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CONTENTS

I. ARTICLES

Language Policy and Research Methodology in Glottodidactics *Sprachenpolitik und Methodologie*

HANNA KOMOROWSKA, *Issues in the Language Policy of the European Union. Motivation as a Key Factor in Promoting Language Learning* 7

GRAŻYNA LEWICKA, *Prozeduren als Diskurshandlungen im glottodidaktischen Prozess* 21

Basic and Referential Disciplines *Grundlagen- und Referenzwissenschaften*

BEATA MIKOŁAJCZYK, *Ausgewählte Aspekte der Textsorte autographes Vorwort einer wissenschaftlichen Abhandlung im Deutschen und Polnischen – Versuch einer Konfrontation* 29

ALDONA SOPATA, *Zweitsprachenerwerbsforschung und Fremdsprachendidaktik* 47

Literature as Communication *Literatur als Kommunikation*

STEPHAN WOLTING, *Der Schriftsteller in medialer Kommunikation mit der Öffentlichkeit. Überlegungen aus fremdkulturwissenschaftlicher Sicht aus Anlass des 80. Geburtstages von Martin Walser* 59

Interculturality *Interkulturalität*

AGNIESZKA BŁĄZEK, *Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Messung interkultureller Kompetenz* 71

MARIA U. JAŃSKA, *Entwicklung der interkulturellen Kompetenz anhand von Materialien für den Fremdsprachenunterricht* 83

ANNA KONIECZNA, *Dilemmas and Paradoxes of English Language-and-Culture Teaching: Foreign or International?* 95

TADEUSZ PACHOLCZYK, *Glottodidaktičeskiye aspekty kroskulturnovo obrazovanija i komunikacii* 107

DANUTA WIŚNIEWSKA, <i>Current Issues in Teacher Autonomy</i>	117
KATARZYNA PAPAJA, <i>Exploring the Use of L1 in CLIL</i>	129
PAWEŁ SCHEFFLER, <i>When Intuition Fails us: the World Wide Web as a Corpus</i>	137

II. RESEARCH REPORT

BEATA LEUNER, <i>Language Maintenance in a new Culture. Case Study: Polish Migrants from the 1980s in Melbourne</i>	147
PAULINA CZUBAK-WRÓBEL, JOANNA LEMPART, <i>Is it possible to learn English in England? The Acculturation Process in the Target Language Country</i>	161

III. BOOK REVIEWS

GRAŻYNA LEWICKA, <i>Glottodydaktyczne aspekty akwizycji języka drugiego a konstruktywistyczna teoria uczenia się</i> , ATUT: Warszawa 2007 (Gabriela Gorąca)	169
ELŻBIETA ZAWADZKA, <i>Nauczyciele języków obcych w dobie przemian</i> , Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”: Kraków 2004 (Kazimiera Myczko)	172
BEATA MIKOŁAJCZYK, <i>Sprachliche Mechanismen der Persuasion in der politischen Kommunikation. Dargestellt an polnischen und deutschen Texten zum EU-Beitritt Polens</i> , Peter Lang 2004 (Waldemar Czachur)	175
SEBASTIAN CHUDAK, <i>Lernerautonomie fördernde Inhalte in ausgewählten Lehrwerken DaF für Erwachsene. Überlegungen zur Gestaltung und zur Evaluation von Lehr und Lernmaterialien</i> , Peter Lang: Frankfurt a.M. 2005 (Marta Janachowska)	178
ANTJE HEINE, <i>Funktionsverbgefüge in System, Text und korpusbasierter (Lerner)-Lexikographie</i> . [= Finnische Beiträge zur Germanistik Bd. 18], Peter Lang: Frankfurt a.M. [u.a.] 2006 (Monika Bielińska)	180
ANNA PILARSKI, <i>Die Operation Merge im Verbalkomplex des Polnischen und des Deutschen</i> . Peter Lang: Frankfurt a.M. 2002 (Aldona Sopata)	183
JAN FELLERER, <i>Mehrsprachigkeit im galizischen Verwaltungswesen (1772-1914). Eine historisch-soziolinguistische Studie zum Polnischen und Ruthenischen (Ukrainischen)</i> . Böhlau Verlag: Köln/Weimar 2005 (Andrzej Kątny)	184

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Dilemmas and Paradoxes of English Language-and-Culture Teaching: Foreign or International?

ABSTRACT. The article presents the many dilemmas concerning the status of English language-and-culture (as a conjoint phenomenon) and the approach to teach it in a non-native environment. It especially focuses on the alternatives of teaching English as a foreign or as an international language, pointing to the problems relating to the choice of any of these particular frameworks.

The article discusses the intricacies of language-and-culture (an interwoven language and culture phenomenon, Byram and Mogran, 1994) as related to non-native language education. Drawing on elements of the "English Today" debate, a scientific discussion concerning the place of English in the nowadays world, the paper presents the many dilemmas concerning the status of English language-and-culture and the approach to teach them in a non-native environment. It especially focuses on the alternatives of teaching English as a foreign or as an international language, pointing to the problems relating to the choice of any of these particular frameworks. With reference to the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) the article indicates and discusses: the difficulty in establishing *the foreign* (that is defining what is the target language group for the non-native learners), the difficulty with establishing who is the *native speaker* to be imitated, the irrelevance of teaching only one dialect of English in general foreign language education, the difficulties connected with the teaching of the foreign "little c" culture (understood as a way of behaviour and communication style) to non-native speakers and the questioned relevance of teaching just the standard varieties of English. With reference to the Teaching of English as an Interna-

tional Language (TEIL) the points under discussion are: defining what constitutes International English, the relevance of TEIL to Modiano's model of the global spread and use of English, the practical aspect of TEIL and the fundamental objectives of TEIL.

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (TEFL)

Teaching in a non-native place and where the language is not normally used for communication, most often takes the form of *x* as a foreign language, for example English as a Foreign Language, where *foreign*, indicating the target language group, needs further specification. Yet, as it turns out, *the foreign* is quite difficult to define and delimit, and it is especially so in the case of English, a language globally used. Within the TEFL framework, when trying to define *the foreign*, there naturally appear many difficult questions concerning the regional and social varieties one should adhere to and choose to teach. If it is traditionally established that the dialect taught is the British English and the RP accent, then what about the non RP Englishes learners are continually bombarded with? It would be unrealistic and impractical to expect learners to avoid these varieties at all. Another question is whether non-native teachers have, after all, any real choice over which native dialect to teach, taking into account the non-native dialect they themselves represent. Equally difficult as delimiting the target language group is defining the *native speaker*. Traditionally we have been dividing speakers into native and non-native ones, the previous representing the norm to be aimed at for the latter. We measured the performance of a non-native against that of a native – on the grounds that we unquestionably assumed the native speaker's competence and proficiency. Yet, together with the uncertainties referring to the target group, there appeared doubts concerning the native speakers. The nowadays reappearing question of who is the native speaker seems difficult to answer. Are people native speakers by birth with the unquestionable authority of being a norm for the non-natives? Do they represent the norm all indistinguishably, independently of the social class they come from, linguistic abilities and intuition, national origin and language spoken at home? Or maybe, are the native speaker characteristics connected with a certain level of education? If so, how can we measure who is already a native speaker, and what for the term *native* then? It seems we are in need of a new definition of a *native speaker*. According to Coppieters (quoted in Kramsch, 1998:22) "a speaker of French is someone who is accepted as such by the community referred to as that of French speakers, not someone who is endowed with a specific, formal underlying linguistic system." Paikeday adds: "If some group thinks you are a native speaker, then you are one within the context of that group." (quoted in Kramsch, 1998: 22). Paikeday's words question the idea of culture and language as having national scope and a native speaker

as a representative of a nation. A similar idea appears in Byram, who states that culture refers to "shared beliefs, values and behaviours of a social group, where *social group* can refer to any collectivity of people from those in a social institution such as a university, a golf club, a family, or those organized in large-scale groups such as a nation or even a "civilization such as 'European'" (Byram, 2002:50). According to Paikeday's and Byram's words, a native speaker and a representative of the target language culture is not any more a representative of, strictly speaking, a nation. It is assumed we may meet native speakers of different groups within a nation, or the other way round – representatives of the same culture on a level superior to what the term *nation* delimits.

(NOT) JUST ONE DIALECT

The acknowledged heterogeneity of social groups, implying the existence of different cultures at each level of social structure (Byram, 2002: 50), emphasizes the need of intercultural abilities rather than native like competence. That is why nowadays it seems largely impractical to teach only one variety of language, unless someone openly admits he or she for some reason needs only or especially to achieve linguistic and cultural competence limited to a specific social group. Canagarajah admits that "new competencies [are] required for communication and literacy in today's world," as a single dialect of English "fails to equip our students for real-world needs" (quoted in Jenkins, 2006: 174). It seems more practical nowadays to teach comprehensible international communication in English than any one specific dialect of the language. At the same time, however, we need to realize that when teaching Englishes (as the dialects are often called nowadays, Kachru, 1982) learners will never achieve and should never be expected to achieve native like competence, as there is no specific homogenous native group representing the characteristics to be adhered to and imitated.

TEFL AND FOREIGN SOCIOCULTURAL NORMS

One more among the many dilemmas and paradoxes concerning the teaching of English as a Foreign Language refers to the teaching of the cultural element of language. Even though these two are inseparable, we may intuitively feel that the cultural element in foreign language education seems much more confusing than the teaching of the linguistic system itself. That kind of sensation may result from a kind of irrelevance of the teaching and use of the foreign "little c" culture in a non-native situation.

Sociocultural norms (referring to both verbal and non-verbal behaviours and their social and cultural appropriateness) and sociolinguistic norms (re-

ferring to verbal behaviours and their social appropriateness) admittedly depend on many more variables than just the language used for an interaction. The sociolinguistic aspect of interaction has been studied by Janicki, who proposed a classification of social situations according to the sociolinguistic norms they involve. Janicki's model (1982: 26) distinguishes between *native language situation* and *foreign language situation* (that is a situation involving at least one non-native participant). Further, among the variables influencing sociolinguistic norms negotiated in a non-native situation, Janicki enumerates: the language used (whether the language used is a mother tongue for one of the participants or not) and the setting of the interaction (that can be native to the native speaker of the language, foreign to the native speaker or foreign to both speakers). Janicki's model can be treated as a kind of framework: even though it takes into account only two speakers, it can be further developed to fit a bigger group of interlocutors. The model makes it very clear that both – interlocutors and setting – influence the sociolinguistic norms used within an interaction. What is underemphasized in Janicki's model is the category of the origin of the interlocutors, which, I believe, should be given greater emphasis. I believe all the factors: people and their origin, the constellation of interlocutors' nationalities alongside with the site of the interaction (and the amount of interlocutors' knowledge of its social conventions) influence the sociolinguistic and sociocultural norms applied.

Referring Janicki's model to a non-native classroom situation (non-native group of students taught by a non-native teacher in a non-native setting), we need to admit that the sociolinguistic (and probably also sociocultural) norms applied in that situation, even with the fluent use of English, will never be the same as the norms of the target language group.

The trend in a non-native classroom education nowadays is to make classroom interchanges truly communicative and realistic. A Polish example of that trend could be a sample of spoken *matura* exam¹ activities, strongly sticking to the roles students might be really one day placed in (e.g. a tourist, a visitor student, a vacation course participant, a host for a foreigner, a guest in a foreign host family). The realistic aspect of *matura* requirements is very strong. According to the requirement of the "realistic", student is never expected to change drastically his or her identity for the sake of performing an exam role. That prerequisite is partly based on psychological assumption, stating that changing your identity might be highly difficult psychologically, affectively, and cognitively, and in fact, the result of such a burden is not what we are going to test during a language exam. So, even when playing the imaginary role, the student is never required to change his or her cul-

¹ Final exam students take at the end of their secondary education.

tural identity and pretend to be a foreigner. He or she keeps being a young person, a student of Polish origin or living and studying in Poland. Moreover, the topic of the conversation, which might be considered to be one more element influencing the sociocultural norms of an interaction, very often focuses on typically Polish issues. So the student is quite often required to be a Polish-native guide into the Polish culture and a kind of culture-mediator, which is a very typical and realistic role for a non-native language user. At the same time, however, performing that role, whether during an exam or during the preparation course, very strongly activates the Polish schemata of knowledge (also the knowledge of social conventions) and thus presupposes a very strong influence of Polish sociocultural norms. Thus, as can be noticed, the many elements of social situation that influence the choice and use (or rather negotiation) of particular sociocultural norms, make the exam or exam preparation situation very strongly Polish norms-oriented, even though the language used is English.

With reference to the learning and teaching of language-and-culture in a non-native situation, I find it crucial to mention the frustration experienced quite often by both learners and teachers who are faced with the paradoxical and unrealistic objectives of acquiring native-like target language competence and using native-like target language sociocultural norms. Clearly, it is impossible to divide language and culture. That is why the use of English, even in a completely artificial non-native classroom situation, involves English culture as well. On the other hand, however, even if we try to make our non-native situations most realistic e.g. through the use of role-playing, drama, realia and decoration, and even with the native-born teacher as the most real part of the culture imitated, the situation created will never be that of the target language culture. Moreover, even if we transport ourselves to the target culture, where the many elements influencing the choice and use of target language sociocultural norms are present, the norms used in our interactions will probably never (or at least for a long time will not) be exactly those of the target culture (see Wierzbicka, 1969: 10-11; Hoffman 1995: 201-207), even though, in this case, they will be likely to approximate them. Because of the intricacy and subconscious influence of the many categories underlying the choice and use of sociocultural norms, I am not in favour of the expectations that are usually placed before teachers: to use and to teach the purely target language sociocultural norms. Trying to fit to that objective means cheating ourselves and results in teachers' frustration and our conviction of their incompetence. It would be undoubtedly easier to teach language-and-culture if we could assume that speaking German implies just and only German socio-cultural norms and that speaking English implies English norms etc. – an assumption which is an oversimplification and whose dubious grounding starts from the belief in the existence of fixed

English or German norms. As Janicki explains, interlocutors functioning in a non-native situation do not follow the norms of a specific group, but negotiate their own norms. What matters then in this kind of interaction are the processes of negotiation rather than the knowledge and competences in the use of norms represented by a specific group. The teaching of non-native communication should concentrate then on processes rather than facts.

Unfortunately, it is facts (or even mere facts) approach that is usually applied within the EFL framework. Teaching target language culture quite often consists of providing learners with as much cultural information concerning the target culture as possible. The teaching of mere facts is, however, not easy at all. It is cognitively very burdening and probably not the most effective approach to teach culture. Cultural facts, and especially those referring to life style, are in a constant stage of flux – changing all the time, extremely numerous and differing across locations and social strata. For this reason, it is extremely challenging and difficult to be up to date with facts, both for the teacher and for the learner. Culture implies extremely many issues and is a heterogeneous and dynamic phenomenon which cannot be taught just as a stable and unchanging status quo. The mere “facts” approach does not make learners aware of and ready to recognize and understand the cultural change that takes place over time and across social strata, social groups and geographical regions. As Omaggio notices, due to the fact that the “information only” approach does not recognize cultural variation, it is very liable to support and fossilize cultural stereotypes, rather than diminish them. Moreover, this kind of approach makes students very facts- an school- and teacher-dependent. Trained with the use of that approach, students might feel out of their depth when faced with a cultural situation not studied before (Omaggio, 1986: 362). Finally, as Galloway notices (quoted in Omaggio, 1986: 361-362), “no course based on a set of facts can adequately prepare individuals for [the] unpredictability [of social encounters]. Cognitive knowledge alone seems to have little effect on an individual’s ability to cope with or adjust to different patterns of behaviour”. Thus, probably much more important than providing learners with facts is equipping them with the ability to be discoverers and interpreters of the foreign culture. Seelye (quoted in Omaggio, 1986: 361) also agrees that the teaching of cross-cultural understanding should involve the teaching of processes rather than facts. “Facts are cheap [he says]. They are also meaningless until interpreted within a problem-solving context”. Taking that into account it seems much more useful if learners, rather than facts, “attain skills that are necessary to make sense out of the facts they themselves discover in their study of the target culture” (Seelye, quoted in Omaggio 1986: 361). Rather than mere facts, we need to teach the processes involved in cross-cultural encounters and the ability to make sense of them, analyse and reflect upon them.

WHO OWNS ENGLISH?

The final point referring to the doubts concerning EFL (and TEFL) alludes to the "Who owns English today?" world debate. The irrelevance of considering any particular group as the target one for foreign language learners, and so as the "owners" of English has already been discussed. It seems that what we are teaching nowadays within the TEFL framework are Englishes (as defined by Kachru, 1982) rather than any particular English. (Even though many Polish lecturers still, at least formally, claim they require British English as a standard). The debate of who owns English today, however, and the issues it raises, go further than acknowledging that there are several mainstream Englishes to be considered as norm-providing. Taking into account facts: numbers and statistics, it results that it is neither the British nor the English mainstream target groups taken together who "own" English. Statistics show that English has been nowadays disappropriated from the so called native speakers of the language. David Crystal's approximate proportion of non-native speakers to native speakers in the world is 3:1 (quoted in Singleton and Aronin, 2007: 3). Beneke and Gnutzmann estimate that 80% of verbal exchanges in which English is used as a second or foreign language involve no L1 speakers of English (quoted in Burt, 2005: 1). Singleton and Aronin admit that "English has permeated the sense of identity of large numbers of non-native speakers to the extent that it is now 'owned' by them. Such users of English 'appropriate' English and take possession of the responsibility for their own behaviour towards it [...]. The idea that the bi-/multilingual user of English is the norm is gaining ground, and with it a more tolerant attitude towards non-native varieties of English." (Singleton and Aronin, 2007: 14). The acceptance of non-mainstream and non-native varieties of English as playing an important part in today's world and probably also influencing the development of the language itself, has stimulated the appearance of the many names comprising the many dialects of English. Linguists have noticed the irrelevance of the name English itself, traditionally associated with the British English, and so they gave suggestions for different terms denoting the international and global use of the language. As alternatives for just English there have been suggested: World English, General English, Common English, International English, Global English or Globish, and also descriptive names: English as an international language, English as a lingua franca, English as a global language, English as a world language and English as a medium for intercultural communication (Erling, 2005). The terms are sometimes used interchangeably as denoting a range of globally comprehensible characteristics of the English language. The centrality of such defined language has been also acknowledged and validated by Modiano and his conceptual model of the spread and use of English.

MODIANO'S MODEL (1999)

Modiano argues English is a globally used language which cannot be restricted to any region. At the same time, taking into account the global and exceedingly non-native use of English, he breaks with the historical and geographical assumptions and rejects the idea of native-born speakers being the owners and arbiters of the language. The model of the spread and use of English he presents consists of overlapping circles, with the central circle denoting International English (IE or EIL), that is culturally, politically and socially neutral language including those features of Englishes that are easily understood by a wide variety of speakers and that function well in international communication. IE is defined as devoid of local influences: strong local accents, only locally understood words, RP accent, expressions that might be ambiguous to English speakers of other varieties. IE is not one standard language but includes varieties easily comprehensible in cross-cultural communication, between both natives and non-natives. The second circle of the diagram is made up of features that may become international but also may be left. The outer five circles denote different dialects (American, British, other major varieties, local varieties and foreign varieties). Each of the dialects comprises features which are hardly comprehensible to members of other groups.

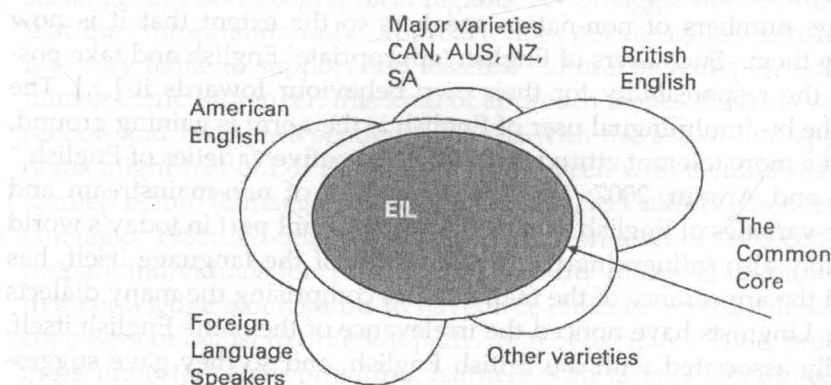


Diagram 1 Modiano's model of English as International Language (quoted in Erling, 2005: 41)

Modiano places all regional and social dialects aside as making international communication more difficult and shows the international irrelevance of native speakers, or at least not their priority in international communication. "I would argue," he says, "that the proficient non-native speakers of EIL, rather than the native speakers who are not proficient in EIL, are better equipped to define and develop English as a tool in cross-cultural communication [...]. A variety is defined by speakers of the variety. A *lingua franca* by

definition is not geographically restricted." (quoted in McArthur, 1999:402). Modiano's model has been hotly discussed and gave rise to much research in the field of IE.

ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) OR INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH (IE)

TEFL and TEIL presuppose quite different approaches to teaching language-and-culture. Taking into account the fact that the foundations of the EFL framework have been shaken and the fact that TEIL seems to fit better the non-native teaching conditions, it might be expected that the future will bring a shift of dominance between these two. This change has been already noticed by Graddol, who pointed to the "irrelevance of native speakers and the end of the phenomenon of English as a foreign language" (quoted in Singleton and Aronin, 2007: 23). There are still problems with defining the basic concepts relating to TEIL. The problem of foremost importance is distinguishing between the sometimes interchangeably used terms: International English (IE) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), as different researchers define their scope and use differently. The distinction that fits well the model of Modiano as well as other major studies in the field of international use of English (Jenkins, Seidlhofer) could be that whether ELF presupposes mainly the use of English between the non-native speakers and in the absence of native-born speakers of the language, IE is independent of the notions of nativeness or non-nativeness, and refers to mutually comprehensible features of the English languages used globally. It seems ELF denotes an artificially limited scope of the language use and does not reflect the global reality of the language. However, with the nowadays very strong orientation towards the non-native use of English, the research undertaken in the field of English as a Global language mostly concerns ELF. There is still much need of research in the area of international communication in English, and especially strictly speaking in the field of IE as defined by Modiano, that is as denoting a range of English language characteristics considered truly international and not artificially restricted to the native or non-native varieties.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL), and the contents they involve, differ significantly. As IE is supposed to be an international and intercultural language, it calls very strongly for intercultural competence versus the one target culture oriented competence implied by EFL. Moreover, TEIL is more concerned with the teaching of processes, e.g. accommodation in speech and norms, than facts. It is worth noticing that nowadays the change from Eng-

lish to Englishes starts to be recognized in education. The modest acknowledgement of Englishes, however, usually takes the form of incorporating chosen IE elements within the TEFL framework, which results in visible inconsistencies. In *New Headway*, *Snapshot* and *Horizons* coursebooks, even though non-natives are sporadically given the status of the authors of texts (speakers and writers), they are left with their original non-native pronunciation and accent but make use of correct English rules. Inconsistencies of that kind will probably not disappear from teaching materials until the frameworks of TEFL and TEIL are well defined and as such, more consequently, applied for the needs of different courses.

CONCLUSIONS

English has been disappropriated from its historical and geographical owners. Nowadays, the world Englishes (including non-native varieties of the language) have been acknowledged and given a recognized status. They have been also admitted the right to include their own sociocultural norms. The shift from English to Englishes, or rather from British English to International English, is supposed to be followed by the change in the theory and practice of learning and teaching the language worldwide. It seems EFL is coming to its end (Graddol), or rather it seems to be placed alongside the English for Specific Purposes (in this case English for the purpose of maintaining contacts with a specific social group). The change that is under way lets teachers and learners gain more confidence in their own competence. At the same time, however, it places greater emphasis on intercultural abilities and their training, as these are strongly required in international communication.

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