

## Decomposition of Nasal Vowels in Polish in View of Common “Errors”.

By Bartłomiej Czaplicki, University of Warsaw

In this paper I attempt to show how common “errors” provide insight into the phonological system of Polish. The status of nasal vowels (e.g. *dąb* ‘oak’, *sęp* ‘vulture’, *gęś* ‘goose’) has been subject to much debate. There are phonologists who grant nasal vowels underlying status (Bethin 1992, Stieber 1958), while others claim that nasal vowels are reanalyzed as underlying sequences of an oral vowel and a nasal consonant (Gussmann 1974, Rubach 1984). Neither of the analyses is unequivocally superior but evidence from non-normative speech points to the latter solution.

I begin by looking at the frequently discussed cases involving the secondary derived imperfective: *wyłączyć* [on] – *wyłączać* [on] ~ [an] ‘switch off’, *mądrzyć się* [on] – *wymądrzać się* [on] ~ [an] ‘play clever’, *zakąsić* [ow] – *zakąszać* [ow] ~ [aw] ‘snack’, etc. Unquestionably, the non-normative realization of the nasal vowels as [an] in the derived imperfective provides evidence for their decomposition into an oral vowel and a nasal consonant. The alternation of vowels [o] and [a] in these words must be seen as analogous to the regular process involving non-nasal vowels in *robić* [o] – *wyrabiać* [a] ‘do’, *odnowić* [o] – *odnawiać* [a] ‘renew’, etc. It is crucial that the so-called nasal vowels are decomposed at the stage when the process changing [o] to [a] takes place. Otherwise, the alternations *wyłączyć* → *wyłączać* [a] and *robić* → *wyrabiać* [a] would have to be handled by two disparate rules.

I move on to consider the dialectal (stigmatized) decomposition of final nasal vowels in *chcą* [om] ‘they want’, *robią* [om] ‘they do’. Even more frowned upon is the denasalization resulting from misanalysis in words like *rozumiem* [em] → [e] ‘I understand’ and *umiem* [em] → [e] ‘I know’. Decomposition can be readily used to account for the behavior of final nasal vowels.

Next, I focus on non-normative and highly stigmatized derivatives of *wziąć* ‘take’: *weznąę*, *weźnie*, *weźniemy* instead of standard *wezmę* ‘I will take’, *weźnie* ‘he will take’, *weźniemy* ‘we will take’; and *wyjąć* ‘take out’: *wyjnę*, *wyjnij*, *wyjmij* instead of standard *wyjmę* ‘I will take out’, *wyjmie* ‘he will take out’, *wyjmij* ‘take out’ (imp.). To tackle the alternations in such words, first I resort to their etymology. I argue that the “errors” are not accidental and, therefore, require an explanation. It is claimed that the words *wziąć* and *wyjąć* underwent a reanalysis of underlying structure as a result of paradigmatic leveling. The

resulting alternations are easily accounted for if the so-called nasal vowels are represented as a sequence of an oral vowel plus a nasal. On the other hand, the assumption of underlying nasal vowels spawns serious complications in the phonological system. Furthermore, it is shown that nasal vowels cannot be maintained at any intermediate stage in the derivation.

Finally, I attempt to refute arguments frequently used to defend the underlying status of nasal vowels, such as nasal vowel backing in, for instance, *zqb* ‘tooth’ – *zęby* ‘teeth’, *wąz* ‘snake’ – *węża* ‘snake’ (gen.sg.). It is claimed that such processes cannot be used as valid arguments in contemporary standard Polish. I conclude that nasal vowels are best analyzed as underlying sequences of an oral vowel and a nasal consonant.

#### Selected References

- Bethin, C. 1992. *Polish Syllables. The Role of Prosody in Phonology and Morphology*. Columbus: Slavica Publishers.
- Gussmann, E. 1974. Nasality in Polish and English. *Papers and Studies in Contrastive Linguistics* 2. 105-122.
- Gussmann, E. 1978. *Explorations in Abstract Phonology*. Lublin: UMCS.
- Rubach, J. 1984. *Cyclic and Lexical Phonology: The Structure of Polish*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Stieber, Z. 1958. *Rozwój fonologiczny języka polskiego*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.