



What's in a Language?

by Roberto Galea

Sorki, but I just put a skitfocie of myself on Fejsie. I'll lovciam cię if you lajkować it. English gets everywhere these days, and it's not just Poles who like to pepper their speech with Anglicisms! English Matters investigates...

While there are more native speakers of Mandarin and Spanish, no other language is as widely used, and in such far flung corners of the world as English. Australians greet each other with a “G’day, mate,” while South Africans will start their day with a chirpy “Howzit.”

And while some countries have not adopted English as an official language, the ubiquity of English in business and culture circles has seen the locals picking up English words for everyday speech.

Franglais

The reason why English is even the international Lingua Franca is interesting in itself. It had almost completely replaced French as the language of diplomacy around WWII, but started gaining traction in 1919, when the Treaty of Versailles was written in

- 4 far flung** | odległy, rozrzucony
mate | kumpel; *tu*: stary!
chirpy | radosny, bez troski
ubiquity | wszechobecność
to pick sth up | nauczyć się czegoś
5 to replace sth | zastępować coś

both languages. Up until then, much of diplomacy was conducted in French. The role of English was advanced further via the role of the United States and the United Kingdom in the aftermath of the second great war. Apocryphally, the French never enjoyed the fact that their language was ►

- 6 traction** | *tu*: tempo, prędkość
to conduct sth | prowadzić coś
advanced | *tu*: umocniony
via sth | *tu*: z powodu czegoś, ze względu na coś
in the aftermath of sth | w następstwie czegoś



In 1994, the French government passed the controversial Toubon Law, which attempted to restrict English-derived words in government publications, most workplaces and state-funded schools, among others.

relegated to a kind of linguistic second division.

Nonetheless, French speakers today often get into their car for a trip over “le weekend,” while they might be invited for “le job interview.” This language was coined Franglais, a portmanteau of the French word for the two languages.

In 1994, the French government passed the controversial Toubon

Law, which attempted to restrict English-derived words in government publications, most workplaces and state-funded schools, among others. Loan words which were frowned upon were “e-mail” and “Start-up.” Quite surprisingly, “le weekend” was allowed.

By the mid-noughties, the French subsidiary of General Electric was

- 1** **relegated** | *tu*: zdegradowany
nonetheless | niemniej jednak
to get into sth | wsiadać do (np. samochodu)
trip | wycieczka
to coin sth | ukuć (np. słowo)
portmanteau | kontaminacja
to pass sth | przyjmować (np. ustawę)
2 **to attempt to do sth** | próbować coś zrobić
English-derived | pochodzący z jęz. angielskiego
state-funded | finansowany przez państwo
among others | między innymi

- loan word** | zapożyczenie
to be frowned upon | być źle widzianym
allowed | *tu*: dozwolony
noughties | lata 2000–2009
subsidiary | filia
to hand sth to sb | wręczyć komuś coś; *tu*: nałożyć (np. grzywnę)
fine | grzywna
3 **to comply with sth** | stosować się do czegoś
resistance | opór
notwithstanding | mimo wszystko, jednak
to catch on | zyskiwać popularność, przyjmować się

handed a fine of more than €500,000 for not complying with the law.

But its resistance of English notwithstanding, France was not the only country to introduce its own colourful elements to the language.

Ponglish

On the other side of the continent, Polish schools taught Russian almost exclusively up until 1989. Since then, English has caught on among the younger population. Just like their word-borrowing French counterparts, Polish youths today are susceptible to saying something like “wysłałem maila,” or, following a tiff, take abrupt action such as “blokować” someone on Facebook.

Matters worsened (or improved, depending on how you look at it) following Poland’s accession to the EU, millions swarmed to the UK looking for better prospects. This mass immigration caused many Poles to adopt English words into their vocabulary. What was particular is that they gave these words a Polish twist. “Idziemy szoping,” and “drinkować” at the pub became popular activities among the expats. Polonia in the UK regularly moan about the “trafiku” on the streets.

This is actually a very common phenomenon, experts say. “We mix the two languages together all the time,” said Magda Pustoła, from the Polish Cultural Institute in London. “It’s absolutely common to blend words and phrases.

- counterpart** | odpowiednik
youth | młoda osoba
susceptible to sth | podatny na coś
tiff | sprzeczka
abrupt | nagły, raptowny
to worsen | pogarszać się
accession to sth | wstąpienie do czegoś
to swarm | *tu*: wyjeżdżać tłumnie
expat = expatriate | emigrant
to moan about sth | narzekać z powodu czegoś
phenomenon | zjawisko
to blend sth | mieszać coś

We find that more and more English is creeping into our Polish – even in meetings at the institute.”

As time passes, language changes becomes more established, with more and more individuals adopting the new way of speech. “As they stay longer, obviously they’re going to start picking up the local slang, the local accents, and they’re going to integrate it into their own Ponglish,” said Anthony Dalglish, a language expert at the UK’s University of Lincoln.

Words travel in both directions. English dictionaries contain a number of technical words taken from Polish. These include “Rendzina” (a type of soil), and “Klotski” (a kind of puzzle where blocks are moved around a board).

Far Eastern Dreams

English is also used as a form of marketing. In recent years, the Internet has been inundated with funny bilingual signs in Asian countries. The translation is sometimes so shoddy, that it is hard to understand the meaning of the sign in the first place. Signs reading “Please dress up politely,” “Do not dangle any doll,” or “Carefully fall into the river,” are as common as they are surreal. Chinese exports also contain unintentionally humorous labelling.

Some experts say that the phenomenon is due to the fact that in Japan, for example, it is fashionable for companies to print English texts onto their products, making them seem more sophisticated and international. “A couple of rambling English sentences on the label, typically arranged neatly in three lines, give a product a catchy, Western look,” wrote the *Wall Street Journal*’s Yumiko Ono, explaining that English words added to products to make them more saleable.

The text is very often way off the mark. Jayne Hildebrand Ikeshima, a lecturer of English at Japan’s Keiai University, opined that “there is often no attempt to try to get it right, nor do

Signs reading “Please dress up politely,” “Do not dangle any doll,” or “Carefully fall into the river,” are as common as they are surreal.

the vast majority of the Japanese population ever attempt to read the English design element in question. There is therefore less emphasis on spell checking and grammatical accuracy.”

Because of the fact that Japanese and Chinese, as well as a handful of Asian languages do not distinguish between an “L” and an “R” sound, this linguistic novelty is called Engrish.

Spanglish

But perhaps the most recognised form of hybrid language is Spanglish. According to the 2012 US census, there are more Spanish speakers in the United States than there are speakers of Chinese, French, German, Italian, Hawaiian, and the Native American languages combined, with 38.3 million Americans speaking primarily Spanish at home.

The Puerto Rican poet Salvador Tió first came up with the word Spanglish in 1940 as a response to the way native speakers relinquished their mother tongue upon immigrating to the United States.

While the use of Spanglish is common among the Hispanic community in the US, it is not considered an actual language, but it is referred to in linguistic circles as a pidgin (a simplified form of communication used among members of communities who speak a different language).

Because there is no unification of what constitutes Spanglish, regional dialects may vary significantly. In some areas of North America, Spanglish is so widespread that a basic knowledge is required to understand those in the area. A handful of authors have

written poems, and works of fiction in the fledgling language, further establishing its use.

Moving On

The Linguistic Society of America estimates that there are just shy of 7,000 distinct languages in the world today. And while global unification is causing a number of languages to become extinct – including an English dialect spoken in South Eastern Ireland, Forth and Bargo dialect, which died in the mid-19th century, it is refreshing to see that English is still alive and well, developing together with the people who use it. ■

4 to creep into sth | wkraść się do czegoś

established | ugruntowany

to contain sth | zawierać coś

soil | gleba

to be inundated with sth | być zalanym czymś

bilingual | dwujęzyczny

shoddy | tandetny, marny

labelling | etykietowanie, metkowanie

due to sth | z powodu czegoś

sophisticated | wyrafinowany, wysokiej klasy

rambling | chaotyczny

neatly | starannie

saleable | poszukiwany, łatwo sprzedający się

to be way off the mark | być błędnym

lecturer | wykładowca

to opine | wyrażać opinię

attempt | próba

5 vast | *tu*: ogromny

therefore | dlatego

emphasis on sth | nacisk na coś

accuracy | *tu*: poprawność

handful of sth | garść czegoś, kilka

primarily | głównie, przede wszystkim

to come up with sth | wymyślić coś

to relinquish sth | zrezygnować z czegoś

referred to | *tu*: nazywany

to constitute sth | stanowić coś, składać się na coś

6 fledgling | nowopowstały

to estimate | (o)szacować

shy of X | zaledwie X

to become extinct | wymierać

it is refreshing to see... | miło widzieć, że...