

## “The Art of Commerce According to American Norms”: Two Early Polish Language Texts on Selling and Salesmanship

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*Two Polish language books on selling and salesmanship, published in the United States between 1913 and 1920, are the subject of this study. These works are placed within the context of Polish settlement and business history in the U.S., as well as within the thriving distance education movement of the period. The books are analyzed with respect to their authors, publishers, and translated content and are compared to English language texts on selling and salesmanship written about the same time. Like other early writings on sales, advertising, and marketing, these Polish texts were disseminated through instruction outside institutions of higher education. Most important, they show how marketing thought may have served as an agent of immigrant acculturation to American norms.*

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According to Bartels (1962), the first book published in North America on the topic of selling and salesmanship was the *Science of Salesmanship* by P.L. Estabrook (Dallas: University Textbook Co., 1904). By 1910 five additional titles were in print and by 1920 the number had grown to 26. Several were written by leading scholars in the emerging field of marketing. These included *Practical Salesmanship* by Louis D. H. Weld (New York: Universal Business Institute, 1910), *Influencing Men in Business* by Walter Dill Scott (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1911), and *Retail Selling and Store Management* by Paul H. Nystrom (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., Inc., 1914). A widely held notion in this period regarded selling as something subjective and difficult to analyze, an “art” in other words (Bartels 1962). Still, the existence of these texts, not to mention their frequent references to the word “science,” indicated great confidence that successful techniques could be taught, principles established, and professionalization achieved. Major universities added courses on salesmanship to their expanding marketing curricula. Ohio State, for example, did so in the 1916-1917 school year, a decade after it offered its first classes in “Distribution of Products” (Bartels 1962).

Two more titles should be added to Bartels’ list up to 1920: *Sprzedawca czyli: Sztuka Prowadzenia Handlu Podług Systemów Amerykańskich (Salesman: The Art of Commerce According to American Norms)* by Józef

Mierzyński (1913-1914) and *Sprzedawnictwo Sklepowe (Store Salesmanship)*, third edition, by Bolesław Z. Urbanski (1919-1920). These books were written entirely in Polish, published in the U.S., and apparently targeted Polish speaking and reading immigrants. They are fascinating documents worthy of historical analysis for the following four reasons: 1) Heretofore, marketing historians have not identified any books on selling and salesmanship – or on any other marketing topic – written in the U.S. prior to 1920 in a language other than English. 2) These two books provide evidence of sophisticated business thinking among Polish immigrants who, as a group, were much more likely to be farmers, miners, and industrial laborers rather than entrepreneurs or professionals (Bukowczyk 1986; Lopata 1976; Pacyga 2003). 3) The books show further that commercial correspondence courses and self-instruction were used as a medium for disseminating early marketing thought into this immigrant population. 4) Finally, they raise the possibility that the emerging literature on selling and salesmanship served, through translation, as an agent for acculturating Poles into the American economic mainstream.

This last point requires further explanation because it introduces a theoretical dimension to the historical analysis. The acculturation of immigrants has long been problematic in the social science tradition of the U.S. In *Democracy in America*, for example, DeTocqueville (1835/1964, p. 124) observed the importance of knowledge and communication in the assimilation of diverse groups into one American people. The word “acculturation” was first used in 1880 to describe changes in Native American languages resulting from contact with European culture (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). Rudmin (2003) provides a thorough review of this large body of work. One seminal scholarly contribution to this literature with great relevance to the present study is Thomas and Znaniecki’s (1918) *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. This was the first comprehensive social-psychological theory of acculturation (Rudmin 2003). The empirical basis for this landmark study consisted of numerous written documents including several series of correspondence between members of Polish family groups living in America and in Europe. The authors showed how the organization of peasant primary groups – the family and the community – responded to the

forces of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. From a more cultural perspective “only very slowly did Polish peasants learn to think economically, in other words, to think in terms of bargaining, exchange, and the advantages to be gained from others” (Zaretsky 1996, p. xiii).

In marketing, acculturation has been approached primarily as an issue for consumer research where it has been defined as the “eclectic process of learning and selectively displaying culturally defined consumption skills, knowledge, and behaviors” (Penaloza 1989, p. 110). As a phenomenon that occurs at both the individual and group level, consumer acculturation has been conceptualized as growing out of tensions between a person’s origin and immigrant cultures. Consumer outcomes include assimilating new products and services, maintaining contacts with the origin culture, and resisting some aspects of materialistic U.S. culture (Peñaloza 1994). A full review of this literature is beyond the scope of the present paper and, in any event, most of this work has not been historical. One exception, however, is O’Guinn, Faber, and Rice (1985) who described how motion pictures were a very important agent for acculturating immigrants as consumers in the early 1900s. Inexpensive and enjoyable without knowledge of English, films conveyed the value of hard work and depicted the rewards of using money in the pursuit of leisure and consumption.

What has not been given due consideration is how early marketing thought itself might have served as a vehicle for acculturating immigrants. The idea of codifying and teaching advertising, sales, and marketing principles was cutting edge everywhere in the early 1900s, but particularly to new arrivals from Europe who may have only recently left farms and villages where economic and social relations had more in common with the pastoral 18<sup>th</sup> century than with the urban and modern 20<sup>th</sup> century. Because they lacked the English language skills necessary to read the mainstream literature listed in Bartels (1962) – not to mention the academic credentials and the money to attend the universities where it was being taught – ambitious Polish immigrants with middle-class aspirations could learn marketing concepts in their native tongue through self-education via correspondence schools by mail, the distance learning system of the time. Thus, acculturation theory provides a useful framework for interpreting the Mierzyński and Urbanski texts and the roles they may have played in disseminating marketing thought among an immigrant population.

The next two sections offer brief histories of Polish immigration to the United States, in particular the creation of an ethnic business community and publishing industry, and the role of correspondence education in disseminating early marketing thought. After these important historical contexts are established, the primary sources, translation, and analytical methods will be described. Subsequent

sections will then discuss the authors, publishers, and contents of the two books, compare them with the period’s mainstream English language literature on selling and salesmanship, explore their roles as vehicles of acculturation, and suggest future research possibilities.

## POLISH IMMIGRATION, BUSINESS, AND PUBLISHING

A handful of Poles came to the Jamestown colony in 1608 and, over the next 250 years, were followed by other individuals and small groups. The largest wave of Polish immigrants arrived in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. From 1850 until 1924 about two million settled permanently in the United States (Kuzniewski 1987). The exact number may never be known because the precursor to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service only recorded country of origin, not ethnicity. Poland had been repeatedly partitioned by Austria, Prussia, and Russia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and did not exist as an independent state between 1795 and 1918. The great majority of Polish immigrants moved to urban areas, Chicago above all, but also to Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, New York, and Pittsburgh. They worked in heavy industry (steel mills, iron foundries, slaughterhouses, refineries) and in coal mines and textile mills (Pacyga 2003). However, a good 10 percent or more pursued agricultural occupations and small farming enclaves ranged from central Texas, where Panna Maria (Virgin Mary) was founded in 1854, up to Polonia, Wisconsin, established in 1858 (Bukowczyk, 1986). Many immigrants referred to their communities as Polonia (Latin for Poland) or *Polonja Amerykańska* and the term Polonia was frequently used (and sometime still is) to describe Polish immigrants collectively. Their homeland was called *Polska* (Kantowicz 1975; Lopata 1976).

Mainly landless peasants and small landholders unable to make a decent living joined by smaller numbers of townspeople and skilled tradesmen, Polish immigrants were intent on establishing their own institutions (Bukowczyk 1986; Kantowicz 1977; Pacyga 2003). They formed their own Catholic parishes and parochial schools, hospitals and asylums for the sick and needy, and death-benefit societies. Religious women provided much of the labor and some of the management for these charitable organizations. Financing came from two rival fraternal organizations, the Polish Roman Catholic Union of America (1873) and the Polish National Alliance (1880). In 1875, the Rev. Vincent Barzynski, a tireless organizer of Polish immigrants, created the *Bank Parafialny* (Parish Bank) for his parishioners at Chicago’s St. Stanislaus Koska and by 1937 the city had 30 such organizations (Granacki 2004). Because of their propensity to scrimp and save and then invest in real estate – home ownership rates for Poles exceeded that of Chicagoans overall – building and loan associations were important endeavors.

Polish business owners were a small minority within the larger immigrant community, which frequently harbored rural prejudices against engaging in commerce (Bukowczyk 1986). Because frugal working-class Poles preferred to eat dinners at home, the family restaurant business was not that attractive, nor were businesses that required a good deal of capital such as furniture and clothing stores. Instead Polish entrepreneurs became independent bakers, butchers, grocers, and saloonkeepers. They also catered to immigrant needs through boarding houses, print shops, photo studios, and funeral parlors. Many of these were marginal operations often run out of a front room by a working-class wife, but some proprietors achieved financial success and high status within their ethnic group. "The successful business owners translated immigrants' letters, held their money, found them jobs, kept them out of jail, and generally showed them how to get by in what must have been, for men and women who spoke little or no English, extremely bewildering surroundings" (Bukowczyk 1986, pp. 37-38).

In Chicago's near north side, its "Polish Downtown," a business district first emerged on Noble Street in the 1870s. Food processing and retailing – bakeries, sausage factories, groceries, meat markets, delicatessens, creameries and dairy stores, and confectionaries – predominated (Granacki 2004). By the 1910s, Polish-owned establishments had dispersed into larger accommodations along Division Street and Milwaukee and Ashland Avenues. In addition, numerous small shops operated from storefronts on residential streets. Drug and cigar stores, some restaurants, taverns (before Prohibition), undertakers, and photography studios were typical (Granacki 2004).

Polish businesses sometimes tried to capitalize on this ethnic solidarity. An ad in a Polish-language newspaper for Union Liberty Furniture Company encouraged readers to "Swój do Swego!" or "support your own" (Kantowicz 1977, p. 206). This term had antisemitic meaning since it was used by Polish nationalists in Europe to encourage the boycott of Jewish merchants in favor of Polish Catholics. In 1914, the Polish American Businessmen's Association of Chicago was founded. Its aims included supplying working capital, fostering cooperative purchasing, encouraging the study of modern business methods, and supplying professional training. Perhaps to counteract lingering peasant distrust of trade, one of the goals stated: "In order to give business a higher social standing, it will gather our best people and finest families about a group of our reliable merchants and industrialists and will create a general liking for business and respect for workers and their families in particular" (*Dziennik Zwiazkowy* 1914). Members could put the Association's seal in their windows.

Crucial to the spread of ideas was the Polish American ethnic press and publishing industry. The first Polish language newspaper in America was New York's *Echo* =

*Polski* (Echo from Poland), which appeared in 1863. Many more small papers were founded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and 170 were launched in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Kuzniewski 1987). Many of these did not last long and, in 1920, a total of 76 newspapers were being published in Polish in the U.S. (Jones 1960). In Chicago, a Polish-language publishing industry began in the 1870s when the Polish Roman Catholic Union and Polish National Alliance each launched their own newspapers. The *Dziennik Zwiazkowy* (*Polish Daily News*) began publishing in 1908. In the 1880s Ladislaus Dyniewicz and Ladislaus Smulski each started flourishing printing companies, the latter publishing a Polish Business Directory in 1905 (Kantowicz 1975). Other such ventures ranged from developing textbooks and other materials for Polish schools, to reprinting novels by Polish authors, to, as will be described, issuing books and pamphlets on salesmanship and store merchandising.

## EDUCATION BY CORRESPONDENCE

Americans have had a long history of distance education. The earliest evidence may be a notice in the *Boston Gazette*, March 20, 1738, placed by Caleb Philipps, a "Teacher of the New Method of Short Hand," which stated that "Persons in the Country desirous to Learn this Art, may by having the several Lessons sent Weekly to them, be as perfectly instructed as those that live in Boston" (cited in Holmberg 1986, p. 6). There is little additional evidence of correspondence courses until 1873 when Ann Eliot Ticknor, the daughter of a Harvard professor, founded the Boston-based Society to Encourage Studies at Home. Over the next 24 years her classical curriculum attracted some 10,000 students, mostly women, who corresponded monthly with teachers. Illinois Wesleyan University also began offering nonresident courses in 1873, soon to be followed by complete baccalaureate, master's and doctoral degree programs. The state of New York authorized academic degrees from 1883 to 1891 through the summer and correspondence programs of the Chautauqua College of Liberal Arts. The University of Wisconsin developed short courses and farmers institutes in 1885 and, when it was founded in 1890, the University of Chicago included university extension among its original five divisions. UC's first president, William Rainey Harper, had also headed Chautauqua and was a vigorous proponent of adult learning. In the realm of religious education, the Moody Bible Institute formed a correspondence department in 1901 that has continued to operate into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Holmberg 1986; MacKenzie, *et al.* 1968; Simonson *et al.* 2003).

More commercial ventures included a course with complete grading services founded in 1891 by Thomas J. Foster, the editor of the daily *Mining Herald* in eastern Pennsylvania. By 1900 his business – incorporated as the

International Correspondence Schools in 1901 – enrolled 225,000 students and grew to 2 million by 1920 (Simonson *et al.* 2003). Demand for specialized marketing education meant that this instruction too could be profitably sold. In the field of advertising, for example, Edward T. Page's public lectures on advertising in 1896 were so popular that he printed them for mail-order sales. By 1903 he had published *Advertising*, an entire textbook on the topic. Other early correspondence school books were George W. Wagenseller's *The Theory and Practice of Advertising*, which consisted of 50, single-page lessons, and similar books by S. Roland Hall written for International Correspondence Schools between 1900 and 1913 (Converse 1959; Coolsen 1947). In the related promotional area of selling and salesmanship, Arthur Frederick Sheldon privately published *The Art of Selling* in 1911. Sheldon's title page enumerated his targets as business colleges, high schools of commerce, Y.M.C.A. classes and private students, implying his book was intended as much for classroom use as for self-instruction.

Some contemporaries criticized commercial models of education for lacking professionalism, which had become a preoccupation of the Progressive era (Schultze 1982; Wiebe 1967). According to the head of the MacMartin Advertising Company of Minneapolis,

"When teaching law in colleges was first talked of, old lawyers shook their heads. College presidents 'couldn't see it,' and so special schools and unreliable 'business colleges' took it up. Then the old lawyers saw that their profession would soon be cheapened and they begged colleges to introduce such courses.

"This is exactly what has happened to the advertising profession to-day. Outside of the 'correspondence courses' there are probably 150 'Business Colleges' and Y.M.C.A.'s throughout the country that will 'graduate' advertising men in from ten to thirty lessons. This is not right." (cited in Whitney 1910, p. 59)

The solution was to add, as rapidly as possible, advertising and the allied branches of marketing education to the curriculums of American universities. Although Bartels (1962) duly ignored the above mentioned correspondence titles in his bibliography, they surely had a role in spreading marketing thought.

## SOURCES AND METHODS

During a visit to the Polish Museum of America in August, 2004, a museum assistant showed the author the Mierzyński and Urbanski books on salesmanship. Established in 1935 by the Polish Roman Catholic Union of America and located on Milwaukee Avenue in Chicago's

"Polish Downtown," this ethnic museum preserves and displays Polish and Polish-American artifacts, art, music, and literature. The two books have been in the museum's archival holdings at least since the time Wolanin (1950) referenced their titles in his *Polonica Americana*, an annotated catalogue of the collection. Following another visit in January, 2007, each book was photocopied in its entirety. A Polish-born student assistant fluent in the language and with some assistance from his family members later began the translation process. Translating did not progress word-for-word starting from the title pages, but rather began with chapter titles and major section headings and then, iteratively, drilled down to subheadings and specific passages of interest.

The analysis began by researching the backgrounds of the authors and publishers. This entailed a reading of translated internal evidence augmented by reference to external primary and secondary sources including *New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957*, the *U.S. 1910, 1920, and 1930 Federal Censuses*, *U.S. Passport Applications 1795-1925*, and *World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918* accessed via Ancestry.com (2008). Then the tables of contents of each work in Polish were described briefly and compared to English language texts on selling and retail salesmanship published during the same period and written by academics as well as one commercial author. Finally, the Mierzyński and Urbanski works were examined within a framework of acculturation theory. Two specific questions addressed were: Who were the readers of these books and what lessons about American norms were being conveyed to them?

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### The Authors

Thus far, no definitive information on Urbanski has been located beyond his name on a Polish language book on store salesmanship. Mierzyński has left a better documentary trail. He was born November 1, 1881 in Kovno, Russia (now Kaunas, Lithuania), emigrated to the U.S. in 1906, and became a naturalized citizen in 1921. He lived in Newark, NJ, Toledo, OH, Stevens Point, WI, and Chicago. According to the 1910 census, Mierzyński was working as a printer for a Polish paper in Stevens Point and supporting a wife and two young boys. His 1918 draft registration described him as tall with a medium build, gray eyes, and light brown hair and listed his occupation as a salesman for the Palatine Commercial Corporation (see below) (Ancestry.com 2008).

Wolanin (1950) catalogued nine entries under Mierzyński's name. The first listed work for Mierzyński is *Polacy w Nowym Yorku (Poles in New York)*, a 135 page book co-authored with Władysław Nalecz and published by A.

A. Paryski in 1910. Seven works cited are business correspondence courses and related topics, such as improving memory, character training, and public speaking. The ninth entry is a lecture on thrift. The last publication date for Mierzyński in Wolanin (1950) is 1920. The U.S. Library of Congress also lists Mierzyński as the author of *Przygody Lejbusia w Ameryce; czyli, Przez cierpliwość do szczęścia I bogactwa, wysoce zabawne i pouczające opowiadana* (*Lejbus' Adventures in America; that is, through patience to happiness and wealth, highly amusing and edifying stories*), a 32 page booklet published in 1912 by Widan Braci Worzałów (Worzałów Brothers Publishers) in Stevens Point.

Mierzyński moved his family to Chicago and became known as an author and publisher by the local Polish-American business community. According to articles published in *Dziennik Zwiazkowy* (1914), he was a founding director of the Polish American Businessmen's Association of Chicago. When called upon to address one of the opening meetings, he eloquently described the two major goals of the organization as profiting its members and serving the public (see Appendix 1). On a 1921 passport application Mierzyński was listed as a real estate salesman.<sup>1</sup> A New York Passenger List shows he and his wife returning to the U.S. from Cherbourg, France on the ship *Majestic*, passing through Ellis Island, November 4, 1924. Mierzyński, his wife, and young daughter made another trip to Poland, returning from Gdynia, September 28, 1932 on the ship *Scanmail* (Ancestry.com 2008). No further information about his life has been found.

## The Publishers

Wolanin (1950) lists the publisher for Mierzyński's text as published by the author. Interestingly, on an angle in the lower right corner of the title page of the copy examined is rubber-stamped "A. A. Paryski/publisher Ameryka-echo/1142-1156 Nebraska Ave. Toledo O." Antoni A. Paryski (1865-1935) was forced to flee from Warsaw in 1883 because of his anti-czarist activities. He emigrated to the U.S., worked for Polish newspapers in several Midwestern cities, and eventually became the best known Polish-American journalist and publisher of his day, sometimes referred to as the "Polish Hearst". His *Ameryka-Echo* newspaper introduced the sensationalism of yellow press journalism and by 1920 it had a circulation of 100,000 (Kuzniewski 1987). Paryski's connection with the Mierzyński book has not been determined, but Mierzyński did stay in Toledo at one point and Paryski may have had some connection with the printing of the book.

On its title page, the publisher of the Urbanski text is identified as Powszechna Szkoła Korespondencyjna Palatyn (Palatine Universal Correspondence School), 1521 Haddon Avenue, Chicago, Ill. Wolanin (1950), on the other hand, lists the publisher as Nakładem Polskiej

Korporacji Palatine (Edition of Polish Corporation Palatine) and in its description of its holding the Connecticut Polish American Archives (2008) calls the company Polska Korporacja Handlowa Palatine (Palatine Polish Business Corporation). Whatever its name, this company published a number of correspondence course texts, not just in salesmanship, but also in advertising, bookkeeping, business mathematics, and commercial geography (Wolanin 1950). The Urbanski copy examined was the third edition of 1920. However, both Wolanin and the Connecticut Archives date the book 1919 (the Polish Museum of America also owns an unbound copy); so perhaps it was really just the third printing.

## Contents

Mierzyński divided his book into five volumes, the first two published in 1913 and the remainder in 1914 (see Appendix 2). The first volume discussed the psychology of selling with strong emphasis on the health, appearance, and character of the salesman followed by an analysis of client categories and principles of persuasion. The other volumes addressed the responsibilities of four selling positions: store clerk, traveling salesman, office salesman, and sales manager. Each volume was numbered independently – respectively 72, 63, 32, 69, 76 pages long – and the book totaled 312 pages in length. A page or two of exam questions concluded each volume. Mierzyński's visual material consisted of business letters, return envelopes, and postcards; trademarks; newspaper and magazine advertisements; and pages from mail-order catalogs, all in Polish with just a smattering of English words. On page 67, Volume 4, a full-page Sears, Roebuck order form is written out in Polish. It is unknown which of these illustrations may have been created for the book and which were reproduced from ones actually used at the time.

Urbanski compiled his book from 18 different lessons, each number separately and ranging in length from 15 to 32 pages (379 pages in all). He divided the lessons into a series of sections numbered consecutively across the lessons from §1 through §287 (see Appendix 3). The lesson numbers inexplicably jump from 8 to 12 although the section numbers continue in proper sequence, except for §205 which is repeated twice as the last section of lesson 12 and the first in lesson 14. Like Mierzyński, Urbanski discussed the topics of selling and the salesman's character at length, but he also incorporated a good deal of material on the retail management and merchandising including store location, purchasing, organization, staffing, credit, calculating profits and losses, window displays, special sales, and, in two lessons, retail advertising. His book was very well-illustrated with line drawings and photographs. Lesson 14 on store organization contains numerous images

of store fronts and window displays and store interiors and furnishings. It even discusses proper store temperatures.

The writing styles of the authors differed considerably. Mierzyński's prose read like a lecture delivered in a conversational manner. Urbanski's writing was more modern and systematic like a true textbook. In their discussions of the salesman's character, on the other hand, both men quoted and paraphrased contemporary Americans, such as the physician and medical author, Nathan Oppenheim, and psychologists, William James and Walter Dill Scott. Urbanski also mentioned the 19<sup>th</sup> century historian, William Hickling Prescott, of whom biographies were published in 1904 by Rollo Ogden and in 1905 by Harry Thurston Peck. In their identically titled sections, "ability to speak well," Mierzyński (Volume 1, p. 33) and Urbanski (§72, p. 11) both quoted the exact same material from George H. Lorimer, an editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*. Lorimer's fictional *Letters of a Self-Made Merchant to His Son*, first printed in the magazine, were published in book form in 1902 and became a national best-seller.

### Comparisons with English Language Books

In order to compare the books in Polish with the English language literature on selling and salesmanship, the following texts were examined: *Marketing Methods and Salesmanship* by Ralph Starr Butler, Herbert F. DeBower, and John G. Jones (1914), *Retail Selling and Store Management* by Paul H. Nystrom (1916), and *The Art of Selling* by Arthur Frederick Sheldon (1911).<sup>2</sup> The Butler, DeBower, and Jones text was comprised of three parts. Part I: Marketing Methods was written by Butler, whereas Part II: Selling and Part III: Sales Management were written by DeBower and Jones. Three years later the publisher, New York's Alexander Hamilton Institute, divided them into separate volumes on *Marketing Methods* by Butler and *Salesmanship and Sales Management* by Jones (1917).<sup>3</sup> DeBower and Jones' first ten chapters (154 pages) on selling and salesmanship will be used for the comparative analysis. Nystrom developed his 280 page book while teaching a course in Retail Selling offered by the Extension Division of University of Wisconsin during the years 1910, 1911, and 1912 (Nystrom 1914). Sheldon's book, 183 pages in length, was published by The Sheldon University Press in Libertyville, Illinois. Sheldon operated a thriving private business school in downtown Chicago (*The Rotarian*, 1976).

The contents of these two Polish and three English texts had much in common, but also some differences (see Table 1). All five books discussed the selling process, persuasive appeals, and characteristics of the salesman, but arranged and labeled the topics differently. The materials were quite practical and presented in straightforward lists. Only Nystrom, who had just completed his Ph.D. at the

University of Wisconsin (Jones and Monieson 1990), included psychological theory. Mierzyński and Sheldon organized their discussions according to different classes of salesmen: store clerk, traveling salesman, office salesman and sales manager in Mierzyński and retail, wholesale, specialty, and promotional salesmen in Sheldon. By specialty, Sheldon meant selling – in the long tradition of the peddler and the insurance agent – directly to consumers, whereas promotional salesmen found private investors for enterprises. Nystrom and Urbanski have much more material on retail store operations and merchandising. One big difference was in the amount of visual material in the different books – the English language texts had almost none whereas the two Polish texts contained quite a few illustrations.

To what extent, if any, did the English language literature on selling and salesmanship influence Mierzyński and Urbanski? Although census records indicate Mierzyński could speak English, no evidence has been found proving that either man could read or write English well, and few English language words can be found interspersed within the Polish copy they wrote. Neither Polish language book contained scholarly citations or a bibliography for further reading, but that was typical. The emerging marketing literature of the time only infrequently referenced other works and none of the English language books analyzed cited their sources. Urbanski may have drawn from his Polish predecessor since he could have read Mierzyński and, as shown in Wolanin (1950), both authors were connected to the same publisher. Yet, both could have developed much of their material from scratch just as writers in English were doing. Nystrom (1914, pp. v-vii), for example, acknowledged the helpful suggestions he received from trade periodicals, from officials of wholesale and manufacturing companies, and especially from the hundreds of salesmen and saleswomen throughout Wisconsin who were his students.<sup>4</sup>

**TABLE 1**  
**COMPARISON OF TOPICAL COVERAGE IN EARLY POLISH AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTS ON SELLING AND SALESMANSHIP**

Topic	Mierzyński (1913-14)	Urbanski (1919)	Sheldon (1911)	Nystrom (1914)	DeBower & Jones (1914)
Salesman's appearance and character	Much	Much	None	Much	Much
Selling process	Much	Much	Some	Much	Much
Persuasive appeals	Much	Much	Some	Some	Much
Psychology and theory	None*	None	None	Much	None
Business writing	Much	None	Some	None	None
Store merchandising	Some	Much	None	Much	Some
Social domain	None	None	None	Some	None
Visual Materials	Some	Much	None	None	None

NOTES: Topical coverage categories: None, Some (less than a chapter), Much (about a chapter or more)

\*Although Mierzyński's first volume was entitled the "Psychology of Selling," the discussion was not theoretical, but rather examined the salesman's appearance and character and the selling process (see Appendix 2).

One finding to emerge from this analysis contradicts conventional thinking about this period. Wilkie and Moore (2003), who refer to 1900-1920 as the first era of marketing thought development, contend that "the societal domain was an implicit issue in the body of marketing thought" (p. 118). This may have been true for the distribution literature they examined, and also for the institutional school of thought pioneered by Richard T. Ely and his students at the University of Wisconsin (Jones and Monieson 1990), but except for the last chapter in Nystrom (1914) on the "relation of the store to its sales people and to the public" (pp. 266-280), none of the other five books on selling and salesmanship, either in English or in Polish, discussed marketing and society issues. Their contents were highly practical and, to a lesser degree, managerial, and were not concerned with public policy or social responsibility issues. Ironically, Mierzyński talked about serving the Polish people in his 1914 comments to the Polish American Businessmen's Association (see Appendix 1) and Arthur Sheldon was a pioneer Rotarian who in a 1910 speech at their first convention coined the association's motto: "He profits most who serves best" (*The Rotarian* 1976), but neither author incorporated these pro-social sentiments into their texts.

## ACCULTURATION

Polish immigrants became acculturated to American life through a variety of agents including family, friends, the media, and institutions (Peñaloza 1994). Some of these agents, such as Polish-language newspapers, corresponded to their culture of origin and others, such as silent films, to their new country. In addition, Poles rubbed shoulders with other immigrant groups, such as Polish Jews and fellow

eastern European Catholics (Pacyga 2003). All of these forces surely dwarfed whatever acculturative effects two textbooks on selling might have wrought. That said, the Mierzyński and Urbanski books targeted a very specific audience within U.S. Polonia and delivered a clear message about the expected American norms of commerce and salesmanship. These norms differed considerably from the ones typically brought over from Europe.

## The Audience

As many as one-third of all Polish immigrants prior to World War I were illiterate and many of the rest possessed only grammar schooling. Still, local immigrant communities had a fair number of relatively educated residents (Lopata 1976). By the 1890s libraries had been established by Chicago parishes and secular organizations (Pacyga, 2003) and the children of immigrants could study Polish in college preparatory secondary schools (Granacki 2004). Polish language newspapers printed as many as 20,000 copies (Kuznewski 1987) and their combined circulations must have been in the 100,000s by the time the Mierzyński and Urbanski books were published. Thomas and Znaniecki's (1918) sources were all written documents. Thus, an audience literate in Polish existed. However, the number of Polish-reading business owners and managers was much more limited and few Poles chose occupations in sales. According to a sample from the 1920 census, only 1.7% of Polish-speaking immigrants and their children were listed as "salesmen" in stores, compared to 2.7% of the Czechs, 5.2% of the Italians, and 59.7% Yiddish-speaking groups studied (Bukowczyk 1986).

Nevertheless, by reaching small numbers of readers in a variety of cities across the U.S., an audience large enough to make publishing these books worthwhile should have existed. Their internal evidence, as well as the annotations in Wolanin's (1950) bibliography, suggest that the Mierzyński and Urbanski materials were used, in either book or serial form, as lessons for correspondence courses. Unfortunately, no evidence has been found to document if the authors actually interacted with their learners by, for example, grading answers to the exam questions at the end of chapters. The examples in the Polish Museum of America archives do not have any underlines or marginal notes that a student might have made.

### Commerce According to American Norms

The instructional contents of the Mierzyński and Urbanski books paralleled that of the comparable books in English, but for the Polish immigrant readers these topics also conveyed the deeper values and expectations of mainstream American society.<sup>5</sup> These readers came from a society where many peasants lived according to familial economies in which limited opportunities existed for engaging in buying and selling (Thomas and Znaniński 1918, p. 184). Although some Polish immigrants may have acquired relatively sophisticated economic attitudes in Europe, many brought only rudimentary ideas about market exchange, about buying low and selling high, and about developing ongoing relationships with customers. Thus, learning the role of the seller was something of a new experience.

Both texts carefully delineated the personal characteristics of the American salesman. Among a litany of desirable attributes, the salesman needed to be particularly concerned about his health and appearance. He regulated his breathing, controlled his food and water intake, got adequate sleep and physical exercise, attended to his personal hygiene, and took care in his choice of clothes and their style, material, and color. American nativists had long been critical of the appearance of immigrants and doubted that they could properly assimilate (Jones 1960). During the highly charged atmosphere of World War I, however, ideas changed and a crusade for "100 percent Americanization" gained traction (Higham 1967). This may have influenced Urbanski who in lesson 2, section §46, listed as appropriate for the salesman the 13 virtues ranging from abstinence to humility that Benjamin Franklin proposed in his *Autobiography*.

Readers were taught the behaviors appropriate of salesmen. In his second volume, "Store Clerk," Mierzyński outlined the sequence of activities in a typical sales situation: greeting the customer, establishing conversation, presenting the product, maintaining eye contact, getting the sale, promoting additional products, overcoming the obstacles, and saying farewell to the customer. Urbanski's lessons 5, 6, and 7 covered similar material. In both books

the salesman was to be an economic actor, an initiator and a doer. This contrasted with the European experience where, as Thomas and Znaniński (1918) observed,

"... the same passivity characterized the peasant's part in economic life. Well adapted to the old conditions of the local farming economy, he stood powerless, ignorant and isolated in face of the great economic phenomena of the external world, and even in face of the small and informal Jewish economic organizations of the neighboring town. In this line his present evolution is most rapid and is particularly important in its psychological consequences (p. 144).

The salesman needed to know his product, but just as important he needed to know how to assess potential customers. Mierzyński (p. 37) described three general personality types – phlegmatic, nervous, and brisk – and then specified nine categories of clients (p. 39). In lesson 4, section §86, Urbanski also wrote about the above three personality types and then, in section §91, he introduced 18 categories of clients. Making such quick and calculating assessments about strangers may have seemed very different and impersonal to immigrants who grew up in places where everyone was known to everyone else. Another new concept was the creation of an ongoing relationship with a customer. For the Polish peasant "Each act of buying or selling is a single, isolated action, not connected with other actions of the same class. The principle of cheap buying and dear selling is therefore not limited by any idea of the future, by any endeavor to get a class of steady customers" (Thomas and Znaniński 1918, p. 187).

In his description of the "office salesman" in Volume 4, Mierzyński discussed how to write and send business letters at some length and gave numerous examples of this type of communication. Although as many as a third of all Polish immigrants were illiterate, writing letters to family in Europe was still quite common. Thomas and Znaniński (1918) analyzed the form and function of these "bowing letters" in detail (pp. 303-315) and used them extensively to gain insight into ethnic culture and social organization. In this facet of acculturation, a cultural practice was not being superseded by American norms, but rather was being shaped and channeled for commercial marketing purposes.

### CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The early literature on selling and salesmanship not only educated native-born, English-speaking Americans, but also reached an immigrant community through Polish language texts. Whereas marketing knowledge could be conveyed in English through university instruction and commercial business colleges, no evidence of classroom



teaching in Polish has been discovered and so marketing materials probably reached this audience at a distance, possibly through correspondence education. For the immigrant group, the Mierzyński and Urbanski books served the dual purposes of informing readers about selling and merchandising practices and also of acculturating them about the character and behavior of salesmen and market exchange within the framework of American business norms.

Much remains to be learned about the books, their authors and publishers, and the target audience. The number of editions, size of print runs, pricing, and distribution are all unknown. Additional trips to the Chicago area may be necessary to search for records not available online. According to the Polish Museum of America (2008), much of its archival collection has yet to be catalogued; so additional primary sources may be available. In addition, an obvious line of future research would entail finding whether similar texts and correspondence school materials on selling and salesmanship or, for that matter, on other branches of marketing thought, were written for other immigrant groups in the United States. Given the rich history of immigration, ethnic business enterprises, and foreign language publishing in the U.S., it would be surprising if these did not exist.

Finally, marketing historians need to rethink the dissemination of marketing thought pre-1920. Bartels' book lists are incomplete and much material reached the public via high schools, Y.M.C.A.s, business colleges, correspondence education, and other forms of self-instruction. The ideas developed by professors were important in developing the field, but relatively few people went to universities in this period. Thus, further research on the early history of marketing thought outside academia would seem to be desirable.

## NOTES

1. On her separate application, Mierzyński's wife, Helen, was listed as a newspaper correspondent for New York's *Nowy Swiat* (*The New World*) and the stated purpose of her travel was to be relief work in and reportage from the recently reconstituted Polish Republic.

2. *Influencing Men of Business: The Psychology of Argument and Persuasion* by Walter Dill Scott (1911) was also consulted, but not used for comparative purposes. Concerned with the rhetoric of persuasion and the application of psychological principles to the selling process, Scott's book was not a teachable text on selling and salesmanship and appears to be something of a rehash of his ground-breaking, 1903 book, *The Theory of Advertising*.

3. In a review of all three books, Yale University economist Ray B. Westerfield (1917) stated: "Together these books make the best existing treatment of their field;

in fact they are quite alone in their field, and the importance of this field is being recognized more and more; as "schools of commerce" are instituted in our universities the need of textbooks for courses in these lines is being acutely felt" (p. 629).

4. When he lived in Stevens Point, ca. 1910, Mierzyński could possibly have met Nystrom if the latter had visited the State Normal School (founded in 1894 and later renamed the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point) while teaching retail selling through extension in the years 1910-1912.

5. During this period, poor whites from Appalachia and blacks from southern backwaters may have experienced similar cultural learning when migrating to the industrial cities of the north. William I. Thomas, who was born in 1863, once wrote: "I was born in an isolated region of Old Virginia, 20 miles from the railroad in a social environment resembling that of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and I consequently feel that I have lived in three centuries, migrating gradually toward the higher cultural areas" (cited in Zaretsky 1996, p. xi).

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