

POLONUS PURLS (Polonus Philatelic URLs)

On-Line Translation Revisited (Are we there yet?)

By: Sam Ginsburg

The Polish Language Challenge

As Asia Rolewicz of the www.bab.la^[1] “language portal” explained in last summer’s e-mail exchange, I was asking her site to translate a Polish word that was “an adjective in the plural genitive case”, but most dictionaries list words in nominative case (for nouns and adjectives) or in the infinitive (for verbs). It sounded like I had to learn how to find the root form of Polish words if the internet dictionary and translation services didn’t have them.

There’s hope. The Polish-English section of www.bab.la will be expanding to include verb inflections (past, present, future, 1st person singular & plural, etc.). They plan to eventually include noun and adjective forms as well. Let’s hope it doesn’t take too long.

In the meantime, some of us (me) have a lot of trouble with foreign cases and inflections. For us EFL (English as a First Language) people, there is Professor Oscar Swan’s website, polish.slavic.pitt.edu, which includes a prize-winning 500-page downloadable Polish grammar book/PDF, and an on-line dictionary complete with search tips (e.g., trimming letters off the right end of a word will often lead to a translation that makes sense). There are also links to various Polish-language resources, and a forum where you can log in and ask questions. Swan even has an on-line first-year Polish language course, which I should take along with diet and exercise. The list of features goes on (e.g., pronunciation guide, songs, soap operas, and downloadable language drills), but some of the links were broken when I looked.

Wikipedia gives an overview of Polish Grammar at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_grammar, as well as a link to Ron F. Feldstein’s 100-page Concise Polish Grammar at seelrc.org:8080/grammar/pdf/comp-grammar_polish.pdf. The Slavic and East Euro-

pean Language Research Center at www.seelrc.org also has links to a variety of Polish resources which I haven’t explored. The Polish history link looks quite promising, however.

Dictionary Sites

Asia Rolewicz of www.bab.la also explained the difference between an on-line translation site and an on-line dictionary. A translation site will accept a URL or a page of Polish (for example), and do its best to translate all of it. A dictionary will accept a word or two and give you a variety of translations, depending on the uses.

Let’s start with dictionaries. Professor Oscar Swan’s dictionary, polish.slavic.pitt.edu/~swan/beta/, provides search tips, a variety of similar terms, and a list of alternative inflections (the noun, indefinite pronoun, hypothetical past pluperfect plural passive positive possessive, etc.) www.bab.la, which I am using more and more, has many of the same features that Swan does, but www.bab.la is jazzier-looking. www.bab.la included about 17 languages at last count. I typed in a word that it didn’t understand, but when I started backspacing from the right end, after “cky” was deleted, it came up with a number of translations and usages. It will also do automatic web and forum searches for the word. In addition to a forum, www.bab.la also includes suggest-your-own-translation, lessons, games, etc.

I think it’s a good idea, however, to have a list of several dictionaries or translation sites, in the hopes that if one doesn’t translate your word or phrase, another will. But the old standards, such as Babylon.com, Poltan.com, Systran, dict.pl, and others, seem to translate better than www.bab.la or Google language tools. So I’m still searching for good sites. [To be continued]

This column discusses some issues, tips, and sites to help with Polish-English translation. Please send corrections, additions, and other suggestions to me at samgins1730@yahoo.com.

Endnotes:

[1] In this article, “http://” has been omitted from the front of internet links because most current browsers will insert those characters when necessary.