Pobrane z czasopisma Annales N - Educatio Nova **http://educatio.annales.umcs.pl**
Data: 26/11/2026 21:56:06

WYDAWNICTWO UMCS

ANNALES
UNIVERSITATIS MARIAE CURIE-SKŁODOWSKA
LUBLIN – POLONIA

VOL. X SECTIO N 2025

ISSN: 2451-0491 • e-ISSN: 2543-9340 • CC-BY 4.0 • DOI: 10.17951/en.2025.10.471-484

Between Languages and Cultures: Polish Youth Speak from the Italian Perspective

Pomiędzy językami i kulturami. Polska młodomowa z perspektywy włoskiej

UMCS

Anita Jagun

Jan Kochanowski University of Kielce. Faculty of Humanities
Uniwersytecka 17, 25-406 Kielce, Poland
ajagun@ujk.edu.pl
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7209-7372

Abstract. Many words and phrases that appear in the sociolect of young people in Poland have English origin. This phenomenon arises due to the ubiquity and significance of the language in various aspects of life. Nevertheless, as the lexical units migrate from one language into another, they sometimes undergo certain modifications in terms of their form and meaning. This might be challenging for those who learn Polish as a foreign language, especially since the youth slang does not seem to be incorporated in their coursebooks. The article aims to examine whether Italian people who study Polish understand English-derived words and phrases commonly used by the youth in Poland. The text reports the results of the survey analysis in which respondents were supposed to provide definitions of the following words: *cringe*, *crush*, *friendzone*, *gigachad*, *m8*, *maybe in another universe*, *NPC*, *POV*, *random*, *rel*, *rizz*, *side-eye*, *sigma*, *slay*, *tryhard*. The study shows that although many Italian students are not familiar with Polish youth speak, they are able to understand the general concepts behind these terms. Nonetheless, it is sometimes difficult for them to capture some detailed semantic nuances.

Keywords: youth speak; youth sociolect; youth language; anglicisms; Polish as a foreign language

Pobrane z czasopisma Annales N - Educatio Nova **http://educatio.annales.umcs.pl**
Data: 26/11/2026 21:56:06

Abstrakt. Wiele słów i zwrotów, które pojawiają się w polskim socjolekcie młodzieżowym, ma pochodzenie angielskie. Zjawisko to wynika ze wszechobecności i statusu tego języka na świecie. Należy jednak pamiętać o tym, że w procesie przenoszenia jednostek leksykalnych z jednego języka do drugiego mogą one niekiedy ulegać pewnym modyfikacjom pod względem formy i znaczenia. Stanowi to wyzwanie dla osób, które uczą się języka polskiego jako obcego, zwłaszcza że slang młodzieżowy nie wydaje się tematem, który pojawia się często w szkolnych podręcznikach. Celem artykułu jest sprawdzenie, czy Włosi uczący się języka polskiego rozumieją słowa i zwroty pochodzenia angielskiego, które są powszechnie używane przez młodzież w Polsce. W tekście zostały przytoczone wyniki analizy ankiety, w której respondenci mieli za zadanie podać definicje następujących słów: *cringe*, *crush*, *friendzone*, *gigachad*, *m8*, *maybe in another universe*, *NPC*, *POV*, *random*, *rel*, *rizz*, *side-eye*, *sigma*, *slay*, *tryhard*. Z badania wynika, że wielu włoskich uczniów nie zna polskiej młodomowy. Osoby te są w stanie zrozumieć ogólny sens kryjący się pod tymi terminami, ale czasami trudno jest im wychwycić pewne szczegółowe niuanse semantyczne.

Słowa kluczowe: młodomowa; socjolekt młodzieżowy; język młodzieżowy; anglicyzmy; język polski jako obcy

INTRODUCTION

Youth speak may be defined as "the way young people communicate in informal situations, i.e., outside the language of school education and outside of situations requiring an official register" (Wileczek 2021: 156). It enables teenagers to express their emotions freely, interpret reality, and share their experiences with their peers. It distinguishes them from the previous generations that use different lexis[1]. It helps them to create "their own world" deeply rooted in their culture. Of course, it cannot be said that young people are a homogeneous group, so some words and phrases are certainly limited to exclusive communities; however, a vast number of lexical units is common for a great majority of them (Wileczek, Senderska 2024). This is feasible thanks to the Internet, which popularizes certain lexemes. In addition, the process is facilitated by the ludic aspects of such terms.

While analyzing Vasisdas (https://www.vasisdas.pl), an Internet portal created to generate vocabulary from Polish youth slang, Dyszak (2019) noted that neologisms which appear on the website are often created based on words functioning in standard language or jargon, through the process of apelativisation,

[1] Although words/phrases that come from youth speak are often transferred to the language of other generations, e.g. through advertisements, new ones quickly emerge and replace them. Moreover, some lexical units that were used by teenagers in the previous decades return to the language of youngsters once in a while. Nonetheless, it seems that it is not a frequent phenomenon.

Pobrane z czasopisma Annales N - Educatio Nova **http://educatio.annales.umcs.pl**
Data: 26/11/2026 21:56:06

and thanks to language borrowing. Due to the prevalence of English at school, on social media platforms, and in different forms of entertainment, it is a popular source of "new words" for the Polish youth sociolect (Jagun 2023). As young people spend a lot of time online, they are exposed to texts or videos from all over the world. They read international websites and watch short films or TV series in English. They also chat with people from abroad using this current lingua franca. However, the vocabulary they use does not always belong to the category of textbook language. As noted by Łaziński, Kołodziejek, Chaciński and Wileczek (2024: 17), "Polish youth slang borrows not only from general English but also from specialized languages such as programming and video games". These words sometimes undergo semantic changes and begin to be used to refer to tangible reality. For example, the term "noob" – which became popular online thanks to games and refers to inexperienced players – can be used to talk about anyone unable to integrate into a particular community (Obserwatorium Języka i Kultury Młodzieży [OJiKM] 2022a).

Since many teenagers representing various nations are exposed to the same Internet content, in theory, they should be likely to understand expressions that come from standard English and English slang. However, while being incorporated into another language, some of the lexical units undergo alterations. This might be challenging for learners who do not encounter these units in their coursebooks but may come across them while talking to a native speaker. This phenomenon is the subject of interest in the following text. The article provides an analysis of how students who live in Italy and learn Polish understand the terms that have English roots and exist in Polish slang. The text was written as a part of the project "Polish Youth Speak at the Crossroads of Cultures – Promotion, Knowledge, Education" (BJP/PJP/2023/1/00014). The project is funded by the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research was based on the survey method – "a system for collecting information from or about people to describe, compare, or explain their knowledge, attitudes, and behavior" (Fink 2003: 1). The questionnaires were distributed digitally through the Google Forms application from 6 March to 19 April 2024. They were prepared in two language versions – Polish and Italian. They were addressed to the individuals who learn Polish in Italian educational institutions. The questions regarded different aspects concerning Polish youth speak, including the respondents' contact with this sociolect and their knowledge of the meaning of particular terms. In total, the forms were completed by 174

Pobrane z czasopisma Annales N - Educatio Nova **http://educatio.annales.umcs.pl**
Data: 26/11/2026 21:56:06

individuals. Nonetheless, as some declared that they lived in Poland, they were excluded from the further research procedure[2].

The study takes into consideration the answers provided by 111 respondents from different parts of Italy, including Rome, Bari, Torino, and Genova. Among them, 78 individuals are female, 31 are male and 2 did not reveal their gender; 66 people attend university, 27 – high school, 17 – middle school, 1 – elementary school; 35 respondents have Italian parents, 32 have Polish parents, 37 have a Polish mother and an Italian father[3]; 18 people were born and spent a part of their lives in Poland, 53 acquired their knowledge of Polish at home and have Polish roots, 38 do not have Polish ancestry and study Polish at school / on a course, 1 was born in Italy but lived in Poland for a while, 1 has Polish origins but does not speak Polish.

Table 1 demonstrates to what degree the study group members have contact with Polish utilizing selected resources. As they are quite a divergent group, their exposure to the language differs. Some of them engage with it while having conversations with their family or friends, and others attend Polish classes at school/university or use various social media platforms. Apart from the sources specified in the table, some research participants mentioned that they have contact with Polish through other means, e.g. by reading literature, watching television, using learning apps/dictionaries, listening to music, or using other social media (e.g. Discord, WhatsApp, or Reddit).

Table 1. The extent to which the respondents have contact with the Polish language in selected sources

	Never	Rarely	Often	Everyday
Contact with family members (adults)	34	13	18	46
Contact with peers	19	42	34	16
University/language school	19	23	60	9
Polish community school / Toy library	53	22	30	6
Social media: YouTube	27	51	25	8
Social media: Instagram	40	26	24	21
Social media: Twitter	75	27	4	5

[2] As the study aimed to discover whether students who currently live in Italy understand the Polish slang of young people, it was decided that the individuals who reside in Poland would not be included in the analysis, since they might be native speakers exposed to direct contact with Polish youth speak on a daily basis.

[3] Apart from that, the respondents have Ukrainian parents (1 respondent), Russian parents (1), a Belgian mother and an Italian father (1), a Ukrainian mother and a Polish father (1), and a German mother and an Italian father (1). One respondent declared that her parents were foreigners but did not reveal their nationality, and one respondent did not refer to her roots.

Pobrane z czasopisma Annales N - Educatio Nova **http://educatio.annales.umcs.pl**
Data: 26/11/2026 21:56:06

	Never	Rarely	Often	Everyday
Video games	61	33	15	2
Internet websites	26	48	21	16
Other Internet / social media sources	54	31	13	13

Source: own elaboration.

Fifty-one respondents declare that they do not have contact with the language of young Poles. Among the people who stated that they engage with Polish youth speak, the frequency of this interaction varies for different individuals. Some of them are exposed to the sociolect while traveling to Poland during the summer break, others while scrolling social media or talking to family and friends. Interestingly, only 38 individuals taking part in the research stated that they use Polish youth speak. They do it mainly because they interact with their family members, peers, and friends of Polish ancestry. One person states that Polish youth slang is helpful when talking about video games, fandoms, and anime. On the other hand, 73 people who do not use this variation declare that their Polish language skills are not advanced enough, or they do not have contact with peers from Poland. Additionally, they indicate that the language they learn is exclusively academic.

Knowing this, it is worth investigating whether (and how) Italian learners of the Polish language would understand the words or phrases that originate from English and appear in the youth slang in Poland. In the survey, the respondents were asked to define the following vocabulary[4] from Polish youth speak: *cringe*, *crush*, *friendzone*, *gigachad*, *m8*, *maybe in another universe*, *NPC*, *POV*, *random*, *rel*, *rizz*, *side-eye*, *sigma*, *slay*, *tryhard*. The analysis of their answers was divided into two stages: explaining the meaning of a particular item and discussing how the research group understood the word or phrase[5]. The results are presented below.

[4] These language units were randomly selected from the Observatory of Youth Language and Culture (https://obserwatorium-mlodziezy.ujk.edu.pl). Although they were all formed based on the English language, some of them do not appear in English slang or do not have the same meaning as their equivalents.

[5] The explanations provided by the respondents frequently included examples of use. They were provided in Polish and Italian. For the purpose of this article, they were translated into English.

Pobrane z czasopisma Annales N - Educatio Nova **http://educatio.annales.umcs.pl**
Data: 26/11/2026 21:56:06

ITALIAN LEARNERS OF POLISH AND POLISH YOUTH SPEAK

In Polish youth speak, the word *cringe*[6] is a noun that can be defined as "something embarrassing, awkward, causing shame or disgust" (Słownik języka polskiego [SJP] 2023a, own translation). The meaning corresponds to the informal usage of the term in English, where it functions as a verb, adjective, or exclamation (Cambridge Dictionary 2025a). In the study, only 3 respondents claimed they did not understand the lexeme. Others described it as 'something embarrassing', 'strange', or evoking discomfort. Some people indicated that 'cringe' can be used while describing a situation (e.g. 'yesterday evening was cringe'), a particular behavior (e.g. 'these trousers are old-fashioned, wearing them is cringe'), an object (e.g. 'this video is cringe'), or even a person (e.g. 'he's sometimes really cringe'). Two respondents stated that 'cringe' is sometimes used when adults unsuccessfully try to behave as if they were teenagers (e.g. 'You're father tries to use slang terms all the time, but he keeps confusing them – what a cringe!'). To experience 'cringe feelings', one does not have to be an eyewitness of a given situation – they can result from what one has just heard (e.g. '– Yesterday Marco sang me a serenade. – Cringe!').

The word *crush*[7] refers to "somebody we have fallen in love with or a person we like" (SJP 2016a, own translation). In informal English, the noun might be defined as "someone who you like a lot romantically, usually someone that you do not have a relationship with, or not a serious relationship" (Cambridge Dictionary 2025b). Three of the study participants did not understand the term. Others described it as a person that one finds attractive. The person might be of the same age, as well as older than the individual who harbors his/her emotions. It can be one's friend, classmate, acquaintance, or even a well-known celebrity (e.g. 'Leonardo DiCaprio is my childhood crush'). A crush does not have to be aware that he/she has an admirer. Moreover, as the feeling is rather ephemeral, the relationship quite often remains platonic. It is a frequent topic of discussion among friends (e.g. 'I need to tell you about my crush').

Friendzone[8] can be understood as "maintaining a collegial or a friendly relationship in a situation in which one side is willing to transform the relationship into a romantic partnership" (Wielki słownik języka polskiego 2019, own

[6] The word has an alternative spelling adapted to the Polish phonological rules, i.e. 'krindż (SJP 2023a).

[7] In Polish youth speak, 'crush' can be also spelt as 'krasz' (SJP 2016a).

[8] Another variant of the word is 'friendzona' (Wielki słownik języka polskiego 2019).

Pobrane z czasopisma Annales N - Educatio Nova **http://educatio.annales.umcs.pl**
Data: 26/11/2026 21:56:06

translation). It is directly transferred from English slang[9]. The word was unfamiliar to 8 people taking part in the research. Others defined it as being a friend of a person one is fond of. The object of affection does not reciprocate the feelings and tries to preserve the status of the relationship in its current state. He or she might not be aware of the situation, but in some cases 'friendzone' is a consequence of rejecting the other person's feelings and the mutual decision to remain friends. It is often accompanied by the expression 'I only see you as a friend'. It seems that although it is difficult to 'leave friendzone', it is sometimes feasible (e.g. 'I don't know how to leave friendzone / I got out of friendzone – he asked me out'). Some respondents indicated that in Italian the word is often used as a verb *(friendzonare)*[10], e.g. 'Marco mi ha friendzonato di nuovo' – 'Marco has friendzoned me again'. One person seemed to misunderstand the lexeme, stating that it refers to a situation when you end your relationship with your partner.

In Polish slang, *gigachad* refers to "an ideal person, who inspires admiration; someone who is good in a particular field or something exceptionally good or excellent" (SJP 2022, own translation). In English slang, the word *GigaChad*[11] is used in a narrower meaning, denoting the embodiment of a handsome, muscular male (Know Your Meme 2018a). In the survey, 38 respondents did not explain the term. Others stated that it indicates someone extraordinary, charismatic, assertive, and known for having a brave and kind disposition. *Gigachads* have a firm set of values and do not compromise them. They are perceived as intelligent, talented, self-confident, and physically attractive[12]. Due to these positive connotations, the word can be used as a compliment after one has achieved something (e.g. '– I got 10[13] on a test although I didn't study. – You're a gigachad!'). Several respondents claim that the lexeme *gigachad* refers exclusively to men. Two people from the research group associate it with a chauvinistic and toxic archetype of male dominance. Some mention that it can be used ironically. Numerous respondents state that *gigachad* does not have to refer solely to people – it can denote a pleasant situation or an object we like.

The word *m8* proved to be problematic for the people participating in the research. As many as 61 people did not provide any definition. *M8* alludes to the combination of the sound "m" ([m]) with the sound of the number "eight" (IPA:

[9] Friendzone is "the state of being friends with someone when you would prefer a romantic or sexual relationship with them" (Cambridge Dictionary 2025c).

[10] In Polish, the verb form is 'sfriendzonować' (OJiKM 2022c).

[11] The word alludes to the slang term "Chad", which indicates a man who is admired by the members of the opposite gender (Know Your Meme 2012).

[12] One respondent mentioned that the opposite of 'gigachad' is 'beta'.

[13] A good grade; in English: A+.

Pobrane z czasopisma Annales N - Educatio Nova **http://educatio.annales.umcs.pl**
Data: 26/11/2026 21:56:06

[eɪt]), which forms the lexeme *mate* [meɪt] (see SJP 2016b). In English slang, it is "used, for example, in text messages and on social media, to refer to a friend" (Cambridge Dictionary 2025d). It retains the same meaning in Polish youth speak (SJP 2016b). Among the several respondents who defined the word correctly in the survey, a few noted that it is rarely used in their community. According to them, it is almost exclusive to online games and used in instant messages among players (such as 'good game, m8'). Surprisingly, 2 people incorrectly associated the term with the word *might*. Three people linked it to the phonetic form of the number '8'[14], but in Italian, which resulted in the answer 'motto'.

The phrase *maybe in another universe* (OJiKM 2024)[15] can refer to situations in which one person desires a highly improbable situation to happen ('Może w innym wszechświecie / Maybe in another universe'). In the survey, 19 people did not define the term. Others treated it as a synonym of *under no circumstances*, *impossible* or *never*. They indicated that the phrase is popular on TikTok and is often associated with memes or photos of a pair of adorable pets or romantic pictures with the caption 'us in another universe'[16]. Unfulfilled relationships are a common context for the phrase (e.g. 'Maybe in another universe we would be able to be together', 'I don't think that Paolo and I can get back together… maybe in another universe', or 'Maybe in another universe we are still friends'). Nevertheless, the expression pertains to unsuccessful attempts to achieve any goal and hoping there is an alternative universe where it is likely to occur (e.g. 'Maybe in another universe I was able to graduate in medicine'). According to the respondents, *maybe in another universe* can be also treated as a manner to reject another person or his/her idea (e.g. '– Will you give me 1,000 USD? – Maybe in another universe', or '– Would you become X's girlfriend? – Definitely not. Maybe in another universe'). However, they also claimed that it is not common among their peers. Two people misunderstood the phrase, stating it is a synonym for 'sooner or later' and 'staying abroad'.

NPC[17] is "an unremarkable person; someone who behaves in a mechanical, suspicious, or strange manner" (SJP 2023b, own translation). It is also an individual who avoids social interactions (OJiKM 2022b). It stems from the English acronym for 'non-playable character' which indicates a character that appears in

[14] In Italian, '8' is 'otto'.

[15] In Polish slang, there are two loan phrases that are equivalents to 'maybe in another universe': 'może w innym wszechświecie' and 'może w innym uniwersum' (OJiKM 2024).

[16] 'Us in another universe' is connected with "a trend on TikTok, among other sites, in which creators pair the catchphrase 'Us in another universe' with videos and images of cute animals like cats, dogs and frogs that look like couples" (Know Your Meme 2023).

[17] An alternative spelling of the word is 'enpecet' (SJP 2023b).

Pobrane z czasopisma Annales N - Educatio Nova **http://educatio.annales.umcs.pl**
Data: 26/11/2026 21:56:06

a game, but the players have no control over it (ibidem). In English slang, apart from its original meaning, it concerns people who are submissive and do not have established moral values (Know Your Meme 2018b)[18]. Forty-four people who took part in the study admitted that they did not know what the term meant. Others often indicated the roots of the word. Many participants mentioned the real-life equivalent of an *NPC* – a person who is ignorant and ordinary. He/she often remains unnoticed in society. Such an individual does not follow any firm ethical norms and represents only mainstream views and tastes. They talk, move, and speak in a mechanical way (e.g. 'I tried to argue about politics with her, but she looked like an NPC, who repeats the same phrases without thinking'). They may be antisocial and behave unreasonably while interacting with others. The respondents noted that the term "NPC" is popular on TikTok.

POV (*point of view*) introduces a comment on a particular situation from the speaker's perspective and is commonly used on TikTok (OJiKM 2021a)[19]. In the survey, 8 respondents did not explain the term. Others correctly deciphered its meaning by providing the full form of the acronym and associating it with one's perspective on a particular issue. They believe *POV* often performs phatic functions by creating a special bond between the interlocutors (e.g. '– I haven't studied and there is an exam tomorrow. – POV: you are me before every exam session'). A person who uses the acronym presents a particular situation from the perspective of another person, character, or even a physical object. He/she often expresses feelings by referring to hypothetical and amusing comparisons ('POV: you are a fridge, and I open you for the fifteenth time in an hour looking for something to eat', 'POV: you are my classmate'). The acronym frequently appears on social media (TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube) as a caption in short videos encouraging the recipients to adopt the author's perspective (e.g. beautiful pictures accompanied with the words 'POV: you are in Torino during the fall').

Although in English *random* is commonly used as an adjective, in informal language it can also appear as a noun denoting "an unknown or unexpected person" (Cambridge Dictionary 2025e). In Polish youth speak, it appears precisely in this context[20] (OJiKM 2023b). During the research, 4 respondents did not provide any definition of the word. However, only 4 people treated it as a noun referring to a stranger. Others perceived it as an adjective or an adverb.

[18] In English slang, the term also functions as 'NPC Wojak'.

[19] 'POV' is a common theme of memes in English too (Know Your Meme 2019).

[20] In Polish youth speak, the adjective formed from the word 'random' is 'randomowy' (OJiKM 2023b).

Pobrane z czasopisma Annales N - Educatio Nova **http://educatio.annales.umcs.pl**
Data: 26/11/2026 21:56:06

Rel proved to be confusing for the research group. In fact, 67 people admitted that they did not know the word. In Polish youth speak, the word is "the confirmation of what the predecessor has said; in other words: 'I feel the same' or 'I agree with you'" (SJP 2023c, own translation). The word originates from the English word *relatable*. In the research, 2 respondents claimed that *rel* is a synonym for a friend/buddy. Two others believed it refers to a person from one's family (Eng. *relative*). One person declared it is a substitute for the phrase 'YouTube reel'[21], and another thought it is equivalent to 'romantic relationships'. The remaining participants accurately interpreted the meaning of *rel*. They stated it is another way to say 'I know what you feel', 'I have the same experience', or 'You're right, it's true' (e.g. '– I am so sleepy. – Rel', '– The test was incredibly hard. – Rel').

Rizz can be associated with "a set of features that enable one to exert an influence on other people; charm; seduction skills, and more broadly – the impression one makes on others" (SJP 2023d, own translation). *Rizz* comes from the word *charisma* and is present in English slang, where it "means that a man can attract women easily and is desirable without trying" (Know Your Meme 2022a). In the research, 49 people did not explain the term. Four respondents seemed to misinterpret the word by saying it refers to one's financial status, it is a way to agree with your interlocutor, or it means making fun of people or embarrassing someone. Others indicated that *rizz* is connected to being charming, self-confident, and having the ability to attract one's object of affection. In order to 'have rizz', one does not have to be physically attractive but witty. His/her words or actions may be romantic and amusing (e.g. 'All the girls in my class are fond of Jack – he's got rizz', 'My dear friend, in reality, you don't have rizz', or 'Show me your rizz').

Side-eye[22] can be defined as "a sideways look that expresses amazement, embarrassment, reluctance, or dissatisfaction" (SJP 2023e, own translation). In informal English, it performs similar functions (Cambridge Dictionary 2025f). It often appears in memes and comments on social platforms (OJiKM 2023a). Twenty-five respondents stated that they did not know the term. One person claimed that it refers to a seductive gaze. Other participants defined it as a glance that expresses disagreement, contempt, suspicion, irritation, astonishment, or skepticism. It is popular in memes but also in casual conversations. If someone uses *side-eye*, he/she is embarrassed by something or disapproves of someone's behavior (e.g. '– Tomorrow I'm going out with Giuseppe, though I know we've

[21] YouTube reel is a short video on YouTube.

[22] In Polish youth speak, 'side-eye' is also known as 'boczne oko' (OJiKM 2023a).

Pobrane z czasopisma Annales N - Educatio Nova **http://educatio.annales.umcs.pl**
Data: 26/11/2026 21:56:06

broken up. Still, he says he loves me – Side-eye', 'I gave Letizia a side-eye when she told me that she had texted her ex', or 'I expressed my opinion on the topic, and she gave me a side-eye').

Sigma is "a term derived from the manosphere that refers to an independent, intriguing, and self-confident man" (SJP 2023f, own translation). In English slang, it is also known as a *sigma male*, retaining the same meaning (Know Your Meme 2021)[23]. Fifty-four people did not define the term in the survey. Others claimed that it refers to a man who is self-sufficient and indifferent to the perception that society has towards him. Three respondents claimed that the word is synonymous with 'alpha male', and several people believed that it refers to a chauvinistic or selfish man. However, most participants stated that *sigma* has more positive connotations. According to them, a *sigma male* concentrates on his career and achieves his goals without being dominant. He is handsome and well-built. He is often a loner, but it does not mean he is antisocial. The word is sometimes used ironically.

Slay can be defined as "wonderful, excellent; a term used to describe something that makes an impression, or someone who generates a significant impact, someone impressive" (SJP 2023g, own translation). It appears in informal English and conveys the same meaning (Cambridge Dictionary 2025g)[24]. It is not exclusive to one part of speech, both in Polish and in English (Cambridge Dictionary 2025g; OJiKM 2022d). Approximately one-third of the respondents declared that they did not understand the term. Many participants described it as a compliment. It may refer to interlocutors' style (e.g. 'Your leather jacket is a slay' or 'Your outfit slays'), an object (e.g. 'This photo slays'), or behavior (e.g. 'Oh, girl – you slay'). It can be also treated as an exclamation or even as an incentive (e.g. 'Slay Queen!'). Two people claimed that the word can be used ironically.

In Polish youth speak, the term *tryhard* is used as a noun to indicate an individual who is putting great effort (more than necessary) to achieve his/her goal (OJiKM 2021b). Twenty respondents did not explain the term. Many others noted that the word comes from the gaming community. However, only 23 remarked that it functions as a noun describing people who are excessively committed to accomplishing their objectives. If they play video games, they do not take pleasure from interactions with other gamers. Instead, they focus on rivalry, and they want to win at any cost (e.g. 'You are such a tryhard. Listen, you still won't win'). One can be a *try-hard* in other situations too (e.g. 'X studies for 12 hours a day, he's really a tryhard'). Such a person is emotionally involved

[23] The phrase 'sigma male' is an alternative form of 'sigma' in Polish youth speak.

[24] However, it can be also used in many other contexts (see Know Your Meme 2022b).

Pobrane z czasopisma Annales N - Educatio Nova **http://educatio.annales.umcs.pl**
Data: 26/11/2026 21:56:06

in his/her tasks and often seeks attention and approval from their community. Surprisingly, several people who took part in the study believed that *tryhard* is a term that serves as an incentive to work harder.

CONCLUSION

Although 51 respondents stated that they did not have contact with Polish youth speak and 73 that they do not use it, in many cases they were able to understand the words and phrases from the questionnaire. This phenomenon shows that English can be helpful for those who learn Polish as a foreign language while contacting their peers in Poland. It is facilitated by the fact that numerous English words also appear in Italian. Nevertheless, some lexical units (e.g. *rel*) may be tricky, and without knowing their denotation in Polish, it is impossible to guess their meaning.

It is worth mentioning that 86% of all the respondents who completed the questionnaire during the project "Polish Youth Speak at the Crossroads of Cultures – Promotion, Knowledge, Education"[25] stated that they believe that it is important to learn Polish youth speak. Nonetheless, as the research showed, many students who live in Italy often do not have contact with the sociolect at school, where they are solely familiarized with academic language.

The solution to this problem can be incorporating youth language into the curriculum. Such classes could include comments from Internet websites and short videos on social media. It would show students the dynamism of the language and might help them to understand their peers better. When it comes to individual steps that a student may take, he/she can read young adult books in Polish, watch videos created by teenagers, or contact their peers on social media. In addition, they can use slang dictionaries and websites devoted to the issue. One of the tools is the Observatory of Youth Language and Culture, a platform run by linguists who are experts in the field. On the website, one can find Polish and English definitions of words and phrases that are used by young people in Poland. All lexical units that appear there are defined and accompanied by numerous examples of use.

[25] In total, 174 people, including those from Poland.

Pobrane z czasopisma Annales N - Educatio Nova **http://educatio.annales.umcs.pl**
Data: 26/11/2026 21:56:06

REFERENCES

Cambridge Dictionary (2025a). *Cringe*. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cringe
Cambridge Dictionary (2025b). *Crush*. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/crush
Cambridge Dictionary (2025c). *Friendzone*. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/friendzone#google_vignette
Cambridge Dictionary (2025d). *M8*. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/m8
Cambridge Dictionary (2025e). *Random*. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/random
Cambridge Dictionary (2025f). *Side-eye*. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/side-eye
Cambridge Dictionary (2025g). *Slay*. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/slay
Dyszak, A.S. (2019). Z badań nad zjawiskami słowotwórczymi i adaptacyjnymi w „najmłodszej polszczyźnie". *Język Polski*, 99(3), 18–31. DOI: 10.31286/JP.99.3.2.
Fink, A. (2003). *The Survey Handbook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
Jagun, A. (2023). The Influence of the English Language on the Polish Youth Speak. *Respectus Philologicus*, 44(49), 120–129. DOI: 10.15388/RESPECTUS.2023.44.49.113.
Know Your Meme (2012). *Chad*. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/chad
Know Your Meme (2018a). *GigaChad*. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/gigachad
Know Your Meme (2018b). *NPC Wojak*. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/slay-slang
Know Your Meme (2019). *POV*. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/pov-memes
Know Your Meme (2021). *Sigma Male*. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/sigma-males
Know Your Meme (2022a). *Rizz / Unspoken Rizz*. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/rizz-unspoken-rizz
Know Your Meme (2022b). *Slay (Slang)*. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/slay-slang
Know Your Meme (2023). *Us In Another Universe*. https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/us-in-another-universe
Łaziński, M., Kołodziejek, E., Chaciński, B., Wileczek, A. (2024). The Code of Youth. *ACADEMIA. The Magazine of the Polish Academy of Sciences*, (2), 15–17. DOI: 10.24425/academiaPAS.2024.151179.
Obserwatorium Języka i Kultury Młodzieży (OJiKM). (2021a). *POV / pov*. https://obserwatorium-mlodziezy.ujk.edu.pl/jednostki/pov-pov
Obserwatorium Języka i Kultury Młodzieży (OJiKM). (2021b). *Tryhard*. https://obserwatorium-mlodziezy.ujk.edu.pl/jednostki/tryhard
Obserwatorium Języka i Kultury Młodzieży (OJiKM). (2022a). *Noob*. https://obserwatorium-mlodziezy.ujk.edu.pl/jednostki/noob
Obserwatorium Języka i Kultury Młodzieży (OJiKM). (2022b). *NPC*. https://obserwatorium-mlodziezy.ujk.edu.pl/jednostki/npc
Obserwatorium Języka i Kultury Młodzieży (OJiKM). (2022c). *Sfriendzonować (kogoś)*. https://obserwatorium-mlodziezy.ujk.edu.pl/jednostki/sfriendzonowac-kogos

Pobrane z czasopisma Annales N - Educatio Nova **http://educatio.annales.umcs.pl**
Data: 26/11/2026 21:56:06

Obserwatorium Języka i Kultury Młodzieży (OJiKM). (2022d). *Slay*. https://obserwatorium-mlodziezy.ujk.edu.pl/jednostki/slay
Obserwatorium Języka i Kultury Młodzieży (OJiKM). (2023a). *Boczne oko*. https://obserwatorium-mlodziezy.ujk.edu.pl/jednostki/boczne-oko
Obserwatorium Języka i Kultury Młodzieży (OJiKM). (2023b). *Random*. https://obserwatorium-mlodziezy.ujk.edu.pl/jednostki/random
Obserwatorium Języka i Kultury Młodzieży (OJiKM). (2024). *Może w innym wszechświecie / Maybe in Another Universe*. https://obserwatorium-mlodziezy.ujk.edu.pl/jednostki/moze-w-innym-wszechswiecie-maybe-in-another-universe
Słownik języka polskiego (SJP). (2016a). *Crush/krasz*. https://sjp.pwn.pl/mlodziezowe-slowo-roku/haslo/crush-krasz;5899748.html
Słownik języka polskiego (SJP). (2016b). *M8*. https://sjp.pwn.pl/mlodziezowe-slowo-roku/haslo/m8;5899769.html
Słownik języka polskiego (SJP). (2022). *Gigachad*. https://sjp.pwn.pl/mlodziezowe-slowo-roku/haslo/gigachad;9285761.html
Słownik języka polskiego (SJP). (2023a). *Cringe*. https://sjp.pwn.pl/mlodziezowe-slowo-roku/haslo/cringe;6383018.html
Słownik języka polskiego (SJP). (2023b). *NPC*. https://sjp.pwn.pl/mlodziezowe-slowo-roku/haslo/NPC;9285764.html
Słownik języka polskiego (SJP). (2023c). *Rel*. https://sjp.pwn.pl/mlodziezowe-slowo-roku/haslo/rel;6952285.html
Słownik języka polskiego (SJP). (2023d). *Rizz*. https://sjp.pwn.pl/mlodziezowe-slowo-roku/haslo/rizz;9286080.html
Słownik języka polskiego (SJP). (2023e). *Side-eye*. https://sjp.pwn.pl/mlodziezowe-slowo-roku/haslo/side-eye;9286081.html
Słownik języka polskiego (SJP). (2023f). *Sigma*. https://sjp.pwn.pl/mlodziezowe-slowo-roku/haslo/sigma;9285770.html
Słownik języka polskiego (SJP). (2023g). *Slay*. https://sjp.pwn.pl/mlodziezowe-slowo-roku/haslo/slay;9285771.html
Wielki słownik języka polskiego (2019). *Friendzone*. https://wsjp.pl/haslo/podglad/86276/friendzone
Wileczek, A. (2021). (Non)Pandemic Youth Speak: On Lexical-Semantic Tendencies in the Polish Language of the Youth. *Roczniki Humanistyczne*, 69(6), 155–174. DOI: 10.18290/rh21696s-10.
Wileczek, A., Senderska, J. (2024). Współczesny człowiek w młodomowie (rekonesans badawczy na materiale Obserwatorium Języka i Kultury Młodzieży). *Annales UMCS sectio N – Educatio Nova*, 9, 401–415. DOI: 10.17951/en.2024.9.401-415.