

Lexical and Semantic Borrowing in a Bilingual Dictionary

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Abstract

The paper starts out with a look at various strategies for dealing with lack of interlingual equivalence in a bilingual dictionary, and subsequently concentrates on one of those strategies, namely, sanctioning a borrowing from the source into the target language. As an illustration, some relevant cases from the author's experience as editor of English-Polish dictionaries are discussed. An attempt is made to highlight the factors which influence decisions about the (non)acceptance of borrowings as translation equivalents.

1. Dealing with Nonequivalence

All bilingual lexicographers must be familiar with the practical consequences of what is referred to in metalexigraphic literature (after Zgusta 1971) as the 'anisomorphism' of languages. A large part of our time and effort is spent trying to circumvent the problem of lack of good target language (TL) equivalents for the source language (SL) items.

In a situation of zero or partial equivalence (to use the terminology of Kromann et al. 1991), several solutions are possible. We can:

(i) offer two or more partially 'overlapping' near-equivalents, hoping that the user will somehow be able to divine that the meaning of the SL item is, in fact, either a 'sum' or an 'intersection' of the meanings of the TL items; e.g., E. *awe* is typically translated in E-P dictionaries with the help of several nouns (e.g., *respekt*, *podziw*, *trwoga*) which, taken together, more or less add up to the meaning of the original

(ii) formulate a definition in the TL; this is an obvious solution in cases when the lack of an equivalent is due to the lack of a referent in the TL culture¹; e.g., E. *jambalaya* – P. *potrawa z ryżu, owoców morza i różnych rodzajów mięsa* "a dish of rice, seafood and different kinds of meat"

(iii) complement the imperfect TL equivalent by an explanatory gloss; this strategy is often used when the TL item is less frequent and/or less well known than the SL one, when it is appropriate in a smaller/larger range of contexts or when it has a different stylistic value; e.g., E. *cutting edge* – P. *awangarda (zwl. w nauce i technice)* "avant-garde (*esp. in science and technology*)"

(iv) extend the scope of the lexical unit to be translated; this is particularly useful when dealing with idiomatic phrases; e.g., E. *pain in the ass* is difficult to render into Polish

without changing the register, but *he's a pain in the ass* can be translated nicely (as, e.g., *on jest strasznie upierdliwy*)

(v) introduce an innovation, usually by borrowing the SL item, either wholesale (both form and meaning are transferred to the TL – this is called a loan, loanword or lexical borrowing) or in part (SL meaning alone is borrowed and associated with an existing TL lexeme – this is called a loan translation, calque or semantic borrowing; see, e.g., Anttila 1989: 140)

(vi) employ a combination of the above.

It is the last but one of these strategies (v) that is discussed in the remaining part of this paper.

2. Sanctioning Loanwords and Calques

Giving one's seal of approval to a borrowing which may or may not eventually be adopted by the TL speech community is a risky business; no wonder that lexicographers are normally reluctant to employ this solution, sometimes hesitating even in cases when the borrowing is fairly widely used. The only situation when no-one is likely to lose sleep over a borrowing is when the new lexical item – or new sense of an existing one – accompanies the appearance of a new referent in the TL culture. To take an example from the field of sport or, more precisely, sport-related activities, the word *cheerleader* is now normally translated as P. *cheerleaderka*; occasional nativised spellings (*czirliderka*) are also in evidence. The borrowing is of relatively recent vintage, having entered Polish, together with the introduction of the institution which it denotes, only a few years ago. Before the mid-1990s, a bilingual lexicographer would have had no option but to explain *cheerleader* by means of a Polish definition, something like the German one in CGCD: *jd, der bei Sportveranstaltungen etc die Zuschauer zu Beifallsrufen anfeuert*.

The status of the average, recently borrowed candidate for inclusion in an English-Polish dictionary is much more uncertain than that of *cheerleaderka*. Especially problematic are cases of semantic borrowing. Consider the English word *cliché*. Perceived as a false friend of P. *klisza* "(photographic) film" or "(printing) plate", *cliché* has traditionally been rendered in E-P dictionaries as *frazes, komunal* or *truizm*, sometimes with a modifying adjective (*wyświechtany, oklepny*). However, these equivalents do not cover all the contexts in which the English lexeme can be employed: they work with reference to an overused linguistic expression, but not an overused idea, notion or motif. As a result, it is not uncommon to find P. *klisza* used in the English sense, particularly in film reviews and other texts dealing with the cinema, e.g.:²

(1) Znakiem firmowym polskiego kina akcji z lat 90. jest ekstremalna komiksowość. Czytaj: upodobanie do budowania scenariuszy na stereotypach, **kliszach** i konwencjach.³ (Internet)

(2) To nie film utkany jest z **klisz**, ale nasze życie.⁴ (GW, 5 Sep. 2003)

Before continuing the discussion of this calque, let us look at a similar, though slightly more controversial, case. Polish *film* (established senses: "motion picture", "cinema", "(photographic) film") is now increasingly being used in the sense "thin layer or coating", as in (3):

(3) Filtry mineralne tworzą na powierzchni skóry cieniutki **film** od którego odbijane są promienie UV, zaś filtry organiczne pochłaniają promienie UV nie dopuszczając ich do

głębszych warstw naskórka, chroniąc w ten sposób komórki skóry przed uszkodzeniami.⁵
(Internet)

Similarly to their treatment of *klisza*, E-P dictionaries for a long time ignored this use, translating E. *film* in the relevant sense as P. *warstewka*, *cienka warstwa* or *blona*. Any of these could be substituted for *film* in (3) above, so the case for sanctioning the new sense of P. *film* is, arguably, not very strong. However, it appears that P. *film* in the sense in question is contextually more restricted than its English counterpart. The word is used, not with reference to a thin layer in general, but specifically with reference to the (protective) layer that the application of a cosmetic product leaves on the skin. Semantic borrowing may perhaps be justified here by the emergence of a new, specialised, concept.

A close examination of the English-based uses of *klisza* and *film* thus reveals – contrary, perhaps, to the lexicographer's gut reaction – that they can no longer be looked upon as instances of false friends being perpetrated by careless or incompetent translators. In particular, it will not do to claim that perfectly good Polish equivalents already exist which cover the senses in question, and that the calques are therefore unnecessary. Most importantly perhaps, both borrowings are now used so commonly that a purist's resistance to them is unlikely to be effective for long. In view of the results of semantic analysis, and of the commonness of sentences like (1)-(3), the decision was taken to include *klisza* and *film* in NKFD as translations of E. *cliché* and *film*, respectively. Any residual doubts were dispelled by the fact that both words were subsequently recorded in the relevant senses in ISJP, a monolingual dictionary of Polish which appeared not long after the letters C and F in our dictionary had been edited.⁶

Moving on to borderline cases, let us consider P. *grillować* as an equivalent of English *grill* in the sense "to interrogate in an unpleasant way". On July 16, 2003, the anchorman Tomasz Lis used the phrase *grillowanie świadków* "grilling of witnesses" on the main edition of *Fakty*, a popular TV news programme. I have heard similar things on several other occasions, always from people who, like this particular journalist, speak very good English. We seem to be dealing here with a change *in statu nascendi*, i.e., an innovation which has not (yet?) achieved the status of a fully-fledged semantic borrowing, being restricted to bilingual speakers. As such, *grillować* was felt to be too marginal to merit inclusion in NKFD, especially considering that, unlike *klisza* or *film*, it does not carry any specific sense(s) which existing Polish words (e.g., *maglować*) could not take care of.

It is, nonetheless, entirely possible that the new use of *grillować* will make it to the next edition of NKFD. The word certainly does not seem as objectionable as the last 'offender' I want to look at in this section. Among the best-known pairs of English-Polish false friends are the words: E. *lunatic* "madman" – P. *lunatyk* "sleepwalker". To the extreme irritation of the linguistically sensitive Polish speaker, one can occasionally come across *lunatyk* used in the English sense, as in (4):

(4) Traktując Biblię jak poradnik agitatora, Ashcroft i inni chrześcijańscy **lunacy** są przekonani, że aby Chrystus powtórnie zstąpił na ziemię, państwo Izrael musi sprowokować wojnę grożącą mu unicestwieniem.⁷ (GW, 2-4 May, 2003).

Like *grillować*, *lunatyk* in the English sense is still infrequent. Unlike it, it is strongly felt to be unacceptable. While *grillować* "to interrogate in an unpleasant way" can be seen as a metaphorical extension of the literal sense "to cook over/under strong heat", the English-

based sense of *lunatyk* does not afford a similarly reasonable interpretation in relation to the sense the word has in Polish. What is more, adding the new sense on top of the existing one might lead to ambiguity in some contexts. Consequently, there can be no doubt that makers of dictionaries (both monolingual Polish and bilinguals with English) will strongly resist sanctioning this new use, even in the face of evidence which, like (4) above, comes from respectable sources. It remains to be seen whether P. *lunatyk* "madman" can survive despite such fierce opposition.

3. CAMP: A Case Study

Apart from the word *cheerleaderka*, what we have looked at so far are all instances of semantic, rather than full lexical, borrowing. To redress the balance, let us now examine one loanword in greater detail, this time choosing a word with a more complex meaning.

The English adj/noun *camp* (for simplicity's sake, we shall disregard the derived verbal form) is explained in monolingual dictionaries along the following lines:

OERD:

camp² *colloq. adj.* 1. affected, effeminate 2. homosexual 3. done in an exaggerated way for effect

n. a camp manner or style

WNRUD:

camp² *sl. n.* 1. **a.** An affectation or appreciation of manners and tastes usu. considered outlandish, vulgar, or banal. **b.** Behavior displaying such affectation or appreciation. 2. Banality, vulgarity, or artificiality when appreciated for its humor

(the adjective *camp*, *campy* is only given here as a run-on)

ENCARTA:

camp² *adj.* 1. **OVER-FEMININE** exaggeratedly or affectedly feminine, especially in a man 2. **AMUSINGLY BRASH** deliberately and exaggeratedly brash or vulgar in an amusing, often self-parodying way

n. 1. **EXAGGERATED FEMININITY** exaggeratedly or affectedly feminine behaviour, especially in men 2. **DELIBERATE OUTRAGEOUSNESS** deliberate outrageousness for humorous effect.

Among authentic examples of use (from the Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus⁸) one finds:

- (5) ... a world marked by camaraderie, **camp**, humor, brotherhood and sisterhood, wit, self-help, and growing indignation at injustice.
- (6) If anything, the big Citroen's styling leans more towards the quirky **camp** - there'll be no mistaking it for anything else on the road, love it or hate it.
- (7) I dearly love Roger Moore, but if you talk about the best Bonds, you're talking about Sean Connery and not **camp** or sendup.
- (8) ... Gunner Howerd, the man who began in **camp** concerts and became the king of **camp**.
- (9) ... he emerges out of much **camp** narcissism as a figure of genuine humility.
- (10) But the set he strolls through (a wedding cake floating on cloud nine), while meant to evoke the old Ziegfeld days, is just plain bizarre - too tacky to be lavish, not tacky enough to be **camp**.

(11) Something of the same quality of **camp** horror is to be found in *The Blob*, a remake of the 1958 B movie about a mysterious substance that eats people.

Arguably, the phenomena (or, possibly, one complex phenomenon) explained in the dictionary definitions above and referred to in examples (5)-(11) can be regarded as culture-bound. For 'exaggerated femininity, especially in a man' to be 'appreciated for its humorous effect', one must be dealing with a culture where behaviour which openly exploits, and plays with, gay stereotypes is perceived as salient enough to warrant a separate name. This, until recently, had not been the case in Poland. Naturally, due to the global influence of Anglo-American culture, many referents and/or concepts originating there sooner or later become familiar to speakers of other languages. On the linguistic plane, this is typically manifested by the appearance of a borrowing. As might be expected, we do indeed find the noun *kamp* and the adjective *kampowy* in Polish, but (so far?) almost exclusively in the context of literary and film criticism, when the so-called 'aesthetics of camp' is being talked about. Witness the following three examples (out of the five or so found on the Internet; last search 9 Sep., 2003):

(12) Niemniej ujawnił w swym referacie również niezwykle interesujące powinowactwo postmodernizmu i estetyki **kampu**, wskazując na ucieczkę prozy postmodernistycznej w często pusty estetyzm.⁹ (report from a conference on late-20th century Polish fiction)

(13) Formy wolności człowieka estetycznego. Od intelektualnego dandyzmu Wacława Berenta do **kampu** Manueli Gretkowskiej¹⁰ (title of conference paper)

14) Atmosfera ta kojarzy mi się z klimatem **kampu**; może to rzeczywiście są pierwsze polskie wiersze konsekwentnie **kampowe**?¹¹ (book review in a Web magazine)

Does a handful of instances like this justify putting the Polish item in a bilingual dictionary? Perhaps. Would the average educated Polish user know what was being meant? They almost certainly would not. Accordingly, the decision was taken not to include the loanword in NKFD. The solution adopted instead is a combination of near-synonyms, TL definitions and glosses, mirroring the various senses recognised by monolingual English dictionaries:

NKFD:

camp² *a. pot.* 1. zniewieściały; afektowany (zw. *celowo*) 2. dotyczący subkultury gejskiej (*np. przebierania się w kobiece stroje*) 3. przesadnie stylowy i. staroświecki (zw. w *zabawny sposób*) 4. ostentacyjnie kiczowaty (*i przez to budzący zachwyt*)

n. pot. 1. zniewieściałość; afektacja; wystawianie się na pokaz; demonstrowanie swego homoseksualizmu 2. subkultura gejska 3. zachwyt nad kiczem, banałem i. wulgarnością (zw. *dla ich walorów humorystycznych*).

This is, obviously, far from satisfactory. Let us not forget, however, that the meaning of the English lexeme is rather vague and difficult to pinpoint; to use the traditional distinction between denotation and connotation, we might say that the meaning of *camp* is largely connotational. This may be responsible, at least in part, for the somewhat artificial multiplicity of (sub)senses which *camp* is split into in monolingual dictionaries. The number and content of the senses recognised there (and copied to some extent in NKFD) could serve as an illustration of Hanks's (2002: 159) observation that "human beings have a natural tendency to define the context (...), rather than focusing on the particular contribution of the word to the contexts in which it occurs".

However imperfect the solution may be from the point of view of lexicographic theory, the Polish translations of the different senses of *E. camp* offered by NKFD are, arguably, more user-friendly than the so-far esoteric equivalent would have been. What we have here is a situation when the TL equivalent (which happens to be a borrowing, but could just as well be a cognate or an entirely unrelated word) is much less known in the TL culture than the SL item is in the SL culture. In fact, its frequency is so low and its domain of use so restricted that the Polish word is actually unfamiliar to the vast majority of Polish speakers.¹²

All this notwithstanding, it seems only a matter of time before *P. kamp* begins to feature in dictionaries. In fact, it is surprising that it has not yet been recorded by Polish monolinguals, given the care and attention with which terms associated with scholarly discourse are customarily treated therein. With regard to bilingual E-P dictionaries, examination of the English corpus evidence has convinced me that, unless we sanction the loanword, the complex of senses associated with *E. camp* cannot be rendered into Polish without losing much of the flavour of the original. Were the decision being made now, instead of three years ago, I would certainly allow *kamp* in, while still holding on to some of the explanatory paraphrases, which might be kept as a gloss.

4. Conclusions

A lexicographer who is not certain whether a recent borrowing should be allowed into a bilingual dictionary must take a number of factors into consideration. In principle, the candidate's presence in a monolingual dictionary of the target language should automatically decide in its favour.¹³ Otherwise, its frequency in TL corpora must be examined, side by side with TL speakers' familiarity with it. While an item's frequency of occurrence can be measured in a relatively straightforward manner (provided a representative TL corpus is available), its familiarity to native speakers is much more difficult to assess. The results of the assessment will always depend to a certain extent on the individual lexicographer's subjective judgement. Ultimately – however strongly we may disapprove of normative attitudes – the lexicographer's intuition and common sense play a significant role in the final decision.

Endnotes

¹ See Tomaszczyk (1983) and (1984) for some sensible postulates regarding the treatment of culture-specific vocabulary in bilingual dictionaries.

² Another genre in which *klisza* is sometimes used like this is literary criticism, especially of the non-academic variety.

³ "A trademark of Polish action movies of the 1990s is their pronounced comic-strip quality, i.e., a predilection for building the script on stereotypes, clichés and conventions." [All translations mine - AAS]

⁴ "It is not the movie, but our life, that is woven out of clichés."

⁵ "Mineral filters form a very thin film on the surface of the skin which reflects UV rays, while organic filters absorb UV rays, making their penetration into deeper layers of the epidermis impossible, thereby preventing damage to skin cells."

⁶ Apparently, the authority of ISJP was not enough for PWNO, another large, recently published E-P dictionary, which takes no notice of the new senses of either *klisza* or *film*.

⁷ "Treating the Bible like an agitator's manual, Ashcroft and other Christian lunatics are convinced that, in order for Christ to come again, the state of Israel must provoke a war threatening its annihilation".

⁸ Access to the LSWE Corpus was granted to the team preparing LSW, a bilingual learners' dictionary for speakers of Polish. The corpus was not consulted during the preparation of NKFD, nor indeed was it available at the time.

⁹ "Nevertheless, he also revealed in his paper an extremely interesting affinity between postmodernism and the aesthetics of camp, pointing to the escape of postmodernist prose into often empty aestheticism."

¹⁰ "Forms of freedom of the aesthetic man: From Waclaw Berent's intellectual dandyism to the camp of Manuela Gretkowska".

¹¹ "The atmosphere brings to mind the climate of camp; perhaps these really are the first consistently camp Polish poems?"

¹² A number of English-department graduates have confessed in informal interviews that they had no idea what *camp* in the relevant sense(s) meant in English, let alone being aware of the existence of *kamp* in Polish.

¹³ We have seen that sometimes, as with the PWNO policy regarding *klisza* and *film*, this does not seem to be a sufficient condition.

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