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1. Introduction. Some recent publications and scholarly discussions¹, notably those presented within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics, tend to claim that the language of religion is largely - or in more extreme opinions, entirely - metaphorical. The rationale underlying such claims is that metaphorical extensions provide the only means that enable language users to talk about things that transcend the limits of human experience. In opposition to those claims, it is the purpose of this paper to show that religious discourse (at least in those aspects that become the subject of the analysis presented below) employs specific, basically non-metaphorical, lexical and grammatical devices. Like metaphors, lexemes and structures "reserved" for this particular type of discourse are used to talk about things and relations that extend the limits of human understanding.

On the other hand, since religious ontologies seem to be "the most <culturally constructed> of all domains of knowledge" (Boyer 1996:204), discussions of the language of religion often rely - implicitly or explicitly - on the assumptions underlying what is known as Whorfian hypothesis². As is well known, the hypothesis, as originally developed by Whorf, has been over the last half century significantly affected by numerous interpretations and misinterpretations, resulting chiefly from the lack of adequate differentiation between the two basic ideas that jointly constitute Whorf's proposal: *linguistic r e l a t i v i t y* on the one hand, and *linguistic d e t e r m i n i s m* on the other (cf. Bytniewski 1991). In its basic form, the theory of linguistic relativity, which states that different languages employ different means to express perceptual and conceptual relations, and that those differences reflect cultural distinctions, underlies much of contemporary thought about language and cognition. What seems more difficult to maintain in the changed intellectual context, is the principle of linguistic determinism, whereby language is believed to determine thought. In the much quoted key paragraph, Whorf claims that "users of markedly different grammars are pointed by their grammars toward different types of observations and different evaluations of externally similar acts of observation, and hence are not equivalent as observers, but must arrive at somewhat different views of

1 Cf. e.g. papers and materials from 25-th LAUD Symposium on "Metaphor and Religion" held on April 1 -4, 1997 in Nettetal, Germany.

2 Boyer, however, focuses on pre-cultural and intuitive aspects of the formation of religious concepts.

the world" (Whorf 1956: 221). Especially with reference to religious ontologies, such a claim, which in its radicalism implies that (all) conceptual structures are directly determined by (sensuous) perception, is clearly untenable. What I wish to claim instead is a somewhat "weaker" version of the hypothesis: that conceptualization "can be informed (...) by structures available in the lexicon and grammar of the language" (Boyer 1996: 205). In other words, although the language that we use does not exactly force us to accept a particular outlook, "through a linguistic usage which is regular and unreflective" "we snare ourselves into an outlook" (O'Halloran 1997: 174). Indeed, it is claimed by a recent critic that this is precisely the right interpretation of Whorf's writings (cf. O'Halloran 1997).

In particular, in the remainder of this paper I would like to claim that the language, whose knowledge, on the level of systematic relations, is largely "subliminal" - is responsible for the construction and entrenchment of religious concepts.

2. Subject matter. When asked to give features most obviously characteristic of Polish catholicism, one of Poland's greatest contemporary writers and thinkers, Czesław Miłosz, said: "Confession and the cult of Mary, Mother of God" (Miłosz 1995:94; translation - E.T.). The following discussion focuses on the second of those features, which the catholic Church in Poland shares with other catholic Churches in Europe but which is almost entirely absent from the Protestant Church. "The cult of the Virgin Mary finds no place in the Bible. It first appears with the doctrine of *Theotokos* or <God-bearer> in the Council of Ephesus" (Davies 1997: 301). It is best expressed by the Latin term *hyperdulia*, standing for the proper veneration of Virgin Mary - the most holy of all mortals. It is something more (lit. "above") than *dulia*, or veneration given to saints and angels. Therefore, the cult of Virgin Mary, while significantly different from the veneration of God (*latria*), goes, none the less, beyond and above the veneration given to the Saints in Heaven (cf. Kaczmarek 1996: 33).

Theological exegesis (or "expert knowledge") contrasts with the folk model. The particular Polish brand of *hyperdulia* involves the image of a Polish devout as *unus defensor Mariae* - "the only defendant of Mary". Moreover, in opposition to the idea of transcendence, the folk image of Virgin Mary (as that of the Lord) requires that there is a human-like ear for Her to listen to our prayers and a human-like mouth to speak to Her Divine Son, to Whom those prayers are to be transmitted. It requires the human-like figure in woman's clothing; in short, to quote Miłosz again, it reflects people's desire "not to lose the Divine accessibility" (1995:75). The image of divine womanhood and motherhood

evokes that of a family, also particularly prominent in the Polish catholicism, where the Trinity is often felt to be composed of the three elements building up a nuclear family: the Mother and Wife, the Husband, and the Son.

I wish to claim that it is this particular combination of the divine and the homely that uniquely defines the Polish cult of Virgin Mary. I would also like to argue that in the minds of the believers this particular religious concept arises not so much through the acquisition of the complex network of religious symbols and metaphors (mostly obscure to contemporary Poles; cf. e.g. the attributes of Virgin Mary in the *Litany of the Blessed Virgin*) and through the actual explicit teaching of the Church, as *via* the subliminal workings of the Polish language itself: the Polish grammar.

In one of the recent reviews, one of Polish priests, philosophers and writers said: "The world keeps moving on; Man keeps changing, and so does his way of looking at the reality. ...The success of accepting religion depends on the ability of its adaptation to the contemporary framework" (Maliński 1997; translation - E.T.). In the same issue of the daily paper in which the interview was printed, we read that "the cult of Virgin Mary is very popular in Poland: it is practised by both the old and the young, the educated and the non-educate, the suffering and the happy; members of different milieus and different subcultures"³. In Polish folk culture, the veneration of Virgin Mary is extremely prominent: special services are held in churches throughout the month of May, the miraculous picture of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa "visits" the homes of the believers, and according to one of recent sources, in the country there are 473 sanctuaries devoted to Virgin Mary (Adamowski 1997:236).

While the conscious "adaptation" of religious teaching to the requirements of contemporary world indeed requires a changed poetics that is tailored to the needs of those "different milieus and different subcultures", it is the grammar - unchanged and common to all speakers - that in a large measure takes care of the "cultural transmission" of religious concepts. In short, it "reflects and to some extent reinforces cultural practices" (Simpson 1993, quoted after O'Halloran 1997:174). Or, to quote yet another of contemporary Whorfians, it "affirms the encultured thought" (O'Halloran 1997: 171).

An additional, classical, argument for "Whorfianism" being a constitutive principle behind the cult of Virgin Mary in Poland is the basic untranslatability of most of its constitutive lexemes and structures. Refutation of the strong version of Whorfian determinism, however, implies the ability to understand - and interpret - the untranslatable

3 The daily paper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 24, 1997. Translation - E.T.

in terms of another (target) language. It is with this implication in view that I wish to present the following analysis to the English-speaking reader.

3. Analysis. The following is a sample analysis; the corpus is not large enough to justify any generalizations based on statistics. Instead, it gives a survey of illustrative examples, taken from contemporary books of common prayer, sermons, homilies, and non-specialist texts, both written (mainly press articles of general circulation) and spoken (interjections). None the less, I hope that the data collected and presented below justify the main claims of this paper.

3.1. Lexis. Some lexical items can be used in contemporary Polish only in reference to Virgin Mary. The most interesting case is perhaps the proper name itself. Till fairly recently, it was spelt as it is today, i.e. *Maryja*, together with other proper and common names of analogous phonological shape, and in accordance with the pronunciation (cf. e.g. *Zofija* - "Sophie"; *bestyja* - "beast", etc.). With time the pronunciation changed, and in the 30's, after a spelling reform, a new pronunciation spelling was introduced: *Maria*, *Zofia*, *bestia*. However, Virgin Mary's name was consciously exempted from the general rule, preserving also its old, and now exceptional, pronunciation. Thus, although Polish girls could now be given the name (which until the 19th century was strictly forbidden), it was only allowed to them in its "human" version (Kucala, 1988: 140). Perhaps less consciously, or less institutionally, with reference to Virgin Mary certain lexical items are preserved which have already become obsolete in all other registers of Polish. A case in point is the verb *porodziła* ("gave birth"): the verbal prefix *po-*, although still preserved in the nominal derivative *poród* ("birth"), has now been replaced with the perfective prefix *u-*: *urodziła*. Characteristically, the archaic *porodziła* appears not only in church hymns, but also in everyday spoken religious discourse.

The opposition between the superior and the homely can also be seen in the choice of epithets given to Virgin Mary (cf. Kucala 1988). Crowned as *Królowa Polski* ("Queen of Poland"), she is also, for instance, the lofty *Księżna sieradzka* ("Duchess of the district of Sieradz"). On the other hand, to the mountaineers of the Tatra, she is the familiar and "domesticated" dialectal *gaŹdzina Podhala* ("farm-mistress of the Tatra Highlands"). However, it is only when particular lexical choices combine with particular grammatical devices that Whorfian determinism becomes fully manifest.

3.2. Morphology: derivation. The cult of Virgin Mary finds its folk expression in the use of diminutives, which are particularly abundant in Polish. Diminutives are used mainly as instantiations of the conceptual metaphor which is aptly symbolized by the

common slogan SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL. The veneration of Virgin Mary focuses on Her two most important attributes: virginity and motherhood (cf. Kucala 1988: 133). Referred to in the diminutive terms of endearment, in the prayers and invocations of common believers Virgin Mary becomes *Najświętsza Panienska* ("The most Holy little Virgin") or, notably, *Mateczka* ("Little Mother"). But it is not only the idea of the beauty of the object of veneration that is expressed: by a metaphorical extension of meaning small is not only beautiful, but also homely, not dangerous, friendly and good (cf. Wierzbicka 1990). The Polish basic level noun *matka* ("mother")⁴ gives rise to a number of conventional diminutives, the most common of those in contemporary usage being *mateczka*, *mateńka*, and *matula*. They are all derived according to general rules of nominal derivation; with the last one (now dialectal) producing the "second-level" hypocoristic *matuleńka*. A second group comprises diminutives derived from the basic nickname *mama* ("mommy"): *mamusia*, *mamuśka*. Interestingly, Our Lady may - and is - called *Mateczka*, *Mateńka* or *Matula* (mainly in Christmas carols, which preserve old dialectal forms), but never - not even in discourse addressed at children, where diminutives have the highest frequency of occurrence - *mama*, *mamusia*, etc. The motivation seems obvious enough: Mother of God is considered as human enough to be addressed in the familiar terms of endearment, but not homely enough to be nicknamed. By the same token, her proper name is never diminutivized, as are its human counterparts (*Marysia*, *Marynia*, *Maryś*, *Mania*, *Majka*, etc., etc.)

So far, the morphology of Polish has been shown to help create the concept of *dulia*: veneration of saints and angels. But the cult of Virgin Mary is tantamount to *hyperdulia*: the elevation of Mother of God above all saints and all angels (cf. *Lumen gentium*). It is here that the grammar of Polish manifests its concept-creating powers. Philosophers of language and theologians (beginning with St Thomas Aquinas) have of course noticed long ago that "certaines expressions que nous avons pour les perfections crees peuvent etre utilisees dans un sens plus excellent en reference a Dieu" (Raukas 1996: 332, emphasis - E.T.) What might perhaps be more revealing at this point is to show that that "higher excellence" may also be achieved through transcending grammatical (rather than purely semantic) categories.

Since the image of Virgin Mary is built through listing her attributes, the category of adjective is an obvious choice. The concept of *hyperdulia* is created through direct translation of the Greek *hyper*: thus the Virgin is addressed to as *Panna nad pannami* ("Holy Virgin of virgins", lit. "Virgin over virgins") or *Święta nad świętymi* (lit. "Holy

4 Historically, itself a diminutive of the OP *mac*.

over the holy"). Most interestingly, however, with reference to Virgin Mary the Polish language uses the "super-superlative" form of the adjective *święty* ("holy"), i.e. the regular superlative form preceded by the prefix *prze-* (originally: "over"): *Prze-naj-święt-sza* (lit. "Over-most-holy"). Apart from religious discourse, the form is never used in contemporary Polish.

Two things are perhaps worth noticing in this connection. First, the adjective, which regularly collocates with *Maria Panna* as an expression of Her divine attribute: *Przenajświętsza Maria Panna* ("Over-most-holy Virgin Mary"), is also found in the interjection *Matko Przenajświętsza!* ("Mother Over-most-holy"). Otherwise, it is only used with direct or indirect reference to God, as a linguistic expression of the concept of *latria*; thus: *Przenajświętsza* (fem.) *Ofiara* ("Sacrifice"), *Krew* ("Blood"), *Męka* ("Passion"), *Miłość* ("Love"), *Laska* ("Grace"), *Wola* ("Will"), *Przenajświętszy* (masc.) *Krzyż* ("Cross"), *Przenajświętsze* (neut.) *Serce* ("Heart"). The only other occurrences are in collocations with the Sacrament: *Przenajświętszy Sakrament* and the Trinity: *Przenajświętsza Trójca*. Second, analogous forms are still preserved with several adjectives referring to objects of latrionic veneration; thus: *przenajśladsza dobroć Boga* ("over-sweetest goodness of God"), *przenajszlachtniejsze drzewo* ("over-noblest wood [of the Cross]"), or *przenajdroższa ofiara* ("over-dearest sacrifice"). And, perhaps more significantly, on an anonymous votive card dated 1946, *Miej w opiece swojej przenajdroższą córkę* ("Have in Your care your over-dearest daughter").

Two conclusions follow. First, the concept of hyperdulia as an element of the cult of Virgin Mary is built through transcending the grammatical category of adjective. Second, although the transcendence is not sanctioned by convention, it can be easily understood, as proved by the creative extensions. This might suggest that transcendence is possible only "against the background of ordinary, intuitive expectations" (Boyer 1996:218), thus casting doubt on the Whorfian principle of determinism. Like the English *over-*, the Polish *prze-* implies going above and beyond - in this case, beyond the relativity involved in all comparisons (cf. e.g. the phrase *the noblest of all people*), or - ultimately - beyond the limits of human experience or imagination. However, not beyond the limits of human cognition. Thus the mother asking God to have her daughter in His care uses the non-conventional expression to reflect the conceptualization of God's love and care such as go beyond the ultimate love and care as exchanged by humans. Yet on the other hand, it seems that the extension is possible only in the context of the divine attributes of God or His Mother; one may then hypothesise that the exposition to the "super-superlative" does indeed condition the way in which the object of veneration is conceptualized.

3.3. *Syntax: word order and collocations.* Any comprehensive analysis of grammatical structures conventionalized in religious discourse connected with the Polish cult of Virgin Mary would go beyond the scope of this paper. At this point, only the most regular tendencies may be signalled, and possible motivations suggested.

Characteristically, the discourse preserves - even in the non-specialized spoken forms - old grammatical constructions, now obsolete and completely absent in other registers. One of the most typical of those seems to be the construction *śłyn'ca* ("renowned + Instrumental: *śłyn'ca cudami* ("renowned for miracles"), *śłyn'ca łaskami* ("celebrated for [Her] grace"), rather than the contemporary *śłyn'ca* + *z* + Gen. (lit. "renowned from N-Gen"). It is trivial to say that religious discourse tends to preserve archaic forms (cf. e.g. Kucala 1988), but perhaps less so to observe that the uncommonness of expression finds reflection in the uncommonness of the concept evoked.

Significantly, adjectival attributes modifying *Matka* ("Mother") and *Panna* ("Virgin") occur in post-position, which is described in traditional grammars of Polish as "restrictive modification"; thus: *Matka Boska* or *Boża* ("Mother of God") , *Panna Święta* (lit. "Virgin Holy"). The traditional explanation readily translates into cognitivist terms: a thing is first defined as a particular "region in space", and then related to another "quality space", which is described by means of the modifier. In view of the image of Virgin Mary - or the cult as such - being built on the opposition between the divine and the homely, this type of construction is well-motivated: Mary is a mother (like human mothers), but her unique motherhood is related to God; Mary is a virgin (like human virgins), but her unique virginity is related to holiness. The alternate "nonrestrictive" modification (*Boska/Boża Matka, Święta Panna*) does not profile the uniqueness. This, precisely, is one of the cases traditionally considered as untranslatable between Polish and English; the closest formal equivalent in English would be the opposition between definite (for restrictive word order) and indefinite (for non-restrictive word order) modification: *the Mother of God* vs. (?) *a Mother of God*; *the Holy Virgin* vs. (?) *a Holy Virgin*.

The last among the "linguistic aspects" of the cult of the Virgin that I want to mention at this junction is the peculiar structure of Polish interjections, which appeal to God and His Mother. Catholicism is probably one of the most anthropocentric of religions, and Polish catholicism is probably the variant in which the constant presence of Virgin Mary is most strongly marked. As in the tradition of other catholic peoples, the dogma of Holy Trinity "has been imperceptibly changing in our imagination into another dogma, never actually expressed: the dogma of a Trinity of God, Mother, and Son" (Miłosz 1995: 79; translation - E.T.). Such is the essence of hyperdulia, as seen by the philosopher. In the

mind of a common believer, the transformation might have gone even further: it is not only the deification of the Virgin, but also an imperceptible transformation of the Trinity into a prototype of nuclear human family: Husband, Wife and Mother, and Child. This is why one of the common Polish religious interjections is *Jezus, Maria, Józefie Święty!* ("Jesus, Mary, St. Joseph!"), where the order of names iconically reflects the hierarchy of veneration.

4. Conclusion. I hope to have demonstrated that the regular and largely unreflective, i.e. "subliminal", usage of the language reflects the nature of the concept of Virgin Mary as it functions in the Polish folk religious cult. The data - limited as it is - provides evidence for what is the gist of the Whorfian hypothesis, which seems to evoke an image of an osmotic merger of language and conceptualization, rather than a picture of an autonomous language "influencing" (not to say "determining") thought. The unique mixture of human and divine attributes, of the homely and the transcendent, in Virgin Mary's cult is an element of the Polish culture; it is affirmed and reinforced through a peculiar conspiracy of various linguistic means: the choice of words, flexion, derivation, word order.

Not long ago on a window pane in one of the houses in a little town in Silesia an image appeared that the inhabitants of the town took to be an image of Our Lady. Proclaimed to be a miracle, it soon became an object of veneration for the local people. Asked for a rational explanation, chemists explained the apparition as a case of irisation, or iridescence of light caused by ionisation. The people would not listen, and protested when the local priest had the window pane removed. Of course it was not the particular usage of language that was illustrated above that made one of the woman see the miraculous apparition. But she did exclaim, in the best Polish tradition of Virgin Mary's cult: *Tu się Mateńka objawiła i tu powinna pozostać!* ("It is here that the very-little-Mother appeared, and it is here that she should stay"; Kortko 1997).

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