

# Polish Punk Rock in English – Sociophonetic Aspects

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## Popular music – lyrics and performance

By focusing on the phonetic layer of song lyrics, the present paper addresses an aspect closely related to the differentiation between lyrics and performance, so significant in the context of song studies – see e.g. Anna Barańczak<sup>1</sup>: “A song has a potential structure [...], which demands to be concretized through performance”. Admittedly an analysis of stylistic or expressive phonic devices<sup>2</sup> is also possible on the basis of lyrics, by focusing on how they can be potentially read<sup>3</sup>; however, my goal is to investigate pronunciation features in a specific context (performing a song), naturally positioning the performer in the center of these considerations.

A written text can be read out loud in different ways, and pronunciation can carry a number of meanings or associations. These associations result from the complex relationship between someone’s way of speaking and their identity, which is crucial in sociolinguistics<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, some linguistic features, including phonetic ones, can carry a specific stylistic, expressive, or artistic potential; according to Aleksander Wilkoń<sup>5</sup>, “Potentially any linguistic sign and form can gain a style-creative value”.

<sup>1</sup> Anna Barańczak, *Słowo w piosence. Poetyka współczesnej piosenki estradowej* [Word in song. Poetics of contemporary popular song] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1983), 60.

<sup>2</sup> See Sykulska’s classification (Karolina Sykulska, “Język emocji – foniczne środki ekspresywne” [Language of emotions – phonic means of expression], *Poradnik Językowy* 5 [2003]: 6–20).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Monika Konert-Panek, “Rozrywka i zaduma – foniczne aspekty tworzenia nastroju w tekstach Agnieszki Osieckiej” [Entertainment and reflection – phonic aspects of creating atmosphere in Agnieszka Osiecka’s lyrics], in: *Simply Agnieszka: on the 75th anniversary of Agnieszka Osiecka’s birthday. Studies and materials*, edited by Igor Borkowski (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2011), 215–231.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Andrée Tabouret-Keller, “Language and Identity”, in: *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, edited by Florian Coulmas (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 315–326.

<sup>5</sup> Aleksander Wilkoń, *Język artystyczny: studia i szkice* [Artistic language: studies and sketches] (Katowice: Śląsk, 1999), 46.

In songs, which are a special combination of words and music, procedures regarding phonetics can become exceptionally effective drives of stylistic and sociolinguistic meaning. In case of English, so-called *style-shifting*, i.e. choosing a different variant of English when singing (as opposed to an artist's normal speech), is an interesting, well-researched phenomenon – see e.g. Peter Trudgill<sup>6</sup>, Paul Simpson<sup>7</sup>, Joan C. Beal<sup>8</sup>, Andy Gibson and Allan Bell<sup>9</sup>, Richard Watts and Franz Andres Morrissey<sup>10</sup>, and Andy M. Gibson<sup>11</sup>. Typically American English is the variant of choice, which is often interpreted as a symbolic homage to idols from the American South, especially popular among British singers. However, such a stylization is inconsistent, and sometimes it is exaggerated, overshooting the imitated phonetic feature<sup>12</sup>.

There are also other trends in popular music, which depend on (among other things) the genre. For example, Morrissey<sup>13</sup> points to *White Rabbit* by Jefferson Airplane, styled as British English, which may stem from the progressive rock/psychedelic music style of this American band resembling Pink Floyd. Promoting some phonetic features of Cockney (i.e. an accent and dialect of London's working class) in punk<sup>14</sup>, which – due to the fact it co-exists with Americanization rather than replaces it – has further complicated the already complex picture of phonetic stylization in British popular music, is an especially significant trend from the perspective of this paper. Trudgill<sup>15</sup> interprets the use of Cockney, a stigmatized accent traditionally associated with lowest social strata, as an example of covert prestige. In terms of vowels, Cockney is characterized by (among other things): [æɪ] instead of [eɪ] (*rain, mate*), [ʌʊ] instead of [əʊ] (*go, so*), or [aɪ] instead of [aɪ] (*fine, mine*). There are also consonantal differences, such as dropping initial [h] in content words (*house, hot*), and intervocalic glottal stops (*better, city*).

Currently examples of singing with one's natural accent are increasingly more common in music, as well. This phenomenon was already observed by Beal<sup>16</sup>, who analyzed the accent of the leader of Arctic Monkeys, Alex Turner, interpreting his forms from the perspective of language and ideology. The fact that Turner does not follow the model of imitating a foreign accent becomes a manifestation of authenticity and a demonstration of anti-conformism – positioning

<sup>6</sup> Peter Trudgill, "Acts of Conflicting Identity. The Sociolinguistics of British Pop-Song Pronunciation", in: *On Dialect: Social and Geographical Perspectives*, edited by Peter Trudgill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 141–160.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Simpson, "Language, Culture and Identity: With (Another) Look at Accents in Pop and Rock Singing", *Multilingua* 18, No 4 (1999): 343–367.

<sup>8</sup> Joan C. Beal, "«You're Not from New York City, You're from Rotherham»: Dialect and Identity in British Indie Music", *Journal of English Linguistics* 37, No 3 (2009): 223–240.

<sup>9</sup> Andy Gibson, Allan Bell, "Popular Music Singing as Referee Design", in: *Style-Shifting in Public. New Perspectives on Stylistic Variation*, edited by Juan Manuel Hernández Campoy, Juan Antonio Cutillas-Espinosa (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012), 139–164.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Watts and Franz Andres Morrissey, *Language, the Singer and the Song: The Sociolinguistics of Folk Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> Andy M. Gibson, "Sociophonetics of Popular Music: Insights from Corpus Analysis and Speech Perception Experiments" (New Zealand, University of Canterbury, 2019), <http://hdl.handle.net/10092/17892>.

<sup>12</sup> Monika Konert-Panek, "Overshooting Americanisation. Accent Stylisation in Pop Singing – Acoustic Properties of the BATH and TRAP Vowels in Focus", *Research in Language* 15, No 4 (2017): 371–384.

<sup>13</sup> Franz Andres Morrissey, "Liverpool to Louisiana in One Lyrical Line: Style Choice in British Rock, Pop and Folk Singing", in: *Standards and Norms in the English Language*, edited by Miriam A. Locher (Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), 195–218.

<sup>14</sup> Trudgill.

<sup>15</sup> Trudgill.

<sup>16</sup> Beal.

him against the mainstream and globalization. The duo Sleaford Mods<sup>17</sup> and the Dublin trio Fontaines D.C.<sup>18</sup> are two more examples of artists who have gained international stardom in spite of – or perhaps partially thanks to – singing with their strong regional accents. These examples illustrate the dynamic character of stylization and potential for the evolution of socio-linguistic meanings and associations with changing circumstances.

## Punk rock – global perspective

Punk rock has always been characterized by a heterogeneity resulting from its origins in *bricolage*, the combining of various elements from both high and low culture, history, and politics<sup>19</sup>. This complexity can be observed on various levels. From the perspective of music, it was influenced by American proto-punk (The Ramones, Iggy Pop), northern soul, reggae, glitter rock, as well as styles associated with mods. This “unlikely”<sup>20</sup> combination of music traditions merged with an equally eclectic fashion style, which visually reflected this cacophony. According to Hebdige, this reflection is distorted, and punk is characterized by its distorting every convention and discourse. In punk rock, dance – a means of expression which often constitutes a ritualized form of courtship – is turned into pogo, i.e. anti-dance, a caricature of conventionalized dance. In terms of music, it favors simplicity, noise and chaos (as Johnny Rotten put it: “We’re into chaos not music”<sup>21</sup>). Song titles or band names often highlight social exclusion (The Unwanted, The Rejects, The Worst)<sup>22</sup>. Finally, in punk rock the language typically represents the working class, using swearwords, typos, grammatical errors (even in final versions of lyrics) which all create an impression of hastiness<sup>23</sup>. According to Hebdige, this relationship is symbolic – the values, lifestyle, music and visual forms are all connected: “The punks wore clothes which were the sartorial equivalent of swear words, and they swore as they dressed – with calculated effect”<sup>24</sup>.

According to Gibson<sup>25</sup>, in punk rock locality and social class are stressed in order to stand out from homogenous, mainstream pop music. In the case of English-speaking punk rock artists, this is

<sup>17</sup>Monika Konert-Panek, „«Just fake accent nicked from someone posh»: akcent w śpiewie jako wyraz tożsamości regionalnej i klasowej: przypadek Sleaford Mods” [accent in singing as an expression or regional and class identity: the case of Sleaford Mods], in: *Muzyka/Uniwersytet/Technologia/Emocje. Studia nad muzyką popularną* [Music/University/Technology/Emotions. Studies in popular music], edited by Andrzej Juszczak et al. (Kraków: AT Wydawnictwo, 2017), 123–136.

<sup>18</sup>Monika Konert-Panek, Mariusz Gradowski, “«Dublin in the rain is mine» – tożsamość i (prze)tworzona tradycja w piosence Big Fontaines D.C.” [identity and (re)created tradition in the song Big by Fontaines D.C.], *Czas Kultury* 3 (2021): 41–47.

<sup>19</sup>Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>20</sup>Hebdige, 25.

<sup>21</sup>Hebdige, 109.

<sup>22</sup>There are similar examples in Polish punk rock: “Awareness of own individualism and incompatibility with the world, considered a positive value, is directly reflected in names: *Taniec odrzuconych* [Dance of the rejected], *Schizma* [Schism], *Stracony* [Lost], *Ulica* [Street], *Zakon Żebrzących* [Monastery of beggars], *Dzieci Gorszego Boga* [Children of a secondary god], see Mariusz Rutkowski, “(Anty)estetyka nazewnictwa punkrockowego” [(Anti-)aesthetics of punk rock names], in: *Unisono w wielogłosie II: w kręgu nazw i wartości* [Unisono in a polyphony II: names and values], edited by Radosław Marcinkiewicz (Sosnowiec: Wydawnictwo GAD Records, 2011), 136.

<sup>23</sup>Hebdige, 111.

<sup>24</sup>Hebdige, 112–13.

<sup>25</sup>Gibson, 17–18.

manifested via accent in singing, and associating linguistic forms with social values<sup>26</sup>. The local turn had to include local linguistic variants. At the same time punk rock would not be itself without subversion and *bricolage*, resulting in a genre characterized by the most peculiar and complex combination of phonetic forms: standard and non-standard British, as well as standard and non-standard American.

Since variety and change are at the heart of sociolinguistics, it is not surprising that after some time also this revolutionary turn (here, to Cockney) could become a new convention; there are examples of singers from outside of this geographic region who display features of Cockney. For example, Billie Joe Armstrong, frontman for the Californian band Green Day is sometimes “accused” of faking a London accent. In fact, he admits to some stylization, explaining that “I’m an American guy faking an English accent faking an American accent”<sup>27</sup>.

This may result from the weight of associations, connotations, and inspirations related to the above-mentioned homage being paid to the masters of the genre. In the case of punks, this is Johnny Rotten or Joe Strummer rather than Elvis Presley. New models are thus crossing borders – not just local, dialectal, but also national, becoming global, which is how traces of Cockney (which probably no longer depends on its original geographic, or even social origins, and instead is now associated with punk rock as a music genre) can also be found in the vocal style (but not in the speech) of Justin Sullivan, singer for New Model Army – especially in early punk albums<sup>28</sup>. This trend can be found also outside the British Isles, for example in Babel 17, a French coldwave/post punk band founded in late 1980s – the song *Come Into Hell & Murder Hate* contains one of the most characteristic features of Cockney: [æɪ] instead of [eɪ] in the phrase “Then you *awake*, and it all seems as a lie...”.

## Punk rock – local perspective

Polish punk rock emerged slightly later than in the West. At first it was characterized by an intensity resulting from the multilayered character of the rebellion it brought. This rebellion was not just against a broadly understood notion of conformism, but it was also political, opposing communism<sup>29</sup>. At the same time, according to Tomasz Lipiński<sup>30</sup>, certain social realities related to the origins of punk rock in England, such as unemployment, recession, a lack of prospects, which also resonated in Poland, additionally (apart from a simplicity of form) encouraged making punk rock outside popular themes, as well. There was a difference, however: in England, punk rock originated in the working class, whereas in Poland – many musicians,

<sup>26</sup>See indexicality and linguistic-ideological perspective: Michael Silverstein, “Shifters, Linguistic Categories and Cultural Description”, in: *Meaning in Anthropology*, edited by Keith H. Basso, Henry A. Selby (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976), 11–55; Asif Agha, “The Social Life of Cultural Value”, *Language and Communication* 23 (2003): 231–273; Lesley Milroy, “Language ideologies and linguistic change”, in: *Sociolinguistic variation: critical reflections*, edited by Carmen Fought (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 161–177.

<sup>27</sup>Alec Foege, „Green Day: The Kids Are Alright”, *Rolling Stone*, 22.09.1994, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/green-day-the-kids-are-alright-247150/>.

<sup>28</sup>Monika Konert-Panek, “Akcent a wizerunek: foniczne aspekty stylu rockowego” [Accent and image: phonic aspects of rock style], in: *Kultura rocka. Twórcy – tematy – motywy* [Rock culture. Artists – themes – motifs], edited by Jakub Osiński, Michał Pranke, Paweł Tański, vol. 1 (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2019), 55–67.

<sup>29</sup>Mikołaj Lizut, *Punk Rock Later* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2003), 5–6.

<sup>30</sup>Lizut, 47–48.

such as Robert Brylewski, Tomasz Lipiński, or Maciej Góralski, represented artistic-intelligentsia circles<sup>31</sup>.

In terms of *bricolage* as the main element determining punk rock, as well as the symbolic relationship between punk's lifestyle, music forms, and visual forms, we should also mention the significance of the image in the perception of this subculture by people who (today) are veterans of Polish punk. Lipiński discusses the visual layer of the first performance of The Raincoats, a Western punk rock band in Poland, and the singer's outfit, styled as if he was a secret service agent from Eastern Europe<sup>32</sup>. Tomasz Budzyński also points out to the importance of aesthetics, stating that he first liked the punk rock image, and only later started enjoying the music<sup>33</sup>.

In terms of language, and specifically the significance of English in the discussed context, in Polish punk rock Polish language dominates to such an extent that it is in fact the default option. Although this does not mean that Polish punk rock bands sing exclusively in Polish, the wish to reflect local realities through local languages seems to be an important motivation both in Poland and at the very source of punk rock.

At the same time, Western inspirations and references play also an important role in the Polish case. Brylewski says that he discovered punk rock thanks to The Clash and Sex Pistols, at the same time stressing that music was the most important part of it all, with ideology – understood here broadly as mockery and provocation – coming second<sup>34</sup>. Dominika (Nika) Domczyk from Post Regiment lists Vice Squad, Avengers, Siouxsie and The Banshees, The Slits and DIRT<sup>35</sup> as her inspirations. The popularity of British punk rock as represented by bands such as Sex Pistols or The Raincoats of course went further, shaping both artists and audiences<sup>36</sup>.

Thus English was naturally a part of the first punk models and inspirations, and a major factor in the decision to use this particular foreign language in a song, a decision which had serious consequences that were not necessarily obvious. First, as Rafał Księżyk<sup>37</sup> observes in reference to the unexpected popularity of *Son of the Blue Sky* by the Polish band Wilki – choosing English is sometimes considered to be “disobeying the rules guaranteeing a national hit”. Of course this example concerns rock in general, however, in a way associations with punk can be even stronger due to the above-mentioned strong relationships of the genre with local conditions, as well as with local audiences. Asked about the origins of Kryzys (specifically – how The Boors became Kryzys), Brylewski explained that “When we gave our first concert, all the songs were in English, but eventually we wanted to build a rapport with the audience, so we gradually switched to Polish”<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>31</sup>Robert Brylewski, Rafał Księżyk, *Kryzys w Babilonie: autobiografia* [Crisis in Babylon] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2012), 69–71.

<sup>32</sup>Lizut, 50–51.

<sup>33</sup>Lizut, 71.

<sup>34</sup>Brylewski, Księżyk, 59–60.

<sup>35</sup>Rafał Księżyk, *Dzika rzecz: Polska muzyka i transformacja 1989–1993* [A wild thing: Polish music and transformation of 1989–1993] (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne 2020), 167.

<sup>36</sup>Sabrina P. Ramet, “Muzyka rockowa a polityka w Polsce: poetyka protestu i oporu w tekstach utworów rockowych” [Rock music and politics in Poland: poetics of protest and resistance in rock lyrics], *Civitas Hominibus* 13 (2018): 115.

<sup>37</sup>Księżyk, 348.

<sup>38</sup>Brylewski, Księżyk, 84.

Likewise, let us consider what the leader of Pidżama Porno, Grabaż, said about the somewhat controversial semantic dimension of the song *Fucking in the Church*, which in itself is beyond the scope of this paper, however, it does throw some light on various motivations behind the choice of a foreign language in a song:

[Gajda]: The sacrilegiousness and indecency of these lyrics made you write them in English.

[Grabaż]: I could not write them in Polish, I would have to be crazy to do it [...] The only saving grace is that I wrote it in pseudo-English<sup>39</sup>.

Thus using a foreign language can help to distance oneself and conceal certain content which would be too drastic if expressed in the native tongue.

Obviously this decision can result from other motivations. For instance, the above-mentioned band Kryzys often played covers of English songs to familiarize Polish audiences with them: “With Kryzys, we have always been doing propaganda, playing several covers, apart from Marley, *Thief of Fire* Pop Group, *Disorder* Joy Division, *Like a Hurricane* Neil Young, *I will Follow* U2”<sup>40</sup>.

Sometimes this decision can stem from the vague idea of a “better sound”. For instance, asked about the use of English in his *News from Tiananmen* Grabaż explains:

I could not write it in Polish. I started to sing this song in English, as I originally did with most of my songs.

I consulted these lyrics with my friends who had studied English, and they made it work somehow<sup>41</sup>.

The Gdańsk band Deadlock, one of the precursors of Polish punk rock, set up in 1979, had a unique attitude towards English<sup>42,43</sup> – especially Jacek “Luter” Lenartowicz, the band’s drummer and songwriter. Lipiński claims that Lenartowicz was fluent in English, and had a gift for “peculiar, Dadaistic lyrics”<sup>44</sup>. Brylewski goes even further, saying that “Luter was against singing in Polish... he saw himself as a cosmopolitan”, and ultimately emigrated from Poland<sup>45</sup>.

## Analysis

The aim of this paper is to determine how the sociophonetic issues outlined above, so far analyzed mostly from the perspective of Anglo-Saxon culture, function in Polish punk rock in its Anglophone version, both in covers and in original songs. The thesis is that pronunciation in singing can be related to expressing certain, potentially evolving, social or stylistic meanings, and in the case of Anglophone Polish punk rock, these meanings can depend on trends within

<sup>39</sup>Krzysztof Grabowski, Krzysztof Gajda, *Gościu* [Guy] (Poznań: In Rock, 2010), 150–151.

<sup>40</sup>Brylewski, *Księżyk*, 96.

<sup>41</sup>Grabowski, Gajda, 175.

<sup>42</sup>Leszek Gnoiński, Jan Skaradziński, *Encyklopedia polskiego rocka* [Encyclopedia of Polish rock] (Poznań: In Rock, 2001), 141.

<sup>43</sup>Ramet, 115.

<sup>44</sup>Lizut, 47–48.

<sup>45</sup>Brylewski, *Księżyk*, 78–79.

the genre. The analysis will focus on the extent to which the above-mentioned complexity of forms related to variants of English manifests itself, in order to determine in particular the type of stylization or its lack. The results will be interpreted from a sociolinguistic perspective, especially language-ideology in reference to meanings ascribed to certain phonetic forms.

The analysis concerns both features which may potentially indicate Cockney-stylization, and a phonetic linguistic interference, i.e. the influence of Polish on the pronunciation of English. The latter perspective includes the potential for influence as a whole, resulting from differences between two phonological systems: moreover, references to the influence of English spelling on pronunciation will also be considered<sup>46</sup>. The former focuses on potential characteristic features which are at the same time the most effective in stylization. Additionally, in some cases also alternative tendencies towards British or American English are indicated.

The study is based on selected songs (both covers and original work) by 10 Polish punk rock bands (Deadlock, Armia, Brygada Kryzys, Kremłowskie Kuranty, Post Regiment, Fate, Stradood Terror, Pidżama Porno, Alians, Świat Czarownic), as well as on a later example of punk rock stylization (Tomasz "Tomson" Lach), excluding Anglophone reggae and jazz rock songs. The analyzed covers include both reinterpretations of punk rock songs, and examples of songs which originally did not belong to the genre, but were rearranged as such. Table 1 lists all the analyzed songs, divided into original songs and covers. Square brackets provide information on the original versions.

Table 1. Analyzed songs

Artist	Original songs	Covers
Alians		<i>I Fought the Law</i> [Dead Kennedys <sup>&lt;?&gt;</sup> ], <i>White Man In Hammersmith Palace</i> [( <i>White Man</i> ) in <i>Hammersmith Palais</i> , The Clash], <i>Global Landlord</i> <i>Herb Connection</i> [ <i>Let's Lynch The Landlord</i> , Dead Kennedys], <i>War</i> [Leonard Cohen]

<sup>46</sup>It should be stressed that the analysis is not concerned with whether a given pronunciation is correct or not, but with providing a broader picture from the perspective of sociolinguistics and style, i.e. determining the stylization potential related to a given pronunciation in song.

<sup><?></sup> The song was originally performed by Sonny Curtis with The Crickets, but it became a classic thanks to The Clash's cover, hence often it is the latter band's version that is recognized as the inspiration. However, in this case the lyrics indicate that it was the version modified by Dead Kennedys.

Armia		<i>Police and Thieves</i> [The Clash], <i>Nie dotykajac ziemi</i> [Not To Touch the Earth, The Doors], <i>Sodoma i Gomora</i> [Sodom And Gomorrah, Misty In Roots]
Brygada Kryzys	<i>Too Much, Subway Train</i>	
Deadlock	<i>Ambition</i>	
Fate		<i>Biały proszek</i> [Unilever, Chumbawamba]
Kremlowskie Kuranty	<i>In Your Eyes</i>	
Pidżama Porno	<i>Fucking in the Church, News from Tiananmen</i>	<i>Rockin' in the Free World</i> [Neil Young]
Post Regiment	<i>Catch Another Train, Awareness, Now I Know</i>	
Stradoom Terror		<i>If the Kids Are United</i> [Sham 69]
Świat Czarownic		<i>My Youngest Son</i> [My Youngest Son Came Home Today, Eric Bogle]
Tomasz "Tomson" Lach		<i>Jingle Bells</i> [trad. <sup>&lt;?&gt;</sup> ]

Most artists display a clear influence of Polish, and their pronunciation is affected by English spelling. These observations concern both bands performing almost exclusively in Polish, only rarely singing in English, and Deadlock, which performs only in English (which is exceptional when compared to the other analyzed bands). In fact, some bands in this group admitted that they were aware that their English was not perfect; for example, the leader and singer of Armia, Tomasz Budzyński, admits in his autobiography that he had always found singing in English problematic due to his lack of aptitude for foreign languages in general. His original plan to record an Anglophone version of the album *Legenda* was not realized: "I struggled with English, and even though *Groźniak* was almost complete, we eventually decided to give up on

<?> Although we know who the author of this song is (James Lord Pierpont), the song itself has become traditional, and as such it is difficult to connect it to any specific performer.



it, mostly because I was not very enthusiastic about the project”<sup>47</sup>. Recording a whole album, the jazz-rock 2009 *Freak*, can be thus considered a surprising experiment. As Budzyński<sup>48</sup> explained: “Our ancient vision suddenly had a comeback. Together with Gero<sup>49</sup> we wrote the lyrics, and then Gero made sure that they were comprehensible. My English had not improved, but the challenge our band undertook also concerned me”. Grabaż, the singer in *Pidżama Porno*, also talked about his unprofessional way of learning English pronunciation: “Football helped me learn English. [...] «Panorama Śląska» published photos of football teams on the last page. Most were from England, so I would ask my father to tell me how to pronounce their names. This is how I believe I have mastered English phonetics”<sup>50</sup>.

The discussion of results can start with one of the most typical and common examples of the influence of Polish on the pronunciation of English – final devoicing of voiced obstruents, which can be observed also in the analyzed material: [t] instead of [d] in *God* (*Deadlock – Ambition*) or in *good* and *friend* (*Pidżama Porno – News from Tiananmen*); [ɛt] rather than [ɪd] in *divided* and *united* (*Stradom Terror – If the Kids Are United*); [s] instead of [z] in *dreams*, *eyes* and *hands* (*Kremlowskie Kuranty – In Your Eyes*, *Fate – Biały proszek*). Moreover, English consonants are often replaced with Polish ones, which sound similar, but have a different place and/or manner of articulation: [š] instead of [ʃ] in *washes* (*Fate – Biały proszek*), [l] instead of [l̥] and [dž] instead of [dʒ] in *kill* and *religion* (*Deadlock – Ambition*), or the Polish [r] rather than the English [ɹ], for example in *there* – “I didn’t even know there was a war” or *nervous* – “the situation makes me kind of nervous” (*Alians – There is a War*). Finally, the proper name in *White Man In Hammersmith Palace* by Alians in the verse “If Adolf Hitler flew in today / They’d send a limousine anyway” – sounds very Polish altogether.

When it comes to vowels, the interference from Polish manifests itself in replacing the English [ə] with the Polish [ɔ] in words like *colors* (*Pidżama Porno – Rockin’ in the Free World*), *ambition* (*Deadlock – Ambition*), *generation* or *ammunition* (*Armia – Police and Thieves*). It should be noted that in the original version by The Clash (to which Armia refers) a similar tendency is observable, yet not as clearly. Replacing [ə] with an unreduced vowel can also be heard in other cases: with [a] in *total* (*Armia – Sodoma i Gomora*). Other vocalic changes include replacing diphthongs with single vowels (e.g. [ɔ] in *total*; *Armia – Sodoma i Gomora*), or replacing English diphthongs with Polish equivalents (e.g. [ɛj] in *away* or [aj] in *whiter*; *Fate – Biały proszek*).

The influence of spelling on pronunciation is another analyzed feature. Some examples have already been provided (e.g. the pronunciation of the word *total*; *Armia – Sodoma i Gomora*). Other examples include *world* and *work* ([ɔ] instead of [ɜ:], *dirty* and *dirt* ([i] instead of [ɜ:]); *Fate – Biały proszek*) or the Polish [a] in such words as *happened* and *Mary* (*Pidżama Porno – News from Tiananmen*). Sometimes a wrong pronunciation can result from an improper application of rules for reading English spelling, which is especially visible in the case of words such as *by* ([i] instead of [aɪ]) and *bullet* and *butcher* ([a] instead of [ʊ]) in the phrases “Till by a bullet sanctified” and “Like

<sup>47</sup>Tomasz Budzyński, *Soul Side Story* (Poznań: In Rock, 2011), 211.

<sup>48</sup>Budzyński, 423.

<sup>49</sup>Gerard Nowak, an English major, had already translated selected lyrics of Armia and recorded them as folk rock songs with The Soundrops.

<sup>50</sup>Grabowski, Gajda, 24.

dead meat on a butcher's tray", replacing correct monophthongs with diphthongs in *brought* ([ou] instead of [ɔ:]) and *children* ([ai] instead of [ɪ]) in phrases "They brought their young saint home today" and "At children's blood in gutters spilled" (*Świat Czarownic – My Youngest Son*).

When it comes to geographic variants of English, they are used inconsistently. In the analyzed covers, original versions represent American, Canadian, and British variants. British pronunciation is contaminated with Americanisms and Cockney. One could say that in some cases, when American songs were covered, a general impression of an American sound is maintained, especially in *Global Landlord Herb Connection*, or *Let's Lynch The Landlord* by Alians, in which [r] is rather consistently used in words such as *landlord* or *turn*, and the vowel [æ] in *blasting* and *can* is replaced with [ɛ], which is closer to its American realization in comparison with the British one<sup>51</sup> *I Fought the Law* is characterized by some inconsistency in terms of British and American phonetic features, for example: *hot* [hat] in the line "Drinkin' beer in the hot sun" resembles the American original, similarly to *got* [gat] in "You can get away with murder if you've got a badge". However, in the preceding verses: "I needed sex and I got mine" and "The law don't mean shit if you've got the right friends", or "My cop friends think that's fun" British pronunciation of words *got* [gɒt] and *cop* [kɒp] can be heard, as opposed to the original. Finally, no examples of imitating Cockney were found, even when it was audible in original versions, e.g. (*White Man*) in *Hammersmith Palais* by The Clash czy *If the Kids Are United* by Sham 69.

In some cases, passages in Polish are intertwined with English, for example in *Nie dotykając ziemi* by Armia or *Biały proszek* by Fate ("gdzieś w tym wszystkim ja i ty – co jesteśmy gotowi zrobić" [you and I somewhere in all that – what we would do]). It seems to highlight the performer's national identity, situating the English of the whole song in a specific context – perhaps even in brackets – constituting a kind of nod to Polish audiences. Moreover, both in the case of Armia and Fate the song titles are Polonized.

The reason why the next two bands, Brygada Kryzys and Post Regiment, are discussed separately, is that the interference from Polish is far less audible<sup>52</sup>, which is unsurprising especially in the latter band given that the singer, Dominika Domczyk, is an English major.

In the two analyzed songs by Brygada Kryzys<sup>53</sup> there are correct diphthongs in such words as *roads*, *hope* and *most*, and there is no final devoicing – one of the most common examples of Polish interference – in words such as *roads*, *live*, *spend*, *need* final [z], [v] and [d], respectively. There is [ə] in *communication*, and even if in the word *isolation* the same vowel is more similar to [ɔ], it is not as clear as in the already discussed examples. A more pronounced example of Polish interference can be heard in the somewhat captious word *patrol* [pə'trəʊl]. Moreover, the pronunciation here sounds more British: [ɒ] in *blocked* ("they blocked all the roads"), no

<sup>51</sup>In *blasting* the stressed vowel in British English would be [ɑ:]. Yet, even in the cases in which phonemic transcription is the same in both the UK and the US variants, as in *can* [kæn], American English [æ] may be more raised and tensed, compared with the British variant, especially in a pre-nasal position, see Matthew J. Gordon, "The West and Midwest: Phonology", 348 in: *A Handbook of Varieties of English. Volume 1: Phonology*, edited by Bernd Kortmann and Edgar W. Schneider (Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004), 338–350; Charles Boberg, "The Phonological Status of Western New England", 17–19, *American Speech* 76 (1) [2001]: 3–29.

<sup>52</sup>It should be stressed that eliminating all first language interference is almost impossible, see Włodzimierz Sobkowiak, *English Phonetics for Poles: A Resource Book for Learners and Teachers* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2004), 22–23.

<sup>53</sup>The analysis concerns Tomasz Lipiński's pronunciation, not Robert Brylewski's.

rhotacism in *never* (“never never knew I could”) or *scared* (“I’m scared to live”), and the vowel in *ask* is [ɑ:] rather than [æ] (“don’t ask me for no money”).

In the case of Post Regiment, the pronunciation is professional, sometimes inclined towards the American variant, e.g. [æ] in *can’t* (“But something wrong happened can’t you see”) or [ɡɑt] in *got* (“You’ve got it in your brain”). Nonetheless, even though the interference from Polish is not as pronounced as in the cases discussed above, it can be noticed that neither group tries to imitate Cockney. Hence, the phonetic trend characteristic for the genre which originated in England is not represented here, even though it occurs in other regions of the globalized world of music.

Finally, let us discuss an exceptionally interesting case: a punk cover of *Jingle Bells* performed solo by Tomasz “Tomson” Lach, singer in Afromental (set up in 2004), as part of the soundtrack to the 2011 movie *Listy do M* [Letters to M]. The cover is characterized by dynamicity and stylistic variability, both in terms of music and language; apart from the basic text in English, there are also verses in Polish. Interestingly, sometimes there is a non-standard accent, e.g. in the line “**Przybieżeli** do Betlejem pasterze” there is the so-called dark [ɫ], which may sound slightly foreign (an interference from English), or regional (Polish Kresy). The most important issue for us here is the occurrence of phonetic features of Cockney in some vowels. This stylization is especially pronounced in the last word of the phrase “Jingle all the **way**” [æɪ]; it also appears in *sleigh* and *sleighbing* (“In a one horse open sleigh”, “A sleighbing song tonight”). [ʌʊ] rather than [əʊ] in *snow* and *ago* (“Dashing through the **snow**”, “A day or two **ago**”) is another vocalic feature of Cockney; additionally, also [aɪ] resembles Cockney [aɪ] in “Making spirits **bright**”.

## Conclusions

Based on this analysis it can be concluded that the English of Polish punk rock bands set up between the late 1970s and early 1990s reflected how Poles learned the language at that time – with heavy interference from Polish, which obviously also depended on individual circumstances and skill. What is especially significant is that their English is not styled to resemble the fashionable Cockney variant, which is observable in other regions of the world of punk rock, including the discussed example of a pop-punk cover of *Jingle Bells* by “Tomson”. It can thus be said that we are dealing here with a somewhat paradoxical evolution of patterns of sociolinguistic meanings. Forms of Cockney – no longer dependent on associations with a specific socio-geographic area – may have become an impressive element of style rather than a determinant of authenticity. Its 1970s rebelliousness has transformed into an attractive stylistic ornament, commercially adapted in the twenty-first century, like the T-shirts featuring punk rock bands, now commercially available in global chain stores. Hence it is English without any stylization that sounds authentic, natural and honest (at least in the context analyzed here), and as such matches the values associated with punk rock, which elevated non-standard forms (covert prestige). We should remember that even incorrect forms have their place in punk rock<sup>54</sup>. There are also examples from outside punk rock which show that imperfect forms with heavy interference from a given native tongue are an asset in carrying important meanings – e.g. Marlene

<sup>54</sup>Hebdige, 111.

Dietrich's strong German accent played a crucial role in constructing her *femme fatale* image<sup>55</sup>.

We should obviously also consider various social conditions in different periods in Polish history. The ability to acquire linguistic awareness of English is far more easily accessible in the twenty-first century than it was in the 1970s or 1980s. English is now omnipresent, and today we have nearly unlimited access to high quality recordings, which means that hearing and imitating certain unobvious dialectal features is easier. This concerns especially those pronunciation features which are not only to some extent conventionalized, but also those becoming common or even commercially appealing. On the other hand, being able to hear features of Cockney in the communist era, using poor quality devices only testifies to someone's exceptional aptitude for languages. Thus the pop-punk cover of *Jingle Bells* may foreshadow a new trend; perhaps with the rising fluency in English and awareness of its many variants, as well as with good access to high-quality recordings, such stylizations will become more common. Hence, to some extent this may be a question of a generational change – the emergence of a generation who is familiar with English enough to copy (consciously or not) specialized, non-standard genre style patterns.

The social conditions mentioned above are to some extent also connected with a broader, and simultaneously fundamental relationship between language and identity. The significance of language in this respect manifests itself first of all in artistic decisions regarding the choice of language – Polish or English. Robert Brylewski's motivation (cited in the third section of this paper) regarding the choice of Polish in order to build better rapport with the audience on the one hand, and on the other – the choice of English in the context of Jacek Lenartowicz's cosmopolitan approach both seem to somewhat confirm certain sociolinguistic observations. A foreign language may mean – to some extent – accepting a new identity; the pronunciation is then considered to be the best, the most sensitive indicator of accepting this new identity, and at the same time of the level to which the borders of linguistic ego can be permeated<sup>56</sup>. This phenomenon can also be considered in the light of studies investigating relationships between a foreign language (especially pronunciation) and a sense of a cultural dissonance. It turns out that the smaller this dissonance is, the better the pronunciation, and *vice versa* – the bigger the dissonance, the worse the accent. In this case, incorrect pronunciation is connected to anxiety related to the loss of identity<sup>57,58</sup>. The audible interference from Polish in most of the analyzed songs can be considered in this context – the artists may not have had any motivation to take on the identity symbolized by Cockney, instead expressing their Polishness with a Polish accent in English. *Polglish*<sup>59</sup> can thus be seen as a symbol of locality, which in itself is valued in punk rock.

These considerations confirm the complexity and effectiveness of phonetics, both in terms of stylization and expressing identity; the stylistic potential of English in its various forms, as

<sup>55</sup>Allan Bell, "Falling in love again and again: Marlene Dietrich and the iconization of non-native English", *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 5 (2011): 627–656.

<sup>56</sup>David Block, *Second language identities* (London – New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 51.

<sup>57</sup>See e.g. Karen Lybeck, "Cultural Identification and Second Language Pronunciation of Americans in Norway", *Modern Language Journal (Estados Unidos)* 86, nr 02 (2002): 174–191.

<sup>58</sup>Obviously the loss of identity can sometimes be a desired effect – see e.g. the case of *Fucking in the Church* mentioned in the third section of this paper.

<sup>59</sup>Sobkowiak, 23.

well as the dynamics of sociolinguistic meanings related to them. Finally – regardless of the applied stylistic model – the role of voice as an important means of communication between a singer and their audience is confirmed, regarding both the relationship between voice and lyrics<sup>60</sup>, and pronunciation with socio-cultural meanings.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

<sup>60</sup>Paweł Tański, *Głosy i performanse tekstów. Literatura – piosenki – ciało* [Voices and performances of texts. Literature – song – body] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2021).

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# KEYWORDS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

punk rock

**ABSTRACT:**

The paper analyzes the functioning of selected English phonetic features and inspirations related to them in Polish punk rock, and interprets the results in a broader stylistic and socio-linguistic context. It is based on the thesis that pronunciation in singing is often connected to expressing specific, potentially evolving social or stylistic meanings, and in the case of Anglophone Polish punk rock these meanings depend on trends within the genre. In most analyzed cases, English pronunciation displays a lot of interference from Polish and an unstylized sound, while features associated with Cockney are quite rare.

*Cockney*

**style**

SOCIOPHONETICS

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