

‘SCHOOL? YOU GO BECAUSE YOU HAVE TO’

THE LINGUISTIC WORLDVIEW OF ‘SCHOOL’ IN POLISH AND  
AMERICAN TEEN INTERNET DISCOURSE

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*Abstract*

This cross-cultural project applies current theories in Cognitive Linguistics to the issue of youth (dis)engagement in the high school setting. Specifically, it analyses American and Polish youth speech from online forums and dictionaries according to five main categories: the institution of school, the place of school, the people of school, the activities of school and the emotions of school. The analysis presents these lexical expressions grouped according to metaphorical source domain in order to better understand how teenagers in each culture conceptualize SCHOOL. The discussion summarises the analysis for each country, whereas the conclusion compares the two and makes comments on the implication for theories of language and education.

The aims of this paper are three-fold: to increase understanding of the ways in which youth view their time in the classroom, to provide a comparative analysis that will shed light on cultural differences in the conceptualization of SCHOOL and its linguistic expression, and to highlight examples of metaphors

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that value school and the educational process so that these conceptual mappings can receive more emphasis in both countries.

Keywords: youth speech; cognitive linguistics; metaphor; education; computer mediated discourse

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper represents an attempt to reconstruct an aspect of teenagers' linguistic worldview—specifically their view of school—through analyzing the words and phrases they use in online forums and websites. The online context makes it possible to study the sociolect of youth in Poland and the U.S. in a natural environment, unimpeded by visible researcher presence. We chose these two countries because of their distinctive differences in educational systems and educational culture, as discussed below, as well as the pragmatic fact the researchers themselves grew up and attended school in these countries. As we noticed in discussing the data, such first-hand contextual and linguistic knowledge proved crucial for accurate interpretation of the language the teenagers use. The resulting cross-cultural comparison reveals that many apparent linguistic similarities have slightly different interpretations due to cultural differences, and therefore reflect different linguistic worldviews. The conclusion also comments on the language teachers in each country can borrow from the other to promote positive conceptualizations of the educational experience.<sup>1</sup> Since language and society are both reflect and influence each other, we hope that a better understanding of teen sociolect can help adults make linguistic choices that will improve attitudes towards school.

In section 2, we introduce the educational context of Poland and the U.S. and explain why surveys fall short when it comes to establishing an accurate picture of youth attitudes. We propose linguistic analysis of online discourse as way around this impasse. In section 3, we describe our theoretical approach to language, which draws on two different schools of cognitive linguistics developed independently by scholars in Poland and the U.S. We present and explain our hypotheses in section 4. In section 5, we describe our methodology and provide details regarding the online forums, blogs, and other sources we used to collect the data for analysis. In section 6, we present the results, including a summary of the major linguistic construals of 'school' for both Polish and American teenagers for five aspects of school life.<sup>2</sup> We

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<sup>1</sup> *We realize that negative descriptions of 'school' are not always simply the result of a pessimistic outlook, but sometimes reveal serious problems within particular schools or systems as a whole. These issues were mentioned within the forums and echo concerns raised in Macnab (2012). However, they constitute a research problem outside the scope of this paper.*

<sup>2</sup> *Linguistic construal is 'the way a speaker chooses to 'package' and 'present' a conceptual representation, which in turn has consequences for the conceptual representation that the utterance evokes in the mind of the hearer' (Evans & Green, 2006, p. 536). The words we use on only communicate content, but also our own way of construing or viewing that content (Langacker, 2008, p. 43). What is in the glass is its content; how we choose to describe it is*

compare and contrast the linguistic worldviews constructed by these construals in section 7. In section 8, we comment on the implications of this study and make suggestions for future research.

## 2. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The last 20 years have seen a variety of changes and challenges in Polish and U.S. educational systems. According to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), Poland, ranked fourteenth worldwide, seems to be doing significantly better than the U.S., ranked thirty-sixth (2013b). Nevertheless, when looking at youth attitudes towards school, the same study claims Polish students are on average less happy than U.S. students (OECD, 2013a) and, despite their academic success, Poles are among those nationalities that see the least sense in attending class (Pezda, 2013). On the other hand, according to Gallop, 55% of fifth to twelfth graders in the U.S. identify themselves as actively engaged in school (Lopez, 2014). These statistics raise as many questions as they answer and suggest that both countries can learn from each other.

Despite its high academic results, Polish schools are commonly described as places of antagonism and narrow-mindedness, and, above all else, remnants of an outdated institution that is overly conservative and cannot offer teenagers anything apart from boredom (cf. Komendant-Brodowska, 2014; Piechota, 2010; Suchecka, 2015). Reforms, such as introducing a four-level educational system (elementary school, junior high, senior high, and college/university in 1999), have not improved the image of Polish schools (Mazurkiewicz & Gocłowska, 2014; Przewłocka, 2015). Instead, the institution has become associated with a painfully inevitable responsibility or a waste of valuable time, as natural as walking and as inconvenient as falling ill, as illustrated by the name of one Facebook page, *Szkoła jest jak kibiel. Chodzisz bo musisz* [School is like the bathroom; you go because you have to]. Moreover, each level of education finishes with an exam that influences where the student goes next. Thus, as the results of our analysis demonstrate, students feel that they are learning exclusively to the next test.

In the U.S., programs such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), 2001, and the more recent introduction of Common Core in 2010 have highlighted both the important role that education plays in society as well as the fear that the U.S. may be falling behind. Both programs, particularly the latter, have raised questions regarding the importance of standardized curriculum and nationwide testing from kindergarten to twelfth grade. In fact, in their study of reasons for student drop out, Doll, Eslami, and Walters (2013, p. 13) suggest that the higher standards introduced with NCLB may be increasing, rather than decreasing, the number of students who choose to

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*construal (cf. Langacker, 2008, p. 44). Together, these construals form/reveal a community's linguistic worldview.*

leave because of push factors.<sup>3</sup> The most recent survey results they discuss involves high school students who left between their sophomore year (2002) and 2004 (Dalton, Glennie, Ingels, & Wirt, 2009). This would be just after the introduction of NCLB. Reasons students gave for dropping out that motivate this analysis of teenager's linguistic worldview include 'did not like school' (36.6%), 'could not get along with teachers' (25.0%), 'did not feel belonged there' (19.9%) and 'could not get along with other students' (18.7%) (Dalton et al., 2009, p. 22).

Moreover, in essay contests aimed at teenagers, students rank school as the leading cause of stress with the second factor being college or getting into college ([www.stageoflife.com](http://www.stageoflife.com)). Social pressures, including bullying and abuse, also cause stress. Indeed, peer pressure or pressure to conform to societal expectations placed third in the same essay contest. Some of the online discussions even identify school as a leading cause of suicide. Considering the fact that suicide is the third highest cause of death among youth (Cash & Bridge, 2009), and the fact that the majority of a teenager's time is spent at school or doing school-related activities, potential effects of one on the other should not be dismissed. Thus, understanding teen attitudes towards school is crucial, both for motivating them to continue their education and help them become a full and active members of society.

Traditionally, research into teen attitudes would be conducted using a combination of surveys and directed interviews. However, these means are limited for several reasons. First, a student may feel pressure to conform to expectations in providing his/her answers. Second, frustration, a bad day, or peer influence may cause a student to purposely provide bogus or excessively negative responses. Third, students themselves admit that they do not always complete surveys honestly. An example of this is an online survey on Zapytaj.pl [Ask.pl]. One user, miśka51595 (2009), asked peers how they respond to surveys about school at school. Of those that have such surveys, 50% mix truth with creativity, 17% answer truthfully, 13% give random answers and 1.4% give positive answers irrespective of whether or not they are accurate. An additional 9% said such questionnaires 'make them want to vomit.' Difficulty in obtaining accurate survey results should not be a surprise, considering that students feel they are under constant social pressure (cf. [www.stageoflife.com](http://www.stageoflife.com)). This discrepancy between poll or survey results and reality reveals itself in the apparent discrepancy between academic achievement and academic enjoyment in the PISA and Gallup results mentioned above.

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<sup>3</sup> Doll et al. (2013) compare reasons students drop out from 1955 to 2004 against the framework of 'push, pull, and fall', which they borrow from Jordan, Lara, and McPartland (1994) and Watt and Roessingh (1994). In this framework, 'push' factors are those coming from within the school (e.g., fear of falling behind, being expelled, not getting along with teachers or classmates), 'pull' factors are external (e.g. getting a job), and 'fall' factors include dissolution or apathy that result in a student disappearing from the school scene (e.g. not liking school). All three play a role in explaining why students dropout; however there seems to be a shift from the 1950s, when pull factors were the strongest.

Thus, it is necessary to find a way to analyze teenagers' views of education, without influencing the material produced for analysis. What in the past posed quite a difficult challenge, is now possible through the volume of Internet forums where teens interact with each other and discuss a number of topics, among which is school, in their own informal sociolect.

### 3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical inspiration for this project comes from two distinct, but complementary, branches of cognitive linguistics, which Tabakowska (2013) refers to as 'Polish Cognitive Studies' (PCS) and 'American and European Cognitive Linguistics' (A/ECL). PCS refers to the research approach developed by Bartmiński and the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin (see Bartmiński, Zinken, & Głaz, 2012). These scholars focus on re-creating a linguistic worldview; that is,

a language-entrenched interpretation of reality, which can be expressed in the form of judgements about the world, people, things, events. It is an interpretation, not a reflection; it is a portrait without claims to fidelity, not a photograph of real object. The interpretation is a result of subjective perception and conceptualization of reality performed by the speakers of a given language; thus, it is clearly subjective and anthropocentric but also intersubjective (social). (Bartmiński et al., 2012, p. 23)

In other words, the aim of research within PCS is to reconstruct the subjective and intersubjective worldview of given communities as revealed in language or sociolect. In the same book, Bartmiński explains that he chose the prefix *ethno-* to emphasize that the approach focuses on language that is closely intertwined with a community (Bartmiński et al., 2012, pp. 7–8). Most of the research conducted by Bartmiński and his colleagues to date has focused on recreating the linguistic worldview of Polish folk language.<sup>4</sup>

Tabakowska (2013, p. 321) uses A/ECL to refer Cognitive Linguistics as motivated by the theories of 'Ronald Langacker, George Lakoff, Gilles Fauconnier, Mark Turner, René Dirven, Günter Radden, Dirk Geeraerts and their collaborators and followers.' As Tabakowska (2013), Zinken (2004), and others have observed, the two approaches to language and meaning share a significant amount of common ground, despite having been developed independently.

Within both, language is understood as an expression of conceptualization and as a way to access the speaker/writer's mentality or system of values (Bartmiński et al., 2012, p. 41; Langacker, 2008, p. 4). However, they differ in that A/ECL focuses on the relationship between language and 'mental *abilities*,' whereas PCS applies a

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<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the majority of the work that applies this theory has to date only been published in Polish or Russian. Exceptions include Zinken (2004), the 2012 translation of Bartmiński's work (Bartmiński, Zinken, and Głaz, 2012), and the contributions in Głaz, Danaher et al. (2013).

broader understanding, ‘including also mental *attitudes*: mental states that condition people’s interpretations of things, relations, and events and which are significantly influenced by their beliefs and systems of values—in other words, by their *culture*’ (Tabakowska, 2013, p. 322). While it cannot be said that cultural context is ignored at the theoretical level of A/ECL, it often takes second place to motivations rooted in embodiment; that is, in human physical experience. The theoretical foundations for a broader approach are available in A/ECL, e.g., the understanding of meaning as encyclopedic, frame semantics, etc.; however, these avenues of research are currently under-exploited (cf. Tabakowska, 2013). Conversely, within PCS, understanding culture and society are key.

This also affects the way in which scholars of both theories understand and research metaphor. Both groups see metaphorical language as ubiquitous and influencing and even guiding the way in which we reason about and respond to a wide variety of concepts (Bartmiński et al., 2012, p. 32; Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff, 2006; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Zinken, 2004)<sup>5</sup>. However, when comparing linguistic approaches to metaphor, it has been argued that PCS places more emphasis on ‘integrat[ing] metaphor—as one important aspect of conceptualisation—into a general framework of studying language and conceptualisation’ (Zinken, 2004, p. 133). At the same time, as Tabakowska (2013, p. 329) observes, ‘the PCS stance could actually be corroborated and strengthened by a more systematic account of metaphor and metonymy, in the vein proposed within the cognitivist framework.’ Thus, we treat metaphor as ‘one important aspect of conceptualisation’ and the formulation or expression of a community’s lexical worldview. At the same time, we turn to E/ACL for an organizational framework.

Although several approaches to metaphor have been proposed within E/ACL, most are to some extent an adaptation of the Contemporary Metaphor Theory (CMT) proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980; see also Lakoff, 2006). According to CMT, lexical metaphors are expressions of conceptual mappings between source and target domains. These mappings are referred to by the conceptual metaphor that guides them, written in all capital letters in terms of X is Y, in which X is the *target* that is understood in terms of the *source*, Y.

For instance, one common way in which people talk about arguments relies on the source domain of war, suggesting the existence of a conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, or COMPETITION (see also Ritchie, 2003). Lexical expressions relying on this conceptual metaphor include

- (1) He *won* the argument.
- (2) I couldn’t *defend* that point.

Although lexical expressions that access this metaphor are common, at least in English and Polish, other metaphorical source domains are also available. Each highlights different aspects of the discussion. These include:

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<sup>5</sup> This view is also in line with proposals by social linguists (cf. Grabias, 2001; Skudrzykova, Warchala, Dylík, Lisoń, & Udalska, 2012).

## ARGUMENT IS A JOURNEY:

- (3) We will *proceed* in a *step-by-step* fashion.
- (4) We have *covered* a lot of *ground*.

## AN ARGUMENT IS A BUILDING:

- (5) She constructed a solid argument.
- (6) We have got a *good foundation* for the argument. (Kövecses, 2010, p. 92)

Moreover, different conceptual metaphors carry different entailments, or different ways of viewing the purpose and goal of a disagreement. If WAR is our source domain, then our goal is to solidly defeat, or even 'kill', our opponent. If we are thinking in terms of a JOURNEY, we will see debate as part of a process towards discovering truth together. Similarly, if BUILDING is the source domain, we will hopefully be working with people of opposing viewpoints on creating one solid structure. The ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphorical construal pits participants against one another, whereas the other two source domains suggest the need for cooperation. In this way, metaphors have discursive import and both reflect and influence social interaction (cf. Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010).

Thus, not only do conceptual metaphors provide avenues for creative linguistic expression, but they also reflect different aspects of the target domain, in this case competition or cooperation (Kövecses, 2010, 2010, p. 92). Moreover, because language use is dynamic, some metaphors 'are not based on similarity but generate similarities' (Kövecses, 2010, p. 82). In other words, when a metaphor is used, it may cause the reader/listener to identify qualities in the target domain that he/she may not have recognized earlier. In this way, the conceptualizer's perspectives and values are shared with, and perhaps absorbed by, members of his/her language community. For this reason, one of the main focuses of this project is how metaphors within youth sociolect express and promote teenagers' linguistic worldview.

CMT reflects the approach to meaning commonly accepted within E/ACL, in which meaning is perspectival, dynamic and flexible, encyclopedic and non-autonomous, and usage-based (Geeraerts, 2006, pp. 4–6). These characteristics of language are commiserate with PCS, however, the language used to express these issues differs (Tabakowska, 2013; Zinken, 2004). For purposes of simplicity, we have adapted the vocabulary of A/ECL with the exception of the notion of *linguistic worldview*, which, although compatible with A/ECL, comes from PCS.

This understanding of meaning and language validates the study of the informal register of youth sociolect and carries several implications. In terms of being perspectival, cognitive linguistics proposes that different usage communities and different users will choose different words and expressions to convey their unique perspectives. The observation that meaning is dynamic and flexible is visible in the ways language is adapted to fit changing circumstances. We can expect this to be particularly true of the youth sociolect as teen life is in a constant flux and the language itself is unofficial and constantly changing. Because meaning is encyclopedic and non-autonomous, it reflects socially shared knowledge as well as the common experience of living in a physical body, particularly in terms of conceptual meta-

phor. Finally, as mentioned already, by starting from the perspective that language can most effectively be studied by looking at examples of real usage for communicative purposes, Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), as a natural means of communicating for the young generation, provides an ideal data base (Wileczek, 2011a).

To summarize, the CMT offers a framework for analyzing lexical expressions by identifying metaphorical source domains that guide students' perceptions of reality, in particular, the way they view the target domain of SCHOOL. As an approach congruent with research in other branches of cognitive and social sciences, it is possible to suggest that these conceptualizations, which form a student's linguistic worldview, both reflect and affect his/her attitude towards school. It is also likely that these conceptualizations have an impact on academic performance.

#### 4. HYPOTHESES

Taking into consideration the polls on opinions about school as well as the cultural and institutional differences in the respective countries, it should not be controversial to suggest that Polish and American youth conceptualize 'school' differently. Moreover, due to the fact that people express their conceptualizations of the world through the linguistic expressions they use (Bartmiński et al., 2012; Lakoff, 2006; Langacker, 2008), we can expect that differences in the sociolect of Polish and American teens will also signal different conceptual mappings and reflect each groups' culturally-specific linguistic worldview. Indeed, scholars working with the CMT have found that metaphors, for example, those relating to emotions, differ according to national culture (cf. Kövecses, 2005). Mikołajczuk (2011) and Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2012) argue that linguistic terms used to describe emotions are not easily translated across language, as apparent 'equivalents' often contain different conceptual content. Thus, we should expect not only differences in linguistic expressions in Polish and American youth sociolect, but also differences in the way these expressions are understood, including the conceptual metaphors onto which they map. For these reasons, we approach the data with two hypotheses. The first is that there will be differences in the language Polish and American students use to talk about their school experience. The second is that these differences in vocabulary will point to the activation of different metaphorical source domains at the conceptual level.

In the sections below, we present the sources for our analysis and the lexical metaphors identified. The discussion summarizes the results for each country, and the conclusion draws attention to similarities and differences we observed. It also highlights areas of serious concern for students and makes suggestions as to how teachers and other people of influence (parents, media, social workers, etc.) can frame their discussion of school to encourage, rather than discourage, youth as they cope with this phase of life.



## 5. METHOD

Examples of youth sociolect come from online discussion forums and blogs. In a survey of teenagers in the United States conducted by the Pew Research Center (Lenhart, 2015), 92% of teenagers said that they are online at least once a day—24% constantly. Only 17% of American youth comment on online discussion boards or forums (such as reddit). Nevertheless, of all the forms of Internet activity discussed in this report, online discussion is the mode least influenced by gender, race, or income.<sup>6</sup> Other activities, such as gaming or using pin boards, differ significantly in terms of social group. On the other side of the Atlantic, the World Internet Project Poland (2011) estimates that 95% of that nation's youth are online for an average of eighteen hours per week. It is their preferred source of news; 87% use it for this purpose. Other reasons for going online include looking for humorous content (85%) and reading blogs (67%).

Not only is the Internet a frequent and normal meeting place for today's youth, it is also a modality of communication that encourages greater self-disclosure (cf. Joinson, 2001, p. 178; Suler, 2004). This is the result of several factors which Suler (2004, p. 321) claims work together to create an 'online disinhibition effect: dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and minimization of authority.' He adds that this often has both positive and negative effects, as Internet users may not only become more open, but also more aggressive and vulgar than they would be in face-to-face contact (as noticed, for example, on *www.urbandictionary.com*, cf. Smith, 2013). At the same time, he claims that these changes do not necessarily reflect a different or 'truer' self, but rather a shift, revealing other aspects of the individual's complex personality that may be considered socially unacceptable in face-to-face interaction (Suler, 2004, pp. 324–325). Taking into consideration the high volume of Internet usage among teenagers, as well as the increased level of self-disclosure, Joinson (2001, p. 190) argues that 'psychologists will increasingly need to include the medium as well as the person in any analysis of social behavior.' This advice for psychologists pertains to linguists and sociologists as well. The Internet, with its anonymity and assumed isolation from adult eyes, is thus an ideal medium for observing and analyzing the sociolect of teenagers without inserting researcher presence.

Although both Polish and American researchers searched for teen forums and online discussions, the final data sets differ due to the fact that the social groupings

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<sup>6</sup> *As one of the reviewers mentioned, information regarding the identity of the Internet users could also provide valuable insight. However, because of the nature of Internet communication, this is not always possible: not all forums request such information from their participants and it is difficult to verify the information that is provided. Nevertheless, youth across the board use online forums more or less equally, this form of online communication should provide the most representative picture of U.S. teenagers' linguistic worldview. Since it is only a bird's eye view, however, designing a project that differentiates between different social groupings would be a valuable follow-up to this paper.*

and types of online communities differ between countries. These differences are visible in Tab. 1, which lists the websites we used in this study. Polish teens use several sites to chat about life, including school. These forums usually have teen or youth in the title and are generally inclusive. In the U.S., or, better yet, in the English language data, there are few such general forums and those that are usually include comments by people of various ages and quite possibly from various countries. The majority of U.S. forums with ‘teen’ in the title are run by adults or agencies trying to help youth cope with difficulties associated with growing up. We were aware of these factors and to control for these factors, the U.S. data set aims at representativeness by using a variety of different types of sites. For example, [www.christianteenforums.com](http://www.christianteenforums.com) was included to counter the abrasiveness of *urbandictionary.com* (cf. Smith, 2013). We included some sites run by adults (e.g., [us.reachout.com/forums/forum.php](http://us.reachout.com/forums/forum.php)); however, any comments that were clearly made by an adult or student living outside the U.S. were ignored in the analysis.

Table 1. Websites used in this study

Polish Data	American Data
1. <a href="http://www.m-forum.pl">http://www.m-forum.pl</a>	1. <a href="http://www.urbandictionary.com">http://www.urbandictionary.com</a>
2. <a href="http://www.nastek.pl">http://www.nastek.pl</a> <sup>7</sup>	2. <a href="http://www.teenink.com">www.teenink.com</a>
3. <a href="http://www.teenzone.pl">http://www.teenzone.pl</a>	3. <a href="http://www.stageoflife.com">www.stageoflife.com</a>
4. <a href="http://www.forum.teenzone.pl">http://www.forum.teenzone.pl</a>	4. <a href="http://www.reddit.com">www.reddit.com</a>
5. <a href="http://www.e-młodzi.pl">http://www.e-młodzi.pl</a>	5. <a href="http://www.christianteenforums.com">www.christianteenforums.com</a>
6. <a href="http://www.st9.pl">http://www.st9.pl</a>	6. <a href="http://us.reachout.com/forums/forum.php">us.reachout.com/forums/forum.php</a>
7. <a href="http://www.ogólne-tematy.pl">http://www.ogólne-tematy.pl</a>	7. <a href="http://www.diaryforteens.com">http://www.diaryforteens.com</a>
8. <a href="http://www.forum-młodzieżowe.eu">http://www.forum-młodzieżowe.eu</a>	8. <a href="http://www.virtualteen.org">www.virtualteen.org</a>

Examples of Polish teen online discourse were initially gathered in 2010 and have been discussed in Wileczek (2011b; 2011a). This data was supplemented and updated in 2015 and 2016, during which time the lexical expressions of American teenagers were collected. As many discussions and blogs in the English data cover this span, we believe that the time frames are comparable. We manually analyzed the content of discussions on school, including school relationships, grades, and homework. We marked linguistic expressions in both Polish and English according to the source domain(s) they seemed to be accessing and grouped them according

<sup>7</sup> When the Polish data was originally gathered this website also appeared as [www.nastolatek.pl](http://www.nastolatek.pl). ‘Młodzież’ and its variants, including the abbreviation ‘m-’, can be translated into English as ‘youth’; ‘nastolatek’ and its variants are Polish for ‘teenager’.

to their similarities. These similarities fit the main source domains presented in the results that follow.

The domains differ between languages for two main reasons. First, as could be expected, the lexical expressions American and Polish students use access different source and target domains. Secondly, as the researchers originally come from two different countries, they also differ in their cultural and linguistic orientation. For example, there were several debates between the researchers regarding the organization of words related to the semantic domain of CONTAINER. For the Polish researchers, the primary association for the word *Auschwitz* was a place of confinement, whereas for the American researcher, the same word seemed to emphasize concepts of forced labor and oppression. Hence, we classified these words differently in the Polish and American data. We did this in order to reflect the most probable conceptualizations of youth in the respective countries. We also opted for a bottom up method of categorization as a more accurate reflection of the uniqueness of each culture as opposed to a more unified, but potentially forced, system of top-down categorization. (For a discussion of the difficulty of assigning source domains see Ritchie, 2003).

However, despite these differences, effective comparison requires a common organizational structure. For this reason, we arranged the results into the following categories, which could also be viewed as target domains within CMT:

- School as an institution
- The space of school
- The people of school
- The activities in school
- The emotions at school

These categories are not exclusive and many expressions comment on more than one aspect of the students' linguistic worldview. For example, many of the expressions in the first four categories also provide insight into the emotions students experience at school. At the same time, if one takes into consideration the fact that one's linguistic worldview is not only a social construct, but also includes individual conceptualizations, it is not possible to include all representations—cognitive or linguistic—within the space of one article. Thus, the material we present are examples of construals observed to be representative of the respective data sets. When resistant discourses—i.e., discourses that go against the general trend—occur, we draw attention to their uniqueness.

As our goal is to re-construct the linguistic worldview of the target domain of SCHOOL in the eyes of teenagers in both countries, our approach is qualitative rather than quantitative. Although we considered counting examples of each metaphorical construal, several complications arose. For example, many forums include extended commentaries by one author on why he/she thinks schools resemble, e.g., concentration camps or prisons. In such posts, the author often uses several lexical expressions to build his construal. What is more, those commenting on the post frequently quote all or some of those expressions, sometimes without making

a clear, conscious decision to do so. These characteristics of online discourse make statistical analysis problematic and unreliable, and we concluded that counting the lexical expressions would not necessarily provide an accurate representation of youth discourse. Thus, taking into consideration our data and the nature of interaction on Internet forums, we decided to focus on a qualitative rather than quantitative analysis. Moreover, a qualitative approach is in line with current work in describing a community or sociolect's linguistic worldview within PCS.

It must also be mentioned that each forum adds a different flavor to the study. For example, when analyzing the English language data, we noticed that the definitions of 'school' on *urbandictionary.com* are not only more negative than on other websites, but also contain more examples of taboo or offensive language. However, as *urbandictionary.com* tends to contain a high frequency of swear words across the board, this may be more indicative of the source than the topic (Smith, 2013). What is more, forum topics also influence the type of language used. Discussions about Advanced Placement courses or college preparation tend to construe the educational experience in a more positive light than, for instance, '14 Good Reasons why School Sucks & Things I Hate About School' (*teenink.com*). Also worth remembering is that the definitions on *urbandictionary.com* are ranked according to popularity: the lower the number the more popular the definition is and, in theory, the more likely it is that users self-identify with it.

In the Polish data, the tone and attitude of the students also varies according to the forum. One of the slang dictionaries used as a reference, *Miejski.pl*, is characterized by a negative and sometimes vulgar tone. This is also visible on such forums as 'Antyedukacja' [Anti-education] on *nastek.pl*. At the same time, texts and comments on other forums and social sites include a wider variety of emotions. On the one hand, there are statements that belittle school in the context of bad relationships with teachers, learning difficulties, uninteresting subjects, and bad notes. On the other hand, there are also humorous expressions that try to lighten up the school reality and even comments defending teachers.

## 6. RESULTS

This section presents the results of the analysis according to the five categories mentioned above. For each, we present excerpts from the Polish and American data according to the target and source domains we identified. As mentioned, some of the expressions include vulgarity. To provide the full linguistic worldview, we have included these in our analysis. The only changes we made to the data below are minor spelling/grammar corrections in order not to prejudice the reader against a student's expression unnecessarily. Translations of the Polish data are in brackets.

*The institution of school*

The definitions of ‘school’ (n.) in Polish and American dictionaries, respectively, provide a prototypical understanding of the institution for purposes of comparison with definitions provided by the youth:

- (7) Instytucja zajmująca się kształceniem, głównie dzieci i młodzieży (Dubisz, 2003) [an institution engaged in the instruction mainly of children and young people]
- (8) an institution for the instruction of children or people under college age.  
("The American Heritage dictionary of the English language," 2011)

Moving from the standard definitions above, we will begin our journey into understanding how youth define the place where they spend approximately six to eight hours of their day. The forums and online dictionaries in both languages include acronym-based definitions of SZKOLA/SCHOOL.

- (9) *Spółeczny Zakład Karno-Opiekuńczy Łączący Analfabetów*  
(<http://www.miejski.pl/slowo-Szkoła>)  
[Community Prison-Care Facility Connecting the Illiterate]
- (10) S.C.H.O.O.L.: *Segregating Classes Hosted by Odd Obese Lawyers*  
(U\_83)<sup>8</sup>
- (11) S.C.H.O.O.L.: *Seven (Six) Crappy Hours Of Our Lives* (U\_142, 302, 305, 348)

Within the Polish sources there is also an acronym based on the English word:

- (12) **Spółeczne Choro-Ordynarne Ośrodki Lagrowskie**  
(<http://nonsensopedia.wikia.com/wiki/Szko%C5%82a>)  
[Community [of the] Ill [and] Vulgar Internment Centers].

Acronyms confine their user in terms of vocabulary and space, limiting the aspects of ‘school’ that can be elaborated on. Nevertheless, youth in both languages are able to express different perspectives on perceived inconsistencies between what school is supposed to provide and their own experiences. In (10), the focus is on the way time is spent (or wasted), whereas in (9) the American school system is accused of promoting or enforcing social differences. Polish teens, on the other hand, highlight the CLASSROOM IS A CONTAINER metaphor. Construals of school as a place that locks students in and wastes their time are common in both sets of data; however, as will be seen, the motivation for these construals are culturally distinct and reflect different linguistic worldviews of the school system.

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<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of brevity, U\_# will be used to mark citations from urban dictionary. As these numbers are based on voting, they may have fluctuated from May 2015 when the data was gathered.

Participants in the online communities also give more elaborate definitions of 'school' than the acronyms above. For reasons of space, we provide only one definition from each language, which we chose for its representativeness.

- (13) Szkoła? Jak (...) instytucja, która jest po prostu nieco lżejszą formą więzienia i zdecydowanie przykrym obowiązkiem miałyby w jakikolwiek pozytywny sposób wpływać na wychowanie i rozwój? 'Vicky' [School? as [...] an institution, which is a somewhat lighter form of prison which would have a definitely disagreeable responsibility if it were to in any positive way influence [a child's] upbringing and development.] ("Czy współczesna szkoła jest w stanie skutecznie wychowywać?")
- (14) (n.) 1. a legal institution that is supposedly for the benefit of humans below the age of 18 so that the government may have a chance to torture, brainwash and break the young minds to their will at a supple age in order for the government officials to have supposedly docile citizens that they may control in order to take over the world, and the lives of all young 'students.' 2. Also referred to commonly as a prison for anyone in ages between 4 to 18. (U\_15)

Both contributors draw on the source domain of PRISON; however, there is a stark contrast in the elements of encyclopedic knowledge accessed in each construal. 'Vicky' (13) appears to have an abstract notion of school as a place where youth have to be, but do not enjoy being because it is boring. Indeed, the above quote follows a previous observation by the same user that 'dzieci i młodzież po prostu źle się czują, a lekcje nie wzbudzają niczyjego zainteresowania' [children and youth simply feel bad and lessons do not awaken anyone's interest]. This contrasts with the contribution of U\_15 (14). Although prison is mentioned in a similarly figurative sense, WORK CAMP or REEDUCATIONAL FACILITY seems to be the primary type of incarceration the student is accessing as a source domain for SCHOOL.

As a result, the image of school as an institution, including its aim and purpose, is conceptualized differently in the two texts. For Vicky (13), the institution attempts to educate, however, it does so poorly. Conversely, U\_15 seems to be arguing that education is a cover, a government deception, in order to create a submissive society through torture and brainwashing. Furthermore, U\_15 claims this is not only the case in the U.S., but throughout the world. As mentioned above, we chose these citations because they are representative of the data as a whole; that is, they construe 'school' in ways that we observed in numerous citations. Additional linguistic examples of these construals in the sections below confirm this choice.

#### *The spatial domain of school*

##### *Polish*

As visible in the quotes above, the conceptual metaphor SCHOOL IS A CONTAINER/PRISON is quite prevalent; nevertheless, there are different emphases both

within and between culture groups. We identified five main spatial areas in the Polish data:

PLACE OF HUMAN DEGRADATION: *buda* [kennel]; *jaskinia* [cave]; *ruder* [hovel]; *slums* [slums]; *bagno* [quag]; *obora* [cowshed]; *nora* [burrow];

CONTAINER (place of confinement): *getto* [ghetto]; *Auschwitz* [Auschwitz]; *obóz zagłady* [extermination camp]; *kraty* [grills, bars];

PRISON: *Alcatraz* [Alcatraz]; *paka* [crate]; *zakład karny* [prison]; *pułko* [box]; *loch* [lager cellar]; *Azbakan* [Azbakan, prison in the *Harry Potter* series];

A PLACE OF INTELLECTUAL DEPRECIATION: *kujownia* [study hall (emphasis on a place for geeks/nerds and rote memorization)]; *nuda* [boredom]; *nudne miejsce* [boring place]; *wykańczak* [finishing tool];

BATTLEFIELD: *wojna* [war]; *walka* [fight]; *poligon* [firing range]; *sztab* [spears]; *schron* [shelter]; *baza* [base].

Sharp discussion arose between the American and Polish researchers in the classification of these terms. For the American, the two categories CONTAINER (place of confinement) and PRISON represent points on a continuum, with the latter being a more extreme case of the former. On the contrary, the Polish researchers' interpretation was that the lexical expressions classified here under CONTAINER focus on the walls, whereas the expressions classified as accessing the source domain of PRISON emphasize loss of freedom. These different understandings of what appears to be a common construal in both sets of data, SCHOOL IS PRISON, highlight the need for greater discussion in cross-cultural and multi-cultural research.

#### *American students*

When looking at the sociolect of American teens, it must be mentioned that, whereas in the Polish data there are several one-word examples, the English data includes more phraseological constructions. These expressions also center primarily on the notion of an enclosed space, but the enclosures they describe vary from an unnamed location that one needs to 'escape' to, at the other extreme, HELL. Examples of these expressions follow.

CONTAINER: *can't wait to get out of here*; *sh\*thole*, *box*; *trapped*;

PRISON: *legal penitentiary*; *The bell tells you when to...*; *jailed up*; *homework leg chains clamp you to your desk*; *correctional facility*; *inmates, your rights...are taken away*; *building which resembles a federal prison*;

CONCENTRATION CAMP / WORK CAMP: *sweatshop*; *a legal slave house*; *Auschwitz*; *A torture chamber*; *The 'right' way to torture your*

*children; Where human rights are banished upon stepping into a room. You cannot sip water, eat, go to the toilet or have a fair trial;*

*FACTORY: a factory for the next generation of obedient workers... to create a load of mindless fork and spoon operators; Instead of producing intelligent well rounded people they produce unquestioning f\*\*kwits; get every ounce of individuality squeezed out of us; make people the 'gears of society';*

*HELL: hell on earth; Hell with florescent lighting; a urine soaked hell hole; God forsaken; pitchfork; abominable hellhole where the life is sucked from young people; a hellhole that forces children and teenagers to close their minds.*

As mentioned above, this is only a sampling of the most visible construals. Others, although less-frequently cited, include BABYSITTER, MENTAL INSTITUTION, BATTLEFIELD, NIGHTMARE, HAVEN-SANCTUARY and HEAVEN. The last two, expressed by students who see school as an escape from home, illustrate the presence of resistant discourses; that is, discourses that deviate from the majority. Other resistant voices are more straightforward: *SCHOOL IS NOT HELL, IT IS NOT A PRISON, IT IS NOT A CONCENTRATION CAMP, AND IT IS NOT WHERE PEOPLE ARE ASSIMILATED* (capital letters in the original). This last statement received a rather low ranking of 444 on *urbandictionary.com*, indicating that it is not widely accepted by the users of the portal. However, it does exist in the discourse space and represents a divergence from the trend that we cannot ignore.

### *The people of school*

Although some of the construals of the people at school draw on the source domains seen above, others are more varied and more particular. As in the previous section, the Polish data is first.

#### *Polish Student(s)*

Positive: *gość, gostek* [nice guy, cool guy]; *koleś* [pal, mate]; *prze-gość* [mega-man] *mózg*; [brain]; *szeniol* [top-dog];

Negative: *trzoda* [flock, herd]; *mutant* [mutant]; *więzień* [prisoner]; *cykor* [sissy]; *kapuś* [snitch]; *kafar* [pile driver = not very clever]; *lizman* [brown-noser]; *lamus* [granary = nerd];<sup>9</sup> *frajer* [loser, fool]; *burak* [beetroot = U.S. rednek]; *muł* [mule]; *sprzedawca* [dealer]; *kujon* [crammer, nerd]; *dziobak* [platypus = someone who is always in the books studying]; *kret* [mole = studies at night]; *snajper* [sniper = has

<sup>9</sup> *In the case of figurative language use, the literal translation is given first, followed by the equals sign (=) and a word or phrase that better reflects the meaning in English.*



acquired lots of 'ones' or 'F's]; *spadochroniarz* [paratrooper = has to repeat the year]; *noob* [noob].

#### *Polish Teacher(s)*

Positive: *facio* ['the man']; *facet*; *ziom* [nice guy, cool guy]; *babka* [cool female teacher]; or diminutive forms of a teacher's first name, such as *Miecio*, *Zibi*, *Czesio*;

Negative: *szeryf* [sheriff]; *klawisz* [warden]; *hejter* [hater]; *gadzi/gad* [reptile]; *lamus* [out-dated; nerd]; *zgred* [geezer]; *dziadek* [grandfather].

Many of the Polish metaphors for fellow classmates come from nature and rely on cultural stereotypes regarding particular animals and their activities for their meaning. When it comes to talking about teachers, using informal and personal diminutive forms of a teacher's name while talking about him/her in the third person brings the teachers into the student's community and can be understood as a positive construal. Negative construals seem to focus on the teacher as being either too old-fashioned or too strict. While the trend seems to be to view teachers in a negative light, some positive, resistant discourses are present. For example, in a forum specifically focused on discussing teachers, one student comments:

*Szanuję większość swoich nauczycieli. Zależy to od ich zaangażowania w pracę, a także w dużej mierze od ich charakteru* [I respect most of my teachers. It depends on their commitment to/involvement in their work and, to a large extent, on their character].

It is worth noting that this student does not feel compelled to respect teachers simply based on their role as a teacher and corresponding authority, but rather based on each individual teacher's engagement.

The same gradation of good/bad is also present in English and even made explicit in posts with divisions into *good—normal—bad* teacher(s). However, the discussion differs when it comes to talking about fellow classmates. Cliques are much more prevalent in U.S. schools than they are in Poland. In Poland, students are usually with the same group of approximately 30 students for their entire time at high school, and they usually develop close relationships. In the U.S. system, each class—math, history, literature, etc.—is comprised of different students; thus, students usually develop their closest ties within the cliques or social groups that they belong to. As a result, defining one's identity in high school is often closely connected to solidifying group membership. This is reflected in the various systems teens use for classifying of their peers. One rather lengthy forum discussion was actually started by a girl trying to decide what clique she belongs to, other posts include surveys to find out what groups, or tribes, their online peers identify with. While the data include the acknowledgement that nice teachers and students exist, negative construals are more frequently expressed. An ambiguous 'they' also appears in the English data.

*American Student(s)*

Neutral-Positive: innocent, defenseless, person, human being, very frail pale little humans, decent person, impressionable youth, children;

Tribes: a\*\*holes, prep-bleh, sluts, jocks, cheerleaders, goth/emo, punk/metal kids, geeks/nerds/dorks;

Negative: popular people, idiot populars, sh\*\*head students, mindless clone bot teenagers, annoying a\*\*hole; gradeworms; wiggers.

*American Teacher(s)*

Neutral-Positive: dedicated, listen, care, awesome, amazing (AP teachers);

Negative: b\*t\*h; god: judging [children]; cruel; some of these teachers molesting children; have anger management problems; a\*\*hole; douchebag; overweight; underpaid; make your life a living hell; old grumpy ugly adults; grammar Nazi;

## American 'They':

A social gathering of idiots; the idiotic, brainwashed, fools of today's American society; a\*\*holes, pricks, jerkoffs, gangsters, gays, gay bashers, racists, tattle tales, thieves, annoying people, gamefreaks.

As can be seen from the examples above, teenagers seem to perceive themselves as victims of the system. In some cases, students express their victimhood as the result of a teacher's behavior (*grammar Nazi*); in other cases, they blame it on bullying, mistreatment or jealousy by 'them'.

*The activities in school*

The fourth aspect of school that we would like to look at is its activities. What do the people, as conceptualized above, do during their time at or 'in' school?

*Polish students*

Language from the Polish data paints a less than positive picture of school life that spans from an unfortunate necessity to a place of intellectual oppression:

WASTING TIME: *bujdy, banialuki* [bunk, balony]; *antyki* [antique, old-fashioned];

COERCION: *Szkoła jest jak WC, chodzisz, bo musisz* [School is like a toilet, you go, because you have to]; *przewlekła choroba wieku dziecięcymłodzieżowego* [a chronic disease for children and youth]; *pańszczyzna* [serfdom].

MECHANICAL / ROTE ACTIVITY: *kuć, ryć, dziobać* [to cram, to grind away at, plod through]; *kąsać fabułę* [bite (=skim) the surface of a subject]; *fizyka mode* [physics mode = studying in a rote manner, without understanding]; *Zasada 3xZ: Zakuć, Zdaj, Zapomnij* [Principle of ‘3xZ’: (cram, pass, forget)];

INTELLECTUAL OPPRESSION: *Szkoła zabija indywidualizm* [School kills individualism]; *pedagodzy-tradycjoniści nie pozwalają uczniowi wyrazić własnego zdania*; [teachers-traditionalists do not allow the student to express his own opinion]; *szkoła to strata czasu* [school is a waste of time]; *miejsce dla średniaków* [school is place for C students]; *myślenie w szkole nie jest wskazane* [thinking in school is not recommended]; *w szkole się nie wychylaj* [don’t stick your neck out/over perform at school]; *I tak jesteś przegrany* [and either way you lose].

HARVEST / SLAUGHTER: *uglebić* [to bring down to the ground]; *ściąć* [cut down]; *rzeźnia* [slaughterhouse]; *żniwa* [harvest]; *dożynki* [harvest festival].

These metaphorical construals do not focus on the positive associations usually connected with the fruit of the harvest in English-language metaphors, but rather on the death of the plant or animal. They refer to a system of evaluation within Polish schools in which the teacher randomly questions students regarding the coursework. Teachers grade the students’ answers and enter them into the register. The metaphors above give the impression that most of these periods of questioning end with plenty of students receiving failing grades. Instead of encouraging regular studying, the questioning is negatively perceived by students as an attempt to tear them down. This can be seen in the way they describe their grade using the names of animal, plants, people and parts of the body, equipment, and tools.

The words chosen are often iconic, motivated by the similarity of the object to the shape of the grade of ‘one’, which is equivalent to a fail in Poland. The multiple linguistic variants highlight the students’ annoyance with the system and may represent a way of coping with the disappointment and frustration of receiving a bad grade. Words bearing a visual resemblance to the shape of the number ‘one’ include *strzała* [arrow], *dzida* [spear], *lufa* [barrel], *pała* [rods, clubs]. It is worth noting here that not only are the expressions highly iconic, but they are also tools used for killing, which may be understood as a metaphorical association between the teacher’s negative assessment and its effect on the student. Words related to footwear suggest a metonymic link between the shoe and the act of kicking or stomping: *bambosz* [slipper], *glan* [boot], *but* [shoe], *trep* [grunt], *chodak* [clog]. These words connote low value regarding the unsatisfactory grade by accessing the conceptual metaphor DOWN IS BAD. Other nicknames for grades highlight their commonness and lack of aesthetic appeal: *badył* [dried out stalk]; *bania* [pumpkin], *kita* [truft, ponytail], *flak* [gut], *sztuka* [one unit]. Another set suggests a military or sporting domain: *bomba* [bomb], *gol* [goal], *trafienie* [hit, bullseye]. These also in-

dicade that in the minds of the students', grades are part of the teachers' weaponry, which they freely use against them.

As noticed earlier, one of the main source domains in the Polish data is the animal kingdom. By comparing human activity (learning, studying) to animal behavior (e.g., *pecking*), the teenagers highlight the lack of intellectual engagement and feelings of dehumanization. Moreover, students depict school as a place they are forced to attend, either out of physical or social obligation, a necessary phase of life. This in itself is not a negative construal; however, it becomes negative when we add the fact that students also see it as a place that discourages independent thinking, a place where it is 'safest' to just memorize and repeat what the teacher has taught

#### *American Students*

Activities mentioned in the English data fall under two general categories—one in which the student is the victim; the other, less frequent construal, views the student as a fighter. Those that victimize the student stem from conceptualizing the educational system as a CONSPIRACY. The resulting construals of 'school' range from a place intentionally designed to waste students' time to a place designed to kill them. Examples of this continuum follow.

*FARCE: where we go to 'learn'; American conspiracy; tricked at a young age; a place that is bada\*\* and all educational... most of the time boring, unenlightening; give 'students' the illusion of being able to have creativity and a mind of their own; disinformation; many 'useful' subjects, preparing for 'life' and the 'real world';*

*INTELLECTUAL OPPRESSION: suppresses independent thought; make you conform; demobilizes kids; destroys your freethinking and creativity; where the human spirit is crushed;*

*BRAINWASHING/SOCIAL PROGRAMMING: fed to you; it's [school's] not failing, it was designed to make an obedient populace; indoctrinated to prepare them for exploitation by the establishment; Pavlov's dogs; Another Indoctrination Center, submissive, and docile drones; trained like puppets and dogs; teaches you that money is the reason to live;*

*TORTURE: Place of torture or evil; a social atrocity that turns normal members of society into suicidal, f\*\*ked-up potheads...; inhumane experiment; place of pure evil where you are embarrassed, hurt, poisoned, and brainwashed;*

*(SEXUAL) ASSAULT: Sucks; place where you spend first 18 years of life taking it up the a\*\*; getting f\*\*ked up; where people get molested;*

*MURDER: Even if you have a good kind of teacher, school is still murder; Going to school against your will has the equivalent life-shortening*

*effect of smoking 94,254 cigarettes; your life is sucked out of you; kills the desire to learn; where creativity goes to die;*

*FIGHTING: I WILL survive the year! ..... Any tips for stayin' alive?; way over my head; Practice. Writing. Essays. They KILLED me; I smoked every single math test I ever took.*

Here we see some similarities with the linguistic worldview represented in the Polish data; particularly, school is a place that discourages creativity and encourages conformity. However, the presumed motivation behind the system differs. Polish students tend to focus on the outdatedness of the system, whereas American students often describe the school as intentional deception and manipulation. It is also important to note that the level of violence is heightened in the American examples and that some activities above are referred to both metaphorically and literally. Moreover, charges of abuse discussed in the forum refer to cases that are both mental and physical as well as individual and systemic (see also Macnab, 2012). That said, only the U.S. data presents fighting as a significant coping mechanism. Other activities of school visible in the American data could be grouped according to the following source domains: DUTY, ADVENTURE/CHALLENGE, SOCIAL TEST, DRUG SUPPLIER, ARCADE, BROTHEL, and SOCIAL HUB. There was also a reference to Columbine, *Shooting range, with fully automated targets*, in which the battle is no longer figurative, but becomes painfully real.

### *The emotions of school*

#### *Polish students*

The emotions of Polish students as relates to their school experience range from frustration to rage to simply letting go and treating it all as a joke. Emotional responses are aroused by several factors; thus, in the examples below, some of the phrases given refer directly to that emotion, others to the situations causing that reaction. In the case of the latter, the category we assigned results from understanding the context of the forum from which the expression was taken.

CONFUSION/FRUSTRATION: *Sajgon* [Saigon, chaos, mayhem]; *Meksyk* [Mexico (within Polish culture, ‘Mexico’ is a stereotypical referent for things confusing, mayhem)] *żenua* [weird, hard to understand in a depressing way]; *niehalo* [no-hello = mad/crazy]; *kicha, kiszka* [bad, awful] *kaszana* [something unsuccessful]; *lipa* [embarrassingly bad];

ANGER—Expressed to varying degrees, including resentment, anger, annoyance, indignation, resentment, hostility, aversion (41): *makabra* [macabre]; *żal na maxa* [regret to the max]; *odrabianie pańszczyzny* [catching up with serfdom = slaving away at homework]; *rzygam tą placówką* [this institution makes me puke]; *ta szkoła to potwór* [this school is a monster]; *piep\*\*yć nauczycieli* [f\*\*k teachers]; *facetka*

*wstawia mi banię przy końcu semestru - żenada totalna* [the woman gives me a fail at the end of the semester—a total embarrassment];

AXIETY / FEAR: *armagedon* [Armageddon]; *dostać bana* [get a ban = be expelled from lessons]; *czarna rozpacz* [despair]; *żałoba* [the classroom is a place/time of mourning]; *kiblować* [spending lessons in the bathroom]; *palić tramki* [burn the trainers—‘skip the lessons’]; *schizować* [getting schizoid]; *nauczyciele krążą jak sępy* [teachers circling like vultures]; *wszędzie kamery* [cameras everywhere]; *placz* [crying]; *mam lekkiego stresu przed wywiadówką* [have a slight stress before parent-teacher day].

SADNESS / HOPELESSNESS: *najsmutniejszy okres życia* [the saddest period of life]; *padaka* [crestfallen]; *antyedukacja* [anti-education]; *kaplica* [chapel = total failure]; *kapota* [horrible, failure]; *nie mieć genów* [to not have the genes]; *zbrodniczy system* [system is criminal, unfair]; *frajerować się* [to allow yourself to be fooled, suckered]; *pieprzenie o Szopenie* [screwing a raccoon = speaking nonsense]; SSS - syndrom senności szkolnej; [SSS - school syndrome of sleepiness]; *cienizna* [something didn’t work out so well]; *cegiełka powszechnego, młodzieżowego kretynizmu* [common brick of teen foolishness]; *gonić za marchewką, której choćbyś się zes\*\*ł i tak nigdy nie złapiesz* [chasing the carrot, which, even if you sh\*\* it, you will never catch it].

BORDOM / APATHY: *koszenie* [mowing—‘a repetitive lesson’]; *stypa* [funeral meal = boring, unsuccessful party].

Negative emotions are also connected with having perceived a sense of superiority from teachers, experienced as verbal humiliation or perceived injustice: *wuefista to wredny człowiek; nie mam siły, żeby z nim walczyć* [my PE teacher is one vicious man; I do not have the strength to fight him].

Polish students have several coping mechanisms for dealing with what they feel to be senseless and boring. One mechanism is to simply make a joke of it. An example of this from the online discourse is to stand up in class and announce a classmate’s ‘birthday’ and begin singing to him/her, with the added comment: *a że nauczyciele się zmieniają, to można robić to na każdej lekcji!* [and because teachers change, you can do it on every lesson!].

Other ways students cope include focusing on the pleasure of the social aspect or employing irony.

ENJOYMENT: *w szkole jest fajnie* [school is cool]; *niektóre lekcje są zabawne* [some lessons are fun]; *ma się kontakt ze znajomymi* [one is in touch with friends]; *można się czasami pośmiać* [we have laughs sometimes]; *spotkania z funflami* [meetings with fun-fellas]; *szkolny LOL* [school LOL - Lots of Laughs]; *polew* [something funny]; *luzik zawsze i wszędzie* [free and relaxed always and everywhere]; *wrzucić na niższy*

*bieg* [toss to a lower gear]; *jechać na wolnym* [ride in the open]; *łapać klimę* [catch the cool air = be in a good mood];

IRONY: *mi to rybka* [it's a fish to me = it's all the same to me]; *kumać* [understand, informal]; *mieć errora* [have an error = have difficulty understanding something]; *strzelić focha* [pretend to be offended]; *trzasnąć wybryk* [pull a prank]; *powracająca fala* [a fail is a returning wave]; *kosz za jeden punkt* [a basket for one point = each fail or 'one' is one point]; *jeden zero dla nauczyciela* [one zero for the teacher].

These coping mechanisms can be seen as a way of ‘taming’ the school experience. We can see this through the focus on having a ‘cool demeanor’, being a ‘chill man’ (Wileczek, 2011b, pp. 9–10) and the shift in focus from education to meeting with friends. When conversations about academic aspects of school are broached, euphemisms and sarcasm are used. This, along with describing successes and failures in terms of sports competitions, weakens the seriousness and finality of the grade. Expressions conveying a positive emotion that results from the educational, rather than social, aspect of the school experience are rare and examples of resistant discourses, not belonging to the average student’s linguistic worldview.

#### *American students*

Emotional reactions of American students can also be categorized into negative and positive responses; nevertheless, there are significant differences.

STRESS/PRESSURE: *as way too much to handle; can't take it anymore; Intimidated... walls around me...; decompress; i melt under pressure also; stressing out [...] I don't know how much more I can take; I can honestly say I am braindead. I can't think straight anymore;*

FRUSTRATION/BOREDOM: *useless boring crap; but it is actually too easy. My grades are slipping ironically because school is too easy; it just seems abundantly pointless! You get obsolete, inconsequential bullshit shoved down your throat [...] if you fail because you don't understand, then that's too bad, which totally defeats the purpose of learning anyways.*

FEAR/ANXIETY: *nightmare; it's so scary I want to start cutting again when school starts back; I'm scared as hell. I have been bullied since pre-kindergarten; If you don't dress or look a certain way your made fun of; I can't write down any notes and it makes me so nervous; it's difficult to totally get past the anxiety completely;*

PAIN / DISILLUTIONMENT: *even a girl/boy friend [...] who will eventually dump you and crush your soul further; All of your hopes and dreams you had in elementary school are destroyed; a for kids to suffer;*

*HATRED: instils in them a great hatred of what they otherwise would not despise; encourages hate, and hate encourages more hate; I'm pissed beyond words because I turned the work in, and somehow my sh\*t is missing; I hate all this anxiety school brings me. I'm just, like, a showcase filled with marks and trophies; School can f\*\*\* up your social life, and one of the main reasons for teenage suicides; the only time you'd actually use math is to calculate the number of bullets you'd put through your head to get yourself out of this nightmarish hellhole of an existence; Two students in my class have snapped at the teacher because of her attitude.*

*HUMILIATION: a huge inferiority complex and denies us our status as humans; degrading; dejection; bullying and harassment; I'm the main bullying target; For a lot of people (including myself) it's difficult to totally get past the anxiety completely; the teacher always mocks you in front of the whole class whenever you make a mistake; making the class feel bad by putting them down and implying that we are half stupid.*

*DEPRESSION / DESPAIR: lots of downs, and some ups; I guess I should get used to being at the bottom of the food chain; I have been working my ass off this year and I just can't find the motivation anymore; I'm out... why me?!? ...where did everything go so wrong? ...I really don't want to mess up my life anymore but I don't know what to do (I feel trapped); setting myself up for rejection and I can't exactly handle that.*

While the frequency of these negative responses raises the question to what extent the 55% of students who evaluate themselves as actively engaged are represented in this sample, it does help explain the disengagement of the remaining 45%. Nevertheless, despite the prominence of negative construals of the school experience, there are a number of examples of students who either cannot relate to these negative experiences, or have experienced these emotions but are fighting against them.

*ENJOYMENT: We hardly have any cliques at my school. Or bullying. I'm a senior now and I have NEVER seen a kid targeted. Everyone just gets along and minds their own business for the most part. I love it.*

*COURAGE: My anxiety has held me back from a lot and I mean a lot but it's a battle to fight; But I refuse to get used to the bottom; but I don't let it bring me down; I am just breaking out of the shell; one month left I just need to hang on; We hate the struggle of fighting the urges, but don't quit. suffer now, then live as a champion as you overcame your battles.*

Moreover, there are several online discussions encouraging alternative perspectives and suggesting that their classmates become part of the solution, rather than



the problem. One student started the forum 'Come help me in my fight against bullying.' In a discussion on cliques on another forum, students participated in the following interchange:

*I always like to be the bridge between cliques because I like to jump around from different ones and get them to know each other.*

*I agree. I am not part of any clique at my school. They are there around me and try to pull me in and make me change but I resist. I am known as the weird guy and am proud of it. I have been told to change and I won't lose my individuality just because some group doesn't think it is 'cool.'*

The author of response draws on several of the conceptual metaphors mentioned by his/her peers. First, there is the social pressure *pulling him in*, telling him to change and his decision to resist, to fight back and protect his *individuality* against the desires of the crowd.

As in the Polish data, negative responses include frustration and anger. However, there is a contrast between the feelings of sadness and hopelessness on the part of the Polish students and the despair expressed by their American counterparts. This was highly visible in that several American teen forums have sub-forums dedicated to addressing bullying and depression. Moreover, emotions such as sadness and despair are expressed in terms of suicide or killing oneself. While some students cope with hatred, or surrender in depression, others seek the good in their experiences and try to fight the negative emotions evoked by their educational journey.

## 7. DISCUSSION

### *Polish students*

The Polish linguistic worldview of 'school' as an institution relies heavily on the source domain of CONTAINER, which students often verbalize as a PRISON or other place of confinement. Within this lexical worldview, youth construe school as a place where they are forced to go. They see it as a necessity of life (like going to the bathroom), a necessary phase of life, or a chronic disease. When it comes to achieving the actual purpose of school—education—they tend to see schools as a waste of time. However, within this linguistic worldview, school is so much more than just a place of incarceration. Many of the metaphorical expressions used to describe the spatial domain of school come from the living places of animals or homeless people. These expressions highlight a prominent view of school as depersonalized; a place where at some level, be it the ministry of education, staff or faculty, adults do not invest in or care about their students. This is further emphasized by excerpts that highlight intellectual depreciation or draw on the source domain of a BATTLEFIELD, the most extreme construal of teacher-student relations. However, although this conceptualization is reflected in euphemisms for bad grades

(e.g. *bomba* [bomb]), negative construals of teacher tend to draw on the conceptual metaphor SCHOOL IS A PRISON, or choose to emphasize that the system is old-fashioned and outdated.

Students also frequently draw from the semantic domain of nature, particularly harvest and slaughter, to describe the activities of school. These two source domains are part of the students' linguistic worldview of the grading system; they see it not as an opportunity to show what they learned, but an opportunity for the authorities to cut them down. Together, these citations suggest that youth feel disrespected, as if teachers and administrators assume from the start that the students are of a lower moral and intellectual standing. This is visible in the broad variety of euphemisms used to talk about getting a failing grade. Students also perceive intellectual oppression as a main activity of school. Whether this results from or leads to poor grades is difficult to say.

These activities produce a broad range of emotions among Polish students, from simply being confused at the contrast between the educational goal and the actual process, to being outright angry. Other students choose not to be upset or bothered, but instead try to focus on the positive—their friends. Moreover, several have created disruptive ways of bringing humor and excitement into the classroom. This suggests complete disillusionment with school as a place of learning.

Taken as a whole, these construals suggest a linguistic worldview in which school is a caustic, anachronistic institution that has become outdated. It is also perceived as a tool of coercion, a tool to create students who are equally old-fashioned. If there is a positive aspect of the school experience, it is the opportunity to develop a community of peers and to meet with friends. While this does seem to be the only bright side, teens do frequently mention it, which may provide some clues for how to redeem the current situation.

These results have positive and negative implications for school and education in the Polish context. School as an institution appears to be losing, but school as a community of peers is winning.

#### *American Students*

Although it contains some expressions similar to the Polish data, the linguistic worldview of American youth bears distinctive differences. 'School' is also frequently construed as a place of confinement, the nature of which varies, occupying different points on a continuum from an undefined place that one wants to escape...to a PRISON...to a CONCENTRATION CAMP...to HELL itself. Students do not use the source domain of HELL to access its eschatological sense, but to prompt readers to construct various images related to an aspect of torture, perhaps combined with notions of inescapability and eternity<sup>10</sup>. The concept of a CONCENTRATION CAMP or WORK CAMP includes the dual activities of brainwashing and destruction of creativity, often claimed to be the result of a government conspiracy to

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<sup>10</sup> A conversation between the authors of this paper revealed that their cultural backgrounds emphasized different attributes of HELL.

remove the natural desire to learn and replace it with a rigid structure of memorization, obedience, and conformity. The accusation is that the government uses schools to prepare (or program) students to enter society as menial workers, submissive citizens, and consumers for the benefit of corporate enterprise. As a result, the conceptual metaphor SCHOOL IS A FARCE occurs frequently in the data. Nevertheless, many of the students express a desire to be challenged and to learn. For these students, their frustration is not with learning, per say, but the feeling that they are being taught things that they perceive as useless, false, or manipulative. Also prevalent is a nostalgic view of the past, in which school did educate youth, and condemnation of the present, in which it is only a BABY SITTER, PRISON or INDOCTRINATION CENTER.

Within these construals, it is impossible to ignore the expressions of pain and suffering caused by real physical and emotional abuse. Sadly, it is the authorities—state, parents, or teachers—as well as by the students' own classmates who are inflicting and causing this misery. Perhaps it is for this reason that, while youth do sometimes cast themselves and their peers as the victims, many express a great deal of distrust if not hatred of other social groupings. Similarly, while students seem to recognize the presence of good teachers, it is the bad teachers that they most often talk about. Surprisingly, however, definitions of 'teacher' available on *urbandictionary.com* are much more sympathetic than those depictions of teachers found within the definitions of 'school' on the same website.

Finally, as a word of hope, it is necessary to mention that for each negative construal at least one resistant discourse is present. One of the most common positive coping methods of American teens is to view school as an ADVENTURE / CHALLENGE or as a stepping-stone to something better later on in life. In online discussions, youth encourage struggling peers to accept this worldview.

Taking all of these points into consideration, there is both bad and good news for U.S. schools. First, there is a lot of pain in students and the system has been and continues to be abused. Students feel isolated, ignored, and rejected. What is more, they tend to feel that teachers and administrators are attempting to brainwash them or push them into a system in which they cannot succeed, be that socially or academically. However, there is good news. Although some see school as a place to hit on girls, play video games, or buy drugs, the majority do want to learn. They want school to be what it claims to be. Youth want to have a meaningful education and a meaningful life in one of two ways: (a) by escaping the materialism that surrounds them, or (b) by leaving school and entering the workforce in order to start earning money. The goal of the latter is to live a 'good' life and / or to contribute to society.

## 8. CONCLUSION

In analyzing the data above, it is possible to observe many similarities: students in both countries are disillusioned with their educational experience; they find the material boring and at times feel humiliated by teachers and / or systems that

teach to the test and not for 'real life' and, in the process, stifle intellectual development. However, despite their apparent similarity, many expressions used by the teenagers carry different conceptual content depending on the culture of their user. For example, words from the semantic domain of PRISON in the Polish data emphasizes loss of freedom, whereas in the U.S. data, this construal is expanded to include a place of torture and brain washing. Additionally, there is a difference behind the reason that youth from both countries see school as a waste of time. In the Polish context, this frustration largely comes from the conservative nature of the school's organization and content, as well as its hierarchical structure. In the U.S., the focus is on the repetitive nature of the content, the lack of challenge and the lack of material relevant to the 'real world.' This suggests that the linguistic worldview of some American youth defines 'school' as a place of abuse or indoctrination rather than one of education. Moreover, the data suggest that the linguistic worldview of teenagers from both countries contains construals of school as a place that kills, rather than encourages, creativity.

Elements unique to Polish and American linguistic worldviews include the above-mentioned notion of school as an 'old-fashioned' phase of life in the Polish case, and school as HELL in the American data. These differences could be explained in two ways. One would be to look at the systems themselves and see if there is more systemic abuse and bullying in U.S. schools, which would increase the pain and suffering component. If there is more systematic abuse or bullying in the U.S., this could be due in part to the prevalence of cliques, and other groupings of 'us' and 'them' that berate non-members. Such notions of 'cool' and 'uncool' students, based purely on superficial characteristics are less common in the Polish system. Rather, members of a class (approximately 30 students that stay together for all lessons during high school), tend to stick together. Another is the difference in emotional reactions. Data suggests that Polish youth are more likely to laugh at the difficulties, see the irony of the situation, and create community. Their disillusionment seems to stem from having to learn to tests and answer keys and not having the freedom to express themselves outside this rubric. On the other hand, American students express greater levels of frustration in response to stress (with trying to be good students or trying to survive socially) and a different, if not more intense, sense of disillusionment. Comments on the U.S. forums repeatedly reiterate students' desire to learn, a desire that they feel is being thwarted by the system. Students' attempts to cope with or counteract this stress are revealed in expressions of anger and depression, leading to disassociation at one extreme, and a fighting attitude at the other. In case of the latter, students adopt the metaphor SCHOOL IS A CHALLENGE / ADVENTURE. Viewing school as something to be conquered appears to be the primary positive construal in the U.S. data. Other resistant discourses included treating school as a wave to ride, but such a carefree attitude is less prevalent in American teen sociolect than in that of their Polish peers. These reactions may be the result of cultural differences between the two countries: i.e., the way Polish students are coping could stem from strategies used by their parents and grandparents in living under communism, whereas the Ameri-

can response could be related to the idealism and pressure to succeed and be 'number one' inherent in their national culture.

While the data reveal a variety of linguistic coping mechanisms, only two appear to provide positive a framework for educational and social development. The first (from the Polish data) is a linguistic worldview that construes school as a positive community of friends; the second (from the American data), treats the overwhelming amount of schoolwork as a challenge, a battle that can be won. Encouraging language that promotes comradery in the American context could assist in fighting the bullying that seems to have become prevalent of late. Construing learning as a challenge or battle in the Polish context could prove more motivating than relaxed irony. It is also worth emphasizing this metaphorical construal in the American context to reengage those students who have fallen by the wayside.

Although there is still much to do, this study has made some important inroads. First, it has revealed places of disconnect in both cultures: archaism and depersonalization in Poland and disillusionment and aggression in the U.S., both of which should be addressed by educational authorities at various levels. Second, it has shown that Polish and American youth each have something to offer when it comes to making the other's linguistic worldview of school more positive, which in turn could lead to better educational outcomes. Finally, this study has demonstrated a method of examining teen attitudes to education that goes beyond surveys and circumvents the problem of researcher presence.

At the same time, the paper was bound by certain limitations. For example, the data was analyzed qualitatively, but not quantitatively. While this is in line with the methodology applied, it would also be worthwhile to conduct a lexical study that would be structured in such a way as to facilitate statistical analyses.

Future research could include a multi-national study based on a larger parallel corpus of online teen communication. Alternatively, it would be interesting to go deeper within a specific culture to see if the linguistic worldview differs according to gender, race, or social status. Moreover, to complete a more holistic picture, it would also be helpful to reconstruct the construals of 'school' present in the linguistic worldview of teachers and parents. These results should also be compared with contextual information to determine which negative construals are founded in actual acts of violence, manipulation or neglect; and which are emotional responses to the effort it takes to strengthen and develop one's mental capabilities.

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*Polish*

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<http://www.m-forum.pl>  
<http://www.nastek.pl>  
<http://www.teenzone.pl>  
<http://www.forum.teenzone.pl>  
<http://www.e-młodzi.pl>  
<http://www.st9.pl>  
<http://www.ogólne-tematy.pl>  
<http://www.forum-mlodziejowe.eu>  
[www.vasisdas.tk](http://www.vasisdas.tk)  
[www.miejski.pl](http://www.miejski.pl)  
[www.vasisdas.webpage.pl](http://www.vasisdas.webpage.pl)  
[http://nonsensopedia.wikia.com/wiki/S%C5%82ownik:Gwary\\_uczniowskiej](http://nonsensopedia.wikia.com/wiki/S%C5%82ownik:Gwary_uczniowskiej)  
[http://sciaga.pl/tekst/44811-45-gwara\\_mlodziowa\\_bez\\_przeklenstw](http://sciaga.pl/tekst/44811-45-gwara_mlodziowa_bez_przeklenstw)  
[http://zapytaj.onet.pl/Category/015/1Szkoła\\_i\\_Edukacja.html](http://zapytaj.onet.pl/Category/015/1Szkoła_i_Edukacja.html)

*English*

<http://www.urbandictionary.com>  
[www.teenink.com](http://www.teenink.com)  
[www.stageoflife.com](http://www.stageoflife.com)  
[www.reddit.com](http://www.reddit.com)  
[www.christianteenforums.com](http://www.christianteenforums.com)  
[us.reachout.com/forums/forum.php](http://us.reachout.com/forums/forum.php)  
<http://www.diaryforteens.com>  
[www.virtualteen.org](http://www.virtualteen.org)  
<http://www.sdl.com/cxc/language/translation-productivity/trados-studio>  
<http://onlineslangdictionary.com>  
<http://www.noslang.com>  
<http://en.bab.la/dictionary>