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New dimensions of teaching English in the days of global and cultural transformation

ABSTRACT

The English language has become the communication vehicle of the process of globalization, enhanced and accelerated also by the development of technologies. It is the default language of international contacts nowadays. English is the language most often learned and taught as a foreign/second language, and it has become the language of planetary range. The new role and status of English has inspired the author to search for new educational goals and dimensions of English language education. English as a global language means that its learner acquires a new global (planetary) identity and teaching English as a foreign language has gone far beyond traditional glottodidactics. There arises a new role for the English teacher, who is also a broker of global (planetary) values and universal cultural issues. The author also outlines the concept of planetary education through teaching English as a global language.

Key words: Globalization, English as a global language, educational goals in glottodidactics, global identity and awareness, global values and issues, role of the teacher of English, English teacher's training, planetary (global) education

GLOBAL MODERNITY

The process of globalisation has been taking place intensively on our planet for more than 50 years. Globalisation has various forms and dimensions and it influences many areas: technology, finances, mass-media, as well as ethnicity, ideology and ethics (Appadurai, 2005, xiii). Economy, politics and culture have been changing fast in the world's scale. People have become more mobile and capital transfer has become more flexible (Burszta, 2008, p. 66; Goban-Klas, 2005, p. 166). It is often stressed that economic motivations of capitalism are the key to understanding the spread of globalisation, with emphasis on technological development making this spread possible (Martell, 2010, p. 48). English is a vehicle of influential fields, for example: science, global business and popular culture. It is widely used in world politics and tourism and also by many business corporations and international (transnational) institutions.

Globalisation can be seen and defined as a process, ideology, state of affairs or discourse (Axford, 2013, pp. 16–20).

Some of the phenomena connected with globalisation and influencing modernity are:

- shortening geographical distance (by means of communication technologies),
- heading from interconnectivity to interdependence (e.g. in economy and politics),
- fusion (hybridization) and clash of cultures (cultural transformation),
- creating new (hybrid) identities,
- shaping areas of common cause and global (transnational) awareness.

If we understand globalisation as discourse, we can see that it has its language: English. Mc Crum notices the close connection between globalisation, economy and the language: “the more global capitalism boomed, the more English developed as its preferred medium of communication” (Mc Crum, 2010, p. 216). This language is perceived as a “default” language of most international contacts. There are no time, place and distance barriers of effective communication any more. Everyone can be in touch with anyone, on the faith of an *a priori* assumption that the language of communication will be English. Statistical data confirm these statements. It is estimated that two English native speakers interacting make only 12% of communication acts (situations) carried out in English (Nerrière, & Hon 2009, p. 4).

EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS OF ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

In the second decade of the twenty-first century English has got a dominant position in the linguistic world, aspiring to be the universal language of mankind. Being a mother tongue for about 300–400 million of people, it is currently a foreign language that is most often learned and taught as a second language worldwide. Nowadays about 1.5 billion people are learning it. The British Council estimates that by 2020 nearly a third of the world's population will be trying to learn English (Mc Crum, 2010, p. 256).

English language has special and unique status among natural languages. Being recognised as an international language of global (planetary) range, it has been losing its geographical territory and becoming culturally neutral, i.e. it is no more associated or bound to one particular linguistic area and its specific national values (Kapica-Curzytek, 2012, p. 75). Burszta notices that the anthropological rule according to which one culture is connected with one language is no longer valid in the case of the present situation of today's multiethnicity and hybridity (Burszta, 1998, p. 77). Undoubtedly, it is no longer valid in the case of English. Being a global language, it influences changes in world culture, bringing about cultural homogenization. It has impact on individuals, introducing common homogeneous models of behaviour (Eco, 2002, p. 348). It is a language of a global supermarket of culture (Matthews, 2005, p. 271) – where culture is understood as resource. Last but not least, English is a language in which commonality of the human condition is experienced and expressed (Axford, 2013, p. 96).

The new role and status of English inspires us to search for new educational goals and dimensions of English language education. The presence of English in school systems creates a special form of social diglossia – when people are bilingual in their own language and English (Wright, 2004, p. 14). The forms of English presence at schools range from being a regular school subject, it can be regarded as a “basic skill” or even implemented as a language of instruction at early age (Harrison, 2013).

We can find examples of solutions in educational policy proving that the special status of English has been recognized and acknowledged by educational systems worldwide. English was added to the Mexican primary school curriculum as a compulsory second language, also Chile and Mongolia have given English a special status in their educational systems (Mc Crum, 2010, p. 256). English is also the second language in Japan (Steiner, 2000, p. 624).

91.6% of pupils were learning English as a foreign language in Poland in the school year 2011/2012 (Braunek, 2013, p. 4). However, the Polish basic curriculum (*podstawa programowa*) does not specify a particular modern foreign language which should be taught. English is not a compulsory foreign language, yet, it has been noticed that there is no choice left for the learners between English and other languages in some schools. In other words, there is a current tendency, if not certain pressure (for example, from the side of the parents) to choose English as the first foreign language to be learned in primary schools (Strzemeska, 2010, p. 78).

It is significant that even though pupils/students who begin to learn a foreign language seem to be given no other choice but English in most cases, they do not express any negative feelings of “losing their autonomy”. This outer pressure is not only accepted but it is also accompanied by inner motivation developed by the awareness of high status of the English language.

Nowadays the reasons to learn English are much different from the reasons given by learners who start learning other languages. In the case of English, the main motive is “the ability to communicate worldwide” or “getting a good job”, which is, of course, an economic factor (Szul, 2009, p. 8). This is why the possible negative feelings about learning a compulsory school subject are reduced. The learner focuses on the pragmatic reasons, understanding and acknowledging the fact that English is a tool of worldwide communication and a key to higher social class (Szul, 2009, pp. 46–47). The need for international contacts has also become more intense due to the constant development of communication technologies (Kapica-Curzytek, 2015, pp. 168–169).

The unique status of English as an international (global) language can also be noticed when we analyse teaching materials. If we compare the contents regarding culture in various language textbooks, we can discover an essential difference between English textbooks and textbooks in other languages. Looking at random language textbooks for teaching languages other than English, we notice that they mainly, if not solely, focus on culture and issues regarding the countries where the learned language is spoken¹. These textbooks follow a traditional approach to cultural contents, promoting only knowledge about the countries where a particular language is spoken.

¹ See e.g.: *Aussichten A1*, L. Ros-El-Hosni et al., (2014), Ernst-Klett Sprachen, Stuttgart, *Em neu, Deutsch als Fremdsprache, Niveaustufe C1*, (2008), M. Perlmann-Balme et al., Hueber Verlag, *Nuevo ven, Español lengua extranjera 2*, F. Castro et al. (2004), Edelsa, Madrid.

In this aspect, English textbooks are different from other language textbooks. There is relatively little information about the culture of specific traditions (customs) of English-speaking countries. Instead, there are more facts about other non-English speaking countries and international issues (globalization, ecology, social issues, world brands, lifestyle)² which cannot be found in the textbooks of other languages. It is also significant that teaching listening comprehension is often based on recordings of people who are not native speakers of English and who talk about their non-English speaking countries.

For example, the new approach to teaching English can be seen in the textbook *New English File Intermediate* which consists of chapters on “International English” with participation of non-native English speakers and with neutral cultural background³. Crystal calls this concept “a new Babel Tower” – with worldwide communication drifting from one standard English to many kinds of English – and, ultimately, to the disappearance of the standard (Crystal, 2010, pp. 167–168).

Thus, we conclude that English textbooks have one more educational aim and function in comparison with the textbooks of other languages: they are focused on promoting the international (universal) aspects and contexts of English (Kapica-Curzytek, 2012, p. 81). They reflect the aspects of English as a global language which is a tool of communication between non-native English speakers and the vehicular of the global culture and transnational flow. It must also be noticed that English is a language through which one’s own intellectual property is expressed and goods and services (as well as cultural local values) are exported to other countries (Graddol, 2000, p. 3).

If English textbooks reflect the fact that English is a language with a new supranational (global) dimension and a medium of interconnectedness (McCrum, 2010, p. 16), we can conclude that teaching English goes far beyond traditional glottodidactics. Its categories traditionally focus on developing language skills and promoting culture of the countries where a particular language is spoken. Teaching English is no more seen as teaching a *foreign* language

² *New Headway Upper-Intermediate*, L. and J. Soars, (2015), Oxford University Press, see also other levels of *Headway*, *New English File Intermediate* (2011), C. Oxenden, Ch. Latham Koenig, Oxford University Press.

³ *New English File Intermediate* (2011), C. Oxenden, Ch. Latham Koenig, Oxford University Press.

only, and it is also taught and learned as a *global* language. Teaching and learning English has become one of the factors of transnationalisation of the public sphere (cf. Couldry, 2014, pp. 43–59), but we can notice a reciprocal effect: teaching English as a global language is also a consequence of the fact that the public sphere is transnational, while learning it is a form of access to it.

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE: NEW EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND A NEW ROLE OF THE TEACHER

The most important aspects (educational goals) of teaching English as a global language are:

- developing global (planetary) awareness,
- preparing learners to participate in intercultural dialogue by developing their intercultural competences,
- promoting universal values (e.g. nature protection, human rights, sustainable development),
- promoting ways of coexistence and cooperation between cultures that would allow accepting differences in a peaceful way, without using physical aggression (anti-war rhetoric),
- creating “stubs” of global civil society (cosmopolitan ethics).

The issues mentioned above create a new dimension and level of human awareness which focuses on ontology of the globalised world (Axford, 2013, p. 190), the structure of its reality and its features. What is more, they also seem to be essential conditions of human existence – especially peaceful coexistence – in the globalised world.

The learner of English acquires and develops a new global (planetary) identity and awareness as defined by A. Giddens (2008, pp. 78–79) firstly, as social responsibility reaching beyond the state border and secondly, as looking for other than national categories of developing one’s identity. For example, it takes place in the situation of communicating with members of network societies created via internet social media (Kapica-Curzytek, 2015, pp. 167–178).

These new educational goals of teaching and learning English as a global language are in full accordance with the idea of “learning to live together” which is one of the UNESCO four pillars of education, meaning opting for dialogue, cooperation and mutual enrichment of different cultures and systems

of values (Nikitorowicz, 2001, p. 124). Preparing people to coexistence and cooperation is regarded to be the biggest challenge for education in the 21st century (Delors, 1998, p. 32). Therefore, there is a need to create education and its educational goals focused on teaching global responsibility and promoting cooperation in solving the world's problems by dialogue and negotiations. It is especially necessary to find ways of conquering anarchy, selfishness and divides, because it is noticed that the process of globalization has brought polarization in many areas (Bauman, 2006, p. 25; Piketty, 2015, *passim*).

The high psychological status of the English language, its prestige and wide range of influence are factors that might be helpful in developing education in this way. It can often be seen that English often becomes a "bridge" connecting individuals with different cultural background, different values and world view and surely some points supporting the international dialogue can be outlined here. One of them is preparing to discussion aimed at developing openness and rational attitude, looking for a compromise – which minimizes hatred and violence (including physical violence) in the world.

A new role for the teacher of English arises here. Consequently, the English teacher is no more merely a foreign language teacher, and his or her teacher's duties, requirements and competences are no more limited to teaching English as a foreign language and the culture of the English-speaking countries. Teaching English as a global language changes the teacher into a guide in the modern world and a "globality" broker, promoting universal (global) values, developing students' intercultural competences and preparing them to peaceful dialogue on the international level.

We have to make a stipulation here that being a broker of global issues and universal values does mean one has to be over-enthusiastic about the process of globalization and its consequences as such. Like in every case, critical thinking is an important factor of shaping and developing one's attitude and views.

Due to the fact that English is taught and learned as a global language, it seems absolutely essential for the teacher of English to follow the current world issues, to understand the global trends, to recognize universal values and to notice connections between phenomena taking place in the quickly changing reality. An English teacher should also understand the importance of developing the attitudes of peaceful coexistence and solidarity of all the planet citizens.

ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE: TEACHERS' TRAINING

This new background of teaching English, arising in the current global world's reality, should also be taken under consideration at the stage of a teacher's preparation to his or her future job. Considering the fact that English is no more a foreign language only, but a global language to teach, one has to go beyond the traditional "philology canon" in educating students of English philology who will become future English teachers. Developing their educational and linguistic competences is not enough in today's reality. They should also be prepared to the new role of "global culture brokers", as described above. This issue seems to be even of more importance, if we realize that the amount of teaching hours of social and human science subjects has been gradually reduced in universities' curricula over the years.

The University of Zielona Góra goes against this disadvantageous trend. In the academic years 2011/2012 and 2012/2013, BA second year English philology students of teacher's specialisation had a compulsory subject: *Współczesne konteksty edukacji* [Modern contexts of education]. It lasted for two semesters (with the number of teaching hours: 60). This subject, based on issues in general pedagogy (*pedagogika ogólna*) provided an interdisciplinary analysis of the phenomena that form the background of contemporary changes of civilization and which influence the state and quality of education. Its main goal was to describe, explain and interpret the most important processes and mechanisms which influence the educational practice. The course also provided an analysis of the English language in its global aspect – i.e. English as a language of global civilization and a tool of developing global awareness. The subject focused also on information, knowledge and models of activities that could be helpful in shaping the humanistic attitude.

Współczesne konteksty edukacji was a subject giving students knowledge about the most important current world events and teaching them to think rationally and critically i.e. to notice the main trends, their chances, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the modern civilization. The subject helped students understand how various fields of humanities influence the educational practice and the everyday school reality, and to notice relevance and connections between global trends of changes of civilization and the condition and quality of state education and education policy.

This was not the only attempt to broaden up the portfolio of subjects in humanities for the students of English Philology. Since the academic year

2015/2016, BA third year students have been offered an optional subject: *Humanistyka wobec wyzwań współczesności* [Humanities towards the challenges of modernity]. The subject is planned for two semesters, with the number of 60 teaching hours. This subject contains issues regarding general knowledge in the fields of modern history, politics, sociology, philosophy, cultural anthropology and related disciplines. Students learn about the background of social and political reality in Poland, Europe and in the world and discuss the aspects of global changes. Global challenges are analysed, among them there are: globalization, development of technology and information society, consumerism, migration and changes in culture.

Understanding the situation of an individual towards the risks and dangers of civilization helps broaden knowledge and sets possible trends and models of functioning. In this way, students develop their rational and critical thinking, they learn to be creative humanists and mature citizens of the world, who are able not only to manage their own development, but to inspire their communities to make the necessary changes as well.

Professionalisation and educating future teachers must oppose the general tendency of narrowing down the range of taught subjects to the rudimentary minimum. This happens mainly because of financial reasons. However, we should no more look at teachers' education as a branch that only "generates costs". Unfortunately, most students themselves have acquired this attitude, being over-pragmatic: "If I do not need this for my job, I can skip it." The broader dimension and background of their education, the more their aspirations, ambitions, creativity and imagination develop, which is necessary to change the world. In this aspect, educating teachers must be seen as a necessary long-term investment.

Introducing the global issues in preparing future teachers of English for their job should not be only accidental. It is recommended that today's global reality the educational standard of educating students of English Philology should consist of three complementary pillars:

- developing language skills (fluency in language),
- shaping teaching competences,
- developing knowledge in humanities (with special focus on globalization and issues related to it).

PLANETARY EDUCATION THROUGH TEACHING ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

This unique situation of English inspires us to ask questions: Would it be possible to make English a default language of universal values and a language of compromise, agreement and cooperation? Could it become a vehicle of global education, intentionally aimed at promoting peace and minimizing and solving intercultural conflicts? Could learning English develop global awareness, especially the ability to look at global issues and problems from the global perspective? Is developing global awareness a remedy for radicalism, extremism and ethnic conflicts?

A stipulation should be made here: the idea of developing global awareness and planetary (global) education is not the same as the utopian and, actually unreal, if not even totalitarian “unification of the whole world”. From the global perspective, planetary education is understood as a humanistic mission. Its main goals are universalization of the concept of person with respect to diversity and preparing people to long-life readiness to responsible and competent solving of the world problems, as well as developing solidarity and conviction that all the citizens of the Earth are part of its ecosystem (Łomny, 1997, p. 344). Therefore, developing global awareness focuses on cooperation in finding solutions of particular issues, learning rational dialogue of cultures and developing attitudes of mutual respect, tolerance and frankness.

English as a default language of new communication technologies also has a new global aspect. Thanks to technologies, many issues become global, like for example the protests against ACTA in 2012 or “One Billion Rising”, a global movement to end violence against women. It shows that communication via technologies is also a factor that influences people’s awareness, identity and personality. This all gives democracy a new sense, forcing politicians to be aware of the global consequences of their decisions. This experience helps us acknowledge the other individual (even from a distant country or culture) who has similar priorities, system of values and views.

Technologies can also support and develop education. Khan Academy, an e-school on the Internet, is an educational global undertaking based on new technologies and English. It is a non-profit organization which started to provide education “to everyone and everywhere”. It allows learners to learn at their own pace. The Academy had been established to help American students,

but it soon achieved global range (Gelles, 2011, pp. 27–30). Could a Global Academy of Planetary Education, similar to Khan Academy, be successful?

Such a project has already been implemented. *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, a cycle of broadcasts, was made together by the British Museum and radio station BBC4. The descriptions of the objects (from the British Museum's collection) tell us a fascinating history of the world and achievements of all human civilization since the earliest times (Kapica-Curzytek, 2011, p. 19). It is a “stub” of patterns of supranational (global) culture, pointing out the mutual dependences and interconnections, intercultural contacts taking place throughout the years. It is different from the earlier confrontational view at cultures meeting with a “clash”. Human history is seen as a kind of ongoing joint project, where one lot of people picked up where another had left off” (*A History...*).

CONCLUSIONS

Teaching English as a global language has the aspect of developing global awareness. An English learner participates in worldwide communication and h/she becomes interconnected to the big social net of English speakers and to the current flow of world issues. Learning English also means acquiring universal values and global issues, like e.g. pop-culture, ecology, knowledge about world brands, famous people and current world affairs. The goals of developing global awareness during lessons of English are: allowing learners to participate in intercultural dialogue, developing their intercultural competences and promoting universal values. The challenge and the key goal is to find ways of peaceful coexistence and cooperation between cultures, which would allow accepting differences in a peaceful way, without using physical aggression.

Since English is a global language nowadays, teachers of English are no longer teachers of a foreign language and culture. By teaching a global language, they also educate future Earth citizens, who are and will be responsible for peaceful coexistence and peaceful global cooperation. An English learner participates in worldwide communication; h/she becomes interconnected to the big social net of English speakers and to the current flow of world issues and acquires universal and global issues. A teacher of English should be a competent guide who will show the way and explain the main global problems of the contemporary world.

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