simple and Universal Human Concepts*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.
- (co-edited with Cliff Goddard) 2002. *Meaning and Universal Grammar: Theory and Empirical Findings* (vols. 1–2). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- 2006. *English: Meaning and Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- (co-edited with Mary Besemeres) 2007. *Translating Lives: Living with two Languages and Cultures*. St Lucia: Queensland University Press.
- 2010. *Experience, Evidence, and Sense: The hidden culture legacy of English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2014. *Imprisoned in English. The Hazards of English as a Default Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (co-authored with Cliff Goddard) 2014. *Words and Meanings. Lexical Semantics across Domains, Languages, and Cultures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Anna Wierzbicka's vast output has been quoted abundantly in world literature (in 2018 her h-index of citation reached 76); it continues to spark unwavering interest, and her analytic application of Natural Semantic Metalanguage (with the adoption of the first-person perspective) is followed by numerous researchers. Wierzbicka's achievements have brought her prestigious awards: the Humboldt Research Prize for Foreign Scholars in the Humanities (1995); the Dobrushin Prize (2010), and the Prize of the Foundation for Polish Science ("the Polish Nobel Prize", 2010).

Although a world-renowned scholar, Anna has never broken ties with her native country, Poland, with her home city of Warsaw, or with Lublin. Volume 4 of the journal *Etnolingwistyka* contains her essay "Uniwersalne pojęcia ludzkie i ich konfiguracje w różnych kulturach" [Universal human concepts in culture-specific configurations], translated by Henryk Kardela, with extensive discussions of her other publications.² The following years

² It appeared in 1991, i.e. before the publication of the English original as the Introduction to Wierzbicka 1992.

saw the publication of Anna's articles written specially for our journal: "Między modlitwą a przekleństwem" [Between a prayer and a curse] (1996), "Współczesne dylematy moralne przez pryzmat dwóch języków – angielskiego i polskiego" [Contemporary moral dilemmas through the prism of two languages: English and Polish] (2006), "Polskie słowa-wartości w perspektywie porównawczej: DOBROĆ, PRAWOŚĆ, ODWAGA" [Polish words-values in a comparative perspective: GOOD/KINDNESS, RIGHTEOUSNESS, COURAGE] (2011–2012). The volume *W zwierciadle języka i kultury* [In the Mirror of Language and Culture] (Adamowski and Niebrzegowska 1999) contains her essay "Semantyka i Ewangelia" [Semantics and the Gospel]. Books in the so-called "red series" published by Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press contain Wierzbicka's contributions on animal names and "the dual subject" (on bilingual speakers), while six other articles were published in the pedagogical "green series": on (i) the semantics of polite phrases, (ii) dialects, jargons, and styles, (iii) speech genres, (iv) the semantic coherence of text, (v) metatext within text, and (vi) the hypotaxis and nominal constructions in the development of Polish. *Etnolingwistyka* has also published reviews of Wierzbicka's monographs. Since 1998, Anna Wierzbicka has been a member of the Editorial Board of the journal, as well as of the scientific council of the EUROJOS project.

Another initiative, launched in Lublin, was to publish Polish translations of some of Anna Wierzbicka's work written in English. The collection of essays *Język, umysł, kultura* [Language, Mind, Culture, ed. Jerzy Bartmiński] appeared in Warsaw as Wierzbicka (1999), whereas her fundamental *Semantics. Primes and Universals* was published in 2006 in Lublin as *Semantyka. Jednostki elementarne i uniwersalne* (2nd edition 2010). The translation of *Lexicography and Conceptual Analysis* (1985) is currently underway.

Anna Wierzbicka's work has had a significant impact on the formation of the Lublin ethnolinguistic circles. One of the key concepts developed in Lublin ethnolinguistics, the so-called cognitive definition,³ was inspired by Wierzbicka's theoretical solutions, especially those from her *Lexicography and Conceptual Analysis*. This is pointed out by the editors of a volume on linguistic worldview:

The name of Anna Wierzbicka is especially important in the context of the so-called "cognitive definition" of the "mental object" associated with a given entity, of the way it is viewed, categorized, evaluated and talked about by speakers of a given language [...]. On the one hand, the preliminary installment of *SSSL* [Dictionary of Folk Stereotypes

³ It is applied, among others, in *Leksykon aksjologiczny Słowian i ich sąsiadów* [The Axiological Lexicon of Slavs and their Neighbours], in five volumes, published by Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Press.

and Symbols] [...] arose independently of Wierzbicka's theory of semantic primitives as a continuation of the work on folklore inspired by the linguist Maria Renata Mayenowa. However, in his major article on the cognitive definition, Bartmiński (1988) already refers to Wierzbicka's *Lexicography and Conceptual Analysis* (1985). This, in the words of the former author (p.c.), is Wierzbicka's most interesting work, with an introduction that contains an excellent account of a comprehensive semantic description that is also pursued by the Lublin-based ethnolinguists. It therefore seemed justifiable to include Anna Wierzbicka's chapter at the beginning of the section on the cognitive definition in this volume: her explications have conceptually fuelled the pursuits of Bartmiński and his collaborators and while the two approaches arose independently, they follow the same general path. (Głaz, Danaher, and Łozowski 2013: 16)

Anna Wierzbicka herself, when commenting on the mutual relations of the Lublin cognitive ethnolinguistics and her own NSM school, wrote:

Despite the fact that we work in different fields, from different viewpoints, in different disciplinary contexts, and with different methodologies, I consider our approaches to be complementary, and the directions of our research to be convergent. (Wierzbicka 2013: 137)

The approaches are complementary in that, *inter alia*, both reject traditional lexical taxonomies (that limit the description of word meaning to necessary and sufficient features), both take note of the whole richness of features relevant to communication and culture, they relate to colloquial awareness and the intuition of the language user, consider lexical, phraseological, paremiological, and textual data as the basis of definitions, both construct explications in the form of sequences of statements grouped into facets. In general, both approaches refer to and continue the anthropological philosophy of language proposed by Wilhelm von Humboldt and Edward Sapir.

In 2004, Anna Wierzbicka received her honorary doctorate from Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in recognition of her work in intercultural semantics and uncompromising pursuit of scientific truth. On that occasion, the University Press published her essay *Jak można mówić o Trójcy Świętej w słowach prostych i uniwersalnych* [How one can speak of the Holy Trinity in simple and universal words]. The work found its development in the 2017 book *W co wierzą chrześcijanie? Opowieść o Bogu i o ludziach*,⁴ published in Kraków by Znak.

Anna Wierzbicka is an eminent scholar, greatly admired for her outstanding and prolific output, her impressive precision of thinking and expression, her consistency and perseverance in research. We would like to thank her for the friendship that she has offered us over several decades, wishing her many more years of creative presence in the academia.

⁴ Its English version titled *What Christians Believe: The Story of God and People in Minimal English* was published by Oxford University Press in 2019 [translator's note].

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Jerzy Bartmiński
(translated by Agnieszka Gicala)