

Hybrid imperative forms in Polish: Problems of translations into German and English

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Abstract

The article deals with the grammatical constructions expressing the imperative in Polish with particular focus on the variations used in spoken language. Colloquial Polish often uses structures which could be described as *verb + pan/pani!* They can be used for any perfective as well as imperfective verb. One of the most popular phrases according to this pattern is the phrase *daj pan/pani spokój!* Phrasemes of this type are used mostly in slang and are characterised by brevity. The research material consists of two different databases: the National Corpus of Polish as well as the online translator Reverso Context. The article presents a number of difficulties experienced by German and English translators. It also shows why the process of translation is a balancing act between remaining true to the original content on the one hand, and creating a translation complying the requirements of the medium for which the translation is being made, on the other hand.

Keywords

grammar, imperative, translation, translation techniques, colloquiality

Hybrydowe formy trybu rozkazującego w języku polskim: Problemy w tłumaczeniu na język niemiecki i angielski

Abstrakt

Artykuł porusza kwestię konstrukcji gramatycznych wyrażających imperatywność w języku polskim ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem form używanych w języku mówionym. Potoczny język polski często używa struktur, które można opisać za pomocą schematu *czasownik + pan/pani!* Związki frazeologiczne tego typu charakteryzują się dużą zwieźlością. Struktury te mogą zostać zastosowane zarówno dla czasowników dokonanych jak i niedokonanych. Jednym z najczęściej stosowanych związków frazeologicznych utworzonych według powyższego schematu jest wyrażenie *daj pan/pani spokój!* Materiał badawczy stanowią dwie bazy danych. Pierwszą jest Narodowy Korpus Języka Polskiego, zawierający typowe użycia słów i konstrukcji językowych jak również informacji o ich znaczeniu i funkcji gramatycznej. Drugą bazę danych stanowi wyszukiwarka tłumaczeń Reverso Context (RC), będąca internetową bazą tekstów dwujęzycznych. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie trybu rozkazującego w potocznym języku polskim oraz przedstawienie trudności powstających przy tłumaczeniu go na język niemiecki i angielski. Omówione przykłady obrazują immanentny dylemat procesu tłumaczenia, polegający na sprostaniu kilku, niekiedy wzajemnie wykluczającym się, zadaniom równocześnie: zachowaniu możliwie największej wierności wobec oryginału i sprostaniu wymaganiom mediów, dla których dany przekład zostaje dokonany.

Słowa kluczowe

gramatyka, tryb rozkazujący, tłumaczenie, techniki tłumaczeniowe, styl kolokwialny

1. Introduction

The article deals with the grammatical constructions expressing the imperative in Polish with a particular focus on the variations used in spoken language. The aim of this study is to present the

imperative in common Polish as well as to show the difficulties in translating this into German and English. The research material consists of two different databases. The first one is the *National Corpus of Polish* (NKJP). It is a collection of texts where one can find the typical use of a single word or a phrase, as well as its meaning and grammatical function. The other database is the online translator *Reverso Context* (RC), which uses millions of bilingual texts. The examples are extracted from real-life contexts, covering a wide range of registers of speech.

2. Imperatives in Polish

The *imperative* (command, appeal) is perceived as one of the oldest functions of speech. The Greek philosopher Protagoras wrote about it as early as 500 years B.C. The first works of Polish linguistics about this topic appeared in the 1960s and 1970s. Among them were the works by Kotarbiński (1966: 53-60), Klemensiewicz (1969: 10-11), Jodłowski (1976: 61), and others. Imperatives are constructed in standard Polish in various ways. They can be directed to any grammatical person. For example, the imperative forms of the verb *dać* are as follows:

Singular

1. niech dam!
2. daj!
3. niech da!

Plural

1. dajmy!
2. dajcie!
3. niech dadzą

The verb forms in the second person contain the information about the person (second person singular or plural) and the mode (imperative). The third person can also be used for addressing persons with whom the sender of the message is not on first name terms (*niech pan/pani da!*, *niech panie/panowie/państwo dadzą!*). The person and the verb of *niech pan/pani da!* and *niech panie/panowie/państwo dadzą!* match each

other. To make these phrases more polite, users can add the verb *proszę* at the beginning or the end of the phrase.¹

Contemporary Polish, however, loves expressions like *daj pan/pani!* (*give it!*), *idź pan/pani!* (*go away!*), etc. These grammatical forms are very broadly used in colloquial Polish. They are imperative forms addressed to a person with whom the sender of the message is *not* on first name terms. Instead of using the complete three word phrase, the sender chooses only the imperative verb form for second person singular (eg. *daj*) and adds to it the address form of *pan* or *pani*. Being, therefore, a hybrid form between the informal (*ty*) and the formal (*pan/pani*), these forms are characterised by the lack of cohesion between the grammatical person and the form of the verb. The reason for their popularity seems to be obvious. Saving the word *niech* makes the phrase shorter and less rigid. Iwona Łuczków (1997: 89-90) sees this kind of sentence as being strongly emotive. In the literature she lists, several opinions have been presented about the use of such structures. For instance, Kleszczowa and Termińska (1983: 120) perceive them as being necessarily unkind, and Doroszewski (1962: 56) as well as Labocha (1988: 214) argue that they can be abusive or rude. At the same time, other works, for instance by Tomiczek (1983: 81-82) or Labocha (1988: 214) underline that in some social groups their use seems to be preferred to the strict formal form.

The structure described above could be used for any perfective as well as imperfective verb. Therefore, it could be described as:

verb + pan/pani!

Examples:

- No, bo *pomyśl pan*, panie, błędy były wyraźne, a Odnowy nija-
kie.

¹ There also exists an even more polite version using the verb *proszę* and infinite, eg. *proszę dać*. The verb, however, obviously does not have the morphologic form of imperative.

- A ot, *siadaj pan* z nami i tak kaszy zostanie.
- Nie można powiedzieć alkoholikowi – *pij pan* jeszcze ten miesiąc potem zobaczymy.

Collocations of this type have a long history in Polish. One of the best known quotations from Polish literature is a hybrid of the above described type. It comes from *Potop* (*The Deluge*) by Henryk Sienkiewicz, laureate of Nobel Prize for Literature in 1905. It is expressed during a sword duel by the novel's protagonist, Andrzej Kmicic. As he realizes that his opponent is clearly superior to him, he pronounces the famous words: *Kończ waść, wstydu oszczędź!* (*Finish – spare the shame!*²). The novel takes place during the Golden Age of the Kingdom of Poland. The historical events described in it took place in the time span of 1655–1657. *The Deluge*, however, was published more than two hundred years later (in 1886). For this reason, Sienkiewicz uses archaic language, employing many outdated words and phrases. The personal pronoun *waść* stands in for the contemporary *pan*.

Hybrid phrases of this type continue to be very popular. Many of them are to be found in the movie *Nie lubię poniedziałku* (*I Hate Mondays*) by Tadeusz Chmielewski from 1971. They are used by taxi drivers (“*Wsiadaj pan!*” [‘Hop on³’], “*Splywaj pan!*” [‘Get lost mister’]), industry workers (“*Kurka wodna, ratuj pan nasz plan!*” [‘Hey man, holy cow, save our plan’]), CEOs talking to their employees (“*Dobra, dobra, daj pan te papiery, to*

² H. Sienkiewicz, *The Deluge, Vol. I: An Historical Novel of Poland, Sweden and Russia*, translated by Jeremiah Curtin, Project Gutenberg 2001, p. 101. Reprint of the first edition from 1891. It is worth noting that Curtin, Sienkiewicz's first translator, labelled all parts of the Trilogy with subtitles referring to Russia, although the territories described in the novels belonged to the Kingdom of Poland during the time of action. They also dealt with the conflicts of Poles and Ukrainians rather than Russians. One possible explanation for this inaccuracy could be the shape of the political map at the time of the translations (that is, the end of the nineteenth century). Perhaps, Curtin intended to make it easier for an American audience to put the novels into the right geographical context.

³ The translations of the following movie dialogs come from the website *YIFY Subtitles*.

podpisze!” [‘Alright, alright, gimme these papers, I’ll sign’]; “No to *naciskaj pan!*” [‘Press it yourself’]), construction workers (“Panie dźwigowy! *Złaż pan* na dół! Zacięła się ta winda, *coś pan ją montował* w Maszynohurcie!” [‘Mister craneman! Get down! The lift you installed in Maszynohurt broke down’]; “*Wyłącz pan* na chwilę tę betoniarkę!” [‘Turn this thing off, will you!’]; “*Przestań się pan* kręcić!” [‘Stop snooping around!’]), random people on the street (“Po angielsku, *pokaż pan!*” [‘Let me see’]; “Te, panie, *chodź pan, pchniesz pan!*” [‘Hey, you! Come here! You’ll push with us!’]) and mechanics in an automobile repair shop (“*Nie przypominaj mi pan,* bo mnie zaleje!” [‘Don’t bring it up’]; “*Chodź pan!*” [‘Come here!’]; “*Dawaj pan* do tyłu!” [‘Get back! Get back!’]; “*Dawaj pan* na podnośnik!” [‘Get on the ramp!’]). The examples show that using this hybrid form of imperative is not restricted to a certain social stratum or occupational group.

It is worth noting that the movie quotations refer only to the masculine pronoun *pan*, and not to the feminine pronoun *pani*. Admittedly, most of the characters in the movie are men. However, a similar tendency can be observed while reviewing the examples from the NKJP. Most of the verbs seem to occur much more frequently in the masculine than in the feminine version, for example the frequency of *bierz pan!* and *bierz pani!* is respectively 9 and 1, *mów pan!* and *mów pani!* – 11 and 2, and *idź pan!* and *idź pani!* – 50 and 2. Sometimes, no feminine version can be found at all: *idźże pan!* and *spadaj pan!* lack a feminine equivalent.

As previously mentioned, the pattern *verb + pan/pani!* can be used for any verb. However, some verbs tend to be used more often than others. One of the most popular phrases according to the pattern is the phrase *daj + pan/pani! + spokój!* (*give it peace!, give up!*). The inherent part of this phraseme is the noun *spokój*. It covers a broad range of meanings like *tranquility, quiet, calmness, calm, silence, stillness, rest, peacefulness, order*. Analogically, the idiom can be used in many different types of situations, eg. as a reaction expressing indignation. To

explain all the possible meanings of the phrase would go beyond the scope of this article but the following examples are going to outline the extent of its semantical field. The NKJP includes *daj pan spokój!* 15 times while its feminine equivalent of *daj pani spokój!* is to be found in the NKJP only 4 times. “Daj Pan Spokój” was also chosen by the musicians Marcin Rys, Marcin Skała, Michał Tyburcy and Paweł Kaczmarczyk for the name of their band, which, once again, speaks to the popularity of the phrase.

3. Challenges faced by German translators while translating hybrid imperative forms

Hybrid imperatives seem to be a Polish peculiarity that presents quite a challenge for translations into English or German. The first question is what should be used to replace the lack of cohesion. German, similarly to Polish, makes a distinction between the formal way of saying *you* (*Sie*, third person plural) and the informal (*du*, second person singular). *Give (it to me)!* would therefore be expressed either as *geben Sie (mir das)!* or *gib (mir das)!* Replacing the verb in the third person plural with a verb in the second person singular would result in a completely incomprehensible expression *gib Sie!*

Analysing the translations of hybrid imperatives into German found in the RC, we can distinguish two basic approaches. The easiest way, it seems, is to *keep the imperative*, only remove the hybrid, and replace it with either a *formal form* or *informal form*.

Formal forms of an imperative:

- Zróbmy tak, *daj pan* 55 dolarów, a dostaniesz pan skarpety... i dorzucę tę dwururkę.
Ich sag Ihnen was, *Sie geben* mir 55\$, und ich gebe Ihnen die Socken... und noch die 12er-Flinte dazu.
- I *przestań pan* się wydzierać!
Also *hören Sie* auf, hier herumzuschreien!

- *Spadaj pan!*
Verschwinden Sie!

Informal forms of an imperative:

- *Daj pan* piwo i kolejkę whiskey.
Gib mir ein Bier und einen Schuss Whiskey.
- Dalej Panie sędzio, *kończ Pan* ten mecz!
Mach schon, *pfeif endlich*, Schluß Mann!
- *Mów pan*, tylko nie opuszczaj rąk.
Behalte deine Hände oben und sag etwas.

The examples above show the translations from a structural point of view. Although the morphologic peculiarity is left out, they present a quite accurate interpretation of the original. In some cases, however, especially when we are dealing with idioms, literal translation does not seem possible. The original imperative sentence is then being translated into a sentence which has a similar illocutionary force as the original hybrid imperative. The forms of Polish and German sentences differ from each other and the translation then becomes an implicit act. Some of the difficulties can be observed in the following examples:

- *Mów pan* po ludzku.
Geht's noch deutlicher?

Po ludzku is an idiom meaning *understandable*. Thus, each part of the Polish phrase is colloquial. So is the German rhetorical question *Geht's noch deutlicher?* Evidently the translator decided to keep the colloquiality of the phrase rather than translate it word for word.

Another case in which literal translation seems to be problematic is when translating texts from movies. It should be noted that the translator of movie dialogs must ensure that the translation is as brief as possible. Audiovisual translation requires translators to work within the confines of significant limitations. Such translation must thus necessarily be *constrained*

translation (Hasiór 2019: 64–65). Surely, one trait of the hybrid imperative is its shortness, as in the following in Polish. From several possible variations, the translator chose the one which seemed to be the shortest:

- I *daj pan* w jednocentówkach.
Und ich will sie in Einern.

For similar reasons, the translator of the next sentence cut the phrase *nie rób pan tego*. Preventing the person mentioned in the sentence from doing something seems to be self-explanatory enough and so the phrase containing the hybrid imperative seems to be redundant:

- *Nie rób pan tego, bo kierownik musi zobaczyć...*
Aber der Manager muss Sie sehen.

Apart from these rather seldom cases of implicit acts, a great majority of the translations are ones using the formal form. Informal forms are rarely used. Aleksandra Markiewicz (1999: 129) argues that the choice between the formal and informal form depends on the relationship between the sender and the receiver. If the situation suggests that the sender treats his or her partner with defiance, the informal form seems to be more appropriate. On the other hand, when the sender seems to have more respect for his or her partner, the formal form would be more adequate.

As in the previous examples, I had difficulties finding any sentence with the hybrid imperative form for the feminine pronoun. In fact, while looking through a number of commonly used verbs, I did not succeed in finding any single one combined with *pani*.

Some of the hybrid phrases are more semantically rich than others. For instance, the imperative *daj pan/pani spokój!* can be used in a variety of situations. Its purpose is to cause somebody to stop doing something, but its translation depends to a great extent on the context in which it is expressed. Among the verbs

often chosen for translation there are the following verbs: *verschwinden* (to disappear), *kommen* (to come), *aufhören* (to cease), vulg. *verarschen* (to kid sb). To underline the high level of colloquiality, often the noun *Mann* (man) is added. The formal form and the informal form seem to be represented to a similar extent. Less often, the phrase is translated with some variation of an illocutionary act. Here again, the database of the RC includes only sentences with the masculine pronoun *pan*.

Formal forms of an imperative:

- No cóż... *Daj pan spokój*.
Naja, jetzt... *kommen Sie* schon.
- *Daj pan spokój*, to pomysł wprost z "Fatalnego Zauroczenia".
Taki manewr, rozumie pan?
Kommen Sie, das ist doch das klassische Manöver wie in "Fatal Attraction"!
- *Daj pan spokój*, to jakieś wariactwo.
Hören Sie auf, Mann, das ist doch Schwachsinn!

Informal forms of an imperative:

- Och, *daj pan spokój*...
Geh schon, *verschwinde*!
- No *daj pan spokój*, przecież przeprosiłem.
Wir wollen, dass *du verschwindest*.
- *Daj pan spokój* i nie zawracaj mi głowy, dobra?
Verarsch mich nicht, Mann, OK?

As was mentioned previously, some sentences present quite a challenge for translators. Because German is a language less fusional than Polish, literal translations are often longer. For this reason, in the examples of audiovisual translation that follow, the part of the phrase containing *daj pan spokój* was treated as redundant and cut:

- To nie może być nasz jedyny wybór, *daj pan spokój*.
Uh. Das kann doch nicht die ganze Auswahl sein.

- *Daj pan spokój*, jesteśmy jakieś sześć przecznic od gościa, którego śledzimy.
Wir sind sechs Blöcke von dem Typen entfernt, den wir stalken.

The translator of the next sentence decided to replace the phrase *daj pan spokój* with another one, having apparently another meaning but being at the same time an illocutionary act conveying the intention implicitly:

- Akurat! – *Daj pan spokój*.
Sie wurden gerade befördert.

4. Challenges faced by English translators while translating hybrid imperative forms

Unlike Polish, English verb forms for both the formal and informal are identical. That is likewise true for creating imperative forms. Thus, the hybrid construction can only be translated into one possible form of imperative.

Imperative forms:

- No to... *daj pan polski!*
OK, *give me* a Polish one.
- *Pij pan* ten sok ze śliwek.
Drink your prune juice.
- *Podpisz pan* papier, to poczujesz się lepiej.
Sign this and you'll feel fine.

English translators, just as their German colleagues, experience a number of difficulties with the translation of some phrases. They sometimes provide a seemingly different sentence from a semantic point of view. The illocutionary force of both the original and its translation, however, is similar. So *mów pan po ludzku* (similar to the German translation previously) is replaced by an English equivalent, being a colloquial rhetorical question:

- *Mów pan* po ludzku.
- What are you talking about?

The next sentence expresses a complete indifference as to what the receiver of the message is going to do or undertake. The Polish phrase is an invitation to do whatever he likes, while the English translation conveys the same message in an implicit act:

- *Rób pan*, co chcesz.
It's a free country.

In the next sentence, the sender of the message would like to convince someone to buy something for his wife. While the Polish original is an explicit illocutionary act, the English equivalent gives the reason for buying, thus being an implicit act:

- *Kup pan* to żonie.
Your wife deserves this.

Reviewing the online dictionary led me to the conclusion that an overwhelming majority of hybrid imperative forms are translated into English as imperatives. Another thing to mention is that the sentences with the pronoun *pani* seem to be used very rarely.

The phrase *daj pan/pani spokój!*, on the other hand, is mostly translated with one of the following verbs: *to come on*, *to give (it) up*, *let (it) be*, or *get out*. Optionally, the colloquiality signalled in Polish by the hybridity can be expressed by the vernacular pronoun *man*. As was the case in the German translations, the database of the RC includes only sentences with the masculine pronoun *pan*.

Imperative forms:

- Proszę pana, *daj pan spokój*, Todd, Todd.
Sir, *come on*, Todd, Todd.

- *Daj pan spokój*, nie potrzebujemy fałszywej skromności.
Come on man, no false modesty now.
- *Daj pan spokój*, wszystko się wydało.
Give it up, man – there’s no surprise left in it.
- *Daj pan spokój*, panie Abdullah.
Let it be, Abdullah sir.
- *Daj pan spokój*.
Get out of here.

In some cases, the phrase *daj pan spokój* is replaced by another sentence, giving an explanation about why the receiver of the message should stop doing something, rather than only urging him to do so:

- No *daj pan spokój*.
- That’s the best I can offer.
- Dobra, *daj pan spokój*.
- It’s not important.

In the last example the idiom was replaced by another English slang phrase, conveying a similar meaning:

- *Daj pan spokój*.
- Give me a break.

5. Conclusion

Imperatives in standard Polish are constructed with a verb in either the informal form, consisting of one word (an exception from this is the first person singular) or the formal form, consisting of three words. In colloquial Polish, however, the imperatives are often constructed by means of the informal verb form and the formal pronoun *pan* or *pani*. The form created in this way can be used for any perfective as well as imperfective verb. Therefore, it could be described as verb + pan/pani! It is worth noting that the scheme is used more often for the masculine pronoun *pan*, than it is for the feminine pronoun *pani*. One of

the most popular hybrid imperative phrases is the phrase *daj pan/pani spokój!* (*give it peace!, give up!*). The idiom is broadly used in a number of different situations.

Hybrid imperatives are a Polish peculiarity that presents quite a challenge for translations into foreign languages, such as German or English. German translators mostly translate it using the formal form of the imperative. Less often, informal imperative forms are used. The idiom *daj pan/pani spokój!* is mostly used with one of the following verbs: *verschwinden* (*to disappear*), *kommen* (*to come*), *aufhören* (*to cease*) or vulg. *verarschen* (*to kid sb*). To underline the high level of colloquiality, the noun *Mann* (*man*) is often added. In the case of this phraseme, both formal and informal forms seem to be represented to a similar extent.

English translators mostly keep the imperative, replacing the hybrid with a suitable verb form. The phrase *daj pan/pani spokój!*, on the other hand, is mostly translated with one of the following verbs: *to come on*, *to give (it) up*, *let (it) be*, or *get out*. Optionally, the colloquiality signaled in Polish by the hybridity can be expressed by the vernacular pronoun *man*. Although hybrid imperatives can be constructed for both masculine and feminine pronouns, the examples found in the RC contain only phrases with *pan*.

It cannot be stressed enough that the material analysed in this article presents but a small register of speech, being not only spoken language, but often colloquial or even offensive language. These kinds of sentences obviously require corresponding translation procedures. Because of the structural homogeneity of the original sentences, their translation involves only a small range of translation techniques. Moreover, it can be assumed that the authors of the translations quoted here are not professional interpreters. Their main emphasis seemingly lies not so much on the artistic aspect of translation but rather on its higher effectiveness. Nowadays, more and more translations are conducted by non-professionals, presenting an interesting subject for further linguistic research.

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