



Jan E. Okuniewski

Dec. 6, 1956 – Jan. 14, 2022

first Publisher of *Psychology of Language and Communication*

long-time Technical Editor and Online Version Editor

I first met Mr. Jan Okuniewski (**Janek** to those who knew him) 40 years ago, in February 1982 at a doctoral seminar that my Mentor, Professor Grace Wales Shugar taught at the University of Warsaw's Institute of Applied Linguistics. Janek, a German Studies graduate of the University of Łódź, caught the Professor's attention with his many questions about children's second language acquisition and foreign language learning. Even then, he was already dreaming of a dictionary for teaching German. This dream came true many years later when he and Dorota Obidniak produced *Mój pierwszy słownik niemiecko-polski. 1000 kolorowych słów* [My First German-Polish Dictionary: 1,000 Colorful Words] and *Wielki ilustrowany słownik niemiecko-polski* [Great Illustrated German-Polish Dictionary] in 2002, followed by *Słownik niemiecko-polski* [German-Polish Dictionary] in 2004 (all three published by Wydawnictwo Wilga).

During his doctoral studies, Janek went on a scholarship to Germany, and upon his return was appointed junior lecturer and then lecturer at the UW Institute of Applied Linguistics, where he worked until 1990. He loved teaching German, but his greatest passion was editing. He was a true expert. He developed his craft first as editor-in-chief at Wydawnictwo Jan Szumacher publishing house in Kielce, which he co-managed, then at his own Wydawnictwo ENERGEIA in Warsaw, later as part of a close collaboration with Wydawnictwo MATRIX and, finally, again at his own publishing house charmingly called Studio LEXEM. The first two publishers (Jan Szumacher and ENERGEIA) produced *Biuletyn Polskiego Towarzystwa Językoznawczego* [Bulletin of the Polish Linguistic Society], among other projects. It helped his many publishing, editorial and translation projects that Janek completed a postgraduate course in intellectual property rights at the University of Warsaw. As a translator of literary and academic texts from German and English into Polish, he worked for many publishers, to mention Wydawnictwo Replika, Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, and Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN. At PWN (Polish Scientific Publishers) he headed the Foreign Language Section in the years 2000–2002.

As a publisher, Jan Okuniewski released books not just in Polish, but also in English and German. He spoke three Western languages: German, English and Swedish. He was fascinated by the languages of the Kashubians, Lusatians and Lemkos. I heard him singing in Kashubian many times. Janek drew a lot of satisfaction and genuine joy from his years-long collaboration with the legendary Slavic scholar from the University of Silesia, Professor Kazimierz Polański, whose specialist field was the Polabian language, an extinct language once spoken by the westernmost Slavs, i.e. northwest of the Oder River. Among other roles, Janek was the editor of the electronic version of a Polabian grammar book (*Gramatyka języka polabskiego*) produced by Kazimierz Polański. He used to say he felt like one of the Professor's apprentices, even though he had never been his student. He always associated the café at the Palace of Culture (they went there during the scholar's visits to Warsaw) with the Professor and their conversations about Polabian.

My place for meetings with Janek was different: the Wedel chocolate lounge on Szpitalna Street. This was where we came up with ideas like the *Language – Cognition – Communication* series in which 24 volumes were published between 1991 and 2016. They included works by authors such as Grace W. Shugar, Piotra Łobacz, Maria Przetacznik-Gierowska, Ewa Haman, Andrzej Bogusławski, Waclaw Miodek, and Maciej Haman, to name a few. Sometimes Janek prepared the typesetting and layout almost at the speed of light. This was the case, for example, with the volume by Professor Maria Przetacznik-Gierowska. As the Professor was very ill, we were really keen on enabling her to see and hold her final book, *Od słowa do dyskursu* [From Word to Discourse] before she passed away. Sometimes books had to be typeset many times over, for example *Fonologia wizualna polskiego języka migowego* [Visual Phonology

of Polish Sign Language], which saw Janek toiling to place multiple signs from this language on every page (the book was written by Piotr Tomaszewski).

Jan E. Okuniewski was a great friend of the »Artes Liberales« Academy (AAL). To him we owe the publication of collective monographs based on the academic sessions of the AAL Inter-University Program of Interdisciplinary PhD Studies. Janek had interdisciplinarity in his blood, which is why the idea of the »Artes Liberales« Academy's Inter-University Program was very dear to him. He handled the technical aspects of the texts for our books and designed the covers (combining his technical skills with a highly developed artistic sense). It was thanks to him that collective monographs like *The Humanities Today*, *Responsibility*, *Teksty i interpretacje* [Texts and Interpretations], *O wątpieniu* [On Doubting], *Nauczyciel Akademicki – etos i warsztat* [Academic Teachers: Ethos and Methods] and *Żywność kulturowo przetworzona* [Culturally Processed Food] could see the light of day.

But our most beloved child, born in 1997, is the journal *Psychology of Language and Communication* (PLC). I presented the idea to Janek at our table at the Wedel café. He was enthusiastic. He knew how important it was to have a bridge between East and West for the exchange of academic thought. And, the Polish publishing market of the time had no international journal covering various aspects of psychological research of language and communicative processes¹. Having gained Janek's assurance that he would be a part of such a project (and remembering the experience of our collaboration on the *Language – Cognition – Communication* series), I outlined the idea of such an English-language journal at a meeting of the University of Warsaw Faculty of Psychology's Department of Psycholinguistics, of which I was the head at the time. The idea gained approval, the project began to crystallize. Thanks to the commitment of the members of the first Editorial Board who were good enough to work with me, the support of the Editorial Advisory Board, and the invaluable assistance and power of determination shown by Jan Okuniewski, the idea for the new journal became reality.

Janek became the first Publisher (at ENERGEIA) of *Psychology of Language and Communication*, its first Technical Editor, and later also its first Online Version Editor. But that is not all. Jan E. Okuniewski authored a number of extremely popular texts in PLC, to mention "Age and gender effects on motivation and attitudes in German learning: The Polish context" (PLC, 2014, vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 251–262). This was a text based on his research for his doctoral dissertation, which he was unable to finish due to his progressing illness. The dissertation was extremely promising and interdisciplinary or even cross-domain in character (at the junction of the humanities and social sciences).

¹ Psycholinguistic texts mainly appeared in the prestigious English-language psychology journal published in Poland, i.e. the *Polish Psychological Bulletin* (PPB). Even after the launch of our journal, we continued to submit texts to the PPB, and in 2009 the *Polish Psychological Bulletin* published an issue (vol. 40, No. 4) edited by Barbara Bokus and Jan Okuniewski: *Knowledge, Language, and Communication*.

This year *Psychology of Language and Communication*, which was the apple of Janek's eye, turns 25. Jan E. Okuniewski, to our great regret, will not be present at the celebration of this jubilee. It's such a shame...

Dear Janek, thank you for all those years of working together!
Thank you for your friendship!
Farewell!

Barbara Bokus
Editor-in-Chief in the years 1997–2014,
currently Honorary Editor-in-Chief

P.S. The above is the English version of the Polish text with which I said goodbye to the late Jan E. Okuniewski after the funeral Mass at the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary on Jan. 22, 2022 in Piaseczno.