



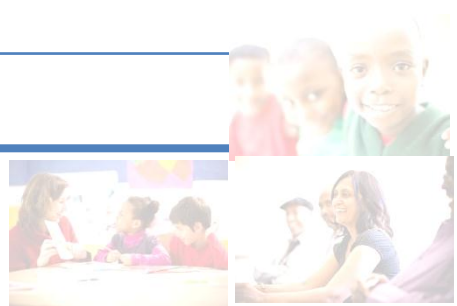
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## Language information

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### Polish

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Language information booklets provide teachers of EAL learners with some information on their first languages (or languages of previous education) and on cultural aspects. Typical differences between these languages and English have been highlighted to make teachers aware where these learners might need additional support.

It is important to note, however, that these are guidelines and that individual learners may not find the areas mentioned here difficult.

For more specific information on languages and their scripts you may want to visit <http://www.omniglot.com/>.

If you wish to print this booklet for colleagues working with EAL learners from this language background, we recommend you use the booklet settings on your printer.

# Polish - polski język

## Maps



## Writing sample

This is Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Polish:

Wszyscy ludzie rodzą się wolni i równi w swojej godności i prawach. Są obdarzeni rozumem i sumieniem i powinni postępować wobec siebie w duchu braterstwa.

**All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.**

(Listen to a recording on <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/polish.htm> .)

## Facts

Language family	Indo-European West Slavic branch
Number of speakers	40 million
Official language	Poland
Minority language	Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine
Writing system	Roman script with diacritics
Main religion	Roman Catholic

## Names

Polish names consist of first names and surnames. People may have middle names.

Women traditionally change their surname upon marriage.

The diminutive form of the first name is often used in conversation. This means that Anna becomes Ania, Anka, Andzia, Anusia or Aneczka or Mateusz becomes Maciek, Mateuszek or Mati. Using these diminutives softens the directness of e.g. a request. **Sit down, Mateuszek** is perceived as a very polite invitation whereas **Sit down, Mateusz** comes across as a command.

## Cultural differences

Polish has a courtesy form of addressing people who are strangers or to whom speakers want to show their respect (**pan** [sir] and **pani** [madam]).

When using the polite form it is quite often not necessary to add **please (proszę)** and **thank you (dziękuję)**. Polish native speakers should therefore not be stigmatised as being rude if they do not use **please** and **thank you** as often as English native speakers would expect them to.

# Language and people

Poland is one of the former communist countries which joined the European Union in 2004. The current Polish republic is the fourth in its history. Poland was one of the richest and most powerful countries in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The strong national movement during the period of the Enlightenment resulted in the first written constitution in Europe in 1791. Soon after, however, Poland was partitioned between Prussia, Austria and Russia.

The Polish remained a nation without a state until 1918 when the Second Polish Republic was founded. This lasted only until 1939 when – at the beginning of World War II – the country was invaded by Germany in the west and the Soviet Union in the east. As a Warsaw Treaty country it bore the name People's Republic of Poland. The ruling communist party was defeated by the Solidarity movement with its figurehead Lech Wałęsa, who – after a ten-year struggle – became president in the 1989 elections.

The state-directed economy has been transformed into a market economy since the end of communism. This involved privatisation of state-owned companies and has led to a highly competitive economy with international shareholders. The process, however,

has not been successfully concluded yet. There are enormous problems as the Polish economy suffers from under-investment and as structural reforms in sectors like education and health care involve high costs. The unemployment rate was almost 11% in 2013. The country is currently trying to meet the criteria for entry into the European Single Currency.

Due to its history, Poland has always been a country with ethnic minorities (among them are Germans, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Yiddish-speaking Jews and Belarusians) and minority languages. Belarusian, German, Kashubian, Silesian and Ukrainian are used in five communal offices. Polish is the official language though.

## Education

The Polish school system has undergone major reforms since the 1990s. Nurseries can be attended from the age of three. Children **start** their compulsory **school education at the age of 6** (or 7) in year 0 (Reception). They attend primary school until the **age of 13**. Then they move on to **secondary education**, which consists of three years **gimnazjum**. This is followed by a three-year **liceum**, a four-year **technikum** education or vocational training.

# What may be new, unusual or difficult for Polish speakers when learning English

## Phonology

The phonology of Polish is significantly different to the phonology of English. Therefore native speakers of Polish may have the following problems when acquiring English:

- ◆ The penultimate syllable of Polish words carries the stress, Polish learners of English might apply this rule to English and mispronounce words. They also tend to find stress-shifts in words like **political** and **politics**, **politician** difficult.
- ◆ Not being used to linking consonants to vowels in a sequence of words, Polish speakers tend to speak English in a more staccato way, pausing after each word.
- ◆ Since Polish distinguishes between 8 vowels (no diphthongs) and English between 22, Polish learners may confuse certain words, e.g.
  - man – men, bad – bed
  - ship – sheep, fit – feet
  - peas – peace
  - saw – sew, bought – boat
- ◆ Weak vowels are unknown in Polish and tend to be pronounced as full vowels in English.
- ◆ Consonants cause fewer problems, but may sound harsher, e.g. **h** is pronounced **x** (like **ch** in Scottish **loch**).
- ◆ Final voiced consonants may be devoiced by Polish speakers, saying **bet** instead of **bed** or **dock** instead of **dog**.
- ◆ **th** is often pronounced as **d**, **v**, **z**, **s** or **t**.
- ◆ The **r** pronounced by Polish learners usually sounds Scottish.

## Grammar

- ◆ Polish is a highly inflected language: Nouns and adjectives are declined for seven cases as well as number and gender. The word order is freer than in English. Being used to nouns having a gender Polish speakers may use **he** or **she** to refer to things.
- ◆ The Polish tense and aspect system is completely different to the English one. Polish speakers tend to use the past tense instead of the present perfect (e.g. **She never saw that film**), which may sound American. They also may use the present perfect with a time marker, saying e.g. **I have seen it last month**. Polish uses the passive much less than English. Polish learners therefore tend not to use it and when they do, they often form it by using the **-ing** form instead of the past participle (**I'm interesting in music**.)
- ◆ Polish questions and negatives are made by simply adding question words or the negative particle **nie** (=no). The English use of **do** is therefore difficult for Polish learners. They are also not familiar with tag questions. When answering questions Polish speakers tend to answer simply with **yes** or **no**, which may sound abrupt for English ears.
- ◆ Since Polish does not have articles **the** and **a** are often dropped or overused by Polish learners of English.
- ◆ Polish learners may find it difficult to decide whether a verb needs a *to*-infinitive, an infinitive or an **-ing** form, they may not see the difference between sentences like **He stopped to work** and **He stopped working**.
- ◆ Prepositions, relative pronouns (**who** for people and **which** for things), the distinction between countable and uncountable nouns and the correct use of adverbs and adjectives may cause further problems for Polish learners.

## Writing

- ◆ Polish spelling is a lot more phonetic than English spelling
- ◆ The rules for capitalisations are different: days of the week and months are not capitalised, but pronouns in letters are, adjectives (to indicate nationality) are not capitalised.
- ◆ Rules for punctuation are also different: subordinate clauses are marked off by commas and inverted commas are „ “ and not “ ”.

## Vocabulary

Polish uses words of Greek and Latin origin like English. Quite often there is only one Polish equivalent for two English words, this may lead to an unidiomatic usage (e.g. clock/watch, say/tell).

## References

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