

Issue of translating vocational titles in relation to cultural changes and their influence on specific occupational titles based on selected examples from the United Kingdom and Poland.

Language is irrevocably connected with culture. Over centuries, both the culture of European countries as well as its reflection within the language evolved significantly. A significant amount of idioms within one language have their equivalents in other languages, even if a direct translation would differ. Referring to a specific example of Poland and the United Kingdom, respectively, the languages of Polish and English, to describe stress, one could say, “I have a lot on my plate”,¹ whilst the same meaning in Polish could be directly translated as “I have a lot on my head”. Such phrases evolved alongside the cultural development across Europe. In some cases, a direct translation of idioms would have the desired result as the recipient easily understands them. In the cited idioms, the phrases can only be differentiated by the ending “plate” or “head”, with the underlying meaning and the first part of the sentence being the same. On the other hand, there are also idioms that are present in both languages, but directly translated are very confusing. For example, “to speak without beating around the bush” and “mówić bez ogródek/talking without small garden” mean exactly the same thing, but when translated into the other language, they can cause some consternation. Translating a speech or text, therefore, requires the interpreter to at least know the culture of the country on a basic level.

The consequences of lacking awareness of the country of the intended translation become apparent not in direct communication during which both parties can clarify and ensure that the other party understood their meaning, but in the translation of documents. Translation of occupational documentation is one of the most frequent and important translation tasks. Both Poland and the United Kingdom have ministerial departments delegated to ensure appropriate assessment of the level of education gained abroad. Such classification is very important for people looking for work, as the appropriate assessment of their qualifications affects their ability to gain and retain employment in the country of their choice.

Even with the existence of such crucial organisations, as in the case of the United Kingdom is NARIC, the cultural affect on the language and the work titles is so intense that even very high qualifications gained in Poland can mean nothing if inaccurately translated. The same principle applies in reverse.

Appropriate translation of documents or translator’s annotations suddenly become vital and indispensable.

There is the word “worker” in English. The appropriate equivalent would be “employee”. Both of these words generally carry the same meaning, but the culture of British countries stigmatised the word “worker,” and now it is perceived as inappropriate or sometimes even vulgar. This term is acceptable in colloquial speech but not in vocational documentation such as contracts and other agreements.

The example above is meant to illustrate the terms in the Polish language. The terms “plumber” or “barber” in Polish are nothing more than “worker” in English. These words are negatively characterised and were replaced with more culturally appropriate words. “Plumber” is a word frequently used in Polish, and everyone is perfectly aware of what “plumber” does. It is a practised occupation, not a “profession”, meaning one gained through qualification.²

1 *The Idioms Largest Idioms Dictionary*, (2023) <<https://www.theidioms.com/a-lot-on-my-plate/>> [accessed 24 August 2023].

2 Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej, *Wortal Publicznych Służb Zatrudnienia* Ministerstwo Rodziny i

The above-mentioned example of a “plumber”, through an apprenticeship program or vocational school, gains the title “Fitter of sanitary installations and equipment”.³ In Poland, the term “Fitter” is held in higher regard and culturally perceived as more appropriate than a “plumber”. The aforementioned *Fitter* has extensive knowledge of plumbing. The curriculum and the vocational exams are the same as a plumber, but the word “plumber” in Poland is perceived similarly or possibly the same as “worker” in the United Kingdom.

The plumber in Poland has for many years been perceived as an occupation requiring no skills. The work of a plumber was frequently physically taxing, such as digging a pit for sewerage systems, carrying heavy cast-iron pipes or even unclogging the toilet by hand. A plumber’s occupation was stigmatised with an image of a filthy, addicted-to-alcohol man. Jobs delegated to a plumber were highly paid, time-consuming and expensive. However, a bottle of vodka would often suffice for a plumber to do it for free or for a pack of cigarettes.

On the one hand, in Poland, the term plumber was perceived as employing someone with no qualifications to do physically taxing groundwork. However, on the other, even people who had vast knowledge were perceived as continuously drunk.

A plumber’s vocational diploma gained in Poland can be confirmed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,⁴ then translated into English and submitted to Naric, where it will be evaluated for British equivalent.⁵ For example, a Polish plumber with the title of a Master will receive a Naric certification of comparability to NVQ level 3. The level of qualification is meticulously verified and fairly represents British standards. The example of a plumber presented above, who gains the comparability certificate of his qualifications being at level 3, will not find work in his occupation, as even with his qualifications certified as level 3, he will be perceived as a fitter, which in the United Kingdom is recognised as a labourer or even a plumber’s assistant. It is because Naric does not have the right to change the vocational terms included on a Polish diploma, and it is unacceptable to include the word “plumber” on a diploma in Poland. Ultimately, it results in a Polish plumber, whose knowledge and skills may exceed the skillset of a British plumber, being recognised as a simple assistant.

A solution to such a conundrum resulting from various cultural differences is to find a reliable translator who will adequately integrate cultural variations and steer the translation in the right direction. In Polish, the term “plumber” may be unprofessional, but it is clear. Diligent translation of the vocational title of “Fitter of Sanitary Installations and Equipment” into the simple term plumber may be met with cultural opposition and reservations towards the credibility of the translation or even the translator themselves. After all, how could one call a Fitter a simple plumber?

The responsibility and firmness of the translator are fundamental in such cases as their knowledge regarding the culture of the country of the language they translate into is very desirable. Only after an appropriate diploma translation, and in this case, a complete change of the

Polityki Społecznej (N.A.) <https://psz.praca.gov.pl/rynek-pracy/bazy-danych/klasyfikacja-zawodow-i-specjalnosci/wyszukiwarka-opisow-zawodow/-/klasyfikacja_zawodow/zawod/712601?_jobclassificationportlet_WAR_nnkportlet_backUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fpsz.praca.gov.pl%2Frynek-pracy%2Fbazy-danych%2Fklasyfikacja-zawodow-i-specjalnosci%2Fwyszukiwarka-opisow-zawodow%2F%2F-%2Fklasyfikacja_zawodow%2Flitera%2FH> [accessed 24 August 2023].

3 Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej, *Wortal Publicznych Służb Zatrudnienia Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej*

4 Związek Rzemiosła Polskiego, *Wykaz Komisji Egzaminacyjnych Czeladniczych I Mistrzowskich, W Zawodach Odpowiadających Danemu Rodzajowi Rzemiosła Powołanych Przez Izby Rzemieślnicze*, (2017) <<https://zrp.pl/dzialalnosc-zrp/oswiata-zawodowa/egzaminy/legalizacja-swiadectw-czeladniczych-i-dyplomow-mistrzowskich/>> [accessed 24 August 2023].

5 Enic-Naric, *Enic-Naric Gateway To Recognition Of Qualifications* (N.A.) <<https://www.enic-naric.net/>> [accessed 24 August 2023].

vocational term, can a Polish plumber gain their desired job.

A very similar, but reversed, situation happens when it comes to a barber, whose Polish equivalent would be “golibroda” or “golarz”, as this occupation went extinct in Poland.⁶ It was performed by people with no qualifications, frequently poor, who would shave their clients the same way - smooth skin with no facial hair. Many of them never had their saloon or even completed their education. This occupation was absorbed by a hairdresser,⁷ who not only could cut hair, style it or shave a client but also had an awareness of the newest fashion trends and did not repeat the same pattern but incorporated originality and could even choose a completely new style for their client.

Potentially, a translation of a vocational diploma of a “barber” gained in the United Kingdom, who completed their education in present times and not only shaves but also cuts or styles hair, as well as has knowledge of the current trends would result in comparability certificate to extinct Polish qualifications or the department deciding that there is no comparable vocation. Only an appropriate translation from a “barber” to a “hairdresser” would result in gaining the correct level of comparable qualifications. In this case, the translator would have to change the entire job classification.

Problems with vocational translations led, among many things, to The National Bar Association of the Attorneys at Law issuing an appropriate directive that in case of a Polish vocational degree of Radca Prawny, the translator should use the term “Attorney at Law”.⁸ It is so because, in Poland, there are only three lawyers’ associations. Therefore, only three types of lawyers formally recognised: “Attorney at Law”, “Solicitor”, and “Tax Adviser”. The term “Lawyer” exists in the Polish language, and it is “prawnik”, alas only as a colloquial term. No one can be employed as a “lawyer”.⁹ At the same time, the United Kingdom has many law qualifications: “barrister”, “solicitor” to name just a few.

In the case of The National Bar Association of the Attorneys at Law, the problem of appropriate translation of their occupation was solved, but in the case of plumbers or barbers, the National Chamber of Craftsmen, which holds responsibility and represents them,¹⁰ did not release any directives concerning that, leaving this up to the craftsmen themselves and their translators. Another subject that may result in problems is the difference in the vocations themselves. A British “surveyor” translated without any annotations or comments from a translator becomes a “geodeta”, whereas a Polish “geodeta”, even if earning a similar salary, having extensive qualifications and being in high demand, only fulfils parts of the duties British Surveyor was trained to do. The occupation of a surveyor in Britain can be translated to “rzeczoznawca” (lit.

6 Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej, *Wortal Publicznych Służb Zatrudnienia Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej* (N.A.) <https://psz.praca.gov.pl/rynek-pracy/bazy-danych/klasyfikacja-zawodow-i-specjalnosci/wyszukiwarka-opisow-zawodow/-/klasyfikacja_zawodow/litera/G> [accessed 24 August 2023].

7 Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej, *Wortal Publicznych Służb Zatrudnienia Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej* (N.A.) <https://psz.praca.gov.pl/rynek-pracy/bazy-danych/klasyfikacja-zawodow-i-specjalnosci/wyszukiwarka-opisow-zawodow/-/klasyfikacja_zawodow/zawod/514103?_jobclassificationportlet_WAR_nnkportlet_backUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fpsz.praca.gov.pl%2Frynek-pracy%2Fbazy-danych%2Fklasyfikacja-zawodow-i-specjalnosci%2Fwyszukiwarka-opisow-zawodow%2F%2F-%2Fklasyfikacja_zawodow%2Flitera%2FF> [accessed 24 August 2023].

8 Krajowa Izba Radców Prawnych, (2018) *Uchwała Krajowej Rady Radców Prawnych w sprawie tłumaczenia nazwy zawodu radcy prawnego na angielski* <<https://kirp.pl/uchwala-krajowej-rady-radcow-prawnych-w-sprawie-tlumaczenia-nazwy-zawodu-radcy-prawnego-na-angielski/>> [accessed 24 August 2023].

9 Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej, *Wortal Publicznych Służb Zatrudnienia Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej* (N.A.) <https://psz.praca.gov.pl/rynek-pracy/bazy-danych/klasyfikacja-zawodow-i-specjalnosci/wyszukiwarka-opisow-zawodow/-/klasyfikacja_zawodow/litera/P> [accessed 24 August 2023].

10 Związek Rzemiosła Polskiego, *Wykaz Komisji Egzaminacyjnych Czeladniczych I Mistrzowskich, W Zawodach Odpowiadających Danemu Rodzajowi Rzemiosła Powołanych Przez Izby Rzemieślnicze*, (2017) <<https://zrp.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/wykaz-komisji-lipiec-2017.pdf>> [accessed 24 August 2023].

appraiser/expert/surveyor), and in this case, gained in the United Kingdom experience and qualifications will fit. However, at the same time, it is an entirely different occupation. The vocational cultures of Poland and the United Kingdom are, in this case, completely different. “Geodeta” and “Rzecznawca” in Poland fall under jurisdictions of different Chambers, requiring different qualifications gained through different vocational training at respective academic institutions. In Poland, “Geodeta” will not do the work of a “Rzecznawca”, and “Rzecznawca” will not do the work of a “Geodeta”, but the British “Surveyor” will do both.

Polish “rzecznawca” is responsible for assessing whether the project was appropriately completed, whether there were any errors during the construction process, assesses the state of the building, whether it fits into the original project, is often times called upon as an expert witness by the Court, decides the value of the property depending on such factors as changes or level of humidity.¹¹

At the same time Polish “geodeta” prepares the documentation required to commence the project, it is his responsibility to consult the maps, type of ground, trees and bodies of water or other constructions in such a way so the project can be appropriately drafted even before the construction process will begin.¹²

British terminology recognises a few specialisations of a surveyor, a “land surveyor”, “building surveyor,” and depending on the specialisation, British surveyor will be better prepared to fulfil future work responsibilities, but it is still the same occupation with the same history and the term is clear and recognisable throughout the British Isles. In Poland, “surveyor-geodeta” and “surveyor-rzecznawca” are completely different and unrelated occupations, which, in the minds of the locals, are connected with different responsibilities.

On a higher level of employment, when the time to commence the construction projects or restoration of construction comes, which is connected with an enormous budget, not only the vocational term but also long-term experience and knowledge are meticulously verified by the investors, the building inspection organisations¹³ or even co-workers, therefore it can be said that no language confusion can not or at least should not affect the safety or quality of work. It is different when it comes to the social scene, where one of the first questions asked of newly acquainted people will be a question about work or qualifications. Misunderstandings, in this case, are easy and can cause many undesirable outcomes.

A perfect example of a potential misunderstanding resulting from too swift, not thought-through translation can be any British occupation that has the prefix “engineer”. Building on the example of plumbers, a potential “gas engineer” is a qualified specialist who fits and services boilers, fits gas pipes and checks their sealing. It is, therefore, a specialist with a qualification level 2 or 3.¹⁴

11 Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej, *Wortal Publicznych Służb Zatrudnienia Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej* (N.A.) <https://psz.praca.gov.pl/rynek-pracy/bazy-danych/klasyfikacja-zawodow-i-specjalnosci/wyszukiwarka-opisow-zawodow/-/klasyfikacja_zawodow/zawod/214210?_jobclassificationportlet_WAR_nnportlet_backUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fpsz.praca.gov.pl%2Frynek-pracy%2Fbazy-danych%2Fklasyfikacja-zawodow-i-specjalnosci%2Fwyszukiwarka-opisow-zawodow%2F%2F-%2Fklasyfikacja_zawodow%2Flitera%2FR> [accessed 24 August 2023].

12 Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej, *Wortal Publicznych Służb Zatrudnienia Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej* (N.A.) <https://psz.praca.gov.pl/rynek-pracy/bazy-danych/klasyfikacja-zawodow-i-specjalnosci/wyszukiwarka-opisow-zawodow/-/klasyfikacja_zawodow/zawod/311104?_jobclassificationportlet_WAR_nnportlet_backUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fpsz.praca.gov.pl%2Frynek-pracy%2Fbazy-danych%2Fklasyfikacja-zawodow-i-specjalnosci%2Fwyszukiwarka-opisow-zawodow%2F%2F-%2Fklasyfikacja_zawodow%2Flitera%2FT> [accessed 24 August 2023].

13 Główny Urząd Nadzoru Budowlanego, *Główny Urząd Nadzoru Budowlanego* (N.A.) <<https://www.gunb.gov.pl/co-robimy>> [accessed 24 August 2023].

14 Gas Safe Register, (2023) <<https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/services/becoming-registered/path-to-gas-safe-registration/>> [accessed 24 August 2023].

Too quick or simply inaccurate translation of British “gas engineer” to Polish can cause a serious misunderstanding in the social spheres, where direct translation would be “inżynier gazownictwa”, a Site Manager, a person with vocational qualifications at level 7. It is because the word “engineer” can be translated directly into “inżynier”, which is pronounced the way the British “engineer” is. This term can also (and in this case, it is necessary to do so) be translated as a “fitter”. Therefore, the Polish word “monter”. “Inżynier” in Poland is a very high qualification, which definitely can not be used by a person who has just completed an apprenticeship. Even though when it comes to looking for work, “Site Manager” and “Gas fitter” look for something different, therefore there is little chance of misunderstanding, social aspects are different and can cause various unpleasant misunderstandings during simple conversations. Language confusion and misunderstanding may be serious issue when combined with cultural differences, when during the development of a vocational culture, these may find their way into the Law.

Until these days in Poland, the Site Supervisors are called the German term “Meister”. Polish construction tradition, even in the Middle Ages, tended to borrow from Germany. German technology and construction solutions have been deemed as simply the best by Polish people.

The aforementioned Polish plumber, even before the fall of the Berlin Wall, has always been connected with the image described above - dirty and drunk, even though the construction technology and especially plumbing solutions vastly changed in the nineties. Heavy iron pipes became a thing of the past, replaced by many complicated plastic solutions. The plumbers no longer dig the pits for sewerage. They often have multiple qualifications as electricians, welders and gas engineers. The many changes mentioned above have little to do with how the perception of a plumber has changed. Over the past 10-20 years, it has become a serious occupation, requiring a vast knowledge and skillset. Frequently, the word “hydraulik/plumber” rather than said disparagingly is said with respect. Maybe soon, the Polish Chamber of Craftsmen and Ministry of Education will change the titles used on the diplomas and the “Fitter of Sanitary Installations and Equipment” will be replaced by a simple plumber.

Such a slow but dramatic cultural change could only happen due to an enormous amount of cultural borrowing from neighbouring, much more developed Germany.

The nineties brought to Poland not only the newest technology and solutions from Germany but also the attitude and work culture. German work style became a standard model in Poland to such a degree that German loanwords, together with cultural misunderstandings, created an occupational position of a “Majster/Meister”.¹⁵ “Majster”, in reference to the Law, is a Site Manager who operates the site and makes all decisions regarding the construction of up to the second floor, not exceeding the total size of 1000 m².¹⁶ At the same time, the term “Majster” is nothing else than the word “Mistrz” (in Polish) and the rarely used in British construction terminology word “Master”, which is more appropriately called “Foreman” these days.

The misunderstandings mentioned previously happened because of the amount of cultural borrowings from Germany, both concerning solutions as well as the work style. Polish labourers borrowed the term “Majster” and proceeded to use it to describe Site Managers, which already had their own Polish term. Alas, “Majster” was thought to carry more weight and was connected to a different work style. As a result, Polish Craftsmen, completing a level 3 training and gaining their Master Craftsman/Foreman diploma, had to complete a state exam to gain the title of a “Majster”, which once again meant “Master Craftsman/Foreman” only in a language of a different

15 *Ustawa z dnia 31 stycznia 1961 r. Prawo budowlane.* (1961 Warsaw: Parliament)
<<https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19610070046>> [accessed 24 August 2023].

16 Tadeusz Biliński, and Emilia Kucharczyk, 'Uprawnienia Budowlane W Przeszłości, Dzisiaj I W Najbliższej Przyszłości', *Przegląd Budowlany*, 1/2017, (2017), pp.49-54 <<https://www.przegladbudowlany.pl/2017/01/2017-01-49-Kucharczyk-Uprawnienia.pdf>> [accessed 24 August 2023].

country.

Such misconstrued cultural and linguistic loanwords would continue to last if not for the Government introducing a Law that renamed “Majster” into “Site Manager/Supervisor”, which was much clearer, logical, and linguistically correct.¹⁷

The above examples confirm that the translator’s linguistic skill should go hand in hand with the knowledge of culture. Vocational titles are very connected to specific areas and easily identifiable there. Over the years, the cultures and languages of European countries changed, sometimes in a similar way, sometimes completely different. Lack of sufficient cultural knowledge of the language can result in multiple errors made by the translator. The vocational titles are, in this case like idioms, which sometimes are translated word for word, and sometimes an adequate interpretation is necessary. The primary responsibility of a translator is to interpret the words and ensure their understanding and clarity in the other language. For this reason, both Polish and British Laws allow the translators to add comments or annotations in formal translations to avoid misunderstanding and to ensure that “Fitter” will not become a “Manager” and a “Foreman” a “Fitter”.¹⁸

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17 *Obwieszczenie Marszałka Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 17 sierpnia 2006 r. w sprawie ogłoszenia jednolitego tekstu ustawy - Prawo budowlane* (2006 Warsaw: Parliament)
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18 *Ustawa z dnia 25 listopada 2004 r. o zawodzie tłumacza przysięgłego* (2004 Warsaw: Parliament)
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