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# Polish

2nd Edition

**by Daria Gabryanczyk, MA**

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**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
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## Polish For Dummies®, 2nd Edition

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# Contents at a Glance

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>Introduction</b> .....  | 1   |
| <b>Part 1: Getting Started with Polish</b> .....                   | 7   |
| CHAPTER 1: Introducing Polish .....                                | 9   |
| CHAPTER 2: Getting Down to Essential Polish Grammar .....          | 23  |
| <b>Part 2: Polish in Action</b> .....                              | 49  |
| CHAPTER 3: Dzień dobry! Cześć! Greetings and Introductions .....   | 51  |
| CHAPTER 4: Getting to Know You: Making Small Talk .....            | 73  |
| CHAPTER 5: Dining Out and Going to the Market .....                | 89  |
| CHAPTER 6: Shopping and Servicing Made Easy .....                  | 119 |
| CHAPTER 7: Going Out on the Town .....                             | 139 |
| CHAPTER 8: Enjoying Yourself: Recreation .....                     | 159 |
| CHAPTER 9: Talking on the Phone .....                              | 177 |
| <b>Part 3: Polish on the Go</b> .....                              | 189 |
| CHAPTER 10: Money, Money, Money .....                              | 191 |
| CHAPTER 11: Planning a Trip .....                                  | 201 |
| CHAPTER 12: Checking into a Hotel or Renting an Apartment .....    | 213 |
| CHAPTER 13: Getting Around: Planes, Trains, Taxis, and More .....  | 229 |
| CHAPTER 14: Asking Directions .....                                | 245 |
| CHAPTER 15: Help! Handling Emergencies .....                       | 263 |
| <b>Part 4: Polish in the Modern World</b> .....                    | 283 |
| CHAPTER 16: Using Polish in the Office .....                       | 285 |
| CHAPTER 17: Polish for Professionals and Public Servants .....     | 303 |
| CHAPTER 18: Polish on the Worksite .....                           | 323 |
| CHAPTER 19: Polishing the New Polish .....                         | 337 |
| <b>Part 5: The Part of Tens</b> .....                              | 355 |
| CHAPTER 20: Ten Everyday Polish Expressions .....                  | 357 |
| CHAPTER 21: Ten Phrases That Make You Sound Fluent in Polish ..... | 361 |
| <b>Part 6: Appendixes</b> .....                                    | 365 |
| APPENDIX A: Mini-Dictionaries .....                                | 367 |
| APPENDIX B: Verb Tables .....                                      | 389 |
| APPENDIX C: Answer Key .....                                       | 401 |
| <b>Index</b> .....   | 405 |



# Table of Contents

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>                            | 1     |
| About This Book                                | 1     |
| Conventions Used in This Book                  | 2     |
| Foolish Assumptions                            | 4     |
| Icons Used in This Book                        | 5     |
| Beyond the Book                                | 5     |
| Where to Go from Here                          | 6     |
| <br><b>PART 1: GETTING STARTED WITH POLISH</b> | <br>7 |
| <b>CHAPTER 1: Introducing Polish</b>           | 9     |
| Spotting the Polish You Already Know           | 9     |
| The Polish Alphabet: Reciting Your ABCs        | 10    |
| Checking Out Consonant Pronunciation           | 12    |
| C  | 12    |
| Ć and Ci                                       | 12    |
| Cz   | 13    |
| Dz   | 13    |
| Dź and Dzi                                     | 13    |
| Dż   | 14    |
| H and Ch                                       | 14    |
| J  | 14    |
| Ł  | 15    |
| Ń and Ni                                       | 15    |
| R  | 15    |
| Ś and Si                                       | 16    |
| Sz   | 16    |
| W  | 16    |
| Ż and Zi                                       | 17    |
| Ź and Rz                                       | 17    |
| Pronouncing Voiced and Silent Consonants       | 17    |
| Saying Polish Vowels                           | 18    |
| Nasal vowels                                   | 19    |
| The nasal ą and ę in the final position        | 20    |
| Searching for Stress and Blending Prepositions | 20    |
| Counting prepositions                          | 21    |
| Placing unusual stress                         | 21    |
| Some Basic Phrases to Know                     | 22    |

|                   |   |    |
|-------------------|---|----|
| <b>CHAPTER 2:</b> | <b>Getting Down to Essential Polish Grammar</b>         | 23 |
|                   | The Case of Polish Cases                                | 24 |
|                   | Nominative case   | 26 |
|                   | Genitive case   | 27 |
|                   | Dative case   | 28 |
|                   | Accusative case   | 31 |
|                   | Instrumental case                                       | 31 |
|                   | Locative case   | 32 |
|                   | Vocative case   | 33 |
|                   | Recognizing Perfective and Imperfective Verbs           | 33 |
|                   | Finding Your Way in Polish Tenses                       | 35 |
|                   | Being in the now with present tense                     | 35 |
|                   | Remembering the past tense                              | 39 |
|                   | Looking into the future tense                           | 43 |
|                   | Being Impersonal  | 46 |
|                   | <b>PART 2: POLISH IN ACTION</b>                         | 49 |
| <b>CHAPTER 3:</b> | <b>Dzień dobry! Cześć! Greetings and Introductions</b>  | 51 |
|                   | Being Formal or Informal                                | 52 |
|                   | Saying hi and bye.                                      | 53 |
|                   | Avoiding trite greetings.                               | 54 |
|                   | Replying to “How are you?”                              | 54 |
|                   | Getting Introductions Right                             | 56 |
|                   | Making informal introductions                           | 56 |
|                   | Presenting yourself and inquiring about others formally | 58 |
|                   | Presenting other people informally and formally.        | 60 |
|                   | Describing Yourself and Others                          | 61 |
|                   | Getting familiar with the verb być, to be               | 61 |
|                   | Saying goodbye to personal pronouns — except sometimes  | 62 |
|                   | Talking about countries and nationalities               | 64 |
|                   | Jumping In to Mówię po polsku (I Speak Polish)          | 68 |
| <b>CHAPTER 4:</b> | <b>Getting to Know You: Making Small Talk</b>           | 73 |
|                   | Asking Key Questions                                    | 73 |
|                   | Finding out who, what, where, and “how do you say ...?” | 74 |
|                   | Discovering the secret to forming yes/no questions      | 76 |
|                   | Sharing Basic Contact Information                       | 76 |
|                   | Living with mieszkąć (to live)                          | 76 |
|                   | Telling people where you’re going                       | 77 |
|                   | Staying connected the 21st-century way                  | 78 |
|                   | Counting Numbers  | 80 |



|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Getting to Know People and Families. . . . .                  | 82         |
| Showing ownership with possessive pronouns . . . . .          | 83         |
| Describing people and objects . . . . .                       | 84         |
| Keeping an Eye on the Weather . . . . .                       | 87         |
| <b>CHAPTER 5: Dining Out and Going to the Market. . . . .</b> | <b>89</b>  |
| Breaking down Mealtime Basics . . . . .                       | 89         |
| Is it time to eat yet? All about meals. . . . .               | 89         |
| Tackling table terms . . . . .                                | 90         |
| Eating and drinking phrases . . . . .                         | 91         |
| Using two verbs at the table: Jeść and pić . . . . .          | 92         |
| The Case of the Accusative Case. . . . .                      | 92         |
| Objectifying masculine nouns and adjectives. . . . .          | 93         |
| Changing feminine endings. . . . .                            | 94         |
| Tabling the accusative case . . . . .                         | 94         |
| Eating Out: Trying Polish Food in a Restaurant. . . . .       | 95         |
| Making reservations . . . . .                                 | 96         |
| Arriving and being seated . . . . .                           | 98         |
| Decoding the menu. . . . .                                    | 100        |
| Asking for what you want. . . . .                             | 102        |
| Preferring, liking, and disliking . . . . .                   | 104        |
| Finding your way to the restrooms. . . . .                    | 107        |
| Navigating food delivery apps . . . . .                       | 108        |
| Shopping for Food. . . . .                                    | 109        |
| Shopping at the supermarket and other grocery shops . . . . . | 109        |
| Finding what you need . . . . .                               | 109        |
| Knowing the measures: Weight, volume, and package . . . . .   | 111        |
| The Case of the Genitive Case. . . . .                        | 113        |
| Owning masculine nouns and adjectives. . . . .                | 113        |
| Showing possession of neuters. . . . .                        | 114        |
| Generating feminine genitives. . . . .                        | 114        |
| Tabling the genitive case . . . . .                           | 115        |
| Making plurals . . . . .                                      | 116        |
| <b>CHAPTER 6: Shopping and Servicing Made Easy. . . . .</b>   | <b>119</b> |
| Introducing Places to Shop . . . . .                          | 119        |
| Shopping for Clothes . . . . .                                | 123        |
| Getting assistance and trying clothes on. . . . .             | 123        |
| Color me Polish . . . . .                                     | 127        |
| Checking fabrics and patterns. . . . .                        | 128        |
| Identifying yourself by what you're wearing . . . . .         | 128        |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Making Comparisons: Good, Better, Best, and More . . . . .              | 129        |
| Comparing with the comparative degree . . . . .                         | 129        |
| Besting the superlative degree . . . . .                                | 130        |
| Dealing with irregular comparatives and superlatives . . . . .          | 131        |
| Paying Compliments . . . . .  | 131        |
| Using Polish Services . . . . .   | 133        |
| Shoe repair . . . . .   | 133        |
| Key cutting . . . . .   | 134        |
| Alterations and dry cleaning . . . . .                                  | 134        |
| Hair styling . . . . .  | 135        |
| Car repair services . . . . .   | 136        |
| <b>CHAPTER 7: Going Out on the Town . . . . .</b>                       | <b>139</b> |
| Understanding That Timing Is Everything . . . . .                       | 139        |
| Counting ordinal numbers . . . . .                                      | 139        |
| Using the 24-hour clock . . . . .                                       | 144        |
| Dividing the day and talking about the future . . . . .                 | 145        |
| Listing the Days of the Week . . . . .                                  | 146        |
| Inviting and Being Invited . . . . .                                    | 146        |
| Making the Most of the Nightlife . . . . .                              | 149        |
| Enjoying yourself at shows and events . . . . .                         | 152        |
| Purchasing tickets . . . . .  | 154        |
| Discussing the show . . . . .   | 156        |
| <b>CHAPTER 8: Enjoying Yourself: Recreation . . . . .</b>               | <b>159</b> |
| Liking the Verb <i>Lubić</i> . . . . .                                  | 159        |
| Being Interested in the Reflexive Verb <i>Interesować Się</i> . . . . . | 162        |
| The Case of the Instrumental Case . . . . .                             | 164        |
| Often Using Often: Adverbs of Frequency . . . . .                       | 166        |
| Exploring the Outdoors . . . . .  | 167        |
| Hiking in the mountains . . . . .                                       | 167        |
| Sunbathing on the beach . . . . .                                       | 169        |
| Going to the countryside . . . . .                                      | 171        |
| Skiing in the mountains . . . . .                                       | 172        |
| Sailing in the summertime . . . . .                                     | 174        |
| <b>CHAPTER 9: Talking on the Phone . . . . .</b>                        | <b>177</b> |
| Buying and Using a Cellphone . . . . .                                  | 177        |
| Dealing with the Preliminaries . . . . .                                | 179        |
| Asking who you're talking to . . . . .                                  | 180        |
| Making the connection . . . . .   | 182        |
| Leaving Messages . . . . .  | 183        |
| Asking someone to repeat themselves . . . . .                           | 185        |
| Making Appointments . . . . .   | 186        |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>PART 3: POLISH ON THE GO</b>                                    | 189 |
| <b>CHAPTER 10: Money, Money, Money</b>                             | 191 |
| Cashing In with Some Basic Money Info                              | 191 |
| Spending złoty and grosz   | 193 |
| Operating ATMs   | 194 |
| Exchanging Currency  | 196 |
| Doing Your Banking   | 199 |
| <b>CHAPTER 11: Planning a Trip</b>                                 | 201 |
| Making Travel Plans with a Travel Agent                            | 201 |
| Timing Your Trip   | 204 |
| Traveling through the seasons                                      | 204 |
| Mastering the months   | 205 |
| Dealing with Visas and Passports                                   | 207 |
| Packing for Your Visit   | 209 |
| Keeping Your Devices Powered Up                                    | 211 |
| <b>CHAPTER 12: Checking into a Hotel or Renting an Apartment</b>   | 213 |
| Choosing a Hotel   | 213 |
| Describing the room you want                                       | 214 |
| Making a reservation   | 215 |
| Discussing services and facilities                                 | 215 |
| Checking into a Hotel  | 218 |
| Checking Out   | 220 |
| Renting or Buying an Apartment                                     | 223 |
| <b>CHAPTER 13: Getting Around: Planes, Trains, Taxis, and More</b> | 229 |
| Arriving in Poland by Air  | 229 |
| Dealing with customs   | 230 |
| Sorting out check-in and boarding                                  | 230 |
| Traveling Around in the City                                       | 233 |
| Finding a taxi   | 233 |
| Taking a train or bus  | 235 |
| Renting a car  | 241 |
| Running Late, Being Early, or Arriving on Time                     | 243 |
| <b>CHAPTER 14: Asking Directions</b>                               | 245 |
| Finding Your Way Around  | 245 |
| Understanding the Answer   | 247 |
| Knowing How Far You Go   | 250 |
| Mapping the Place  | 251 |
| Going Places with the Four Verbs “to Go”                           | 252 |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Traveling by Car or Another Vehicle . . . . .                             | 253        |
| Describing a Position or Location . . . . .                               | 255        |
| Locating the locative case. . . . .                                       | 256        |
| Exploring prepositions of location and position. . . . .                  | 260        |
| <b>CHAPTER 15: Help! Handling Emergencies . . . . .</b>                   | <b>263</b> |
| Shouting for Help: Pomocy! . . . . .                                      | 263        |
| Handling Health Problems. . . . .   | 264        |
| Helping out. . . . .  | 264        |
| Giving advice . . . . .   | 265        |
| Expressing pain when you're hurt. . . . .                                 | 266        |
| Seeking help at the ER . . . . .  | 270        |
| Sending well wishes . . . . .   | 272        |
| Braving the dentist . . . . .   | 273        |
| Ensuring that you get reimbursed . . . . .                                | 275        |
| Dealing with Car Accidents. . . . .                                       | 276        |
| What Bad Luck! Getting Help When You've Been Robbed . . . . .             | 278        |
| Dealing with Domestic Emergencies . . . . .                               | 279        |
| <b>PART 4: POLISH IN THE MODERN WORLD. . . . .</b>                        | <b>283</b> |
| <b>CHAPTER 16: Using Polish in the Office . . . . .</b>                   | <b>285</b> |
| Finding Your Way around the Office. . . . .                               | 285        |
| Office furniture and accessories . . . . .                                | 285        |
| Dealing with faulty office equipment . . . . .                            | 287        |
| Planning Your Day. . . . .  | 290        |
| Arranging a meeting . . . . .   | 291        |
| Setting a date . . . . .  | 297        |
| Canceling meetings and apologizing . . . . .                              | 298        |
| Getting Down to Business with Business Traveling . . . . .                | 299        |
| <b>CHAPTER 17: Polish for Professionals and Public Servants . . . . .</b> | <b>303</b> |
| Getting Hired and Getting Fired . . . . .                                 | 303        |
| Talking about how much you work. . . . .                                  | 307        |
| Leaving for good . . . . .  | 308        |
| Losing your job . . . . .   | 309        |
| Talking About Your Job . . . . .  | 309        |
| The verb pracować (to work) . . . . .                                     | 310        |
| Industries and departments . . . . .                                      | 311        |
| Decoding corporate job positions. . . . .                                 | 315        |
| Working for Public Services . . . . .                                     | 316        |
| Working in a hospital or pharmacy. . . . .                                | 317        |
| Working for the police and fire departments . . . . .                     | 320        |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>CHAPTER 18: Polish on the Worksite.</b>                          | 323 |
| Looking for a Construction Job                                      | 323 |
| Breaking down Shift Lengths and Times                               | 327 |
| Getting Familiar with Workers and Their Tools.                      | 327 |
| Working on worker titles  | 328 |
| Getting down to tools and construction equipment                    | 330 |
| Dealing with problems at home                                       | 331 |
| Keeping up with Health and Safety.                                  | 332 |
| Reporting Accidents   | 334 |
| <b>CHAPTER 19: Polishing the New Polish</b>                         | 337 |
| Untangling the Perplexing Web of Ponglish                           | 337 |
| Inserting pure English in Polish sentences                          | 338 |
| Decoding English in Ponglish sentences                              | 338 |
| Spotting Ponglish in literal translations                           | 341 |
| Bracing yourself for extreme Ponglish.                              | 343 |
| Mastering Corpuslang.   | 345 |
| Navigating the Digital Chatter                                      | 348 |
| Colorful Polish Slang.  | 350 |
| Keeping Up with the Language of Youth                               | 351 |
| <b>PART 5: THE PART OF TENS.</b>                                    | 355 |
| <b>CHAPTER 20: Ten Everyday Polish Expressions</b>                  | 357 |
| Nie za bardzo   | 357 |
| Jasne/Pewnie!   | 358 |
| No  | 358 |
| Masz rację.   | 359 |
| Jako tako   | 359 |
| To niemożliwe!  | 359 |
| Chyba   | 359 |
| Naprawdę  | 360 |
| Zaraz/Za chwilę   | 360 |
| Palce lizać!/Pycha!/Mniam, mniam!.                                  | 360 |
| <b>CHAPTER 21: Ten Phrases That Make You Sound Fluent in Polish</b> | 361 |
| No to trudno.   | 361 |
| No coś ty!  | 362 |
| Nie ma mowy!  | 362 |
| Nie ma sprawy.  | 362 |
| Daj (mi) spokój!  | 363 |
| Być może and Może być.  | 363 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Wszystko (mi) jedno .....                  | 363 |
| Czy ja wiem? .....                         | 364 |
| O co chodzi? .....                         | 364 |
| Co za pech! .....                          | 364 |
| <b>PART 6: APPENDIXES</b> .....            | 365 |
| <b>APPENDIX A: Mini-Dictionaries</b> ..... | 367 |
| <b>APPENDIX B: Verb Tables</b> .....       | 389 |
| <b>APPENDIX C: Answer Key</b> .....        | 401 |
| <b>INDEX</b> .....                         | 405 |

# Introduction

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Society is becoming increasingly international. Low-cost airfares make traveling or moving abroad a more realistic option, global business environments require overseas travel, and friends and neighbors often speak another language. Knowing how to say at least a few words in other languages becomes more and more useful. Additionally, you may want to connect with your heritage by learning a little bit of the language that your ancestors spoke.

Whatever your reason for acquiring some Polish, this book can help. *Polish For Dummies* gives you the skills you need for basic communication in Polish. I'm not promising fluency, but if you want to greet someone, purchase a ticket, or order something from a menu in Polish, you need look no further than *Polish For Dummies*.

Recognizing that language exposes you to every aspect of the human condition — allowing you to explore the past, understand the present, and contemplate the future — is important. Language sometimes alters how people express various emotions and conditions. Although people are connected through their ability to speak, you can take it one step further (toward understanding) by being able to communicate in another language. Few things are as exciting as that!

The best way to discover a new language is to immerse yourself in it. Listen to the sounds of Polish, focus on pronunciation, and observe its written form. By listening and repeating, you enter a new world of ideas and cultures. Acquiring Polish through immersion truly feels like a form of magic.

## About This Book

---

This book isn't like a class that you have to attend twice a week for ten weeks without missing any. You can use *Polish For Dummies* however you want, whether you're aiming to pick up some words and phrases for your trip to Poland or you just want to greet your Polish-speaking friend in their language. This book can help you reach moments of genuine understanding in a new language. Use the text as a language and cultural guide for those moments when you truly need to understand how and why things are done.

Take your time going through this book, reading as much or as little as you want at a time. You don't have to follow the chapters in order; feel free to read only the sections that interest you.

The best way to understand and appreciate a language is to speak it. Throughout the book, you can find plenty of words, phrases, and dialogues (along with pronunciations) for you to practice the language. The audio tracks offer a wide range of spoken dialogues, which you can use to enhance your pronunciation and intonation.

Keep in mind that you don't have to go through this book all at once or from cover to cover. Simply choose a chapter that interests you, and you can find cross-references to other parts of the book.

## Conventions Used in This Book

To make this book easy for you to navigate, I set up a few conventions:

- » Polish terms are set in **boldface** to make them stand out.
- » Pronunciations, set in parentheses in *italics*, follow the Polish terms. I underline the emphasized syllables in the pronunciations. The translations, again in parentheses, follow the pronunciations. I occasionally change up the order of the items, but the Polish is always bolded, the pronunciation italicized, and the translation in normal (roman) text.

Verb conjugation tables (lists that show you the forms of a verb) follow this order:

- » **ja:** the *I* form
- » **ty:** the singular, informal *you* form
- » **on, ona, ono:** the *he, she, it* forms
- » **my:** the *we* form
- » **wy:** the plural, informal *you* form
- » **oni, one:** the *they* form for a group with at least one man; the *they* form for a group with no man



A typical verb conjugation table has columns for the pronoun forms, the Polish verb, the pronunciation, and the translation, as in the following table:

| Form       | Polish            | Pronunciation            | Translation                |
|------------|-------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| (ja)       | czyta- <b>m</b>   | ( <i>chih-tam</i> )      | I read/am reading          |
| (ty)       | czyta- <b>sz</b>  | ( <i>chih-tash</i> )     | you read/are reading       |
| on/ona/ono | czyta- <b>ø</b>   | ( <i>chih-ta</i> )       | he/she/it reads/is reading |
| (my)       | czyta- <b>my</b>  | ( <i>chih-ta-mih</i> )   | we read/are reading        |
| (wy)       | czyta- <b>cie</b> | ( <i>chih-ta-ch'ye</i> ) | you read/are reading       |
| oni/one    | czyta- <b>ja</b>  | ( <i>chih-ta-yohN</i> )  | they read/are reading      |



TIP

As you may notice, the personal pronouns **ja**, **ty**, **my**, **wy** (*ya*, *tih*, *mih*, *vih*) are in parentheses here and in all conjugation tables in this book. That's because you don't actually say those pronouns when you're speaking Polish. I explain the pronoun issue in detail in Chapter 3.

Unlike English, Polish uses special formal forms to address people in official situations. (I write more about how to address people in Chapter 3.) So the *you* form has the following formal equivalents in Polish:

- » **pan, pani:** **pan** (*pan*) is the formal *you* to address a man and **pani** (*pa-n'ee*) the formal *you* to address a woman (singular).
- » **państwo, panowie, panie:** These terms are the formal, plural *you* form to address a mixed group, a group of men, and a group of women, respectively. **Państwo** (*pan'-stfo*) also means "ladies and gentlemen"; **panowie** (*pa-no-v'ye*) means "gentlemen"; and **panie** (*pa-n'ye*) translates as "ladies" (plural).

When reading verb tables or conjugating verbs, remember that **pan** takes on the same verb form as **on** (he) and **pani** the same verb form as **ona** (she) — the third-person singular. In the present tense, the plural **państwo**, **panowie**, and **panie** take on a verb in the third-person plural (the same as **oni** [*they* male or mixed] and **one** [*they* female]). However, in the past tense and the future that uses past tense forms, **państwo** and **panowie** follow **oni**, while **panie** follows **one** in the choice of a verb form. Chapter 2 explains verbs in more detail.

Studying a language is a unique endeavor, so this book includes a few elements that other *For Dummies* books don't:

- » **Talkin' the Talk dialogues:** The most effective way to improve in a language is to see and hear how it's used in conversation. That's why I include dialogues throughout the book under the heading "Talkin' the Talk." These dialogues present Polish words, their pronunciations, and their English translations.
- » **Words to Know tables:** Memorizing key words and phrases is also crucial in picking up a language. Therefore, I gather the important words that appear in a dialogue (and sometimes the nearby text) and list them under the heading "Words to Know."
- » **Fun & Games activities:** If you don't have Polish speakers to practice your new language skills with, you can use the Fun & Games activities to reinforce what you're working on. These word games are enjoyable ways to assess your progress.

Also, because each language has its own ways of expressing ideas, the English translations I provide for the Polish terms may not be literal. I want you to understand the essence of what's being said, not just the words themselves. For example, you can translate the Polish phrase **wszystko w porządku** (*fshih-stko fpo-zhon-tkoo*) literally as "everything in order", but the phrase really means "fine." This book gives the "fine" translations.

## Foolish Assumptions

To write this book, I had to make some assumptions about you and what you want from a book called *Polish For Dummies*:

- » You have no knowledge of Polish.
- » You're not looking for a book to make you fluent in Polish; you simply want to pick up some words, phrases, and sentence constructions to communicate basic information.
- » You don't want to have to memorize long lists of vocabulary words or boring grammar rules.
- » You want to have fun while discovering a bit of Polish.

If these statements apply to you, then you've found the right book!

# Icons Used in This Book

If you're looking for specific information while reading this book, I've made finding it easier for you by placing the following icons in the left-hand margins throughout the book:



REMEMBER

I use this icon to indicate crucial pieces of information that you need to bear in mind.



TIP

This icon highlights tips that can make Polish easier for you.



GRAMMATICALLY  
SPEAKING

Languages are full of quirks that may catch you off guard if you aren't ready for them. This icon points to discussions of these unusual grammatical rules.



CULTURAL  
WISDOM

If you're looking for information and advice about Polish culture and travel, look for this icon.



PLAY THIS

The audio tracks included with this book allow you to listen to real Polish speakers, providing a better understanding of how Polish sounds. This icon identifies the “Talkin’ the Talk” dialogues available as audio tracks online.

## Beyond the Book

In addition to what you're reading right now, this book comes with a free, access anywhere Cheat Sheet containing tips and vocabulary to help you on your journey to speak Polish. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and type “Polish For Dummies Cheat Sheet” in the search box.

You can find the audio files for a selection of “Talkin’ the Talk” dialogues at [www.dummies.com/go/polishfd2e](http://www.dummies.com/go/polishfd2e). I encourage you to download the tracks, listen to them, and recite the dialogues. This same website also provides bonus chapters with additional fun and interesting information about Poland and the Polish language.

# Where to Go from Here

Exploring a new language is all about diving in and giving it a shot (no matter how poor your pronunciation may be at first). So take the plunge! Never feel embarrassed when speaking Polish. Poles will greatly appreciate your efforts to speak even a few words and easily forgive any language mistakes or cultural blunders. What matters is that you're making an effort to learn and speak the language. Of course, the better your Polish, the more impressed your Polish friends, family, or business partners will be.



TIP

If you've never studied Polish before, you may want to read the chapters in Part 1 before moving onto the later chapters. Part 1 covers some of the basics you need to know about the language, such as how to pronounce the various sounds.

After that, pick a chapter that interests you or listen to some audio tracks. Most importantly, make sure you have fun!

# 1

## **Getting Started with Polish**

### **IN THIS PART . . .**

Familiarize yourself with Polish words whose meaning you can work out without consulting a dictionary.

Discover how to make Polish sounds and how to crack the Polish “grammar code.”

Learn a few quickie phrases to impress your Polish friends!

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Identifying some familiar-looking Polish words
- » Pronouncing the alphabet and all its vowels and consonants
- » Stressing the right syllable
- » Using basic expressions

## Chapter 1

# Introducing Polish

**B**eing able to produce sounds that native speakers can recognize and understand is vital for successful communication. This chapter discusses Polish pronunciation and some of the conventions I use in this book.

## Spotting the Polish You Already Know

Polish borrows a number of words from English across various domains, including politics, technology, sports, economics, and business. These borrowed words have either retained their original spelling or been adapted to the Polish spelling, but they're still easy to recognize (and to remember!) for native English speakers. You won't have much trouble working out the meaning of these words:

- » **adres** (*ɑ-dres*) (address)
- » **biznes** (*bɛɛ-znes*) (business)
- » **hotel** (*hɔ-tel*) (hotel)
- » **interfejs** (*een-ter-feys*) (interface)
- » **kawa** (*kɑ-va*) (coffee)
- » **komputer** (*kɔm-pɔɔ-ter*) (computer)
- » **kultura** (*kool-tɔɔ-ra*) (culture)

- » **park** (*park*) (park)
- » **telefon** (*te-le-fon*) (telephone)



TIP

Check out the upcoming sections of this chapter for detailed pronunciation tips.

Of course, you can get into trouble when you're dealing with so-called *false friends* — words that look similar in English and Polish yet have completely different meanings:

- » **aktualnie** (*a-ktoo-al-n'ye*) means *currently* or *presently* rather than *actually*
- » **audycja** (*aw-dih-tsy-a*) means *a broadcast*, not *an audition*
- » **data** (*da-ta*) means *date*, not *data*
- » **ewentualnie** (*e-ven-too-al-n'ye*) is the English *possibly* rather than *eventually*
- » **fatalny** (*fa-tal-nih*) doesn't translate to *fatal* but to *abysmal*
- » **hazard** (*ha-zart*) is *gambling* (which can be hazardous to your bank balance)
- » **pensja** (*pen-sya*) is *salary* rather than *pension*, which is **renta** (*ren-ta*) in Polish
- » **sympatyczny** (*sihm-pa-tih-chnih*) is *nice* or *friendly* but not *sympathetic*
- » **szef** (*shef*) means *boss*, not *a chef*, unless you say **szef kuchni** (*shef koo-hn'ee*) (head chef)

## The Polish Alphabet: Reciting Your ABCs

Alongside Polish words throughout this book, I've provided their pronunciation in parentheses. To make reading and saying the words easier for you, the pronunciations are divided into syllables with hyphens — for example, (*al-fa-bet*). Try to say the underlined syllable more strongly, because it's a stressed syllable. Make your way to the “Searching for Stress and Blending Prepositions” section later in this chapter to read more about the Polish stress.



GRAMMATICALLY  
SPEAKING

When the first writings in Polish appeared, the 26 letters of the Latin alphabet couldn't accommodate the 45 sounds that somehow needed to be represented. As a result, the Polish alphabet consists of 32 letters and uses a variety of consonant clusters such as **ch**, **cz**, **dź**, **dz**, **dż**, **sz**, and **rz**. *Note:* Q, v, and x are not Polish letters and appear in foreign words only.



PLAY THIS

Table 1-1 shows all the Polish letters and how to say them in parentheses. (Listen to audio track 1 to help you with pronunciation.)



TABLE 1-1

## The Polish Alphabet

|                         |                  |                 |                   |
|-------------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| <b>a</b> (a)            | <b>ą</b> (ohN)   | <b>b</b> (be)   | <b>c</b> (tse)    |
| <b>ć</b> (ch'ye)        | <b>d</b> (de)    | <b>e</b> (e)    | <b>ę</b> (ehN)    |
| <b>f</b> (ef)           | <b>g</b> (gye)   | <b>h</b> (ha)   | <b>i</b> (ee)     |
| <b>j</b> (yot)          | <b>k</b> (ka)    | <b>l</b> (el)   | <b>ł</b> (ew)     |
| <b>m</b> (em)           | <b>n</b> (en)    | <b>ń</b> (en')  | <b>o</b> (o)      |
| <b>ó</b> (o kreskovane) | <b>p</b> (pe)    | <b>q</b> (koo)  | <b>r</b> (er)     |
| <b>s</b> (es)           | <b>ś</b> (esh')  | <b>t</b> (te)   | <b>u</b> (oo)     |
| <b>v</b> (faw)          | <b>w</b> (voo)   | <b>x</b> (eeks) | <b>y</b> (eegrek) |
| <b>z</b> (zet)          | <b>ż</b> (z'yet) | <b>ź</b> (zhet) |                   |



REMEMBER

Although the Polish pronunciation may seem rather daunting, it is in fact regular, and after you memorize a couple of patterns, you'll soon notice that you can easily pronounce every word you come across.

Native speakers find working out how to spell a word from its pronunciation easy (with some exceptions, they simply learn by heart). And if in doubt, they simply ask for clarification. However, as a foreigner, you may be asked to spell your name or need someone to spell a street name for you, so the following phrases may come in handy:

- » **Czy może pan/pani przeliterować?** (*chih mo-zhe pan/pa-n'ee pshe-lee-te-ro-vach?*) (Can you spell it, please?) — speaking formally to a man/woman
- » **Proszę przeliterować.** (*pro-she pshe-lee-te-ro-vach'.*) (Please spell it.) — formal
- » **Czy mam przeliterować?** (*chih mam pshe-lee-te-ro-vach?*) (Do you want me to spell it?)
- » **Proszę mi to napisać?** (*pro-she mee to na-pee-sach?*) (Can you please write it for me?)



CULTURAL WISDOM

When spelling, unlike the English habit of saying, *A for Alpha, B for Bravo*, and so on, Polish people often use first names. So you'll hear something like the following: **A jak Anna** (a yak an-na), **Be jak Barbara** (be yag bar-ba-ra), **Ce jak Celina** (tse yak tse-lee-na), and so on.



TIP

If you're going to Poland, prepare a list of first names (ideally Polish ones) that you can use to spell your own name so that you don't panic when you need to spell it in Polish.

# Checking Out Consonant Pronunciation

Some consonants are pronounced the same way in both Polish and English: **b, d, f, g, k, l, m, n, p, s, t, and z**. In words with double letters, such as **Anna** and **lekki**, each letter is pronounced separately as in *an-na* and *lek-kee*.



TIP

For the sake of simplicity, in pronunciations, I use **n** before *k* or *g*. But think of how you pronounce **nk** in the English word *bank*. Polish people say *nk* and *ng* in the exact same way.

The following sections cover the consonants for which pronunciation is different from English.

## C

In Polish, **c** is pronounced as *ts* in *tsetse fly* or *Betsy*. Don't confuse it with the English *k* sound as in *car*. In the pronunciations, you see the symbol *ts* to indicate letter **c**, as in these examples:

- » **co** (*tso*) (what)
- » **centrum** (*tse<sup>n</sup>-troom*) (city center)

## Ć and Ci

These consonants represent exactly the same sound. Unfortunately, that sound doesn't have a direct equivalent in English. You need to think of the word *cheese* and try to say the *chee* part just a touch more softly. Yes, you're in business! In the pronunciations, *ch'* indicates **ć** and **ci**.



REMEMBER

The ' in a pronunciation reminds you that it's a soft sound. I add an extra *y* to help you pronounce **ci** when followed by a vowel and *ee* when **ci** forms a syllable.

Now, try the sound of these words:

- » **ciepło** (*ch'ye-pwo*) (warm)
- » **cicho** (*ch'ee-ho*) (quietly)
- » **mówić** (*moo-veech'*) (to speak, say)



GRAMMATICALLY  
SPEAKING

Ć and ci are used in different situations. You write ć when it appears at the end of a word, as in pić (*peech'*) (to drink) or before another consonant as in ćma (*ch'ma*) (moth). The ci form is written before a vowel as in ciocia (*ch'yo-ch'ya*) (auntie). However, you'll see a number of words where ci appears before a consonant or at the end of a word. This situation happens only when ci actually forms a syllable, as in ci-cho (*ch'ee-ho*) (quiet) and ni-ci (*n'ee-ch'ee*) (sewing threads). Identical rules apply to soft pairs such as ś and si, ź and zi, dź and dzi, and ń and ni, which I cover in upcoming sections.

## Cz

Cz shouldn't cause too many pronunciation difficulties. The sound is like the *ch* in *cheddar*, only a touch harder. In the pronunciations, you see *ch* to represent **cz**. Here are some examples:

- » czarny (*char-nih*) (black)
- » czas (*chas*) (time)

## Dz

The pronunciation of **dz** is like the *ds* in *reeds* or *goods* and is indicated by *dz* in the pronunciations. Practice the following words:

- » dzwon (*dzvon*) (bell)
- » bardzo (*bar-dzo*) (very)

## Dź and Dzi

The English tongue is unfamiliar with the soft **dź** and **dzi**. Their pronunciation is softer than *je* in *jeans*. To represent them, you see *dj'* in the pronunciations. I add an extra *y* to help you pronounce **dzi** when followed by a vowel and *ee* when **dzi** forms a syllable. Here are some Polish examples:

- » dzień (*dj'yen'*) (day)
- » godzina (*go-dj'ee-na*) (hour, time)

You can read about the rules of the **dź** and **dzi** spelling in the “Ć and Ci” section earlier in this chapter.

## Dż

When saying **dż**, think of both of the *g* sounds in the English word *Georgia*, and you're in business. To represent **dż**, you see *dj* in the pronunciations. You're now ready to practice it:

- » **dżungla** (*djoon-gla*) (jungle)
- » **dżem** (*djem*) (jam)

## H and Ch

**H** and **ch** are identical twins as far as pronunciation is concerned. Think of the *h* in *hat*. Because you say both **h** and **ch** in the same way, you see *h* to indicate them both in the pronunciations. Remember to breathe out gently when practicing this sound:

- » **historia** (*hee-sto-rya*) (history)
- » **hotel** (*ho-tel*) (hotel)
- » **chleb** (*hlep*) (bread)
- » **ucho** (*oo-ho*) (ear)



TIP

Be aware that the **y** sound is represented as *ih* — the *i* sound in *pity* — throughout this book, so when you see the *ih* combination in the pronunciations, as in **mily** (*mee-wih*), remember that the *h* is barely breathed. The sound certainly isn't the same as the *h* in the word *hat*. Go to the “Saying Polish Vowels” section later in this chapter for guidance on pronouncing vowels.

## J

The letter **j** is pronounced like the *y* in *yes*, and that's how it appears in the pronunciations — *y*:

- » **jeden** (*ye-den*) (one)
- » **projekt** (*pro-yekt*) (project)

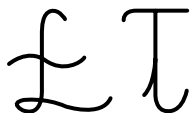
## Ł

This letter may look a bit exotic to you — printed capital Ł, small ł, and handwritten as in Figure 1-1. Luckily, its pronunciation is exactly the same as the English *w* in *water*. Ł is marked as *w* in the pronunciations, as in these examples:

» **szkoła** (*shko-wa*) (school)

» **łatwy** (*wa-tfih*) (easy)

**FIGURE 1-1:**  
The written  
capital  
and small ł.



## Ń and Ni

These two consonants, similarly to *ć* and *ci*, are soft; despite different spellings, they sound exactly the same. They're unfamiliar to the English tongue. When pronouncing *ń* and *ni*, think of the English words *onion* or *new*. Throughout this book, the soft *ń* and *ni* are presented as *n'*. I add an extra *y* to help you pronounce *ni* before a vowel and *ee* when *ni* forms a separate syllable. Read these examples:

» **nie** (*n'ye*) (no)

» **koń** (*kon'*) (horse)

» **hiszpański** (*heesh-pan'-skee*) (Spanish)

» **nisko** (*n'ee-sko*) (low, down)

You can read about the spelling rules for *ń* and *ni* in the “*Ć and Ci*” section earlier in this chapter.

## R

The letter *r*, although pronounced a bit differently than in English — it's a trilled *r* — is presented as *r* in the pronunciations. In fact, it's not a big problem if you pronounce it the English way. Polish native speakers will certainly understand you. However, if you want to perfect it, take a deep breath, oscillate the tip of your tongue just behind your teeth in an up and down motion and say the *r* sound very loudly. Check out audio track 1 for how it actually sounds.

Here are some examples you can use to practice your **r**:

- » **rok** (*rok*) (year)
- » **park** (*park*) (park)

## Ś and Si

Ś and si sound exactly the same, despite their different spelling. You won't find a direct equivalent in English, but if you think of the *shee* part of the English word *sheep*, which you say with a bit of softness, that's it! Throughout this book, these sounds are represented by *sh'*. I add an extra *y* to help you pronounce **si** when followed by a vowel and *ee* when **si** forms a separate syllable. Here are some examples:

- » **siedem** (*sh'yē-dem*) (seven)
- » **środa** (*sh'rō-da*) (Wednesday)
- » **coś** (*tsosh'*) (something)
- » **silny** (*sh'eeł-nih*) (strong)

For the rules of spelling, refer to the “Ć and Ci” section earlier in this chapter.

## Sz

Sz is pronounced as the *sh* in *shop*, only a bit harder. And, naturally, it appears as *sh* in the pronunciations, as in these examples:

- » **szansa** (*shan-sa*) (chance)
- » **szkoda** (*shko-da*) (shame, pity)

## W

The **w** is pronounced as *v* in *visa*, and you see *v* in the pronunciations to represent **w**, as in these examples:

- » **woda** (*vō-da*) (water)
- » **Nazywam się . . .** (*na-zīh-vam sh'yē*) (My name is. . .)