

# English Loanwords in Polish and the Question of Gender Assignment

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## 1 Introduction

In borrowing and code-switching situations in which the host language (L1) has grammatical gender but the donor language (L2) does not, L1 speakers are faced with the problem of assigning gender to L2 loanwords. This is the case with English loanwords in Polish, since English does not have grammatical gender, but Polish has three: masculine, feminine, and neuter. In this paper I examine gender assignment to English loanwords by Polish speakers in the United States.

I will first show that, contrary to findings of some previous studies (Arndt 1970, Poplack et al. 1982), there is considerable interspeaker variation in loanword gender assignment. This variation results from tension between (i) the gender of the Polish equivalent or near-equivalent and (ii) the phonological shape of the word, i.e. what genders are allowed by Polish morphophonotactics. In Polish, certain nominal endings are associated with a particular gender, and therefore it is usually possible to predict a noun's gender by looking at its phonological shape. I will discuss this in detail in section 3.

The sentences in (1) provide an example of interspeaker variation to be discussed in this paper.

(1) a. **Speaker 1:**

ten                      *brace* który                      nosiłam na kolanie  
this (masc.nom.) *brace* which (masc.nom.) I wore on knee  
"this brace which I wore on my knee"

b. **Speaker 2:**

ta                      *brace* która                      mam na kolanie  
this (fem.nom.) *brace* which (fem.nom.) I have on knee  
"this brace which I have on my knee"

The loanword in (1) is *brace*. For Speaker 1, *brace* is masculine, as evidenced by the masculine demonstrative *ten* "this" and the masculine form *który* "which." For Speaker 2, *brace* is feminine as shown by the feminine forms *ta* "this" and *która* "which" (descriptive reports of similar variation for Polish

speakers in the United States can be found in Doroszewski 1938 and Lyra 1966).

Second, I will demonstrate that there is also variation within the speech of a single speaker depending on the case in which the loanword occurs. The sentences in (2) offer an example of such variation.

(2) a. **Nominative case:**

nowa highway w Massachusetts  
 new (fem.nom.) highway in Massachusetts  
 "the new highway in Massachusetts"

b. **Genitive case:**

nie zbudowali jeszcze tego highway'u  
 haven't built (3pl.) yet this (masc.gen.) highway (masc.gen.)  
 "they haven't built this new highway yet"

In (2) the borrowed noun is *highway*. In the Nominative (2a), *highway* is feminine, as shown by the feminine form of the adjective *nowa* "new." In the Genitive (2b), however, *highway* is masculine, as shown by the masculine demonstrative *tego* "this" and the masculine inflectional ending -u on *highway*. By examining several cases of such variation, I will demonstrate that in assigning gender to loanwords in oblique cases speakers evaluate the entire paradigm and opt for paradigm uniformity.

Third, I will address the question of how loanword gender assignment can be influenced by speakers' attitudes towards borrowing and code-switching, in particular by their preferences for or against morphological integration of loanwords. I will suggest that speakers who prefer not to integrate loanwords end up making different gender assignment choices from those who opt for integration.

## 2 Methodology

Previous studies of loanword gender assignment have analyzed loanwords already established in the speech community (Arndt 1970, Beardsmore 1971, Poplack et al. 1982, Rabeno and Repetti 1997). The problem with such an approach is that it practically precludes interspeaker variation: speakers are likely to assign gender by convention current in their speech community. By contrast, I chose to test some English nouns which are borrowed occasionally by one or more of the consultants, and some which never appear as loanwords

in their spontaneous speech.<sup>1</sup> By introducing novel borrowings and also by targeting speakers with multiple gender assignment tasks, I was able to observe real-time computation of gender by an individual speaker. This approach reveals the workings of the productive generative system, rather than simply accessing the speakers' lexical entries.

Forty-seven English nouns were tested on each speaker in 2 different tasks. In the first, the speakers were given English sentences in which the target noun was underlined, and asked to translate them into Polish while treating the underlined noun as a loanword, as illustrated in (3).

- (3) *original sentence*: a long message on the answering machine  
*Polish translation*: długa message na automatycznej sekretarce

In the second task, the speakers were asked to make grammaticality judgments for Polish sentences with integrated and unintegrated English loanwords in different genders, as illustrated in (4).

- (4) *Task*: rate each sentence's grammaticality on the scale of 1-5 (5=best)  
 Nie zostawiłeś... "You didn't leave..."  
 (A) żadnego message'u "any message" (masc.gen., inflected)  
 (B) żadnej message'y "any message" (fem.gen., inflected)  
 (C) żadnego message "any message" (masc.gen., uninflected)  
 (D) żadnej message "any message" (fem.gen., uninflected)

In both tasks, each word was tested in the Nominative, Genitive, and Locative cases. In this paper, I will focus on the first two cases only.

The speakers were also asked to provide the nearest Polish equivalent for each noun. Finally, in a casual interview they were asked about their feelings concerning Poles' use of English words when speaking Polish (for ex.: "Do you find yourself using English in conversations with other Poles? Does it depend on the situation or who you're speaking with? What do you think of Poles living in the United States who code-switch into English a lot? If an English word is used in Polish, do you think it should be inflected according to Polish cases or conjugation?").

This study tested 7 speakers bilingual in Polish and English. The criteria

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I am using the terms "loanword" and "borrowing" to denote all single-lexeme L2 forms, both established ones and novel (spontaneous) ones. The latter have sometimes been separated into loanwords and single-lexeme code-switches in language contact literature (Myers-Scotton 1993, Poplack et al. 1990), but for the purposes of this paper I will not attempt to make this distinction.

for selecting speakers were (i) that they had grown up and lived in Poland until at least their mid-teens and now use Polish at least once a week, and (ii) that they have spent at least several years living in the United States and studying or working in an English-speaking environment. These criteria ensure that (i) the speakers' acquisition of Polish was native and that Polish has not been replaced by English as their dominant language (as often happens with very young immigrant children), and (ii) that they have daily contact with English and have lived outside of Poland long enough to be to some extent comfortable with code-switching.

### 3 Polish gender system

Polish has three genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter. Since the possible endings for each depend in part on the noun's animacy, to limit the scope of this study I chose to focus on inanimate nouns. The possible endings for inanimate nouns in each gender in the Nominative case are listed in Table 1.

MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTER
any consonant	-a  consonants: -c noc "night" -ć sieć "net" -cz rzecz "thing" -sz mysz "mouse" -ż maź "grease" -dź łódź "boat" -ń sień "hall" -w brew "brow"	-e -o -um (in established loan-words only, like <i>muzeum</i> "museum")

Table 1. Possible endings for Polish inanimate nouns in the Nominative case (in Polish spelling).

As shown in Table 1, masculine inanimate Nominative nouns can end in any consonant, neuter nouns do not end in consonants except for the -um ending in loanwords like *muzeum* "museum," and feminine nouns end in -a or one of the specific set of consonants listed. If a noun ends in a consonant in a given case, it is considered to have zero inflectional ending. In the Genitive case (the oblique case discussed in this paper), all genders have an inflectional ending. Table 1 illustrates that when a Polish speaker borrows an English noun, (s)he is able to decide its gender based on the ending. For example, a

noun ending in -c could be either masculine or feminine, but one ending in -a is more likely to be feminine.

#### 4 Interspeaker variation

It is crucial to stress the prevalence of interspeaker variation in gender assignment witnessed in my data set. Of the 47 words tested, only 8 showed total agreement in gender assignment among the 7 speakers, 9 showed agreement except for one speaker, and as many as 30 showed variation in two or more speakers. It is important to note that (except for *basement*) the nouns showing agreement for all speakers have no conflict between the requirements of Polish morphophonotactics and the gender of the Polish equivalent. These findings are presented in Table 2, which lists all the English words tested according to their variation or stability in terms of gender assignment.

A detailed analysis of particular examples in which interspeaker variation may be observed reveals what happens in the gender assignment process when the gender of the Polish equivalent and the phonological shape of the word are in competition. Example (1) is repeated below as (5).

(5) a. **Speaker 1:**

ten                      *brace* który                      nosiłam na kolanie  
this (masc.nom.) *brace* which (masc.nom.) I wore on knee  
"this brace which I wore on my knee"

b. **Speaker 2:**

ta                      *brace* która                      mam na kolanie  
this (fem.nom.) *brace* which (fem.nom.) I have on knee  
"this brace which I have on my knee"

c. Translation of *brace* into Polish:

**Speaker 1:** *usztywnienie* (neuter)

**Speaker 2:** *bransoletka* (feminine)

Total agreement among speakers Total words: 8	Variation in one speaker Total words: 9	Variation in at least two speakers Total words: 30
mortgage table framework file (on a computer) state (as in <i>New York State</i> )	passage age schedule policy tool	message (on answering machine) web page dish tissue

basement garbage storage	avenue highway statement porch	issue case (of flu) case (of wine) brace (on one's knee) space (as in <i>my own space</i> ) texture furniture feature lecture timetable piece (of writing) prejudice power data email gate (at the airport) boat vote street job entry (in one's address book) shift (at work) account range damage speech
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Table 2. Distribution of tested nouns according to interspeaker variation in gender assignment.

In (5) the English borrowing *brace* is masculine according to Speaker 1, which is shown by his use of the masculine forms *ten* "this" and *który* "which." Meanwhile, Speaker 2 treats *brace* as feminine, modifying it with the feminine *ta* "this" and *która* "which." I propose the following analysis to account for this difference.

For Speaker 1, *brace* is masculine. In translation, Speaker 1 associates *brace* with the Polish *uszywnienie*, which is neuter. The fact that no neuter nouns can end in a consonant (Table 1) suggests that for Speaker 1 morphophonotactic constraints of Polish win out over faithfulness to the gender of the Polish equivalent. By contrast, for Speaker 2 *brace* is feminine and this speaker translates *brace* as the feminine *bransoletka*. Since -s is not a possible ending for a Polish feminine noun (Table 1), it seems that for Speaker 2 it is faithfulness to the gender of the Polish equivalent that wins out. One possible reason for this may be that Speaker 2 has generalized a subset of consonantal endings possible for Polish feminine nouns based on their shared features, such as [+strident]. Since the [+strident] set includes [s], Speaker 2 allows *brace*

into the feminine category, even though the phoneme [s] does not typically figure as a feminine ending. In sum, the variation in gender assignment observed between Speakers 1 and 2 can be accounted for by the competition between (i) Polish morphophonotactic constraints and (ii) faithfulness to the gender of the Polish equivalent. The result of this competition is different for each speaker.

Example (6) below presents an additional challenge, because both Speakers 3 and 6 translate the borrowed noun *power* as the feminine *sila*, yet Speaker 3 nonetheless assigns *power* to the masculine category, as shown by the masculine adjectival *rosnący* "growing" (6a).

(6) a. **Speaker 3:**

rosnący *power* żeńskich organizacji  
growing (masc.nom.) *power* female organizations (gen.)  
"the growing power of women's organizations"

b. **Speaker 6:**

rosnąca *power* kobiecych organizacji  
growing (fem.nom.) *power* women's organizations (gen.)  
"the growing power of women's organizations"

c. Translation of *power* into Polish:

**Speaker 3:** *sila* (feminine)      **Speaker 6:** *sila* (feminine)

In this case, the two requirements discussed above, that is, (i) Polish morphophonotactics, according to which feminine nouns cannot end in -r (Table 1), and (ii) faithfulness to the gender of the Polish equivalent, are not in competition. However, in (6) two more forces are at play. On one hand, the -er ending of *power* is indexed as strongly masculine, witnessed in such Polish masculine words as *menadżer* "manager" and *reżyser* "movie director." On the other hand, *power* is strongly feminine because most abstract nouns in Polish take the feminine gender. Variation between Speakers 3 and 6 may be due to a different ranking of these generalizations.

## 5 Variation in the speech of one speaker depending on nominal case

An even more interesting case of variation is when one speaker makes different gender choices for the same noun depending on its case. Of the 47 nouns tested, 17 show such case-dependent variation for at least one speaker, and 9 show it for two or more speakers. In example (2), repeated below as (7), Speaker 4 chooses feminine in the Nominative, as shown by the feminine form

*nowa* “new” (7a), but masculine in the Genitive, as shown by the masculine form *tego* “this” and the masculine Genitive inflectional ending -u in *highway’u* (7b).

(7) a. **Nominative case:**

nowa *highway* w Massachusetts  
new (fem.nom.) *highway* in Massachusetts  
“the new highway in Massachusetts”

b. **Genitive case:**

nie zbudowali jeszcze tego *highway’u*  
haven’t built (3pl.) yet this (masc.gen.) *highway* (masc.gen.)  
“they haven’t built this new highway yet”

c. Translation of *highway* into Polish:

*autostrada* (feminine)

The phonemic content of *highway* suggests that it will be treated as masculine, because it does not have a possible ending for a Polish feminine noun. But the translation of *highway* is the feminine *autostrada*, and the related words such as *ulica* “street,” *aleja* “avenue,” *droga* “road,” and *trasa* “route” are all feminine. This suggests a high ranking of the gender of the Polish equivalent, which explains why Speaker 4 treats *highway* as feminine in the Nominative. However, in light of this argumentation the speaker’s treatment of *highway* as masculine in the Genitive appears puzzling.

I propose the following analysis for this case-dependent variation. In the Nominative, the speaker weighs (i) Polish morphophonotactics against (ii) faithfulness to the gender of Polish equivalents, and gender faithfulness ranks higher. In the Genitive, however, the speaker must consider an additional factor: the inflectional ending of the noun. In doing so, he appears to evaluate the entire inflectional paradigm. If we posit the existence of requirements for paradigm uniformity and for faithfulness to the input form, the speaker’s behavior becomes much clearer. The chart below illustrates this point.

/highway/	Nominative	Genitive	Polish minimal pair
bare form masc.	highway	highway	
inflected masc.	highway	highway’u	<i>olej</i> → <i>oleju</i> “oil”
bare form fem.	highway	highway	
inflected fem.	highway’a	highway’i	<i>Nadzieja</i> → <i>nadzieji</i> “hope”

In choosing a Genitive form, the speaker must make sure that it is in concord with the Nominative form indicated by the Genitive ending chosen. If



he chooses a bare feminine or a bare masculine form, the problem disappears: a bare form does not have an ending at all. If he chooses the inflected feminine form, however, the Nominative cannot be *highway*, but it must be *highway'a* with an -a ending (following the pattern of a minimal-pair noun in Polish, i.e. *nadzieja*). This is because -j is not a possible feminine ending in Polish, and thus it cannot take feminine inflectional endings. A feminine in a final -j (or another consonant not permissible for the feminine category) can exist only as a bare form, uninflected, which is what happens in Polish to foreign feminine names such as Janet or May.

Alternately, the noun can be integrated phonologically and given the -a ending to produce the Nominative feminine *highway'a*. But this in turn violates faithfulness to the input form for this speaker (where the input form is /highway/). Meanwhile, the masculine Genitive form *highway'u* has *highway* as its Nominative, and is therefore acceptable. When assigning gender to the oblique form, the speaker thus chooses the masculine (in bold on the chart).

In the phonological literature, paradigm uniformity has been cited as capable of overriding allophonic patterns (for example, identity effects in truncation, Kager 1999). In my analysis, speakers appear to generate an entire paradigm based on an oblique form of a novel loanword, and evaluate it to make decisions about gender assignment. They select the gender which does not violate their grammaticality judgments anywhere on the paradigm. Additionally, we see that certain morphophonological constraints (i.e. paradigm uniformity and faithfulness to the input form) can override the requirement for faithfulness to the gender of the L1 equivalent. This resembles Steriade's (1999) finding that phonological constraints rank higher than gender requirements in French adjectival liason. In my data, a similar ranking occurs in a language contact situation.

Example (8) below further illustrates the process of paradigm evaluation for the same Speaker 4.

(8) a. **Nominative case:**

zła . *gate* na lotnisku  
 wrong (fem.nom.) *gate* at airport  
 "the wrong gate at the airport"

b. **Genitive case:**

nie mogła znaleźć odpowiedniej *gate* na lotnisku  
 not could find right (fem.gen.) *gate* (bare form) at airport  
 "she couldn't find the right gate at the airport"

- c. Translation of *gate* into Polish:  
*bramka* (feminine)

In (8) Speaker 4 borrows the noun *gate* (as in, “gate at the airport”), which he translates into Polish as the feminine *bramka*. But the choices he makes in this example are different from (7). Rather than inflecting the word *gate* as masculine in the Genitive, he treats it as a feminine bare form. Notice that in (8a) *zł◻a* is the feminine form for “wrong,” and (8b) *odpowiedniej* is the feminine form for “right” while *gate* remains uninflected.

The chart below illustrates the speaker’s options (his choice in bold). The inflected feminine *gate’y* is out because for this speaker faithfulness to the input form in the Nominative rules out *gate’a* (cf. ex. 7). The feminine bare form is acceptable. However, when faced with a similar dilemma in (7) this speaker opts for an inflected masculine form of *highway*. Below I will propose an analysis to account for this variation.

/gate/	Nominative	Genitive	Polish minimal pair
bare form masc.	<i>gate</i>	<i>gate</i>	
inflected masc.	<i>gate</i>	<i>gate’u</i>	<i>glej◻t</i> → <i>glejtu</i> “pass, permit”
bare form fem.	<b><i>gate</i></b>	<b><i>gate</i></b>	
inflected fem.	<i>gate’a</i>	<i>gate’y</i>	<i>meta</i> → <i>mety</i> “finish line”

Anttila (1997) argues that variation which appears “free” may be explained by *crucial nonranking* of constraints (Anttila 1997: 48). Adopting Anttila’s OT-based framework we may posit that for Speaker 4, faithfulness to the input form ranks highest, so a form like *gate’a* B and, consequently, *gate’y* B is impossible. But the requirements that (i) the loanword be inflected, and that (ii) faithfulness to the Polish gender be maintained are not ranked with respect to each other, allowing for variation in the speaker’s choices. If this is the case, we would predict that in a grammaticality judgment test (see section 2) Speaker 4 would accept both the bare feminine form and the inflected masculine form, but reject the inflected feminine form completely. And indeed, this is what happens. Speaker 4 rates bare forms and the inflected masculine form as 3-4, but the inflected feminine form gets 1 (where 1=worst, 5=best).

Judgment test for Speaker 4:

Nominative masculine bare form:	<u><i>czwarty</i></u> <i>gate</i>	3	“fourth gate”
Nominative feminine bare form:	<u><i>czwarta</i></u> <i>gate</i>	3	

Nominative feminine inflected form	<u>czwarta</u> gate 'a	1	
Genitive masculine bare form:	<u>którego</u> gate	3	"which gate"
Genitive masculine inflected form:	<u>którego</u> gate 'u	4	
Genitive feminine bare form:	<u>której</u> gate	3	
Genitive feminine inflected form:	<u>której</u> gate 'y	1	

The relative ranking of the different requirements in loanword gender assignment is not the same for all speakers. For example, it seems that for Speaker 1 faithfulness to the input form is not very important. In example (9) the speaker produces the inflected Nominative feminine *zła gate 'a* "the wrong gate" and the inflected Genitive feminine *właściwej gate 'y* "the right gate" (illustrated also on the chart, the speaker's choice in bold). These forms also receive high scores on the speaker's grammaticality judgment test (below).

(9) a. **Nominative case:**

zła gate 'a na lotnisku  
 wrong (fem.nom.) gate (fem.nom.) at airport  
 "the wrong gate at the airport"

b. **Genitive case:**

nie mogę znaleźć właściwej gate 'y na lotnisku  
 not can find right (fem.gen.) gate (fem.gen.) at airport  
 "I can't find the right gate at the airport"

/gate/	Nominative	Genitive	Polish minimal pair
bare form masc.	gate	gate	
inflected masc.	gate	gate'u	<i>glejt</i> → <i>glejtu</i> "pass, permit"
bare form fem.	gate	gate	
inflected fem.	<b>gate'a</b>	gate'y	<i>meta</i> → <i>mety</i> "finish line"

Judgment test for Speaker 1:

Nominative masculine bare form:	<u>czwarty</u> gate	4	"fourth gate"
Nominative feminine bare form:	<u>czwarta</u> gate	4	
Nominative feminine inflected form:	<u>czwarta</u> gate 'a	4	
Genitive masculine bare form:	<u>którego</u> gate	2	"which gate"
Genitive masculine inflected form:	<u>którego</u> gate 'u	4	
Genitive feminine bare form:	<u>której</u> gate	1	
Genitive feminine inflected form:	<u>której</u> gate 'y	5	

Crucially, Speaker 1 does not haphazardly accept the Genitive *gate'y* but reject the Nominative *gate'a*: example (9) and the judgment test show that the speaker is consistent in his preference for the feminine inflected form throughout the paradigm. This supports the claim that there exists a requirement for faithfulness to the input form, which can be ranked differently for each speaker. For Speaker 4, faithfulness to the input form is highly ranked. In the translation task, he chooses uninflected bare forms and maintains faithfulness to the gender of the Polish equivalent. When presented with inflected forms on the grammaticality judgment test, he accepts the masculine but not the feminine. For Speaker 1, on the other hand, faithfulness to the input form has a low ranking. In the translation task, he chooses inflection and faithfulness to the gender of the Polish equivalent. When presented with other forms, he accepts the masculine inflected one, but rejects uninflected ones, thus showing consistency rather than haphazardness.

## 6 Speakers' attitudes and gender assignment

The interview portion of my study suggests that sociolinguistic variables, such as register, the identity of the listener, and speakers' attitudes towards borrowing and code-switching, affect each speaker's ranking of factors which inform loanword gender assignment. Specifically, speakers decide whether or not to integrate loanwords morphologically based in part on their attitudes towards such integration, which may change depending on register and other variables. As I have shown in section 5, the ranking of faithfulness to the input form (i.e. preference for keeping loanwords unintegrated) directly affects gender choice.

In interviews, Speakers 2, 6, and 7 expressed strong preferences for morphological integration of loanwords. In their view, if one decides to borrow an English word, one should treat it as an addition to one's Polish vocabulary, and this implies inflecting it. These three speakers inflected 47%, 32% and 54% of nouns, respectively. By contrast, Speaker 4 (section 5), who believes that inflecting loanwords sounds uneducated and prefers to keep them as bare forms, thus marking them explicitly as L2 forms and avoiding sounding as if he "forgot his Polish," inflected only 2.5% of nouns. After he admitted that he does inflect borrowed nouns for humorous effect, I asked him to perform the translation task again as if he were trying to achieve this effect, and this time he inflected 42% of nouns. Of those, every noun ending in a consonant which appeared as feminine when uninflected was changed to masculine in the inflected version, as might be predicted by the analysis in section 5. The remaining speakers had no particular opinions about loanword integration, and

their rate of inflecting the nouns fell at an average of 15%. These findings are consistent with many sociolinguistic studies where speakers' attitudes have been shown to affect (more or less consciously) the linguistic choices they make (the classic example is Labov 1963).

Previous studies have differed on the role of sociolinguistic factors in gender assignment to loanwords. Haugen (1969) and Beardsmore (1971) mention that gender assignment varies with the speakers' level of education and familiarity with L2. Others, notably Arndt (1970) and Poplack et al. (1982), argue that gender assignment is not subject to sociolinguistic factors. However, evidence from my study suggests that such factors may in fact play an important role in the gender assignment process, and may be in part responsible for interspeaker and individual variation.

## 7 Conclusion

In contrast to previous research on loanword gender assignment (Arndt 1970, Beardsmore 1971, Poplack et al. 1982, Rabeno and Repetti 1997), this study focuses on the gender assignment process in the productive component of individual grammars. In this paper, I have shown that in real-time computation of gender of borrowed nouns speakers exhibit significant variation, and that this variation can be accounted for by positing a number of requirements and constraints (faithfulness to the input form, faithfulness to the gender of the Polish equivalent, paradigm uniformity and Polish morphophonotactics), which are ranked differently for each speaker. In addition, I have shown that this ranking can be influenced by sociolinguistic factors such as register and speakers' attitudes towards borrowing.

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