

Heritage Retrieved and the Naming of Central European Realities

What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet; (Shakespeare, RJ, II, ii, 56-57). Actually, Juliet is not quite right, and we as translators know it. As translators of the languages of Central Europe, we are continually and painfully being made aware of the importance of names - every time we are faced with the necessity of giving a name in English, or any language other than our own native tongue, for any of the specific local realities proper to the culture from whose language we are to translate, when we find that there is no unanimously established and fixed name for that reality in the target language. That there has been no continuity of tradition, or that there have been several traditions co-existing or at variance with each other, or that perhaps there was once an established tradition which has been lost - for the terminology of our culture in the target language. Since 1989 and the great opening up of a territory for many decades literally and culturally a forbidden zone, we as translators have been expected to be codifiers and well-nigh oracles for the instantaneous discovery of foreign-language terminology for the things of our own domestic milieux about to be presented to the world at large.

Even if no outgoing promotional effort were made by our home authorities, the world at large is beginning to swirl in and through our local sights, events and occasions. Millions of visitors are being attracted to the previously little traversed Central European Quadrangle, the tourist route marked out at its corners by the metropolises of Prague, Bratislava, Budapest and Cracow. When they stand in the Market Square, or in the Kanonicza dumbfounded at the discovery of a Central European Renaissance the existence of which they had never suspected but now have stumbled on, they need words - a verbal commentary to underpin the image, not a dumb guide groping for words - to explain and fill in reassuring details of the reality they see in front of them, which will otherwise remain nothing more than a flit through the silent movies for them.

We as Central European translators have come to know this more and more acutely over the past decade. And we have also come to be aware of the following situation, too. An official representative comes from another country and it is necessary to talk or correspond with him, to present promotional materials to him, about the new administrative realities in this part of the world. But again there are no fixed terms, first because there has been no predominant and distinctly principal tradition of such terminology in the foreign language in question to represent *our* culture, secondly because several alternative names have sprung up in the target language and it is not clear which of them has the best claim to establishment, thirdly because our governments are still in the process of carrying out the relevant reforms, the outcomes of which are not yet fully predictable. Fourthly, etc. etc. ... Yet the VIP arriving at the airport has to be informed by our country's authorities of his host's name and title, and of the appropriate terms for this in his own or in the world language he speaks (I shall relate the rest of this paper to English). For all of these tasks central and local authorities are looking to (or perhaps not looking to, until it is too late) translators for ready-made answers, when we all know that up to now international diplomatic and political terminologies were normally built up and developed over many centuries of relations between two states, although sudden changes such as wars and their aftermath, or flourishing growth in peace-time, occasionally made the pace of terminological development faster, while periods of isolationism, colonialism or economic stagnation (or all three at once) slowed it down. Not until now was there such a widescale demand for instant naming. Here we may cast a glance at the European Union, but cannot (and should not) expect it to settle these matters for us.

On 1st January 1999 the Ustawa o samorządzie województwa (Voivodeship Local Government Act) came in force throughout Poland, dividing the country up into sixteen large territorial divisions to replace the forty-nine which had existed since 1975. The establishing of names for these territorial entities in the current global language of international communication became a practical need of paramount importance, yet one which has not been addressed properly by the authorities concerned. The primary failure has been the failure of the parties concerned to lay down a viable set of principles or guidelines for the determination of what the official English names of the following should be:

1. województwo dolnośląskie
2. województwo kujawsko-pomorskie
3. województwo lubelskie
4. województwo lubuskie
5. województwo łódzkie
6. województwo małopolskie
7. województwo mazowieckie
8. województwo opolskie
9. województwo podkarpackie
10. województwo podlaskie
11. województwo pomorskie
12. województwo śląskie
13. województwo świętokrzyskie
14. województwo warmińsko-mazurskie
15. województwo wielkopolskie
16. województwo zachodniopomorskie

One might try to exonerate the authorities involved because, after all, they are made up of politicians and civil servants, not linguists, historians and translators. But they might have thought of the potential problems a little bit earlier ... The demands (notably, neither suggestions nor indeed recommendations) the politicians concerned have come up with hitherto have been that 1) the original Polish names be preserved and 2) that the traditional names should be preserved. No-one appears to have advised them that such requirements were a) mutually irreconcilable and b) not necessarily concordant with the functional capacity for the assimilation of new words and terms into English, for example. But what do you mean by 'traditional'? 'Traditional' in what language? What the servants of the state presumably wanted was for the 'best job to be done', in other words for the interests of both the Republic of Poland and its regions, as well as of the convenience of non-Polish parties throughout the world, to be served as best as possible. By applying a mode of reasoning which only at first sight appears to be equivocation, it is possible to arrive at a solution which almost reconciles the two mutually incompatible demands. But first an answer has to be provided to the question of

the conditions which a newly created (or re-discovered) English name for a territorial entity in a non-English-speaking country has to meet.

I would venture to reply that there are at least three such features the successful term must have. It must be:

- a. distinctive,
- b. functional,
- c. meaningful.

By distinctive I mean that the proposed term must be immediately and readily recognisable to recipients worldwide as denoting the foreign entity it is to denote, here one of the sixteen new Polish regions - just as the name Poland, or Republic of Poland, alongside People's Republic of Poland or pre-war Poland, or pre-partitional Poland will be readily intelligible to educated recipients throughout the world as referring to the particular political and historical entities they designate; whereas *Polska*, *Polsha*, *Polonia*, *Lechistan* or *Lengyelország* might be confusing for certain recipients if used in a general English text and may therefore occur only in specific applications for specific, limited applications of English.

By functional I mean that the term should be syntactically and stylistically efficient in English, that it should adhere to the linguistic norms applicable in English to words in its grammatical category and semantic class. Since in English proper nouns and adjectives relating to place-names are spelled with a capital letter, the English equivalents for the names of the Polish regions must be spelled with a capital, even though the original Polish terms are not capitalised. Secondly, in English the main component of the official name of a particular administrative region is invariably a proper noun, not an adjective, the English equivalents of the Polish administrative regions should also use substantive, not adjectival forms. Thirdly, the proposed terms in English have to be easy enough to be used effectively on first encounter by all proficient speakers of English throughout the world. A corollary of this will be the ease of derivative formation, such as the obtaining of secondary adjectival forms (for informal use) from the basic proper nouns. So therefore it may turn out to be expedient to abandon original Polish-language names in favour of Anglicised equivalents. This is, in fact, a traditional custom in English with the official names of some of the regions and territories of countries with which the large English-speaking communities have enjoyed cultural relations of long standing, e.g.:

Bavaria - for German *Bayern*;
Saxony - for German *Sachsen*;
Thuringia - for German *Thüringen*;
the *Rhineland Palatinate* - for German *Rheinland-Pfalz*;
Brittany - for French *Bretagne*;
Normandy - for French *Normandie*;
the *South of France* - for French *Le Midi*;
Tuscany - for Italian *Toscana*;
Lombardy - for Italian *Lombardia* - etc.

Thirdly the proposed term in English should be meaningful, that is it should carry the political and cultural meanings inherent in the original term as understood by source-language recipients - or as much of these original meanings as possible. In other words, it should be culturally satisfactory or 'pleasing' to the speakers of both source and target language. This requirement, again, may make Anglicisations more desirable than straightforward, cumbersome yet intrinsically confusing transfers of the original Slavonic words, for instance the translations Western for *zachodnio-* in *zachodniopomorski* and Lower for *dolno-* in *dolnośląski*. More significantly, the stricture of meaningfulness is another recommendation in favour of historical Anglicised terms, desirable to both the sender and recipient communities as expressions of the historical fact that for well over a thousand years, even during the periods of political dependence, Poland has contributed to the culture and political affairs of Europe, and that the modern state with its present-day territorial division has an ancient heritage within that continent, albeit the borders of modern Poland and of her current internal territorial divisions may not correspond to the historical borders, which have varied more than in many other places in Europe in the course of the passing millennium. Another salient consideration here in opting for Anglicised terminology is that traditionally foreign names have been Englished through the mediation of mediaeval Latin and the universal Latinity of the western part of the continent. This in turn has two beneficial aspects: 1) it may help to resolve problems caused by diverse linguistic traditions of onomastic nomenclature in a part of the continent well-known for its multi-ethnicity, for instance Silesia will be the undisputed winner as an English term (established in the language since the 18th century anyway) in the war between *Śląsk* and *Schlesien*. 2) It may help some educated users of English to notice and effect connections in their knowledge of European history, which is probably still not being taught or presented anywhere on the continent as an integral and unified subject. For instance, the selection of the traditional term Pomerania for *Pomorze* (*pomorskie*) is a decision to use the mediaeval Latin term, Pomerania, which is derived from the Slavonic *Pomorze* (meaning 'land lying along the sea coast'). The German name for the area, Pommern and its derivative Pommerellen, are in fact also derived from Pomerania and therefore indirectly from the Slavonic name, whereas the Latinised term, Pomerania, often tends to be wrongly associated by English speakers with Germany and Germans, not with Slavs. A decision by the Polish authorities to adopt Pomerania as the official term in English would help to restore the authentic original etymological associations. I shall risk a claim that these two considerations are only apparently mutually contradictory, in fact they are complementary and simultaneously valid, reflecting the reality of a part of the continent well-known for its ethnic inhomogeneity and dispersedness - and also the realities of the reception of our part of Europe by people from other parts of the continent.

Finally, I shall observe that what the politicians concerned really wanted was foreign-language terminology that would satisfy all three of the above criteria: that it would be 1) distinctive, clearly identifying their regions to the outside world; 2) functional, that it would 'work' and be easy to use in the foreign language, and 3) meaningful, that it would give their foreign partners and recipients exactly the historical, political and cultural message they wanted to transmit about their region.

Before I return to the question of the existence of traditional Anglicised terms for the regions of Poland, I shall have to respond to the problem of the best term for the unit of territorial division, *województwo*. This is a relatively simple task, if the three above-quoted criteria are applied along with the OED, which gives the terms *voivodeship* (for the territorial unit) and *voivode* (for the office and person holding the office). There is a twofold definition of the office: 1) the historical term used throughout Central and Eastern Europe with special reference to Transylvania, and 2) specifically the officer in charge of an administrative district in modern Poland. There can be no doubt *voivodeship* is definitive, efficient and meaningful as a term, a clear winner over all other contenders such as *province*.

I now assert, perhaps to the surprise of many, that there are traditional terms in English, going back to the 16th century, for the regions of Poland. They are all recorded in a manuscript entitled *A Relation of the State of Polonia*, 1598, which is preserved in the British Library, and has been published as Volume XIII in the series of collections of historical documents relating to Poland, *Elementa ad fontium editiones*, issued and edited by Karolina Lanckorońska. The reason why not very many people may be aware of the existence of these Anglicised terms is of course the long period in history - almost two hundred years altogether - when cultural relations between Poland and the English-speaking countries dwindled down to nearly nil on account of Poland's political non-existence as an independent state and therefore also the lack of cultural exchange over a geographical separation very considerable

for the times. The renderings asterisked in my final list of suggestions are all to be found recorded - many of them very frequently - in A Relation of the State of Polonia. I am convinced that the revival of these terms once used and so natural-sounding in English - rather than the hunt for utterly new but traditionless surrogates - would be a solution in the sub-conscious, not fully realised spirit, rather than the letter of the authorities' resolution, and that once disseminated they would soon be accepted as the natural standards, in the interest of all parties concerned. After all, Poland is now at a stage in cultural relations with the rest of the world unparalleled at any other period in history - except for the brief spell of two decades between the World Wars - since the 18th century. Should we then not look back into our history to retrieve the strands of a lost linguistic heritage of cultural relations shared with the rest of Europe?

Presenting my final list of suggestions I now withdraw from commenting on the anomalous or controversial items, but shall be pleased to answer questions during discussion time.

List of suggested names for the new territorial administrative regions of Poland

1. województwo dolnośląskie - The Voivodeship of Lower Silesia*
2. województwo kujawsko-pomorskie - The Voivodeship of Cuiavia* & Pomerania*
3. województwo lubelskie - The Voivodeship of Lublin*
4. województwo lubuskie - The Voivodeship of Lubusz
5. województwo łódzkie - The Voivodeship of Łódź
6. województwo małopolskie - The Voivodeship of Lesser Poland*
7. województwo mazowieckie - The Voivodeship of Mazovia*
8. województwo opolskie - The Voivodeship of Opole
9. województwo podkarpackie - The Voivodeship of Sub-Carpathia
10. województwo podlaskie - The Voivodeship of Podlussia*
11. województwo pomorskie - The Voivodeship of Pomerania*
12. województwo śląskie - The Voivodeship of Silesia*
13. województwo świętokrzyskie - The Voivodeship of Kielce
14. województwo warmińsko-mazurskie - The Voivodeship of Varmia* & Masuria
15. województwo wielkopolskie - The Voivodeship of Greater Poland*
16. województwo zachodniopomorskie - The Voivodeship of Western Pomerania*