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## English-Polish language contact and its influence on the semantics of Polish

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## English-Polish language contact and its influence on the semantics of Polish

### 1. Introduction

It is a well-known fact that nowadays Polish, as many other European languages, is heavily influenced by the English language. Such influence is a result of a much wider phenomenon, namely language contact, which in turn is a result of culture contact. It is worth noting that such contact seems not only natural, but also inevitable, as Sapir pointed out:

‘Languages, like cultures, are rarely sufficient unto themselves. [...] When there is cultural borrowing there is always the likelihood that the associated words may be borrowed too. [...] The careful study of such loan-words constitutes an interesting commentary on the history of culture’ (Sapir 1921: 192–193).

### 2. Defining language contact

Traditionally, the phenomenon of language contact was understood as ‘situation in which two or more languages coexist within one state and where the speakers use these different languages alternately in specific situations’ (Bussman 1998: 260).

Another, slightly different definition was proposed by Crystal:

‘a term used [...] to refer to a situation of geographical continuity or close social proximity (and thus of *mutual* influence) between languages or dialects’ (Crystal 1997: 87) [emphasis mine].

When defined in this way, the phenomenon does not seem to exist in present-day Poland. However, as was stated in my earlier work (Zabawa 2006,

2007), language contact nowadays does not have to imply the coexistence of two languages within one state. In fact, the English-Polish contact may and does take place in present-day Poland via the Internet, television, cinema, radio, books, the press and the process of learning and teaching English. Thus, the definition given at the beginning of the section needs to be restructured: we do not necessarily witness mutual influence between the languages in contact. It is very often the case that such influence, most often manifested by the existence of loanwords, is restricted to one direction only, with the more prestigious language normally being the donor, as Jespersen pointed out:

‘Loan-words *always* show a superiority of the nation from whose language they are borrowed, though this superiority may be of many different kinds (Jespersen 1964: 208–209) [emphasis mine].

This is precisely the case here, as English influences Polish to a great extent (cf. Section 3), whereas the reverse situation, namely the influence of Polish on English is also documented, but such a phenomenon is very limited in scope and restricted to the level of vocabulary, cf. Podhajecka, who enumerates as few as 19 words of Polish origin, noted in *Oxford English Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* (referred to as OED). Moreover, it can be speculated that such loans are used or even known by a very limited number of people and thus they can be said to play a peripheral role in English (Podhajecka 2002: 333–337).

### 3. The linguistic outcome of English-Polish contact

According to Mańczak-Wohlfeld (1994:7–9, 1995: 23–34) and NEP VI (1998: 753), the earliest contacts of English and Polish date back to the 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest words of English origin in the Polish language, however, date back to not earlier than the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Mańczak-Wohlfeld 1987).

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were 21 words of English origin noted in the dictionaries or other texts published at that time (Mańczak-Wohlfeld 1995: 30). At the beginning of the next century, their number grew to about 250 (Mańczak-Wohlfeld 1995: 35–38). Nowadays the number of anglicisms in Polish is still growing. Such a tendency can be seen especially after the turning point of 1989, when Poland regained independence. English has become the most popular foreign language, commonly taught in Polish schools. What is perhaps even more important, is the fact that English started to be considered not only a very useful, but also a fashionable language. The development of modern technology, especially the Internet, as well as the dominant position of the United States in the present-day world, is of great significance here as well. Moreover, the contacts between English and Polish have become closer than ever before, primarily due to the opening of the British labour market for Poles, following the entrance of Poland to the European Union.

Changes in Polish resulting from the influence of English can be detected primarily in the area of vocabulary, which is manifested by the existence of lexical borrowings, e.g. *weekend*, *komputer* or *gadżet*. It is worth noting that the older layer of English borrowings is usually fully assimilated and such words are often not even perceived as foreign by an average speaker. As for examples, one could mention here such words as *sport* or *dżem*.

However, the changes in Polish can nowadays be detected not only in the area of vocabulary. Other areas are affected as well (cf. also the bibliography):

- semantics, manifested by the existence of semantic borrowings, where the meaning is borrowed, while the form is native, e.g. *ikona* (traditionally used in the meaning of ‘a painting of a holy person used in the Orthodox Church’<sup>1</sup>), now used, probably under the influence of English *icon*, in two new senses: ‘a small symbol on a computer screen that represents a program or a file’ and ‘a famous person admired and seen as a symbol of a particular idea’. The present paper, as the title suggests, will be restricted to this type of loans.
- syntax, e.g. the use of adjectives in the attributive position instead of the postpositive one: *komediodowy serial* [adjective+noun] instead of correct *serial komediowy* [noun+adjective] or the use of noun clusters [noun+noun] (hyphenated or not): *auto szyby*, *auto naprawa*, *Biznes Linia* (for more information on English syntactic borrowings in Polish, see Arabski 2006: 16–17, Otwinowska-Kasztelanic 2000, Markowski 1992b, Mańczak-Wohlfeld 1993).
- morphology, e.g. the use of the suffix *-gate*: *Rywingate*, *Orlengate* (cf. also Kreja 1993) or the prefix *e-*: *e-książka*, *e-biznes*, *e-bank*, *e-firma*, *e-podpis*, *e-praca*, *e-sklep* (cf. also Zabawa 2004a).
- pragmatics, e.g. using more thanking in responses to compliments (Arabski 2006: 17) or using the informal form *ty* instead of formal *pan*, *pani* in e.g. television quizzes and commercials.
- spelling, i.e. replacing parts of Polish words with English letters, the phenomenon being based on homophony, e.g. *qmpel* instead of *kumpel*, *dloop* instead of *dtug* (cf. Internet blogs)
- punctuation, e.g. the use of quotation marks on the model of English, i.e. “ ” instead of traditional „ ” or the use of a dot in decimal fractions: 2.30 instead of 2,30 (Zabawa 2005).

What is more, English influences Polish in a number of other ways, cf. e.g. the use of various symbols, such as ‘&’, which make phrases look more English (Chłopicki and Świątek 2000: 232–233) or the use of diminutives of first names in formal or semi-formal publications, e.g. in newspapers and magazines, as well as in television or radio programmes, e.g. *Radek Sikorski* (Mańczak-Wohlfeld 1993: 281).

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<sup>1</sup> English definitions of Polish words are formulated with the help of or quoted from English monolingual dictionaries: *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition (abbreviated to OALD) and *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (abbreviated to ODE).

#### 4. Research done in the field

On the whole, it seems that the influence of English upon Polish lexis (i.e. lexical borrowings) has been researched relatively thoroughly. The earliest systematic studies on English elements in Polish were carried out by Fisiak, followed by Mańczak-Wohlfeld (cf. the bibliography). Furthermore, there have recently appeared many articles dealing with the problem in question. Some of them deal with words borrowed from English in general, cf. e.g. Markowski (1992b), Sękowska (1993), whereas others with borrowings from a given semantic field, e.g. drugs (Bartłomiejczyk 2006), medicine (Górnica 2000), or with loans in a given variety of Polish, e.g. in the language of university students (McGovern 1992) or in the language of press advertisements (Zabawa 2004b). Still others concentrate on individual words borrowed from English, e.g. *kolegium/college* (Wojciechowska 1992), *grill*, *pager*, *notebook* (Pięcińska 2001).

Unfortunately, however, the area of other borrowings, including semantic ones, has attracted much less attention of linguists, not least because such borrowings are much more subtle and thus more difficult to notice and analyze, despite the fact that their number is constantly rising<sup>2</sup>. It is nevertheless possible to quote some papers here, most notably Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2000), Witalisz (2004), Zabawa (2004c), Markowski (2004). Most of them, however, concentrate only on describing individual instances of semantic loans in Polish. As Waszakowa asserts (1995:8–9), the mechanisms of the emergence of semantic borrowings in Polish remain yet to be analyzed. The present author has proposed his own hypothesis concerning possible ways of introducing semantic loans into Polish (cf. Section 7).

#### 5. The methodology used for describing and discussing semantic loans

When a linguist aims at analyzing English semantic loans in the Polish language, one difficulty seems to be predominant: the necessity of distinguishing between English semantic loans and Polish native neosemanticisms. In other words, it is not always easy to decide whether the emergence of a new meaning of a given Polish word has been triggered by English or not. In fact, we can only resort here to speculations.

The methodology for finding semantic borrowings in any text corpus, e.g. composed of press articles, proposed by the author, and presented previously in the author's doctoral dissertation (Zabawa 2006: 167) is presented below as Diagram 1.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Witalisz (2007), for example, there are currently more than 300 English semantic loans in Polish.

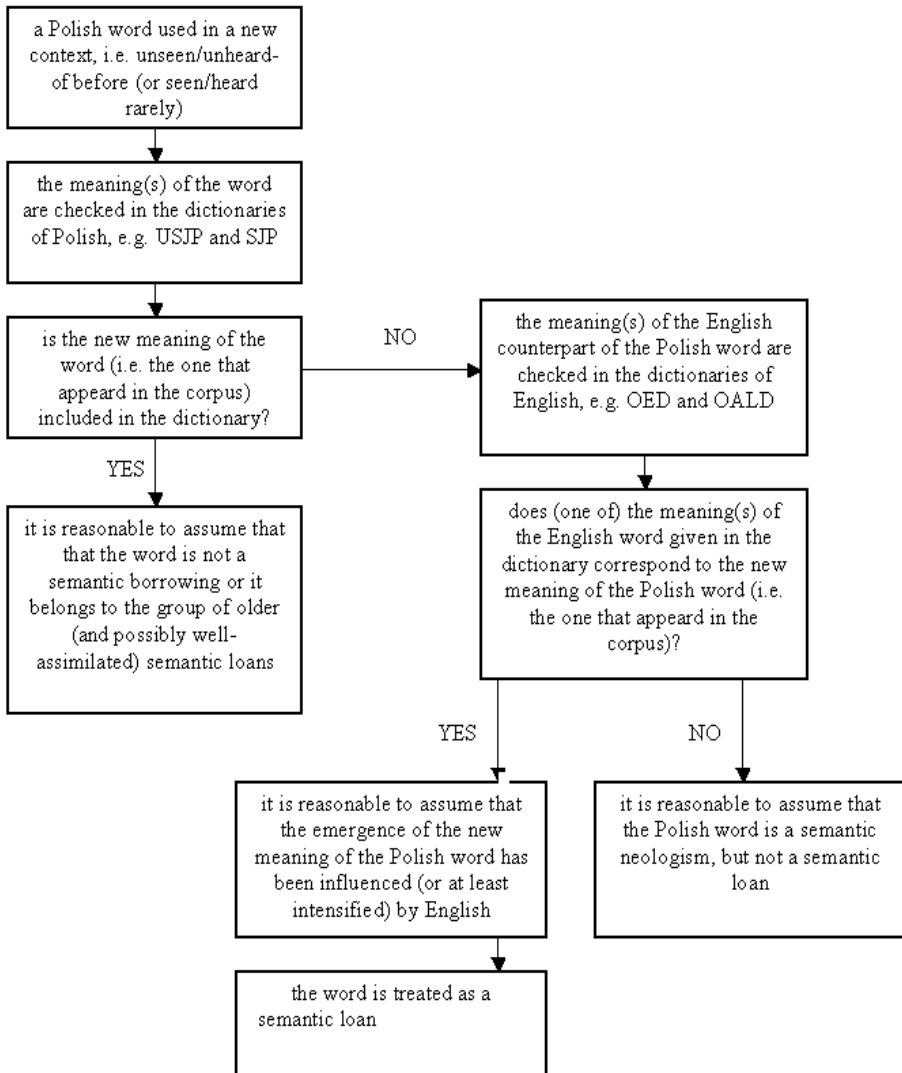


Diagram 1: The methodology for finding semantic loans in a text (Zabawa 2006: 167).

The procedure presented above is generally in line with the findings of Markowski (2004: 39), who also postulates that it is reasonable to assume that a given Polish word is a semantic loan when there is a correspondence between its new meaning and the older meaning of its English (or other foreign-language) counterpart.

## 6. Classification of semantic loans

English semantic loans in Polish do not form a homogenous group and thus it is possible to assign them to three different subtypes (cf. also Zabawa 2006):

- semantic extensions, i.e. words whose meaning has been extended under the influence of English, e.g. *wirus* used nowadays not only in the old meaning of ‘a small thing, visible only under a microscope, that causes infectious diseases’ but ‘a hidden computer program that can e.g. destroy data or cause various other faults’ as well. This subtype of semantic loans is by far the most common.
- semantic shift, understood in the present paper as an extension of meaning followed by a gradual disappearance of the traditional sense. In other words, a new meaning is becoming more common than the older one. One can mention here such examples as e.g. *piracki*, now commonly used (at least by the younger generation) in the meaning of ‘sold illegally’ (referring mainly to CDs and DVDs with music, films or computer software) rather than in the old meaning of ‘connected with a pirate, i.e. a person on a ship who attacks other ships’.
- semantic restriction, i.e. the restriction of the meaning of a word, possibly under the influence of English. In other words, a word becomes more specialized and used in a narrower range of contexts. Not surprisingly, this type of semantic borrowing is very rare and difficult to pinpoint. As for examples, one could mention here the word *molestować*, used previously in the general meaning of *naprzykrzać się, nudzić kogoś ciągłymi prośbami* (‘to nag sb’). Now, by contrast, the meaning of the word seems to have been restricted to sexual contexts only, possibly under the influence of English *molest* (cf. Zabawa 2004c: 64–65).

## 7. The process of introducing semantic loans into Polish (a hypothesis)

It appears that most of the semantic loans are introduced first into written or written-to-be-spoken Polish (e.g. film scripts, commands appearing on a computer screen, press articles, instruction manuals, etc.) and only then do they penetrate into spoken variety. Many of such loans appear as a result of careless or even incorrect translations from English into Polish, since English words are often translated into Polish by means of primary counterparts. The term itself was introduced by Arabski, who defined it as ‘an item which in IL [=interlanguage] represents the whole group (list) of L2 translation equivalents and thus causes underdifferentiation errors’ (Arabski 1979: 139). In our situation the term in question is understood in a similar way, but the translation (either subconscious or conscious) operates in the opposite direction, i.e. not from L1 into L2 (as in Arabski’s understanding) but from L2 into L1. In other words, a Polish primary counterpart of a given English word is the most ‘obvious’ translation, often resembling the original English word in spelling, e.g. *icon-ikona*,

*president-prezydent, option-opcja, aggressive-agresywny*<sup>3</sup>. The entire process is illustrated by Diagram 2 below<sup>4</sup>. The diagram shows how the Polish word *ikona*, originally used in the meaning of ‘a painting of a holy person, used in the Byzantine and other Eastern Churches’, came to be used in the new meaning of ‘a small symbol on a computer screen, representing a program or a file’. It seems that the extension in question is due to the translation of the English term *icon* by means of its Polish primary counterpart *ikona*.

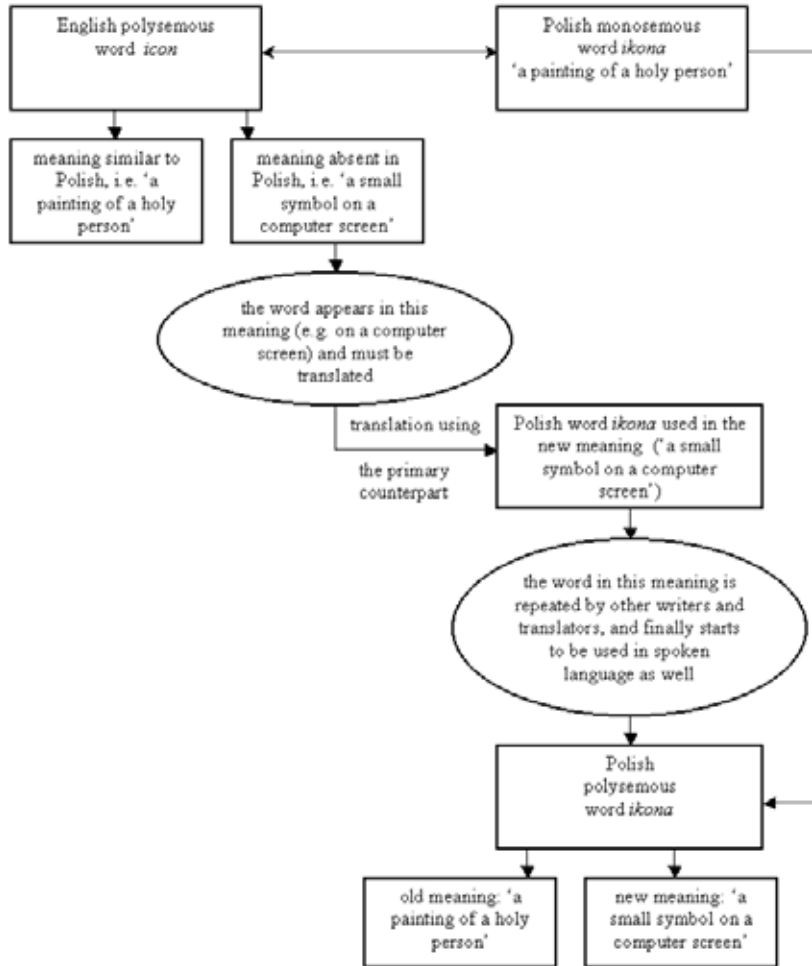


Diagram 2: The presumptive process of introducing the semantic loan *ikona* (Zabawa 2006: 176–177).

<sup>3</sup> Detailed description of the process can be found in the author’s doctoral dissertation (Zabawa 2006: 172–181) and in one of the author’s articles (Zabawa 2007: 89–102).

<sup>4</sup> The diagram was first presented and discussed in the author’s doctoral dissertation (Zabawa 2006: 176–177).



## 8. Examples of English semantic loans in Polish

As was stated before, the number of semantic loans of English origin in contemporary Polish is slowly, yet consistently, growing. Examples of them are given below (Markowski 1992a, 1999, 2004, Markowski and Pawelec 2001: XIII, Waszakowa 1995:7–8, Otwinowska-Kasztelaniec 2000, Witalisz 2004, Zabawa 2004c, 2006, 2007):

- *adres* (in the meaning of ‘a string of characters which identifies (1) a destination for e-mail messages or (2) a particular website, on the model of English *address*), e.g. *podaj mi adres tej strony*
- *agresywny* (in the meaning of ‘full of energy, intensive, behaving in a determined way’, on the model of English *aggressive*), e.g. *agresywny pracownik marketingu, agresywna kampania reklamowa*
- *aplikacja*, used in two new meanings on the model of English *application*: (1) ‘a written request for something, usually a job’, e.g. *aplikacje należy składać w dziale kadr do końca września*, (2) ‘a computer program designed to do a particular job’, e.g. *uruchomić aplikację do obróbki zdjęć*
- *dieta* (in the meaning of ‘the food that a person eats and drinks’, on the model of English *diet*), e.g. *w diecie przeciętnego Polaka wciąż zbyt mało jest warzyw i owoców*
- *dokładnie* (used to indicate agreement on the model of English *exactly*), e.g. *I znowu wszystko będzie na nas. – Dokładnie.*
- *dokument* (in the meaning of ‘a computer file containing text’, on the model of English *document*), e.g. *zapisać dokument na twardym dysku*
- *generacja* (in the meaning of ‘a single stage in the development of a type of product’, on the model of English *generation*), e.g. *najnowsza generacja komputerów*
- *inteligentny*, used nowadays in a wider variety of contexts, referring not only to human beings, but to objects as well, e.g. *inteligentny samochód, inteligentna pralka*
- *korespondować* (in the meaning of ‘to agree, to be equivalent or similar’, on the model of English *to correspond*) e.g. *treść kursu nie korespondowała z zainteresowaniami uczestników*
- *okno* (in the meaning of ‘an area within a frame on a computer screen’, on the model of English *window*), e.g. *zamknij wszystkie okna przed włączeniem komputera*
- *oryginalny* (in the meaning of ‘existing at the beginning of something, first or earliest’, on the model of English *original*), e.g. *oryginalne „Gwiezdne Wojny”*
- *piractwo* (in the meaning of ‘a process of making and selling illegal copies, especially of CDs and DVDs, on the model of English *piracy*), e.g. *piractwo (komputerowe) wciąż nie zostało zlikwidowane*
- *prezydent* (in the meaning of ‘a head of a society, council, or other organization’, on the model of English *president*), e.g. *prezydent związku*
- *promocja* (in the meaning of ‘a set of advertisements for a particular product’ and ‘an act of selling a product, especially a new one, at a reduced

- price', on the model of English *promotion*), e.g. *kupiłem nowy telewizor, był w promocji* (or *była promocja*)
- *przyjazny* (in the meaning of 'helpful and easy to use, not damaging something, especially the environment', on the model of English *friendly*), e.g. *produkt przyjazny dla środowiska*
  - *sieć* or *Sieć* (in the meaning of 'the Internet', on the model of English *the Net*), e.g. *poszukać czegoś w sieci, być uzależnionym od Sieci*
  - *wirus* and *robak* (in the meaning of 'a self-replicating computer program, typically having a detrimental effect', on the model of English *virus* and *worm*), e.g. *robak rozprzestrzenia się za pomocą poczty elektronicznej*
  - *wydawnictwo* (in the meaning of 'the preparation and issuing of a piece of music; such a thing issued for public sale', referring mainly to DVDs, on the model of English *publication*), e.g. „35 years of Montreux Jazz Festival” to tytuł czteropływowego wydawnictwa z wyborem nagrań dokonanych podczas najważniejszego europejskiego festiwalu muzyki jazzowej, odbywającego się w szwajcarskim Montreux ('Wprost')

## 9. Evaluation of semantic loans

In general, the number of English semantic loans in Polish is much smaller than that of lexical borrowings. Their number is, however, consistently growing. What is more, semantic loans can be labelled as insidious, since most of them, in contrast to lexical ones, are noticed only by the people trained in linguistics (cf. Otwinowska-Kasztelaniec 2000). Naturally, the process of expanding the meaning of Polish words is not bad in itself and thus should not be blindly criticized. Nevertheless, as was noted before in one of my articles (Zabawa 2004c), such changes are not always desirable, especially when the meaning of a given Polish word becomes vague or imprecise as the result of the process.

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## **Kontakty angielsko-polskie i ich wpływ na semantykę języka polskiego**

### Streszczenie

Artykuł niniejszy skupia się na problematyce angielsko-polskich kontaktów językowych i ich wpływu na semantykę polską, objawiającego się przede wszystkim powstawaniem pożyczek semantycznych. Autor stwierdza, iż problem ten jest wciąż niedostatecznie opisany w polskiej literaturze przedmiotu, gdyż większość prac z tego zakresu koncentruje się jedynie na przedstawieniu list najnowszych zapożyczeń semantycznych, a niewiele jest prac opisujących to zjawisko od strony teoretycznej. Autor koncentruje się zatem nie tylko na przedstawieniu licznych przykładów pożyczek semantycznych, ale i na mechanizmach ich powstawania, a także na sposobach ich poszukiwania w korpusach tekstowych.