

## Variation in Polish word-final nasal vowels: A sociolinguistic study

Karolina Baranowska

Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

karolina.baranowska@amu.edu.pl

Polish nasal vowels are subject to a great deal of variation. First of all, their realization is dependent on the phonetic context of the segment. When they occur before fricatives or word-finally, they are realized as nasalized diphthongs consisting of an oral vowel and labial-velar glide [ɔw̃] and [ɛw̃], e.g. *wąska* ['vɔw̃ska], *męski* ['mɛw̃sci], before stops and affricates as sequences of oral vowels followed by nasal consonants, e.g. *ząbek*, ['zɔmbɛk] *zęby*, ['zɛmbi] (Zaleska and Nevins 2015: 252), and before approximants /l, r, w, j/, as entirely non-nasal vowels [ɛ] and [ɔ] *plunąłem* ['plunɔwɛm] (Bloch-Rozmej 1987: 84). Even though there exists a set of prescriptive rules concerning the realization of nasal vowels, there is still some stylistic and regional variation, especially in word-final positions. For example, in central as well as southwest Poland, word-final /ɔ̃/ is realized as a sequence of an oral vowel and a nasal segment, e.g. *siedzą* 'they sit' is pronounced with word-final [ɔm], in Warmia and Mazury as a sequence of an oral vowel and the back non-syllabic vowel or glide [ɔw] (Dubisz, et al. 1995: 114), while in the east /ɔ̃/ can be completely denasalized, e.g. *idą* 'they go' is realized with [ɔ] (Dunaj 2006: 163). All these regional variations are regarded as less prestigious in prescriptively-oriented publications (e.g. Dunaj 2006, Madejowa 1993). As for /ɛ̃/, there is no consensus on which word-final variant- [ɛw̃] or [ɛ]- is seen as carrying more prestige. While some argue that the denasalization of word-final /ɛ̃/ has become standard and realizing it as [ɛw̃] is hypercorrect (e.g. Karaś 1977), others see denasalization as the less prestigious variant (e.g. Zajda 1977).

Although there is ample research on vowel nasality in Polish, sociolinguistic studies investigating the realization of nasal vowels seem to be scant and this is why the aim of this research was to investigate the relationship between the realization of word-final nasal vowels and different sociolinguistic factors including age, gender, education, place of residence, as well as style (read vs conversational speech). In addition, a potential change in prestige associated with the variation was explored. The participants of this study were fifty native speakers of Polish living in Greater Poland. They were asked to read aloud a text and describe a picture. Having analysed the words containing nasal vowels word-finally, I found, inter alia, statistically significant associations between age and the realization of word final /ɔ̃/ as [ɔm]. Moreover, speakers with higher education realized /ɔ̃/ as [ɔm] more frequently than speakers with elementary education. When it comes to /ɛ̃/, the participants with higher education denasalized /ɛ̃/ more frequently than the participants with elementary education. Furthermore, /ɛ̃/ was denasalized more frequently in spontaneous speech elicited by means of the picture description task.

### References:

Bloch-Rozmej, Anna. 1987. "Nasal Vowels in Polish." *Poznań Studies in Contemporary Linguistics* 32: 81-102.

Dubisz, Stanisław, Halina Karaś, and Nijola Kolis. 1995. *Dialekty i Gwary Polskie*. Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna.

Dunaj, Bogusław. 2006. "Zasady Poprawnej Wymowy Polskiej." *Język Polski* 3: 161--72.

Karaś, Mieczysław. 1977. "Przedmowa." In *The Dictionary of Polish Pronunciation*, VII--VIII. Warsaw: PWN.

Madejowa, M. 1993. "Normative Rules of Modern Polish Pronunciation." *Studia Phonetica Posnaniensa* 4: 19--30.

Zajda, Aleksander. 1977. "Problemy Wymowy Polskiej W Ujęciu Słownika." In *The Dictionary of Polish Pronunciation*, XXVII--XXXIX. Warsaw: PWN.

Zaleska, Joanna, and Andrew Nevins. 2015. "Transformational Language Games and the Representation of Polish Nasal Vowels." In *NELS 45: Proceedings of the 45th Meeting of the North East Linguistic Society: Volume 3*, 251--60. Amherst, MA: GLSA.