

II. REVIEWS

DOI: 10.17951/et.2018.30.331

Wojciech Bukowski
ORCID: 0000-0003-4265-9914

MEMORY WRITTEN IN LANGUAGE*

Review of Waldemar Czachur (ed.), *Pamięć w ujęciu lingwistycznym. Zagadnienia teoretyczne i metodyczne*, 2018, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, pp. 263, ISBN: 978-83-235-3198-2.

Research on memory goes back to the late 1920s, with the appearance of *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* [The Social Frameworks of Memory] by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. Published in 1925,¹ the monograph initiated a discussion on “collective memory” and its associations with such disciplines as history, psychology, or anthropology. With the publication of the monograph, there came a departure from the historical perception of collective memory. For decades, however, the concept remained on the margin of the humanities and social sciences. In the 1970s, the issue was addressed by Pierre Nora and Jacques Le Goff (2007), but translations of their works did not appear in Poland until the 1990s.² Detailed research on collective memory was conducted in the 1980s in the United States, while David Lowenthal’s *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985) originated seminars on collective memory at the University of London. In Poland, the concept of collective memory was introduced by Nina Assorodobraj (1963), who, collaborating with Barbara Szacka on the idea of historical consciousness, understood collective memory as all conscious manifestations of the past in the present, such as rites, rituals, ancestor-honouring practices, as well as the knowledge of the past shared by members of a given community. The close relationship between memory and language is pointed out by Pomian (2006), Pajdzińska (2007), or Chlebda (2014), but the first linguistic monograph entirely devoted to collective memory was only published in 2014 (Wójcicka 2014).

The present volume is a continuation of linguistic research on collective memory. It is an important voice, presenting the current state of the art in collective memory

* The review appeared in Polish as “Pamięć językiem pisana” in *Etnolingwistyka* 30. The present English translation has been financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, project titled “English edition of the journal *Etnolingwistyka. Problemy języka i kultury* in electronic form” (no. 3bH 15 0204 83).

¹ The English translation of the author’s writings: Halbwachs 1980, 1992; in Polish: Halbwachs 2008.

² For recent editions, cf. Nora 2001 and Le Goff 2007.

research. The authors of individual chapters are humanists from various academic centres in Poland and Germany. The subsequent chapters are authored by Waldemar Czachur, Wojciech Chlebda, Marta Wójcicka, Teresa Dobrzyńska, Jan Kajfosz, Michael Klemm, Edyta Grotek, Jarosław Bogacki, Kinga Zielińska, and Pierre-Frédéric Weber. The contributors set out to show the relationship between memory and language from both a theoretical and an empirical perspective.

In the first chapter, Waldemar Czachur points to a rather moderate involvement of linguists in research on collective memory, although it has long been indicated that there is a definite link between language and communication on the one hand and the construction and transmission of collective memory on the other. As regards the relation between memory and history, it was oral traditions, myths, tales, and after the invention of printing – also written texts that began to link the past with the present. Collective memory has a culture-forming function, adapting past images to present needs. By referring to the findings of Jeffrey Olick, the author draws attention to the division of collective memory into *collected memory* from the metonymic perspective and *collective memory* from the metaphorical perspective. Regardless of the paradigm within which various disciplines approach the concept of collective memory, its shared attributes are: (a) dynamism and continuous changeability; (b) linguistic and interactive nature; (c) materiality and mediation; (d) contextuality; (e) relation with and reference to the past; (f) functional link with the present (p. 15). Czachur focuses on the medium and mediation of memory, i.e. the means of coding and transmitting memory, including speech and writing in the form of radio, television books, or the Internet, as well as monuments, rituals, and ceremonies. He perceives language as a medium for conveying the content of memory, communicative patterns, and practices.

In the second chapter, Wojciech Chlebda seeks a connection between language and memory. The author focuses on collective or social memory, while he views languages as codes “produced” by members of specific communities and functioning within them. He points out collective memory is built out of verbality, while its formation and storage are dictated by language and its products: “As a rule, the content of memory itself and the account of its content are different” (p. 59). At work here is a bidirectional mechanism that involves centripetal forces, when language shapes the content of memory itself, and centrifugal forces, when it shapes the accounts of this content (pp. 59-60). The same processes also operate in non-memory, or oblivion. In the examination of memory/non-memory, the centrifugal vector is activated, as it externalises the state of the human psyche. This inward orientation leads to subjective narrations of memory, which are interpretations of both the content of prospective memory and, indirectly, of those fragments of reality that have become the foundation for memory’s content (p. 63).

In the third chapter, Marta Wójcicka explores the relationship between language and collective memory, pointing out that she is mainly concerned with spoken language, which involves “abbreviations, conventionalisation, stereotyping” (p. 70). Language enters into a relationship with memory by way of a “paradox of mutual dependence” (Bartmiński 2001: 17), and Wójcicka identifies connections between collective memory and language in that language constructs, expresses, shapes, and

interprets memory. This kind of relationship indicates the supremacy of language, which is “the determinant of memory, its conveyor, model and interpreter” (p. 72). The author also emphasises relations between memory and culture. They are multidimensional: (a) symmetrical; (b) memory is part of culture; (c) memory is part of culture, determined by language; (d) culture is part of collective memory; (e) language is part of culture as part of collective memory; (f) culture as part of language and collective memory. The author pays attention to the analysis of the language of collective memory in a cultural context, proposing the use of such facets as: media, practices, carriers of memory, and codes – in relation to three types of culture: oral, written, and electronic. At the end of her considerations, she presents a typology of collective memory based on the model proposed by Assmann, who distinguishes between communicative, cultural, and intercultural memory (Assmann 1992; in Polish: Assmann 2015: 146; in English e.g. Assmann 2008).

In the fourth chapter, Teresa Dobrzyńska underscores the importance of memory in communication and treats texts and language use as spheres that involve memorising, revising, and recalling content. She underscores the contribution of cognitive psychology to discourse research, stressing in acts of communication people confront newly acquired information with the knowledge entrenched in their consciousness (basic knowledge). She distinguishes short-term memory, i.e. the first stage of information processing, and long-term memory, which stores, for instance, the knowledge of a linguistic code or general knowledge. The use of the knowledge stored in the long-term memory “facilitates the study of linguistic communication with special attention being paid to the way utterances develop and the impact that certain conditions have on the way a text is transmitted and received” (p. 101).

In chapter five, Jan Kajfosz analyses the role of formulaic, stereotyped texts in the conceptualisation of the past based on presupposed, non-verbalised knowledge. Referring to proverbs, he points to the inter-subjective understanding of their implicit but verbalised content among a given community of speakers. The author states that in a world of linguistic realism, where names are used as labels for pre-existing phenomena, language is a reflection of the objective reality and does not contribute anything to it. Referring to iconic communication, Kajfosz notes that “until recently we had been told about the world and the events that take place (they had been described to us); today they are shown to us, while the description only has a complementary function to the images that appear on the screen” (p. 123). He treats this situation as a return to the culture of myth, in which “mnemonically maintained resources of shared references in the form of a shared social memory replace analytical thinking” (p. 129).

In the sixth chapter, translated from German by Edyta Grotek, Michael Klemm draws attention to the changes in our culture of remembering. Following Marshall McLuhan, he notes that “we shape our tools and then our tools shape us”.³ Likewise,

³ The quote is usually, though mistakenly, attributed to McLuhan’s *Understanding Media* (1964), although it does not appear there, nor does it appear in other writings of the author. Instead, the quote can be attributed to McLuhan’s friend and collaborator Father John Culkin, SJ, although the idea is consistent with McLuhan’s approach (cf. <https://mcluhangalaxy.wordpress.com/2013/04/01/we-shape-our-tools-and-thereafter->

the ubiquitous media shape individual and collective memory. The author states that “without continuing the practices of recollection in various communities, there is no individual or collective identity” (p. 137). Collective memory is based on “figures of memory”, which include for instance TV summaries of the year analysed in this chapter. These summaries function as elements of the process powering the collective memory of a given community, and their task is to perform or initiate social reminiscence (p. 143). This genre makes use of the “media historical clichés” that not only reflect reality, but also shape it, leaving a mark on collective memory. Following Uwe Pörksen, Klemm refers to such widespread images as “visiotypes”, i.e., “types of fast-standardizing visualisation” (p. 145). There also exist audiotypes and audiovisiotypes. The author draws attention to manipulative techniques in the creation of television programmes. Multimodal elements of framing have an impact on the receiver: by steering the latter’s perception and thinking, they impose an unambiguous interpretation.

In chapter seven, Edyta Grotek addresses the question of whether memorial sites and their linguistic reconceptualisation can function as a testimony to the formation of the collective identity of a specific community? The study concerns the city of Toruń in the 19th century, with two dominant cultural spheres: Polish and German. The author defines the terms “identity” and “collective identity” as “self-awareness and self-understanding of an individual in relation to one’s own person, one’s general situation, and social belonging” (p. 166). Grotek points to language as the most powerful identity-creating factor. However, in the 19th-c. Toruń, a vital role was also played by the sense of belonging, defined, after Proshansky (1978: 195), as “place-identity”. Grotek regards the city as a whole composed of two subsystems: urban and social. In the context of 19th-c. Toruń press, both Polish and German, she notes that the figure of Nicolaus Copernicus functions as a “place of memory”, with a polyphonic dimension, and if both communities are ready for “dialogic memory”, it could find its place in their joint memory (p. 180).

In the eighth chapter, Jarosław Bogacki, describing the situation of the Silesian population at the turn of the 19th c., draws attention to the difficulties with shaping collective identity in a situation of insufficient ethnic, religious, cultural, and political cohesion. The author refers to the monthly *Schlesische Provinzialblätter*, with its attempts to narrate the construction of the Silesian-Prussian-German collective identity, which with time began to resemble national identity. From the sociological and cultural point of view, the author defines collective identity – after Jan Assman (1992) – as “an image that the community builds in relation to itself and with which its members can identify”. From a linguistic point of view, he postulates the recognition of collective identity as a social construct that arises in and through discourse.

In chapter nine, Kinga Zielińska deals with online announcements, discussing their remembrance strategies. She pays special attention to “mediated memory”, associated with “verbalised memory”, which is nowadays, through the use of linguistic and semiotic codes, a powerful weapon in consolidating images of an object

or event. The author classifies online announcements as a “mini genre”, due to their constricted form and content, neutral style, and expressive function (p. 222). Following Ulrich Schmitz (2015), the author assumes that “under the influence of another code, both the form and the function of the text or image undergo multiple changes, which in turn consolidates them in a mutual relationship with a global, richer meaning” (p. 225). Describing commemoration techniques, Zielińska draws attention to the process of permanent multimodal memory control, imposing a specific interpretation and shaping the memory of the human subject.

In the tenth chapter, translated by Edyta Grotek, Pierre-Frédéric Weber shows that languages of memory can be different in the context of German memory after 1945. Following Johann Michel, the author distinguishes between linguistic-narrative, iconographic and scenographic media of memory, which are usually correlated. He notes that the lack of verbalised memory does not mean a lack of memory as such, and that the distribution of collective memory is socially and politically conditioned. Tabooing and displacing certain contents from the public domain, as a means of exercising authoritarian power, are counterproductive in that they equip memory with an emotional load and fuel it, instead of lessening its impact.

The volume as a whole presents the recent achievements of Polish and German research on collective memory. Thanks to a plethora of references to the literature from different fields, including sociology, social psychology, history and cultural studies, it is in fact an interdisciplinary volume, although specific contributions are linguistically oriented. The monograph is a cross-sectional study on the relations between collective memory and language. Undoubtedly, it should be of great interest to representatives of humanities and social sciences engaged in research on memory.

Translated by Anna Wyrwa

References

- Assmann, Jan. 1992. *Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und Politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*. Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck.
- Assmann, Jan. 2008. Communicative and cultural memory. In Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds.) *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. 109–118. Berlin and New York: De Gruyter.
- Assmann, Jan. 2015. *Pamięć kulturowa. Pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość w cywilizacjach starożytnych*. Trans. Anna Kryczyńska-Pham, 2nd edn. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo UW.
- Assorodobraj, Nina. 1963. Żywa historia. Świadomość historyczna: symptomy i propozycje badawcze. *Studia Socjologiczne* 2: 5–45.
- Bartmiński, Jerzy. 2001. Język w kontekście kultury. In Jerzy Bartmiński (ed.) *Współczesny język polski*. 13–22. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.
- Chlebda, Wojciech. 2011. Szkice do językowego obrazu pamięci. *Pamięć jako wartość. Etnolingwistyka* 23: 83–98.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. 1925. *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. Paris: F. Alcan.

-
- Halbwachs, Maurice. 1980. *The Collective Memory*. New York: Harper & Row Colophon Books.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. 1992. *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. 2008. *Spoleczne ramy pamięci*. Trans. Marcin Król. Warszawa: PWN.
- Lowenthal, David. 1985. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Le Goff, Jacques. 2007. *Historia i pamięć*. Trans. Anna Gronowska and Joanna Stryczyk. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- McLuhan, Marshall. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Nora, Pierre. 2001. Czas pamięci. Trans. Wiktor Dłuski. *Res Publica Nova* 7: 37–43.
- Pajdzińska, Anna. 2007. Pamięć jako wartość. In Jan Mazur, Agata Małycka, and Katarzyna Sobstyl (eds.) *Człowiek wobec wyzwań współczesności. Upadek wartości czy walka o wartość?* 253–261. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.
- Pomian, Krzysztof. 2006. *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.
- Proshansky, Harold M. 1978. The city and self-identity. *Environment and Behavior* 10: 147–169.
- Schmitz, Ulrich. 2015. Badanie płaszczyzn wizualnych. Wprowadzenie. Trans. Magdalena Makowska. In Roman Opilowski, Józef Jarosz and Przemysław Staniewski (eds.) *Lingwistyka mediów. Antologia tłumaczeń*. 57–77. Wrocław-Dresden: ATUT.
- Wójcicka, Marta. 2014. *Pamięć zbiorowa a tekst ustny*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.