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## POLISH FACES OF ENGLISH ACRONYMS AND ALPHABETISMS: AN ILLUSTRATION OF CONTACT-INDUCED LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY (PART 1)

**Keywords:** acronym, alphabetism, abbreviation, adaptation, language contact, borrowing

### Abstract

*Didżej* and *didżejować* appeared in Polish due to language contact and loanword assimilation processes; the former is the English noun *DJ* in graphic disguise, the latter is a Polish verbal derivative that conceals the English etymon. The article focuses on discussing and exemplifying the multiple ways in which English acronyms and alphabetisms are assimilated and integrated in the Polish lexical and grammatical systems. Part 1 of the article concerns loanword adaptation processes that have been identified for English lexical loans in several European languages. The linguistic outcomes of loanword adaptation processes, which both occur during the borrowing process and follow it, serve to support an observation that intensive lexical borrowing from English is a change-provoking and development-motivating process that leads to linguistic diversity rather than linguistic homogeneity. An illustration of contact-induced linguistic diversity with corpus-driven data is preceded with a brief discussion of English abbreviations, which, in Part 2, are contrasted with their “polonized” versions that undergo formal, semantic and pragmatic changes in the recipient language.

### 1. Introduction

The present-day popularity of English worldwide has been facilitated by the dominance of the Anglo-American culture, for which English is the vehicle. Non-English

users understand the significance of English lexis that names technological, economic and cultural concepts in worldwide communication, and willingly draw on the English lexicon. Thus intensive lexical borrowing from English satisfies the onomasiological needs of speakers of other languages (see e.g. Görlach 2001, 2002). Since English became a global *lingua franca* and the world's greatest donor of vocabulary, there has been an ongoing debate among linguists who have tried to determine whether the process of global linguistic borrowing from English is leading to linguistic homogeneity or, on the contrary, to the diversification of the recipient languages. The aim of this article is twofold. While focusing on the discussion and exemplification of several types of loanword adaptation processes with English acronyms and alphabetisms that have been borrowed into Polish (Part 2), we will support the view, expressed repeatedly in recent studies on language contact, that linguistic borrowing from English is, paradoxically, a change-provoking and development-motivating process that leads to linguistic diversity rather than linguistic homogeneity (Part 1).

## 2. Argumentation towards contact-induced language diversification

It has been claimed in a number of Slavic studies on language development (see e.g. Ohnheiser 2003; Waszakowa 2010) that intensive internationalization processes, caused primarily by the influence of English, may gradually lead to linguistic homogeneity (see also Phillipson 1992: 17, 47ff). Contrary to this observation, a number of recent studies on language contact and the influence of English on European languages provide arguments in favour of contact-induced language diversification. It has been claimed and amply exemplified, especially in the case of morphologically complex languages, that English lexemes on entering the recipient languages begin their own lives (Alexieva 2008; Dunn 2008; Fischer 2008; Winter-Froemel 2008; Witalisz 2011). The borrowed elements, just like native lexemes, undergo various types of formal, semasiological and onomasiological alterations in the recipient language, both at the integral and post-borrowing phases (Fischer 2008: 5). They exhibit morphological and semantic potential for independent dynamic development within the recipient language, which leads to the creation of new meanings and new expressions (Alexieva 2008: 51). Borrowed lexical elements are seen as contact-induced “innovations” in the recipient language (Winter-Froemel 2008: 19), which suggests that a borrowed element becomes formally a new linguistic unit, liable to further changes.

Borrowed lexemes may change formally, i.e. they undergo phonological, graphic and morphological adaptation to assimilate to the phonetic, graphic and morphological systems of the recipient language, cf. for instance the graphic adaptation of English loans in Slavic languages, particularly those that use the Cyrillic script, e.g. Rus. *ноутбук* < E. *notebook*, Rus. *шоумен* < E. *showman*, Rus. *сэлфи* < E. *selfie*; cf. the Polish versions of English verbs and adjectives that no longer resemble their English etymons having been adapted at all three levels to conform to the Polish grammatical system, e.g. P. *lajkować* < E. *to like*, P. *hejtować* < E. *to hate*, P. *zaczekować się* < E. *to check in*, P. *szkilować się* < E. *to chill out*, P. *lajtowy* < E. *light*,

P. *każualowy* < E. *casual* and P. *fristajlowy* < E. *freestyle*. Formal changes on the whole facilitate the integration of lexical loans in the recipient language, while morphological adaptation is more frequent in cases when the two languages in contact are genetically distant, e.g. Polish with its high inflectionality requires all English verbs and most adjectives to be morphologically adapted through suffix attachment. Morphological adaptation may also involve clipping and suffix replacement, as well as suffix attachment in nouns, e.g. Rus. *coфm* < E. *software*; P. *klikalny* < E. *clickable*, Rus. *смайлик* < E. *smile, smiley* (Dunn 2008: 59; Witalisz 2014: 119).

Loanwords and loan translations may undergo semantic adaptation in the recipient language. The meaning of a transferred or calqued lexeme may be narrowed, which is the most frequent type of semantic change in loans (Mańczak 1985), broadened or changed completely at the post-borrowing phase (Alexieva 2008; Dunn 2008; Witalisz 2011), cf. computer-related terminology in which English loans are used as monosemes in several European languages, while their etymons are polysemous in English, having originally been created by extending the meanings of pre-existing words used in other contexts (Dunn 2008: 54), e.g. *software, scanner, domain, to click, to browse*. Polish *strefa zero*, calqued from American English *Ground Zero*, has been reanalyzed semantically and used repeatedly in the Polish media in ways unknown to English when referred to local dramatic events. *Szczęśliwe godziny*, loan translated from E. *Happy hours*, is frequently used, contrary to its English etymon, to advertise telephone companies, economy class tickets, beauty parlours and second-hand shops in Poland (Witalisz 2015: 216, 218).

Perhaps the major argument for contact-induced language diversification is the rule-governed morphological creativity of the recipient language users, i.e. their forming loan-based native derivatives that have no discoverable counterparts in the donor language. English loanwords exhibit considerable derivational potential in the recipient languages, as illustrated by the following word-formation families in Polish and Russian: P. *PR* > *PR-owiec/piarowiec* [n.], *piarowy/piarowski* [adj.], *piarowo* [adv.], *piarować* [v.], *pod-PR-ować* [v.] (< E. *PR*); P. *chuligan* > *chuliganić* [v.], *chuliganeria* [n.], *chuligański* [adj.], *chuligaństwo* [n.] (< E. *hooligan*); Rus. *нуар* > *нуаровский* [adj.], *нуарщик* [n.], *нуарист* [n.], *нуарить* [v.] (< E. *PR*). Complex and polysyllabic English loanwords happen to be clipped in the recipient languages, e.g. P. *fejs* < P. *Facebook* (< E. *Facebook*); P. *komp* / Rus. *комп* < P. *komputer* / Rus. *компьютер* (< E. *computer*). Semantic loans from English, using the potential of native word-formation processes, function as bases for native derivatives, e.g. P. *aplikacyjny* [adj.] < P. *aplikacja* 'a request for' (< E. *application*), P. *bazowy* [adj.] < P. *baza* 'a facial cosmetic' (< E. *base*). The univerbation of loan translations from English results in the following nouns: Rus. *кредитка* < Rus. *кредитная карточка* (< E. *credit card*); P. *śniadaniówka* < P. *telewizja śniadaniowa* (< E. *breakfast TV*) (Dunn 2008: 58, 59; Witalisz 2015: 265, 2016: 59, 81).

Contact-induced linguistic diversification is also manifested by the hybridity of language forms. Borrowed English elements are used as components of hybrid creations that lack English models and are formed in the recipient language by analogy to English expressions but quite independently of them. English affixes

and combining forms which have been borrowed as components of complex or compound loanwords from English attach to the recipient language lexemes, e.g. *-ing*, *-burger*, *-holic*, *-gate*, *-man*, *-land* etc., as in e.g. P. *szafing* ‘a party at which friends exchange their own and their children’s used clothes’ (P. *szafa* ‘wardrobe’ + E. *-ing*), P. *Góral Burger* ‘the name of a fast food restaurant and meal’ (P. *góral* ‘highlander’ + E. *burger*), P. *sejmoholik* ‘a person addicted to watching debates in the parliament’ (P. *sejm* ‘parliament’ + E. *-holic*), *oscypekgate* ‘a scandal related to the registering of a particular type of cheese in the EU’ (P. *oscypek* ‘type of cheese’ + E. *-gate*), P. *wiochmen* ‘a redneck’ (P. *wiocha* ‘village’ + E. *-man*) (Mańczak-Wohlfeld, Witalisz 2016). Some of the hybrid derivatives are further used as derivational bases in the recipient language, e.g. P. *wiochmen* > *wiochmenka* [fem. n.], *wiochmeński* [adj.], *wiochmeństwo* [abst. n.], *wiochmenić* [v.].

English polymorphemic expressions lose their English superficialities once they have been calqued to the recipient languages. Covert loans are composed of native material in the recipient language, cf. the newly-formed Polish complex and phraseological loan translations that are direct translations of English idiomatic expressions, e.g. P. *przeglądarka* < E. *browser*, P. *białe kołnierzyki* < E. *white-collar workers*, P. *w tyle / z tyłu głowy* < E. *at/in the back of one’s mind*, P. *wychodzić z szafy* < E. *to come out of the closet*, P. *Miłego dnia!* < E. *Have a nice day!*, and the half-calqued loanblends, e.g. P. *e-książka* < E. *e-book*, P. *krwawa Mary* < E. *bloody Mary*, P. *surfować w sieci* < E. *to surf the web/net*. An English polymorphemic expression takes a different shape in every language it is calqued into, e.g. E. *fast food* is rendered as Ch. 快餐 (E. lit. ‘fast meal’), Cz. *rychlé občerstvení*, F. *restauration rapide*, G. *Fertiggericht*, H. *gyorsétel*, P. *szybkie jedzenie*, Rus. *быстрое питание*, Sp. *comida rápida*, Sw. *snabbmat*.

The elements borrowed from a foreign language may acquire or lose specific connotations, i.e. their meaning may undergo amelioration or pejoration in the recipient language. The former is frequently observed in the case of English swear words, which lose some taboo status when used in the recipient languages, e.g. the English expletive *fuck* used in Russian (Dunn 2008: 60) and Polish. The latter is illustrated by the expression *know-how* which, neutral in English, has gained sophisticated overtones in Italian, German (Pulcini 2002: 162) and Polish. The acquisition of specific connotations can also be observed in the diminutive and augmentative derivatives from loanwords. The Polish slang expression *krejzolek*, a diminutive noun from E. *crazy*, evokes positive connotations and is non-offensive, while P. *hicior*, an augmentative noun from E. *hit*, expresses speaker’s derogatory attitude (examples after Rostowska 2009).

The recipient language speakers’ linguistic creativity is also reflected in the formation of pseudo-Anglicisms. It seems that English has become a lexical reservoir on which speakers of other languages willingly draw to form English-looking expressions such as e.g. Rus. *uon-myp* ‘a combination of shopping and tourism’ (lit. ‘shop-tour’), G. *Handy* ‘mobile phone’, P. *before party / beforing* ‘a party taking place before the major event’, It./Sp. *footing* ‘jogging’, Slov./Cr. *golman* ‘goalkeeper’, or the pan-European *happy end* ‘a happy ending’ (Filipović 1994: 138; Görlach 2001; Alexieva 2008: 46; Dunn 2008: 62; Witalisz 2014). It must be noted though that some of these expressions may in the course of time be replaced either by their English

counterparts, as in the case of It. *footing*, or co-exist with hybrid creations, e.g. P. *before party* and *beforek* (E. *before* + P. suffix *-ek*).

Borrowing from English appears a multi-dimensional process whose effects paradoxically bring about linguistic diversity rather than linguistic homogeneity. Language data show that English words on and after entering the recipient languages are subject to formal and semantic changes conditioned by language- and culture-specific constraints. The subsequent parts of this article focus on providing more evidence to support this view.

### 3. English acronyms and alphabetisms

The point of departure is a brief reference to the productivity of acronymization and the letter-by-letter abbreviation in English, as well as to the diversity of English abbreviated forms, which, in Section 4, will be contrasted with their “polonized” versions that undergo formal, semantic and pragmatic changes in the post-integral phase of the borrowing process.

Acronyms are words coined from the initial letters of the component words of a multi-word expression, e.g. *NATO*, *laser*, *UNESCO*, and have traditionally been differentiated from alphabetisms (or initialisms), e.g. *USA*, *VIP*, *BBC*, *CD*, *BYOB*, which, in contrast to the former that are pronounceable words, are pronounced as sequences of letters. Terminology concerning these two types of abbreviations has been used rather freely. Acronyms happen to be described as a hyperonym of alphabetisms (Quirk 1996/1973: 449), or are necessarily distinguished from them (and from abbreviations) as a separate category of abbreviated forms (Bauer 1988: 39; Szymanek 1989: 101; Booij 2005: 20). For Bauer (1988: 39), acronyms are “more than just abbreviations, because they are actually pronounced as new words”. In the subsequent parts of this work, we shall use the term “abbreviation” in its generic, hyperonymic sense, covering both alphabetisms, such as *WHO*, *WTC*, *GPS*, *lol*, and acronyms, such as *AIDS*, *TESL*, *BASIC*, and *WASP*, as well as those contracted forms whose pronunciation varies, e.g. *asap*. Alternatively, we shall refer to both acronyms and alphabetisms as A&As, unless reference has to be made to each category individually.

Acronyms and alphabetisms are created to say the maximum in minimum time. The use of abbreviated forms saves time, space, and makes the writing and pronunciation of lengthy and complex names less laborious. English A&As are used in various areas of life, both in general and specialized languages. They are not only abbreviated forms of the names of companies, institutions and of scientific terms, but also of names of diseases, frequently used multi-word expressions and, particularly in American English, of personal and geographical names. There are no universal standards of their orthographic styling in English (cf. 4.10, Part 2), neither strict pronunciation rules, e.g. both *VAT* and *IRA*<sup>1</sup> can be pronounced as

<sup>1</sup> Individual Retirement Account (AmE) (M-W).

individual letters or as a word (FD; M-W; Marchand 1969: 452; Bauer 1983: 237ff; 1988: 39ff; Szymanek 1989: 101ff).

Some acronyms indicate the concealed meaning, as in e.g. *WASP* (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant), and precede the expression or name which it abbreviates, e.g. *BASIC* (Beginners' All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code) (Bauer 1983: 237). In contrast to other word-formation processes, except for clipping, neither acronymization nor letter-by-letter abbreviation generates new complex words in the sense of a combination of a new form and a new meaning. Abbreviations are just formal reductions of the full forms of multi-word expressions (Štekauer 2000: 111). It is only when the abbreviated form comes to be used with a meaning different from its unabbreviated source expression, that the former can be recognized as a distinct word (cf. Bradley 1948: 148; cf. 4.7).<sup>2</sup>

English A&As are used internationally not only as abbreviated names of currencies, names of countries, international communication codes, computer-related terminology, online domains, airlines, etc. (cf. SSA; SSiSA; WSSiS), but also are borrowed into the lexical systems of other languages. There they become autonomous lexical units that exhibit morphological and semantic potential for independent development within the recipient languages.

#### 4. Adaptation of English acronyms and alphabetisms in Polish

The data collected for the purposes of this study include 190 English acronyms and alphabetisms that have been borrowed into Polish. The basic forms of A&As have been sourced from a dictionary of Anglicisms in Polish (SZA) and from the Polish mass media, including printed press, domain-specific magazines, electronic press, as well as TV and radio programmes. Also, the author's students have kindly shared the A&As they use on a daily basis in their electronic communication. The exemplifications of the adapted forms of English A&As used in Polish presented in Sections 4.1–4.9 (in Part 2) come from the National Corpus of Polish (NKJP). The analysis of the phonological adaptation of English A&As in Polish in Section 4.1 (in Part 2) is based on the author's communicative experience and on how the A&As in question are pronounced in the Polish media.

Excluded from the study are the so-called syllable-words (Marchand 1969: 452) since they are hardly distinguishable from clipped compounds (Szymanek 1989: 101), such as P. *hi-fi* (< E. *hi-fi*, *high* + *fidelity*), *wi-fi* (< E. *wi-fi*, *wireless fidelity*), *piksel* (< E. *pixel*, *picture* + *element*), *sitcom* (< E. *sitcom*, *situation* + *comedy*), which fall outside the category of acronyms (cf. Bauer 1983: 233, 237).

Borrowed acronyms and alphabetisms, just like other lexical loans, are liable to change at various levels in the recipient language. Referring to the findings of the corpus search and to the types of contact-induced change discussed in Section 2, we are able to identify the following types of adaptation of English A&As in Polish:

<sup>2</sup> See Bauer (1983: 237–238) on unusual acronyms and on the lack of predictability in acronymization.

- formal adaptation (phonological, graphic, morphological),
- inflectionality of English A&As in Polish,
- formation of English A&A-based native derivatives,
- pragmatic changes,
- semantic adaptation,
- creation of loan translations, and
- the formation of hybrid creations and blends.

These types of adaptation of English A&As in Polish are addressed in detail and exemplified in Part 2 of the article, which also raises the issues of their orthographic styling and of the suggested implementation of Polish spelling rules in the English-sourced A&As.

## Dictionaries and corpora

- FD = *The Free Dictionary*. [<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/>].
- M-W = *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. [<http://www.merriamwebster.com/>].
- NKJP = Przepiórkowski A., Bańko M., Górskia R.L., Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk B. (eds.). 2012. *Narodowy Korpus Języka Polskiego* [= *National Corpus of Polish*]. Warszawa. [<http://http://nkjp.pl/>].
- SSA = Grzybowski J. et. al. 1993. *Słownik skrótów angielskich. Elektronika, informatyka, telekomunikacja*. Warszawa.
- SSiSA = Kostyra M. 2006. *Słownik skrótów i skrótowców angielskich*. Kraków.
- SZA = Mańczak-Wohlfeld E. (ed.). 2010. *Słownik zapożyczeń angielskich w języku polskim*. Warszawa.
- WSSiS = Müldner-Nieckowski P. 2007. *Wielki słownik skrótów i skrótowców*. Wrocław.

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