
Political discourse on old-age pension issues in the election programmes of the largest political parties in Poland

The political discourse used by individual political parties or politicians to communicate with their addressees is important in the context of the language used in communication about retirement economics. In particular, we can observe the development of political discourse in the media, thanks to which messages addressed by politicians reach their recipients. The media today are intermediaries between the senders of political messages and their recipients, *i.e.*, citizens. The frequency of political communications increases particularly during a pre-election period. The article analyses the party political programmes of Platforma Obywatelska [Civic Platform] and Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [Law and Justice] – in terms of the content that appeared during campaigns prior to the parliamentary elections in 2007, 2011, 2015. The focus is placed on issues related to the old-age pension system, proposed changes and the positions taken by the above-mentioned groupings in the specific years. The results of this comparative analysis reveal a picture of the political discourse regarding pension issues in Poland in the 21st century, and its evolution with the changes seen in many areas of social life.

Key words: discourse, (old-age) pension system, pension issues, political discourse, retirement

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Introduction

Old-age pension issues have been one of the components of political parties' programmes prior to recent elections. They are one of the most important issues for Polish social policy, particularly when faced with the problem of an ageing society, which is why the views of individual politicians evoke noticeable emotions among voters. However, it is interesting how pre-election declarations compare with the changes introduced after winning an election, as well as which of such declarations enjoy the most popularity amongst society as a whole. The aim of this article is to characterise the political discourse on pension issues in Poland in the years 2007–2015 based on the proposals of two political parties – Platforma Obywatelska [Civic Platform] and Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [Law and Justice].¹ Those parties have been chosen as a result of them enjoying the greatest public support and the fact that in the discussed period each of them were once in government and once in opposition. Individual political parties have different views on old-age security, which is why their proposals made during election campaigns differ. In the further part of the text, after explaining the definition of political discourse and indicating its theoretical assumptions, their changes over the past few years will be presented, as well as the extent to which the citizens were guaranteed the maintenance of the current standard of living, and whether these beliefs had a chance to be implemented. The analysis of the phenomenon is based on a comparison of the pre-election programmes of Civic Platform and Law and Justice for the elections in 2007, 2011 and 2015, as well as on the *exposés* of prime ministers on taking office, as well as information from online media.

Since the 2004 European elections and parliamentary elections in 2005 Poles' electoral sympathies have been transformed. Previously, the parliamentary political scene was based on a pattern of

division into post-communist and post-solidarity parties, which resulted in the polar alternation of power following subsequent parliamentary elections.²

This mechanism was subject to gradual decomposition, resulting in a drop in left-wing support, together with the growing importance and strengthening of such parties as PO and PiS. The first parliamentary election, to which the author refers, was held on 21 October 2007 as a result of the adoption by the Sejm of the resolution on shortening the term of office for the Sejm and the Senate.³ PO won the election, gaining 41.51% of votes, while PiS received 32.11%.⁴ A comparison of the results of the 2007-2015 parliamentary elections is presented in Figure 1.

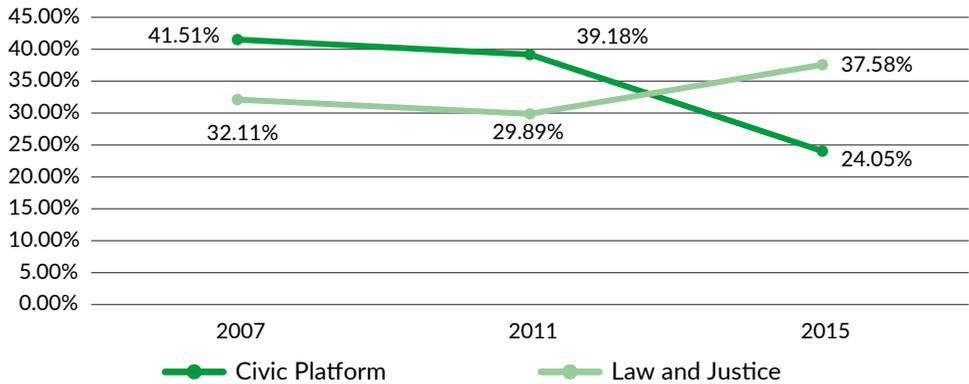
¹ In the remainder of the article, the names of both parties will be also written in the abbreviated form, respectively: Civic Platform – PO, Law and Justice – PiS.

² See *Wybory parlamentarne w 2011*, ed. A. Turska-Kawa, W. Wojtasik, Sosnowiec 2012.

³ See the resolution of 7 September 2007 on shortening the term of office of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland (Journal of Laws of 2007 No. 163, item 1154).

⁴ All data on the results of parliamentary elections given in the article come from the website of the State Election Commission (pkw.gov.pl). All data relate to elections to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland.

Figure 1. Results of elections to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland for the years 2007–2015



Source: own study based on data from the State Election Commission

The concept of discourse

Before analysing individual postulates related to the pension system, it is worth explaining the very concept of the discourse. It seems popular, in particular as used and emphasised by the media, but it is not always clear where it comes from and what contexts it can be associated with.

The theory of discourse arises from reflection on language and its role in the process of shaping social reality. It should be noted that the term “discourse” is on the one hand included in the set of features characteristic of the concept of “communication,” and on the other hand, it possesses its own autonomous features. As Aleksandra Synowiec claims:

the term “discourse” comes from the Latin *discursus* and is an old definition of conversation, discussion, speech. The dictionary definition locates the term “discourse” in the area of oral communication. On the other hand, the adjective “discursive” in the first sense refers to the philosophical term that defines conversation, the mental recognition of reality. In the second sense, the adjective “discursive” is understood as a logical category. This means “based on inference, where each link in the chain of reasoning depends on the previous one and conditions the next.”⁵

Discourse could be considered a complementary component of the language communication scheme proposed by Roman Jakobson, which includes the sender, the recipient, the code, the contact, the message and the context.⁶ It can also be treated as a means

⁵ A. Synowiec, *W stronę analizy tekstu – wprowadzenie do teorii dyskursu*, “Zeszyty Naukowe. Organizacja i Zarządzanie” 2013, No. 65, p. 384.

⁶ R. Jakobson, *W poszukiwaniu istoty języka*, Warszawa 1989, p. 81.

of communication with others, because it is commonly identified with such terms as dialogue or conversation. Undoubtedly, this is a category derived from linguistics, linked with language organisation as part of the utterance. Formerly it was referred to as a synonym for the concept of “language” itself, but now it is treated as part of the process of communication, both spoken and written. Indeed, language can interpret reality, adopt a certain point of view – the communication process can set the rules for the relationship between the sender and the recipient of content, certain patterns and conventions that determine the way of thinking.

Michel Foucault has also dealt with the issue of discourse. The French researcher claimed that the concept of “discourse”:

in the most general and most labile system meant [...] a set of verbal relations (between the word and reality) – and thus the discourse was understood in this case as something that has been created in terms of sets of characters. But the discourse was also understood as a set of formulation acts, a series of grammatical or logical sentences.⁷

This means that discourse consists of a sequence of characters (or sets of such sequences) that make up the utterance. This can be more or less complex and relate to any topic. A given sequence forming a series of linguistic behaviours is related to the topic, purpose and manner of forming the utterance. It is worth noting that in addition to the typically linguistic approach, M. Foucault has also presented a different approach to the definition of discourse – he combined it with power. In his opinion, the structures and mechanisms of power are visible in the meanings that are constructed by a society. According to him, every discourse will be associated with the system of power, because it means that a given view, opinion is imposed on a certain number of persons. At the same time – which is worth emphasising – one discourse prevailing at a given moment will dominate the others.⁸

Teun van Dijk, in turn, considers the use of “discourse” in everyday communication as a starting point for determining what discourse is. He adopts a theoretical model based on the definition of three main dimensions of discourse: language use, communication of ideas and interaction in social situations.⁹ In T. van Dijk’s opinion we have to bear in mind that:

discourse as a social activity is situated within the framework of understanding, communication and interpersonal interaction, which in turn are part of a wider context.¹⁰

Such an understanding of the word “discourse” shows that it is related to the process of communication, and also, to have a chance to occur, it must depend on such factors as the context or situation of communication. T. van Dijk rightly notes that the discussed term

⁷ S.J. Rittel, *Komunikacja polityczna. Dyskurs polityczny. Język w przestrzeni politycznej*, Kielce 2003, p. 91.

⁸ A. Synowiec, *op. cit.*, p. 389.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

¹⁰ *Dyskurs jako struktura i proces*, ed. T. van Dijk, Warszawa 2001, p. 31.

depends on the use of language itself – the very decision in this respect determines the subsequent steps in the communication process. The style of the content shared and the type of discourse will depend on the idea we convey and to whom we address it. However, Anna Duszak notes that the values

reproduced in patterns of communication behaviours shape communication expectations – they create and promote specific attitudes towards texts and communication partners.¹¹

This is a valid observation, because in this way a model of utterance conveyed to the recipient – and thus a kind of discourse – is created. The researcher has also noted that in Poland, the common concept of discourse seems to function in a relatively limited scope. It is related to a spoken rather than to a written utterance.

Political discourse

Within each of the sciences, the concept of discourse will have a different interpretation, depending on the situation in which it occurs. Karolina Lokert has noted that today language and communication are integrally connected with power, and in the existing social system they are used to manipulate and achieve specific goals.¹² Political discourse, *i.e.*, a politicised communication message, is an example of such language. As noted by Izabela Kujawa, the political discourse can be considered to be one of the components of contemporary culture and as an instrument of power or a tool for creating reality. According to this researcher, it can be defined as

a whole of heterogeneous utterances (texts, behaviours) having a similar driving force, similar action, origin and context, occurring not in isolation, but creating a dialogue, being in a specific relation (also in opposition) to other groups of utterances.¹³

In turn, Marek Czyżewski defines political discourse as

the process of the communication of symbolic elites, *i.e.*, groups and persons who exercise power over mass communication centres, first of all journalists and politicians.¹⁴

He also proposes defining as political discourse all communication events that take place within symbolic elites in connection with political events. In this way, he emphasises

11 A. Duszak, *Tekst, dyskurs, komunikacja międzykulturowa*, Warszawa 1998, p. 242.

12 K. Lokert, *Dyskurs polityczny – analiza KAD*, "Językoznawstwo: Współczesne Badania, Problemy i Analizy Językoznawcze" 2011, No. 1 (5), p. 82.

13 I. Kujawa, *Strategie dyskursu politycznego a medialny obraz świata*, "Annales UMCS Sectio FF" 2009, No. 23, p. 47.

14 A. Balczyńska-Kosman, *Język dyskursu publicznego w polskim systemie politycznym*, "Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne" 2013, No. 2, p. 150.

that this kind of discourse is important from the point of view of creating social reality and integration into the communication practices that take place therein. The basic functions of this type of communication include *e.g.*:

- the function of presenting the politicians' view of the world,
- the function of presenting the political goals of specific groups or individuals,
- the function of creating reality in a way similar to the views of politicians,
- propaganda and manipulative functions.¹⁵

As concerns the recipients of political discourse, generally speaking, it is the whole of society, *i.e.*, the group of recipients differentiated by age, gender, place of residence, education. In this case, the language in which the messages are formulated must be understandable to everyone, without omitting any group. Usually, the linguistic means used to convey political information have persuasive features – inducing the recipient to act in accordance with the sender's intentions, to accept or reject certain ideas or views. Such a communication system is very well reflected in programmes addressed to the public during election campaigns, to which the further part of the article will be devoted.

It can be noted that media coverage is that dimension which remains open to political discourse and in which such discourse may be carried out in a specific way. Individual media (the press, television, radio, and in particular the Internet – the most-widely used today) are characterised by dynamics and variability, giving and processing messages at a speed depending on the political or social situation.¹⁶ Contemporary political discourse can therefore be considered as a way politicians communicate with society, build their image, as well as a kind of polemic between individual actors on the political scene (both individuals and political parties). As Janina Frasz claims:

The ideal model of democracy implies large media participation in public debates that should mould citizens to participate within the communication community.¹⁷

The theoretical assumption for discourse to function is that it should be universal and also democratic in nature and should not limit the way the message is formulated, as opposed to other acts of speech. The following may be *inter alia* mentioned as elements of political discourse: the language of propaganda, persuasion, convincing argumentation. Depending on the competence of the senders and the perceptive capabilities of the recipients, these will be more or less intense. The present-day lexicon of political language in Poland is rich and includes

many thousands of words referring to the public life of Poles (social, economic, political, cultural, religious).¹⁸

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 146–147.

¹⁶ See H. Batorowska, R. Klepka, O. Wasiuta, *Media jako instrument wpływu informacyjnego i manipulacji społeczeństwem*, Kraków 2019, p. 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ K. Ożóg, *O języku współczesnej polityki*, "Polityka i Społeczeństwo" 2007, No. 4, p. 105.

The use of a variety of phrases is also forced by the very nature of political activity – the way of communication with citizens is determined by solving social problems and ruling the country. Therefore, it is not surprising that contemporary Polish politicians use persuasive messages that at the same time refer to the most important spheres of public life and the everyday life of citizens. On the other hand, appeals for a specific position – as in the case of parliamentary, presidential and local elections – strengthen the recipients' sense of being important within the communication process.

Old-age pension system in Poland

Before presenting the positions of Civic Platform and Law and Justice on pension issues, it is worth recalling the very functioning of the pension system in Poland. Old-age pension security is one of the elements of social security. In general, it can be considered as a system guaranteeing income to all persons covered thereby throughout the entire period after the end of professional activity.¹⁹ As noted by Iwona Olejnik, the pension system can be composed of:

- legal regulations governing its operation,
- institutions managing and supervising its proper operation,
- employed persons who pay pension contributions or for whom such contributions are paid or who additionally save for their old age,
- persons receiving pension benefits.²⁰

Indeed, these are the components of the old-age pension system in force in Poland, and each of them seems to be important and dependent upon others. But how has the approach to pensions changed over the years? The Polish pension system post 1989 has undergone changes, but for the author of this article the most important of them were those introduced since 1999. A radical change was made at that time and we are still facing its consequences. Until 1998, the pay-as-you-go (PAYG) pension system was in operation in Poland, based on a defined benefit. In such a system, the old-age pension amount depended on the earnings from selected years of one's professional career and on the period of insurance coverage. There were also many possibilities of early retirement. The radical reform of 1999 instigated changes, in particular related to the creation of the three-pillar system, which is still valid today. This made it possible to link the level of a future pension to the amount of all contributions paid. Important issues raised by politicians related to the old-age pension include the retirement age, pension privileges and privileged groups for early retirement, types of old-age pensions (individual, matrimonial, bridging). These issues are used as arguments in election campaigns. Individual

¹⁹ See M. Góra, *System emerytalny*, Warszawa 2003.

²⁰ I. Olejnik, *Zabezpieczenie emerytalne. Modele i determinanty zachowań polskich gospodarstw domowych*, Poznań 2016, p. 51.

actors on the political scene are committed to improve the Polish pension system in such a way as to meet the expectations and needs of citizens. As I. Olejnik wrote:

The ideal situation is when the old-age security guarantees financial independence in the retirement period. This means that the pensioner's income from pension benefits and/or private savings (assets, resources) enables him/her to satisfy his/her needs not only in a satisfactory manner, but also in a manner allowing them to maintain a minimum standard of living as was the case when they worked.²¹

Retirement issues in the election programmes of political parties

In 2007, PO proposed the programme entitled *Polska zasługuje na cud gospodarczy* [Poland deserves an economic miracle]. Bronisław Komorowski wrote in the programme introduction:

We want to repair the state and not to destroy it, we want to strengthen, not weaken democracy and the free market, we want a faster march towards western standards of life and development, so that everyone in Poland can live a better life.²²

The message formulated in this way at the beginning of the election programme was building a friendly discourse, encouraging people to support PO, because thanks to this party every citizen would live at a better level than before. As regards the pension issues, they were not presented in any one specific section of the programme, but were discussed several times in connection with taxes or family policy.

The chapter on social policy indicated the need for principles aimed at allowing those on maternity and child-care leave to continue their pension insurance. Attention was also paid to the elderly and their standard of living. In the field of pensions, PO mainly proposed limiting the possibility of early retirement, increasing the average age of people retiring from the labour market, as well as extending the pension age for women, so that by 2015-2020 it would be equal to the retirement age of men (it was assumed that by 2025 the retirement age for both women and men would be 67 years). The issue of bridging pensions also appeared – they were intended for those who worked in specific conditions and on specific positions. PO also planned to create an institution that would guarantee the efficient operation of the pension system – a national actuary office, to strengthen the role of the Demographic Reserve Fund, to stabilise the Social Insurance Institution [Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych, ZUS], to introduce changes in the agricultural pensions system and to reform the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund [Kasa

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²² *Program PO. Polska Zasługuje na cud gospodarczy*, 2007, <https://mamprawowiedziec.pl/file/14512> (online access: 15.1.2019).

Rolniczego Ubezpieczenia Społecznego, KRUS]. Thus PO was willing to convince voters that the pension system required modification, in particular through comprehensive changes, considering an individual rather as part of the functioning mechanism.

In turn, PiS emphasised fairly strongly the social aspect of pensions. The issue of decent pensions which would improve the quality of life was singled out. Planned was to increase the amount of benefits by 6%, to increase pension contributions for those raising children, to introduce an act on bridging pensions and an act on the method of payment of pensions from open pension funds. PiS intended to prevent poverty in old age, which is why they planned to introduce personal income tax relief for those who decide to save in the long-term (each person could deduct PLN 1,000 a year from their income if they devoted it to retirement). As for the changes in the operation of pension institutions themselves, they claimed that ZUS could be transferred from an organisational unit with its own legal personality into a classic state budget unit. In this way, funding could come directly from the budget, which would ensure control over expenses. According to PiS politicians, in this way older people would gain the security of stable and secure pension payments. “We are aware that there are many people in Poland who are not doing well. That is why we want them to receive help as part of social solidarity, which will allow them to get back on their feet,”²³ assured Jarosław Kaczyński, the PiS President.

Focus on institutional matters was clearly visible in PO’s narrative on pension issues. The politicians of this party were rather thinking about improving institutional operations and the mechanism for collecting pension funds and their use in the future. On the other hand, PiS paid more attention to the quality of life of citizens in old age and to its improvement, which is why they promoted the introduction of solutions that would also ensure controls over pension expenditure.

In the discourse of both political parties one can notice a direct approach to society, so that everyone could feel to be the recipient of their ideas. However, the language of PiS seemed more accessible – speaking about old age security for citizens, which could be close to people casting votes for this party. On the other hand, thanks to a comprehensive approach presented by PO, aimed to ensure that, as the electoral slogan proclaimed, “everyone in Poland could live a better life,” even the increase in the retirement age, usually met with reluctance, did not reduce this grouping’s support. Interestingly, after winning the election, Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced in his *exposé* that the work on the pension reform would be completed as soon as possible, so that as of 1 January 2009 it would be possible to pay out pensions under the new system.²⁴ Indeed – the bridging pensions were introduced in 2009, thus limiting the possibility of early retirement for certain professions. As Marcin Bojanowski and Leszek Kostrzewski wrote on the *Wyborcza.biz* website, only 270 thousand people

23 See *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość—Dokumenty*, <http://old.pis.org.pl/dokumenty.php?s=partia> (online access 31.7.2019).

24 See *Exposé premiera Donalda Tuska [STENOGRAM]*, *Wyborcza.pl* 18 November 2011, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,10668035,Expose_premiera_Donald_Tuska__STENOGRAM_.html (online access: 31.7.2019).

working in the most difficult conditions, such as steelworkers or miners, had been granted the right to early retirement, while 900 thousand people, including journalists and artists, had lost their retirement privileges. However, the election programme assumptions concerning KRUS reform or the equalisation of the retirement age for women and men were met.²⁵

In 2011, following a four-year term of rule by the PO-PSL (PSL is an abbreviation of Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe [Polish People's Party]) coalition, pre-election polls gave them a good chance to extend their term of office. As a result of elections held on 9 October, PO won again, obtaining 39.18% of the vote, which enabled the PO-PSL coalition to continue in office. In 2011, as before, PiS ranked second with 29.89% of the vote. What impact did this have on pension issues and had the 2007 postulates been realised?

In 2011,

PO's offer was clearly ideologised in terms of the programme. [...] the image of the Platform was promoted as a party for the average citizen, not fitting in to any one ideological trend, and combining different styles of thinking about the state.²⁶

Thus, the offer had become more friendly to various social groups, being written in a simple and communicative language, with a clear content message. The *Następny krok. Razem* [The next step. Together] programme was divided into four sections: innovation and social capital, family and security, a free citizen and an effective state: pension issues were discussed in the last section, although to a lesser extent than they had been in the 2007 election programme. Attention was paid to the four-year achievements of D. Tusk's government, with proposal of only those changes that had no chance of being implemented before. Such a situation (maintaining power) builds a slightly different discourse than in the situation of a struggle for power, which is why the messages formulated by PO may have seemed less elaborate. First of all, it was proposed to increase tax relief for persons voluntarily saving for their pensions to an amount of up to 6% of their income, to increase the efficiency of open pension funds management, and to reform the pensions for the uniformed services. Efficient pension system operations would be supported by the transfer of state revenues from shale gas extraction to ensure the security of any future pensions. In its programme, PO emphasised the achievements of the previous four years, including the reduction of the fee charged by OFEs from 7% to 3.5%, the introduction of bridging pensions, increase in the retirement age (which was supposed to bring savings to the state budget) and the increase in the amount of granted pensions.

The opposition, which in 2011 included PiS, started its campaign before the parliamentary elections in difficult situation. First of all, this was just after the Smolensk catastrophe, in which many political figures from the party had died. It also resulted

²⁵ See M. Bojanowski, L. Kostrzewski, *Kto zepsuł reformę emerytalną. Wszyscy mają "za uszami"*, Wyborcza.biz 16 March 2011, http://wyborcza.biz/biznes/1,147880,9258706,Kto_zepsul_reforme_emerytalna__Wszyscy_maja__za_uszami_.html?disableRedirects=true (online access: 31.7.2019).

²⁶ *Wybory...*, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

in the loss of PiS influence in several key state institutions. However, this did not prevent the development of a very extensive election programme entitled *Polska Nowoczesna, Solidarna, Bezpieczna* [A Modern and Safe Poland based on Solidarity]. It contains two types of messages: the first – criticising the policies of those currently in power, and the second – announcing the need for change. It was stated, *inter alia*, that:

A Poland based on solidarity is a country where [...] citizens are guaranteed decent pensions and assistance in difficult situations. On the other hand, the reduction of resources allocated to open pension funds should be assessed as a halfway measure that does not solve any problem in the long term. The PiS proposal to introduce a free choice between ZUS and open pension funds has been rejected. It assumed the departure from a bizarre solution in which the state first collects public contributions in the form of pension insurance payments, in the form of pension insurance contributions, deemed forced savings, and then privatises these funds, imposing thus on citizens such a way of spending their money.²⁷

Thus, the government's policy was strongly opposed and a discourse based on opposition and assurances of reversing the situation was built. It was also emphasised that every citizen should have the right of choice. For this reason the proposal of allowing citizens to choose between ZUS or open pension funds, an idea rejected by PO, was promoted. This proposal was justified by giving society greater flexibility over its way of life. In the parliamentary election campaign in 2011, PiS devoted much more attention to pension issues than they had in 2007. They *inter alia* planned to grant those holding the title of professor, conferred by the President of the Republic of Poland, similar pension rights to those enjoyed by judges and prosecutors; to grant an allowance to the old-age or disability pension for volunteer firefighters for their long service in Volunteer Fire Brigade units; to ensure pension security for parents taking care of disabled children, if this requires them to resign from professional work; to add a lifetime matrimonial pension to a lifetime funded pension; to introduce a *quota* indexation of old-age and disability pensions and an allowance for persons receiving benefits lower than PLN 1,300. PiS politicians admitted in their programme that ZUS activities should be improved – to ensure that citizens feel more comfortable, the number of customer service centres should be increased, their working hours should be adjusted to the needs of insured persons and entrepreneurs, and Internet services should be enabled. Attention was also drawn to promoting activity amongst those of retirement age so that they would not leave the labour market too quickly, at the risk of low pensions. It was also proposed to abolish limits on earning extra money by those entitled to an old-age pension in order to prevent the professional deactivation of such persons and the development of an informal economy, as well as to abolish such limits for those receiving pre-retirement allowances and benefits.

The pensions discussion conducted by PO proved that their politicians still intended – as in 2007 – to focus on systemic changes. This shows that their discourse

²⁷ See Prawo i Sprawiedliwość–Dokumenty, *op. cit.*

on pension issues was targeted rather at people familiar with the operation of the entire mechanism of receiving benefits and aware of the importance of other policy areas for the efficient functioning of the pension system. Above all, however, it should be noted that emphasised were the merits gained from the four-year term of office and used as an supporting argument in the new election campaign. Such a method of communication suggests that citizens satisfied with the existing pension rights, would certainly support PO in its efforts to develop the reforms that had been implemented and those that had been initiated. On the other hand, the discourse undertaken by PiS shows that even greater focus was being put on the individual than had been the case in the 2007 campaign and that the communication was targeted at individual citizens. Thanks to individual-group focused communication, citizens may identify themselves more willingly with the election programme of a given party. PiS applied this method, while at the same time highlighting the errors of the current government. However, the increasingly diverse messages emanating from both parties did not alter their support – for it remained at a level similar to that of 2007.

In his *exposé* of 18 November 2011, Prime Minister D. Tusk announced the continuation and extension of the pension reform undertaken by PO in the years 2007–2011. He proposed that as of 2013, the retirement age should be gradually increased to 67 years. “Therefore, we propose the following system: every four months we will extend the retirement age by one month, which means that every year we will work longer by three months” – he said in his speech.²⁸ This meant that 67 years was to have been reached in 2020 for men and 2040 for women. Interestingly, Łukasz Paradowski, in analysing the discourse in the Internet media regarding the pension reform carried out in 2012, noted that according to a survey conducted by Public Opinion Research Centre [Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej, CBOS] in 2012, “most Poles were unsatisfied with the proposal to increase the retirement age. 75% of women and 64% of men were strongly against this solution.”²⁹ The author also noted that individual online media conducted detailed analyses for raising the retirement age and prepared tables in this respect (these media included the most popular portals, such as *Interia.pl*, *Onet.pl*, *Gazeta.pl*, *WP.pl*, which commented on the changes on an ongoing basis).³⁰ However, as Ł. Paradowski notes, there were few comments from politicians themselves, especially in social media:

politicians who have their profiles on such websites as Facebook or *nk.pl*, after initiating the discussion on the changes in the pension system, to a large extent did not participate in the discussion. They could not or did not want to present arguments for and against the reform. At the same time, a negligible percentage of politicians who decided to take

²⁸ *Exposé premiera Donalda...*, *op. cit.*

²⁹ Ł. Paradowski, *Dyskurs w mediach internetowych dotyczący reformy emerytalnej w 2012 roku*, “Nowe Media” 2013, No. 4, p. 56.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 62–66.

part in the discussion only repeated slogans known from other media. They could not justify their position.³¹

This type of behaviour was not to have a positive impact on the perception of the introduced changes. In an interview conducted by Paweł Pieniążek from “Krytyka Polityczna”, Krzysztof Hegemajer noted that an increase in the retirement age was not necessary, but it was important that the retirement age for women and men was equalised and that funds for future pensions were saved in the state budget.³²

2015 was a time of leadership change on the Polish political scene. The parliamentary election held on 25 October 2015 ended with PiS winning with 37.58% support and PO in second place with a score of 24.05%. What had both parties proposed to improve in the situation of pensioners in Poland, and what impact could this have had on the election result?

During the election campaign, PO postulated compulsory social insurance coverage for contracts of mandate (on the total remuneration in this respect), which would guarantee higher future benefits. The issue of prolonging professional activity to make the retirement age equal for women and men and amounting to 67 years had returned.

Without this reform, weakening the negative effects of the ageing population, the number of people of working age would decrease by 5 million by 2040. Reducing the retirement age again would condemn millions of Poles to starvation pensions and ruin the state's finances.³³

There was also an idea to upgrade the pension system with a more widespread third pillar.

In the PiS election programme called *Zdrowie, rodzina, praca. Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwości 2014* [Health, family, work. The Law and Justice Programme 2014] announced before the 2015 election, once again – as four years previously – there were allegations regarding the government's actions in the area of pensions:

The government completely disregards social dialogue [...]. Despite strong opposition, it hits pensions, raises the retirement age in a very limited way, often ridiculing the poorest part of society.³⁴

As a counterargument, it was announced that protection against dismissal from work would be maintained for 4 years before reaching the retirement age, that the period of care for a small child would be included in the pension insurance period, that the

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

³² See P. Pieniążek, *Wyższy wiek emerytalny? Przede wszystkim wyższe emerytury*, “Krytyka Polityczna” 22 February 2012, <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/wyzszy-wiek-emerytalny-przede-wszystkim-wyzsze-emerytury/> (online access: 31.7.2019).

³³ See M. Stopka, *Polska przyszłości. Program Platformy Obywatelskiej RR*, 2015, <http://www.michalstopka.pl/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Polska-Przyszlosci-Program-PO.pdf> (online access: 31.7.2019).

³⁴ See *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość—Dokumenty*, *op. cit.*

retirement age would be reduced (which was described as not forcing people to work until the age of 67, but only creating such a possibility for those who would like to remain in the labour market), and that citizens would be able to choose between ZUS and open pension funds. Everyone should decide on their own whether they want to transfer part of their contributions to open pension funds. A separate pension system for the military was also proposed.

Definitely, the election programmes of both parties during the campaign before the parliamentary election in 2015 maintained a line of arguments similar to those of previous years, however, the issue of the pension system was presented in a more specific, matter-of-fact language, using substantive arguments. Once again, there was the juxtaposing of two ideas: the position of the ruling party wishing to maintain power and proving that the implemented changes in pensions were correct and had improved the system; and the position of the opposition party, criticising government ideas, proposing proprietary solutions regarding pensions. A comparison of programmes for all three years of election campaigning is presented in Table 1. It shows that both groupings used communicative language, accessible to the average recipient. The differences mainly consist in the proposals of both parties and their arguments – putting the system (PO) or the citizen (PiS) at the centre. For both parties, the discourse on pension issues was built either on goals already achieved or on criticism of the predecessor's government. Depending on the election campaign year, the arguments were expanded on or made more concrete, consistently describing the position of the party and contributing to the creation of views and the image of reality by society.

After winning the election, Prime Minister Beata Szydło said in her *exposé*:

In the long run, we will have a serious debate on the pension system. The decision will depend on citizens themselves. We will ask citizens about all matters important to them.³⁵

She also announced a reduction in the retirement age – to 65 for men and 60 for women – and an attempt to increase the level of pensions. Since 2015, Law and Justice has not only reduced the retirement age as announced in its election programme, but also ensured four years of protection against dismissal for employees at pre-retirement age, an increase in the minimum pension,³⁶ as well as having introduced in 2019 the so-called maternity pensions (for mothers who have given birth to a minimum of four children).³⁷

35 *Exposé premier Beaty Szydło – stenogram*, 2015, <https://www.premier.gov.pl/expose-premier-beaty-szydlo-stenogram.html> (online access: 31.7.2019).

36 See L. Kostrzewski, *Pięć ważnych zmian w emeryturach w 2017 roku. Obniżony wiek emerytalny, waloryzacja po nowemu*, *Wyborcza.biz* 3 January 2017, <http://wyborcza.biz/biznes/1,147880,21197614,piec-waznych-zmian-w-emeryturach-w-2017-roku-obnizony-wiek.html> (online access: 31.7.2019).

37 See *Emerytura dla matek. Kto otrzyma świadczenie w ramach programu "Mama 4 Plus?"*, *Gazeta.pl* 18 January 2019, <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114883,24376574,emerytura-matczyna-kto-otrzyma-swiadczenie-w-ramach-programu.html> (online access: 31.7.2019).

Table 1. Civic Platform and Law and Justice programme regarding the pension system during pre-election campaigns for the years: 2007, 2011, 2015

	Civic Platform	Law and Justice
Most important assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continuation of pension benefits for persons on maternity and child-care leave, • limiting the possibility of early retirement, • equalisation of the retirement age for men and women, • raising the retirement age to 67 years, • introduction of bridging pensions, • establishment of institutions that would ensure the smooth functioning of the pension system, • increasing tax relief for persons voluntarily saving, • uniformed services pensions reform, • increasing the amount of granted old-age pensions, • transfer of state revenues from shale gas extraction to ensure the security of future pensions, • upgrading the pension system with a more common third pillar. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase in the level of old-age pensions, • introduction of bridging pensions, • introduction of tax relief within personal income tax for those who want to save, • transformations within ZUS, • citizens' freedom of choice between ZUS and open pension funds, • change of pension conditions for persons holding the title of professor, • allowance to the old-age pension for volunteer firefighters accrediting long service, • pension security for parents taking care of disabled children, who are forced to resign from work, • improvement in ZUS functioning, • promoting activity amongst people of retirement age and protection against dismissal from work for 4 years before reaching the retirement age, • abolishing the limits on earning extra money for those entitled to an old-age pension, • including the period of care of a small child to the pension insurance period, • retirement age: 60 years for women and 65 for men, • a separate pension system for military personnel.
Language of messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • simple and communicative, • targeted at different groups of recipients, • direct targeting of own position to the recipient, • moderately attacking its opponents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • simple and communicative, • targeted at different groups of recipients, • direct targeting of own position to the recipient, • strongly attacking its opponents.
Arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arguing that in the future the standard of living may improve in Poland, • funds to allow a decent standard of living in retirement must be found in the budget, • the increased retirement age guarantees higher benefits as well as higher activity and allows people to remain in the labour market, • the entire pension system must be improved to ensure that higher benefits are received in the future, • drawing attention to professional groups – uniformed services and personnel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a decent pension improves the seniors' standard of living, • criticism of the PO government – insufficient measures in the field of pension policy, the need for changes, • citizens must not have solutions imposed on them or be forced e.g., to save money simultaneously in ZUS and open pension funds, • focusing on family issues related to the pension system, • ZUS functioning should be improved, • drawing attention to professional groups: professors, military service personnel.

Source: own study

Summary

The article presents the views of two political parties with different programmes on issues of pensions – Civic Platform and Law and Justice, with a theoretical introduction based on a definition of political discourse. The concepts of both groupings were analysed in the context of three election campaigns – in 2007, 2011 and 2015. Issues discussed during each of them included pensions, however, new arguments were provided each year in an attempt to convince society of the proposed solutions. The political discourse of both parties shows their different positions and proposals for improving the pension system, in order to best serve its recipients. A comprehensive approach was contrasted with focus on the individual, while keeping in mind that the message should be as clear as possible and should reach every citizen. The differences in the narration of both parties consist in more (PiS) or less (PO) direct targeting of information at an individual citizen and paying attention to their particular problems and concerns. At the same time, each of these parties emphasised the importance of the quality of life of Poles and, in the slogans proclaimed during election campaigns, announced that after winning the election the standard of living would be better. The effectiveness of pre-election activities is reflected in the election results, which also show how PO and PiS formulate their message depending on the position they hold: those in power or those in opposition. The proposals regarding pension issues presented in the pre-election programmes were reflected in legislative activities performed by the government of PO (jointly with Polish People's Party) and by the subsequent PiS government, which resulted in pension changes in Poland, ones still continued in 2019.

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Dyskurs polityczny na temat spraw emerytalnych w programach wyborczych największych partii w Polsce

Dyskurs polityczny, jakim komunikują się z odbiorcami poszczególne partie polityczne czy sami politycy, jest dziś istotny w kontekście przekazu językowego dotyczącego ekonomii emerytalnej. Szczególnie zaobserwować możemy rozwój dyskursu politycznego w mediach, dzięki którym komunikaty skierowane przez polityków trafiają do odbiorców. To media dziś są pośrednikiem pomiędzy nadawcami politycznych komunikatów a ich odbiorcami, którymi są obywatele. Częstotliwość komunikatów o charakterze politycznym wzrasta w szczególności w okresie przedwyborczym. W artykule zostały zanalizowane treści pojawiające się w programach partii politycznych – Platformy Obywatelskiej oraz Prawa i Sprawiedliwości – w czasie kampanii przed wyborami parlamentarnymi w latach: 2007, 2011, 2015. Skupiono się na sprawach związanych z systemem emerytalnym, proponowanych zmianach oraz stanowiskach wskazanych ugrupowań w konkretnych latach. Z wyników analizy porównawczej wyłania się obraz dyskursu politycznego na temat spraw emerytalnych, który funkcjonuje w Polsce w XXI w., oraz jego ewolucji związanej ze zmianami zachodzącymi w społeczeństwie w wielu dziedzinach życia.

Słowa kluczowe: dyskurs, system emerytalny, kwestie emerytalne, dyskurs polityczny, emerytura