

LITERATUROZNAWSTWO I KULTUROZNAWSTWO

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“MAY GOD PICKLE YOU”: INTERCULTURAL BATTLE FOR WORDS IN POLISH WORLD WAR II RECOLLECTIONS

The Second World War alliance brought Poles and Britons closer together than ever before in history.¹ This cooperation translated into a joint command and military ventures. At the local level it engaged both nations in a web of (inter)cultural endeavours which affected encounters both in and outside of the battlefield. One of the key components of these wartime exchanges was communication. Triggered by the circumstances of war, the large number of Polish combatants staying in Britain meant that Poles entered, among other things, the language realm of the British other.² The aim of this article is to present cultural implications of these veterans' language encounters. After all, their struggle to be competent English language users revealed more than problems with conveying and deciphering meanings. It interfered in intercultural communications thus affecting socialising processes, questions of identity, and power relations. The author is aware of the constructedness of the autobiographical material and acknowledges that the recollections of combatants referred to in this

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1 The Anglo-Polish Alliance was signed on August 25, 1939. “The treaty consisted of an open, widely publicized part and a secret protocol. Article 1 of the open text dealt with a direct aggression: Should one of the Contracting Parties become engaged in hostilities with a European Power in consequence of aggression by the latter... the other Contracting Party will at once give the Contracting Party engaged in hostilities all the support and assistance in its power”. Germany attacked Poland on September 1, 1939 and on September 3 Britain declared war on Germany. See Jan Karski, *The Great Powers and Poland. From Versailles to Yalta* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 290.

2 In May 1945 there were 50,000 Polish soldiers in Britain, in: Encyklopedia PWN, accessed 25.05.2016, <http://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/>.

article, including their at time anecdotal evidence, are a representation of cultural encounters rather than their accurate copy.

It is a cliché that language plays an important role in human life. This has been indicated by researchers from various scientific disciplines. In linguistics, for example, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis suggests that the language we speak influences our thoughts and actions. One of the most influential 20th century philosophers, Austrian-British Ludwig Wittgenstein, asserted that “The limits of [our] language are the limits of [our] world”. Cultural studies benefited from Ferdinand de Saussure’s ideas on language which, according to him, is a window on reality,³ and language occupies a prominent place in the discussions of such cultural constructions as identity and subjectivity.⁴ Linguistic anthropology emphasises the connection between language and culture since the former creates cultural worlds.⁵

Making their temporary homes in the UK, Polish combatants could learn better than anyone else about the significance of language awareness. Transplanted from their native culture into the Anglo-Saxon world they had to undergo their socialisation process anew. As Hofstede Geert et al. point out, “In a way, the visitor in a foreign culture returns to the mental state of an infant, in which the simplest things must be learned over again”.⁶ One such thing was learning the language. It is such a natural skill that, unless we have problems or a disability, we take it for granted that we can build meaningful utterances and choose the mode of doing so. We may also not realise the individual and social needs language satisfies. In essence, language has numerous functions which make it an efficient and powerful tool. Geoffrey Finch divides them into micro and macro functions, depending on whether they serve particular interests or more universal aims respectively⁷. As far as the former are concerned, he distinguishes⁸: 1) the physiological function (releasing physical and nervous energy); 2) the phatic function (for sociability); 3) the recording function (to provide a record); 4) the identifying function (to identify and classify things);

3 Turner Graeme, *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2003), 10–13.

4 Chris Barker, Dariusz Galasiński, *Cultural Studies and Discourse Analysis: A Dialogue on Language and Identity* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 28.

5 Sociolinguistics and Linguistic Anthropology, accessed 20.05.2016, <http://artsandsciences.sc.edu/ling/Concentration-two>.

6 Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organisations: Software of the Mind. Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 3rd ed., 2010), 384.

7 Geoffrey Finch, *How to Study Linguistics: A Guide to Understanding Language* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2nd ed., 2003), 21.

8 Geoffrey Finch notes that his “list is based on a traditional one compiled by A. Ingraham (Swain School Lectures, 1903) which is frequently used as a starting point for discussing the uses of language”, in: *ibidem*, 45.

5) the reasoning function (an instrument of thought); 6) the communicating function (as a means of communicating ideas and feelings) and 7) the pleasure function (to give delight).⁹ The macro functions in Finch’s classification comprise: 1) the ideational function (to conceptualise the world); 2) the interpersonal function (to interact with the world and consequently bring ourselves into being linguistically); 3) the poetic function¹⁰ (to play with the world linguistically for our pleasure) and 4) the textual function (to construct texts). This article will address these functions in the context of language being the vessel of a culture. Cultural and intercultural intricacies of its usage will thus be accentuated.

In the process of adaptation to a new cultural reality, the degree of the individual’s *preparedness*¹¹ plays a significant role along with, among other factors, earlier experiences of exposure to the environment of the host culture. As far as Polish-British relationships are concerned, the outbreak of World War II marked an over 900 year old tradition of these contacts including: dynastic,¹² diplomatic and trade links, Scottish settlement in Poland and attempts by Poles to revive their economy and regain independence, also with the help of the British. However, these relations were not strong enough to capture the imagination of an average Smith or Kowalski. Different histories and interests, of both countries, did not foster meaningful encounters conducive to common collective memory. One of the consequences of this was Polish unfamiliarity with the language of the wartime ally. Historical and political circumstances had made Poles learn French, German and Russian instead. The popularity of French in Poland paralleled other countries’ interest in France. Since the 16th century its growing political and economic importance, as well as the literary output facilitated by

9 In this article four out of the seven micro functions will be referred to. As far as reasoning, poetic and recording functions, there is no evidence of their presence in Polish veterans’ recollections. Obviously, in most cases, the combatants’ English was not good enough to allow them to make use of these functions. Some signs of the poetic function in use can be detected in Antoni Wasilewski’s book, where he reprinted sample poems from his military unit’s magazine. However, these poems were a mixture of Polish and English words, an attempt to give soldiers some practice in English and to encourage them to learn the language.

10 Geoffrey Finch notes: “Halliday identifies three principal metafunctions, namely, ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The concept of the poetic function comes from the linguist Roman Jakobson and describes a centrally important function not adequately accounted for by the other three” in: *idem, How to Study*, 45.

11 *Preparedness* – “the mental, emotional, and motivational readiness to deal with the new cultural environment, including the understanding of the host language and culture” Young Yun Kim “Adapting to a New Culture: An Integrative Communication Theory”, in: *Theorising about Intercultural Communication*, ed. William B. Gudykunst (London, New Delhi: Sage Publications Thousand Oaks, 2005), 389.

12 E.g. Canute the Great’s mother was Świętosława, the sister of Polish king Bolesław Chrobry (967–1025).

the stabilisation of its literary language, triggered “the invasion of French language and culture”. The country’s court etiquette, art and science were emulated in Western Europe. French was the language of diplomacy.¹³ The vehicles for the propagating of anything of French origin in Poland were Polish-French royal marriages, the reign of the Wettins in the 18th century who used French at their court, and French orders and trade contacts.¹⁴ Since 1772, when Poland was partitioned among the neighbouring states of Russia, Prussia and Austria and consequently ceased to exist after the third partition in 1795, the German and Russian languages became tools of the occupiers who aimed to uproot Polish national identity and, by implication, oust French as the main foreign language. When Poland regained independence in 1918, German continued to be a popular language, being the language of the neighbour state and an enemy.¹⁵ French never lost its attractiveness but it also gained political meaning. Poles relied on France to help them regain freedom and so they fought on Napoleon Bonaparte’s side in the 19th century. After the failed national uprisings they emigrated mainly to France where they found refuge and campaigned for the Polish cause. In interwar Europe, apart from French and German, English continued to be used.¹⁶ While it is true that independent Poland introduced English into its system of education, it was still neglected, whereas German was thriving. Data from 1929 and from 1934 (in brackets) show that English was taught in 48 (48) vs. German in 603 (698) state and private high schools, to 80,270 (52,993) vs. 177,304 (159,260) pupils.¹⁷ English was unpopular. Discussing the relationship between emotions and languages, Zagajewski wrote that Poles had a friendly attitude towards French but were cool towards English.¹⁸ Academics and school teachers sounded the alarm about the low status of English. At the same time, articles about the significance of English as a world language were published. The philologist Zygmunt Czerny raised his concerns and called for changing this “antinationnal anomaly”, as he called it:

Currently in numbers considerably less English is taught in Poland than by the occupiers on the same territory before 1914. In many provinces English is not taught at all, whereas

13 Michał Cieśla, *Dzieje języków obcych w zarysie* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1974), 38–40.

14 Ibidem, 48–51.

15 Ibidem, 245.

16 Ibidem, 237.

17 The data comes from the following periodicals: *Języki Nowożytne* (1929): 69–70 and *Oświata i Wychowawanie* 8/10 (1934); Zygmunt Czerny „Ustrój nauczania języków obcych w polskiej szkole średniej”, in: *Z problematyki nauczania języków obcych. Wybór artykułów z książki pamiątkowej i zjazdu neofilologów (1929) i z „Neofilologa” (1930–1939)*, ed. Antoni Prejbisz (Warszawa: Państwowe Zakłady Wydawnictw Szkolnych, 1962), 217.

18 Karol Zagajewski, „Reakcje uczuciowe przy poznawaniu obcych kultur”, *Neofilolog* 4 (1938): 221.

in others its instruction is exceptionally modest. And yet there are several million Polish citizens who have to live with the Anglo-Saxons,¹⁹ and Polish economic exchange with the Anglo-Saxon countries, or carried out with the help of the English language, amounts to half of the entire trade. Polish culture can only benefit from an intensification of the Anglo-Saxon influence treated as a completion of, or balance to, the influences of other cultures on Polish culture.²⁰

He then appealed for a significant increase in the number of English classes and pupils learning English as an obligatory subject and concluded “I postulate this out of the deepest feeling of duty that we should redress the damage inflicted on the Polish culture and economy by the present system of foreign language teaching”.²¹ The implementation of changes suggested by Czerny and others was brought to a halt due to the outbreak of war on September 1, 1939.

The Polish military, which arrived in the British Isles during the war, found favourable environmental conditions for cultural adaptation. In particular, the imminence of the Battle of Britain consolidated society against a common threat and created positive *host receptivity*²², which overall continued throughout the war period.²³ Operational readiness and communicative competence (the communicating function of the language) were of paramount importance. To put it simply, since communication is a two-way process, when on duty Poles were expected to receive and understand orders, instructions and other messages coming from their British commanders, operational unit staff and comrades-in-arms, including the ground crew. Combatants admitted that the foreign language command did pose problems, especially at the beginning of their stay in Britain. English language classes became a priority but, together with military training courses, they brought strife among allies. British attempts to make Poles learn operational vocabulary clashed with the determination of Polish combatants to get airborne, and this grew their sense of frustration that rather than fight the enemy they were chained to classroom desks. Poles, many of whom were well trained in schools in their country and had already taken part in two war campaigns in Poland and in France, found it patronizing and snobbish on the part of their British commanders to prolong exercises. Polish pilot Witold Urbanowicz, the commander of

19 Apparently he was referring to Poles who had emigrated to the USA.

20 Zygmunt Czerny „Ustrój”, 221–222. All translations from Polish into English are mine [JW].

21 Ibidem.

22 *Host receptivity* – similarly to “interaction potential” “acquaintance potential” the term “refers to the degree to which a given environment is structurally and psychologically accessible and open to strangers”, Kim “Adapting”, 389.

23 On a larger scale, the dynamics of the British openness was dependent on the political developments related to Polish-Soviet relations.

the legendary 303 Fighter Squadron, reproached the British Wing Commander Ronald Kellett: "I brought my cadets from Poland through Romania, Syria and France. My men did not come all this way to sit around learning English."²⁴ The British, on other hand, complained about linguistic indiscipline of the Slavs, who would not pay much attention to the precision of English grammar and produced random meanings: "Rebuking a Pole was a waste of time. He would appear to understand, give a magnificent salute and then go away and default again."²⁵ Problems intensified when combined with conflicts over the dominating role of British commanders placed in Polish manned units to reduce the language barrier. Waław Król, a fighter pilot, hinted that the British criticism of Polish ignorance of English became a veiled form of expression of superiority: "On the whole, he [Flight Lieutenant Farmer] was kind towards Poles, but demanding. Sometimes when he did not like something he got excited and even fumed loudly. He seemed not to understand why, up to now, Poles would not learn the English language."²⁶ However, if Polish combatants were exposed to "host conformity pressure",²⁷ then it must be noted that examples to the contrary were also true. To facilitate language acquisition by diminishing mutual distance and showing understanding, the RAF officer John Kent taught Polish aviators the names for aircraft parts and flying procedures by firstly learning their Polish equivalents.²⁸ In return, he was rewarded by being named "Kentowski" by his students.²⁹ The "-ski" ending is typical of Polish male surnames, which meant that the officer's surname was polonised. The same was done, this time out of his own free will, by the British adjutant D. A. Upton who, on his departure from the Kościuszko Squadron, left his words of thanks in the Squadron's diary and signed his name with its polonised version – "Uptonski".³⁰

24 "Bloody Foreigners" *The Untold Battle of Britain* (2010) written and directed by Carl Hindmarch. Darlow Smithson Productions for Channel 4, first broadcast 29 June 2010.

25 Adam Zamojski, *The Forgotten Few. The Polish Air Force in World War II* (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Aviation, 2010), 59.

26 "Wobec Polaków był na ogół uprzejmy lecz wymagający. Gdy czasem mu się coś nie spodobało, podniecał się i nawet głośno wybuchał. Zdawał się nie rozumieć, dlaczego Polacy dotąd nie nauczyli się języka angielskiego". Waław Król, *Walczyłem pod niebem Londynu* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1982), 74.

27 "Host conformity pressure refers to the extent to which the environment challenges strangers to act in accordance with the normative patterns of the host culture and its communications system", Kim "Adopting", 388.

28 "He wrote out the Polish words phonetically on his pant leg so that he could have them available when giving instructions in the air" Lynne Olson, Stanley Cloud, *A Question of Honour. The Kościuszko Squadron: Forgotten Heroes of World War II* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 120.

29 Ibidem.

30 Ibidem, 164.

To be confident participants of cultural exchanges, Polish speakers had to make sure that they knew the names and meanings of individual words (the identifying function of the language) also outside the battlegrounds. The ability to name things ensures security by introducing familiarity to an otherwise alien environment and makes objects subordinated to men. As Finch says:

Language not only allows us to record, but also to identify, with considerable precision, an enormous array of objects and events, without which it would be very difficult to make sense of the world around us. Learning the names of things allows us to refer quickly and accurately to them; it gives us power over them.³¹

Researchers in intercultural communication agree that, to adjust to a new culture, sojourners³² try to control uncertainty and anxiety.³³ For most veterans, the United Kingdom was a *terra incognita* which could be an overwhelming experience. To cope with the unknown they reached for word identification as soon as they came to, what they called, “Last Hope Island”. Wasilewski, a soldier, commented on the first English city he saw: “We are leaving Liverpool behind. Somebody had already explained that liver means *wątroba* [Polish for “liver”] and pool is *zbiornik, kadź* [Polish words for “pool”].” Apparently, translating proper names does not make much sense and it may have nothing to do with looking for the etymology of words either.³⁴ It might have been mere curiosity but also an effort to control what was otherwise uncontrollable. As we learn from the veterans’ accounts, this is what the British did, too, when they anglicised Polish names, which was a coping mechanism to manage the pronunciation of the Polish language and/or a mark of appreciation and symbolic welcome to their community. Consequently, Stanisław became Stanley, Józef Joseph or Władysław Vladek.³⁵

31 Finch, *How*, 29.

32 “Sojourners are visitors who travel to another culture to reside for a period of time (e.g. a few months to several years), but do *not* intend to reside permanently in the host culture”, William B. Gudykunst “An Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory of Strangers’ Intercultural Adjustment”, in: *Theorising about Intercultural Communication*, 419.

33 Ibidem, 421.

34 The origin of the name Liverpool is as follows: “English city on the River Mersey, *Liuerpul* (c.1190) ‘Pool with Muddy Water,’ from Old English *lifer* ‘thick, clotted water’ + *pol* (see pool (n.1)). ‘The original reference was to a pool or tidal creek now filled up into which two streams drained’ [Victor Watts, *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 2004]. The adjective and noun *Liverpudlian* (with jocular substitution of *puddle* for *pool*) is attested from 1833, Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed 25.05.2016, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=Liverpool>.

35 Antoni Wasilewski, *W szkocką*, 204.

In his theory of apperception from the beginning of the 20th century, Jan Rozwadowski drew on psychology to show the relationship between cognition and the word-formation processes. Renata Grzegorzycykowa elucidates Rozwadowski's assumptions:

We get to know the reality by recognising in it the elements we are familiar with whereas the element which is new is categorised into the general class of familiar objects and at the same time we distinguish a new distinct characteristic. This can be observed e.g. in the speech of children who name an object unknown to them by referring to some other, semantically closest word, and by indicating its distinguishing trait (e.g. a *striped horse* 'zebra').³⁶

This idea may be applied to the study of the cultural reality surrounding Polish military. Memoirs show that to understand the other, Poles referred to the concepts which had already been known to them. In other words, they perceived the world through their own small world – their experience, knowledge, tradition, etc. (an idea developed also by Witold Doroszewski). When Wasilewski inserted English words in his recollections, he at the same time attempted to find their approximate semantic equivalence in Polish resorting to what was culturally close to his Polish readers. Since some things common in Britain were nonexistent in Poland, e.g. hot-dogs, veterans provided their brief descriptions: "There came also barrels of Scottish beer, piles of plates, glasses, cups and, at the last moment, boxes and baskets with cookies and the so called *hot-dogs*, that is rolls with frankfurters [emphasis mine]."³⁷ Similarly, the English word "sandwiches" was defined by the diarist as *kanapki w kształcie trójkątów* [sandwiches in the shape of triangles]. Apparently, Poles were more familiar with open sandwiches which, for their British allies, would pass for canapés and two pieces of bread would only qualify as a sandwich. Furthermore, unlike Poles who would rather add lemon to their tea, the inhabitants of the British Isles drank it with milk. This was reflected in the Polish translation of "cup of tea". The literal translation would be *filizanka herbaty* but in Wasilewski's book it becomes *herbata z mlekiem*, that is "tea with milk".³⁸ The reason for this may be his poor command of English and/or his attempt to emphasise the different culture of tea drinking.³⁹

36 Renata Grzegorzycykowa, *Zarys słowotwórstwa polskiego. Słowotwórstwo opisowe* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwa Naukowe, 3rd ed. revised, 1979), 25.

37 "Zjechały też beczki piwa szkockiego, stopy talerzy, szklanek, filizanek, a w ostatniej chwili pudła i kosze ciastek oraz tzw. hot-dogs, tj. bułki z parówkami", Wasilewski, *W szkocką*, 87.

38 Poles did not usually add milk to tea, hence this cultural difference was indicated not only by means of a word-for-word translation into Polish, but also by adding information that the tea was with milk.

39 "Podają herbatę z mlekiem tzw. cup of tea", Wasilewski, *W szkocką*, 18.

If WWII Poles could take lessons on British customs then the opposite was also true. When Mr. Wilson, a pub owner in Scotland, complained about the behavior of drunk Poles, Wasilewski introduced him to the concept of Polish *kanapki* [canapés] which were to be a panacea for this problem: “Poles have strong heads but they have to have something to nibble when they drink, and here beer is the only zagrycha!”⁴⁰ Even though the Scotsman did not believe him that *kanapki* were a good idea, his wife was eager to try. Wasilewski taught her how to make them and soon the number of canapés sold went up from 48 to 300 a day as Poles who learnt about Polish *kanapki* visited the pub in great numbers. “Kind-hearted Mr. Wilson found no words to thank me for this idea (...)” remembers the combatant, “and at parting he stuttered out that he earned over 300 pounds on these Polish *kanapki* (...). Apparently my notice in the window – Polish *kanapki* – survived for a couple of years, commemorating the Polish stay there.” “However, *kanapki* did not catch on among the Scots. Tradition is stronger there, as strong as the repugnance to the onion,”⁴¹ concluded the Pole.⁴² In the end, the Scottish people learned much more than just a Polish word. After all, *kanapki*, the example of an arbitrary signifier, were the carrier of various cultural meanings. The British learnt about Polish drinking patterns, and both sides realised that, as a social phenomenon, alcohol use may differ depending on the country (culture) we live in. Consequently, the places where one drinks alcohol may differ too. Mr. Wilson found out that the Polish equivalent of a Scottish pub is different because even though both do not have to have a restaurant service, in Polish bars one can still have food, which is a cultural response to the custom of drinking alcohol along with the consumption of food. The failure of the *kanapki project* in post-war Scotland proved the incompatibility of consumer identities. Food could unite in the liminal war period, but as soon as the war finished so did the liminal food negotiation patterns. *Kanapki* did serve its purpose for Poles though. Through “smuggling” their culinary culture, they could not only assist the allied civilians in developing their intercultural businesses, but they could also find another way to retain and practise their own national identities.

The identification processes, of words and phrases that were otherwise difficult to name, could be supported by non-linguistic measures. Cartoonist Wasilewski took

40 “Polacy mają silne głowy, tylko jak piją, muszą też jeść, muszą przegryzać, a u was na zagrychę jest tylko piwo”. Zagrycha (zakąska) – a kind of appetizer accompanying an alcoholic beverage. Ibidem, 75.

41 Onion was a constitutive ingredient of these Polish canapés.

42 “Poczciwy mr Wilson nie miał dość słów podzięk za ten mój pomysł. (...) na pożegnanie wykrztusił, że na tych polish kanapki zarobił przeszło 300 funtów. (...) Ponoć ten mój napis w oknie – polish kanapki – przetrwał kilka lat, znacząc pobyt Polaków. Jednak kanapki nie przyjęły się wśród Szkotów. Tradycja jest u nich silniejsza, równie silna jak wstręt do cebuli”. Wasilewski, *W szkocką*, 77.

advantage of his artistic skills, as he admitted he could not rely on his knowledge of the language since he was not a talented English learner. As he found out though, even then one could not get away from the word categorisation system if the control of reality was to be effective. He recalled the reaction of a “Fish and Chips” bar waitress when she saw his picture of an obviously distorted image of a hen: “I drew a hen and two eggs flying out of it into a glass. I simply wanted to order two eggs in a glass. The Scotswoman looked surprised at the enigmatic cartoon and the order, smiled and, shaking her head, stuttered out: Sorry, but here roosters don’t lay eggs!”⁴³ Problems also occurred when, due to mispronunciation, the words spoken by Poles described a reality different than they had intended. This happened, for instance, when soldiers were interested in viewing apartments but were given alcohol instead, the consequence of their mispronunciation of the word “room” which for the native inhabitants’ ear sounded like “rum”. Similarly, questions about the “bus” turned into requests about a “bath”.⁴⁴ Combatants were ready to violate military discipline rules rather than have their reputation among the British tarnished:

The duty officer asked about the reason for my late coming. ‘Bath, lieutenant’. (...) Well, coming back to the bus station last night I asked a Scotswoman ‘bas’, thinking of autobus [Polish for *a bus*]. She invited me to her place, prepared a bath and then ‘a cup of tea’. I drank it, thanked her and left. In the street I asked another Scotswoman: ‘bas’. She also invited me to take a bath and I had to have another meal. This way I missed the last bus. ‘But couldn’t you explain to them?’ – the officer asked. – ‘I don’t know English’ – the soldier replied – ‘and if I had declined, the Scotswoman could have thought that Poles are dirty’.⁴⁵

From a cultural point of view, the concern about being perceived as dirty, and thus giving in to the hosts’ expectations, did not (only) have to be an expression of

43 “Narysowałem kurę, a z niej wylatujące do szklanki dwa jajka. Chciałem po prostu zamówić dwa jajka w szklance. Szkotka ze zdziwieniem spojrzała na tajemniczy rysunek i zamówienie, uśmiechnęła się, po czym kręcąc głową wykrztusiła: Sorry, ale u nas koguty nie znoszą jaj!” Wasilewski, *W szkocką*, 68.

44 Wiktor Tomaszewski, *Na szkockiej ziemi. Wspomnienia wojenne ze służby zdrowia i z Polskiego Wydziału Lekarskiego w Edynburgu* (Londyn: The White Eagle Press, 1976), 63.

45 “Oficer służbowy zapytał się, co było powodem spóźnienia. ‘Kąpiel, panie poruczniku’ (...) Ano, wracając wieczorem na stację autobusową, zapytałem się Szkotki: ‘bas’, myśląc o autobusie. Szkotka zaprosiła mnie do siebie, przygotowała kąpiel, a po kąpeli ‘cup of tea’ – herbata. Wypiłem, podziękowałem i wyszedłem. Na ulicy zapytałem się innej Szkotki: ‘bas’. Ta zaprosiła mnie również na kąpiel i musiałem zjeść drugi posiłek. Tak ostatni autobus odszedł!”. “Jak to”, rzekł oficer, ‘nie mogliście jej wytłumaczyć?’. ‘Nie znam angielskiego’ odpowiedział żołnierz, ‘i gdybym odmówił, Szkotka mogłaby pomyśleć, że Polacy są brudni’. Ibidem.

subordination to the dominant culture and/or showing it due respect. It could also be a manifestation of a deliberate policy of the Polish military to promote a positive image of their country abroad. One of the first wartime issues of the edited abroad Polish Air Force newsletter called for a sociocultural adjustment: "Let us be gentlemen! Let us look at the English and observe them, let us study their better qualities and appropriate them. We are not tourists who do not need to adapt themselves to the manners of the country. We are soldiers of the Polish forces, and the eyes of all Englishmen are upon us."⁴⁶ Soldier Wasilewski recalled the eagerness with which recruits tried to adjust to these recommendations right after approaching Albion:

Six in the morning – they wake us up. We arrived in some big port. (...) everybody shaves. Yesterday's lecture about[English] gentlemen works. The order was given: 'Nobody can come ashore unshaved!' – everybody must be a 'gentleman'. A race for water ensued (...) Scraping beards (...) with and against facial hair. (...) Actually, everybody looks like an Englishman [now], they are already shaved and have their boots cleaned.⁴⁷

Soldiers, even if fluent enough to have conversations in English, were not always aware of the cultural weight of individual words which made them prone to breaking conventions by adopting inappropriate register. Terms which classify forms of address would then be mixed up and selected words used in wrong social contexts. This is what happened to a Polish major who probably never forgot his encounter with the British Queen on the occasion of her visit to Forfar, Scotland, where the Polish army was stationed. Eager to seize the rare opportunity to talk to the Queen and apparently to show off his language skills in front of the rank and file, he ended up putting himself in an embarrassing situation. As soon as he started talking, the Queen Mother burst into unstoppable laughter which was so infectious that it made the Polish soldiers, the ones he wanted to impress, laugh too. The queen explained that never before had anybody addressed her as "Madam".⁴⁸ The major could not know that the proper mode of address was "Your Majesty", and then "Ma'am". The language incompetence displayed by this utterance could have been all the more hurtful due to the fact that Polish culture is characterized by a considerably high power distance

46 Zamoyski, *The Forgotten*, 60.

47 "Godzina szósta rano – budzą nas. Dopłynęliśmy do jakiegoś dużego portu. (...) wszyscy gołą się. Wczorajszy wykład o [angielskich] dżentelmenach poskutkował. Padł rozkaz: 'Nikomiu nie wolno zejść na ląd nie ogolonym!' – każdy musi być 'gentlemanem'! Pogoń więc za wodą. (...) skrobanie bród (...) pod włos i za włos. (...) Właściwie to wszyscy robią wrażenie Anglików, są już ogoleni i mają wyczyszczone buty", Wasilewski, *W szkocką*, 14–15.

48 Adam Majewski, *Wojna, ludzie i medycyna* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1987), 136–137.

index,⁴⁹ and such a mistake in front of his subordinates could undermine the major's authority.

In combatants' interactions with the civilian population, the phatic function of the language came to the fore. Language in the phatic context is formulaic and meaningless but ensures social bonding.⁵⁰ Examples include "inquiries about health, comments on weather, affirmation of some supremely obvious state of things".⁵¹ The psychiatrist Eric Berne compares it to "stroking", which corresponds to the cuddling which children get from adults.⁵² Many Poles, especially soon after their arrival in Britain, had problems with expressing even such basic ideas in a foreign language and, unsurprisingly, felt awkward in situations which required "ritualised exchanges".⁵³ Rather than risking strained moments of silence or equally embarrassing gaffes, some would avoid social encounters. Others resorted to less socially attractive topics of conversation, looking for alternative solutions in conducting small talks. The soldier and doctor Adam Majewski recalls communicating with newly-acquainted British women from FANY (The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry): "Conversation at dinner, conducted partially using sign language and partially with broken English, revolved around such topics as the name for a spoon, fork, salt, bread and soup. They explained to us what a given thing is called in English and how to pronounce it properly and asked for the Polish names of these things."⁵⁴ The lack of social language competence could also translate into missed chances of developing closer relationships with the women one fancied. Bomber pilot Ludwik Domański and his friend's unsuccessful attempt at picking up women turned them into objects of mockery among their colleagues. When once on a stroll in a park they tried to stop two females who were passing by. The situation demanded a quick reaction. However, after the initial "Hello" they were unable to continue the conversation. Aware of time running out, they uttered the only words they remembered from their last English lesson: "Do you like potatoes and umbrellas?" This unconventional way of striking up an acquaintanceship proved a

49 Power distance is one of the dimensions of national cultures distinguished in *Cultures and Organisations...* A high score in this dimension is characteristic of hierarchical countries, which display "considerable dependence of subordinates on bosses". In an educational environment teachers are "gurus who transfer personal wisdom", Hofstede et al., *Cultures and Organisations*, 61, 72, 73.

50 Finch, *How*, 22–23.

51 Malinowski Bronisław from Randolph Quirk in Geoffrey Finch, *How*, 22.

52 Finch, *How*, 23.

53 Ibidem, 25.

54 "Przy obiedzie rozmowa, prowadzona częściowo na migi, częściowo łamaną angielszczyzną, obracała się wokół takich tematów, jak nazwa łyżki, widelca, soli, chleba, zupy. One tłumaczyły nam, jak się dany przedmiot nazywa po angielsku i jak go należy poprawnie wymawiać i nawzajem dopytywały się o nazwy polskie", Majewski, *Wojna*, 120.

failure: “Taken aback by such a strange question they [the girls] turned and walked away”.⁵⁵ Unsophisticated introductions, including “you very beautiful”, and other phrases that were memorized by heart, brought to some British women’s mind the “Me Tarzan – You Jane” scene.⁵⁶

Oral phatic language has its “written equivalent”. In the case of letters, their opening and closing formulas serve as examples.⁵⁷ Fighter pilot Bernard K. Buchwald, an eager language learner, practiced his skills also writing letters and asking the addressees about feedback on his performance. On one occasion the feedback he received was *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. The telling present came in response to a letter which Buchwald wanted to end with “May Lord protect you” [niech cię Bóg zachowa w swej opiece], but he translated it as: “May God pickle you”.⁵⁸ On another occasion, acting formally in his capacity as the censor of private correspondence written by soldiers, and unaware of cultural symbols, he would diligently erase all crosses at the bottom of soldiers’ letters which he found to be “suspicious”, but left nature and weather descriptions, which he enjoyed reading. He realised quite quickly that his intuition had led him astray and that he was supposed to do exactly the opposite since it was weather accounts which belonged to classified data whereas crosses, standing for kisses, were harmless. Finch warns that a lack of awareness of phatic language wording may result in “considerable embarrassment and even bad feeling”.⁵⁹ Buchwald’s reaction confirms that these errors should not be seen in isolation and counted among language deficiencies only. The pilot felt guilty

55 Ludwik B. Domański, *My Flights to Freedom* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Biuro Tłumaczeń, 2002), 47.

56 Zamoyski, *The Forgotten*, 61.

57 Finch, *How*, 23.

58 Bernard Karol Buchwald, *Od Wrony do Spitfire’a. Wspomnienia pilota* (Poznań: „Comp-Druk”, 1999), 103. This kind of mistake was not only restricted to Buchwald. Adam Zamoyski cites a similar example: “One British bomber crew setting off on a dangerous mission was nonplussed when one of their Polish colleagues drew himself up and sent them on their way with a valedictory ‘May God pickle you, gentlemen!’”, 167.

The origins of this mistake can be found e.g. in John Frayn Turner’s (*Periscope Patrol: The Saga of the Malta Force Submarines* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2008), 128): “A wealth of humour lay behind Commander Karnicki’s [Borys Karnicki – commodore in Polish navy] deep-set eyes, but he was slightly bewildered at times by the notorious vagaries of the English language. He took genuine delight in recounting his latest *faux pas*. One of the most amusing occurred at the end of a party at a house in Malta. After thoroughly enjoying himself, he went up to thank his hostess for the enchanting evening. He had prepared his phrase in advance – for safety, as he thought. When taking his leave he astounded the lady by making a formal Polish bow over her outstretched hand and saying in all solemnity, ‘God pickle you, madam.’ ‘You see,’ he explained subsequently to Shrimp Simpson shaking with joy, ‘my English was not so good then. I wanted to say the right thing. In Poland we say ‘God preserve you.’ So what do I do? I look in the dictionary for the word and I find ‘to pickle or preserve’. So I say ‘God pickle you!’”.

59 Finch, *How*, 24.

of “depriv[ing] mothers, wives, girls and sisters of signs of love from the authors of the letters.”⁶⁰ Other Polish participants of social encounters felt equally uncomfortable, unable to engage in more sophisticated social discourses. Interestingly, communication failures did not discourage Buchwald from learning the language. After the war he studied English at the British university and then continued his studies at the University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań, Poland, where he received a PhD in the humanities. This pilot is an example of a successful intercultural learner displaying personality traits facilitating the adaptation process in a foreign environment: openness (to new information), strength (to stay confident while coping with adversities and risk), and positivity (optimism and “self-trust”).⁶¹ Lack of these in language learners “would weaken their adaptive capacity and would serve as self-imposed psychological barriers against their own adaptation”.⁶²

Although the record of a conscious use of the physiological purpose of the English language by Poles in their memoirs seems nonexistent, veterans were affected by it. One of the functions of language is “to relieve the physical and nervous energy generated by emotional distress”.⁶³ The latter was part and parcel of the war, and some soldiers reached for so-called “bad language”⁶⁴ as a “coping mechanism”.⁶⁵ Proof of the brutalising power of the war itself,⁶⁶ such language paradoxically helped to alleviate the consequences of this brutalisation: “The particular horrors of these wars [WWI and WWII] – the constant threat of death by poison gas and machine guns, trench warfare, incendiary bombing – led to feelings of rage and helplessness that needed an outlet in frequent swearing”.⁶⁷ Majewski commented on the British soldiers with whom the Polish army travelled:

Now we realised how talkative the English were. The word that reached us most often sounded for us like “faken”. There is no spelling of this word even in the Oxford dictionary. When I tried to count its use, we came to the conclusion that the word is repeated five times more often than any other [English] word. All around us we could hear “faken war”,

60 Buchwald, *Od Wrony*, 103.

61 Kim “Adapting”, 390.

62 Ibidem, 391.

63 Finch, *How*, 21.

64 Ibidem, 22.

65 Tim Cook, “Fighting Words: Canadian Soldiers’ Slang and Swearing in the Great War”, in: Emma Mason, *Slang and swear words helped soldiers survive the ‘First World War’*, accessed 02.04.2016, <http://www.historyextra.com/warslang>.

66 Julian Walker, “Swearing”, accessed 02.04.2016, <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/swearing>.

67 Melissa Mohr, *Holy Sh*t: A Brief History of Swearing* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 227.

“faken Japs”, “faken officers”, “faken command”, “faken sea”, “faken weather” etc. etc. When I was finally falling asleep, dozens of conversations which reached my ears merged into the monotonous intonation of the word which reminded me of the croaking of Polish frogs. I think our soldiers were correct when they called them [the English] “fakeny”⁶⁸.

The usefulness of the word (“fucking”) Majewski was unfamiliar with and tried to give meaning to did not lie in its “conceptual content”, but in its social taboo status which, when activated, gave the speaker quick emotional relief because the “vocabulary of violence” corresponded to the user’s feelings.⁶⁹ Furthermore, cursing, a part of the military life, acquired the significance of occupational bonding, reinforcing identity and the norms of masculinity.⁷⁰ During the Great War “bad language” had already become so common that some words, including *fuck*, lost their intensity.⁷¹ Julian Walker continues: “Frequently ‘fucking’ and ‘bloody’ were used as palliatives, so that the order to ‘get your fucking rifles’ was recognised as considerably less urgent than the order to ‘get your rifles’”.⁷² One cannot rule out, of course, the fact that class issue was also at stake. In this case, rather than strengthen belonging, cursing would have the reverse effect as middle-class troops found it difficult to fit in and isolated themselves from what they considered obscene and thus unacceptable.⁷³

We do not know whether the lack of knowledge of curse words had more far reaching consequences for Majewski and his colleagues, but there were social contexts when this ignorance could hit back. Commodore Borys Karnicki, learnt it the hard way in a conversation with the British Vice Admiral Max Horton on the formal occasion of the latter’s inspection of the Polish submarine *Wilk* [Wolf]. Taking for granted his good command of English, the veteran used the word he had heard from a Scottish foreman and which sounded to him like “foggy” and was, as he later admitted, “the word that every sailor knows”. Consequently, the British high naval officer learnt

68 “Teraz przekonałiśmy się, jacy Anglicy są gadatliwi. Najwięcej przy tym dochodził nas dźwięk słowa, które dla naszego ucha brzmiało ‘faken’. Pisowni tego wyrazu nie ma nawet w słowniku oxfordzkim. Gdy próbowałem liczyć, to stwierdziliśmy, że powtarza się pięć razy więcej od każdego innego wyrazu. Ze wszystkich stron dochodziło nas ‘faken war’, ‘faken Jerry’, ‘faken Japs’, ‘faken officers’, ‘faken command’, ‘faken sea’, ‘faken weather’, itd. itd. Gdy w końcu zasypiałem, to dziesiątki rozmów, które dochodziły do moich uszu, zlewały się w jedностajną intonację tego wyrazu przypominającego mi kumkanie polskich żab. Wydaje mi się, że nasi żołnierze mieli słuszność, gdy mówili o nich: te ‘fakeny’, Majewski, *Wojna*, 200–201.

69 Finch, *How*, 22.

70 See e.g. Julian Walker “Swearing” and Cook “Fighting”.

71 Edwin Battistella, *Bad Language: Are Some Words Better Than Others?* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 81.

72 Walker “Swearing”.

73 Ibidem.

from the Polish submarine commander that due to “fucking weather” the painting of the warship had to be stopped. Karnicki recorded the reaction of the Briton in his recollections: “The admiral looked at me in surprise. – F..., indeed [he answered]”.⁷⁴

The lack of, or insufficient knowledge of, the host country’s language prevented Poles from effectively using language functions, which had a direct impact on the intercultural context of Polish-British relations. In the war reality, communication flaws could impinge on the allied performance on the battlefield, leading to (fatal) accidents. As presented above, placing Polish combatants under English speaking commanders helped to overcome the language barrier but, on the other hand, created imbalance in power relations. In some instances such solutions were construed by Poles in terms of control which, in individual cases, was confirmed by these commanders overstepping their authority and the existence of host conformity pressure. Similarly, language and training courses conflicted with both Polish eagerness to go into active warfare and their considerable combat experience. They also aroused hostility, as they were perceived as a mark of alleged British swaggering snobbery. Combined with operational supremacy of the British ally, this may have given an impression of Poles being subjugated to a dominating British culture.

Apart from being an operational barrier, language was also a social challenge. “Our own culture is to us like the air we breathe, while another culture is like water—and it takes special skills to be able to survive in both elements”, says Hofstede Geert et al.⁷⁵ Managing this sociocultural uncertainty was stressful for both parties, even if Poles expressed openness in their attitudes and were met with receptive host environment. For some veterans, the process of adaptation was too demanding and they stuck to the company of their compatriots. Others would be more adventurous intercultural learners and adapt more easily to the new environment. Actually, in wartime circumstances, social mingling was encouraged to break prejudices and foster friendly allied coexistence. Such contacts had an additional psychological value since, uprooted from their homeland, the Polish military could not rely on their traditional family and social links to relieve combat trauma.

Language exchanges were also a transmission belt for identity issues. The combatants’ own response to language mistakes could be dictated as much by the sensitivity to the host culture as by the interests of the national image. The words Poles introduced into the language and cultural repertoire of the other strengthened their identi-

74 “Na pokładzie wyjaśniłem mu, że z powodu f... pogody (staralem się powtórzyć wiernie słowo użyte przez formana) przerwaliśmy malowanie okrętu. Admirał popatrzył na mnie ze zdziwieniem. ‘F..., indeed’”, Borys Karnicki, *Marynarzski worek wspomnień* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1987), 89–90.

75 Hofstede et al., *Cultures and Organisations*, 23.

ties by bringing the meanings of home culture into the foreign land. By underlining differences between their own and the allied cultures, such word implementation allowed for repetitive processes of defining oneself. The unintentional play with the language that Poles exercised due to their lack of knowledge and which, at times, was taken for language insubordination, contributed to a new British identity, language and culture wise. By using English in their own creative way, and for their own ends, by constant, dynamic codification of it, the Slavs made the host language more flexible and turned it into a lingua franca as early as the 1940s. Borrowing from Umberto Eco, who used the term referring to the theory of codes and mass communication, we can compare the intercultural encounters between the Poles and the Britons to "a semiotic guerrilla warfare",⁷⁶ an underground battle over the language. This hidden warfare was not about violence, bloodshed and weapons, but about signs. The warfare would result in a hybrid culture (even if for brief moments) where British culture was as much a hybrid as the Polish one.

Overall, the examples analysed in this article illustrate that, as far as the language is concerned, wartime Poles did not fundamentally differ from peace-time sojourners, struggling with communication in foreign environments, which may attest to the universality of the language experience. At the same time, it is the commonality of the experience and aim (this struggle for intercultural competence) which, at times, might have diverted veterans' attention from the horrors of combat zones and made them look to intercultural competence as a kind of refuge to bring a sense of normality. Even if just for this end, the battle for words was worth fighting.

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76 Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 150, note 27.

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Abstract

This article discusses Polish-British cultural encounters, in Britain, during World War II. On the basis of selected Polish veterans’ recollections, the author attempts to examine the struggle of Poles with the English language (mostly unknown to them) and put it into the cultural framework of intercultural communication. The analysis proves what scholars of various disciplines note, that language is not only an instrumental communicative medium, but it also influences the cultural world in which we live. In the case of Polish combatants, their inefficient use of the English language, and subsequent inability to use all its functions properly, impinged on the dynamics of power, socialising processes and issues of identity, which contributed to the nature of the allied military relations and cultural adaptation.

Keywords: World War II, Polish-British cultural relations, intercultural communication, recollections

“NIECH CIĘ BÓG ZAKONSERWUJE” (MAY GOD PICKLE YOU) –
MIĘDZYKULTUROWA BITWA O SŁOWA WE WSPOMNIENIACH
POLSKICH WETERANÓW II WOJNY ŚWIATOWEJ

Streszczenie

W artykule zanalizowano polsko-brytyjskie relacje kulturowe w czasie II wojny światowej, opierając się na literaturze wspomnieniowej autorstwa polskich weteranów. Analiza językowych zmagania Polaków (z których większość nie znała angielskiego) ujęta jest w ramy komunikacji międzykulturowej i pokazuje, że ich brak kompetencji językowych oraz wynikająca z tego nieumiejętność (właściwego) zastosowania funkcji języka, wpływała na dynamikę sił (power relations), relacje społeczne i towarzyskie oraz kwestie tożsamościowe, co ostatecznie przyczyniało się do kształtu alianckich relacji wojskowych oraz kulturowej adaptacji Polaków.

Słowa kluczowe: II wojna światowa, polsko-brytyjskie relacje kulturowe, komunikacja międzykulturowa, literatura wspomnieniowa