REPRESENTATION OF CARE LEAVING AND CARE LEAVERS IN MEDIA DISCOURSE. A POLISH STUDY

Reprezentacja usamodzielnianie się i osób usamodzielniających się w dyskursie medialnym. Studium polskie

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Abstract

The presented analyses aim at depicting social discourse concerning the process of care leaving. They are of a preliminary nature and are intended to prepare methodological, and theoretical grounds for a larger research project devoted to this issue. The analyses are conducted in the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA). The analyses facilitated the identification of major linguistic forms (tokens), as well as their broader clusters (genres), constituting the content of the investigated discourse. Moreover, the reconstruction of a discursively created subject of the transition from foster care to independent life (i.e., the care leaver) was performed in the context of these analyses, together with characteristics assigned to the subject.

Keywords: care leaving trajectories, care-leavers, critical discourse analysis, media discourse, semiotic representation.

Streszczenie

Prezentowane analizy mają na celu opisanie społecznego dyskursu na temat procesu usamodzielniania wychowanków pieczy zastępczej. Mają one charakter wstępny i są zorientowane na przygotowanie metodologicznego i teoretycznego projektu szerzej zakrojonego procesu badawczego poświęconego tejże tematyce. Przedstawiane analizy są osadzone w podejściu określonym mianem krytycznej analizy dyskursu (CDA). W rezultacie analiz dokonano identyfikacji głównych form językowych ekspresji, składających się na treść analizowanego dyskursu. W kontekście przeprowadzonych analiz dokonano także rekonstrukcji dyskursywnie wytwarzanego podmiotu procesu przejścia pomiędzy opieką zastępczą a życiem samodzielnym, wraz z przypisywanymi mu charakterystykami.

Słowa kluczowe: trajektorie procesu usamodzielnienia; wychowankowie form opieki zastępczej w procesie usamodzielnienia; krytyczna analiza dyskursu; dyskurs medialny; reprezentacja semiotyczna.

Introduction

In the Polish language pedagogical literature, the process of care leaving is commonly described either from a structural perspective, including its formal aspects and institutional practices, or from the perspective of biographical studies, focused on the participants' lives and experiences (including the identity experience) (Golczyńska-Grondas 2014; Golczyńska-Grondas 2016). The presented analyses aim at describing the process of care leaving as a linguistically mediated process, thus found in socially shaped thinking patterns about care leavers and forms of their linguistic expression. Such research aims lie in the scope of the methodological approach termed critical discourse analysis (CDA). The subject of the studies which results are presented involve discursive constructions of the care leaving process and care leavers as its actors/subjects. Perspectives on care leaving trajectories, as well as the ways in which care-leavers are perceived, are reconstructed here on the basis of colloquial beliefs and experiences expressed by various individuals.

CDA: Theoretical and epistemological assumptions

Critical discourse analyses involve a critical examination of how discourses are carried out by linguistic forms of expression of any kind. The analyses may also focus on other forms of communication, such as visual images: photos, films, video blogs, etc. (In this study both sources of data are utilized.) The first approach refers to the 'traditional' CDA methodology developed, for instance, by N. Fairclough, R. Wodak, T. Van Dijk et al. (Fairclough, 1995, 2013; Woodak, 2013, Van Dijk, 1993, 2009). The second form relates to the modification of this approach – developed over many years of research practices utilizing CDA – termed Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) (Machin, Mayr, 2012), in which the notion of linguistic expression has been extended to include any 'text' type (also a visual text) as a text understood in broad sociocultural terms rather than purely linguistically (see: Melosik, Szkudlarek, 2010).

In its basic meaning, the notion of discourse refers to a linguistically mediated model of reality (Foucault, 1972). As 'models of the world', discourses refer to both linguistic practices with their mental bases, and social practices. Since social practice and linguistic/semiotic practice constitute one another, in critical discourse studies language is always perceived as a form of social practice (Fairclough 1995). That is why semiotic practices are always investigated in their relation to specific fields of social practices (Resigl, Wodak, 2009: 87). Discourses involve 'discursive scripts' which form perspectives on social reality and its particular segments (Van Leeuwen, Wodak, 1999). On the basis of 'discursive scripts' people construct their beliefs concerning the essence of reality itself, the processes and events present in it, as well as specific characteristics of subjects participating in this reality (i.e., individuals, or en-

tire social groups). In this sense, it can be claimed that discourses create their 'ontologies' as reality representations. Moreover, discourses represent and reflect aspects of power asymmetries that pertain to structural inequities embedded in various domains of social practice. As such, power relations might be both legitimized, or delegitimized in discourses (Wodak, 2015). A discourse, as an object of investigation, is not a monolith, but 'a dynamic semiotic entity that is open to reinterpretation and continuation' (Wodak, 2015). Consequently, it may be argued that discourses never constitute fully homogenous structures, however their fields are not completely heterogeneous.

CDA represents a socially engaged research approach. It is described as a form of critical social analysis which involves critical questioning of power relations existing in the society. As such its social engagement refers to ethical value of justice (Fairclough, Fairclough, 2018).

CDA in the current investigation

CDA, as the methodological approach, allows us to examine how practices of care leavers' transition between foster care and independent lives are represented and recontextualized in discursive scripts embedded in common knowledge or 'folk wisdom'. Discursive scripts refer to the concept of *genre* (as applied in CDA): a genre may be understood in terms of a socially ratified way of using language in relation to various types of social practices (Reisigl, Wodak, 2009: 89). Consequently, *a token* is a subordinate structure in relation to a *genre*. Broadly speaking, tokens relate to meaningful phrases that describe facts, people, objects, and so on.

Since CDA always involves a problem oriented research, research questions should be formulated, or developed in the course of the investigation. In literature devoted to this approach, various manners of formulating research questions are differentiated. In this study, I refer to selected suggestions offered by R. Wodak (2015), including the following forms:

a) First, 'How are persons, objects, phenomena/events, processes, and actions named and referred to linguistically?'
b) Second, 'What characteristics, qualities, and features are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events, and processes?'
c) Third, 'From what perspective are these nominations, attributions, and arguments expressed?'

Data analysis

The data chosen for this analysis was obtained from a corpus of 76 'acts of speech' found in various Internet sources, including:
- Press articles published or re-edited online;
- Internet users' comments to online articles;

- Content of video blogs and Internet portals, including users' comments;
- Content presented in social media, especially in closed Facebook groups, whose authors were predominately former care leavers[*].

Linguistically expressed content, as well as photographs and visualizations, were considered and their basic semiotic analysis was conducted (See: Djonov, Zhao, 2014; Machin, Mayr, 2012).

The collected utterances were treated as 'texts' that facilitated, following the inductive research procedure, the identification of broader 'genres', representing the structure of care leaving discourse. During the study, structural conditions of discourse were frequently referred to (the analysis of these conditions was intentionally omitted in this paper[†]), hence the employed research procedure involved multiple cross-investigations of the relationships between: acts of speech, genres, and the structural context of care leaving discourse. Such a procedure refers to a three-dimensional discourse analysis proposed by N. Fairclough, consisting of micro-, mezo-, and macro-levels of interpretation (Fairclough, 1995).

It should be stressed that the obtained data include utterances of 'three parties':

a) laypersons, speaking from the 'outside' perspective, who were never placed in foster care and did not participate in its services (o – *outsiders*);

b) people who were placed in foster care (in the past), articulating their voice from the 'inside' perspective of the process (a – *actors*).

c) professionals involved in the care leaving process, functioning as educators, foster parents or social workers (i – *insiders*).

In the presented analyses, I employed terms that denote the position of particular groups in discourse (*actors*, *insiders*, *outsiders*). Due to the scope of analyses and the space available, the least attention was devoted to articulations expressed from the perspective of educators/social workers and custodians (marked as *insiders*).

Discursive constructions of the care leaving process and care leavers as its actors

1. Discursive constructions of the subject (i.e., the care leaver)

The expression of **care leavers' immaturity for independent life** constitutes a core of epistemic beliefs and evaluations formulated by *outsiders*. The most frequent attribute assigned to the social actors in the process of care-leaving is the notion of 'pa-

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[*] I obtained consent from moderators to join three Facebook groups. My participation was covert in the sense that the authors of content were unaware of the nature of my analyses (I was not asked about this). I was a passive user who did not publish my own content or comments.

[†] These are discussed in other texts in this publication (See articles by: P. Kulikowski, K. Zdanowicz-Kucharczyk, H. Kędzierska, S. Zagulski).

thology' in its different variants: moral, social, and psychological. The social stereo-typization of care leavers and pushing them into the position of *the ('worse') Other* seems evident here‡. The linguistic, socially created image of a 'care leaver' bears the characteristics of social racism. Social racism is a category derived from the works of Michel Foucault (Foucault, 2004a, Foucault, 2004b). Social racism introduces a new (as opposite to 'traditional' ethnical racism) "'principle of exclusion and segregation' deployed to protect the health of the population from abnormal elements internal to the social body" (Erlenbusch 2017:138). From the perspective of the actors in the process of care-leaving, defensive attitudes can be observed, aimed at attempting to negate stereotypization, in which, however, they express (linguistically) their hopelessness in confrontation with the strength of the marginalizing discourse:

> *It's not at all that we steal. That we overuse drugs. E.g. I don't touch any drugs, alcohol... And someone who figured out that children from a children's home (i.e. a foster care institution) steal is really nuts ... And himself is a thief and drug addict... (a)*

Importantly, the phenomenon of social racism indicated by Foucault embraces, among others, defensive attitudes, and activities undertaken by actors who dominate social life (i.e., dominating classes, dominating groups). Within these activities, the excluded groups are accused of attempting to appropriate social goods appurtenant (by definition) to the 'healthy' or 'legally entitled' majority. A similar scheme can be observed as regards care leavers since they are attributed with:

a. demanding attitude towards the common good: *The problem lies deeper in these children, they have a demanding attitude towards people and the world* (o)

b. having a privileged access to the common good:

One of them has already got a flat for free – two-rooms; he gets quite a lot of money, he doesn't do anything, he can easily get an education...and he complains and grumbles, that he is not well all the time. He blames all his failures on growing up in a children's home [and] *thinks that he is treated worse by everyone because of that – though this is rubbish, he is treated even better – he is better off than ordinary people of his age, 'cause rarely someone from a family at an average level gets a flat at the start and a monthly amount that easily makes ends meet. This is actually unfair...I understand that he has gone through a lot, but to treat him like an egg that cannot incidentally get overworked.* (o)

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‡ Herein, I relate to the status of *The Other* in the context of postcolonial studies. *The Other* constitutes the binary opposition to *The Self*; he/she does not belong to 'the group' as an unauthorized, incompetent, improper, etc. (see: Said 1993).

But what do you mean about those difficulties with finding a job? So, if someone was in a children's home, then, out of compassion, at the start he must be given a job for 4 000 PLN a month? (o)

Most people begin with poorly paid jobs, either as a waitress, or somewhere in a shop etc. Why do they have to have all of life made easier?? Only because they have no parents...? (o)

And why flats and allowances for bastards at taxpayers' expense? Why do I need to bear the cost that such grew up begotten in unclear circumstances? The state can't afford that. (o)

Discourse of social racism articulates beliefs that the 'abnormal element' is a parasite on the 'healthy social tissue'. From such a perspective, as Foucault observed, practices of separation are desirable. A similar conviction is expressed in the following utterance:

> *Also, there should be no problems with a job, if children learnt diligently (especially languages) – after all they can leave, families don't keep them in Poland (sad, but true).* (o)

From the perspective of the dominating discourse of care leaving, its actors are marked with a multidimensional deficit, excluding them from the possibility of fulfilling different social roles. One can speak here about a coherent 'theory of deficit', rooted in common sense knowledge (folk knowledge) expressed by *outsiders*. It is represented by the following articulations:

a. Moral deficit
Young people brought up in pathological families don't even think to be responsible for their actions. Instead of renting a flat, buying a fridge and furniture, improving their professional qualifications for the money they get upon leaving [foster care]*, they have fun for some time spending it, then the dough is gone – and what next? – Next, if they don't come to their senses and use support offered also by the facility, there is mugging, stealing, breaking-in, or a homeless shelter.* (o)

b. Emotional deficit – understood as the inability to express feelings and establish relationships:
Feelings are not his strongest suit. 'Cause where would he learn them? At home nobody hugged him, kissed him, told him that they loved him. Kuba [Jacob] *doesn't know showing love.* (i)

- *My father believes that I will never satiate my future husband's hunger for love, that he will be unfaithful on each occasion, and that no matter how hard I try, I will not give him what he desires, that is satisfying his emotional deficits constantly. This scared me a bit. It's a fact that my boyfriend is sometimes sad, nobody knows why, and constantly asks if I really love him, but I think that all people in love behave like that, but if not? If this is what dad is talking about?* (o)
- *Try to get to know what orphan disease is, then you will learn almost everything about him.* (o)

I think that he will be unable to show parental feelings to his own children. (o)

My mother-in-law was [brought up] *in a children's home, and she is messed up. She was with this singer – Kora* [a famous Polish pop-singer] *and something is also wrong with her, as you can see on TV.* (o)

c. Motivational deficit – this aspect is mostly expressed by custodians and educators:

Despite much effort on our part, they were not motivated to work on themselves and they did not believe that you can have dreams that come true. But we try to show them how the world functions. (i)

d. Helplessness

They can't fill in on their own an application for an identity card, they don't cope with looking for a flat or a job, and even if they find a job, they have a big problem with managing the monthly budget. Sometimes they are successful, sometimes not. Those who give up return to the pathology to which they were born, because even there it is better than in the adult world. (o)

The issue of helplessness emerges in the utterances of custodians and educators. Perhaps this results from empirical observations of the people who follow life trajectories of care leavers. It may also be the aftermath of the report of the Supreme Audit Office (NIK) (2018)[§], devoted to youth who were placed in foster care. Findings from this report, that concerned care leavers' helplessness created by care facilities, seems to become rooted in the public opinion.

e. Biological deficit

Although the motif of a biological deficit appears to be marginal, at least in the context of quantitative data, it is worth considering – owing to its particularly drastic dimension legitimizing exclusionary beliefs and practices (being in fact racist in the sense of the previously mentioned social racism). The issue of a biological deficit was mentioned during the discussion that took place on a scientific seminar (sic!), in which I participated. The speaker articulated a thesis on the permanent damage to the amygdala (part of the brain) in individuals who were placed in foster care, which, apparently, made them permanently unable to exhibit the 'normal' social functioning. I should add that the speaker employed a manipulative rhetorical device by referring to the apparent 'scientific research', yet was unable to provide any details about the studies referred to (i.e. authors, dates, and so).

2. Perspectives on care leaving trajectories

2.1. The fall trajectory (outsiders' perspective)

From the outsiders' perspective, care leaving trajectory appears to be 'the fall trajectory', inevitably leading to failure. The following exemplary utterance demonstrates this synthetically and, at the same time, metaphorically: [Care leavers] *crash at the first corner.*

In the analyzed arguments, as the source of the convictions, the following cluster appears: **Care leavers' future is entirely determined by the initial conditions.** The pathologicalization of the family, and social life of care leavers' original biological environment is primarily stressed. Two types of arguments are employed here: nativist that consider the inherently 'imperfect nature' attributed to care leavers as the source of their future failures, and those representing environmental determinism.

The nativist approach may be illustrated by the folk knowledge belief as expressed in the Polish proverb and quoted by the outsider: *the apple doesn't fall far from the tree* [English equivalent: Like father, like son] (o). In its extended form, the primary genre** of 'the fall trajectory' refers to the moral deficit attributed to care leavers:

> *A few days later, one of the house-dwellers was missing 50 PLN,* [they thought] *it was surely her* [my] *doing. And their mistake that they had let*

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§ The abbreviation 'NIK' refers to the Supreme Audit Office (Najwyższa Izba Kontroli) which is the supreme audit institution subordinated to the Sejm (lower chamber of the Polish Parliament).

** A genre is understood in terms of a specific type and semiotic sub-structure of language typically used in a particular context; in this sense, genres form 'skeletons' of discursive structures.

> *such a pathology in. They corrected it quickly and decidedly. On returning from work I found my things packed with a 'letter' saying "fuck off you thief from 'bidul'* [colloquial term for a foster care institution]*!"* (a)

Outsiders are convinced that a moral deficit makes care leavers enter the paths of crime and addiction. This conviction is based on the belief in the care leavers' permanent inability to take responsibility for their lives and relationships with others: *This is pathology. My ex-husband was from a children's home. Don't listen to those cretins who write that things may be different, an orphanage* [in colloquial terms – 'children's home', e,g, foster care institution governed by the state] *is a repository of pathology; orphans who lost their parents constitute 0.00001 %, the rest is pathology, even when he reassures and promises miracles in the end pathology will come out of him.* (o)

The argument expressing **environmental determinism** assumes the following, exemplary form: *Adulthood following a foster care institution: 'repositories' doom for a lifetime* (this is the title of an article published in one of the Internet portals. Interestingly, it presents official data obtained during the control conducted by NIK (2012) concerning the functioning of foster care facilities, and comments of readers).

Other exemplary acts of speech express a similar notion:
> *Because in a children's home there is only pathology* (o).
> *All persons raised in a children's home that I know steal, take dope, guzzle, and screw around. Nobody normal comes out of there* (o).

Additionally, the quoted types of linguistic expressions are often accompanied by the word *bidul*, traditionally assigned to foster care facilities governed by the state (in the colloquial language). The word *bidul*, being a specific neologism referring to *bieda* [poverty], expresses poor upbringing and socializing conditions that do not meet children's needs.

2.2. The metaphor of the vicious circle and the perception of care leavers as doomed to life failure (care leavers' perspective)

From the perspective of the participants in the process of care-leaving, the stereotype itself, and socially created expectations pertaining to the 'gravitational impact' of the upbringing environment are perceived negatively. These contribute to the mechanism of the vicious circle of recreating the original status, thus leading to difficulties on the way to independent adulthood:

> *It wasn't until the first job in Poland that I understood that this 'sentence' that I got as a kid will cling to me. At some point, during talks with pals*

> *from work, it turned out where I am from. I told them also about my mother over beer. And this quickly got to the boss, and it turned out that I was not up to being a waiter in a club because I was 'some waif'.* (a)

In this case (as in many others) a care leaver articulates the phenomenon of fundamental distrust that care leavers experience in society. This distrust is of a discriminatory nature, limiting individuals' access to common good and social roles – in the above case – to economic resources related to professional work. This may affect the chances of entering into, and establishing relationships with others, as well as the transition to family life. In this context, the following utterance may be considered (a question asked by an Internet forum user):

> *My boyfriend was in a children's home. We are both 34 years old. He is independent and resourceful, we have lived together for a month and a half, and so far it is very good, but... Does the fact that someone was raised in a children's home impact his adult life? Are there any issues that I should know about before I get married? Maybe I should not have doubts, only my family frowns upon this relationship, I constantly hear 'he is from a children's home, be careful'. But, what should I be careful about? Please, if you have any experience, or knowledge about this – write.* (o)

The metaphor of the vicious circle also affects care leavers' perceptions of their biographies (both in its retro- and prospective dimension) as doomed by fate. In the context of undertaken activities, this may lead to the abortion of efforts aiming at an effective construction of adulthood and – occasionally – the 'acceptance of (fatal) fate'. This would happen when care leavers were unable to differentiate between the content of the 'prophecy of fall' found in the social discourse of care leaving and the actual conditions for action (which, however, still does not eliminate their challenging nature). In some cases, *actors* are able to make this differentiation, thus mobilizing efforts focused on overcoming discursively created limitations:

> *I spent the following two nights living according to the stereotype that an orphan in adult life will end up being homeless. I spent the first night sitting on my bags at the railway station and crying. Then I pulled myself together, that I have to put my stuff to the luggage office, go to work, and quickly find something new* (a).

> *The truth is that if you want to achieve something then after leaving a children's home you don't go to your family home, because if you do, you will go down, so you have to move in on your own* (a).

2.3. The difficult start trajectory

The difficult start trajectory represented in discourse of care leaving is best illustrated with the metaphor of being 'pushed into adulthood'. It is reflected in the aforementioned NIK reports that indicate such problems as: absence of economic grounds to lead an independent life, problems in community life associated with care leavers' social isolation and the feelings of loneliness and lack of social support offered. These problems are expressed in the following utterances:

Emotionally abused, deprived of relatives' support, they start from scratch. (i).

They are left to themselves. (i).

[Her boyfriend] *turned out to be a boor who is afraid, or ashamed of a girl from 'bidul'* (i).

And my mother is my mother. Nota bene, she even didn't offer her wishes on my eighteenth birthday. Didn't even text me. Not that I waited for this. But, you know, I felt uncomfy (a).

I feel sorry for these children who begin their start in life with nothing, and it's not even about the proverbial scratch, but without having any close person ... it's terrible (o).

'A difficult start' is the source of excessive effort in trying to enter adulthood effectively, while adulthood is perceived by care leavers mostly in terms of economic independence.

I was in a children's home in Trzcianka and [...] I have already collected 10 thousand PLN for a flat, but it is still little. I'm still short of about 150 thousand. I try as much as I can; I meet all conditions, I even passed my driving test because I had it planned in my program of gaining independence. I have earned for everything myself and, honestly, I don't know what will be with me next because my psyche has slowly enough. I work on average 15 hours a day. How long will I manage? So far I have lived like that for 2 years. (a)

I'm 18 years old and have just become independent. I have neither a family nor a flat.. you wait even for 10 years!! I want to finish studies, I want to learn, I have had school certificates with distinction since the primary school. I haven't gone down only thanks to my ambition.. and what am I to do now?? I've had 10 thousand for renting, [the money] will be gone soon, and I am one more year in a secondary technical school and the matura exam [secondary school leaving exam] *this year...how can I prepare for it if I can barely pay my bills?? And when the money is gone??* (a)

> *My friends describe how it is on holidays, how they are having fun, how they are partying, what studies will be like etc., and we have to worry what to put into the pot...*(a)

> *The truth is that if you want to achieve something then after leaving a children's home you don't go to your family home, because if you do, you will go down, so you have to move in on your own.*(a)

The difficult start is also related to the aforementioned discriminatory practices towards care leavers. These practices are based on socially/discursively created prejudices. This is an example of one care leaver's narrative describing recruitment procedures during her employment:

> *The first stage of the recruitment was the insurance knowledge test. I had 93 percent. The lady who supervised our group already whispered to me that I had this job for 100 percent [...]. The recruitment lady started to ask me about my interpersonal skills. She asked how important parents were for building them. When I answered that I had been brought up by my grandmother for some years and then 'bidul', she asked the next question. About my relationships... with my parents. I shortly answered that I didn't remember my parents. Equally shortly she thanked me for the conversation. Then it turned out that I got 15 percent on the interview.* (a)

2.4. Trajectory of building life independence via relying on oneself

This cluster is based on care leavers' utterances that are of a success stories nature and echo the neoliberal phantasm 'from rags to riches', also expressed as 'Yes we can' (irrespective of the starting point conditions). Below sample statements are presented.

> *If you can count, count on yourself.* (a)
> *Nobody will tell me that I'm dependent on anyone.* (a)
> *Job is the basis. I don't have to rely on anybody's mercy.* (a)
> *People! What doesn't kill us, makes us stronger. Such is life. Do you think that even if someone is raised in a family home, then he has it easy?? (...) I say, if you want to make something of yourself, you will, you just need strong MOTVATION.* (a)

> *Believe me, those who lost their family in childhood (I lost my father when I was 12 and mother even earlier) don't feel its lack. Paradoxically, this situation is even more conducive to making your own decisions. A man learns independence and doesn't grow to be a life wimp.* (a)

And yes, it's true that children from children's homes cope very well. Why? They are strong, they acted everyday according to some schedules, day plans. We always had to wait, or work for something, we have been taught this. Nothing ever came to us just like that. (a)

I, when I left care institution, was 19 years old...now I'm 21. I left the cabaret with the so called 'bye bye' one day, and was with all my belongings on the street. But somehow I bucked up and got on my feet after half a year, obviously I wouldn't have managed without friends, but I know that you may [start] from scratch and this gives me satisfaction that I've achieved everything on my own. Now I am a manager of one of Warsaw pubs. All friends tell me how I've achieved this at such a young age. And I tell them simply that I demand much more of myself than only school. Let me stress that I have been an orphan since I was 7 years old. Without any starter kit or flat from a children's home. (a)

Maybe that's why I am so determined, obsessively ambitious, and I don't allow myself to be pushed somewhere aside. I thought that if I were completely different from my mom, then I would also have a completely different life. I also knew that learning could be the pass to a better life, I would have done lots of things, but I always minded school. Nobody would take away knowledge and education from me in the future, this was the only thing that depended on me and spoke of me. I didn't have any influence on what family, what environment I came from. There is nothing I can do about the fact that the family couldn't help me at the start, even if I got angry that it's unfair. [...] I had to look after myself, what I could do was to learn, and incidentally I love to learn new [things], improve myself, I like reading even textbooks, then this work gave me joy and satisfaction with myself. It gave me the confidence that I control, if not the world around, then at least myself and my fate. (a)

All the time, although I study daily, I work professionally to be able to sustain myself. As yet as a waitress in Pizza Hut for 4 years. (a)

The difficult start trajectory embraces the motif of gratitude as expressed by the next excerpt to be quoted in this section. Care leavers' narratives contain overt motifs of owing the present achievements/status to other people – these are mostly educators, but also people met incidentally. The motif of gratitude is, nevertheless, associated with that of the difficult start. Care leavers' whose narratives contain this token,

express their gratitude for the assistance in reducing the level of difficulties accompanying the process of care leaving:

> *After leaving the care institution I got a flat rather quickly. I could also rely on help from the head of the facility, we keep in touch until now – says Piotr, living "on his own" for eight years, husband and father of four boys. In the children's home I completed a secondary technical school of building, works was at once. I owe a lot to my educators. I don't know where I would be now if I had stayed with my father.* (a)

The motif of gratitude also emerges in the narratives of educators employed in educational care facilities. However, it has a slightly different form associated with a self-affirmative type of utterances:

> *Thanks to us our children go into the world where they fulfill themselves, and sometimes even their most secret dreams.* (i)

2.5. Trajectory of an efficient transition into adulthood

This trajectory is completely different from the others since it is characterized by a psychological pattern of norm. In some sense, one can speak here about a normalized transition into adulthood, determined by adequate initial conditions (illustrated by metaphors of 'home' and 'family' as the starting point) and an efficient process of socialization, accompanied by the establishment and strengthening of social and emotional relationships. However, the starting point for this trajectory is foster care rather than the biological family. Herein, foster care is equated with a family home in care leavers' utterances. *This was my home, my family home* – said one of care leavers about the state-governed care facility in which he was raised. From the educators' point of view: *this is not "bidul"* [orphanage] *any more, but a home which is left by good people who become great fathers, fantastic mothers*; *Many of them say that they would not change their stay in an orphanage for anything else.* I found narratives characterized by a similar tone, including also rich visual material, on two popular YouTube channels run by adult mentees of state-owned foster institutions who remain in the facilities since they continue their education. The authors of these video blogs effortlessly describe the living conditions in the facilities that are perceives as their 'home'. They present other people living with them as if they were members of the family. The visual narrative layer emphasizes a friendly ambience created by furniture, everyday use objects, cozy interiors, soft cushions, etc., and also stresses the authors' freedom of expression both in the verbal and non-verbal context. Social response to the 'efficient trajectory' is also interesting. I was surprised by the great number of views and viewers' comments. My attention was par-

ticularly drawn to the content of viewers' comments accompanying the published video material, indicating that 'inviting' outsiders to the private space of children and youth placed in care facilities may be a good way to overcome the social stigmatization of care leavers. For instance, the following comment was found in this respect:

> *Ajgor* [Igor], *thank you, I didn't know it looked like that, I always looked with stereotypes, that inclinations for alcohol, stealing, violence ... I was so stupid, there is a care institution nearby, I'll go there and see what I can do to help. Thank you again, mate, you open people's eyes, you do something good. Respect and go on doing it! You are a role model...*

One may notice that 'the trajectory of an efficient transition into adulthood' does not fit the overtones of other discursive content presented in this article. Although the trajectory was placed in the context of care leaving discourse, owing to its semantic distinction it cannot be treated as a component of the same (i.e., dominating) discourse. Further elaboration on this issue, however, extends beyond the scope of this paper.)

The nest-building trajectory

The construction of this trajectory seems to be driven by care leavers' attempts to satisfy their psychological needs, especially those related to establishing intimate relationships. Interestingly, this trajectory is particularly intensively marked in the visual material which is not publically available (close groups and profiles in social media). The semiotic layer is characterized by the particularly prominent presence of significations referring to parenting and – slightly weaker, though nevertheless strongly marked – to intimate relationships and family. Attention is drawn to great numbers of photographs of ('beautiful') babies or toddlers whose images appear to be romanticized. This trajectory is represented slightly less prominently in the linguistic layer, where the following utterances may be found:

> *What I would like most is to meet some girl and have children, family.* (a)

> *My dreams? (...) To have a job, I think to earn five thousand a month. To have a wife, child, very slowly, maybe even over 20 years, build a house.* (a)

> *Now I care about my happiness and that of my child. I am a good mom and I would give anything for my son. He goes to a kindergarten, has good care and love and knows that he can always rely on me and that I love him most in the world; he is my sun, my son.* (a)

The nest-building trajectory invites a more extensive analysis as regards the psychological dimension referring to theories of developmental needs. This however, is beyond the scope of CDA as a theoretical and methodological approach applied here.

Discussion on the limitations of the study

The presented analyses – as mentioned in the introduction – are of a provisional nature, mostly due to the limited range of the obtained data and their one-sidedness, not allowing for a more in-depth analysis of the relationships between the semiotic layer of care leaving discourse and the dimension of social practices as a 'field of action' (Wodak, 2011). Consequently, I treat them as the starting point and, at the same time, pilot research for a more comprehensive research project.

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