

## English Naval Terms in Polish: A Retrospective View

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**Abstract:** The way English words entered the Polish language was conditional on the situation in which Poland found itself as the result of partitions. When searching for the linguistic routes of English sea terms into Polish, we can observe the levels of assimilation of English words into Polish naval terminology combined with the influence of the languages of the partitioning powers, particularly German and Russian. In connection with the lasting legacy of the influence of foreign languages on Polish after the partitions, there appeared a necessity of settling controversies concerning the extent to which the Polish maritime lexicon should be influenced by other languages, including English. The article looks back on the circumstances in which the Polish naval terms were taking shape. The work of the Sea Terminology Commission, established after World War I, reflected the disputes between advocates and adversaries of the English language in the Polish maritime terminology. Thus, the article aims to bring out apparently the most interesting aspects of these discussions that were carried on in the relevant literature.

**Keywords:** naval language, borrowings, Polish navy, Polish neologisms

### 1. The origins of the Polish Navy

The beginning of contemporary Polish Navy goes back to the last months of 1918 when after years of partitions Poland began to create its own armed forces. According to the decree, signed on the 28 November 1918, the then head of state Józef Piłsudski ordered the creation of a Polish fleet together with the Naval Section as a part of the Ministry of Defence (Ciesielski *et al.* 1992: 9-11, Czerski – Waśko 1980: 24, Ordon 1966: 83-86).

In the early 1920's the first differences concerning the treatment of the navy became noticeable. The point of issue lay in the competences of the command of the navy. All in all the Polish Navy, despite its small size, gained a high level of independence in the armed forces on the formal level and even higher in its internal organization.

It was Adm. Świrski who insisted on the distinct status and requirements of the navy. He believed that the army and the navy should have separate heads, both of whom would serve under the Minister of Defence. The formal separation of the navy from army structures was approved by the parliament on 9 April 1938 by article 2 which began with the following words: “The armed forces consist of the army and the navy.”

The significance of the Navy is crucial in a state which has an access to the sea coast. Although the navy is naturally attached to the sea, it defends the entire country together with the army. For Ginsbert (1935a: 44) the navy is the most obvious element of independence of the state and the defence of the nation’s interests. According to him, the first and foremost duty of the navy is the defence of the sea lanes (Ginsbert 1935a: 44-45, *Polskie Siły Zbrojne...* 1962: 27). At war the navy must defend those lanes and guard the freedom of the seas which Ginsbert (1935a) understands as an access to the sea, necessary to the state, and the ability to reach the enemy in its own territorial waters. Elsewhere he (Ginsbert 1938: 143, 1935a: 19) states that the navy plays its part not only in war but also in peace time. It defines the hierarchy of the state and its power and is a source of useful alliances and the economic well-being of society.

## 2. Naval language

Poles are not a seagoing nation like the British or the Dutch. In its past history Poland relied on hired foreign ships and crews. The Polish seafaring language did not exist in the past and therefore could not be related to any other vocabulary. In the Polish Navy, created in 1918, words and phrases were often adopted out of necessity from traditional seagoing nations, including Germans as our neighbours (cf. Jasiński 1935, Kleczkowski 1928). In time many such words acquired Polish pronunciation retaining their original meaning.

The language of the sea is governed by simplicity and clarity. Such a way of communication on ships was forced on seamen by the environment, their work and struggle at sea (Tuczyński 1975: 59). In his article “Leave their language to the sailors” (*Zostawcie marynarzom ich język*), Jasiński (1936) writes that the language of sailors is devoid of “literary embellishments” and it took shape from foreign terminology accepted all over the world. The introduction of new terminology, not understood by the sailors themselves, would lead to “equating the land with the sea; yet, who would benefit by it?”

The language of the navy ensures doing things in a certain way – the safe way. It is supported by tradition. Vocabulary in the navy is not entirely comprehensible for an average user of the language. Already the navy itself, in non-linguistic terms, constitutes a certain clearly isolated context. The naval vocabulary was created in order to avoid ambiguity and arbitrary choices with regard to the usage of special terms (Rybicka 1967: 96, 1976: 56). In the case of specialized contexts factual accuracy is of paramount concern. Interestingly, Łuczyński (1986) rates the normalized terminology among artificial lexical systems which he exemplifies by the early sea terminology. In turn, Vilke (1982:441) characterizes the scientific language as the one distinguished by the consistency of meaning, emotional neutrality, the lack of euphony and narrow specialization. The naval terminology avoids polysemy, words and phrases carrying an emotional overtone as well as synonyms that blur the boundaries between the meanings of specific terms. Those, in turn, abound in internationalisms and neologisms. As regards their usage, Doroszewski (1950: 24) writes:

*The scientific terminology should have an international character on the broadest possible scale.*

### **3. Sea vocabulary and its incorporation into Polish**

At the beginning of the 20th century foreign influences on the Polish language became more intense for various reasons (Ułaszyn 1957). The widening of trade and political contacts with Great Britain, and in particular the building of the fleet and sea industry, were conducive to English influences; though at first it was limited almost exclusively to sport terminology (cf. Koneczna 1936/37). Every nation gaining access to the sea felt the need to put sea terminology in order, standardize the spelling, and provide precise definitions for foreign special terms. This need appeared in Poland at the time when it obtained access to the sea after World War I.

Relying on statistical data, Mańczak-Wohlfeld (1995) argues that at present the influence of the English language on Polish is not as significant as it could appear. Having analyzed the English influence on Polish maritime terminology, she (1999) draws similar conclusions. However, Łuczyński (1991: 17) voices a different opinion:

*So far there have been no works devoted to English loanwords in Polish maritime terminology, though it was the lexical layer of Polish which was relatively earliest infiltrated by English – right at the beginning, a significant number of English*

*words were absorbed. The large number of sea terms of English origin is emphasized by the authors of many studies on English loanwords in Polish.*

Irrespective of the opinion about the creation of normalized terminology, sea vocabulary seems to confirm an essential regularity concerning the direction of borrowing. Namely, of the two nations in contact, the one which is more developed economically and culturally, and therefore can serve as a model to be followed, is the one which usually exerts a stronger linguistic influence over the other (Rybicka 1976: 5). According to Fisiak (1961: 5-6), this is an external or non-linguistic reason for borrowing words which is the main cause of interference rather than the internal or structural reasons. The direction of the borrowing process is similarly defined by Haugen (1969: 370, 372), Szymańska (1979: 26), Brückner (1939: 4) and Vilke (1982: 448).

The normalization of Polish sea terminology presents quite a simple picture because it began immediately after World War I. The gaining of access to the sea gave Poland a chance to build up sea trade as well as a merchant fleet and a navy. Between the two world wars English lexical influences were limited, apart from sport vocabulary, to sea and sailing terminology; after World War II this traditional sphere of influence of the English language remained (cf. Grabowska 1972: 222). In his work Fisiak (1961: 111) divides 721 English loanwords into twelve groups according to their meanings. After sport as the second largest group he mentions the sea, ships and seamen which he describes as follows:

*The Polish sea terminology abounds in loanwords, a part of which are English borrowings. (...) Most maritime loanwords are indirect loans, because at the prime of shipbuilding and ports' development Poland was in the period of partitions. That situation was not conducive to the creation of new Polish words. At the same time English words found their way into Polish through German and Russian. (Fisiak 1961: 116-117, cf. Koneczna 1936/37, Ożdżyński 1986: 107)*

Once this became apparent in the service of Polish seamen in English naval ships, then as a natural consequence, Polish seafaring terminology became enriched with a number of English loans. Between the two wars there were strong, both purist and tolerant, linguistic tendencies concerning loanwords in Polish sea vocabulary. Both advocates and adversaries of loanwords in the Polish language aimed to systematize seafaring terminology. The latter, however, only partially succeeded in replacing the loans by calques or newly invented Polish words in literature on the subject.

#### 4. Disputes over naval terminology

The attempts at establishing sea terminology were accompanied by stormy discussions in the circles of those involved in that problem. The fundamental subject of the discussion, and the main bone of contention at the same time, was the adoption of either a foreign or a native source for the whole terminological system. One of the ways was to adopt the so-called international sea terminology. The advocates of that solution pointed to the universal character of such terminology, its naturalness and the support it had in the maritime tradition of the peoples of Europe. They stressed the fact that words of foreign origin were the names which were close to a large group of specialists and seamen who served under foreign flags before Poland gained independence.

Among the supporters of adopting vocabulary of foreign origin were experienced sailors, 'sea dogs,' seamen serving in the Russian or Prussian fleet. Primarily, they were struck by the unnatural, artificial and bizarre features of the new forms in sea words, coined 'by force' and solely from native elements. Those people, with practical experience of the sea, knew that it was unavoidable to rely on some foreign lexical basis when creating vocabulary exclusively on the words of native origin. Mariusz Zaruski, the author of *Współczesna Żegluga Morska*, is considered the main advocate of introducing foreign sea terminology into the Polish language. He received support from Jerzy Bohdan Rychliński (1925) and Jan Kierkus (1935). The latter writes:

*No authority on land, no most learned expert, nor collective scholarly body – can impose any terminology on seamen without the approval of the latter. Seamen on the coast constitute an environment which radiates maritime terminology onto society.* (Kierkus 1935: 688)

Commander Zajączkowski expresses his opinion in a similar vein in the introduction to *Wiedza Okrętowa*:

*As regards terminology, I basically used words which had been already widespread among seamen. I did not refer to dictionaries that had been published in our literature, as I have assumed that terminology comes into use in practical life and cannot be imposed from above.* (the quote after Kleczkowski 1928: 114)

In turn, Julian Ginsbert (1935b), not being the enemy of borrowing popular foreign words into Polish, strongly opposes the 'phonetic shaping of words' (*fonetyzowanie*) in writing, as it used to be done by the Russians.

*It would be a thousand times better to reach for Dutch or Anglo-Saxon original words rather than adopt the same Germanisms with the distorted Russian articulation.* (Ginsbert 1935b: 935)

The most fervent defence of the existing sea vocabulary was taken up by Zbigniew Jasiński (1936), in his article entitled “Leave their language to the sailors” (*Zostawcie marynarzom ich język*). According to him, the need to introduce artificial vocabulary is contradicted not only by the usefulness and succinct simplicity of the terms already adopted but also by a big number of obstacles stemming from the properties of the Polish language. For him, the terms proposed by Kleczkowski (1928: 120) such as *dziobnik*, *dziobniak*, *tylniak*, *wiórnik* or *przedniak*, are „cudniki, cudniaki, cudaki i cudactwa.”

Elsewhere in his article, Jasiński (1936) pours ridicule on Polish neologisms by giving his own derisive examples:

Okręty tak się mają nazywać: statek z linii regularnej (*liner*) ma być koniecznie: *regularnik* (proponując: *punktualnik* albo jeszcze bardziej ‘po polsku’: *prawidłowiec* lub *godzinpilnik*); statek, chodzący nieregularnie (*tramp*), ma się nazywać: *przygodnik* (omal nie *awanturnik*); statek pośpieszny (*kurjer*) – *pośpiesznik*; szkolny – *szkolnik* (czy *Szyller*?); wożący rudę – *rudowiec*; o krytym pokładzie – *krytowiec*; pływający za ocean (*transatlantyk*, *transoceaniczny*) – *dalekowiec*...

Despite that, the sea terminology of foreign origin in the Polish language had many adversaries. They defended the purity of Polish and suggested terms from the lexical reserves of the Polish language or, alternatively, neologisms created from native elements. They pointed to the unfounded belief about some international maritime terminology. They claimed that the advocates of foreign words wanted to introduce a hybrid terminological system, having its source in German and Dutch and distorted by the agency of the Russian language. They argued that foreign terminology was not consistent with the spirit of Polish. Long multi-compound words of Germanic origin, so frequent in the names of masts and sails, were particularly alien to the Polish language. This concerns, in particular, Dutch loanwords in Polish maritime vocabulary (for details and examples, see Ożdżyński 1986). In the lead of those who supported the creation of a pure Polish sea terminology stood Kleczkowski (1937, 1938). He was strongly supported by Karol Stadtmüller (1935: 836) who wrote that *one has to be a dictator not only in life, but also in establishing terminology!*

In his opinion, also the terms proposed by Kodrębski (1935) were suitable for adoption in sea terminology. Moreover, the fact that Poland did not have too long a

tradition connected with the sea as well as a minor role of the sea in Polish history, is perceived as an advantage by Kodrębski (1935: 44):

*Surely quite a number of foreign navies envy us our unusually favourable situation in that respect: not to be a slave to 'the past,' i.e. accumulated old stockpiles, obsolete equipment inherited from the preceding generations, fossilized routine and uninspired minds.*

In turn, the international character of sea terminology is an illusion according to Rossowski (1935) and Klejnot-Turski (1928). Words of the same origin used in different languages usually have different pronunciation that their identity cannot be seen. Additionally, Rossowski (1935: 932) thinks that German sea vocabulary is erroneously overestimated because

*our seafaring activity is not restricted only to the Baltic, and it will be gradually spreading to the expanses where German, or rather Germanized maritime language, will not be of much help.*

Also Gajewski (1947: 89) draws attention to

*that disgusting Dutch-German sailor's jargon which is not the international language of seamen whatsoever, as some naively imagine.*

A separate heed should be paid to Bolesław Ślaski, the author of *Słownik Morsko-Rybołówczy* (1922) and *Polski Słownik Marynarski* (1926). He worked alone collecting sea words from literature and local dialects and also by introducing his own neologisms or loanwords. One of the critics of his works was Jasiński (1936) who called Ślaski a reformer „*usiłującym pouczać chłopą jak ma trzymać grabie*” [“trying to instruct a farmer on how to use a rake”]. Ślaski defended himself in the article “In defence of maritime terminology” (*O terminologję morską*) (1937). In his review, Klejnot-Turski (1926) in two consecutive editions of *Żeglarz Polski* also made a severe assessment of Ślaski's seamen's dictionary.

In the background of the whole discussion concerning the adopted method of establishing sea terminology, there appeared disputes about individual names. Almost each author involved in that cause was pushing for his own proposals. Here are some of the proposed names put forward by individual authors: Mieszkowski (1947) – nurkowiec or podmornica ‘okręt podwodny’ (for *submarine*), linkor ‘ship of the line,’ niszczyciel ‘kontrtorpedowiec’ (for *destroyer*), trałowiec ‘trawler’ or ‘trawler,’ tankowiec ‘cysternowiec’ (for *tanker*); Modrzejewski (1947) – cysternowiec ‘tankowiec,’ kontrtorpedowiec ‘niszczyciel;’ Kleczkowski (1938) –

podwodnik ‘łódź podwodna,’ podwodnikowiec ‘okręt-matka dla łodzi podwodnych,’ minowiec ‘minostawiacz’ (for *mine-layer*), minownik ‘minołowiec’ (for *mine sweeper*), rejowiec trójmasztowy ‘bark,’ dwunitka ‘marlinka’ (for *marline*), klamra ‘szekiel’ (for *shackle*); Ginsbert (1935b) – podwodnica or podwodnikowiec ‘łódź podwodna;’ Kodrębski (1935) – ścianacz min or podcinacz min ‘trawler’ (or by the analogy with pulling weeds: plewiec), buczek or bekadło ‘klaxon,’ najaśnica or światlak ‘reflektor,’ osłaniacz, eskortowiec, towarzysz, szperacz, przewodnik szperaczy ‘torpedowiec’ (for *torpedo boat*); Stadtmüller (1935) – zanurzeniowiec, zanurzeniówka or zanurzőwka ‘łódź podwodna,’ samolotowiec or transportowiec samolotów ‘lotniskowiec’ (for *aircraft carrier*), stawiacz min or wyławiacz min ‘trawler;’ Brückner in the introduction to *Słowniczek Morski* by Bernatt (1935) suggests lodnik ‘lodołamacz’ (for *icebreaker*) or unos ‘znos’ (for *drift*).

An optimal solution of that issue lies somewhere in the middle, judging by the words of prof. Brückner who writes that on the one hand

*we should use our own language to give names to new things and activities;*

and on the other,

*no language can be offended by adopting foreign terms, used all over the world.*

(From Brückner’s introduction to *Słowniczek Morski* by Bernatt 1935)

Other linguists voiced parallel opinions:

*Today no one proposes to expel foreign words completely from a language, as it is clear that the presence of loanwords does not endanger linguistic purity and correctness. No language develops in isolation, and contacts with other languages must lead to mutual lexical interactions, sometimes less or sometimes more intense. The excess of loanwords is always eliminated in the course of the natural development of a language. Only the most needed loanwords are left.* (Ropa 1974: 526, cf. Doroszewski 1950: 24, Friedrich 1938/39: 76, Szmańda 1979: 32)

## 5. Sea terminology commission: Purism versus tolerance

As can be seen from the above, every nation feels the need to put in order their sea terminology, standardize spelling, and precisely define foreign special terms taken over from other nations. After World War I the first Polish seamen came from the three conqueror fleets: Russian, German and Austrian. Thus already at the beginning

there clashed three similar yet in many instances different terminologies. Łuczyński (1987: 8) gives the following description of that period:

*In fact the whole 19th century and nearly twenty years of our century were a time almost lost with regard to this terminology (native maritime terminology) due to the lack of a Polish fleet and navy. Polish seamen, sailors and sea travellers sailed under foreign flags and thus practically encountered only foreign terminology. The attempts at introducing native maritime terminology were deadlocked at that time, as it was impossible to use the established terms in practice.*

After Poland had gained its independence the Polish coast became the place of the development of sea trade and the navy. This also marked the beginning of the regeneration of native sea vocabulary. Urgency in this undertaking seemed to be a necessity because seamen and other people of the sea, returning to their homeland, knew only foreign terminology, mainly Russian and German. The lack of established and uniform terminology could be felt at every step. A maritime dictionary was needed both in the Navy, the Ministry of Industry and Trade as well as in all sea institutions. Naval terminology was neglected most and required organization and promotion. The discrepancy between naval and merchant marine terminology became obvious (Alfa 1934, Hornung 1947, Pertek 1947, Rossowski 1935), though not always respected. Hornung (1947: 98) remarked on this fact in the following way:

*Unfortunately having worked at sea a dozen or so years, we have not managed to instil into the biggest enthusiasts of the navy such a fundamental difference that exists between the concept 'a commanding officer of a vessel' and 'a captain of a ship'!*

There even appeared an opinion that a proper terminology commission should be appointed specially to deal with the affairs of the Navy. Such a commission would become an authoritative body for every further action with regard to regulations, specifications, giving orders, shipbuilding as well as publications across the whole country (Avanti 1935: 452). Since individual efforts aiming to systematize sea vocabulary did not produce the desirable result, a collective attempt was made.

In 1927 a Terminology Commission was appointed at the Sea and River League (*Komisja Terminologiczna przy Lidze Morskiej i Rzecznej*), and later at the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (*Polska Akademia Umiejętności*). That body, composed of linguists, representatives of the Navy and technicians, drew up ambitious yet not an easy plan to create Polish sea terminology. Despite absorbing

several individual proposals, the activity of the Terminology Commission neither encompassed the entire group of authors of native terminology nor finished the discussion concerning its final shape (Łuczyński 1987: 10).

Initially the Terminology Commission was headed by gen. Mariusz Zaruski and from 1930 it worked under the guidance of the linguist, prof. Adam Kleczkowski. Gen. Zaruski, unlike Kleczkowski, did not share the belief in the possibility of imposing a few thousand, even the most skillfully coined, new Polish words. In his opinion, purely Polish vocabulary could not survive in the international maritime environment. The outcome of those activities was a sea dictionary (*Słownik Morski*) published in 1929 in the form of six modest publications, altogether numbering over five thousand terminological entries. However, it could not be compared with any other contemporary sea dictionary (Ptak 1956: 155).

Kleczkowski's bias prevailed on the Commission forum and, as a result, the terms in the sea dictionary are native in most cases. The concession or, depending on the point of view, the lack of consequence was by quoting terms of foreign origin in brackets. There were other publications and parts of material in preparation but they were not issued due to the outbreak of World War II.

The reactions to the adoption of terminological proposals in the then society were different, especially in specialist circles. Taking into account the overtones in the publications and literature on the subject in the period between the wars, it can be inferred that the book series *Słownik Morski* met with controversial feedback. The dictionary was criticized both by adversaries and advocates of the concept of the Commission's head, Adam Kleczkowski. A lack of acceptance for the verdict of the Terminology Commission was also reflected in the independent decisions of the Polish Sailing Association (*Polski Związek Żeglarski*).

## 7. Concluding remarks

Despite the fact that the originators of normalized sea terminology spared no efforts to create an ideal lexical system, the result of their work turned out to be far from perfect. It was the Terminology Commission that made the decision to adopt one source for Polish sea terminology. The Commission opted for native terminology, i.e. the most successful neologisms. However, in *Słownik Morski* the entries are accompanied by terms of foreign origin which were put in brackets and referred to words from seamen's slang, e.g. *pełnożaglowiec trójmasztowy* /fregata/, *dziobak* /buzszyć/, *przednik najwyższy* /fokbombramsel/ (examples from Łuczyński 1986: 131).

According to Łuczyński (1986: 134), the terminological system of *Słownik Morski* is, all in all, a compromise of different and often opposing tendencies. Many ideal assumptions turned out to be impossible to realize in practice. The words of Kierkus (1935: 690) complement that assessment:

*After several years of quite an isolated existence of the first books of the sea dictionary, it is beyond all doubt that purely Polish vocabulary did not survive at sea. Only an insignificant number of Polish words were introduced successfully. Those names which did not catch on immediately, will not do so later either.*

The ease with which an overwhelming number of words of English origin has entered the naval language, has given rise to two types of reactions. The pragmatists maintain that they enrich Polish and do not see any harm in this process, while the purists argue that they have a rather destructive impact on Polish. The soundest view is probably a mixture of the two, as uncritical borrowing is just as harmful as insularity. If such a view were to have any practical results, a more conscious effort to use the Polish language is the main prerequisite, but more information about the nature and extent of English influence will also be of great help.

Another problem is the future of the terminological system connected with the sea. The proposals of the Sea Dictionary were not enthusiastically received and only a small number of recommended terms has been adopted in the maritime environment. Therefore, the terminological system cannot be based solely on theoretical assumptions or put forward by a group of experts. The most valuable corrections are introduced by practice. Apparently, it is not easy to create vocabulary in a given field of human activity, including the navy. The rules governing a language apply also in terminology.

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