
On *bullying, mobbing* (and *harassment*) in English and Polish: Foreign-language-based Lexical Innovation in a Bilingual Dictionary

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Abstract

The present paper deals with the treatment of incipient borrowing in a bilingual dictionary. While not completely new, the topic has so far received little attention in the lexicographic literature, Adamska-Sałaciak (2004) and (2007) being among the few exceptions. Yet it is worthy of note that, in a period when dictionary making as a whole is being overhauled, the lines previously drawn regarding the lexicographic treatment of borrowing seem to be shifting as well. In particular, the requirement – not always explicitly voiced – that unless a loanword has been recorded in a monolingual dictionary of the recipient language, it is not eligible for inclusion in a bilingual dictionary (whether as an equivalent or as a headword), seems to have lost much of its force, especially with regard to the digital medium. This gives bilingual lexicographers more freedom, but at the same time puts more responsibility on their shoulders. The issue is illustrated by a discussion of a specimen case encountered in the process of updating a major English-Polish, Polish-English dictionary.

Keywords: lexical innovation; borrowing; bilingual dictionary; English; Polish

1 Background

The data for this paper comes from the second, digital edition of *The New Kosciuszko Foundation Dictionary* (henceforth *NKFD2*), a large bilingual dictionary with English and Polish edited by the present writer. The first edition, referred to here as *NKFD1*, was a traditional, print dictionary, published in 2003. It originated as an update of a much earlier work, *The Kościuszko Foundation Dictionary* (*KFD*), whose two volumes were published, respectively, in 1959 (English-Polish) and 1961 (Polish-English). What matters for the purposes of the present discussion is only the most recent incarnation of the dictionary, in particular, the Anglicisms which were added to the wordlist in its Polish-English section.

In quantitative terms, compared with its predecessor, the Polish-English part of *NKFD2* has grown by 3,987 entries, 1,018 of which are English-based.¹ This is a conservative estimate, since only items certain to have come from English have been included in the

1 The dictionary's overall number of entries is 141,444: 78,405 in the English-Polish part and 63,039 in the Polish-English one. Detailed information about *NKFD2*'s other features can be found in Adamska-Sałaciak (forthcoming).

count; ² most abbreviations have been disregarded, as have calques (loan translations) made up exclusively of native elements, such as, for example, *wielozadaniowość* 'multitasking'. The Libre Office 5.0 spellchecker fails to recognise 301 of the 1,018 items as Polish words, which suggests that the inclusion of roughly every third one of them in the wordlist may have been a judgment call for the lexicographer.

In qualitative terms, some of the newcomers are either native formations (e.g. feminine nouns, diminutives, deverbal nouns, denominal verbs, reflexive verbs) derived from English bases or variant (usually nativised) spellings. Were we to exclude all of those, concentrating solely on items of unique meaning and form, the overall number of borrowings might drop by as much as ten to fifteen per cent. Still, no matter how one counts, the fact remains that English loans constitute a sizeable proportion of the new lexis added to the Polish-English part of *NKFD2*. The following are a handful of representative examples:

- native formations derived by affixation from English stems: *wyoutować* 'to exclude; to isolate' (*informal*)
- calques: *metadane* 'metadata', *grupa fokusowa* 'focus group'
- semantic loans: *dedykowany* 'dedicated' (in the IT sense)
- accidental homonyms of existing Polish words: *czatować* 'to chat (on the Web)'³

Some innovations are more creative than average (e.g. *japiszon* 'yuppie'), one or two look like borrowings from English but are, in fact, made up of Latinate elements (e.g. *juryslingwistyka* 'branch of linguistics dealing with the language of the law'). The borrowing of some of the items could easily have been predicted, given that they are associated with new denotata; IT terms, such as *autoresponder*, or marketing ones, such as *astrourfing*, can serve as examples here. Alternatively, while the denotatum as such is not new, it had previously lacked an established name in Polish. Looking at our list of 1,018 items, the latter type seems especially prominent among lexemes describing human affairs in general, and various forms of behaviour in particular. It does not require a lot of imagination to see that the lack of a name for a particular kind of behaviour makes it more difficult to recognise instances thereof (*asertywny* 'assertive' being a case in point), not to mention defining it in the light of the law and, when appropriate, prosecuting it (as is the case, for example, with *stalking*).

At the other extreme, we find loans which seem completely redundant (e.g. *background*) in that they do not carry any (denotational) meaning that would not already be covered by an existing, perfectly equivalent native term (in this case, *tło*). If loanwords of this kind can be said to serve any function at all, it is to reveal something about the speakers/writers who opt to use them in preference to their native counterparts.⁴

The contrast between, on the one hand, "necessary loans" and, on the other, "luxury loans"⁵ has been well documented in studies of linguistic borrowing and as such does not need to be discussed here any further. Far more interesting material can be found in between the two extremes of the spectrum: in this instance, among those Anglicisms which appear neither strictly necessary nor entirely redundant in Polish. The following

² Thus, for instance, not *latte* or *pepperoni*, even though both are likely to have entered Polish via English rather than directly from Italian.

³ The native verb of the same form means 'to lie in ambush'.

⁴ This aspect is sometimes referred to in lexical semantics as social meaning (e.g. Murphy 2010: 33).

⁵ Renamed "catachrestic" vs "non-catachrestic" loans by Winter-Froemel and Onysko (2012).

small study focuses on one such case.

2 Case Study

The immediate inspiration for this paper came from listening to the radio. On 9 July 2015, a psychologist interviewed on Radio Tok FM repeatedly used the word *bullying* while speaking Polish. The broadcast followed in the wake of a teenage suicide: a fourteen-year-old had killed himself a few days earlier, apparently as a result of having been bullied by his schoolmates. The context made it clear that the psychologist was using the word *bullying* to refer to behaviour by children/teenagers which consists in persecuting another child/teenager and which takes place at a school or similar institution; he even offered a definition, treating the word as a technical term that his listeners might not have come across. What struck me was that, if he was to be believed, the loanword must have undergone a narrowing of meaning in Polish. This provided a stimulus for deciding to examine the available lexicographic and corpus evidence in order to check whether the above conclusion, based as it was on a small sample of one person's linguistic behaviour, would be corroborated. To obtain a fuller picture, the search was subsequently extended to near-synonyms of English *bullying*, namely *mobbing* and *harassment*.

2.1 Definitional evidence

Presented below is the definitional evidence from those English and Polish sources which proved the most informative in the course of preliminary research. Only the relevant bits of the definitions are quoted.

2.1.1 English sources

Wikipedia

Bullying is the use of force, threat, or [coercion](#) to [abuse](#), [intimidate](#), or aggressively [dominate](#) others. The behavior is often repeated and habitual. (...) Behaviors used to assert such domination can include verbal [harassment](#) or [threat](#), physical [assault](#) or coercion, and such acts may be directed repeatedly towards particular targets. If bullying is done by a group, it is called [mobbing](#). (...) Bullying in school and the workplace is also referred to as peer abuse. A [bullying culture](#) can develop in any context in which humans interact with each other. This includes [school](#), family, the [workplace](#), home, and neighborhoods.

OED3

Bullying: The action of the verb to bully: overbearing insolence; personal intimidation; petty tyranny. Often used with reference to schoolboy life.

Urban Dictionary

Bullying: see abuse.

As the above shows quite clearly, in English the victim of bullying may be an adult, and the perpetrators may be work colleagues, neighbours, or family members (although

the *OED3* definition suggests that the (proto)typical context is a boys' school).⁶The Wikipedia entry is the richest of the three. Among other things, it offers a glimpse into the relation between bullying and mobbing, which immediately suggests the need to take a closer look at how the latter type of behaviour is defined in the same sources. Here is what we find.

Wikipedia

Mobbing in the context of human beings means [bullying](#) of an individual by a group in any context, (...) such as a [family](#), friends, peers, [school](#), [workplace](#), [neighborhood](#), [community](#), or online. When it occurs as [emotional abuse](#) in the workplace, such as "ganging up" by co-workers, [subordinates](#) or [superiors](#), to force someone out of the workplace through [rumor](#), [innuendo](#), [intimidation](#), [humiliation](#), [discrediting](#), and [isolation](#), it is also referred to as malicious, nonsexual, nonracial, general [harassment](#).

OED3

Mobbing: The action of a mob or group of people in attacking, harassing, or crowding round a person (now esp. in adulation or acclamation); an instance of this. Also: the action or an act of congregating in a mob or crowd.

The *OED3* entry thus lacks the relevant sense, a fact that is not as easily explainable as the somewhat old-fashioned definition of *bullying*.⁷We find much more information in the crowd-sourced Urban Dictionary.⁸

Urban Dictionary

Mobbing: Also known as "workplace bullying" – playground bullying by people who are chronologically adults, directed against their colleagues.

Bullying, psychological terror or aggression, hostile workplace behavior, workplace trauma, incivility, emotional violence resulting in emotional injury affecting the target's mental and physical health.

Anne and Emily enjoyed mobbing any new employee that they perceived as a threat, until either the target broke down and attempted to fight back - and was fired - or the target quit. The two celebrated each victory by laughingly claiming that their victim had been "voted off the island."

This definition (with its accompanying example) is ranked as number 2 in the Urban Dictionary; definition number 1 describes a different sense (driving around in a group and having a good time), while definitions 3 through 6 are all similar to 2. On the whole then, when it comes to *mobbing*, the Urban Dictionary appears largely to agree with Wikipedia.

Finally, let us have a look at *harassment*, which Wikipedia offers as a synonym of

⁶ Note, however, that the OED informs us "[t]his entry has not yet been fully updated (first published 1888)".

⁷ The relevant note says: "[t]his entry has been updated (OED Third Edition, September 2002)".

⁸ The Urban Dictionary came top of the list when *mobbing define* was typed in Google. It was followed by dictionary.com (which only has definitions of *mob*, *n.* and *v.*), with Wikipedia coming next.

mobbing.

Wikipedia

Harassment covers a wide range of behaviours of an offensive nature. It is commonly understood as behaviour intended to disturb or upset, and it is characteristically repetitive. In the legal sense, it is intentional behaviour which is found threatening or disturbing. [Sexual harassment](#) refers to persistent and unwanted sexual advances, typically in the workplace, where the consequences of refusing are potentially very disadvantageous to the victim.

The most important conclusion from all of the above seems to be that, in English, *bullying* is the more general term, while *mobbing* refers to bullying perpetrated by a group. In addition, especially in the workplace context, both *mobbing* and *bullying* are sometimes treated as synonymous with *harassment* of a general (i.e. neither sexual nor racial) nature, as well as, occasionally, with *peer abuse*.

2.1.2 Polish sources

There is no entry for *bullying* in the Polish Wikipedia, which can plausibly be interpreted as evidence that the Anglicism is not yet at home in Polish. By contrast, Wikisłownik, the Polish section of the multilingual Wiktionary, has two entries for *bullying*: one where the item in question is parenthetically qualified as *użycie wyrazu obcego w języku polskim* 'a foreign word used in Polish', and another described simply as *język angielski* 'English'. It is, of course, the former that is of interest to us.

Wikisłownik

Bullying: tyranizowanie, znęcanie się, powtarzalne zachowania o charakterze agresywnym jednego lub grupy sprawców wobec ofiary
(‘Bullying: tyrannising, abuse, recurrent behaviour of an aggressive nature by one or more perpetrators towards a victim’)⁹

In terms of the classification proposed by Adamska-Sałaciak (2010), the two verbal nouns, *tyranizowanie* and *znęcanie się*, are best seen as translational equivalents of *bullying*, i.e., as items which can translate it in certain contexts, but which cover only part of its meaning. Apparently, no cognitive equivalent of *bullying* exists in Polish, that is, one that would both render the source-language meaning faithfully and at the same time constitute a good translation thereof in all, or at least most, contexts. Were such a perfect equivalent available, the author of the Wikisłownik entry would have had no need to resort to partial translational equivalents. The two translational equivalents are followed by a longer phrase which constitutes a definition; the rest of the entry contains examples of usage, one of which reads:

O ile bullying w szkole jest zazwyczaj prymitywny, w pracy przybiera inne formy.

(‘While bullying at school is usually primitive, in the workplace it takes other forms.’)

This particular example would seem to contradict the claims of the Polish psychologist

⁹ All translations are mine (AAS).

mentioned early on in section 2, agreeing instead with the English definitions quoted in 2.1.1, in that behaviour described as bullying need not be restricted to non-adults. However, given the nature of Wikisłownik, we have to reckon with the possibility that its perception of the word's meaning in Polish may be affected to quite a significant extent by the source language meaning. Be that as it may, the lack of a universally valid Polish equivalent of English *bullying* would seem to constitute a good enough reason for borrowing the lexical item into Polish.

In contrast to *bullying*, on which it is silent, the Polish Wikipedia does have an entry for *mobbing*. Interestingly, whoever wrote that entry has chosen to comment on the differences between Polish and English, noting that, in English, the term – as part of the phrase *workplace mobbing* – is used mainly in specialist literature, while *workplace bullying* and *workplace harassment* tend to be preferred in everyday language:¹⁰

Wikipedia

Mobbing – termin wywodzący się z języka angielskiego od wyrazu "mob" co oznacza tłum, natłok, banda. Odpowiednikiem polskiego *mobbingu* po angielsku jest na ogół *workplace bullying* lub *workplace harassment*. *Workplace mobbing* używany jest w tym znaczeniu jedynie w literaturze naukowej. Mobbing oznacza prześladowanie podwładnego lub współpracownika w miejscu pracy.

('Mobbing – a term derived from the English word "mob", meaning a crowd, throng, or band. The English counterpart of Polish *mobbing* is usually *workplace bullying* or *workplace harassment*. *Workplace mobbing* is only used in this sense in scientific literature. Mobbing refers to persecuting an employee or co-worker in the workplace.)

In addition to the Polish Wikipedia entry for *mobbing*, there is also one in the online *Wielki Słownik Języka Polskiego (WSJP)*, a large monolingual dictionary of Polish whose compilation is now in progress.

WSJP

mobbing: długotrwałe psychiczne znęcanie się przez zwierzchnika lub współpracowników nad członkiem grupy ludzi razem pracujących lub uczących się

('long-term psychological abuse of a member of a group of people who are working or studying together by a superior or by co-workers')

According to this definition then, the meaning of *mobbing* in Polish need not be restricted to group behaviour: it can equally well describe the actions of an individual, as long as that individual is in a position of power over his/her victim.

As for *harassment* in Polish, no entry could be found anywhere in the available sources.

2.2 Corpus evidence

The data presented in 2.1.2 is basically all the definitional evidence that could be found in Polish sources – not surprisingly, perhaps, given that we are dealing with incipient borrowing. It is now time to present the (Polish) corpus findings, all of which come from

¹⁰ This agrees with the response of an educated British English speaker who, when consulted on the matter, claimed unfamiliarity with this sense of *mobbing*, while recognising the alternatives.

the pITenTen12 corpus, queried with the help of the Sketch Engine.

bullying

387 (0.04 per million); many occurrences either explain the English term or quote literature in English where the term appears in the title

mobbing

22,100 (2.30 per million)

mobbingować (verb)

56 (0.007 per million)

mobbować (verb)

12 (0.0015 per million)

harassment

131 (0.016 per million); 42 of these appear in English-language texts that seem to have infiltrated the Polish corpus as quotations; 51 occur in the phrase *sexual harassment* (usually cited as the origin or equivalent of the Polish *molestowanie seksualne*); of the remaining 38, the vast majority feature in definitions of the English word, thus qualifying as mention of the word rather than its use

3 Findings

The analysis of the lexicographic and corpus evidence leads to the following, still largely tentative, conclusions. At the moment, *bullying* is only used in Polish by professionals studying human behaviour (psychologists, sociologists) and is reserved for the description of the cruelty children/teenagers sometimes inflict on one of their peers, primarily in the school environment. In the light of the evidence, it would thus appear that the lexicographer who admitted *bullying* as an equivalent in the English-Polish part of NKFD2 (see Appendix) had made the right decision.

By contrast, *mobbing* appears to be well established in Polish. It is not only relatively frequent in corpora, but is also recognised as a word of the language by a large monolingual dictionary; in addition, it has given rise to a verb in two competing forms: *mobbingować* and *mobbować*.¹¹ Furthermore, Polish *mobbing* is both wider and narrower in meaning than its English counterpart: wider, because it can refer to situations when the perpetrator is either an individual or a group (rather than only the latter); narrower, because it typically describes behaviour confined to the workplace or place of study, rather than behaviour occurring "in any context" (cf. the Wikipedia definition of English *mobbing* in 2.1.1). Given the latter, it can be said to be closer to English *workplace harassment/bullying* than to English *mobbing* (unmodified). Finally,

¹¹ Both have met with the approval of the Polish language academy (http://www.rjp.pan.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=683:mobbingowanie-mobbowanie&catid=44:porady-jzykowe&Itemid=58), though only the former features in *WSJP*, where it is labelled as informal.

unlike in English, *mobbing* in Polish is *the* word for the concept in question, widely used in the media and familiar to educated speakers.

As for *harassment*, there is not enough evidence in corpora to justify including it in a bilingual English-Polish, Polish-English dictionary, not even in the capacity of an equivalent. In other words, *harassment* has not (yet?) been borrowed into Polish. A contributing reason may be that it frequently occurs in the phrase *sexual harassment*, for which a well-established Polish counterpart (*molestowanie seksualne*) already exists.

To sum up the treatment of the three lexical items in *NKFD2*: Polish *mobbing* has been included both as an equivalent in the English-Polish part and as a headword in the Polish-English part; Polish *bullying* features only as an equivalent in the English-Polish part and is labelled as domain-specific; *harassment* has not been treated as a lexical item of Polish, not even as a terminological equivalent of limited currency.

4 Conclusion

What has been presented here is merely a tiny snapshot of the kind of things to which bilingual lexicographers have to pay attention when dealing with cases of borrowing not yet recorded in monolingual dictionaries of the recipient language. Once the requirement of the monolingual dictionary's seal of approval has been relaxed, it is up to the lexicographer – or, more often, a team of lexicographers – to work out their own set of criteria for inclusion, corpus evidence naturally constituting the most important guide. Another crucial task is to try and specify the nature of the equivalence relationships in question. As we have tried to demonstrate, one cannot always expect complete semantic identity between the source-language and target-language forms, even in the relatively early stages of the borrowing process (the differences between *bullying* and *mobbing* in English and Polish being a case in point). Finally, whenever necessary, the lexicographer has to make normative decisions regarding spelling, inflection and/or word formation pertaining to the loanword in the recipient language, a topic which falls beyond the scope of the present contribution.

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Appendix

The entries for *bullying*, *mobbing* and *harassment* in *NKFD2*

English-Polish

bullying znęcanie się nad słabszymi; zastraszanie, terroryzowanie; *psych. socjol.*
bullying

Polish-English

no entry

English-Polish

mobbing mobbing

Polish-English

mobbing workplace bullying *l.* harassment, mobbing

mobbingować (także **mobbować**) bully, harass (*in the workplace*)

mobbować (także **mobbingować**) bully, harass (*in the workplace*)

English-Polish

harassment 1. nękanie, dręczenie 2. napastowanie, molestowanie; **sexual harassment**
napastowanie *l.* molestowanie seksualne

Polish-English

no entry