



Linguistic Globalization as a Reflection of Cultural Changes

Alicja Witalisz
Pedagogical University of Cracow
alicjawitalisz@gmail.com

“Vocabulary is a very sensitive index of the culture of a people”

(Edward Sapir, 1949: 27)

Key words: linguistic globalization, culture-specific key words, borrowing, globalisms

Introduction

The discussion of issues related to globalization cannot do without analyzing changes in language, many of which are related to and depend on cultural globalization. The aim of the paper is to examine the way in which cultural globalization influences world languages. Globalization impacts various peoples and systems of the world, and cultural changes, facilitated by globalization processes, are reflected in language use. In short, English-induced linguistic globalization alters lexical and semantic systems of languages that are influenced by this modern lingua franca. The language a community speaks is part of its culture and so few changes in language occur unless there are prior changes in culture. A good glossary, recording changes in language becomes a diary, a history book that indirectly reports political, social, cultural and even economic events in the history of a community. Many of the examples quoted in this paper come from Slavic languages as they well illustrate recent history and social changes that countries of Eastern and Central Europe have been experiencing as a result of the political and social shift from communism to democracy after 1989.

It is a natural phenomenon that human languages change, develop, refresh their vocabulary, undergo semantic and syntactic changes. One of the reasons for those alterations is linguistic exchange between languages. This usually occurs when two communities, living side by side, interact by exchanging ideas, tools, methods, cultural



behaviors, as it happens for example in the multicultural communities in American cities. In the era of global communication, though, the physical co-existence of two communities speaking two different languages is not longer necessary for the linguistic exchange to happen.

Linguistic globalization

In political studies the term 'linguistic globalization' is associated with the spread of English as a tool for global communication (Phillipson, 1992; Dua, 1994) among people who use it as either first, second or foreign language. In language studies, linguistic globalization may be seen as global intensive lexical borrowing from English by languages whose speakers use English as a foreign language, e.g. Polish, Spanish, Chinese. The process of linguistic globalization is facilitated by cross-lingual borrowing, with English being the most prominent donor of vocabulary and set expressions.

Why do linguists need to speak of globalization in relation to linguistic borrowing? Traditional language studies have used the term 'internationalism' for vocabulary shared by a number of different languages. Internationalisms are defined as language elements, usually of Greek or Latin origin, used in at least three different language groups within the Indo-European language family (Maćkiewicz, 1993), e.g. *president, culture, politics, bank, analysis, planet, film, diet, doctor*, etc., which appear in most European languages (see Table1)¹. Recently, it became quite clear that we need to think not of internationalisms but of 'globalisms' (Bartmiński, 2000: 116), i.e. words or expressions used by the inhabitants of the global village; words shared by languages different enough to belong to different language families. Thus, modern internationalisms should be perceived as globalisms, not longer limited to European languages, but spreading all over the world due to both new communication technologies and languages like English or Spanish spoken internationally. The majority of globalisms have English as their source language, i.e. language from which they are borrowed by other systems.²

¹ A rich collection of internationalisms can be found in Buck (1949) and Görlach (2001).

² Non-English globalisms include the so called cultural borrowings, i.e. culture-specific terms naming some phenomena typical of a particular community and its tradition, customs, history, religion, politics, e.g. *Ayatollah* (from Arabic) or *Perestroika* (from Russian).



Table 1. Examples of internationalisms of Greek or Latin origin.

Source language	English	Polish	Russian	Spanish	Italian	German	Norwegian
Latin <i>prae-sidens</i> 'sitting in front'	president	prezydent	президент	presidente	presidente	Präsident	president
Latin <i>cultura</i> from <i>colere</i> 'to cultivate'	culture	kultura	культура	cultura	cultura	Kultur	kultur
Greek <i>politikós</i> 'public, civil'	politics	polityka		política	politica	Politik	politikk
It. <i>banca</i>	bank	bank	банк	banco	banca	Bank	bank
Greek <i>étymos</i> 'true'	analysis	analiza	анализ	análisis	analisi	Analyse	analyse
Greek <i>planētēs</i> 'wanderer'	planet	planeta		planeta	pianeta	Planet	planet
Greek <i>phōtós</i> 'light' <i>gráphō</i> 'to draw'	photography	fotografia		fotografía	fotografia	Fotografie	fotografi
Greek <i>díaita</i>	diet	dieta		dieta	dieta	Diät	diett
Latin <i>medicina</i> , from <i>mederi</i> 'to cure'	medicine	medycyna		medicina	medicina	Medizin	medisin

It goes without saying that globalisms are chiefly English terms naming either new technological advances or American cultural models. The present-day spread of English worldwide and its becoming a defining characteristic of linguistic globalization (Sonntag, 2004) have been facilitated by the dominance of the American culture, for which English is the vehicle. The Americanization of world cultures (Huntington, 1996) provokes and is well exemplified by lexical changes in various languages, which borrow American English vocabulary along with cultural peculiarities.

The theoretical framework for the analysis of the dominance of English worldwide has awaited numerous labels and has been referred to as cultural and "linguistic imperialism" (cf. Tomlinson, 1991; 1999; Phillipson, 1992: 65), "English language



hegemony” (Phillipson, 1992; Dua, 1994; Sonntag, 2003) or even “linguistic and cultural genocide” whose victims are cultures and languages drawing extensively from English and the (Anglo-)American culture (Phillipson, 1992: 13). In this paper I shall concentrate on the relation between language and culture as well as on the types of linguistic influence and the way in which contact-induced English-sourced lexical innovations become a defining feature of linguistic globalization.

Language and culture

In language studies there has been an ongoing debate on the nature of the relation between language and the way language users perceive the reality. The Whorfian hypothesis of linguistic relativity stating that language shapes the way people think and perceive the world, severely criticized by e.g. Pinker (1991), was re-examined by Wierzbicka (1998) who points to the fact that language, its lexicon in particular, both shapes and reflects language users’ way of thinking. Certain expressions in language, encoding past experiences of a community, echo a particular point of view, but at the same time induce language users to adopt that point of view. Wierzbicka argues that people’s way of thinking can never be totally determined by the language they speak as there many alternative ways of expressing one’s thoughts.

Language mirrors reality and it is both a medium and a signifier of human interaction (Sonntag 2003). There is a tight interdependence between the life of a community and the language this community speaks. It is especially the vocabulary of a language that is seen as a reflection of, or the so called “culture sensor” of customs, traditions, values and ways of thinking typical of particular communities and their cultures (Wierzbicka, 1998). It points not only to characteristic features of particular cultures but also differences between them. Each language has its historically shaped “key words” or “culture-conditioned lexical items” (Tabakowska, 2001: 185), i.e. culture-specific expressions that define the culture of a particular community, e.g. *ayatollah* in Islamic communities, *guru* in the Hindu tradition, *rat race* in America. Many other expressions, such as e.g. *ground zero*, refer to historical or political events that are directly connected to the history of a nation. The key words of a language name the key



values cherished and shared by people who speak this language. They are the key to the culture of a nation for those who wish to understand it (Wierzbicka, 1998).

Since there is a direct link between the culture of a particular community and the language this community speaks, no changes in language are possible without prior changes in culture. In the course of the dominance of one culture, its key words are transferred to other languages. One other reason for the transfer is the worldwide reporting of political, social and other events that took place in the country enjoying the status of an influential superpower.

Types of linguistic influence

American cultural models adopted by other nations or events associated directly with America and discussed worldwide carry English linguistic material. This results in the adoption (or adaptation in cases where formal changes occur) of English culture-specific vocabulary by the recipient languages. Language studies proliferate in research concerning the process of linguistic borrowing, a result of which are numerous classifications of the borrowed language elements (Betz, 1949; Haugen, 1950; Weinreich, 1953; Duckworth, 1977). The two main types of linguistic borrowing found among globalisms of English origin are 'loanwords' and 'loan translations'.

Loanwords are copies of the English source words, closely resembling their English models (e.g. *iPod* or *talk show*), loan translations are calques of English model expressions translated with the use of native vocabulary of the recipient languages (e.g. Polish *drapacz chmur* or Spanish *rascacielos* from English *sky-scraper*).

Loanwords of English origin are most conspicuous as they are easily recognized as foreign by an average language user of a language other than English. They are similar both graphically and phonetically to their English source words. Many of them are 'cultural borrowings' (Bloomfield, 1933) or expressions representing particular semantic fields, such as computer technology, business, economy, politics, but also broadly understood popular culture, cosmetics, fashion. A new device or phenomenon is borrowed along with the word that is used to refer to it. Consider the following instances of American linguistic export (Table 2):



Table 2. Examples of English loanwords in selected European languages.

English source word	Spanish	Russian	German	Polish	Hungarian	Turkish
iPod	iPod	ай-Под iPod	iPod	iPod	iPod	iPod
scanner	escáner		Scanner	skaner	szkenner	skanner
fast food	fast food (comida rápida)	фастфуд	Fast food	fast food	gyorsételek	fast food
hamburger	hamburguesa		Hamburger	hamburger	hamburger	hamburger
talk show	talk show	-	Talk show	talk show	talk show	talk show
sitcom	sitcom		Sitcom	sitcom	szituációs komédia	sitkom
Halloween	Halloween (Noche de Brujas)	хеллоуин	Halloween	Halloween		

Much less conspicuous borrowings are loan translations, which are direct translations of English expressions such as *rat race*, *First Lady*, *ground zero*, *head hunter*, *skyscraper*, *fat-free*, *fast food*, *white collar*, *Silicon Valley*, *Trojan Horse* (with its computer related meaning), *brain drain*, *dream factory*, *Shadow Cabinet*, *Star Wars*, *popular culture*, *middle class*, *head hunter*, *positive thinking* and many others. They are hardly ever recognized as foreign by non-specialists since they are built of native vocabulary of the recipient languages and so do not struck with their foreignness (see Table 3). Although the meaning of such expressions is to some extent idiomatic, it may be inferred from the context in which they are used. It is worth mentioning that such linguistic innovations, based on English models, later on may extend their meaning as a result of local cultural factors, of which a good example is the Polish expression *strefa zero* translated directly from English *ground zero*. Its new, culture- and history-oriented



senses³ prove that “the history of the meaning of nearly every word is a little cultural story” (Harley, 2006: 102).

Table 3. Instances of loan translations from English.

English source expression	Polish	Czech	Russian	German	Spanish
political correctness	poprawność polityczna	politická korektnost	политическая корректность	politische Korrektheit	corrección política
First Lady	Pierwsza Dama	První dáma	Первая (леди)	Erste Frau	Primera Dama
sky-scraper	drapacz chmur	mrakodrap	небоскрёб	Wolkenkratzer	rascacielos
electronic mail	poczta elektroniczna	elektronická pošta	электронная почта	E-Post	correo electrónico
fast food	szybkie jedzenie	rychlé občerstvení	- (фастфуд)	- (Fastfood)	comida rápida
pop(ular) culture	kultura popularna	pop kultura	поп-культура	Popkultur	cultura popular

In some cases one English expression brings to life two innovations in the recipient language. The English word *sky-scraper* exists in Polish as a loan translation *drapacz chmur* with the meaning of ‘a multi-storey building’ and as a loanword *skyscraper* (from English *skyscraper ad*) meaning ‘a web banner used for online advertising’.

Cultural changes reflected in language use

The process of borrowing by one language from another is more than just a linguistic issue. Language studies are of great assistance to the study of cultural and social

³ The expression *strefa zero* (from English *ground zero*) was coined in Polish in September of 2001 and has since developed semantically to refer to the following: 1. ‘the site of the destroyed WTC in New York in 2001’; 2. ‘New Orleans and Bay St Louis after Hurricane Katrina in 2005’; 3. ‘the ruin of an exhibition hall in Chorzów, Poland, 2006’; 4. ‘the site at which a dead swan infected with bird flu was found in Toruń, Poland, 2006’ (Witalisz, 2007).



phenomena. Analyzing the instances of linguistic borrowing from English, it is easy to identify the American cultural patterns which are most easily adopted by other communities. Corpus analysis carried out so far points to several semantic fields which illustrate which aspects of culture are recognized as American and which of them are adopted most willingly by the recipient cultures (Witalisz, 2006). Most numerous represented areas include: 1. working style, making a career based on competition, achieving fast success (the famous American dream'); 2. names of occupations; 3. modern communication technology, computer-related terminology; 4. the cult of beauty and youth, which makes you think that good looks will make you happy and successful in life; 5. food and eating habits; 6. popular culture (movies, music, TV, entertainment in general); 7. ways of spending free time; 8. advertising practices, in particular the use of metaphor to manipulate the recipient into buying a product by establishing a discourse of positive, homely associations; 9. the use of euphemisms and avoiding naming things directly; 10. the use of qualifiers such as *hyper*, *mega*, *super*, especially in the media, as a way of presenting insignificant events or a pieces of information in an attractive and attention-catching way.⁴

Conclusion

American culture and American English are often identified as "the current culprits in the march toward global cultural and linguistic homogenization" (Sonntag, 2009:8). Yet, recent cross-language research based on European languages proves that the process of borrowing from English quite paradoxically contributes to language diversification due to formal and semantic changes that the English etymons undergo in the course of the adaptation process (Alexieva, 2008; Dunn, 2008, Witalisz, 2010). Likewise, global cultural trends always have an impact on local communities and require special absorption, the outcome of which may be interpreted as 'hybridity', referring to the result of new cultural elements being "creatively adapted to mesh with existing ones" (Osterhammel & Petersson, 2005).

Cultures other than American do adopt certain American ways but the language naming units borrowed along with these cultural phenomena frequently undergo

⁴ For specific examples of culture-oriented English loanwords and loan translations used in Slavonic languages and representing each of the semantic field mentioned see Witalisz, 2006.



onomasiological (new compounds and derivatives) and semasiological (meaning alteration) changes in the recipient languages, which means that the borrowed words may differ both formally and semantically from their English source expressions. Also, they may start referring to local realities. English-induced linguistic globalization should not be perceived as a reflection of the hegemony of English but as a marker of “linguistic cosmopolitanism” (Hannerz, 1990: 237), seen as openness towards divergent cultural and linguistic experiences.

References:

Alexieva, N.,

2008. “How and Why are Anglicisms often Lexically Different from their English Etymons?”, in: R. Fisher & H. Pułaczewska (Eds.), *Anglicisms in Europe* (pp. 42-51).

Bartmiński, J.,

2000. „Pasywne i aktywne paneuropeizmy we współczesnym języku polskim”, in: J. Mazur (Ed.), *Słownictwo współczesnej polszczyzny w okresie przemian*, Lublin (pp. 109-116).

Betz, W.,

1949, *Deutsch und Lateinisch: Die Lehnbildungen der althochdeutschen Benediktinerregel*, Bonn.

Bloomfield, L.,

1933. *Language*, New York.

Buck, C.D.,

1949. *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages: A Contribution to the History of Ideas*, Chicago.

Dua, H.R.,

1994. *Hegemony of English*, Mysore.

Duckworth, D.,

1977, “Zur terminologischen und systematischen Grundlage der Forschung auf dem Gebiet der englisch-deutschen Interferenz: Kritische Übersicht und neuer Vorschlag”, in: H. Kolb, H. Lauffer (Eds.), *Sprachliche Interferenz: Festschrift für Werner Betz zum 65. Geburtstag*, Tübingen (pp. 36-56).



Dunn, J.,

2008. "Face Control, Electronic Soap and the Four-Storey Cottage with a Jacuzzi: Anglicisation, Globalisation and the Creation of Linguistic Difference" in: R. Fisher & H. Pułaczewska (Eds.), *Anglicisms in Europe* (pp. 52-69).

Görlach, M.,

2001. *A Usage Dictionary of Anglicisms in Sixteen European Languages*, Oxford.

Hannerz, U.,

1990. "Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture" in: M. Featherstone (ed.), *Global Culture*, London (pp. 237-251).

Harley, H.,

2006. *English Words*, Blackwell Publishing.

Haugen, E.,

1950. "The Analysis of Linguistic Borrowing", *Language* 26: 210-231.

Huntington, S.P.,

1996. *The Clash of Civilisations*, New York.

Maćkiewicz, J.,

1993. „Wyrazy międzynarodowe (internacjonalizmy) we współczesnym języku polskim”, in: J. Bartmiński (Ed.), *Encyklopedia kultury polskiej XX wieku. Tom II. Współczesny język polski*, Wrocław (pp. 525-531).

Osterhammel J., Petersson, N.P.,

2005. *Globalization: A Short History*. Princeton.

Phillipson, R.,

1992. *Linguistic Imperialism*, Oxford.

Pinker, S.,

1994. *The Language Instinct*. New York.

Sapir, E.,

1949. *Selected Writings in Language, Culture and Personality*, ed. D. Mandelbaum, Berkeley.

Sonntag, S.K.,

2003. *The Local Politics of Global English: Case Studies in Linguistic Globalization*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.



Sonntag, S.K.,

2004. "Hegemony and Resistance: Linguistic Globalization in the Early 20th Century", *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Hilton Chicago and the Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, IL, Sep 02, 2004.*

Sonntag, S.K.,

2004. "Understanding Linguistic Globalization", *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Le Centre Sheraton Hotel, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, Mar 17, 2004, available at: http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p72489_index.html, accessed on 15 Feb 2010.*

Sonntag, S.K.,

2009. "Linguistic globalisation and the call center industry: Imperialism, hegemony or cosmopolitanism?", *Language Policy* (2009) 8: 5-25.

Tabakowska, E.,

2001. *Kognitywne podstawy języka i językoznawstwa*. Kraków.

Tomlinson, J.,

1991. *Cultural Imperialism*, Baltimore.

Tomlinson, J.,

1999. *Globalisation and Culture*, Cambridge.

Weinreich, U.,

1953, *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems*, The Hague.

Whorf, B.L.,

1956. *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, Ed. J.B. Carroll. New York.

Wierzbicka, A.,

1998. *Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words. English, Russian, Polish, German and Japanese*. Oxford.

Witalisz, A.,

2006. "English Linguistic Influence on Polish and Other Slavonic Languages", *Quaderni del Centro di Studi Linguistico-Culturali*, available at: <http://amsacta.cib.unibo.it/918/1/OCCASIONALp.pdf/>.



Witalisz, A.,

2007. *Anglosemantyzmy w języku polskim – ze słownikiem* (English Semantic Loans in Polish – with a Dictionary). Kraków.

Witalisz, A.,

2010. "Words Know No Borders 3: Linguistic globalisation - a Contribution to Linguistic Homogenization or the Creation of Linguistic Difference?", in: *Proceedings of the International Across Borders Conference IV: Migration in Culture, Language and Literature*, Krosno, Poland, 16-17 April 2010 (in print).