

# POLISH FOREIGNER TALK

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An experiment was conducted whose aim was to elicit a sample of 'foreigner talk' in Polish. The subjects were 28 students at the Institute of English Studies at Poznań University. They were given half an hour's talk in English about the phenomenon of 'foreigner talk' and then asked to translate into Polish ten English sentences (see appendix). These were the same sentences as used by Ferguson in his elicitation of English 'foreigner talk' (Ferguson 1975). They were then asked to 'translate' the standard Polish sentences into Polish 'foreigner talk'. The analysis of the resulting 280 sentences largely confirmed the findings of other investigations into 'foreigner talk' in other languages, as to the salient characteristics of this widespread so-called 'simplified register' (cf. Ferguson 1971, 1975; Corder 1977, Meisel 1977, Fairfax-Crone 1975, Stassin 1977).

## 1. STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

### (a) *The verb*

The verb in standard Polish is morphologically marked for voice, person, number, gender, aspect and tense. In the data elicited there was a very strong tendency to reduce the complexity of the verbal morphology by the general use of the unmarked form of the infinitive (i.e. the imperfect infinitive). Thus, out of 426 finite verb forms in the standard Polish version only 84 were marked morphologically in any way in the elicited 'foreigner talk'.

The range of morphological marking, where present, was severely reduced; person and gender marking was occasionally present but plural number only once. Tense marking was generally ignored and temporal reference achieved,

where the context permitted, by adverbial means. There was no pattern to be observed in the few cases where perfective aspect marking had been retained.

The general use of the infinitive form necessitated, of course, the introduction of personal pronoun subjects which, where the verb is marked for person in standard Polish, are in most cases optional (see below).

(b) *The copula*

The copula was not omitted as frequently as studies of 'foreigner talk' in other languages would have predicted (69 out of 140 potential cases). The forms most frequently found, however, are severely restricted; *być* (infinitive), *jest* (3rd person sing. pres.). Ferguson's claim that there will be a strong tendency to omit the copula in 'foreigner talk' does not seem to be supported in this case. There are five sentences in the test instrument which contain a copula in standard Polish, each representing a different sentence type: affirmative, negative, *yes/no* interrogative and *wh-* interrogatives of two types. Table 1 shows how each type was handled by the subjects.

Table 1. Distribution of various forms of the copula in Polish 'foreigner talk'

	Ø	<i>być</i>	<i>jest</i>	<i>sq</i>	<i>mieć</i>	Total
Where is the money?	17	9	—	1	1	28
Is he your brother?	16	6	6	—	—	28
He's not my father.	15	10	3	—	—	28
He's my brother.	19	9	—	—	—	28
Who is this man?	6	10	12	—	—	28
Totals	73	44	21	1	1	140

With the exception of sentence 5, the tendency to omission tends to be clear. In the analysis of items II and VII (see appendix) there is considerable variability in the ways the subjects realised the copula in the two clauses. For each item there were a number of different solutions (see Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of various forms of the copula in two paratactic sentences in Polish 'foreigner talk'

Clause 1	Clause 2	Item II	Item VII
Ø	Ø	12	5
<i>być</i>	<i>być</i>	8	5
<i>jest</i>	<i>jest</i>	2	5
Ø	<i>być</i>	2	1
<i>jest</i>	Ø	2	7
<i>być</i>	Ø	1	4
Ø	<i>jest</i>	1	—
<i>być</i>	<i>jest</i>	—	1
		28	28

In item II two tendencies are clear: the omission of the copula in both clauses or the selection of the infinitive in both clauses (20/28 subjects). In item VII no such tendency is present. No explanation is offered for this finding.

Taken with the previous data, it appears justified to say that the scale of simplification appears to operate in this fashion: omission of the copula → use of the unmarked infinitive form → the use of other finite forms.

### (c) *The noun*

In the use of nouns in the data, there is a strong tendency to the omission of case marking. Out of eight nouns in the test sentences four are in subject function and four in other functions. If all test subjects had observed this difference by appropriate case marking, it would have yielded 112 examples of nouns in nominative case and the same number in other cases. The actual obtained results, however, show only 10 nouns marked as nominative as against 206 in oblique forms — a clear tendency to simplification of the case system.

The data also shows a slight tendency towards a generalisation of the singular form of the noun. In item VIII, where the noun is countable, thirteen subjects 'redundantly' marked the noun as plural and retained a cardinal number. There were, in all, three plural nouns in the test sentences. The expected yield, therefore, of plural forms in the data was 84. In the result only 59 of these were marked for plural, 25 remaining unmarked.

There were two interesting cases of 'lexical simplification': one subject used *papa* for *father* (the identical form was found in some of Ferguson's subjects) and twice the reduplicated form *paf-paf* occurred in the place of the normal word for *gun* (cf. *bam-bam* in Ferguson's data).

### (d) *Personal pronouns*

In standard Polish usage first and second person pronoun subjects are omitted, since the category is marked in the inflections of the verb. The third person pronoun subject is optional in all cases where the verb signals the gender of the subject (cf. item III) or where reference is previously established in context (cf. items II and VII).

In item III the verb *powiedziata* in the subordinate clause signals a feminine subject, hence the pronoun *ona* may be omitted. In items III and IV reference is established in the first clause and therefore the pronoun is optional in the second. In non-subject function, of course, all pronouns are obligatory. With this in mind we can calculate the number of personal pronouns in both functions which would be required in the data in standard Polish and then compare them with the forms actually found in the corpus. The results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Pronoun forms supplied in 'foreigner talk' data compared with requirements in standard Polish

Person	Subject		Non-subject	
	Standard Polish required	Foreigner talk supplied	Standard Polish required	Foreigner talk supplied
1 <i>Ja</i>	0	100	56	40
2 <i>Ty</i>	0	102	56	34
3 <i>On</i>	84	152	56	49
	140			
	28			
<i>Ona</i>	56	49	0	0

As could have been predicted, the simplification of verbal inflection resulted in an increased incidence of personal pronouns.

There is, however, very little evidence of a simplification of the morphology of the pronoun system. The nominative case of the first person pronoun with an appropriate preposition was used in place of the correct case marking in only 10 out of a possible 56 occurrences. The corresponding figures for second and third person are 15 and 12 respectively. This indicates a tendency of only between 20—25% towards simplification of the pronoun system, and is in line with the findings in 'foreigner talk' in other languages.

Apart from a few sporadic cases of the use of the possessive form of the pronoun in other functions, the use of the former is normal except for 2 subjects who used the feminine form *twoja* and *two moja*, at the same time changing the gender of the accompanying noun from masculine to feminine.

Two interrogative pronouns, *kto* and *gdzie*, were used in standard ways (with one exception when *kim* was used (instrumental case)).

Items I and IX permit the occurrence of a singular relative *który* and plural relative *które* respectively in standard Polish. The observed results were the use of *który* 5 times and 3 non-subject forms in item I, and only 3 occurrences of *które* in item IX; the remaining 45 possible were handled by parataxis.

#### (e) Conjunctions

Only the conjunction *i* (and) was called for in the test sentences. It was employed 26 times to coordinate clauses of a compound sentence (item V), three times in the coordination of imperative sentences (item IV) where in standard Polish only a single verb is called for, and 11 times to render the meaning *with me|you* (e.g. *he and I*; item VI).

(f) *Other categories*

Prepositions were comparatively numerous, used both with object case pronouns and those simplified subject case pronouns which occurred in other functions.

Adverbs were used in standard ways. There were two attempts to simplify *zawsze* (always) by resorting to periphrasis — *noc i dzień* (night and day) or *ciagle* (continually). It is also worth noting that in the items where no adverbs appeared in the stimulus sentences some subjects attempted to indicate present time adverbially, e.g. *teraz* (now) (twice) and future time with *potem* (afterwards) (twice) and *później* (later) (once). They also used the adverb *razem* (together) for *with me* and *with you* (four times).

The quantifier *trochę* (some/a little) was used only seven times (item V). Together with *malo* (little) (twice) and *trocha* (once), a dialectal form of *trochę*, little used now, the quantifier was only used by ten out of 28 subjects. This again might indicate a characteristic feature of Polish 'foreigner talk'.

(g) *Complex and compound sentences*

No clear picture emerges of the way that the clauses in complex and compound stimulus sentences are handled in Polish 'foreigner talk'. In the two complex sentences (items I and IX) there is a definite tendency towards asyndetic subordination. In item I the relative pronoun was used only 9 times. Twelve subjects simply omitted the relative and conjoined the two clauses paratactically after having simplified each in the manner described above. Six subjects used in addition a pronoun in the second clause, thereby establishing coreferentiality of both clauses. One subject reversed the order of the clauses establishing coreference with the first and making a comment on it with the second. In item IX no such variability was observed, but more subjects used asyndetic subordination than in item I (25 subjects). In the complex sentence in item III, 26 subjects resorted to the use of the relative pronoun *co*, one used *ta rzecz* (this thing) and only one subject omitted the relative. It is difficult to explain this fact otherwise than by assuming that the subjects retained the relative in order to mark the embedded clause as interrogative (see comments on interrogation below).

(h) *Tense*

As stated earlier, tense markings are generally disregarded by subjects. Where the translation made it possible (items V, IX and X), time was realised by adverbs of time. Apart from a few instances of a similar kind in other sentences mentioned above, the distinction between tenses was lost: in item III the past tense was only marked twice and, strangely enough, the two subjects used the present tense of the verb instead. In item VI the standard future form of the verb was used only six times.

(i) *Interrogation, negation and the imperative*

Interrogatives other than yes/no interrogatives are marked as such with interrogative pronouns. In standard Polish yes/no questions are formed by placing an interrogative particle *czy* in front of an affirmative sentence. In the data this particle was very seldom used (9 times in item III and 7 times in item VII). Subjects tended therefore to disregard the formal distinction between yes/no questions and affirmative sentences. In the written form interrogation, of course, was marked by the use of the question mark. In speech presumably the distinction would be marked by intonation.

Negative sentences did not exhibit any peculiarities. As in standard Polish, negation was achieved by placing *nie* before the verb or before the negated noun phrase in the absence of the copula. There were only two cases of *nie* being placed after the negated element.

Item IV consisted of three imperative verb forms, one with negation. The first two forms (*come and see*) would normally be rendered with one word in standard Polish. In this sample of 'foreigner talk' the result was effectively the same (see above). Ferguson's prediction that in such sentences there will be a tendency to use second person pronouns before the verb seems to have been borne out in the case of the first sentence in the item, where the pronoun *ty* was added in 19 cases. The remaining 9 subjects either used the standard imperative form (twice), the infinitive (3 times), a future form of the verb (twice) or some other form (twice). In the negated imperative sentence, however, the personal pronoun was used only 8 times, the infinitive 14 times, and the standard imperative form 6 times. Characteristically, six subjects used forms of the verb *remember* instead of *not+forget*.

To get a complete picture of the experiment it is important to consider how the original English sentences were rendered into standard Polish. The first thing that strikes the investigator is the fact that the subjects had some difficulty with their native language. This phenomenon does not appear to be a unique characteristic of the present experiment (Zydatiss, quoted by Corder 1973) and as such requires some explanation. However, before such an explanation is undertaken let us first examine the kind of 'errors' made by the subjects.

(1) Many female subjects (10) have a tendency to use masculine forms of the verb in the first person singular. This may be due to the prevailing tendency to use masculine forms in translation exercises.

(2) The third person singular pronoun was omitted (15 times) where it was obligatory in order to mark the gender of the subject.

(3) The quantifier *trochę* was omitted seven times.

(4) On six occasions the subjects exhibited a preference for the subject

case of the interrogative pronoun *kto* as in *Who is this?* instead of the object case *kim* as in *Who is this man?*

(5) Many subjects had difficulty in rendering the unmarked English form *go* (item X) into Polish, where it is necessary to specify the form of going.

## 2. VARIABILITY ANALYSIS

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that there is considerable variability in the data of 'foreigner talk' in Polish elicited in this investigation. Ferguson (1975) specifically refers to 'tendencies' which may be found in simplified registers and comments on the considerable variability which may be found in empirical data in relation to the omission of the copula. It was therefore felt that it would be of interest to examine, in the case of the present data, the nature and extent of the variability to be found in respect of the four major categories: the noun, the verb, the pronoun and the copula. It was hypothesised that such a study would reveal a pattern of simplification which could be expressed in the form of an implicational scale of the sort which stated that if a subject showed a measure of simplification in one category (e.g. the verb) he would show a degree of simplification at least equal or greater than that in some other category (e.g. the copula).

The first step in undertaking this analysis was to classify all subjects' use of Noun, Verb, Pronoun and Copula on a three-point scale: consistent use of standard system = +, consistent use of one invariable form = -, and variable performance, i.e. alternating between + and -, = V. This analysis yielded six patterns:

	Pro.	Noun	Cop.	Verb	
1	V	V	V	V	13 subjects
2	V	V	V	—	7 subjects
3	+	V	V	V	2 subjects
4	+	V	V	—	3 subjects
5	+	V	—	—	1 subject
6	—	V	V	—	2 subjects
					<hr/> 28 subjects

It will be seen from this analysis that there is an implication operating from right to left, such that the copula system is always of equal or greater complexity than the verb system, the noun than the copula and, with the exception of two subjects, the pronoun system than the noun. It may also be observed that the reversal of the categories (N)oun and (C)opula makes no significant difference to the pattern with the exception of one subject

(pattern 5). Thus, by eliminating only three out of 28 subjects all the remainder can be accounted for in terms of just four patterns.

	P	N/C	V	
1	V	V	V	13 subjects
2	V	V	—	7 subjects
3	+	V	V	2 subjects
4	+	V	—	3 subjects
				<hr/> 25 subjects

Since, however, the 'variable' category includes a number of different 'degrees of simplification', the second step was to quantify the degree of simplification in each category. This was done by assigning an 'index of simplification' for each category according to the number of distinctions (e.g. tense, number, gender, case, aspect, etc.) observed by each subject in each category. The resulting indices, which varied between 1—3 in the case of the copula and 1—6 in the case of the verb, were reduced to comparable figures by multiplication to supply a common denominator (i.e. 30). The results of this computation yielded the following patterns of implication:

1.	$P \rightarrow C \rightarrow N \rightarrow V$	17 subjects
2.	$P \rightarrow C \rightarrow V \rightarrow N$	5 subjects
3.	$C \rightarrow P \rightarrow N \rightarrow V$	2 subjects
4.	$P \rightarrow N \rightarrow C \rightarrow V$	4 subjects
		<hr/> 28 subjects

This can be quantified in terms of certain implications of simplification:

$P \rightarrow C$	26 subjects out of 28
$C \rightarrow V$	25 " " " 28
$C \rightarrow N$	24 " " " 28
$N \rightarrow V$	16 " " " 28

This analysis shows that there was a very general tendency to simplify the copula system to an equal or greater extent than the pronoun system, the verbal and nominal system than the copula system and a slightly less pronounced tendency to simplify the verbal system to a greater extent than the nominal system. To put it another way, this data suggests that simplification begins with the verb, extends to the noun, then the copula and lastly to the pronoun system.

Whilst these results are certainly interesting and suggest that we have here a small stretch of a continuum of complexity—simplicity, the number of subjects involved and the number of instances of each category in the test instrument is rather small. It must be remembered that the instrument was



not designed for any sophisticated quantitative study which a variability analysis involves. However, the findings that simplification does indeed appear to be patterned and not random is of some theoretical interest and warrants further investigation with elicitation techniques designed specifically to yield a sufficient quantity of data for a more thoroughgoing study of this tendency.

## APPENDIX

- Item I I haven't seen the man you are talking about.  
 Item II He's my brother, he's not my father.  
 Item III Did you understand what she said?  
 Item IV Come and see me tomorrow. Don't forget!  
 Item V Yesterday I saw him and gave him some money.  
 Item IV He's working with me. He'll work with you too.  
 Item VII Who is that man? Is he your brother?  
 Item VIII He always carries two guns.  
 Item IX Where's the money I gave you yesterday?  
 Item X She's going tomorrow.

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