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English words in the talk of Polish teenagers : a review of sociolinguistic aspects

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ENGLISH WORDS IN THE TALK OF POLISH TEENAGERS. A REVIEW OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS

Key words: linguistic code of teenagers, lexical borrowings, English loanwords, reasons for use, means of transmitting English loanwords

The following article mainly deals with the process of lexical borrowing. It presents a group of English loanwords which are commonly adopted and used by Polish teenagers and specifies a division of these items within certain semantic categories. One of the prior tasks of this paper is to provide exemplary sentences which are to illustrate the mechanism of lexical borrowing among young Poles who seem to excessively incorporate English words to their speech, thus leading to a variety of linguistic combinations and modifications.

An issue of concern here is also specification of the reasons for this sort of adaptation which is followed underneath by identification of the factors which influence such lexical choices of young Poles. In order to delineate a more thorough picture of the whole phenomenon, the article quotes the results of the research which was conducted among Polish teenagers in March 2007. However, before presenting the research data, it is worth featuring first the general frame of reference which depicts the youth as a special social group with its own system of communication in which lexical borrowings seem to actively participate.

Young people and their linguistic code

Young people appear as a very inventive and expressive group which produces their own strategies of communication. These strategies allow them for performing a number of linguistic modifications that help them to signal their sense of belonging and to present their own worldviews, beliefs and opinions. Particularly creative in this sphere are teenagers who by their sociolect contribute significantly to the transformation of the language and as a result to the enrichment and diversification of linguistic systems of many cultures.

Nowadays teenagers form a dictionary of their own words, phrases and usages which they treat as an important element of their social milieu and as a sign of their identification with the group. Since they want to be more “adventurous” in what they are saying, they perform a great deal of transformations which result in the creation of some sort of a discreet code which is to be hardly understood by others (especially by the older generation; see also [Garcarz 2005]). They adopt to their practices the mechanisms of word formation, code-switching and “semantization”. By doing so, they lead to the establishment of a special kind of language which is often called a sociolect [Satkiewicz 1994]. Such a language appears as an effective means of communication which allows all group members to exchange information and ideas in a similar way and to develop certain forms of expressing themselves and their reality. One may define a sociolect as a distinctive variety of language which enables its speakers to reflect anything as well as in standard language, or sometimes even better, though in many cases by different means. A sociolect comes out as a specific language system which may be used to refer to the conceptual, emotional and cultural world of young people (references in [Garcarz 2005]).

An important aspect to be mentioned with regard to this system refers to teenagers’ tendency of looking for the words which can fully express their attitudes towards things, people and ways of behaviour. Their main aim in this respect is to sound novel and more adventurous and to provide new forms of communication and reflection. In order to achieve it, young people combine various words in unusual structures, apply mechanisms of affixation and refine the meanings of lexical items. In fact, they change words in extraordinary ways. Some of the items are modified by them significantly, others only partially, whereas still others totally replaced by foreign words. This last process is very characteristic of the talk of Polish teenagers for whom the English language with its vulgar and obscene vocabulary functions as a source of lexical enrichment. Since swearing is considered to be a normal part of teenagers’ interaction, many English slangy words and colloquial expressions are actually incorporated to the informal speech of Poles who in this way make it vivid and colourful.

Crucial to the above discussion are the observations of Michał Garcarz [Garcarz 2005] who indicates that the language of the Polish youth is becoming more English-language-oriented. He argues that grammatical simplicity and lexical universality of English make this language a convenient and an economic means of communication for people coming from different cultures. In his view the omnipresence of English in Poland results from young people’s susceptibility to every language innovation, conformity to the model of communication practiced by the group as well as eagerness to adapt English language standards for individual purposes. The idea which comes to the fore in his considerations is that English is an irreplaceable ingredient of the Polish language culture which is estimated to possess a considerable number of English loanwords, especially the ones of colloquial or slangy character.

The same opinion is shared by other researchers such as, for instance, Anna Duszak [Duszak 2002] who presents Poland as a country with an unprecedented influx of English words and values. Touching upon this subject, A. Duszak points out that the

use of foreign words, especially the ones from socially sensitive domains, is relevant for the construction of social identities of speakers of the receiving language. In her considerations she particularly accentuates the role of English borrowings which are used to refer to new objects and processes for which the Polish language does not have any good equivalents. Duszak also highlights the applicability of English in various language games which aim to shock, provoke, persuade or guarantee fun. In her estimation, this language plays a strategic function in the textual and social world of contemporary Poles.

The line of reasoning presented above suggests that young people, especially teenagers, are a specific group of people who create their own linguistic code through certain changes in the lexical-semantic sphere of language.

The process of lexical borrowing

Borrowing is viewed as the process thanks to which a language acquires some property, item or rule from another language [Tomaszczyk 1993]. Its most common form is lexical borrowing which is seen as one of the important sources of enriching one's and society's lexicon. It usually refers to taking over lexical items which are assimilated according to the phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic rules of the recipient language [Burkhanov 1998]. As Tomaszczyk [1993] indicates, borrowing is a mechanism which is activated by speakers as a response to new communicative needs and as a sign of vitality in language. Thus, the term is used to denote the process of adopting a foreign element to a given linguistic system, the result of which is a special group of words which are called "loanwords" or "borrowings" [Burkhanov 1998; Lopatkin-Easton 1993]. Lester Jacobson [Jacobson 1994: 185] identifies several reasons for the occurrence of such words in a linguistic system. He particularly accentuates the importance of contact between speakers of different languages, the role of bilingual communities and the dominance of a people in a given area of science, technology or social life whose lexis seems to function as a crucial source for other speech communities.

Elżbieta Mańczak-Wohlfeld [1995] also enumerates the reasons why people introduce loanwords into their language. Among the extra-linguistic factors mentioned by her is the need-filling motive which involves finding new designations that are more economical and less artificial than native expressions. Another factor is the so called prestige motive which requires adopting items from the language which has high standing and prestige. Worth noting here are also some intra-linguistic factors which are related to the low frequency of occurrence of certain words, the loss of expressiveness of some native lexemes and insufficient differentiation of specific semantic fields in one's own language (as contrasted with the source language). The need of being trendy is another determining factor which exerts influence on the adaptation of foreign words, especially the ones which originate from the culture, science and technology of a supreme and highly valued speech community such as, for instance, of the

English-speaking countries which nowadays contribute significantly to the social, cultural and technological development [Mańczak-Wohlfeld 1995: 18–19; see also Krawiec 2007].

The general framework presented above is to be supplemented by the typology of borrowing processes. As far as this sphere is concerned, it is possible to distinguish such categories as:

- straightforward adoption – in which the borrowed item does not undergo any changes in the form;
- loan blending – which refers to the alteration of the word so that it could fit the vocabulary of the recipient language, this type of borrowing involves combination of foreign and native morphemes, in such a formation one part of the word is adopted whereas the other one belongs to the original language;
- loan translation (often called calque) – is a process in which an item from the foreign language is translated piece by piece into the recipient language, it is performed by the use of the native elements of the recipient language;
- loan shift (also identified as semantic extension) – involves an extension of the meaning of a word in one's native language so that it corresponds to that of a word in the other language, it refers to rearranging words in the base language according to the pattern provided by the other, the result of the process is the creation of a new meaning [Burkhanov 1998; Mize 2006; Romaine 1995; Tomaszczyk 1993].

Another important aspect to be discussed in this paper is the association of lexical borrowings with the cultural development. This point is mirrored in the considerations of some scholars [e.g. Sapir 1921, Cienkowski 1964] who suggest that loanwords should be treated as a supplement to the history of culture and as an indicator of contacts between different populations. In this approach, lexical borrowings appear as a cultural map which informs about what one nation has taught another one (Bloomfield cited by Mańczak-Wohlfeld [1995: 14]). The above line of reasoning does not, however, find reference in the discussions provided by the majority of linguists who rather examine borrowings in isolation from the development of culture, thus treating them only as the linguistic phenomena [Mańczak-Wohlfeld 1995: 14]. This is not to be the case in the following article whose main aim is to investigate both the semantic-lexical nature of loanwords and the socio-cultural factors underlying the linguistic choices of Polish teenagers. Such a link of perspectives is presented in the passages of the section to come where certain research data is provided and analysed with regard to English words adopted and used by Polish teenagers.

Adaptation of English words by Polish teenagers

As Anna Duszak [2002] indicates, Poland, similarly as many other cultures, is nowadays witnessing an unprecedented influx of English words and values. Due to the scope and the intensity of this influence, English starts to become a system which has high social and linguistic relevance for the Polish society and their patterns of interac-

tion. She notes that English borrowings, whether lexical, grammatical or textual, are used to reflect the changes which are taking place in the social, cognitive and linguistic sphere of Polish life. The use of English in Polish conditions is in her opinion determined by the need of referring to new objects and processes for which the Polish language does not have any good equivalents, or by the in-group tactic which refers to the notions of solidarity and discreetness. One of the problems identified by Duszak in this matter is, however, the expansion of colloquial communication patterns which is followed by the tendency of vulgarization of speech, growth of verbal aggression and a general desire to shock at any price. Duszak points out that the growing presence of English in the Polish language may be perceived in a variety of ways. It can be seen as disgraceful, dangerous, useful or sometimes funny, which proves of different evaluations of English loans by the society. The differences also occur in the abilities of Poles to understand such intrusions. Comprehension of and a positive attitude to English is very characteristic of the groups which through a new linguistic repertoire want to express their needs, goals, interests, lifestyles or worldviews as well as to project their new social images. By resorting to the items from this language, they try to transmit some special meaning and to construct intra- and inter-group discourses which are to be understandable and pragmatically acceptable for their effectiveness and efficiency. What is implied by Duszak is that English functions as a form of reflection which is used in some subsystems of the Polish social and linguistic domains and which is imported with the help of certain groups of speakers of the Polish language.

Further considerations of Duszak stress the need of integrating lexical-semantic studies of loans within an interactive and functional model of discourse processing. In her estimation, such a line of investigation may provide important data on the actual functioning of loan words in their new semiotic environment. The approach presented by Duszak in fact adds to the coverage of the semantic and morphosyntactic character of English borrowings which so far has been extensively dealt with by scholars [e.g. Fisiak 1970; Mańczak-Wohlfeld 1995]. The idea which comes to the fore here is that the functioning of English in the Polish language may provide vital sociolinguistic data which may offer an insight to the phenomenon of code-alteration, social identification and lexical diversification.

The above line of reasoning is to be supported by the arguments put forward by Michał Garcarz [2005] who points out that English vocabulary constitutes an indispensable element of the Polish language culture in which certain groups of people adopt loanwords for their own purposes. In his opinion, a social group which is most susceptible to language innovations are young people who eagerly adapt English language standards, thus creating a hermetically closed speech community. It is therefore necessary to take a close look at the glossary of Polish teenagers and to examine the items which are adopted by them from the English language and to find the reasons for doing this.

In order to project the subject matter under discussion, it is essential to turn to the results of the survey which was conducted among Polish teenagers in March 2007. The survey was based on a questionnaire which was distributed in the group of 255 young

people (138 females and 117 males) at the age of 14–19 who responded by referring to the process of incorporating English words to their speech. The obtained data is presented in the passages below and characterized with regard to some sociolinguistic aspects. At this point it must be emphasized, however, that although the main aim of this study is an analysis and classification of English loanwords used by Polish teenagers, some attention is also given to the identification of motives for adopting English vocabulary by young Poles. In fact, the investigation seeks to answer the questions of what items are borrowed from the English language, how they function in the Polish system and what effect they have on the process of communication. It is also the goal of this study to distinguish the most influential channels by means of which the transmission of lexical borrowings takes place. Besides, a task of high priority is a differentiation between the words and expressions adopted by males and females as well as gymnasium and secondary school students.

Addressing these issues, let us first establish a list of items most frequently quoted by Polish teenagers who participated in the research and who illustrated the use of English loanwords in certain exemplary sentences. The obtained data is in fact possible to be classified into certain semantic categories which are more or less concerned with sex, insulting, abusing, greeting, confirming, refusing and apologizing. These aspects of life are particularly likely to be represented in the English words transmitted by Polish teenagers whose mechanisms of adaptation are specified here according to the female-male distinction as well as the division of teenagers into gymnasium and secondary school students. A group of English words and phrases most frequently adopted and used by young Poles is presented in the following tables:

Table 1

English words adopted by gymnasium students (125 respondents)

of students	quoted lexical items	%*	use of English loanwords
1	2	3	4
Girls (74 respondents)	1. ok/oki/okey/okej	95	– Ok, nie ma sprawy. – Okey, zaraz przyjdę. – OK, to do jutra.
	2. sorry/sory/sorki	66	– Sorry/sorki, ale nie mogę przyjść. – Sorry, możesz się przesunąć?
	3. hey/hej/heya	32	– Hej, Anka! – Heya, co słyhać?
	4. yes	22	– Yes, pożyczę ci zeszyt. – Możesz zadzwonić do mnie później? Yes, nie ma sprawy.
	5. fuck you/fak ju	20	– Fuck you młody! – Zjeżdżaj, fuck you.
	6. shit/shiet	20	– Ta muza to shit! – To wszystko to wielkie shit!
	7. cool/kul	18	– Gośka, wyglądasz cool! – Tu jest kulowo.
	8. the best	18	– Jesteś naprawdę the best. – Ta piosenka jest the best.

cont. table 1

1	2	3	4
	9. thanks/thex/fenks	6	– Thanks, bardzo mi pomogłaś. – Fenks za zadanie. Wielkie thanks.
	10. fakaj się	10	– Fakaj się Michalina! – Fakaj się młocie!
	11. fuck/fack	10	– Masz zadanie domowe? O fuck, zapomniałam! – Fuck, znowu zapomniałam kluczy do mieszkania.
Boys (51 respondents)	1. ok/okey/oki	92	– Daj zadanie z matny! – OK. – Okey, to da się zrobić.
	2. sorry/sorki	47	– Sorry, nie chciałem! – Sorki, że czekałeś.
	3. cool/kul	29	– Jesteś kul gość! – Gdyby nie ta zdzira byłoby coolowo i odjazdowo.
	4. yes/yeah	27	– Yo gościu, masz szlugi. – Yes, yes, mam, zara ci dam. – Masz hajs? - Yeah!
	5. fuck you	25	– Ej debilu, fuck you! – Ty zjebie genetyczny, fuck you popaprańcu.
	6. fakaj się/fuckaj się	23	– Fakaj się lebero! – Ty kurwa lamusie zajebany fakaj się.
	7. fuck	23	– Fuck, ale bałagan. – Kurwa już mam dosyć tego twojego pierdolonego freda, kurwa jego mać dzwoni do mnie o 6 rano i pyta o kasę, fuck!
	8. yo/jo!	23	– Yo ziomal! Jak leci?
	9. shit/szit	21	– Yo madafaka jedziemy na bitchiska. – O shit, nauczyciel widział mnie, jak palę papierosy. – Shit, stara znalazła test.
	10. no	19	– No way ziommm, kurwa za chuja nie dam ci numeru do tej niuni. – Nie czaisz kurwa, no money no money to nie ćpamy.
	11. bitch/bycz	17	– To jest ta bitch, która spierdoliła. – Ty stary jechaliśmy kurwa wczoraj na spidzie i kurwa takie rozjebane bitches stały, że kurwa kutas szyberdachem wystawał.
	12. motherfucker/madafaka	17	– Pożycz mi zeszyt madafaka! – Ale ten gościu jest madafaka, wyjechał 10 piw w 20 minut!
	13. babe/baby	13	– Jak dla mnie baby jesteś cool i tyle! – Komm zu mir baby!

* The percentages given in the table specify a number of students from the group who quoted particular items.

Table 2

English words adopted by secondary school students (130 respondents)

of students	The most frequently quoted lexical items	%*	Exemplification of the use of English loanwords
1	2	3	4
Girls (64 respondents)	1. ok/oki/okey	76	– Oki, zrobię to! – OK, pójdę tam z tobą!
	2. sorry/sorki	45	– Sorry, ale nie czaję tego. – Nadepnęłaś mi na nogę! – Sorki!
	3. cool	28	– Na tej imprezie jest cool!
	4. fuck you	23	– Wow, jaką masz coolową bluzkę. – Daj mi kasę! – Fuck you! – Daj zadanie z matmy! – Fuck you!
	5. yes	23	– Yes, yes, yes! To jest to! – Yes, of course pojedzie tam.
	6. no	21	– No, no, no kochana, ten chłopczyk będzie mój. – Oh no, jak ten bydlak mógł zerwać ze mną.
	7. fuck (fucking world)	15	– Oh fuck! Co ja zrobiłam? – Fuck, ale to zadanie trudne.
	8. please/plis	15	– Zrób to dla mnie, plis.
	9. the best	12	– Please, moge na chwilę pożyczyć tą płytkę? – On jest the best.
	10. I don't know	10	– Aśka jest the beściara. – Gdzie jest Baśka? I don't know. – I don't know. Pewnie namierzyła pewnego gościa i pognała za nim.
	11. I love you/lovciam cię/ /lovusiam cię	10	– Lovciam cię jak nikogo na świecie. – Wiesz, że I love you.
	12. shit	10	– Oh shit, ale zimno. – Shit, kartkóweczka!
Boys (66 respondents)	1. fuck	59	– Zjechałem to, fuck! – Fuck, ale boli mnie noga.
	2. ok/oki/okey	51	– Ok, przyjdę po ciebie o piątej. – Ok, nie ma sprawy.
	3. sorry	40	– Sorry, ale na serio zjechałem. – Sorry za spóźnienie.
	4. motherfucker/maďafaka	24	– Ale z ciebie jebany maďafaka! – Wał się na ryj, maďafaka!
	5. fuck you	22	– Fuck you, you dumb fuck! – Fuck you, ty wyrwidole osrany.
	6. shit/holy shit	21	– Kurwa, ale to jest shit! – Ja pierdole, ale odjebaliście shit.
	7. bitch	18	– Co jest bitches? – Ooooo... ale bitch! – Kręćcie dupciami, bitches!
	8. fuck off	16	– Fuck off, koleś, nie denerwuj mnie, bo oberwiesz! – Fuck off, ty mały okurwieńcu.
	9. nigga	16	– Wossup nigga! (to one's friend) – Co tam nigga?
	10. cool	15	– Cool, jest impreza. – To jest naprawdę cool. W życiu takiego czegoś nie widziałem.

cont. table 2

1	2	3	4
	11. what's up dog/man	15	– Wossup dog! Co robisz? – What's up dogs! Wy przejebane gówna, co uwas?
	12. lookać/lukać/oblukać	13	– Idziemy połukać, jak grają w piłkę. – Looknij na tą stronę. – Fajne fireksy, lukniemy do środka.
	13. fakaj się/fuckaj się	10	– Fakaj się, pedale. Jesteś zwykły frajer. Pierdol się. – Fuckaj się, ty rusko kurwo!
	14. suck my dick	10	– Suck my dick, chuju jebany! – Suck my dick, ty kapisznie pierdolony!
	15. baby/babe	10	– Fajny tyłeczek, baby! – Pa, baby!

* The percentages given in the table specify a number of students from the group who quoted particular items.

Comparing the above lists of loanwords, one may come to the conclusion that Polish teenagers at the gymnasium and secondary school level reveal a great tendency for adopting and using in their speech a similar set of English words and expressions which are sometimes modified in their spelling and pronunciation and which are blended with Polish elements in order to suit the youth's communicative needs. An observation to be made at this point is that teenagers of both sexes turn to vulgar and obscene words in their talk, which is also proven by the findings of other researchers [e.g. Garcarz 2005]. Elaborating on this observation, one should, however, note that the growth of slangy expressions, swearwords and derogatory terms is very characteristic of the language used by secondary school males who have a considerable number of English lexical units at their disposal and who operate these items more frequently than other examined groups, as it is signalled by the responses gathered in the table below:

Table 3

The frequency of use of English words in the examined groups

Level	Group	The frequency of use of English words*		
		very frequent	frequent	rare
Gymnasium	girls	22%	44%	34%
	boys	27%	53%	20%
Secondary school	girls	15%	44%	41%
	boys	38%	41%	21%

* The percentages provided in the table present an approximate number of teenagers giving a particular response.

One of the most interesting dimensions in relation to the subject matter is also specifying the reasons for adopting English loanwords by Polish teenagers. Considering this issue one should turn directly to the responses of the examined groups which particularly emphasize the need of young people to be trendy, funny, original and very

expressive. Young people claim that thanks to the adaptation of foreign words to their speech, they can sound better, communicate more easily, reflect their thoughts and feelings more efficiently and exchange information with other group members in a faster way.

As for the channels of transmitting English words to the language of the Polish youth, the respondents accentuate the importance of such means as television, the internet, films, computer games as well as song lyrics. They also stress the influence of one's social environment, in particular, friends who appear to contribute significantly to the adaptation of English by teenagers. Bearing these in mind, it is essential now to provide some concluding remarks to the subject under discussion, which is a notion to be dealt with in the passage below.

Concluding remarks

The variety of a linguistic code presented above with its loanwords (e.g. *cool*, *sorry*), foreign and native slangy and vulgar expressions (e.g. *fuck*, *shit*, *kurwa*, *rozjezbany*), neologisms (e.g. *fureksy*, *bitchiska*) and a set of added prefixes and suffixes (e.g. suffix *-owy* in *coolowy*), turns out to be an efficient and powerful system for its speakers. It can convey anything that standard language can, although it may do so by different means. This is why teenage speech with English loanwords should be seen not as a problem but as a part of the linguistic diversity which enriches modern life. It plays an important role in expressing the concepts, ideas and ways of behaviour of the young generation. Thus, it should be treated as a phenomenon which makes human communication fresh and "full of flavour". The words, phrases and sentences presented above seem to hold a significant position in teenagers' speech and function as a useful source of expressing young people's feelings and emotions.

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Summary

English Words in the Talk of Polish Teenagers.

A Review of Sociolinguistic Aspects

The following article primarily deals with the notion of lexical borrowing. It particularly emphasizes the process of adopting English loanwords by Polish teenagers who in this way reflect their views, beliefs and feelings as well as accentuate their sense of belonging and their presence in the society.

Apart from encapsulating opinions and observations of scholars on this subject, the article provides an extensive amount of empirical data which comes from the survey conducted among young Poles in March 2007. This data is presented by the author with the aim of issuing a list of English loanwords commonly adopted by Polish teenagers for whom these words function as an important part of their daily communication. The use of these items is exemplified in the article by various sentences which were quoted by teenagers participating in the research. The sentences in fact illustrate how foreign units are incorporated to the Polish system and in what social contexts they are applied by the youth.

An analysis of the data is also carried out here to assist the author in classifying English loanwords into certain semantic fields and in distinguishing and comparing the codes developed by boys and girls at the gymnasium and secondary school level.

The article in the final part enumerates the reasons for adopting English words by Polish teenagers and discusses the most influential channels by means of which the transmission of lexical borrowings takes place.