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# NAMES OF MENTAL OPERATIONS IN POLISH AGAINST THE SLAVIC BACKGROUND

## Abstract

This article deals with the semantics of the all-Slavic THOUGHT/THINK. Due to their specific and indeed unique properties, which are attested by its frequent occurrence, its extraordinary ability to form words and collocations as well as its notable presence in appellative and onomastic material, this pair of lexical units should be classed as a kind of "semantic operators". The evidence, which takes into account a broad semantic background and real semantic value, is unequivocal: to acquire real semantic value these core words have to form collocations or to appear in specific contexts. This fact justifies my proposal that the generally accepted etymology of *myśl*/*myśleć* (a consensus repeated in various etymological dictionaries which align this form with the Lithuanian *maũsti*/*maudžiù*/*maudžiaũ* ('to ache slightly but persistently, to feel a dull pain / a prolonged distressing ache / a mild joint pain; to long, desire, want; to bother, pester, bore') be replaced by an affiliation with the word family rooted in the IE *\*men-*, which is present in the all-Slavic *\*pamętь* 'memory'. Its irregular phonetic development may have been caused, in accordance with Mańczak's Law, by the abundance of its compound formations.

This article is focused on words from the semantic field of mental, intellectual and cognitive operations covered otherwise by COGITATIO, MENS, SENTENTIA, SUSPICIO, OPINIO. There is quite a number of such words in the Slavic languages, as is the case of other Indo-European languages (Buck SS entry: Mind, Thought). I have chosen Polish as a representative instance of the Slavic family because of my thorough knowledge of the language, i.e. a competence which enables me to undertake detailed semantic analyses based on close observation of the mental

words syntactic performance, connectivity and word-formation preferences. Lexical sources are used only as a supplement: in each case a lexical unit is referred to its most important contexts that determine its distinct meaning.

Polish has certainly more than a score of lexical units (both nouns and verbs) in the field of mental operations. They are, to name but a few, *myśl* (*myśleć*) 'a thought, to think', *duma* (*dumać*) 'to brood', *baczyć* 'to watch', *dociekać* 'to inquire', *pomnieć* 'to recall', *pamięć* 'memory', *mniemać* 'to deem', *umieć* 'to be able to', *znać* 'to know', *sądzić* 'to consider / to believe', *cenić* 'to appreciate', *oceniać* 'to evaluate', *pojąć* (*pojęcie*) 'to understand / to grasp a concept', *rozważać* 'to ponder', *mylić się* 'to err', *przekonać* 'to persuade', *przypuszczać* 'to presume / to guess', *zastanowić się* 'to think over or to wonder', etc. Each of these words has its own history. Some are rooted in archaic forms that go back to ancient Indo-European dialects (e.g. *-mnieć*, *znać* 'to know'), some can be traced to Proto-Slavic, and some others are relatively new coinages that made their appearance at later stages of the history of the Polish language (e.g. *zastanowić się, zastanowienie, rozwaga* 'to think over, a pause for thought, caution').

To discuss all of those verbs and nouns would require a book-length study; here I am going to focus on those that represent one, in many ways unique, lexeme which denotes the semantic field COGITATIO. Its Polish nominal and verbal equivalents are *myśl, myśleć,* Proto-Slavic *\*myslъ*, which is the base of a word family (not very big, though): *myśleć* 'to think' (obsolete *myślić*, Proto-Slavic *\*mysliti*) and derivatives formed by a wide range of prefixes (*\*do-, \*jъz-, \*na-, \*o(b)-, \*orz-,\*per- \*po-,\*pri-,\*sъ-, \*u-, \*vy-, \*za-*, cf. Skok ER vol. 2: 431). It may be noted that only one word in the class of cogitatives, namely *\*znati* 'novisse', 'to know', has a comparable range of prefixes. In Polish *myśleć* lacks just one common prefix, the predominantly spatial *\*pri-*. Furthermore, the verbal base may have produced some predictable paradigmatic back formations, i.e. *nomina actionis* of the type *\*-myslъ*. Affected by onomastic derivation, these forms became the base of personal anthroponyms, and consequently acquired an adjectival (participial), characterising value, as in Old Polish first names *Bole-mysł, Dobro-mysł, Unie-mysł*, or alternately with the verb in the initial position, e.g. *Myśli-bor, Myśli-dar* (SEM vol 1: 174). Finally, there are two adjectives *\*-myslъnъ* and *\*myslivъ*, and nominalised form *myśliwy* 'a huntsman, i.e. one who thinks/ ponders how to seek out and kill game', although in Old Polish this form functioned as a simple participial adjective meaning 'thinking'.

MYŚL (MYŚLEĆ) is undefinable, it is one of the elementary semantic units, or linguistic universals, that can be found in any language, among all people (Wierzbicka 1999 *passim*; Kurcz 2005: 112 ff.). *Myśleć (myśl)* 'to think' is involved in the mind's intellectual and psychological faculties. The observation of linguistic facts connected with thinking suggests that it is a sui generis semantic (or even semiotic) o p e r a t o r, or i n d i c a t o r. However, it does not acquire its full semantic profile, indicative of specific mental behaviours unless it is linked with words and positioned in a situational context. MYŚL is the only concept in the COGITATIO class that is perceived and conceptualised in terms of activity or movement. As a result the word *thought* is clearly the only one in the copious class of *nomina cogitationis* which forms

compounds with verbs or, generally, other expressions denoting activity or movement, e.g. phrases like *myśl przychodzi / odchodzi / ucieka / urywa się* 'a thought comes/races through one's mind / runs away / becomes discontinuous'; *myśli się toczą/płyną* 'thoughts roll/flow'; *potok / tok myśli* 'a stream / a flow of thoughts'; *myśl szybka* 'a quick thought', *myśl jak błyskawica przemknęła* 'a thought crossed one's mind like a flash of lighting'; *przeskok myślowy* 'a leap in thinking'; *myśl nagła* 'a sudden thought'; *natłok/kłębowisko myśli* 'an onslaught of thoughts / muddled thinking'; *myśli się snują/plączą* 'thoughts wander / keep meandering'; *myśl sięga, cofa się* 'thought reaches out, recoils'; thought can be used to construct something, e.g. *konstrukcja myślowa* 'an idea / a construct / a theory'; a thought can be sown and take root, e.g. *myśl kiełkuje* 'thoughtsprouts'; thoughts can be stirred up or suppressed, e.g. *pobudzić, zniszczyć myśl* 'to awaken, destroy a thought'; thoughts can be *zabójcze, wyniszczające* 'murderous/debilitating'; thoughts can come in bits and pieces, e.g. *okruchy myśli* 'crumbs of thoughts'; thoughts can be stolen, e.g. *kraść/podszywać się pod cudze myśli* 'steal somebody else's thoughts / plagiarize'.

The quality and characteristic features of mental states is further revealed through the juxtaposition of *myśl, myśli, myśleć* 'thought, thoughts, to think' with a vast array of adjectives and adverbs. These phrases specify behaviours and mental states that can then be matched with certain types of conduct. In this particular case, too, the scope and variety of the actual combinations exceeds anything that can be found in the field of other lexical units of this kind. MYŚL gives rise to countless metaphorical constructions that reach out into the world of things, colours, physical activities, etc. So we have thoughts that are *wesołe* 'joyful', *radosne* 'merry', *szczęśliwe* 'happy', *pogodne* 'cheerful', *jasne* 'bright', *zielone* 'green', *słoneczne* 'sunny/ hopeful', *kolorowe* 'multicoloured/euphoric', *czarne* 'black/gloomy', *posępne* 'sullen', *smutne* 'sad', *tragiczne* 'tragic', *żałobne* 'mournful'. In some expressions MYŚL, i.e. thought, or rather way of thinking, seems to mirror the quality of the mind, as in the pairs *myśl ścisła, logiczna, ostra, przenikliwa* and *umysł ścisły, logiczny, ostry, przenikliwy* 'precise/scientific, logical, sharp, incisive'. Thought can be *mądra* 'wise', *szlachetna* 'noble', *wielka* 'great'. While a phrase like *myśl Kanta* 'Kant's thought' encompasses a person's philosophy and his beliefs, most phrases with the headword *myśl* narrow it down, e.g. *głupia* 'stupid/silly', *podła* 'mean', *zła* 'wicked/evil', *ciężka* 'heavy/ oppressive', *tępa* 'dull', *jałowa* 'futile', *oślizgła* 'slimy/loathsome'. The same concerns plural noun collocations like *myśli paskudne* 'foul', *grzeszne* 'sinful', *świńskie* 'dirty'. Here are some more examples of well-established collocations with *myśl: prorocza* 'prophetic', *pobożna* 'pious', *dziwaczna* 'strange', *chora* 'odd mad' – with connotations of an underlying mental aberration.

As these examples show the semantic unit *myśl, myśli, myśleć* possesses an extraordinary capability (exceeding that of any other elementary kernel) to produce phrases that can be used to mark and hold up to view an amazing range of personal characteristics, both broad and subtle. Finally, it may be noted that the verb *myśleć* modifies its portion of meaning of 'cogitare' depending on the attached suffix, e.g. *do-myślić się* 'to guess correctly', *prze-myśleć coś* 'to think over', *na-myślić się* 'to think over and make up one's mind', *u-myślić (sobie coś)* 'to form a plan, think

out', *coś jest, idzie, odbywa się, dzieje się po myśli, pomyślnie* 'something goes ahead well, as intended, successfully'.

In various contexts the word *myśleć* itself generates meanings that – in favourable circumstances, by which I mean sufficient frequency of occurrence – can acquire a stable lexical meaning, eg. **myślę** *o budowie nowego domu* 'I am thinking about building a new house', *ani* **myślę** *ci ustąpić* 'I'd never think of backing down', *zawsze o tobie* **będę myślała** 'I'll always think of you = remember you', **myślę***, że kłamiesz* 'I think/suppose you are lying', *twoja* **myśl** *była trafna* 'you were right', *to daje mi* **do myślenia** 'I conclude that…', and *czy dobrze* **myślę***, że …?* 'am I right to conclude that…?'.

*Myslъ, *mysliti, *myslьnъ*, Proto-Slavic units distributed across a wide geographical area (for lexical material, though without context, c.f. ÈSSJ 21: 47 ff.) have a distinct semantic and connotative semantic profile, and, as we have already noted, they are unique among any other "mental" words by virtue of their ability both to combine with countless specifying morphemes or words and to express a seemingly endless range of activities, impressions and intellectual qualities from elementary self-awareness through individual acts of though ("I think therefore I am"), perceptions, judgements, assertions, surmises, conjectures, reasoning, intentions, dreams, wishes, passions to the extreme of mad desire. In short, the cluster MYŚLENIE, MYŚL is extraordinarily expansive: it has extended its semantic field into the real of emotions and volition, and, functionally, even into anthroponymy.

From the structural point of view the etymology of the root *myslъ* is clear. Interestingly, this word had no counterpart in the Baltic area, and yet in Proto-Slavic it must have possessed a high dynamic and a huge semantic and functional potential in order to colonise the important semantic field around MENS. One principal difficulty we encounter in *myslъ* is its initial vocalic root; the affix though seems to fit in well with a small but ancient series of nomina abstracti formations *-slъ* of the type *-roslъ* (Sławski 1974: 106). The traditional, commonly accepted etymology (cf. a review of etymology in ÈSSJ 21: 49–50) assumes here a link with the Lithuanian verbs *maũsti maudžiù/maudžiaũ* 'to ache slightly but persistently, to feel a dull pain / a prolonged distressing ache / a mild joint pain; to long, desire, want; to bother, pester, bore' and *apmaũsti*, v.intr. 'to find irksome, repugnant' and v.tr. 'to be in the way, to distract' (Smoczyński SE: 378–79), and also the Greek μύθος 'word, speech; theme, subject, matter; charge, mission, advice; saw, proverb; tale, story; fiction, legend'. The link is usually made to the second meaning of the Lithuanian verb 'to long, desire, want' which can be derived from 'to bother, pester, to tire somebody with repeated requests, i.e. to want something badly'. The Slavic counterpart of the Lithuanian word is *muditi* and its not very old, predictable derivatives (cf. ÈSSJ 20: 167 ff) which refer generally to the action of wasting one's time, procrastinating, winging, making a nuisance of oneself. In Polish *mudzić* is an obsolete word. Linde in his dictionary (4. p. 178) goes for his quote to the 17th-century writer Wacław Potocki: *Żyjesz bez towarzystwa, z zdaniem wszech ludzi, Kto go nie ma, ten życie tyra, ten go* **zmudzi** (If you live your life without company, then everybody agrees that you'll use it up to no avail, you'll waste it), but it also brings up *mudzi mi się* (I've been here too long,

i.e. I must go now). In dialects the word is used more often, e.g. *mudzić (się)* 'to dally, toil, fret; drag one's feet', hence *żmudny* (Old Polish and dial. *zmudny*) 'burdensome, difficult', Old Polish 'sloppy, vacillating' (Sstpol. s.v.); dial. *zmudzić, żmudzić* 'to pester somebody, tire (with requests, etc.), waste (time)', *żmudzić się* 'to worry', *zmudno* 'sad', *zmuda,* among others, 'a feeble person' (Karłowicz SGP s.v.). It also occurs as the surname (originally a nickname) *Żmuda*, or *Zmuda*.

As neither in Slavic nor in Lithuanian does the word *\*muditi (māusti)* carry any suggestion of intellectual/ mental activity, it must represent a totally different semantic profile from *\*myslь*. And indeed, Smoczyński's extensive studies of Balto-Slavic parallels leaves out completely both *\*myslь* and the Greek formation which is noted by Frisk GEW (2: 264).

In Slavic, next to *\*myslь, \*mysliti* there is only one word family which is semantically so close to it as to be almost identical. Rooted in the primary *\*mьniti/\*mьněti (sę)* 'to think, consider, suppose; understand; appear' (ÈSSJ 21: 113 ff.), this verb was supplanted by the more expansive *\*mysliti*. It is attested in the earliest texts only in the forms *mnieć* 'suppose, consider, believe, maintain' and *leko mnieć* 'disregard, to think lightly of' (Sstpol.) as well as the derivatives *mniemać*, obs. *mnimać*. It is worth noting that the primary verb *\*mьniti* did not produce even at that early stage any nominal derivative. Only compound forms with the suffix *po- \*po-mьniti/\*po-mьněti* 'remember' (Pol. obsolete *pomnieć/ pomnę* 'to keep in one's memory, remember' (SJP; Linde; Sstpol. s.v. and occasionally in dialects) were able to generate a nomen actionis in two alternants *\*po-* verbum / *\*pa-* nomen : *\*pa-mętь* 'memoria' 'memory'. In this context the suffix *po-* does not have the meaning of 'post' or 'after' (cf. Boryś SE entry: *pamięć*), but is a marker of the perfective aspect and the beginning of an action as in *poczuć, polecieć, pojechać* 'to feel, take off, leave'. In Polish *pomnieć* has dominated the semantic field of memory and produced a large number of derivatives with suffixes that trim the basic meaning of 'meminisse', e.g. *napomnieć/napominać* 'reprove / keep reproving', *dopomnieć / dopominać (się)* 'claim, demand', *przypomnieć* 'remind', *wspomnieć* 'remember briefly', *upomnieć* 'reprimand', *wypomnieć* 'reproach', and *zapomnieć* 'forget'. Practically all of those verbs have nominal derivatives which represent the late type of *nomina actionis* ending in *-anie* and *-enie*. However, the word *pomnieć* itself was supplanted by the secondary form *pamiętać* 'remember'.

On the semantic level the meaning of *pamięć*, *pamiętać* is 'to bring back to mind, to conjure up a mental image of something, to represent, to perpetuate a memory, or a sensory perception (visual, aural, olfactory) from the PAST. Memory enables one to retain the past and bring it back into the present, e.g. **pamiętam** twoją twarz 'I remember your face, i.e. I keep it in my memory, I (can) recall the image of the face I have seen before'; **pamiętam** twój głos 'I remember your voice, i.e. I have heard it before'; **pamiętam** zapach 'I remember the smell, i.e. I can retrieve that past experience'. That mental activity (thought) and memory are inextricably combined is demonstrated by their overlapping presence in a number of collocations, e.g. *sięgać myślą/pamięcią* 'one's thoughts reach out / one's memory reaches out'; *pamięć/myśli przychodzą, odchodzą, uciekają* 'memories/thoughts come, go, escape'; *zachowuje*

*się coś w myśli i w pamięci* 'something is kept in one's thoughts / in one's memory'; *będę cię pamiętać* 'I'll remember you, i.e. I'll always think of you'; *pamięć/myśli się snują, wysnuwają* 'memories/thoughts linger, haunt'; *pamięć/myśli się urywają, kończą* 'memories/thoughts become fragmented, fade away'; *okruchy myśli/pamięci* 'precious thoughts/memories'; *dobra pamięć, dobre myśli o kimś* 'good memories of somebody', *zapomnieć* 'to forget, i.e. to remove or erase something from one's memory'; *portret pamięciowy* 'a facial composite, i.e. one that has been imprinted on one's memory'; *mówić z pamięci* 'to speak from memory, i.e. to speak without hesitation, without notes, relying on one's good memory'. In brief, memory is defined here as the entrenched mental traces (thoughts) of what was or happened some time ago (previously). And if, for example, I say that *dzisiejszy dzień zapadnie mi głęboko w **pamięć*** (this day will be engraved in my memory) it means that I will remember it and the memory of it will be ready for retrieval at any time in the future.

The etymology of the \**mьniti* family has been thoroughly researched. It is a descendant of the IE base \**men-* 'think' which can be found in all IE languages (Pokorny IEW: 726–728). \**Pamętь < -\*mentis, mṇteis* is an ancient root derivative with the suffix *-tь,* cf. Lith. *mintis,* Avestan *-maiti-,* Old Indic *mati-* (E I-EC entry: THINK). The lexical material collected by Pokorny (IEW q.v.) shows a wide range of meanings, yet all of the items seem to be in a way concentrated round the basic COGITARE, i.e. 'to conceive of in the mind, consider'.

Following Toporov (Ètim 1963: 5–13), who noted the possible connection between \**myslь* and the IE family \**men-,* I submit that the former may represent an ancient formation which descends from the base \**men-/\*mon-/\*mṇ-.* The expansive nature of the word – both in the field of appelatives and proper names (onomastics) – and its considerable semantic weight, its successful conquest of the area of COGITARE accompanied by its increased use and proliferation of compounds may have caused irregularities in its phonetic development. This was first noted by Witold Mańczak, who called it a phonetic derailment. Irregular developments, or derailments, are unpredictable and cannot be subsumed under any rules. In the case discussed here it affects the base structure, i.e. a change in the quality of the vowel between two sonorants, a combination which cannot but incite the liability of the internal vowel. It is a simple explanation, and yet, I believe, entirely justified.

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