MAŁGORZATA CIUNOVIČ
Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, Warszawa
e-mail: m.ciunowicz@uksw.edu.pl
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4573-4182

ZAPEWNIAĆ ['TO ASSURE']: REMARKS ON THE ASSESSMENT PRESENT IN POLISH *VERBUM DICENDI* USED IN TV NEWS PROGRAMMES

ABSTRACT: The journalists' choice of *verba dicendi* in the function of reporting verbs seems to be one of the tools enabling us to measure the objectivity of the news narrative commentaries. The analysis of the sample material from two Polish TV news programmes (*Fakty* and *Wiadomości*) depicts the range of assessing *verba dicendi* used by journalists, and helps verify whether previous remarks on the linguistic features of those verbs are applicable to the media language.

KEYWORDS: reporting verbs, language valuation, media language

Preliminary remarks

The aim of this article is twofold. First of all, the author would like to present briefly all *verba dicendi* used in the analysed sample of TV news narrative commentaries[1] with regard to the assessment (i.e., valuation) that is revealed in the utterances. This would serve as a background and introduction to the second part of the article, where the verb in question will be examined more precisely, with reference to

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[1] The term *narrative commentary* is applied throughout the text to the part of the news material where the journalist (the author) can be heard (as opposed to politicians, specialists, scientists etc.).

previous research concerning the speech act verbs. The author's intention would be to confront linguistic studies on this verb with its actual use in the natural context of *verba dicendi*: journalists' reported speech.

The criteria for the selection of lexical material (i.e., speech act verbs) were adopted after the study of Zbigniew Greń (1994), enriched with the studies of Marzena Stępień (2010) and Anna Wierzbicka (1987, see Chapter 3). The analysed sample shall include pre-election Sunday releases from September 1st to October 6th 2019 of two leading[2] TV news: *Fakty* (TVN) and *Wiadomości* (TVP1, TVP Info and TVP Polonia) before parliamentary elections in Poland in 2019[3].

The tools of pragmatic linguistics (in the understanding of Renata Grzegorczykowa, 1990) will serve to describe the expressions in use. Their interpretation assumed from the context, situation, knowledge about the world and members of the dialogue, "the analysis of nonce words, as well as all subtexts, allusions understandable to speakers only in a specific situation" (Grzegorczykowa 1990, p. 30), i.e., intentional meanings of the utterance (consistent with the intention of the sender). The crucial aspect of Polish TV news context is the socially visible division between the channel that, by default, supports the ruling party (TVP with its news programme *Wiadomości*) and the other one that, by default, supports the opposition (TVN with *Fakty*). It is worth verifying whether this division is reflected in the valuation of speech acts verbs used by the journalists.

State of research

Verbs from the group of *verba dicendi* have repeatedly attracted the interest of Polish researchers, suffice it to mention comprehensive monographs by Emilia Kozarzewska (1990), Zbigniew Greń (1994), Jolanta Chojak (2006) and Marzena Stępień (2010). Polish *verba dicendi* are distinguished in those studies not only on the basis of their meaning, but also due to formal characteristics, both of which have been thoroughly investigated, depending on the author's perspective (the semantic, semantic-syntactical or formally grammatical one). For the purpose of this text, the monographs of Greń and Stępień are crucial, because they contain analyses of the verb *zapewniać*.

Apart from monographs, it is also worth mentioning articles addressing the issue of *verba dicendi*; one of them being especially important for the purpose of this text, i.e., Elżbieta Wierzbicka's paper (1980). It is devoted to grammatical and semantic features of the verbs with the meaning 'mówić' [to speak/to say]. Another article, analysing the verb *wyśmiać (kogoś, coś)* (Banasiak 2019), although is not directly related to the subject of this article, provides interesting conclusions on the semantic and pragmatic aspect of mocking in the Internet political discourse.

Finally, what should not be omitted, is the exhaustive study of a Polish linguist concerning English verbs, *English Speech Acts.* Verbs: *A Semantic Dictionary* by Anna Wierzbicka (1987), which would be used in this article as a point of reference for Polish verbs.

Without questioning the richness of these studies, the author would like to concentrate on the issue that has been understudied, i.e., the presence of the component of valuation in those verbs in a specific context: journalistic reported speech, where lack of valuation and assessment is the evidence for the speaker's objectivity.

Linguistic valuation in the Polish language of media is currently a frequently discussed topic, and has already been meticulously examined with respect to the propaganda texts in People's Republic of Poland (PRL), just to mention the studies of Jadwiga Puzynina (1993), Michał Głowiński (1990) or Jerzy Bralczyk (2003, concerning the language of Polish political propaganda in the 1970's). The last linguist described the mechanisms of communists' newspeak and provided a precise, methodologically structured list of linguistic tools that transmit valuation (and are present in language regardless of political systems). His remarks on *verba dicendi* (Bralczyk 2003, pp. 88–91) had a significant impact on the choice of utterances used in this analysis.

Verba dicendi in TV news narrative commentaries

The analysis of the first part of the article concerns all speech act verbs found in the sample material. As it has been mentioned above, it covers Sunday releases of *Fakty* and *Wiadomości*, but the examples of verbs were excerpted only from the utterances made by a journalist (the author of a given TV material) in the so--called narrative commentary, in the form of reported speech or citing direct speech.

The period before the elections is of particular importance both to politicians and voters: it is a time of increased persuasion on one side, and the willingness to gain knowledge on the other. The role of mass media is, at least theoretically,

to transmit information on political parties' programmes as objectively as possible, so that the voters could make the right decision at the ballot boxes. This assumption also refers to the choice of reporting verbs made by journalists in their TV news materials: linguistic units should not contain the traits of the sender's[4] valuation. In case of *verba dicendi*, the valuation may be disclosed either in the meaning of the verb (e.g. *grzmieć*$_2$ [to thunder])[5] or in the context of the whole utterance, according to the determinants of linguistic assessment in Bralczyk's terms (2003, p. 77f), as in the case of the quotations with the verb *pytać* [to ask] (which does not contain valuation in its lexicographical description[6]). In both situations, the author of this article classified the verbs as *verba dicendi* with clear (contextual) valuation (see Tab. 1).

Two types of valuation have been differentiated, describing either the solidarity of the current sender (i.e., the journalist, S_2) with the primary sender (e.g., a politician, S_1), marked by [+sol] or lack of solidarity, marked by [-sol][7]. The term *solidarity* reflects in this context the sender's S_2 valuation, either positive or negative, which may be implied on the basis of determinants of linguistic assessment present in the utterance (such as the meaning of the verb, the presence of assessing lexemes, and the whole communicative situation understood in pragmatic terms). The marker [+sol] will, therefore, describe the verb in the utterance (x_2), where S_2 (here: the journalist) valuates positively S_1 (e.g. the politician) and his or her utterance (x_1) addressed to the supposed recipient (here: the society future voters). Let us provide examples for both types of valuation.

The verb *krytykować* [to criticize] has been classified as [-sol] on the basis of its meaning ('mówić źle[8] o jakiejś osobie lub rzeczy, wykazując ich błędy lub braki', WSJP/ 'to speak badly of a person or thing, depicting their mistakes or deficiencies'), and the context of the whole utterance:

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[4]   The current sender (i.e. the journalist, S_2), as opposed to the primary sender (of the original proposition, e.g. a politician whose words are quoted in the material, S_1).

[5]   This verb contains in its meaning the semantic component negatively valued 'mówić głośno, grożąc lub piętnując kogoś lub coś', WSJP ('to speak out, threatening or stigmatising someone or something'). Cf. „*Odbudujemy polską armię*" – *grzmi na partyjnej konwencji Grzegorz Schetyna, a zgromadzeni na sali biją brawo* ['We will rebuild the Polish army,' thunders Grzegorz Schetyna at the party convention, while those gathered in the hall applaud], W 6.10, 13'50'').

[6]   See the definition of *pytać* in WSJP: 1. 'zwracać się do kogoś słowami, aby uzyskać jakąś informację' [to address someone in words to get some information]; 2. 'egzaminować' [to examine].

[7]   These marks were applied, among others, in the methodology used by Jerzy Bralczyk (2003) in the description of valuation used by the sender of political propaganda texts.

[8]   Increased letter-spacing in all cases belongs to the author.

(1) Kampania wyborcza wkracza w decydującą fazę, partia rządząca składa propozycje dla pracowników i pracodawców, opozycja krytykuje. [The election campaign enters a decisive phase, the ruling party submits proposals for employees and employers, the opposition criticises.] (W 22.09, 0'4")[9]

The quotation comes from the programme in public television, by default supporting the government. The current sender describes the opposition's statements by the verb *krytykować* [to criticise], as opposed to the ruling party, which *składa propozycje* [submits proposals]. There is a visible contrast between the positive value of creating something (constructive proposals) and destroying it (revealed by the verb *krytykować*). The current sender valuates therefore the primary sender's words negatively, which would be marked as [-sol].

The verb *pytać* [to ask] does not contain a semantic component positively or negatively valuating in its lexicographical definition: 'zwracać się do kogoś słowami, aby uzyskać jakąś informację' (WSJP, [to address someone in words to get some information]). Let us, however, look at the examples:

(2) Grzegorz Schetyna[10] pyta, ile kosztowała [konwencja PiS-u w Lublinie] podatników, bo partie dostają subwencje z budżetu. [Grzegorz Schetyna asks how much it [=PiS convention in Lublin] cost the taxpayers, because parties receive subsidies from the budget.] (F 8.09, 2'07")

(3) Piotr Świerczek[11] pyta, czy rzeczywiście wszystkie [loty rządowe o statusie „head"] były misją oficjalną. [Piotr Świerczek asks if indeed all [government flights with the 'head' status] were official missions] (F 8.09, 4'45")

Both quotations were excerpted from the channel, by default identified in public perception with the opposition. In both contexts the verb *pytać* [to ask] is used rhetorically, and it superimposes some doubt, disbelief on the content of the information. The later part of the material describes either too lavish character of a ruling party's convention (2) or the alleged government abuses of special flights (3). In both examples, the current sender valuates the ruling party negatively and, at the same time, the primary sender (who „reveals" in a way the government's negative behaviour by *asking*) – positively. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine the current sender from *Fakty* to use the verb *pytać* with reference to the primary sender from the government (**Jarosław Kaczyński*[12] *pyta…*), just as it seems improbable for

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[9]   Each source of quotation from TV news indicates the name of the programme (W – *Wiadomości*, F – *Fakty*) and the accurate time of the end of utterance.

[10]   Grzegorz Schetyna is a member of the opposition party, Civic Platform (PO), and its former president.

[11]   Piotr Świerczek is a TVN reporter.

[12]   Jarosław Kaczyński is Deputy Prime Minister and president of the governing party, Law and Justice (PiS).

the current speaker from *Wiadomości* to use this verb with respect to the primary sender from the opposition that he is supposed not to solidarize with (**Grzegorz Schetyna pyta…*). The verb *pytać* is therefore qualified as [+sol].

As it may be observed above, even one component of linguistic valuation present in the utterance was sufficient for the author to classify the verb as [+/-sol]. Such a broad approach may be of course debatable, but the aim was to depict all possible tools of valuation through the choice of a given speech act verb.

The selection of linguistic units was made in accordance with Zbigniew Greń's approach (1994) that classified the verbs implying 'speaking' by the collocation criterion (*kryterium* łączliwościowe, Greń 1994, p. 22f). It consists in trying to combine a verb with a phrase that signals the silence of the person referred to in the sentence (cf. **W milczeniu poinformował o zwycięstwie przeciwnika* [He silently informed about his opponent's victory]). Additionally, the author of the article marked the verbs that, apart from the semantic component of 'saying,' contain information on the knowledge unverifiable by the speaker, as it was precisely described in Marzena Stępień's dissertation (2010).

Polish verbs were subsequently juxtaposed with their nearest English equivalents (according to the dictionary by Mizera et al. 2010) present in Anna Wierzbicka's monograph (1987), where semantic explications for each speech act verb were provided. The presence of a given verb in the classifications of Z. Greń, M. Stępień and A. Wierzbicka was marked with G, S and W respectively.

Table I. *Verba dicendi* with clear (contextual) valuation

	valuation	n° of quotations	classification
apelować (to appeal)[13]	[+sol]	1	G, W
deklarować (to declare)	[-sol]	1	G, S, W
dziękować (to thank)	[+sol]	1	G, W
grzmieć (to thunder)	[-sol]	1	G, S, W
krytykować (to criticise)	[-sol]	2	G, S, W
ostrzegać (to warn)	[+sol]	1	G, W
podkreślać[14] (to stress)	[+sol]	1	G, S, W
przekonywać (to convince, to persuade)	[-sol]	1	G, S, W

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[13]   In order to simplify the notation in the table, the author lists the verbs in the infinitive form, and not according to the scheme *X (verb 3sg) (sth / that p)*. The verbs were used either in reported speech or when quoting direct speech. Due to the purpose of the article, the issue of the syntax schema and syntactical marks has been omitted.

[14]   The verb appeared only once, in the phrase *podkreślać znaczenie* [to stress the meaning]; the English form *to stress* served to describe the verb *zaznaczać* as well.

przestrzegać (to warn)	[+sol]	1	G, W
przypominać (to remind)	[+sol]	2	G, W
przyznawać (to affirm)	[-sol]	1	G, W
pytać (to ask)	[+sol]	2	G, S, W
składać propozycje (to propose)[15]	[+sol]	1	G, S, W
twierdzić (to claim, state)	[-sol]	1	G, S, W
utrzymywać (to maintain)	[-sol]	2	S, W
uważać (to think)[16]	[-sol]	1	-
uznawać (to recognise)	[-sol]	1	-
zachwalać (to praise)	[-sol]	1	G, W
zapewniać (to assure)	[+sol]	7	G, S, W
zaznaczać (to stress)	[+sol]	1	G, S, W
żądać (to demand)	[-sol]	2	G, W

The list of speech act verbs with clear valuation consists of 21 linguistic units (out of all 25 *verba dicendi* used in the analysed sample). Almost half of them were qualified as [+sol], while 11 as [-sol]. It seems to be an impressively long list when compared with the one of the *verba dicendi* that do not contain homogeneous valuation (either [+sol] or [-sol]) or are neutral:

Table II. *Verba dicendi* neutral or without clear (contextual) valuation

	valuation	n° of quotations	classification
mówić (to tell)	[+sol] [-sol] neutral	7	G, W
obiecywać (to promise)	[+sol] [-sol]	3	G, S, W
odpowiadać (to reply, to answer)	[+sol] [-sol]	2	G, S, W
rozmawiać[17] (to talk)	[+sol] neutral	4	G, S, W

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[15]   The phrase *składać propozycje* was treated here as synonymous to *proponować* present in the studies of Z. Greń and M. Stępień, and *to propose* analysed by A. Wierzbicka.

[16]   The verbs *uważać* and *uznawać* are not present in the above-mentioned monographs, because they are not primarily *verba dicendi*. Nevertheless, their use in the sample material indicates the contextual component of 'saying'.

[17]   One quotation included in this group contains the phrase *wzywać do rozmów* [to call for talks], and not precisely *rozmawiać* [to talk]; grasping the pragmatic difference between those two units would undoubtedly be interesting.

This list consists of four linguistic units, with the basic verbs *mówić* and *rozma-wiać*, and quite numerous representations in the analysed sample. Nonetheless, the number of verbs that are clearly used without valuation is scarce.

X *zapewnia, że* [X assures that]

The verb chosen for a more detailed analysis is the one that has the biggest representation in quotations among *verba dicendi* with clear valuation. Additionally, its use in the context of TV news commentaries may lead to interesting conclusions.

According to the lexicographical entry (WSJP) *zapewniać* means 'mówić komuś, że coś bez wątpienia istnieje lub nastąpi' [to tell someone that something unmistakably exists or will happen]. Zbigniew Greń includes this verb in the equivalent-synonymic group of verbal lexemes *zaręczać* [to vouch] (Greń 1994, p. 184), highlighting that „the [primary, S_1] sender communicates certain information to the [primary] recipient as if it were true (which is stated by the metasender [current sender, S_2] by classifying the speech act)."[18] Transposing this into the context of this article, the quoted politician considers his words to be true/says something as if it was true, according to the journalist.

As one of the semantic properties of the unit *ktoś zapewnia kogoś o czymś/ o tym, że p* [X assures sb about sth/about the fact that], Marzena Stępień points to the following:

> By selecting the verb *zapewniać* (to assert) the current sender [S_2] wants to say that they admittedly do not know if the content of proposition is truthful, however they are willing to say that it is false. They are inclined to do so, because to their mind regardless of what the primary sender [S_1] knows, they will say that the content of proposition is true. On the other hand, the primary sender expects that someone may be willing to regard the contrary judgment as truthful, and they perform an act of speech being a counter-reaction to this possibility. Thereby, they want to someone to become convinced that *p* is true still (Stępień 2010, p. 176f).

According to the above description, the politician from our context would be aware of possible disbelief on the part of society; the journalist (knowing that the politician, regardless of what he knows, will state that what he says is true) would rather be inclined to say that everything said by the politician is false.

Anna Wierzbicka (1987, p. 333f) provides a following explication of the nearest synonym of *zapewniać* – to assure:

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[18]   Originally: „nadawca [pierwotny] przekazuje odbiorcy [pierwotnemu] określoną informację w taki sposób, jakby była ona prawdziwa (co stwierdza, klasyfikując akt mowy, meta-nadawca)."

I assume that you are thinking of something that you would want to be true

I assume that you are not sure if it is true

I think I can cause you to be sure that it is true

I say: X

I say this because I want to cause you to be sure that the thing that you would want to be true is true

In this explication, the English verb *to assure* is a specific answer to the recipient's doubts, it „is matter of uncertainty **and** worry" (Wierzbicka 1987, p. 334)[19], it implies both the uncertainty and the desirability of the state of affairs in question (i.e., in our context, the unsure society wants to happen, to be true something announced by a politician). On the other hand, Stępień argues that the last element is absent in Polish *zapewniać*:

> according to the researcher [A. Wierzbicka], the potential recipient of the message has doubts as to whether something is true, and at the same time wants it to turn out to be true. It seems that such an expectation is not included in the meaning of the Polish verb *zapewniać* (Stępień 2010, p. 112)[20].

Let us verify whether the above observations stay valid in the context of the analysed utterances:

(4) Rząd zapewnia, że nie zostawi rolników bez pomocy. [The government assures that it will not leave farmers without help.] (W 1.09, 20'04")

(5) Jak zapewnia minister rolnictwa, rządowe pieniądze [dla rolników] czekają, ale opozycja w wielu miejscach opóźnia szacowanie strat [As the Minister of Agriculture assures, government money is waiting, but the opposition is delaying the estimation of losses in many places] (W 6.10, 6'34")

(6) Władze miasta zalecają ostrożność (…) ale zapewniają jednocześnie, że woda w kranach (…) jest zdatna do picia. [The city authorities recommend caution (…) but they also assure that the water in the taps (…) is safe to drink.] (F 1.09,11'53")

(7) (…) Prezydent Trzaskowski[21] zapewnił, że o awarii (…) powiadomił władze państwowe i służby natychmiast gdy się o tym dowiedział. [President Trzaskowski assured that he had notified the state authorities and services of the accident as soon as he had learned about it.] (F 1.09, 13'01")

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[19]   Bold type according to the original.

[20]   Originally: „zdaniem badaczki [A. Wierzbickiej] potencjalny odbiorca komunikatu ma wątpliwości, czy coś jest prawdą, i zarazem chce, aby to właśnie okazało się prawdą. Wydaje się, że takie oczekiwanie nie jest wpisane w znaczenie polskiego czasownika *zapewniać*."

[21]   Rafał Trzaskowski is a member of the opposition party, Civic Platform (PO), and President of Warsaw.

(8) (…) Ale nie ma powodów do niepokoju, zapewniają władze miasta. [But there are no reasons to worry, city officials assure.] (F 8.09, 11'23")

(9) „Stany Zjednoczone nigdy nie zrezygnują z obrony wolności i niepodległości Polaków" – tak wiceprezydent Mike Pence zapewniał podczas obchodów wybuchu IIwś. Dzięki polsko-amerykańskiemu sojuszowi jesteśmy bezpieczni, jak nigdy wcześniej ['The United States will never give up defending the freedom and independence of Poles,' assured Vice President Mike Pence during the celebrations of the outbreak of WWII. Thanks to the Polish-American alliance, we are safer than ever before.] (W 1.09, 13'33")

In each quotation containing this verb (4–9), it was used when the current sender (S_2) was reporting words used by the primary sender (S_1) he supports (in case of *Wiadomości* – the ruling party, in case of *Fakty* – the opposition). The journalist (the current sender, S_2) is not inclined at all to say that all said by the politician is false (unlike it was suggested by Stępień, 2010, p. 176f) – on the contrary, the journalist solidarises with the politician.

In all those contexts, the politician (the primary sender, S_1) is rather aware of the possible disbelief in the part of society (the recipient), according to what Stępień stated (and Wierzbicka with respect to the verb *to assure*). What is more, the society – in all these utterances – may have some doubts (considerable or slight), according to the journalist, whether what is announced by the politician is true, and at the same time wants it to turn out to be true, just as Wierzbicka suggested for the verb *to assure*. It seems therefore that the use of *zapewniać* in this specific, journalistic context, is close to (or even identical with) the English *to assure*, much closer than it was depicted by M. Stępień in her semantic remarks.

Thus, the contextual meaning exceeds the lexicographical definition ('to tell someone that something unmistakably exists or will happen'). The persuasive function of the use of the verb *zapewniać* in the analysed context is to express support for S_1 and make the recipient believe that what S_1 says is true.

It should be noted that only one quotation was classified as [-sol], perhaps due to the use of past tense, and the distance to the primary sender created by this grammatical form:

(10) Wczoraj zapewniali, że żegnają bohatera [Kornela Morawieckiego], dziś klaskali Lechowi Wałęsie, gdy tego bohatera nazwał zdrajcą. [Yesterday they assured they were saying goodbye to the hero [Kornel Morawiecki], today they clapped Lech Wałęsa when he called the hero a traitor.] (W 6.10, 9'14")

This is probably the context described by M. Stępień: her remark (i.e., the current sender is willing to say that what the primary sender was saying is false) stays valid for this (solitary) example.

Conclusions

In the media referencing political discourse, *verba dicendi* play an important, persuasive role, because many of them (if not the majority) have an evaluative component inherent in their structure (e.g. *krytykować* [to criticise], *grzmieć₂* [to thunder]) or in the context (e.g. *pytać* [to ask]). The range of speech act verbs that contain valuation (either contextual or attributed to their meaning) present in TV news narrative commentaries is far too abundant for the texts that should meet the requirements of objectivity. In many cases, they could be successfully replaced by their neutral equivalent or devoid of assessing context.

The analysis of the verb *zapewniać* indicates in turn that the journalistic use imposes valuation on the linguistic unit that was formerly described by slightly different semantic features. It may be marked by [+sol] and positive valuation of S_2 for what S_1 says, it implies that x_1 (what S_1 says) is true, and it is used to dispel the recipient's possible doubts. In all analysed examples the contextual meaning of Polish *zapewniać* coincided with the meaning of English *to assure*.

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Streszczenie

Zapewniać: uwagi o ocenie obecnej
w polskim czasowniku mówienia używanym
w telewizyjnych programach informacyjnych

Wybór określonych czasowników mówienia w wypowiedziach relacjonowanych przez dziennikarzy może wskazywać, jak się wydaje, na ile obiektywny jest komentarz narracyjny danej wiadomości. Analiza próbki materiału z dwóch programów informacyjnych (*Faktów* i *Wiadomości*) pozwoli ukazać zakres oceniających czasowników mówienia używanych przez dziennikarzy i zweryfikować, czy wcześniejsze uwagi o cechach językowych tych czasowników zachowują aktualność w odniesieniu do języka mediów.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: czasowniki mówienia, wartościowanie w języku, język w mediach

MAŁGORZATA CIUNOVIČ
Wydział Nauk Humanistycznych
Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego
ul. Dewajtis 5
01-815 Warszawa