

# PERCEPTIONS OF AGE-RELATED VARIATION AMONG LEMKO SPEAKERS IN POLAND

*Project Report submitted to The German Association for Endangered Languages (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Sprachen - GBS)*

Michael Hornsby, PhD, DLitt, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland  
(mhornsby@wa.amu.edu.pl)

## INTRODUCTION

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The term Rusyns or Carpatho-Rusyns is sometimes used to denote the minority in Poland known as the Lemkos, and the former term might be more familiar to people outside of the Polish context.

The most succinct description of the Rusyn peoples has been provided by Magocsi (2009: 6):

Rusyns or Carpatho-Rusyns are a Slavic people inhabiting the southern and a part of the northern slopes of the north central ranges of the Carpathian Mountains. They speak a series of East Slavic dialects, use the Cyrillic alphabet, and are traditionally Eastern-rite Christians, either Greek Catholic or Orthodox. Their homeland is found within the borders of three states – Ukraine (the Transcarpathian oblast), Slovakia (the Prešov Region) and Poland (the Lemko Region). There are also about a dozen Rusyn villages in northern Romania (the Maramureş Region), one or two in northeastern Hungary, and a small but culturally vibrant community in the Vojvodina Region of Yugoslavia. In the absence of statistics, it is impossible to know the total number of Rusyns, although estimates range from 900,000 to one million

Lemkos are recognized as an ethnic minority in Poland according to the Act of 6 January 2005 on national and ethnic minorities and on regional languages – ‘ethnic’ rather than ‘national’, since there is not another state, apart from Poland, where they could have originated from (cf. the nine ‘national’ minorities - Byelorussians, Czechs, Lithuanians, Germans, Armenians, Russians, Slovaks, Ukrainians and Jews - can all “trace” their origins to a country outside of Poland). In particular, this Act accords a certain number of rights for minorities within Poland to organize cultural associations, to use their languages in both the private and public domains and to receive education in their languages. Magocsi (2009: 7) has noted that ‘of all the Rusyns, the Lemkos had the most difficult recent past, since between 1945 and 1947, almost the entire population (about

180,000) was resettled to the Soviet Ukraine or deported to the far western regions of Poland, in particular Silesia.’ This was largely due to guerrilla activity in post-war Poland carried out by Ukrainian partisans, seeking to secure eastern Galicia and Volhynia for the Ukrainian state (Snyder 2003: 169-170, 176), and with whom the Lemkos were suspected of collaborating. The resettled Lemkos and their descendants now live in widely scattered areas of the so-called “recovered Western territories” (Silesia, Pomerania) of Poland (Mihalsky 2009: 61), apart from some 10-20,000 of them who were allowed to return to the traditional Lemko area of southeastern Poland in 1957 (Mihalsky 2009: 70). It remains problematic to accurately enumerate the current number of Lemkos in Poland. Some estimates place the number of Lemkos as 50,000 people (ECRML 2011: 6). According to the Polish Census of 2011, however, the number is much lower, with 6,000 people declaring a Lemko-only ‘nationality’, 4,000 declaring a double-national identity (Lemko-Polish) and 1,000 declared a Lemko identity together with a non-Polish identity, indicating a total of 11,000 Lemkos in Poland (Hornsby 2014: 3).

## GOALS OF THE PROPOSAL

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The Lemko community already possesses a number of texts produced either in the Lemko standard of Rusyn (e.g. grammars) or collections of stories, songs, etc, produced in a variety of regional variants. What is sorely lacking is any up-to-date metalinguistic data which is available for use by both the speaker community itself and more widely by the international academic community and other interested parties. The primary aim of this project was to produce a small number of short video films from a cross-generational perspective. A series of short interviews were held with speakers from three target groups: (1) grandparent generation; (2) parent generation; (3) younger generation. The participants were asked to comment on the use of the Lemko language at the present time, how often they use it themselves, with whom and for what purposes; their perceptions of how the Lemko language is changing or of how their speech differs from that of older/younger speakers; and their thoughts on the survival of the language in the future.

## RESULTS

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A series of video and audio files have been produced with speakers of Lemko of different ages from a number of places in Poland (and Ukraine): Lublin, Kraków and Ługi. Two speakers are

ladies of retirement age (Ukraine and Ługi), a further three speakers are middle-age ladies (Lublin and Ługi), then younger speakers are represented from among the Lemko-speaking community in Ługi and from Lemko-speaking students in Kraków. Most of the audio recordings have been translated into English, and a number of the video recordings have been subtitled into English. The video files to date have not archived anywhere. It is hoped that in the future that these files will be uploaded to a suitable database (e.g. LAC) for interested parties (members of the community, linguists, etc), subject to open licence and participant consent restrictions.

These recordings have been played to a focus group of Lemko-speaking students in Poznań and their reactions solicited over the *perception* of each speaker and whether any difference was noted linked to generational differences. This modus operandi is generally known as Feedback Filming which is the presentation to participants and other community members of selected parts of their recent filming in order to trigger further conversation. The new conversation often leads to more in-depth discussion of the issues, greater clarity, and contextual elaboration. Feedback Filming often elicits more confidence and higher levels of eloquence in participants. This proves especially valuable for documentation, linguistic analysis, and research in related disciplines. The feedback-inspired footage is filmed and often edited together with the original footage to elaborate or contextualize that data and this new version can, in turn, be used to trigger additional cycles of feedback and discussion. (See <http://speakingplace.org/resources/> for more details).

From the data generated from the above methodology, a book chapter has been prepared and published:

Hornsby, Michael. 2015. *Revitalising Minority Languages: New Speakers of Breton, Yiddish and Lemko*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

#### **Who Speaks for the Lemko Language? Pp. 93-117.**

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- 4.1 Lemkos in Poland: a divided community
- 4.2 Standardization of Rusyn
- 4.2.1 Standardization of Lemko in Poland

- 4.3 Education in Lemko
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- 4.6 A continuum of linguistic competence
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- 4.9 Representing the Lemko community: the publication of *The Little Prince*
- 4.10 Conclusion

## BUDGET EXPENDITURE (€1,022 AWARDED)

Travel (train, car hire): €300
Accommodation: €200
Subsistence: €150
Equipment expenditure (memory card, tripod for camera): €150
Purchase of written materials: €22
Simultaneous translation (Ukrainian/Lemko > English) costs: €100
Research participant costs: €100

## REFERENCES

European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. 2011. *Application of the Charter in Poland*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available online at [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/minlang/Report/EvaluationReports/PolandECRML1\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/minlang/Report/EvaluationReports/PolandECRML1_en.pdf)

Hornsby, M. 2014. *Constructing a Lemko identity: Tactics of belonging*. *International Journal of Multilingualism* 12 (1), 1–12.

Magocsi, Paul R. 1999. *Of the Making of Nationalities There Is No End*. Vol. 2. New York: East European Monographs.

Mihalsky, S. 2009. Rebuilding a shattered community: The Lemkos after “Akcja Wisła”. In Rusinko, E. (ed.) *Committing Community: Carpatho-Rusyn Studies as an Emerging Scholarly Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 61–82.