Vocabulary internationalisms and start-ups

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Abstract

The environment of start-ups functions both in the area of the English language and the national languages which borrow numerous elements from the former one. The analysis of the internationalisms adapted in the Polish language proves that the vocabulary takes on the new shades of meaning as well as evaluative (validation) elements. It means that international words, highly popular in the globalisation era, have only apparent meaning content even in specialist lexicon since they are not devoid of the influences of language and culture of other areas. That, in turn, can exert influence on the effectiveness of international communication.

Key words: internationalisms, borrowings, specialist lexicon.

The dynamics of globalisation vs. linguistic changes

The dynamics of globalisation is the phenomenon whose repercussions encompass the language sphere which leads to the unification of languages. We are currently dealing with the strong expansion of the English language and there is a lot indicating that the world will be dominated by the model in which people will be in a way bilingual making use of English and the national languages (Zuckermann 2003), hence, in consequence, the national languages will be doomed to specific destruction (Steiner 1975). The dynamic civilisation changes necessitate searching for the new methods of linguistic observation which will soon enable identifying the phenomena that may appear ephemeral yet conducive to the language systems.

The globalisation processes focus on the area of the activity of start-ups. That specific and highly popular area of business activity stemming from Silicon Valley in a natural way derives its professional vocabulary from the English language. The environment of start-ups – innovative, creative, dynamic – make simultaneous use of the English language, common and facilitating communication for all. On the other hand, it functions in the local language area where there are inevitably new English elements introduced adapted to the local language systems. That kind of adaptation is often connected with the diversification of meanings of the lexemes creating some language shades and validation elements (emotional load) absent from other languages.

Start-ups are a new form of business activity so the language of that specific environment has not yet constituted the subject of detailed analysis. Undertaking its research one has to face two main challenges: globalism (the

analysis has to be rooted in the wide context) and the dynamics as well as the liability of functioning (in separate language areas) which may be compared to the brisk stream. The research was conducted by means of the Internet network which was treated as a scattered corpus (Kilgarriff 2003) (using the tools which include search engines).

The analysis was carried out in the area of the Polish language yet, it seems that the conclusions drawn illustrating the element of the globalisation processes may be referred to not only other languages but also to other areas of human activity.

Internationalisms amongst start-ups

In the case of the vocabulary connected with the activity of start-ups the borrowed professionalisms are internationalisms i.e., according to the classic definition of Haugen, the vocabulary of similar meaning and spelling with often distinct pronunciation spread in the majority of languages of western Europe (Haugen 1950). The vocabulary analysed functions not only in European languages but probably in all languages used in the areas where start-ups operate.

Methods

In the research presented there were 12 internationalisms analysed connected with the activity of start-ups which function in the area of the Polish language: *akcelerator* (Eng. *accelerator*), *bootstrapping* (Eng. *bootstrapping*), *decacorn* (Eng. *decacorn*), *ekosystem* (Eng. *ecosystem*), *inkubator* (Eng. *incubator*), *jednorożec* (Eng. *unicorn*), *lean startup* (Eng. *lean startup*), *MVP* (Eng. *MVP*), *pitch deck* (Eng. *pitch deck*), *pivot* (Eng. *pivot*), *skalowanie* (Eng. *scaling*), *start-up/startup* (Eng. *start-up/startup*).

The research was multi-stage, it checked whether the given internationalism appears, how it is defined, in what meanings it is used in the dictionaries of the English and Polish languages, in the National Corpus of Polish, specialist papers, (the original version, translations and Polish-language ones) and in non-specialist texts (popular press, Internet websites, blogs etc.).

The vocabulary connected with that type of activity is in its early stages of dissemination and, in most cases, is not yet noted in the dictionaries. The analysis conducted was qualitative, pragmalinguistic, which enabled making comparison and identifying the similarities and differences in the meaning of the internationalisms in the areas of the English and the Polish languages.

Examples of diversifying of the meanings

Among the 12 analysed internationalisms one can indicate both those in case of which there were no transformations of meaning in the process of moving to the area of the Polish language and those in which there were some deviations or diversifications stemming from separate mechanisms.

1. Changes in meaning stemming from translation e.g.

The acronym: *MVP* - Minimum Viable Product; “smallest group of features that will elicit customer feedback” (Blank, Dorf 2012). In the Polish translation of the book by Blank and Dorf *MVP* is „minimalnie satysfakcjonujący produkt” (Blank, Dorf 2013). The word *satysfakcjonujący*, closer to English *satisfying*, does not seem right in that context. Who and in what way would the product satisfy (its creator, the customer or the investor)? *Viable* has in its meaning range: *profitable, likely to succeed, sustain on the market, competitive*. Experienced start-uppers explain that they mean the product ready enough to be demonstrated to the customer or the investor to assess the interest (with the lowest possible financial expenses and asap). That translation appeared in the start-up “Bible” hence it is constantly reiterated.

2. Emotional load

The start-ups are currently highly popular and strongly promoted in Poland. It is trendy not only to possess a company but rather a start-up. That causes fading of the meaning of start-up originally specifying the activity, but also adding the internationalism from the area of start-up activity of the emotional load – in that case a positive one. An interesting example is the internationalism *pitch deck*, which denotes the presentation for the investor. The appearance of that word in the Polish language instead of the common *prezentacja*, proves the need for exemplification, emphasis and sophistication. Pitch deck is a presentation “well-thought over”, „effective”, „catchy”, while the ability to create it is „improved throughout start-up life”.

3. Metaphorisation and the perception of the World

Another example is the internationalism *unicorn* denoting the start-up worth at least a billion dollars. The creator of the metaphor, an American investor, wanted to emphasize that a start-up worth a billion dollars is as rare as a unicorn – a mythological creature. The rarity of its appearance – the construction block of the meaning of the lexeme *unicorn* in the area of the American language is not yet found in the Polish language. In the Polish cultural sphere a unicorn is not regarded as a real creature thus the metaphor entails rather an unachievable dream.

Conclusions

The internationalisation of the vocabulary is somehow accompanied by a disharmony since the language speakers employ the same vocabulary yet the understanding of the terms used may be slightly different. The analysis enabled not only researching the problem in the new area but also reflecting on the globalisation phenomena which are becoming the key to the nations functioning in many a sphere such as in culture, business and language. Realizing such mechanisms is essential in the perspective of international communication which, despite the increasing popularity of the English

language, is not devoid of the influence of the national and cultural features - even in the case of internationalisms.

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