

## REVIEW OF *MASTERING POLISH WITH TWO AUDIO CDS*

### Mastering Polish with Two Audio CDs

Albert Juszczak

Third Edition

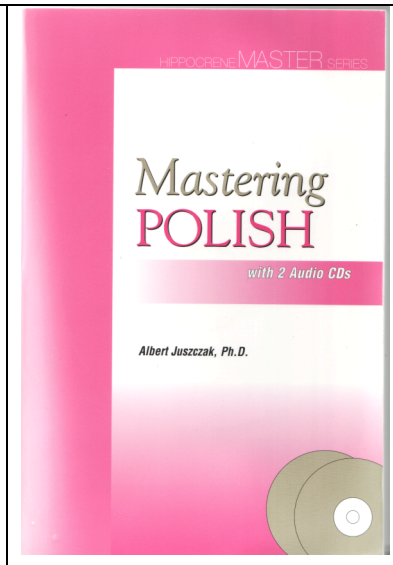
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### Review by Pawel Szudarski, Teacher Training College of Foreign Languages, Wrzesnia, Poland

Polish is undoubtedly a less frequently taught language. This becomes especially evident if the present status of the Polish language is compared to that of Spanish, French, or English. Therefore, it is sometimes hard to find reference materials for individuals who wish to learn Polish, as textbooks are either badly organized or do not provide reliable information about the structure of the language. Hence, the very fact that *Mastering Polish*, a comprehensive course aimed at a US audience, has appeared on the American market (now in its third edition with audio CDs) is very promising, especially for those who for various reasons have decided to begin their adventure with this language. According to the author, the course "assumes no previous knowledge of the language," and it can be used both as a self-study and a classroom resource book (back cover). Based on the language functions and topics, as well as the grammar content covered in the book, one can conclude that it is aimed at beginning level adult learners.

The course is comprised of a book and two accompanying CDs. As the course is based on a functional approach to language learning, there is a lot of challenging material in the form of various activities and grammatical explanations to explore in all twenty-one chapters. The chapters follow a very similar pattern of presenting language input: a conversation (in some chapters there are two conversations, all of which are recorded on the CDs), grammatical and/or lexical insights, and exercises. It is assumed by the author that the aim of the course is "to provide a student with a general understanding of the language's overall structure as well as the means for basic communication" (back cover) and to help students become able to "read and write basic material using correct grammar and syntax" (p. 13). It seems that the way *Mastering Polish* is organized serves these purposes, making learners work with more and more structurally complex tasks. However, the book contains no graphic support of the written text. This complete lack of pictures or photos throughout the whole course is even more striking when one reads on the back cover that "everyday situations and local customs are explored through dialogues, newspapers extracts, drawings and photos." Certainly a more user-friendly and attractive layout of the course could cater to the needs of many students, especially those who are visual learners.

## CHAPTER NINE

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## CONVERSATION I: At Jagiellonian University.

Państwo Waters idą piechotą do Wierzyńka na obiad z panem  
 1 2 1  
 Jastrzębskim. Jutro pójdą na Uniwersytet Jagielloński. Ojciec  
 2 2 3  
 Jacka Waters skończył Uniwersytet Jagielloński—przed Drugą  
 1 2 3 4  
 Wojną Światową. Dla Jacka to będzie wzruszająca wizyta. Zobacz  
 1  
 Collegium Maius—bardzo stary budynek, gdzie studiowali—  
 2 3 4 5 5 6 7 8  
 pięćset lat temu—Dr. Faust i Mistrz Twardowski.

Jill Waters: 1 2 3 4  
 Od czego jutro zaczniemy naszą wizytę na  
 Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim?

Jack Waters: 1 2 2  
 Najpierw spotkamy się z Rektorem w jego  
 kancelarii. A potem pójdziemy do Collegium  
 1  
 Maius. Tam jest sławne muzeum.

Jill Waters: 1  
 Słyszałam o Collegium Maius.

Jack Waters: 1 2  
 Zobaczymy tam dużo ciekawych pamiątek  
 z minionych wieków.

Jill Waters: 1  
 A potem co zrobimy?

Jack Waters: 1  
 Potem pójdziemy na obiad, i na Wawel.

Jill Waters: 1 2 3 4  
 Czy jest jeszcze smocza jama?

Jack Waters: Oczywiście. Ciągłe jest popularną atrakcją  
 dla turystów.

Państwo Waters doszli do rynku. Są przy głównym wejściu do  
 1 2 3  
 Wierzyńka. Ich spacer się skończył. Teraz czeka ich przyjemny  
 4  
 wieczór.

\* \* \*

The Waterses walk to Wierzynek for dinner with Mr. Jastrzębski.

Tomorrow they will go to Jagiellonian University. Jack Waters' 2 1 2 2  
 1 3 3  
 father graduated from Jagiellonian University before World War

II. This will be an emotional visit for Jack. They will see 1 2

Collegium Maius—a very old building where Dr. Faustus and 5 5 6  
 7 8 1 2 2 3 4  
 Master Twardowski studied five hundred years ago.

Jill Waters: 1 & 2 4 4 4 4  
 How [lit. from what] are we going to begin  
 our visit to Jagiellonian University  
 3  
 tomorrow?

Figure 1. Sample conversational text from *Mastering Polish*.

As far as the conversations in the book are concerned, they are first presented in Polish and then translated into English, which might be perceived by some learners (and teachers) as following a grammar-translation method approach to teaching the language. In Chapters 1 and 2, the conversations are additionally preceded by introductions in English, informing students about the events that are taking place in the conversation situations. This is most likely done intentionally to make the very beginning of the course more approachable and comprehensible, which might be important for those who have no prior knowledge of Polish. All conversations (both in Polish and English) are supported by small numbers placed above the text, which help learners follow the word order as they look at the English translation of the conversations in Polish. This could be a very useful feature because the flexible word order in Polish might be a challenge for learners. Further, giving the impression that the course follows a grammar-translation approach, the instructions for all exercises are also given in English. In most contemporary language textbooks, in contrast, instructions, and sometimes even grammatical explanations, are presented in the target language, as it is commonly believed by contemporary authors of language materials that even procedural language constitutes a valuable source of input for students developing language skills (e.g., Gotteri & Michalak-Gray, 1997).

Undoubtedly, the two CDs accompanying the book are very helpful for learners following this course, since many of them may have few other possibilities of listening to fluent speakers of Polish. The recordings provide Polish spoken in both formal (e.g., a conversation with a dean at the university) and informal situations (e.g., small talk with friends at a party). However, the pace of the dialogs in *Mastering Polish* does not resemble the way native Polish speakers communicate, at least not in the first chapters of the course. It is understandable that the author might not want to overwhelm students at the very

beginning of the course by making them listen to the fast and contracted speech of native speakers of Polish. Yet, according to the principles of the communicative approach to language learning and teaching, completely non-authentic or semi-authentic materials should generally be avoided since they are not as effective a source of language input for students as samples of natural speech (Nunan, 1999). Similarly, Brown (2001) argues that "language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes" (p. 43).

Additionally, it is puzzling why the author of *Mastering Polish* did not decide to record more exercises on the CDs. For example, the presentation of ordinal numbers in Chapter 4 could have been supplemented with a model recording of all of the numbers. Pronunciation is a vital aspect of becoming fluent in any foreign language, and in the case of Polish, with its consonant clusters that have no equivalent in English, it is a demanding task for learners to pronounce certain words without having any models to listen to (this would be particularly important because the book and CDs can, according to the author, be used as a self-study course). Since the CDs do contain the recordings of the example sentences from some tasks (e.g., track 2 on the first CD – "Asking questions in Polish"; track 4 on the first CD – "Forms of address"), one may wonder why *Mastering Polish* was not enriched with more exercises recorded in a similar way.

In the introduction to the course, the author states that one of the aims of *Mastering Polish* is for learners to become able to participate in conversations in the most common situations. In this regard, the course truly offers an impressive range of topics ("At the auto repair shop", "At the town market", "Visiting an art gallery"), which enables students to continually expand their vocabulary in Polish. What is more, the expressions that students are exposed to in this course should help them function effectively in a Polish-speaking environment and use the language for communicative purposes; e.g., ways of asking about the price or time, ordering food in a restaurant, or expressing their personal feelings.

However, some vocabulary items presented by the author in this course are very rarely used by native speakers of Polish today; for example, the greetings used in Chapter 14 – *dziatki*, 'kids'. No contemporary Polish speaker would use this expression as a way of welcoming guests at a party. Furthermore, there are also occasional mistakes in *Mastering Polish*; for example, *napewno* 'certainly' in Chapter 7 should be spelled as two separate words. Additionally, the course does not adequately depict contemporary Polish society. Unlike other courses for learners of Polish (e.g., Miodunka, 2000), *Mastering Polish* does not reflect all the changes that have taken place in Poland since the political transformation of 1989. This is visible when one looks at the prices of the products and services referred to in this course: they were accurate in 1995 (before the denomination reform of the Polish currency was implemented) but not in 2007. This might lead to some misconceptions about Poland for those who treat this course as a reliable source of information.

As far as language practice is concerned, *Mastering Polish* offers a wide variety of exercises. The tasks that students are asked to perform include translating from Polish into English (either short phrases or full sentences), dictation units on the CDs, whose aim is to further enhance students' ability to understand spoken Polish, and grammatical practice (e.g., providing correct verb forms in various tenses, or giving plural forms of nouns). Furthermore, what appears to be particularly useful is the review sections and self-assessment tests that follow Chapters 5, 10, 15, and 21. They allow students to consolidate the material covered throughout previous chapters and diagnose weak and strong areas in their Polish language skills.

In addition, *Mastering Polish* asks students to write paragraphs and very short essays, since the author believes that writing ideas in a foreign language is "probably the best way of polishing and assimilating knowledge of how the language works" (Introduction, p. 14). Writing topics cover many typical communicative situations, for example, "the first day in school", "visiting a new town", and "your most recent experience at a music concert". However, the writing exercises are not supported by any pre-writing activities or models of compositions in Polish that students could use as guidelines. The course does not provide any hints on how writing assignments should be approached, and, even though the

author points out that students should have little difficulty in finding people fluent in Polish who might give them feedback on their writing, this might in fact not always be the case for American learners. Therefore, presenting model essays in Polish would have been a good idea. If *Mastering Polish* is used by beginners who are expected to write in Polish as early as in the first chapter, more emphasis should have been placed on the preparation of learners for these tasks.

The glossary from the course and the answer key to the exercises, which are placed at the end of the book, are an asset of *Mastering Polish*. The author avoided lengthy vocabulary lists after each chapter, as can often be found in language-learning materials. Instead, all the words used in the course are shown together with their meanings in the alphabetically organized Polish-English glossary. Also, the answers to the exercises from all the chapters can be checked in the key, which is an important aspect of a self-study book.

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**biekitny/a/e** (adj.): blue  
**bogaty/a/e** (adj.): rich  
**bohaterka**: heroine  
**boleć**: to be in pain; to suffer  
**bolesny/a/e**: painful  
**Bóg**: God  
**Boże Narodzenie**: Christmas (lit.: Christ's birth)  
**brak mi**: I lack  
**brakować**: to be missing  
**brama**: gate  
**brat**: brother  
**broń**: weapon (also used in plural sense of: arms, weapons)  
**broszurka**: (a small) brochure  
**brydż**: bridge (the card game)  
**brzeg**: (noun) edge  
**brzęczeć**: to buzz  
**brzoskwinia**: peach  
**brzydki/a/e** (adj.): ugly  
**budować**: to build  
**budynek**: building  
**but**: shoe  
**butelka**: bottle  
**być**: to be  
**być wziętym**: to be driven (in a vehicle)  
**być winnym**: to be guilty;  
**być winnym (komuś coś)**: to owe (something to someone)

## C

**całować się**: to kiss each other; to kiss oneself  
**cały/a/e** (adj.): whole, entire  
**cebula**: onion  
**cebulka**: small onion

**cel**: aim; goal  
**cena**: price  
**centrum**: center  
**ceramiczny/a/e** (adj.): ceramic  
**chce mi się**: I feel like  
**chcieć**: to want to  
**chętnie**: gladly  
**chleb**: bread  
**chłodno**: coldly; coolly  
**chłop**: peasant; also used to mean: a big strapping fellow  
**chłopiec**: boy  
**chmura**: cloud  
**chmurzyć**: to cloud over  
**chodnik**: sidewalk; runner  
**chodzić**: to walk  
**chory/a/e**: sick  
**chować się**: to hide oneself  
**chrapać**: to snore  
**chronić**: to defend, protect  
**chudnąć**: to lose weight; to slim down  
**chustka**: kerchief; handkerchief  
**chyba**: perhaps, probably  
**ciasto**: cake, dough  
**ciastko**: cookie  
**ciągle**: constantly  
**cicho**: quietly  
**ciebie**: you (2nd pers. sing. gen. & acc.)  
**ciekaw/a/e**: interesting, curious; **być ciekawym**: to be curious  
**cielak**: calf  
**cielę**: calf  
**cielęcy/a/e**: veal; calf-like (adj.)  
**ciemno**: dark (adjective); darkness (adverb)

**cień**: shadow; shade  
**ciepło**: warmly  
**ciepły/a/e**: warm  
**cieszyć się**: to be delighted; to delight in (something)  
**cieśnina**: strait; narrows  
**ciężki/a/e**: heavy  
**ciocia**: aunt  
**co roku**: every year  
**co za**: what a  
**cokolwiek**: whatever  
**coraz więcej i więcej**: more and more  
**coś**: something  
**córka**: daughter  
**cukier**: sugar  
**czapka**: cap  
**czar**: charm  
**czarny/a/e**: black  
**czas**: time  
**czasami**: now and then; sometimes  
**czegoś**: something  
**czek**: check  
**czekać**: to wait  
**czerwiec**: June  
**czerwony/a/e**: red  
**czesać**: to comb  
**czesać się**: to comb oneself  
**cześć!**: hi!  
**część**: part  
**często**: often; frequently  
**członek**: member  
**człowiek**: man; human being  
**czołg**: (battle) tank  
**czterdzieści**: forty

**czternaście**: fourteen  
**cztery**: four  
**czterysta**: four hundred  
**czuć, że**: to feel that  
**czule**: cordially  
**czwartek**: Thursday  
**czy**: if, whether  
**czyj**: whose  
**czytać**: to read  
**czytelnik**: reader  
**ćwiczyć**: to practice

## D

**dać**: to give  
**dać buźki**: to give a kiss (colloquial)  
**dach**: roof  
**daleko**: far (adv.)  
**dawno**: long ago (adv.)  
**dawny/a/e**: old, old-time (adj.)  
**dąb**: oak  
**dedykacja**: inscription; autograph  
**dekolt**: low cut neckline (on clothing)  
**delfin**: porpoise  
**demokracja**: democracy  
**dentysta**: dentist  
**detektyw**: detective  
**deszcz**: rain  
**dla**: for  
**dłaczego**: why  
**dlatego**: because  
**dłoń**: palm of the hand  
**długo**: for a long time (adv.)

Figure 2. Glossary page from *Mastering Polish*.

As the course progresses, it seems that a short review of the Polish spelling system would have been of great help to learners. Polish spelling, due to its complexity, is difficult, even for many native speakers. Certain words are pronounced in the same way despite their different spelling; for example, the words *może* 'perhaps' and *morze* 'sea' are identical in their pronunciation, yet their spelling is different. There are many more such examples in Polish as well as some rules that would help students of Polish avoid making mistakes. It is puzzling why the author of the course does not mention this important aspect of the Polish language at all.

All in all, *Mastering Polish* is an adequate source of comprehensive language input for beginning learners of Polish. It is meant to give "the knowledge-equivalent of somewhat more than one year of average

college-level Polish instruction" (Introduction, p. 13). This is an ambitious goal, especially if one treats this book as self-study material, and, therefore, the help of a teacher or tutor is highly recommended throughout the course, even by the author himself. Despite its shortcomings, *Mastering Polish* looks like it can provide a solid foundation in the Polish language, but it might need to be supplemented by more materials that would enhance students' knowledge. Finally, the book's modest price should appeal to many individuals interested in both learning and teaching Polish.

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### ABOUT THE REVIEWER

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