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## THE USE OF ENGLISH ELEMENTS IN POLISH COMMERCIALS AND PRESS ADVERTISEMENTS: SUCCESS OR FAILURE<sup>1</sup>?

The paper deals with the use of English lexical borrowings in Polish commercials and press advertisements. The author first gives a brief, general account of English loanwords used in Polish advertisements and then concentrates on concrete examples of such borrowings. Particular attention is paid to the discussion of the necessity of the use of such loans in the Polish language of advertising. The author argues, on the basis of the questionnaire described in the paper, that most of the English loans in Polish do not make the message clearer to a Polish receiver. In fact, they seem to hinder comprehensibility. However, as the questionnaire has shown, they do evoke positive connotations of a given product and/or a company.

### 1. Introduction

It is beyond doubt that English nowadays exerts a strong influence on many European languages, including Polish. Such influence can be detected in various types of texts, both spoken and written. It seems only natural, however, that some kinds of texts, such as those used in commercials and press advertisements, are affected by English to a greater extent than others. Consequently, the Polish language used in advertisements appears to be particularly interesting for research, since – as one may expect – it would be rich in various types of English borrowings.

The aim of the present paper is thus to discuss some instances of the influence of English upon the Polish language used in commercials and press advertisements. Such influence can most readily be noticed in the area of vocabulary (cf. lexical borrowings). However, other spheres, such as semantics, morphology, syntax, or even pragmatics, are not free from the influence of English, either. The present paper, however, will be restricted to lexical loans.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of the paper presented at 19<sup>th</sup> Annual APEAA Conference in Aveiro, Portugal (2008).

The structure of the paper is as follows: first, the author would like to give a general account of the influence of English upon Polish language used in commercials and press advertisements, and then concentrate on concrete examples of lexical borrowings. What is more, the author will not only discuss the necessity of the use of such loans in the Polish language of advertising but evaluate the strategies used by copywriters as well. The key questions here are: is the use of English elements in the language of advertising justified or not? What is their function in text? Can the use of such elements be described as desirable from the point of view of a potential receiver? In other words, are they successfully incorporated into the text of Polish advertisements or not?

## 2. The influence of English upon Polish language used in television commercials and press advertisements – general remarks

As was noted above, the influence of English upon Polish language used in commercials and press advertisements can be traced in all language subsystems. As a consequence, the following types of borrowings can be distinguished (cf. Mańczak-Wohlfeld 2006):

- lexical borrowings (see below)
- semantic borrowings, where only the meaning is borrowed, e.g. *ikona*, whose meaning has been extended under the influence of English *icon*
- morphological borrowings, e.g. *e-zakupy* (lit. ‘e-shoppings’)<sup>2</sup>
- syntactic borrowings, e.g. noun+noun clusters: *komputer świat* (lit. ‘computer world’)
- other borrowings, e.g. affecting punctuation or the use of capital letters.

## 3. Classification of English lexical borrowings used in Polish press advertisements and television commercials

A lexical borrowing (also known as a loanword) can be defined as “[a lexical item] which has come to be used in a language or dialect other than the one where it originated” (Crystal 1997: 227). As the class of English lexical borrowings used in Polish press advertisements and television commercials is not homogeneous, however, several subgroups can be distinguished:

- (1) classification according to the type of a loanword (Haugen 1950, Weinreich 1974):
- loanwords proper, where both the form and meaning are borrowed, usually (albeit not necessarily) with some degree of assimilation, e.g. Polish words *komputer*, *weekend*, *bukować* from English *computer*, *weekend*, *(to) book*

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<sup>2</sup> The morpheme *e-*, meaning *electronic*, comes from *e-mail* (see also Zabawa 2004b).

- loanblends (also referred to as hybrids), where only part of the form is of foreign origin, while the rest is native, e.g. Polish *mebelgate* (lit. 'furniture' + 'gate', from 'Watergate')
  - loan translations (also referred to as calques), where the morphemes of the borrowed words or phrases are translated one by one, e.g. Polish *nastolatek* from English *teenager*, *telewizja kablowa* from English *cable television*.
- (2) classification according to the degree of assimilation (Mańczak-Wohfeld 2006):
- unassimilated loans (also referred to as quotes or *Fremdwörter*), which are used with a foreign spelling and pronunciation, with no morphological adaptation, e.g. *sorry*, *ice tea* used in Polish on the model of English
  - partly assimilated loans, which are used with a partly (or sometimes completely) adapted spelling and pronunciation. They may or may not inflect, e.g. Polish word *tabu* from English *taboo* and French *tabou*
  - (fully) assimilated loans (also referred to as *Lehnwörter*), which are inflected and their spelling and pronunciation are adapted to the system of a recipient language, e.g. Polish words *komputer*, *dżem* borrowed from English *computer*, *jam*. In fact, they are frequently not even perceived by laymen as words of foreign origin.
- (3) classification according to a location of a given borrowing (cf. also Zabawa 2004a):
- used in a company and/or product name only
  - used in slogans quoted entirely from English
  - used in the main text of an advertisement.

The present paper will be restricted to loanwords proper located in the main text of an advertisement. As a consequence, loans appearing in a company and/or product name as well as in slogans, will be excluded from the present study.

#### 4. Functions of English borrowings in Polish press advertisements and television commercials

As I stated in one of my earlier papers (Zabawa 2007), it is possible to distinguish between two basic functions of English lexical borrowings in Polish: (1) the need-filling function (which can also be referred to as the lexical gap function) and (2) the iconic function (which can also be referred to as the prestige function)<sup>3</sup>. In the former case, a borrowing can be described as a necessary one as it is used in order to satisfy a lexical need. In the latter case, on the other hand, a borrowing can be labelled as unnecessary, since the use of it is not needed from the point of view of the meaning of a given structure.

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<sup>3</sup> The terms 'need-filling function' and 'prestige function' have been borrowed from Hockett (1958).

## 5. A hypothesis

It would seem that most of the English lexical borrowings used in Polish commercials and press advertisements can be said to have the iconic function only. They are used because of linguistic snobbery, fashion, or because of a desire to make the product seemingly better and more sophisticated (cf. also Zabawa 2004a). This is generally in line with Arabski, who stated “lately, however, there have been more and more English loans which are used in Polish not to reduce the lexical deficit of vocabulary but to identify the speaker with English or American culture” (Arabski 2007: 17).

To verify the hypothesis, a special questionnaire, described in the next section, was designed.

## 6. The questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 15 short quotations in Polish, taken from Polish press advertisements. Each quotation contained one English construction. The questionnaire was given to 85 Polish people fluent in English, mostly students of English (graduates of various teacher training colleges). The task of the respondents was to explain the meaning of a given English construction (in Polish). They were asked not to simply translate it into Polish, but to provide an explanation of the meaning. Additionally, to make the task easier, the respondents were provided with the information which product was being advertised in a given case.

The sentences from the questionnaire are given below, with the English constructions underlined. Each point is supplemented with the information about the product which was advertised in each case, the English translation of the Polish phrase and the explanation of the meaning of the underlined English phrase<sup>4</sup>. Naturally, the translation and explanation were not given to the respondents. A full text of the questionnaire (in Polish) is given in the appendix.

1. ubezpieczenia komunikacyjne **direct**  
     ‘[insurance] direct car insurance’  
     [via the Internet or phone]
2. automatyczna skrzynia biegów **proactive**  
     ‘[a car] automatic proactive transmission/gearbox’  
     [anticipatory, responding actively to various situations]
3. system oświetlenia “**coming home**”  
     ‘[a car] system of lightning “coming home”’  
     [headlights that remain on (for a short time) after the vehicle stops]

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<sup>4</sup> The definitions of English constructions are based on or directly quoted from either Internet sources, primarily *Wikipedia* (<http://en.wikipedia.org>) or English monolingual dictionaries, primarily *Oxford Dictionary of English*, published by Oxford University Press.

4. dodatkowo każdy model ma unikalne funkcje, jak na przykład: **tough solar**, czas światowy, alarm, stoper, podświetlenie i inne  
 ‘[a watch] additionally, each model has some unique functions: tough solar, world time, alarm, stopwatch, backlight and other’  
 [refers to solar powered battery charging system]
5. pierwszy kompaktowy **crossover** tak dynamiczny, by rzucić wyzwanie miastu  
 ‘[a car] first compact crossover so dynamic as to challenge the city’  
 [a vehicle that derives from a car but borrows features from SUV]
6. dostępny także z wyposażeniem w wersji **Tech Run**  
 ‘[a car] available also with Tech Run equipment’  
 [with multimedia and audio-visual devices, such as CD/MP3 player, DVD player etc.]
7. antykoncepcja **Light**  
 ‘[medicine] contraception light’  
 [less harmful, containing smaller amount of hormone]
8. Fiat Bravo w **leasingu**  
 ‘[a car] Fiat Bravo leasing’  
 [an arrangement, which confers a right on one person to possess property belonging to another person]
9. zawiera kompaktowych rozmiarów **subwoofer**  
 ‘[home cinema] includes compact size subwoofer’  
 [a loudspeaker for bass audio frequencies]
10. najlepsze zawody **Freestyle Motocross**  
 ‘[sport] best Freestyle Motocross competition’  
 [a kind of motocross in which motorcycle riders attempt to impress judges with jumps and stunts]
11. nowa kolekcja filmów dostępna dzięki usłudze **VOD**  
 ‘[home cinema] a new collection of films thanks to VOD’  
 [Video on Demand]
12. doświadczenie w sprzedaży **B2B** mile widziane  
 ‘[job advertisement] experience in B2B environment would be advantageous’  
 [business-to-business]
13. mile widziane doświadczenie jako Przedstawiciel Handlowy w branży **FMCG**  
 ‘[job advertisement] experience as Sales Representative in FMCG business would be advantageous’  
 [fast moving consumer goods]
14. do zadań pracownika będzie należała kompleksowa obsługa klientów z portfela **SME**  
 ‘[job advertisement] an employee will be responsible for handling SME customers’  
 [small and medium enterprises]
15. poszukiwany **Property Locator** – Katowice  
 ‘[job advertisement] we are looking for Property Locator’  
 [someone who finds deals for investors]

## 7. The results

The results of the study are presented in Table 1 below. In the first column, the number of the sentence from the questionnaire, together with the key word, is given for easy identification. In the second column, the number of correct answers is given (both in terms of absolute numbers and percentages); in the next one, the number of approximate answers is provided. These include the answers which were not totally wrong, but too general, vague or approximate. In the fourth column, the number of wrong answers is given. It is important to note that when a respondent provided simply a translation of the English phrase into Polish, without any real explanation of the meaning, his or her answer was counted as a wrong one and included in the column in question. Finally, the fifth column indicates the number of ‘no answers’.

Table 1. The results of the questionnaire

English construction	Correct answer		Approximate (or very general) answer		Wrong answer (or a simple translation, without any explanation)		No answer	
1. direct	7	8.23%	19	22.35%	35	41.18%	24	28.24%
2. proactive	4	4.71%	18	21.18%	8	9.41%	55	64.71%
3. coming home	5	5.88%	8	9.41%	36	42.35%	36	42.35%
4. tough solar	12	14.12%	2	2.35%	28	44.71%	43	50.59%
5. crossover	12	14.12%	24	28.24%	12	14.12%	37	43.53%
6. Tech Run	3	3.53%	8	9.41%	14	16.47%	60	70.59%
7. Light	46	54.12%	6	7.06%	20	23.53%	13	15.29%
8. leasing	24	28.24%	41	48.24%	4	4.71%	16	18.82%
9. subwoofer	22	25.88%	23	27.06%	3	3.53%	37	43.53%
10. Freestyle Motocross	62	72.94%	5	5.88%	3	3.53%	15	17.65%
11. VOD	16	18.82%	0	0.00%	6	7.06%	63	74.12%
12. B2B	6	7.06%	1	1.18%	12	14.12%	66	77.65%
13. FMCG	8	9.41%	0	0.00%	6	7.06%	71	83.53%
14. SME	2	2.35%	1	1.18%	2	2.35%	80	94.12%
15. Property Locator	11	12.94%	8	9.41%	21	24.71%	45	52.94%

It is important to remember that all the respondents (85 in total) were advanced in English, and many of them were students of English. Even though, as one can see, the majority of them were not able to explain the meaning of the English constructions in a satisfactory way. Only in two cases did the number of correct answers exceed 50%, namely *Light* (54.12%) and *Freestyle Motocross* (72.94%). In the remaining cases, the number of correct answers was surprisingly low, well below 50%, from *SME* (2.35%) up to *leasing* (28.24%).

Furthermore, it is of great interest and importance to quote some examples of wrong answers given by respondents. Originally, these were written in respondents' native language, i.e. Polish; here, however, they have been translated into English. The number indicates the construction from the questionnaire. Additionally, the key word (i.e. the one being explained) is also given:

1. direct

that can be obtained without any problems / fast, efficient / without bureaucracy / close to people's needs  
relating to a company that will pay you the damages quickly and without delay  
that can be bought at a customer's home / basic insurance (without any additional risks)  
indirect insurance (signed by someone else on behalf of you)

2. proactive

resistant, durable / modern, efficient, of high quality / environmentally friendly / that can be relied on

3. coming home

nice and cosy / a very good / of high quality / safe / powerful / modern system of lightning  
energy-saving system / a system that will not fail you / that enables you to feel like at home  
a system that makes the driving easier or safer / that turns on automatically at a given time

4. tough solar

heat-resistant / weather-resistant / anti-shock / that glows in the dark / with a hard glass / with a compass

5. crossover

a car that will not fail you / good for a city (quick, easy to park, etc.) / a very fast car / a sport car  
good for off-road conditions (resistant, durable, etc.)  
referring to an equipment that makes the driving easier and more efficient

6. Tech Run

a very good / modern equipment / something that makes the driving easier / with automatic transmission

## 7. light

not expensive / readily available / with low sugar content / low calorie / easy to use / not requiring any effort

making the life easier (you take it only once a week) / natural birth control (not artificial contraceptives)

refers to education about contraceptives

## 8. leasing

buy now, pay later / you don't need money

## 9. subwoofer

something of high quality / an amplifier / a device for reading computer files

## 10. Freestyle Motocross

sponsored by Red Bull

## 11. VOD

[no examples]

## 12. B2B

face-to-face contacts / selling via the phone / connected with customer care

## 13. FMCG

selling products / something connected with marketing

## 14. SME

a proper noun (name of a company)

## 15. Property Locator

a very competent person / the owner of a property / a caretaker / a person who sells houses, flats

an inhabitant of a given city / a person who owns a flat

As one can see, the vast majority of the respondents' associations are positive and approving, cf. e.g. the answers provided for *coming home*: (*system of lightning*) *nice and cosy, very good, of high quality, safe, powerful, modern, energy-saving, that will not fail you*. In other words, the majority of the informants did not know what was actually meant by a given English construction in a given advertisement, but they clearly thought it must have been something good. Thus, it is evident that most of the English constructions evoke positive connotations, even though their meaning may not be entirely clear.

## 8. Conclusions

As was mentioned earlier, nowadays English influences many European languages, including Polish. Such influence, manifested primarily through the existence of lexical



borrowings, can be particularly easily found in the language of advertisements. It would seem, however, that the constructions of English origin are rarely fully understood by Polish native speakers, even those fluent in English. From the linguistic point of view, therefore, their use cannot be described as desirable. Consequently, they do not seem to be successfully incorporated into the text of Polish advertisements. It is important to remember, however, that the constructions in question do evoke positive associations.

As a result, the use of the majority of English constructions in Polish commercials and press advertisements can be classified as:

- failure – from the point of view of comprehensibility and clarity of the message
- success – from the point of view of the producer, wanting to evoke (in a customer's mind) positive connotations with a product (and possibly with a company as well).

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## Appendix

Proszę o uważne przeczytanie poniższych krótkich tekstów (są to fragmenty polskich reklam telewizyjnych i prasowych) zawierających zapożyczenia angielskie. Proszę spróbować wyjaśnić znaczenie (**po polsku**) podkreślonych zapożyczeń.

UWAGA! Nie chodzi tutaj o zwykłe przetłumaczenie podkreślonych wyrazów lub fraz na język polski, lecz o wyjaśnienie ich znaczenia **w danym kontekście**. Dla ułatwienia podano informację, co było przedmiotem reklamy w danym przypadku (w nawiasach kwadratowych).

Bardzo proszę, aby podczas wypełniania ankiety nie korzystać ze słowników lub innych pomocy, lecz opierać się wyłącznie na swojej wiedzy i intuicji językowej.

Dziękuję za wypełnienie ankiety.

1. [ubezpieczenia] ubezpieczenia komunikacyjne direct
2. [samochód] automatyczna skrzynia biegów proactive
3. [samochód] system oświetlenia „coming home”
4. [zegarek] dodatkowo każdy model ma unikalne funkcje, jak na przykład: tough solar, czas światowy, alarm, stoper, podświetlenie i inne
5. [samochód] pierwszy kompaktowy crossover tak dynamiczny, by rzucić wyzwanie miastu
6. [samochód] dostępny także z wyposażeniem w wersji Tech Run
7. [medycyna] antykoncepcja Light
8. [samochód] Fiat Bravo w leasingu
9. [kino domowe] zawiera kompaktowych rozmiarów subwoofer
10. [sport] najlepsze zawody Freestyle Motocross
11. [kino domowe] nowa kolekcja filmów dostępna dzięki usłudze VOD
12. [ogłoszenie o pracę] doświadczenie w sprzedaży B2B mile widziane
13. [ogłoszenie o pracę] mile widziane doświadczenie jako Przedstawiciel Handlowy w branży FMCG
14. [ogłoszenie o pracę] do zadań pracownika będzie należała kompleksowa obsługa klientów z portfela SME
15. [ogłoszenie o pracę] poszukiwany Property Locator - Katowice