



Szczęśliwej Podróży! (Bon Voyage!)

*What every manager should know
about Polish translation*



COMMUNICATION. IN ANY LANGUAGE.

Of the total Polish speakers worldwide, 38 million live in Poland, where virtually everyone learns it as their native tongue.





I came, I Warsaw, I conquered

If you want to succeed in the Polish-speaking market, you should keep an old Polish proverb in mind:

“Kiedy wszedłeś między wrony, musisz krakać jak i one.” It means: “When among the crows, crawl as the crows do.”

The challenge, however, is that crawling like a crow would be far easier for native English speakers than trying to learn the Polish language. With seven cases, five grammatical genders, complex verb conjugations and multi-consonant constructions (not-to-mention words longer than the Polish-German border), Polish is one of the hardest European languages for English speakers to master.

But don't sign up for those bird-calling lessons just yet. Your goal isn't to win an Academy Award for your role in the next Roman



Polanski film, it's to produce seamless, high-quality Polish translations. By learning a little about the language and by following the few tips we've outlined in this guidebook, you can produce perfect Polish translations every time.

So take a few minutes to learn how to manage your Polish translation projects proactively and professionally. As they say in Poland, *“Bez pracy nie ma kołaczy.”* “With no work, there is no dinner.” Or as we would put it: “No pain, no gain.”

Worldwide, Pole to Pole

Like Poland itself, the Polish language has a long and distinguished history. With approximately 50 million Polish speakers throughout the world, the language once considered a Lingua Franca in Central Europe continues to be a beacon of Polish culture globally today.

Of the total Polish speakers worldwide, 38 million live in Poland, where virtually everyone learns it as their native tongue. In nearby Lithuania, nearly 10% of the population considers Polish to be their primary language, and you'll also hear Polish spoken in designated regions of Belarus and Ukraine.

Polish-speaking communities also proliferate in several other



European countries, as well as in Israel in the Middle East; Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay in South America; and Canada and the United States on the North American continent. In the United States alone, more than 11 million

people are of Polish descent, and nearly 700,000 American inhabitants speak Polish.



A member of the Slavic language family, Polish is the world's second-most spoken Slavic tongue, surpassed only by Russian. Other



members of the Slavic family closely related to Polish include Czech and Slovak.

Unlike Russian, Polish is written in a Latin-based, rather than a Cyrillic alphabet, which makes it easier for English speakers to recognize Polish words. But that's just the good news. The bad news is that regardless of how they are written, Polish words can be a linguistic obstacle course for non-Slavic speakers.

Try, for example, to pronounce the full name of Poland's national saint, St. Stanisław of Kraków. Before he was canonized by Pope Innocent IV in 1253, Poland's celebrated Christian martyr was known to his friends as Stanisław *Szczepanowski*. (Just be glad he was from *Kraków*, instead of *Szczecin*.)

A, B, Chopin

The Polish alphabet contains 32 letters, including 23 consonants and 9 vowels. For the most part, the Polish alphabet is identical to English, except that Polish orthography doesn't make use of the letters Q, V and X.

Some Polish letters do, however, use diacritical marks that aren't found in English. These include:

- n The *kreska*, an upwardly slanting dash that appears above five separate letters: Ć, Ń, Ó, Ś and Ź.
- n The *ogonek*, a sort of squiggle that appears underneath variants of two vowels:Ą and Ę.
- n The *kropka*, a small dot found above the letter Z, which looks like Ź.



Polish also uses a letter – written as Ł – and referred to in English (appropriately enough) as the *L with stroke* or sometimes as the *Dark L*. Dating back to the 16th Century, the letter ł is pronounced similarly to the English letter W.



Now that you know everything you ever wanted to know about Polish diacritical marks but were afraid to ask, here is a complete list of the Polish alphabet:

UPPER CASE

A Ą B C Ć D E Ę F G H I J K L Ł M N Ń O Ó P R S
Ś T U W Y Z Ź Ż

LOWER CASE

a ą b c ć d e ę f g h i j k l ł m n ń o ó p r s ś t u w
y z ź ż

Design/Layout Guidelines

English and Polish do not translate word for word. In fact, in most cases, a Polish translation will require considerably more words to communicate the same meaning conveyed by your English version. Below is an example of an English paragraph, followed by its Polish translation.

Polish is a Slavic language spoken by about 50 million people in the world. It is primarily spoken in Poland, but large Polish-speaking communities exist in several other countries as well. Because of Poland's strong cultural and economic influence in Central Europe, Polish has been one of Europe's most important languages for centuries. As an official language of the European Union, Polish continues to play an important economic and cultural role internationally today.



Język polski należy do grupy języków słowiańskich. Posługuje się nim około 50 milionów ludzi na świecie. Mówią nim głównie mieszkańcy Polski, jednak w wielu innych krajach znajdują się również społeczności mówiące po polsku. Ze względu na silny wpływ kulturowy i gospodarczy Polski w Europie Środkowej, język polski od wieków był jednym z najważniejszych języków europejskich. Język polski, będący urzędowym językiem Unii Europejskiej, nadal odgrywa istotną rolę kulturalną i gospodarczą na arenie międzynarodowej.

As you can see, the Polish text requires one more line of printed type than the English paragraph does. This extra-length requirement is normal and should always be anticipated when translating English into Polish.

If your translation project involves printed materials, plan for your Polish-language versions to require 20% more printed text than your original English drafts. Leave enough white space in the original design and layout to allow for the extra room your Polish copy will require. By doing so, you'll avoid the need to create a separate design for your Polish drafts – not only saving you headaches, but time, money and mistakes as well.



Say it in Perfect Polish

With words like *gęgźółka*, which means “cuckoo” and drives countless Poles equally cuckoo trying to spell it, you might think it's literally impossible to produce perfect Polish translations. Well, it isn't. In fact, you can do it every time.



The secret is to focus on the translation management process itself, rather than on the language per se. Here are a few final tips to help you achieve seamless translations time and again.

Be Polite, Please

Poland has had one of the most glorious histories in Europe, but it's a glory that hasn't come without sacrifice and bloodshed. The



country has often been under foreign domination, with pressure from the ruling government at the time to establish German, Russian or another language as the official Polish tongue.

Centuries of struggling for independence have led to a strong national pride in the Polish language – a pride you should always respect when conducting business in Polish-speaking markets. Poles believe strongly in the concept of “correct Polish,” and they typically regard slang expressions as improper and uneducated use of the language.

Educated Poles are also highly sensitive to typos and spelling errors, and in business communications, formal forms of address are not only considered polite and professional, but essential. The moral of the story is that rather than to translate your English drafts literally word for word, ask your Polish translator to advise you on proper style and usage as well.

Winning the Numbers Game

Overlooking differences between English and Polish numerical punctuation is a frequent mistake. Where English uses commas to



designate thousands, Polish relies on periods. Conversely, although English uses periods to designate decimal points, Polish uses commas. See the example below.

ENG	POL
1,000	1.000
1,000,000	1.000.000
25,500.50	25.500,50
0.50	0,50

Remember, Polish readers are particularly sensitive to typos, so don't forget to double-check your numerical punctuation. If you don't, your materials are certain to look unprofessional. Period.

The Perfect Process

As we said earlier, the secret to achieving successful translations every time is to focus on the overall translation process, rather than on the Polish language itself.

First of all, NEVER rely on translation software alone. Engage a professionally qualified translator who is a native speaker of Polish. After this translator prepares the first draft, another native Polish speaker – preferably one you already know and work with – should review it for mistakes or stylistic inconsistencies.

If there are disagreements, the two translators should work together to resolve all issues and develop another, agreed-upon version before the final materials are produced. It's as simple – and effective – as that.



Far simpler, in fact, than one of our favorite Polish tongue twisters: *Chrzyszcz brzmi w trzcinie w Strzebrzeszynie, strzasa krople dżdzu*. In English it means: “A beetle sounds in the reeds in Strzebrzeszyn, disturbing rain drops.”

Only after sufficient amounts of Polish vodka do we recommend attempting to pronounce it. In the meantime, for more information on Polish translation, contact your Conersis representative.



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