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Orthophonic errors/clippings in speeches delivered by prominent Polish politicians (2009-2016)

Pomyłki ortofoniczne/skrócenia w wystąpieniach prominentnych polskich polityków (2009-2016)

Summary:

This paper tackles the issue of incorrect abbreviating original words in the Polish language used by the most prominent Polish political figures of the recent years. Orthophony as such is extremely frequently violated in everyday language. The language of Polish broadcast media, contrary to what it was like a few decades ago, seems to follow the trends observed in the speech of ordinary citizens of the country. Moreover, official speeches delivered by major politicians appear to reflect the nonchalance of average speakers. In this article a preliminary analysis of the issue of language decadence at the heights of power is proposed.

Keywords: morphology, phonology, clipping, orthophony, speeches, broadcast media, politicians, sociolinguistics

Streszczenie:

Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje kwestię niepoprawnego skracania polskich wyrazów używanych przez prominentnych polskich polityków ostatnich lat. Ortofonia jest bardzo często naruszana w języku codziennym. Współczesny język mediów audiowizualnych, w odróżnieniu od sytuacji sprzed kilku dekad, wydaje się ulegać trendom widocznym w mowie przeciętnego obywatela. Ponadto, oficjalne przemowy głównych polityków najwyraźniej odzwierciedlają nonszalancję i niedbałość przeciętnych użytkowników języka. W artykule zaproponowana jest wstępna analiza schyłku poprawnego języka na szczytach władzy.

Słowa kluczowe: morfologia, fonologia, ucięcie, ortofonia, wystąpienie, media audiowizualne, politycy, socjolingwistyka

1. Introduction

In this paper we will concentrate upon certain orthophonic errors which can be recently observed in public speeches delivered by the most important Polish politicians with particular attention paid to the issue of clipping. These errors, whose selected examples (2009-2016) are provided below, were gathered by the present author while listening to political debates and official political speeches in Polish broadcast media.

The Polish language, like most or all languages, is in the process of constant change. Nowadays, since the world is developing much faster than in the previous centuries, languages follow suit and the changes they experience are incomparably more rapid than ever before. Novel concepts appear and new words have to be invented, well-known words and phrases adopt new meanings and different versions of familiar meanings surface almost every day. This happens mainly due to the fact that digital media, whose range and speed are uncontrollable, have an unpredictable and unstoppable impact on the language of the man in the street.

Nonetheless, the influence of the language employed by the common speaker has the opposite effect – the language of the media and that used in the media by those who can appear there changes as well.

On the following pages we will take a closer look at only a small fragment of a large body of errors which can be detected in political speeches in Polish broadcast media, namely on those which violate orthophony – the correct pronunciation of words, from the linguistic viewpoint mainly. The samples selected for this article include both spontaneous discussions or speech recorded live and without any preparation and official speeches, which should be, theoretically, well-studied and perfected. An attempt will be made here to discover whether morphological and phonological processes observed in other parts of the ever-changing language can be held responsible for these errors. A sociolinguistic viewpoint will also be taken into account.

The organization of the paper is as follows. First, the linguistic aspects of the word and phrase shortening processes will be presented. Second, examples of clipping in colloquial Polish will be offered and discussed. Third, Internet samples of speeches delivered by leading Polish politicians will be provided and analyzed.

2. Clipping in morphology and phonology

Clipping or abbreviation is one of the most common types of word coinage. According to Bauer[1] clipping is a process of shortening original lexemes (be they

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[1] L. Bauer, *English Word-formation*, Cambridge 1983, p. 233.

simplex or complex) without losing the meaning of these words. Similar definitions can be found in Szymanek[2], Carstairs-McCarthy[3] and in many other sources.

Generally, abbreviated forms fall into at least three types: the end of the original lexeme may be dropped (back-clipping), the beginning may be deleted (fore-clipping) or both the initial and the final part of the basic word may be truncated (mixed clipping), while the middle of the word remains intact. These possibilities are illustrated below:

(1)

Original word	Clipped form
a. back	
veterinarian	*vet*
pornography	*porn*
microphone	*mike*
b. fore	
celluloid	*loid*
telephone	*phone*
caravan	*van*
c. mixed	
refrigerator	*fridge*
detective	*tec*
influenza	*flu*

As we can see above, there are at least three strategies which speakers of English adopt to abbreviate original long words. In all the cases above the resulting forms are in agreement with the rules of English phonology and phonotactics in that they do not contain any sound combinations which are not found in the regular, non-abbreviated vocabulary.

In everyday conversations, speakers of the English language also tend to shorten whole phrases, especially those which are particularly common, e.g.

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[2]   B. Szymanek, *Introduction to Morphological Analysis*, Warszawa 1989.
[3]   A. Carstairs-McCarthy, *An Introduction to English Morphology*, Edinburgh 2002.

(2)

Original phrase	Shortened version
good morning	*morning* or *g'morning*
good afternoon	*afternoon*
good evening	*evening*
goodnight	*night* or *g'night*
excuse me	*scuse me*

In the examples of pleasantries above we can notice an interesting tendency. In the phrases *good morning* and *good night* the optional clipped versions retain the initial sound of the left-hand part of the whole expression. From the viewpoint of morphology, there is nothing wrong with deleting any part of the original word as long as the speakers consider the result correct in terms of their language awareness and intuition. When we look upon this process from the phonological perspective, the situation seems more complicated. Normally, it matters for the speakers whether a word begins with a vowel or with a consonant. This is why, among other things, we encounter two versions of the indefinite article, e.g. *a pear* vs. *an apple*. The same can be observed when we consider the so-called linking-*r*, as in *more pears* ([r] is not pronounced) vs. *more apples* (the linking [r] is audible). In the examples in (3) we see a different trend. Words beginning in vowels do not 'invite' previous consonants, while the consonant-initial words do that. Consequently, in rapid speech the phrases like *g'morning* or *g'night* phonetically begin with the consonant clusters [gm] and [gn], respectively. No word in the English lexicon displays such clusters in word-initial position. Therefore, normal colloquial abbreviations may run afoul of English phonology and phonotactics.

The process of clipping is not confined to English alone. Similar phenomena can be spotted in other languages as well. Consider the following data from colloquial German[4]:

(3)

Original phrase	Shortened version	
Guten Morgen	*Morgen*	– 'good morning'
Guten Abend	*Abend*	– 'good evening'
Gute Nacht	*Nacht*	– 'good night'
Danke schön	*ke schön*	– 'thank you very much'

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[4] I collected these examples during my trips to Germany in July 2011 and December 2015.

These examples show that clipping is fairly typical in commonly used phrases irrespective of the language. In German no violations of phonotactic rules can be observed, though.

In any event, it has to be emphasized that neither the English nor the German examples presented in (2) and (3), respectively, have the same status as officially recognized abbreviations shown in (1) above. The shortened versions of these phrases are purely colloquial and one cannot find them in writing. Therefore, they belong to no morphologically identifiable category.

What should not be neglected in this discussion is the sociological aspect of the above-mentioned shortenings. In particular, since nowadays people tend to live 'fast', the time they spend on communicating with other people appears to shorten gradually. As a result, rendering the meaning becomes more crucial than the actual form in which the message is delivered.

In the ensuing section we will take a look at a handful of similar clipped forms which can recently be observed in colloquial Polish.

3. Clippings in colloquial Polish – a linguistic aspect

In this part we will consider Polish data gathered by the present author from everyday conversations and from the mass media. Nowadays the spoken language of the media does not differ considerably from what can be encountered in real life. This situation results from many sociological and cultural factors which will not be discussed here in greater detail.

Szpyra-Kozłowska[5] observes that in Polish two main types of clipped forms are found. One category contains colloquial items like *professor > sor* – 'professor', which are not as common as their equivalents in English, while the other can be classified as hypocorisms, e.g. *Tomasz > Tomek* – 'Tom', *Janina > Janka* – 'Jane' etc. Here, apart from clipping, diminutive suffixes are added. This classification is by all means plausible in general. Nonetheless, while observing the spoken reality of colloquial Polish (slang and expressions known only to a handful of subculture insiders being excluded here), another set of expressions presents itself with a relatively high frequency. Let us now consider the following examples of common phrases found in colloquial Polish:

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[5] J. Szpyra-Kozłowska, *Słowotwórstwo bez morfemów, czyli o morfologii prozodycznej i formach uciętych*, „Biuletyn PTJ", 2000 t. LVI, p. 66.

(4)

Original phrase	**Shortened version**	
a.		
spokojnie	*spoko*	– 'relax!'
dyrektor	*dyr*	– 'director'
profesor	*prof*	– 'professor'
specjalista	*spec*	– 'specialist'
kontratak	*kontra*	–'counterattack'
b.		
dzień dobry	*(do)bry*	– 'good day'
dobranoc	*branoc*	– 'good night'
do widzeni	*(wi)dzenia*	– 'goodbye'
dziękuję	*kuję*	– 'thank you'
bez sensu	*psensu*	– 'nonsense'
przepraszam	*praszam*	– 'sorry'
naprawdę	*prawdę*	– 'really'
absolutnie	*psolutnie*	– 'absolutely'
dokładnie	*kładnie*	– 'exactly'
na razie	*nara*	– 'see you'
do zobaczenia	*dozo*	– 'see you'

The words in (4a) illustrate colloquial clipping which leads to the forming of shortened versions of lexical items which can be heard in informal situations, sometimes as examples of professional jargon.

The examples in (4b) include single words or phrases which are clipped by many speakers of Polish, even well-educated ones, in informal situations. Most of them, except the final two, of them are instantiations of fore-clipping. Technically, the initial part of the word or phrase is truncated while the ending invariably remains intact. The phrase *psensu* is slightly exceptional since the initial sound is preserved as well. Moreover, it should be noted that the initial [b] of *bez* assimilates to the initial [s] of *sensu* in terms of voicing. It is simply devoiced because Polish phonology does not tolerate groups of consonants whose voicing properties are different. What is also worth mentioning is that the resulting shortened versions conform to phonotactic patterns of Polish. The initial consonant clusters found in the abbreviated examples are

normal Polish word beginnings. For example, the combination [br] can be encountered in *broda* – 'beard', [pr] in *proca* – 'sling', [kw] in *kłopot* – 'trouble', etc.

Another type of error, vowel devoicing or deletion, was detected by Biedrzycki[6] over 40 years ago but its expansion seems to be in progress. In the final decades of the twentieth century this phenomenon was treated as occurring in very colloquial, unguarded speech and it was not observed in the media where importance was attached to diction. The examples include **prosz* instead of *proszę* – 'please', **barc* for *bardzo* – 'very', and **dopsz* used for *dobrze* – 'well'. Below we will see how this trend has found its way to the media and politics.

4. Politicians and errors in everyday debates

During heated debates in the Parliament, while answering question during press conferences or inside television studios Polish politicians frequently make simple grammatical mistakes. What is of interest here is orthophonic mistakes, though. This phenomenon may result from the fact that their speech is often chaotic, unguarded and spontaneous. One of such errors is the failure to pronounce word-final vowels[7]. Consider a few examples of recorded mistakes below (the exact time in which the utterance in question occurs in the recording is provided in the footnotes):

(5)

Intended version	**Actual version**	
a. Radosław Sikorski		
w Bydgoszczy	*w Bydgoszcz*[8]	– 'in Bydgoszcz'
nie do kwestii bezpieczeństwa	*nie do kwestii bezpieczeństf* [9]	– 'not in the case of security'
b. Ryszard Kalisz		
prawnego	*prawnek*[10]	– 'legal-gen.sg.'

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[6] L. Biedrzycki, *Samogłoski bezdźwięczne w języku polskim*, „Logopedia", 1975 T. XII, pp. 14-24.

[7] Another typical mistake is the omission of ł [w] in words like *widziałem* – 'I saw-masc,' *słyszałam* – 'I heard-fem.' etc. More details can be found in: K. Jaskuła, *Intervocalic elision of labials in Polish*, in: *Crossing Phonetics-phonology Lines*, eds. J. Szpyra-Kozłowska, E. Cyran, Newcastle upon Tyne 2014, pp. 63-74; K. Jaskuła, *A sign of the times – a brief note on voiceless vowels and word-final devoicing of consonants in emphatic Polish*, in: *Language Change: Faces and Facets*, eds. M. Charzyńska-Wójcik, J. Wójcik, A. Bloch-Rozmej, Lublin 2014, pp. 99-109.

[8] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Gg-JjDaI_8, 0.59.-1.01, [accessed: 18.03.2016].

[9] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_GLDwNvYv4, 5.14-5.16, [accessed: 18.03.2016].

[10] http://www.polsatnews.pl/wideo-program/gosc-wydarzen-ryszard-kalisz_6348483/ 0.59-1.00, [accessed: 20.03.2016].

domniemanie niewinności domniemanie niewinność[11]   ' – presumption of innocence'

c. Jarosław Gowin

nieprawidłowości	*nieprawidłowość*[12]	– 'abnormalities'
miejsc pracy	*miejsc prac*[13]	– 'workplaces'
tych ludzi	*tych luć*[14]	– 'those people'
lata dziewięćdziesiąte	*lata dziewięćdziesiąt*[15]	– ' the 1990s'

d. Małgorzata Kidawa-Błońska

konkretne osoby	*konkretne osop*[16]	– 'particular people'
ta różnica	*ta różnic*[17]	– 'this difference'

As we can see, the errors are the same in all the cases. The final vowels are missing and the original vowel-final words now end in consonants with all the phonetic consequences. In particular, in the wrongly pronounced word like *niewinność* – 'innocence'-gen.sg., the final consonant cluster remains palatalized although the palatalizing high front vowel [i] is absent from the actual utterance. In words such as *luć* – 'people-gen.', the final consonant remains palatalized as well. Additionally, in accordance with the rule of word-final devoicing of obstruents in Polish, the original voiced affricate [ʣ] loses its laryngeal property and is realized as the voiceless [ʨ]. The same process of devoicing is observed in *prawnek* – 'legal-gen.sg.' and *osop* – 'people' where the original voiced stops [g] and [b] are realized phonetically as [k] and [p], respectively.

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[11] http://www.tvn24.pl/kropka-nad-i,3,m/jaroslaw-gowin-i-ryszard-kalisz-w-kropce-nad-i,538024. html, 5.32-5.33, [accessed: 20.03.2016].

[12] http://www.tvn24.pl/kropka-nad-i,3,m/jaroslaw-gowin-i-ryszard-kalisz-w-kropce-nad-i,538024. html, 13.46, [accessed: 20.03.2016].

[13] http://siedem.videosejm.pl/video/41504-jaroslaw-gowin-konferencja-z-4-wrzesnia-2015-r, 0.25-0.26, [accessed: 20.03.2016].

[14] http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/jaroslaw-gowin-w-kropce-nad-i,615925.html, 0.28-029, [accessed: 20.03.2016].

[15] http://www.polsatnews.pl/wideo-program/gosc-wydarzen-jaroslaw-gowin_6363317/, 09.04, [accessed: 20.03.2016].

[16] http://www.superstacja.tv/program/salon-polityczny-malgorzata-kidawa-blonska,6360112/, 2.12-2.13, [accessed: 24.03.2016].

[17] http://www.superstacja.tv/program/salon-polityczny-malgorzata-kidawa-blonska,6360112/, 5.43, [accessed: 24.03.2016].

5. Prominent politicians and their official speeches

As shown in the examples in section 4, the politicians quoted took part in discussions and performed live, as a result of which their pronunciation was occasionally flawed. The following exemplars are taken exclusively from official speeches delivered by the most prominent Polish politicians. Such talks are expected to be well-prepared, practised, polished and subsequently recorded. This is not always the case, though, since the same mistakes as those occurring in live performances presented in (5) above are also found in the official speeches.

(6)

Intended version	Actual version	
a. Lech Kaczyński		
Polki, Polacy, drodzy rodacy	*Polki, Polac, drodzy rodac*[18]	– 'Polish women and men, dear countrymen'
dziesiąty	*dziesiąt*[19]	– 'tenth'
b. Beata Szydło		
szanowni państwo	*szanowni państf*[20]	– 'ladies and gentlemen'
szanowni państwo	*szanowni państwo*[21]	correct
naprawa Polski	*naprawa Polsk*[22]	– 'repair of Poland'
tego czasu	*tego czas*[23]	– 'this aount of time'
tempo wzrostu	*tempo wzrost*[24]	– 'the rate of growth'
szybko	*szypk*[25]	– 'rapidly'

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[18] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hx2yRU7p700, 0.29-0.30, [accessed: 21.03.2016].

[19] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hx2yRU7p700, 0.38, [accessed: 21.03.2016].

[20] http://www.tvn24.pl/whttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hx2yRU7p700iadomosci-z-kraju,3/oredzie-premier-beaty-szydlo-o-zmianach-w-tk,603285.html, 0.06-0.08, [accessed: 21.03.2016],

[21] http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/oredzie-premier-beaty-szydlo-o-zmianach-w-tk,603285.html, 0.52-0.53, [accessed: 26.03.2016].

[22] http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/oredzie-premier-beaty-szydlo-o-zmianach-w-tk,603285.html, 3.55-3.56, [accessed: 21.03.2016].

[23] http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/oredzie-premier-beaty-szydlo-o-zmianach-w-tk,603285.html, 0.29.-0.30, [accessed: 26.03.2016].

[24] http://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2015-11-18/premier-beata-szydlo-przedstawia-swoje-expose/, 0.23-0.25, [accessed: 21.03.2016].

[25] http://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2015-11-18/premier-beata-szydlo-przedstawia-swoje-expose/, 1.27, [accessed: 21.03.2016].

c. Bronisław Komorowski

w gospodarce	*w gospodarc*[26]	– 'in the economy'
do aktywności	*do aktywność*[27]	– 'to the activity'

As regards the phonetic details of the errors in the examples above, what is striking again is the failure of the speakers to pronounce the final vowels. These vowels can be called silent, mute or simply unpronounced. Such orthophonic errors take place especially (if not exclusively) at the end of phrases and in exclamations. What is worth noting, however, is that the speakers are apparently unaware of their own mistakes and they may repeat the same word correctly or incorrectly. It sometimes happens that the same person in the same sentence or talk uses the same word or phrase twice (compare footnotes 15 and 16), once with a mistake and the other time with no flaw. It seems, then, that we are dealing with a classic example of the interplay between what the speakers know about the language they use (linguistic competence) and how they use the language they know so well (linguistic performance), perfectly described by Chomsky[28].

6. A sociolinguistic aspect of errors

Sociolinguistics deals with analyzing the society's impact on the language of its users. This branch of linguistics, developed mainly in the second half of the twentieth century, is common among linguists who analyse diverse varieties of language. Different versions of the same language may depend on social status, education, age, gender, dialectal variation, language contact and a large number of other, minor factors (Romaine[29]; Coulmas[30]). Sociolinguistic studies have been conducted all over the world (e.g. Labov[31]; Trudgill[32]; Chambers[33], Hernández-Campoy[34], etc.) as well

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[26] http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/oredzie-bronislawa-komorowskiego,565800.html, 0.25-0-27, [accessed: 21.03.2016].

[27] http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/oredzie-bronislawa-komorowskiego,565800.html, 4.10-4.11, [accessed: 21.03.2016].

[28] N. Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, Massachusetts 1965.

[29] S. Romaine, *Language in Society. An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, Oxford 2000.

[30] F. Coulmas, *Sociolinguistics. The Study of Speakers' Choices*, Cambridge 2005.

[31] W. Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns*, Philadelphia 1972.

[32] P. Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*, London 2000.

[33] J. K. Chambers, *Sociolinguistic Theory: Linguistic Variation and Its Social Significance*, Malden 2009

[34] J. M. Hernández-Campoy, *Sociolinguistic Styles*, Chichester 2016.

as in Poland (e.g. Lubaś[35]; Wilkoń[36], etc.) Some of them (e.g. Kurzowa[37]; Leitner[38]; Loewe[39], etc.) examine the language of the media from the sociolinguistic viewpoint. The issue of clipping and orthophonic errors has not gained too much popularity among sociolinguists, though.

Nonetheless, let us consider the above-mentioned criteria to see whether any of them can be applied to the present discussion. As regards the social status and education, all the politicians mentioned here naturally belong to the intelligentsia, they are well-off and well-educated. Their age is invariably over fifty, although younger politicians are alike in this respect. The gender does not seem to matter since, although a smaller number of women make the mistakes at hand, there are fewer women than men in politics generally. There are no clear-cut dialectal differences either since they all speak Standard Polish in public. Hence, all the most typical touchstones of sociolinguistics do not find any crucial application in this discussion. All but one – language contact.

Normally, this term refers to two separate languages which influence each other. In the case of Polish, it seems that this definition applies to another type of impact. In particular, the language of the average speaker is so influential that even the speakers who are, officially, well-educated, blindly reflect what they experience in their everyday life and contact with regular speakers. In sum, no polished speech survives.

7. A simple diagnosis of the state of affairs

What is the reason why the most prominent Polish politicians make simple orthophonic mistakes while revealing their ideas and beliefs in public? Another question should be asked and answered here as well. What is the reason why also broadcast media journalists, panel show hosts, interviewers, invited experts, weathermen and the like do the same? This paper is not about the latter groups. Nonetheless, the answer seems to boil down to a simple diagnosis. This opinion is presented below.

When broadcast media commenced in the first decades of the twentieth century, they had a multi-layered mission. The mission was mainly to gather important information and to broadcast it to the public. Another goal was to verify the information

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[35] W. Lubaś, *Społeczne uwarunkowania współczesnej polszczyzny. Szkice socjolingwistyczne*, Kraków 1979.

[36] A. Wilkoń, *Typologia odmian językowych współczesnej polszczyzny*, Katowice 2000.

[37] *Badania nad językiem telewizji polskiej: studia metodologiczne i opisowe*, red. Z. Kurzowa, Warszawa 1985.

[38] G. Leitner, *The sociolinguistics of communication media*, in: *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, ed. F. Coulmas, Oxford 1997, pp. 187-204.

[39] I. Loewe, *Gatunki paratekstowe w komunikacji medialnej*, Katowice 2007.

so as not to lose credibility. When the radio and television became part and parcel of a life of an ordinary recipient, attention was paid to not only to informing but also to educating the listeners, the sound of the language being involved. In Britain RP (Received Pronunciation) and in the United States of America GA (General American) were normally, albeit not by all experts, considered as the prestige dialects. In Poland the so-called literary language enjoyed the same status in the media. In most countries broadcast media employees had to represent the highest standards of grammar and pronunciation, and public figures who were interviewed were expected to display exemplary diction as well. The United Kingdom and the USA apart, in Poland the current state of affairs appears to be as follows.

Nowadays the standards for both parties, that is the interviewers and the persons invited, have changed. It is not the media that set standards of pronunciation. On the contrary, they follow the sub-standards represented by the average speakers of the language. Due to wide access to higher education, a great number of people nowadays have diplomas and even research degrees. However, this fact need not correspond with a very good command of the Polish language, the pronunciation being part of it. These speakers establish the new canons and these new standards are most readily adopted by the media and by speakers who appear there, politicians included.

8. Conclusion

This paper was aimed at discovering whether purely linguistic or sociolinguistic reasons for orthophonic errors made by Polish politicians during their public performances could be detected, pinpointed or explained. It was shown that the clipping of word-final vowels has little to do with the typical morphological process of abbreviation. Nonetheless, it was observed that the wrongly clipped forms are following the regular rules of Polish phonology. As for the sociolinguistic part, the criteria established for pinpointing the reasons why some linguistic phenomena occur in the talks of certain groups of people are not exactly helpful.

We may conclude, therefore, that politicians do not differ from any other average users of Polish even though the former appear in the media much more frequently. Journalists and experts also make the same mistakes as the man in the street. What does this tell us about the average speakers of the Polish language? They use their language the way they like, frequently casually and carelessly, sometimes pronouncing the same word in dissimilar ways, depending on the mood, attitude or the place of that word in a phrase. Politicians giving their talks in the media do exactly the same thing. Thus, the language of the media and that heard in the media is no longer an elegant example to follow.

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