Do Polish teens speak like Valley Girls? An analysis of the Valspeak sociolect and its adaptation to the Polish language

Przemysław Megger
(University of Warsaw)

Valspeak is a sociolect of English that emerged in the 1970s in California, spoken mostly by young women. Its main features, besides a specific vocabulary, include phonetic and syntactic phenomena: uptalk (rising intonation in declarative utterances [Warren 2016]), vocal fry (lowering the voice frequency to 28-73 Hz at the end of a word [Chao and Bursten 2021, Habasque 2021]), construction *to be like* using as a quotative, and word *like* as a discourse marker. Nowadays, these features are observed not in a sociolectal character, but as a property of the colloquial variety of English (Kopp and Ganz 2016).

The purpose of the paper is to analyze new phenomena in the phonetics and syntax of Polish, the genesis of which can be associated with the Valspeak. The analysis of the research material, consisting of utterances from the spoken variety (internet videos) and the written variety (social media posts), has shown that all four mentioned features have been borrowed into Polish, especially its youth variety. The paper will undertake a formal analysis of these phenomena in terms of their innovation to the linguistic system of the Polish. Based on contextual analysis, their functions in communication will also be reconstructed.

Phonetic features were adapted to the Polish system in an unchanged form. Analysis of recordings using Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2024) showed that the same intonation contours and lowering of voice frequency are realized in Polish and in English.

The construction *to be like* corresponds to the Polish calque *być jak*. As in English (Ferrara and Bell 1995), it introduces independent speech. This innovation is incompatible with the syntactic system of the Polish language since *być jak* is a construction introducing comparisons, which obligatorily precedes an exponent being compared (Żmigrodzki 2007).

On the other hand, *like* (Suh 2011) has been adapted to Polish in the form of *jakby*. It functions on the same basis as in English, i.e. as a word the speaker uses to signal a pause necessary to think about the rest of the message. Possible modality introduced by *jakby* will be considered.

So far, these features have not been analyzed for Polish. Some researchers only have mentioned the discussed phonetic properties (Demenko 1999, Garczyńska 2016). However, these phenomena have been described in isolation, without linking them to a set of features characteristic of Valspeak. The paper aims to fill a gap in research on contemporary varieties of the Polish language.

References

1. Boersma, Paul, and Weenink, David (2024), Praat: doing phonetics by computer [computer program], version 6.4.05, retrieved from: http://www.praat.org/.
2. Chao, Monika, and Bursten, Julia R. S. (2021), Girl Talk: Understanding Negative Reactions to Female Vocal Fry, *Hypatia* 36(1), 42–59, https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2020.55.
3. Demenko, Grażyna (1999), *Analiza cech suprasegmentalnych języka polskiego na potrzeby technologii mowy*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza.

4. Ferrara, Kathleen, and Bell, Barbara (1995), Sociolinguistic Variation and Discourse Function of Constructed Dialogue Introducers: The Case of *be + like*, *American Speech* 7(3), 265–290.

5. Garczyńska, Justyna (2016), Czy mężczyźni mówią tak samo jak kobiety? O wybranych różnicach fonetyczno-akustycznych między mową mężczyzn a mową kobiet, *Prace Filologiczne* 69, 139–154.

6. Habasque, Pierre (2021), Is Creaky Voice a Valley Girl Feature? Stancetaking & Evolution of a Linguistic Stereotype, *Anglophonia. French Journal of English Linguistics* 32(1), https://doi.org/10.4000/anglophonia.4104.

7. Kopp, Rochelle, and Ganz, Steven (2016), *Valley Speak. Deciphering the Jargon of Silicon Valley*, Redwood City: Genetius Publishing.

8. Suh, Kyung-Hee (2011), The Social Meanings of Discourse Markers in Valspeak: Like and Totally, *Journal of British and American Studies* 25, 157–186.

9. Warren, Paul (2016), *Uptalk. The Phenomenon of Rising Intonation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

10. Żmigrodzki, Piotr (ed.) (2007–), *Wielki słownik języka polskiego PAN*, online: https://wsjp.pl.