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Sztencel, Magdalena (2009) Boundaries Crossed: The Influence of English on Modern Polish. *E-pistemy*, 2 (1). pp. 3-17.

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Boundaries Crossed: The Influence of English on Modern Polish

MAGDALENA SZTENCEL
Newcastle University

The influence of English on Polish dates back to the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; however, it gained momentum after 1989, when Poland overthrew communism and opened its borders to the West. In research on the Polish language, which culminated at the end of the twentieth century, Mańczak-Wohlfeld (2006) recorded about 1700 English borrowings collected from various dictionaries, media and spoken language sources. Because of the continuous influx of borrowings, this number is probably not truly indicative of the real scale of the influence that English has been exerting on Polish.

This paper examines different aspects of lexical as well as structural borrowing from English to Polish and discusses social attitudes to the infiltration from English. Based on the current literature and data collected from Polish internet pages and the Polskie Wydawnictwo Naukowe (PWN, "Polish Scientific Publishers") corpus, the paper shows that the boundaries of casual (superficial) contact of Polish with English have now been crossed. I argue that, with the structural infiltration at play, the contact between the two languages should be characterised as "more intense", which parallels Stage 3 of Thomason and Kaufman's (1988) borrowing scale.

The paper also shows how the tensions between the prescriptive stand of language purists and the linguistic behaviour of native speakers of Polish have resulted in the unpredictability of loan assimilation process.

Lexical borrowings and their influence on Polish orthography

Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2000) distinguishes three types of lexical borrowing from English in Polish. She defines LOANWORDS as simple words or phrases transferred to a target language and LOANBLEND

as combinations of a loan with a recipient language form. She classifies LOAN-SHIFTS as incorporating both CALQUES – loans where “foreign language elements are replaced by semantically equivalent native ones” – and SEMANTIC LOANS, i.e. native language words used in accordance with a donor word semantics (2000, p.15-16). I will reserve the term CALQUE to the borrowing of grammatical structures as well as function words. Unless specified as “grammatical”, “syntactic” or “morphological”, I will use the terms LOAN, BORROWING and LOANWORD interchangeably.

Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2000) claims that lexical borrowings undergo a gradual process of adaptation before the recipient language community fully assimilates them. In the initial stage, she argues, borrowings are used as QUOTES, which retain their donor language form (2000, p.19).¹ This is not always the case. Quite often the adaptation process is very fast, as happens with many verbal loans, which are relatively easily adapted into the Polish inflexional system. However, certain loans are not readily assimilated into the Polish morphological system. Such words as *fair play*, *science fiction* or *reggae* will perhaps always remain non-inflectable due to their phonology or for other reasons, which will be further discussed in the last section of this paper.

Mańczak-Wohlfeld (1995) differentiates between five types of lexical borrowing from English to Polish and points out that SHIFT (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic’s LOANWORD), a borrowing that is semantically identical with its foreign counterpart, is by far the commonest type. Some examples include *sweter* (sweater), *dżojstik/joystick*² (joystick) and *bum/boom* (boom). There are also instances of NARROWING such as *drink*, which in Polish only has the “alcoholic drink” sense.

The only extensions discussed in the reviewed literature are SEMANTIC EXTENSIONS. Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2000, p.36) points to the use of the adjective *wyrafinowany* (sophisticated), which used to only refer to someone’s taste or artistic preference. Now, under the influence of its English counterpart, its meaning has been extended to “complicated”, “of good quality” or “with vast possibility of usage” as in *wyrafinowane programy komputerowe* (sophisticated computer

¹ Otwinowska-Kasztelanic does not specify it, but what she seems to have in mind is that retaining the donor language form involves retaining the source language orthography as well as resistance to target language morphology. This is the interpretation that I assume in this paper.

² In cases where there is an alternation between two graphemic forms, they are separated by a slash.

programmes). Another striking semantic extension is, as noted by Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, entering colloquial speech. The noun *przyjaciel* has so far been reserved to a very close friend because of a strong emotional element of meaning it normally carries³. Otwinowska-Kasztelanic claims that under the influence of English *friend*, Polish *przyjaciel* is gaining a more neutral meaning.

SEMANTIC BORROWING from English is also a common phenomenon in contemporary Polish. Interesting cases can be seen among the expressions of approval and agreement. The adverb *absolutnie*, apart from its original meanings *completely* and *utterly*, is now used as an exclamation and expression of approval as in English “Absolutely! I couldn’t agree more”. Other examples are *dokładnie* and *dokładnie tak*, used as English *exactly* and *exactly so*, respectively (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic 2000, p.86).

Mańczak-Wohlfeld (1995, p.67) discusses yet another type of borrowing, often referred to as a PSEUDOANGLICISM, where there has been a complete change of meaning of the borrowed item. The cases in point are *smoking* (frock) and *buble*, which refers to “goods of poor quality” rather than to its English source’s (bubble) meaning of “a visionary or unrealistic project or enterprise” (The Concise Oxford Dictionary).

Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2000) points out that the borrowed words, in most cases nouns, immediately become the base for adjective formation. For instance, the adjectival suffix *-owy* is readily added to the noun *konsulting* (consultancy) to make the adjective *konsultingowy* (consulting), as in *badania konsultingowe* (consulting market research). However, Waszakowa (in Otwinowska-Kasztelanic 2000, p.34) claims that the tendency for assimilation of loanwords seems to be weakening since it is fashionable to manifest their foreign origin. I will return to this issue in the section on “social attitudes”.

Loans are by and large readily adapted into the Polish morphological system. In the corpus gathered by Mańczak-Wohlfeld (1995) out of about 1600 nouns, only 65 are not fully declined and about 150 resist Polish morphology. The examples in the last group, according to Mańczak-Wohlfeld, are either recent borrowings or older borrowings that cannot undergo morphological adaptation because of their form. As regards verbal borrowings, the majority of them receive the suffix *-ować* and become fully assimilated. Few do not have perfective forms (i.e. forms expressing completed actions), like *jazzować* (to

³ An emotionally neutral word for *friend* in Polish is *kolega*.

jazz) whereas three, namely *stop*, *pull* and *play* only occur in the imperative form. Mańczak-Wohlfeld observes that half of the adjectives in her sample are inflected according to Polish paradigms, like *wirtualny* (virtual) or *filmowy* (of film). However, the other half is non-inflectable. Some of the examples are *blue*, *fair*, *fit* and *happy*.

When analysing borrowings it is not uncommon to take into account orthography as it helps determine the degree of loan assimilation. The graphemic systems of English and Polish are different; the former utilises 26 and the latter 32 graphemes. The letters X, Q and V, which are used in English, officially do not belong to the Polish alphabet. According to the Polish Language Council (PLC), all neologisms as well as borrowings can and should be spelt in conformity with Polish orthographic rules. This picture, although preferred by purists, is not always reflected in real language. X, Q and V do occur in borrowings and are not always transformed into the letters of Polish alphabet once a loan has been assimilated.

According to Mańczak-Wohlfeld (1995), out of 1700 English borrowings found in her corpus about 550 retain their original spelling, for example *baby-sitter*, *driver*, *lobby*. In about 250 examples she noted variation in orthography, as in *bandžo/banjo*, or *czarter/charter*. This, she claims, points to two facts; these borrowings have been introduced by people with a good command of English and the process of assimilation is not advanced. However, there is a problem with this view. There are some borrowings that have not been adapted on the graphemic level even though they were introduced into Polish a long time ago. The noun *taxi* is a case in point. Combined with the recent tendency to retain the original form of borrowings, the assimilation process does not any longer seem to be as predictable as one might wish.

There is actually another counter-example to Mańczak-Wohlfeld's theory of gradual loan assimilation (given by Mańczak-Wohlfeld herself in the same book). She observes that the strength of the impact that English has on Modern Polish is reflected in the fact that some of the borrowings which have already been assimilated on the graphemic level, are now coming to be spelt according to the English rules. For instance, *dżin* is now more and more often spelt as *gin*, and *biznes* as *business*. This, she argues, points to the high prestige of English among the Polish society (1995, p.84-89). Mańczak-Wohlfeld's argument is not supported by the data found in the PWN corpus. The spelling *gin* is far more common than *dżin*, with 491 and 30 occurrences respectively. However, as regards *biznes* and

business, the situation is opposite;⁴ the Polish spelling is still overwhelmingly preferred (2487 cases) to the English spelling (415 cases).⁵ Because the tendency to return to the foreign spelling is a recent phenomenon, it would be interesting to see how this ratio will look in a decade or two.

Coming back to the letters X, Q and V, Bajerowa (2005, p.149-50) claims that although they have in some sense already become part of the Polish alphabet, their use is still limited and they are not reforming Polish orthography. However, the data collected from Polish internet pages do not seem to support this claim.

Fig. 1. Occurrences of foreign vs. polonized spelling of some borrowings. (Source: google.pl)

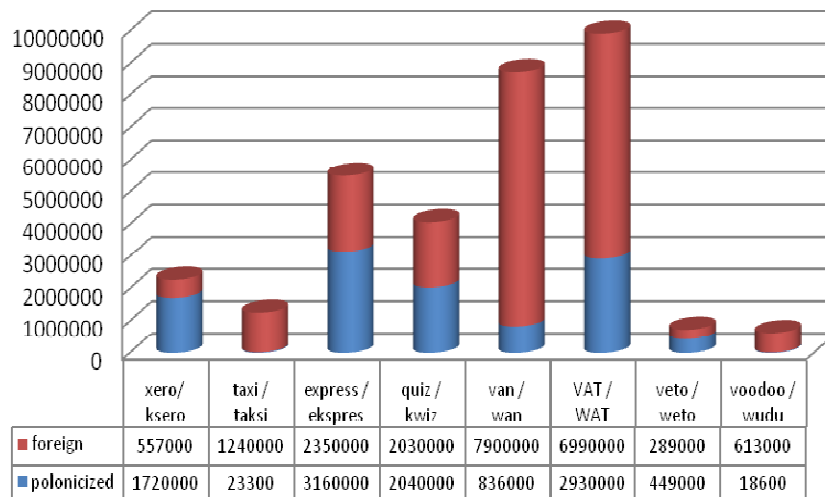


Figure 1 shows that in all cases except for *ksero*, *ekspres* and *weto* the foreign spelling is preferred. These examples indicate that the influence of English on Polish orthography is not limited to the borrowings from English only but exerts on the lexemes which were introduced to Polish via other languages too, like *taxi* (French) or *ekspres* (German).

⁴ The two examples might lead to a conclusion that the speakers of Polish prefer the forms which are orthographically more economical. However, it is not always the case (compare Fig. 3).

⁵ Similar proportions are found on Polish Internet pages searched by *google.pl* engine.

Do these findings contradict Bajerowa's claim that the Polish orthography is not undergoing a change? The preference for non-polonized spelling as in *taxi*, *van*, *VAT* and *voodoo* might lead to such a conclusion. However, it is definitely too early to be certain. Styling the spelling to look more English is in vogue but this tendency might either bring about reforms or disappear without a trace.

Grammatical influence

One type of grammatical influence is interference in grammatical relations. This can be commonly seen nowadays in Poland, where certain new constructions have been introduced into the language via the influence of mass media and advertising. The three major syntactic borrowings are attributive adjectival constructions (where an adjective precedes the noun it modifies) instead of postpositive ones, attributive use of nouns (where a noun pre-modifies another noun) and the use of the adverb *generalnie* as a discourse marker (Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, 2000, p.37).

Whereas English allows the postpositive construction (where an adjective follows the noun it modifies) exceptionally, in Polish the postposition of the adjective is frequent and often obligatory. The ubiquitous use of attributive constructions where the rules of word order in Polish do not allow it is often attributed to careless journalism and advertisement. Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2000, p.38) points out that although the relatively free word order of spontaneous speech and the use of contrastive stress in Polish occasionally allow for their occurrence, they are ungrammatical in writing. In spite of this, phrases like *polityczny pluralizm* (political pluralism) or *wirtualna rzeczywistość* (virtual reality) have become the norm.

The same author discusses the use of nouns in the attributive function, a phenomenon which until the nineteen nineties was reserved for poetic use in Polish. Instead of *myjnia samochodowa* (car wash) nowadays Poles use *auto-myjnia* and instead of *plan biznesowy* (business plan) – *biznesplan*.

An interesting borrowing, classified by Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2000, p.39) as lexico-syntactic, is the use of the adverb *generalnie* (generally, in general) as a discourse marker. Instances of such use, she claims, can be found in the language of media and in the colloquial speech. What is striking about this use, and what Otwinowska-Kasztelanic does not mention, is the use of a single lexical item here. Normally, sentence adverbial function is represented in Polish by phrases, such as *ogólnie rzecz ujmując*,

generalnie rzecz biorąc (generally speaking) or *szczerze mówiąc* (frankly). It seems that *generalnie* might be an innovation in this sense as well.

Other minor syntactic novelties, namely prepositional calques, can be found in the field of computer science. Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2000, p.112) claims that these are typically found in new collocations where speakers “try to render the meaning of prepositions used in their English equivalents”. One of the examples she mentions is “*logo zapisane dla WinWorda*” (logo recorded for WinWord) where, the preposition *dla* is a calque of the English *for*. This phrase should be translated as “*logo zapisane w WinWordzie*”.

Certain structural transfers from English have also been committed in advertising, from where they have spread to colloquial Polish. Mańczak-Wohlfeld (1995, p.86) quotes a slogan “*Syndy – która jest wszystkim, o czym marzysz*” as a calque from English “*Syndy – who is all you could wish for*”. Normally, Polish does not allow relative pronoun constructions of this kind. Nevertheless, I found 34 constructions of this type on Polish Internet pages, but there were no such examples in the PWN corpus.

Some changes in the use of personal pronouns have also been observed, especially in advertising. Advertising slogans (1) and (2) below, quoted by Mańczak-Wohlfeld, are cases in point.

- (1) *Kup twój bank.* (Buy your bank)
- (2) *Poznaj siłę twoich pieniędzy.* (Discover the power of your money)

In Polish possessive pronouns equivalent to English *your* are, depending on the gender and number of the modified noun, *twój*, *twoja* or *twoje* and their case variants. However, if the subject of the sentence refers to the owner of the object being possessed (even if the subject is elliptical) as in “*(You) do your homework!*” the pronouns *swój*, *swoja* or *swoje* and their case variants have to be used. Mańczak-Wohlfeld (1995, p.83) claims that the pronouns *twój* and *twoich* in (1) and (2) have been used instead of *swój* and *swoich* under the influence of English. Taking into account the role that advertising has played in the diffusion of adjectives used in the attributive position and the attributive use of nouns, this might be seen as a threat to some of the agreement rules underlying the use of possessive pronouns in Polish.

As regards morphological innovations in Polish under the influence of English, Fisiak in his article from 1986 claimed that no English affixes had appeared in any new formations in Polish (1986, p.254). This is

no longer true. As Mańczak-Wohlfeld (2006, p.65-66) points out, the English suffix *-er*, mostly added to form a name of a person semantically related to the theme to which it is attached, has become productive in Polish. Thus, *szpaner* has been formed from the verb *szpanować* (to brag) and *blokers*, denoting someone whose life revolves around the block of flats where he lives, has been formed from the noun *blok* (block-of-flats). The examples are numerous. According to Mańczak-Wohlfeld, this phenomenon can be attributed to a good knowledge of English among many Poles; the creators of these neologisms properly analysed the commonly used borrowings with the suffix *-er*, such as *spiker* (speaker) and used it to form neologisms.

Mańczak-Wohlfeld (2006, p.67) also points to the fact that neologisms are being created with the English participial suffix *-ing*. For instance, *schoding* is a type of physical exercise formed from the noun *schody* (steps) and *hangaring*, formed from the noun *hangar* (hangar), denotes an enclosed area crowded with people. The morpheme *-gate* has been used to form nouns relating to various kinds of political scandals such as *Rywingate*, *Sanepidgate* or *Orlengate*. Since there have been many political scandals in Poland in the last two decades, the morpheme has become relatively productive.

An interesting phenomenon of the productivity of the morpheme *-man* in other languages than English itself is described by Piotrowski (2003). He claims that *-man*, which is common but no longer productive in English, is nevertheless productive in other languages. Thus, in Polish you can speak of *heroinoman* (heroin addict) or *kinoman* (cinema lover).

When discussing morphological adaptation of English loans, Mańczak-Wohlfeld (1995, p.57) mentions a few borrowings that can function in Polish as several parts of speech (a phenomenon called CONVERSION). For example, *tip-top* and *underground* both function as nouns, adjectives and adverbs. Although conversion is very common in English, it is exceptionally rare in Polish. What is striking about these two loans is that because of their phonological form both lend themselves well to Polish morphology. Although marked as non-inflectable in Uniwersalny Słownik Języka Polskiego⁶ (USJP), the lexeme *underground* is often found with adjectival and adverbial suffixes. There are over 2,000 instances of the inflected adverb and nearly 36,000 examples of the inflected adjective found in the Polish Internet. To compare the frequency in use of the inflected vs.

⁶ An online dictionary.

uninflected adjective *underground*, a search has been carried out on Polish internet pages. The expressions examined were the Polish equivalents of *underground style*, *underground music*, and *underground CDs*. The agreement rules would produce three different gender and number variants of the Polish adjectival suffix – *owy* for the adjective modifying these three different nouns. The results are presented in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2. Occurrences of inflected vs. uninflected forms of the adjective *underground*. (Source: google.pl)

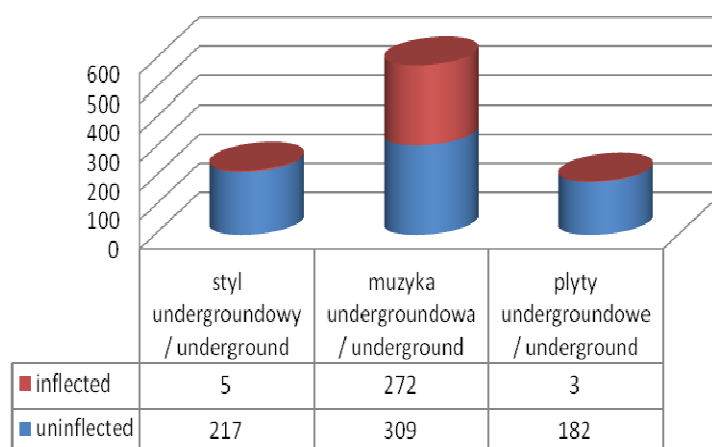


Figure 2 shows that even though the adjective *underground* can be and is inflected, it is used predominantly in its uninflected form. The conversion of this lexeme in Polish could perhaps be linked to the tendency to retain borrowings as quotes.

Social attitudes

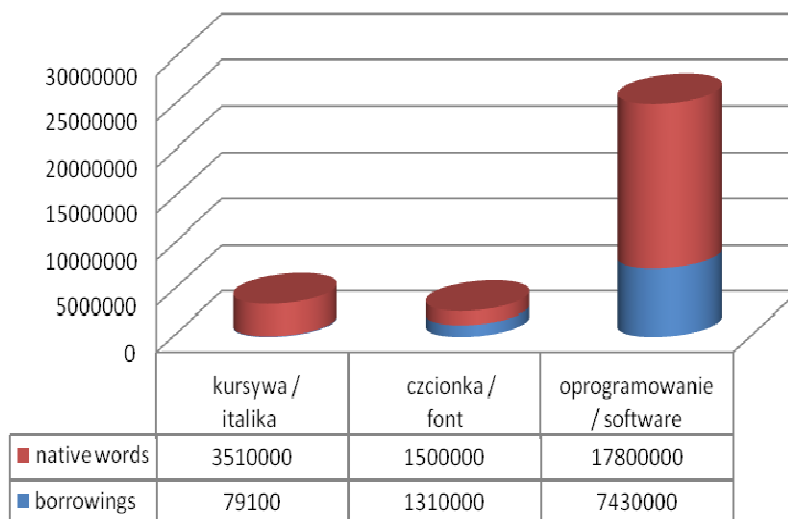
Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2000, p.116-40) carried out a language awareness questionnaire among 250 native speakers of Polish. The results revealed several important facts; the acceptability of the grammatical borrowings depends on the frequency of its use in the media and on the age of the informants. The more commonly a phrase is used and the younger the respondents, the more widely accepted borrowings are. The youngest group of the informants (15-20 year olds) were unable to comment on the recent changes in Polish grammar. This, according to Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, may mean that their linguistic intuition was formed in the period of

extensive influx of English borrowings, and that their grammar system is perhaps already different.

As regards lexical influence, the questionnaire showed that although widely used, the speakers of Polish disapprove of English loanwords. This, in my opinion, clearly indicates the power that media may exert on people and their language; if loans are repeated with high frequency, they can become part of a language despite unfavourable attitudes. However, as Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2000, p.153) points out, the number of English loanwords currently used in Polish will probably change. It might transpire that Polish will assimilate only the borrowed names of new designates provided that their use is important for economical communication. Others, she claims, may be replaced by Polish equivalents.

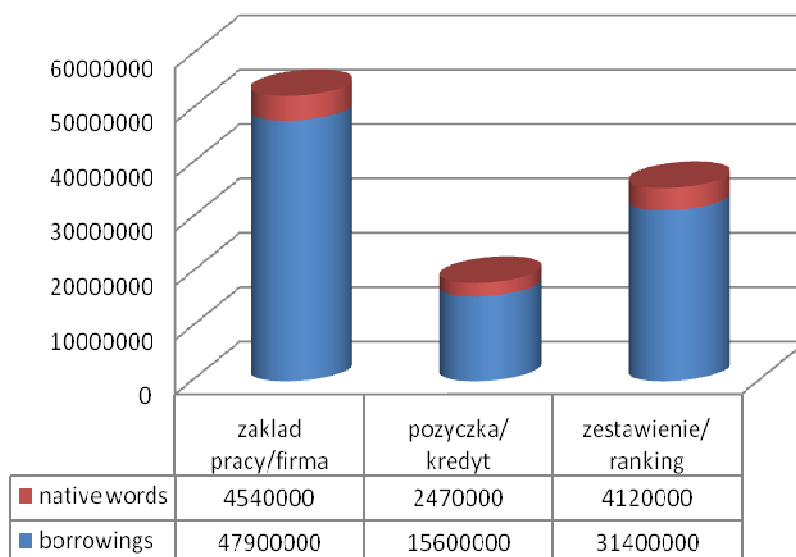
The preference for borrowed or native lexical items could be tested by looking at the frequency in use of the lexical doublet pairs by the speakers of Polish. Cudak and Tambor (in Otwinowska-Kasztelanic, 2000, p.27) in their article from 1995 enumerate many doublet pairs existing in Polish in the domain of computer science. The examples found on Polish internet pages show that there is some resistance to the borrowings in this semantic field – the Polish lexemes are much more popular (Fig. 3). However, it seems that the preference for the Polish items in this case has not been dictated by the users of Polish themselves but by the translation of the Microsoft Word package.

Fig. 3. Occurrences of borrowings vs. native lexical items in the semantic field of “computer science”. (Source: google.pl)



Some doublet pairs from the field of business and economy presented in Figure 4 show an opposite tendency.

Fig. 4. Occurrences of borrowings vs. native lexical items in the semantic field of “business and economy”. (Source: google.pl)



The results presented in Figures 3 and 4 are by no means representative of what is going on in Modern Polish. They do, however, illustrate the fact that the tendencies might be different in various semantic fields.

The findings of the questionnaire carried out by Otwinowska-Kasztelanica point to several things. Firstly, by and large the speakers of all age groups are aware of and disapprove of lexical borrowings, but the younger generation fully accept the word order changes modelled on English. Secondly, the number of words borrowed into Polish in the last two decades and the usage of the grammatical innovations are extensive. Therefore, it could be argued that despite the overtly expressed disapproval, there is a tacit social consent to English infiltration.

There is one more perspective from which we can look at social attitudes towards foreign influence. It might be claimed that they will be reflected in the adaptation process of borrowings on various

levels; if loans are readily adapted into the target language graphemic and morphological systems,⁷ there is no significant resistance.

Many loans that for a long time were resistant to Polish morphology have now come to be declined. The noun *ksero* (Xerox) is a case in point. Although still marked as uninflected in most of the dictionaries (also in USJP), in colloquial speech it is readily inflected. Bańko (PWN online) claims that although many dictionaries list *ksero* as uninflected, in colloquial Polish inflected forms are widespread. He points to the fact that inflectable *ksero* does not violate the rules of Polish but, on the contrary, conforms to its inflectional nature.⁸ It seems thus that the lexicographers' and ordinary native speakers' stands on the morphological status of the borrowings differ significantly.

This could lead us to think that resistance to graphemic and morphological adaptation would thus reflect negative attitudes of target language speakers. In reality, however, it is not so simple. It has already been mentioned in the first section of this paper that there is a tendency now to retain the foreign graphemic form of the borrowings in Polish and that the morphological assimilation of the loans is weakening. What is more, it has also been pointed out that some loans which have already been adapted on the graphemic level are now more and more often spelt in accordance with the English rules. The examples of structural conversion and their use despite the availability of inflected forms might also be associated with this tendency. Many linguists working on language contact (e.g. Mańczak-Wohlfeld, Otwinowska-Kasztelanica, Przybylska) link these phenomena to the high prestige of the English language in Poland. Therefore, the tendency to retain the borrowings from English as quotes and emphasising their English origin could in fact also be seen as a reflection of the positive approach that Poles have towards the lexical influence from English.

However, as already mentioned, it is too early to decide whether the current fashion for English will leave an indelible imprint on Polish. As Thomason and Kaufman (1988) point out, contact-induced change

⁷ All borrowings in Polish are fully adapted on the phonological level (Mańczak-Wohlfeld 2004).

⁸ It must be mentioned here that Polish dictionary editors have been very reluctant to acknowledge colloquial speech. Serejska Olszer (2001, p.32) mentions "Nowy Słownik Poprawnej Polszczyzny", a dictionary published in 1999, whose editor has been severely criticised for using two acceptability norms, standard and colloquial. It seems that Polish dictionaries are still written to serve the normative and prescriptive function, rather than to present the language as it is at a given point in time.

cannot be predicted from the prestige that the source language has among the target language speakers. Some of the words and forms discussed will probably disappear, but some will survive and enter standard Polish. It is definitely an exciting experience to be able to capture the changes in process, but these changes, no matter how serious and dramatic they seem at the moment, may not be indicative of the Polish language spoken in twenty years' time.

Conclusions

Lexical influence of English on Polish has been limited to content words. Certain prepositional calques have been recorded but there have been no cases of function word borrowing. This, according to Thomason and Kaufman's borrowing scale (see below), is characteristic of a casual contact.

- Stage 1: Casual contact (lexical borrowings only)
- Stage 2: Slightly more intense contact (function words and slight structural borrowing)
- Stage 3: More intense contact (basic and non-basic vocabulary, moderate structural borrowing)
- Stage 4: Intense contact (heavy lexical and structural borrowing)

(Adapted from Thomason and Kaufman [1988])

However, as several grammatical innovations have been introduced into Modern Polish from English, the contact between the two languages can no longer be characterised as casual. The use of the adverb *generalnie* in its new, discourse marker function can be classified as a slight structural borrowing. However, the use of attributive adjectival constructions and attributive nominal constructions indicate that the contact is more intense (Stage 3). The same holds true of several derivational suffixes (i.e. suffixes used in word-formation), which have been abstracted from the borrowed words and become productive in Polish.

As far as the social attitudes towards the borrowing from English are concerned, the picture is not very clear. On the one hand, the native speakers of Polish express their disapproval of this phenomenon. On the other, the number of English borrowings that have infiltrated into Polish in the last two decades and the high acceptability of the grammatical changes do not reveal that there is resistance. What is more, both tendencies, to assimilate certain loans and to retain others as quotes, are indicative of positive attitudes towards borrowings from English and of a high prestige that this language has among Poles.

Because the English-Polish language contact is still in process, the information available now does not allow us to predict the linguistic effects it may bring about. Polish is not the only language on which English is exerting considerable influence – in fact, it is a global phenomenon. The international tendency to absorb English vocabulary points to the role of English as a lingua franca of the modern world. However, as a reaction to paneuropeization, this tendency has now been counter-balanced by a trend to emphasise national differences and to cherish national languages of the EU countries. With such dissenting tendencies at work, it is even more difficult to predict the long-term effects that English will have on Polish.

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