

This research project focuses on an endangered East Slavic language variety spoken in eastern Poland, specifically in the north-eastern part of the Lublin Voivodeship (Polesie Lubelskie: Włodawa County and Biała County). This local, non-standardized language variety is often referred to by the inhabitants themselves through various terms: "chachłacki language," "local speech," "in our own way," or "in our way." Despite its historical continuity and cultural significance, it remains socially marginalized and excluded from official minority language protection frameworks in Poland and Europe, rendering it highly vulnerable to extinction.

The main objective of the project is to understand and describe how language ideologies function in contexts of marginalization, ambiguous identity, and historical processes of assimilation. The research aims to show how speakers perceive, evaluate, and name their local language, and how these practices reflect deeper social and historical processes. The eastern borderlands of Poland constitute an exceptionally interesting area for such research because this region, once a vibrant center of the multiethnic Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was dramatically transformed by the events of the 20th century: wars, border shifts, Operation Vistula, and years of assimilation policies. Despite these transformations, traces of its multilingual past continue to shape local linguistic practices and identity narratives.

The research will be conducted in selected villages of Polesie Lubelskie using ethnographic methods. These include:

- In-depth narrative interviews with at least 30 individuals with varying levels of proficiency in the local variety, from fluent speakers to those with partial knowledge
- Participant observation in homes, churches, and community spaces
- Discourse analysis focused on how people talk about their language, what terms they use, and what values they attribute to it

The study focuses on three main questions: how residents conceptualize and name their local language variety; what role emotions, memory, and local identity play in sustaining language practices despite marginalization; and how religious affiliation and community history affect the transmission and perception of the studied language variety.

This topic requires urgent scholarly attention for several reasons. First, the East Slavic variety used in Polesie Lubelskie is seriously endangered – the number of speakers is decreasing, and intergenerational language transmission is weakening. Without immediate documentation and analysis, this important element of cultural heritage may disappear irretrievably. Second, while there have been previous dialectological studies in this region, there is a lack of analysis focusing on the ideological, social, and affective dimensions of language use. Third, the Polesie Lubelskie region has experienced a complex history of ethnic, religious, and linguistic transformations, making it an ideal site to study processes of linguistic marginalization, persistence, and resistance.

In Poland, there is growing interest in linguistic diversity and regional varieties, but Polesie Lubelskie remains noticeably absent from these discussions, reflecting broader processes of ideological "erasure." This study aims to fill this gap by offering a deeper understanding of how local residents experience and express their linguistic identity in the context of dominant language ideologies.

The study will create the first comprehensive sociolinguistic description of language use in Polesie Lubelskie that incorporates the perspectives of the speakers themselves. It will extend theoretical understanding of the connections between standard language ideologies, religious identity, and language persistence in multilingual contexts. It will provide valuable linguistic documentation of an endangered variety, thereby enriching scholarly debates on minority languages. The special value of this project lies in working with speakers rather than merely about them – this approach treats linguistic diversity as a living social practice, not just a structural system. The project has significance both for science, deepening knowledge about language survival, and for the community itself, documenting an important element of their cultural identity and potentially supporting future language preservation initiatives.