I. Rozprawy i analizy

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Articulating the Irrational:
Beliefs in Witches in the Šariš dialects*

Werbalizując nieracjonalne –
wiara w czarownice w dialektach szaryskich

Abstract: The analysis of dialectal communication from the Šariš dialects area reveals that belief in the existence and influence of witches and witchcraft was once prevalent and deeply rooted among the local population. This belief, comparable to contemporary beliefs in paranormal phenomena, represents a paranormal belief that historically helped individuals cope with unexpected events and provided a secondary control over challenging situations when primary control was unattainable. The paper identifies the common ground shared by paranormal beliefs in witches, conspiracy theories, and rumours. Detailed research into dialectal expressions aims to identify linguistic features that affirm the truthfulness and credibility of such beliefs. The paper also investigates how the *argumentum ad populum* fallacy and epistemic modality are employed to enhance the perceived credibility of information. Special emphasis is placed on the phenomenon of bewitchment and its linguistic articulation. In conclusion, paranormal beliefs about supernatural forces, such as witches and witchcraft, were once driven by strong extra-linguistic motivations and characterized by distinct linguistic forms in Šariš dialects, prefiguring contemporary manifestations of conspiracy theories and various forms of disinformation.

Keywords: witch, paranormal belief, *argumentum ad populum*, epistemic modality, conspiracy theory, rumour, bewitchment, Šariš dialects

1. Introduction

In recent years, one can observe a marked increase in the distrust of scientific knowledge and a parallel rise in support for non-scientific or conspiratorial narratives. The underlying causes of this change are multifaceted, including the increased presence of scientifically unverified opinions, the influence of social media, the psychological effects of social isolation and institutional distrust during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the intentional dissemination of misinformation generated by artificial intelligence. As a result, various conspiracy theories – ranging from beliefs in global conspiracies to flat-Earth theories and climate change denial – have gained prominence.

However, belief in conspiracy theories and intentionally false information is not solely a modern development. Historically, individuals believed in supernatural forces and paranormal phenomena, often attributing personal misfortunes, family tragedies, and natural disasters to such influences. As Malinowski (1948) argues, belief in paranormal forces is tied to the human need for control in the face of misfortune, illness, or death. This illusion of control, discussed by Langer (1975), rests on magical thinking and the assumption of causal links – tendencies that, while common in childhood, may persist into adulthood, though they may weaken under the influence of education (Subbotsky 1997, Dağ 1999). Strikingly, both historical and contemporary forms of these beliefs share several features, such as fear of the unknown, perceived threat, rejection of randomness, and the tendency to overestimate causal relationships.

Witches and witchcraft fall under the broader category of paranormal phenomena. Tobacyk and Milford (1983) and Tobacyk (2004) identify seven categories of paranormal beliefs: traditional religious beliefs, parapsychological phenomena (e.g. psychokinesis), witchcraft, superstition, spiritualism, unusual life forms, and premonitions. This study focuses on belief in witchcraft, which includes beliefs in black magic, witches, and voodoo (Tobacyk & Milford 1983). However, there exists a terminological discrepancy in how beliefs in witches and witchcraft are classified. Some scholars use the term **unfounded beliefs** (Belanger 1944; Šrol 2019; Ståhl & van Prooijen 2018), i.e., ideas rooted in the acceptance of paranormal phenomena that contradict natural laws or scientific understanding (Šrol 2019: 15). Others classify belief in witches more specifically as a type of **paranormal belief** (Tobacyk 2004), while yet others treat paranormal beliefs as a subset within the broader category of unfounded beliefs (Lindeman & Aarnio 2007).

In this paper, such beliefs are referred to as paranormal beliefs so as to avoid creating an impression that the belief system of the studied dia-

lect community is inferior or invalid. The aim is to document, interpret, and understand these beliefs within their cultural and cognitive contexts, rather than to evaluate them against external standards of rationality or evidence. On the contrary, the beliefs in question are considered potentially vital components of the community's worldview, central to how individuals conceptualize and engage with their reality.

Unsurprisingly, paranormal beliefs were frequent in the past when scientific explanations were either unavailable or inaccessible to certain social groups (Šrol 2019). Paradoxically, they continue to circulate even today, despite the availability and accessibility of scientific knowledge.

From the psychological standpoint, paranormal beliefs can be seen as adaptive responses. When individuals attributed adverse events to paranormal forces – such as the actions of witches – they were granted an illusory sense of control over circumstances that were otherwise unmanageable (Dağ 1999; see also Malinowski 1948, Langer 1975). Belief in the harmful influence of witches emerged as a natural response to perceived danger and served as a coping mechanism in the face of fear, uncertainty, and helplessness (Šrol 2019: 16). Individuals encountering unexplained or adverse life events – in their family or community – resorted to these supernatural explanations (*porobeňisko*, i.e. bewitchment) when rational interpretations were unavailable. An equally effective way of overcoming uncertainty and fear was the belief in the possibility of removing or averting the effects of a paranormal phenomenon, through the ability to dispel (in Šariš dialects in eastern Slovakia expressed by the verb *odrobic*).

Paranormal beliefs in witches, their harmful actions (like *porobeňisko*), and protective rituals (such as *začitovaňe* or *zarikaňe*) show how certain individuals tend to interpret tragic or unexpected events through supernatural forces. Two interpretative approaches may be considered. The first attributes such beliefs to cognitive deficiencies, such as impaired probabilistic reasoning (Šrol 2019: 18). The second aligns them with similar psychological and social dynamics as rumours and conspiracy theories. Here, paranormal beliefs about witches are seen as collective attempts to make sense of ambiguous or threatening circumstances – functionally analogous to rumour generation (Buluc 2024: 215). From this perspective, such beliefs should be understood as historically grounded coping strategies rather than dismissed as irrational relics.

There appears to be one key similarity between paranormal beliefs in witches and conspiracy theories: the strong sense of being under threat, when people who hold these beliefs often perceive the world as dangerous and full of hidden enemies (Šrol 2019: 29). Another important parallel is the

overestimation of causality. Conspiracy theories and paranormal beliefs alike provide straightforward explanations for complex phenomena, which may, in reality, result from multifaceted or uncontrollable variables (Šrol 2019: 29).

Paranormal beliefs also exhibit significant overlap with rumours. Rumours are defined as claims about people, groups, events, or institutions that lack verification by direct evidence but gain credibility through widespread belief (Sunstein 2014: 4). As will be demonstrated, appeals to collective belief similarly feature in dialect narratives about witches. Both rumours and paranormal beliefs tend to reinforce pre-existing views and therefore spread easily (Buluc 2024: 214). The motivations behind rumour formation mirror those underlying paranormal beliefs. Rumours often emerge as communal efforts to comprehend ambiguous, uncertain, or threatening situations. They represent attempts by social groups to exert secondary control in contexts where primary control is unavailable (DiFonzo & Bordia 2007), a function also served by paranormal beliefs in witches.

According to DiFonzo and Bordia (2007), factors such as insecurity, anxiety, lack of control, and belief are significant motivators for rumour dissemination. These motivations also underpin paranormal beliefs in witches. Additional factors include the desire for fact-finding, social bonding, and self-presentation (DiFonzo & Bordia 2007: 70 ff.). The need to understand one's environment, build social ties, and maintain a positive self-image by sharing seemingly exclusive knowledge (Ali 2020: 3–4) is evident in both rumour-spreading and paranormal beliefs. In both cases, people make sense of confusing experiences by coming together and relying on the support and shared understanding of their group (Buluc 2024: 215).

In certain respects, beliefs in witches exhibit characteristics akin to stereotypes as understood within the framework of cognitive ethnolinguistics. This stereotypical nature of paranormal beliefs is reflected in their dual function, which aligns with the twofold role of stereotypes defined by Lippmann (1961, as cited in Bartmiński, 2010, 2016). Specifically, stereotypes serve a **psychological function** by reducing the cognitive effort required to understand the world, and a **social function** by helping individuals defend and maintain their social positions.

People often learn about the world before ever encountering it directly. Most of what is known is shaped by their imagination and expectations long before they experience it. These preconceptions strongly influence people's perception and guide their attention, making some things feel instantly familiar and others unexpectedly foreign. Even a small sense of familiarity can be exaggerated, while minor differences can make something feel completely strange (Lippmann, 1961, as cited in Bartmiński, 2010, 2016).

This dynamic applies not only to stereotypes but also to beliefs in witches.

Besides saving our cognitive effort, Lippmann believes there is also another reason why people hold to their stereotypes instead of trying to see things more objectively. Stereotypes can be a core part of the traditions and help protect one's place in society. They give us a stable, familiar view of the world – one that fits with personal routines, preferences, abilities, comforts, and aspirations. While a stereotypical view might not reflect the whole truth, it presents a version of the world to which individuals have adapted. In such a world, people and things occupy familiar roles and behave in expected ways. This familiarity and predictability provide people with comfort and a sense of security.

As Bartmiński (2010, 2016) further notes, drawing on the work of Zygmunt Gostkowski (1959), stereotypes also serve a stabilizing function by providing individuals with a sense of security. Rather than functioning as tools for intellectual discovery or truth-seeking, stereotypes operate pragmatically: they aim to simplify life, enhance survival, and help take effective action. A similar mechanism can be observed in the examined paranormal beliefs in witches. These beliefs offered mental refuge in times of hardship, providing comfort and helping individuals cope with difficult life situations.

2. Linguistic expression of paranormal beliefs in witches in the Šariš dialects

Following this theoretical overview, the paper proceeds with an analysis of dialectal expressions related to paranormal beliefs in witches within the Šariš dialects in Eastern Slovakia. These expressions are considered in light of their cognitive and psychological significance, revealing how language reflects and reinforces belief systems.

The texts under examination originate from two corpora. The first consists of transcripts recorded in the 20th century[1] and preserved in the Dialect Texts Archive (DTA) of the Department of Dialectology at the Ľudovít Štúr Institute of Linguistics, Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava.[2] The second valuable source is represented by a publication from amateur

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[1] The precise date of recording is specified in the sources section at the end of the paper.

[2] It is claimed that this collection of dialectal texts "has been compiled through systematic linguistic fieldwork research in all the villages throughout the entire territory of Slovak dialects. It covers the form of the territorial dialects spoken by the indigenous population from the 1930s to the end of the 20th century" (see https://www.juls.savba.sk/dial_oddelenie_en.html).

ethnologist Ján Lazorík (2015), who recorded and transcribed native speakers of the Šariš dialect, although he did not indicate the specific dates of the recording. Both corpora of examined transcripts collected during the dialectal field research may serve as a valuable source of co-linguistic data for the description of lexical material within its cultural context (Niebrzegowska-Bartminska 2017). It is important to emphasize that the examples cited in this paper are provided solely to illustrate the points; nevertheless, additional instances can be found in the examined corpus of transcripts from interviews conducted in rural communities of the Šariš region in Eastern Slovakia.

From a lexical perspective, to denote a witch, the Šariš dialects use the noun *bosorka*/*bosurka* (Buffa 2004: 28), along with the synonymous term *baboňa* (ibid.: 15). Among these, the noun *bosorka* (and its variant *bosora*), as well as the masculine derivative *bosoroš* ('male witch'; ibid.: 28), appear in the analyzed texts. The noun *striga*, with the same meaning as in standard Slovak ('a bad witch, a hag') (ibid.: 261), was also found in the material examined.

Derived from the noun *baboňa* ('a witch'), the verb *baboňic* (including the variant forms *babuňic* and *baboňaric*) occurs in the dialect transcripts, with the meaning 'to bewitch' or 'to cast a spell' (ibid.: 15), e.g. *naozdaj, aľe opravdzivo (tag hvareľi) znala baboňic* – '[the witch] who for certain, for sure (that's what they said), could bewitch'. The word family of a noun *baboňa* includes nouns *baboňstvo*/*babuňstvo*, which appear frequently in the analyzed dialect material and carry the meanings: 1. sorcery; 2. superstition, as recorded in the *Slovník šarišských nárečí* (Buffa 2004).

Yet, in addition to the verb *baboňic* ('to bewitch' or 'to cast a spell') other verbs are also used in the transcripts to describe the actions of witches: *žrec* ('to eat alive'): *To hvareľi, že un jiɣ žre* ('They said he eats them alive'); *pohubic* ('to harm'): *ta kravi pohubel* ('so he harmed the cows'); and *popsuc* ('to damage'): *tag znal popsuc kravi, co to ňedovitrimaňa bulo* ('he could damage cows so badly that one could not bear it').

In the dialect utterances analyzed, when speakers communicate paranormal beliefs about the existence and activities of witches, they frequently refer to ancestors or other people. This represents an example of *argumentum ad populum*, an appeal to popular belief – "the fallacy committed by directing an emotional appeal to the feelings or enthusiasms of 'the gallery' or 'the people' to win assent to an argument not adequately supported by proper evidence" (Walton 1980: 264). In this fallacy, the truth of a statement is assumed based on its widespread acceptance, rather than on factual or logical support. The following examples from the dialect data exhibit the features of *argumentum ad populum*:

– Tam jedna na Majdaňe, **hvareľi**, *že je bosora* ('In Maidan, there was a woman who, **they used to say**, was a witch') (Z. P., Pečovská Nová Ves, p. 10);

– F Šenviźu bars **stare ľudze spominaľi** *dajaku staru babu Ľutuľu-strigu, co naozdaj, ale opravdzivo (* **tag hvareľi** *) znala baboňic.* ('In Śenviź, **old people used to mention** an old woman, Ľutuľa, the witch, who for certain (**that's what they said**), could bewitch') (Lazorík 2015: 49);

– To **hvareľi**, *že un jiγ žre.* ('**They said** that he eats them [cows] alive'); (H. K., Uzovské Pekľany, p. 20);

– To **hvara**, *že to z dobrim duxom ňenarabjaju oňi.* ('**They say** that [witches] don't work with a good spirit') (H. K., Uzovské Pekľany, p. 24);

– a **ľuʒe hvareľi**, *že každi pjatek o pulnoci tej paľenčuxi cale vedro mala* ('and **people said** that every Friday at midnight she would brew a whole bucket of alcohol') (A. Ž., Hendrichovce, p. 5);

– to **śe hvari**, *že k peklu skrucila* ('so **it is said** that she turned it toward hell') (A. Ž., Hendrichovce, p. 5).

However, through the use of *argumentum ad populum*, paranormal beliefs carry the same risks that accompany the spread of rumours. As Sunstein and Hastie (2015: 89) note, rumour-spreading groups often engage in groupthink, which tends to amplify individual errors in judgment rather than correct them. Rumours are also subject to cascading effects, where individuals adopt beliefs or behaviours simply because others in the group do so. It is not uncommon for such groups to eventually adopt more extreme views than those originally expressed. In the context of paranormal beliefs about witches, the amplification of individual misjudgments and the cascading reinforcement of collective narratives are especially relevant.

In addition to *argumentum ad populum*, the dialect material also reveals the use of epistemic modality to express conviction about the supernatural actions of witches or male witches. This is evident in the following example:

– Ta kravi pohubel a napraviʒ ňeznal, ta tiž **muśel** *ľem s totim zlim duxom narabjac. Kebi ňebul cośka narabjal, ta bi ja znam... To hvara, že to z dobrim duxom ňenarabjaju oňi. Ta ja ňeznam jak to bulo.* ('So he harmed the cows and couldn't undo it, so **he must have worked** with a bad spirit... If he hadn't worked with something, then he would have... do I know[?]... They say they don't work with a good spirit. So I don't know how it was.') (H. K., Uzovské Pekľany, p. 24).

In this passage, the speaker conveys paranormal belief through the use of a modal verb combined with an indefinite construction (*ta tiž* **muśel ľem** *s totim zlim duxom* **narabjac** – 'so **he must have worked** with a bad spirit'), followed by an *argumentum ad populum* (**To hvara**, *že to z dobrim duxom ňenarabjaju oňi* – '**They say** [male witches] don't work with a good spirit'). Simultaneously, however, the speaker relativises her belief using ellipsis (*Kebi ňebul cośka narabjal, ta bi ja znam..*" – 'If he hadn't worked with something, then he would have... do I know[?]') and later explicitly

expresses uncertainty (*Ta ja **ňeznam** jak to bulo.* – 'Well, **I don't know**
how it was').

Greater certainty regarding the reliability of the paranormal belief is
evident in another speaker's answer to the question of whether witches once
existed. The speaker replies: *Ta šak buľi, jak bi ňebuľi. Ojoj, a keľo jich
bulo, ale to šicko už vimarlo.* ('Of course they existed – how could they
not? Oh, and how many there were! But they've all died out now.') (A. Ž.,
Hendrichovce, p. 1). This formulation suggests that the speaker has specific
individuals in mind, who have already died.

At the same time, the speaker acknowledges that others do not share
her conviction. She states: *Znace, ket ja ʒecom povim, že to [bosorki] buľi,
ta śe mi śmeju, že vi babo take glupe jak noc, bo take glupstva spominace,
co śe človekovi xce s teho srac. Ta tak.* ('You know, when I tell my children
that [witches] existed, they laugh at me, saying: "You grandma, you're as
dumb as the night, talking such nonsense that it just makes a man burst".[3]
So that's how it is.'). However, when the interviewer reassures her that he
believes her, the speaker resumes her narrative, reaffirming her belief: *Ta
co. No ta, buľi bosorki, buľi. I ja pametam že buľi, ta šak to ozdaj ňe tak
dluho, paru roki, co buľi.* ('Oh well. So there were witches – there were. I also
remember there were. It wasn't even that long ago, just a few years.') (A.
Ž., Hendrichovce, p. 1).

When asked what the witch used to do, the speaker answers: *No a co
mala robic? Ta šak žila sebe. Ľemže ona znala take veci, co vi ňeška aňi ket
školi mace pejc, ňebuʒece znac, ta jak! No ta šak ona znala porobic, i odrobic.*
('Well, and what was she supposed to do? She just lived her life. But she
knew such things that even if you went to five schools today, you'd still
never know! Oh yes, she knew how to cast spells and how to break them.')
(A. Ž., Hendrichovce, p. 2). The extraordinary abilities attributed to the
witch – namely, the ability to cast a spell (i.e. *porobic*) and remove/undo
spells (i.e. *odrobic*) – suggest a connection between the belief in witches
and the concept of bewitchment (*porobeňisko*) that is analysed in the next
subchapter.

2.1. The phenomenon of bewitchment (*porobeňisko*)

The Šariš dialect noun *porobeňisko/porabeňisko* ('bewitchment') is defined
in the dictionary of Šariš dialects as 'an object that has magical power' and
exemplified as: *Muśela dajake porobeňisko prejsc abo pojesc* ('She must have
walked over or eaten some kind of bewitchment') (Buffa 2004: 217). In *Slovník*

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[3] In translation, the softer equivalent of the source text expression is used to avoid
vulgarity.

slovenských nárečí ('Dictionary of Slovak Dialects', Ripka 2006: 1005), the nouns *porobenisko* and *porobisko*, found in Spiš and Šariš dialects, are defined as 'a place or object under the influence of bewitchment, possessing magical properties or power', with examples such as: *Plano nam idze, jak kebi to bulo porobeňisko* ('Things are going badly for us, as if it were a bewitchment'); *Take porobeňisko to aňi do rug ňetreba vźac* ('One shouldn't even touch such a bewitchment'); *Pot kameňom pred maštaľňu bulo porobisko, stari pohar a v ňim cośka pomiešane* ('There was a bewitchment under a stone in front of the stable, an old glass with something mixed inside').

A bewitchment (*porobeňisko*) as the result of witchcraft was often used to explain occurrences with a sudden or unexpected onset. From the psychological point of view, it is more comforting to believe that such events were caused by magic than to admit that one has no control over them. Thus, a person replaces their sense of helplessness with belief in supernatural influence (Šrol 2019: 15–16). As the analysed texts prove, bewitchment (*porobeňisko*) was believed to cause sudden paralysis: *Že tiž‿možno tag‿bulo, ta bulo daγʒi či toto porobeňisko viľate, či co. Ta išla do školi taka ʒifčica [. . .] Tag‿ona prešla. Tak potim ona tu f‿totiγ‿nohoγ‿ňijag‿ňimala vladi.* ('So they say it might have been some bewitchment thrown down or something. So this girl went to school [. . .] Then she passed it. After that, she couldn't move her legs anymore.') (M. O., Krásna Lúka, p. 6).[4] The expression *Že tiž‿možno tag‿bulo* ('So they say it might have been. . .') suggests that the speaker is relaying information from others, which might be viewed as an implicit *argumentum ad populum*.

The noun *porobeňisko* is derived from the polysemic verb *porobic*, which in Šariš dialects has the meanings: 1. 'to finish job/to do'; 2. 'to bewitch' (Buffa 2004: 217); its aspectual counterpart is treated as the variant pair *porabjac*, *porobjac*, with the same two meanings: 1. 'to be doing/making,' 2. 'to cast a spell, to bewitch' (Buffa 2004: 216). In the context of paranormal belief in witches and witchcraft, the second meaning is relevant. This verb appears multiple times in the examined corpus, e.g. in the statement: *Jak ja ľem znam, ta ket xcela **porobic**, ta dala povicme takemu ʒecku jablučko, ono źedlo, a už bulo **porobene*** ('As far as I know, if she wanted to **bewitch**, she'd give, say, a little boy an apple, he'd eat it, and he'd already be **bewitched**')

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[4] Additionally, the deverbal noun *porobenie* is used in Slovak dialects, meaning 'bewitchment', for example in the sentence: *Aľe tag na porobeňe jej bulo, ošaľela či jaki svati, ja ňeznam* ('But she was under some bewitchment, went mad or what, I don't know') (Ripka 2006: 1005). In the analyzed dialect material, the form *porobeňe* appears only in the fieldworker's questions during the recording from Hendrichovce (DTA, 66/6/1); in the speakers' answers, only the semantically equivalent aspectual counterpart occurs, the deverbal noun *porabi̯aňe* (H. K., Uzovské Pekľany, p. 19).

(A. Ž., Hendrichovce, p. 2). In this excerpt, the bewitchment occurred in the form of "an object under the influence of bewitchment; an enchanted object" (Ripka 2006). The formulation *Jak ja ľem znam* ('As far as I know') again suggests that the information is based on knowledge relayed to the speaker by others.

A witch could use a *porobeňisko* not only to directly influence a person (as seen in the previous examples), but her actions could also cause harm to a person's livestock or other property. For instance, cows might have refused to eat or be milked: *Bosorki ku nam choʒeľi furt. Mľiko odbiraľi nam bosorki a* **me vereľi**, *oj! Ta jag̱bi ňe. [...]* **To zme vereľi** *šicko, ta co bi zme ňevereľi. Bosoroš tu xoʒil fše popod oblaki kovaľovo a do každej staňi xoʒil.* ('Witches kept coming to us all the time. The witches were taking our milk, and **we believed it**, oh yeah! Of course, we did. [...] **We believed** everything, why wouldn't we have believed that? The male witch used to walk here all the time under the windows of smith's house, and he would go into every barn') (Š. P., Medzany, p. 13). Following the reference to the actions of the witch, the speaker uses a repeated inclusive plural (*me vereľi, oj!* [...] *To zme vereľi šicko*), which serves to indicate that the truth and credibility of the belief were guaranteed by others in the community who also shared it. It seems the paranormal belief in the influence of witches and bewitchment was not questioned at the time – it was considered entirely natural: *me vereľi, oj! Ta jag̱bi ňe. [...] To zme vereľi šicko, ta co bi zme ňevereľi* ('we believed it, oh yeah! Of course we did. [...] We believed everything, why wouldn't we have believed that?').

The quoted extract also illustrates a further connection between paranormal belief and rumour (see Introduction). The inclusive plural (*me vereľi* – 'we believed') demonstrates that paranormal beliefs, like rumours, reinforce pre-existing assumptions and thus spread easily within a community. Finally, as with rumours, paranormal beliefs provide explanations for difficult or unexpected events (e.g. when a cow stopped giving milk, it was attributed to bewitchment or witchcraft), thereby enabling individuals to exert secondary control over situations they cannot directly influence (Buluc 2024: 214).

Conclusion

To investigate paranormal beliefs about the existence of witches, dialectal communication from the Šariš dialect area was examined. While the sample is necessarily limited, the findings suggest that belief in the existence and agency of witches was once widespread among the population. Since the

speakers recorded in the 1970s referred to their ancestors when asserting the truthfulness of the information, the exact time when these beliefs existed cannot be determined; however, it is assumed they existed long before the recorded mentions.

Belief in supernatural phenomena such as witches belongs to the broader category of paranormal beliefs, which historically functioned as cognitive tools that helped individuals cope with unexpected life events or maintain a sense of secondary control over difficult situations within the family or household.

In the introduction, the conceptual parallels between paranormal beliefs and conspiracy theories, as well as the connections between paranormal beliefs and rumours were outlined. The narrative structure of paranormal beliefs reveals that their supposed truth and credibility are most commonly justified through *argumentum ad populum,* a fallacious type of reasoning that appeals to the opinion of others rather than to evidence. To express conviction about the supernatural actions of witches, epistemic modality was also employed.

The analysis paid particular attention to the dialectal lexicon associated with paranormal beliefs. In the dialectal utterances under examination, specific lexemes used to express paranormal beliefs about witches were identified (e.g., *porobic*, *porobeňisko*).

Future research into the dialectal lexicon of paranormal beliefs in witches could focus on the paranormal belief in how bewitchment or a curse could be removed, as examples of such beliefs, expressed by the Šariš dialect verbs *odrobic, napravic*, *spomusc*, etc., were also recorded in contexts linked to these practices. Special attention should also be given to stereotypical motifs that accompany discourse about witches in the analyzed material. These include the witch's appearance and form, her supernatural abilities, the magical herbs she used to cause harm, and her typical meeting places (e.g. crossroads). Due to their rich symbolic value and complexity, these motifs deserve independent research and analysis.

Based on the findings presented in this study, it can be concluded that paranormal beliefs about witches, witchcraft, and bewitchment possess both specific linguistic forms and distinct extralinguistic motivations within the Šariš dialect discourse. Understanding the motivations behind the emergence and persistence of paranormal beliefs about witches thus contributes to our broader comprehension of the reasoning mechanisms underlying contemporary belief in conspiracy theories, rumours, and misinformation.

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Streszczenie: Analiza dialektów szaryskich pokazuje, iż wśród miejscowej ludności występowała niegdyś powszechna i głęboko zakorzeniona wiara w istnienie czarownic i czarów oraz w ich wpływ na ludzi. Przekonania te można uznać za wiarę w zjawiska paranormalne, która pomagała w radzeniu sobie z nieprzewidywanymi zdarzeniami i zapewniała pewien stopień kontroli nad sytuacją, gdy pełna kontrola nie była możliwa. W artykule identyfikuje się płaszczyznę wierzeń, wspólną dla wiary w czarownice, teorie spiskowe i plotki. Dzięki szczegółowym badaniom wyrażeń dialektalnych można identyfikować cechy językowe potwierdzające prawdziwość takich przekonań. W artykule zwraca się także uwagę na to, w jaki sposób błąd *argumentum ad populum* i modalność epistemiczna zwiększają rzekomą wiarygodność informacji. Szczególny nacisk położono na zjawisko rzucania czarów i jego językowe przejawy. Paranormalne przekonania co do działania sił nadprzyrodzonych, takich jak czarownice i czary, były niegdyś wzmacniane poprzez silne motywacje pozajęzykowe, a w dialektach szaryskich charakteryzowały się odrębnymi formami językowymi, co można uznać za wcześniejszą formę współczesnych teorii spiskowych i różnych form dezinformacji.

Słowa kluczowe: wiedźma; wierzenia paranormalne; *argumentum ad populum*; modalność epistemiczna; teoria spiskowa; pogłoska; czar/urok; dialekty szaryskie