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Euro-English and Language Pedagogy

Streszczenie

Pozycja języka angielskiego jako języka komunikacji międzynarodowej, zakwestionowanie statusu i roli rodzimego użytkownika języka angielskiego jako wzorca i modelu, wytyczającego cele dydaktyczne w nauczaniu i uczeniu się języka angielskiego jako języka drugiego/obcego i wyłonienie się nowych odmian tego języka na arenie światowej nie pozostają bez wpływu na politykę edukacyjną i metodykę nauczania języka angielskiego na świecie i w Europie. Wielu teoretyków i praktyków stawia dziś pytanie, czy przedmiotem nauczania powinien być nadal amerykański czy brytyjski angielski, czy może jedna z nowszych odmian tego języka, np. tzw. euro-angielski, czyli nieco uproszczona forma języka angielskiego, funkcjonująca jako lingua franca wśród Europejczyków. W chwili obecnej wydaje się, że potencjalne korzyści, jakie mogłoby przynieść wybranie tej odmiany języka angielskiego zamiast jednej z odmian standardowych, nie stanowią istotnej przeciwwagi dla ewidentnych minusów takiego wyboru, co jest główną tezą autorki niniejszego studium.

How English develops in the world is no business whatever of native speakers in England, the United States, or anywhere else. They have no say in the matter, no right to intervene or pass judgment. They are irrelevant. The very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it. ...It is not a property for them to lease out to others while still retaining the freehold. Other people actually own it.

Widdowson (2003: 43)

1. New Englishes: basic terminological distinctions

It is commonly recognized that the role of English as a language of global communication is entirely unprecedented. While, as Crystal (2003: 7–12) convincingly argues, throughout the centuries it has always been the case that the power of the people who speak a certain language, in particular the political

and military power, has been the most important factor contributing to and decisive for the language gaining the status of an international tongue, the present-day status of English as the global lingua franca is due to a whole range of different and multi-faceted reasons (cf. Smith 2005 for an interesting devil's advocate polemic of why English features rather poorly as a lingua franca).

It is open to dispute to what extent the sheer numbers of speakers of English in the world *originate in* the success of the English language and to what extent they *contribute to* this success, but these numbers remain impressive nevertheless: it is estimated that there are around 375 million of native speakers of this language, and over a billion of non-native speakers (Graddol 1997: 14, 18).

Unquestionably, the different functions that the language performs in personal, social and professional contexts, which are referred to as its *range*, and the varied social strata that the language 'belongs to', indicative of its *depth* (B. Kachru 1986, Y. Kachru 2011), are unmatched by any other language spoken on earth, even though such languages as Hindi or Chinese can boast to have more L1 speakers, and some other languages are used as international languages, e.g., French and Spanish, or as lingua franca tongues, e.g., Japanese and Swahili (Young and Walsh 2010: 125).

The territorial expansion of English is likewise unparalleled, with the diaspora of two kinds contributing to the spread: on the one hand, a large migration of English native speakers to Australia, North America and New Zealand in the past, and, on the other, the dissemination of the English language among many ethnic groups in Asia, Africa and other parts of the world (Y. Kachru 2011: 156–7). As a result, both mother-tongue (that is native) and second-language (nativized) varieties of English have originated (MacKenzie 2009: 226–7). B. Kachru (1986) has classified these as Inner and Outer Circle countries respectively. In addition, as a result of globalization, in the last couple of decades the role of English in countries which remain basically monolingual and where it has merely the status of a foreign language has increased considerably, and it "is seen as an important key to success and upward social mobility" (Jeon 2009: 232). These countries are classified as the Expanding Circle by B. Kachru (1986), and English has the role of a foreign language there.

In very many countries all over the world at least a working command of English is considered an important professional skill, and English labels and names used in product, shop and service names are regarded to be a sign of "elitism, trendiness, late-fashion and high-quality" (Hasanova 2010: 8). It is important even in countries where it is not used for any institutional or public purposes, as English is the language of international corporations and organizations, the language of academic conferences and publications, the language

of best-selling books and renowned media (cf., among others, Crystal 2003, Gil 2010, Graddol 1997, 2006, MacKenzie 2009, Taavitsainen and Pahta 2008, Young and Walsh 2010).

All this means that while performing essential political and public functions in a number of divergent societies and communities, English has also acquired the status of the language of wider communication, especially in Europe, where it is commonly used for interpersonal, professional and administrative purposes by non-native speakers of English who do not share a common language (Berns 2009, Taavitsainen and Pahta 2008). It is postulated by some researchers that the *English as a lingua franca* label should be associated with such contexts, in contrast with situations in which communication between non-native and native speakers takes place, for which the term *English as an international language* is applicable (Jenkins 2006: 160–1, see also Erling 2005 for a useful discussion on the different labels used for English in its worldwide role, and McArthur 2004 and Watterson 2011, for reviews of the history and uses of the terms *world*, *international* and *global English*).

In these distant geographical locations and very different political, economic, social and educational contexts, the English language has been developing in various ways, giving rise to what is often referred to as *New Englishes* (cf. Berns 2009, Jenkins 2006), that is varieties of English characterized by specific linguistic and socio-pragmatic features, which define their idiosyncratic profile. There is again a lot of disagreement on the status of these and how they compare with well-established varieties, such as American, Indian or Singaporean English (Jenkins 2006, Y. Kachru 2011). For example, there is an on-going debate on the status and role of European English, or Euro-English, that is the variety of English as used by Europeans. Euro-English is believed to be marked by specific phonological, grammatical and lexical features typical of the European lingua franca (Modiano 2006: 231), but these are not homogeneous and differ depending on the L1 of the users, the context and the function for which the language is employed. While some scholars emphasize the formal, distinctive features of Euro-English (cf., e.g., Modiano 2006, 2007, Seidlhofer 2001a, 2001b), others argue for the “form follows functions” approach, indicating that it is negotiation of meaning more than anything else that determines “the identity of an English that is distinctly European in its formal manifestations and in its functional allocation” (Berns 2009: 195).

2. Problems with nativeness and the standard variety

The recognition of new Englishes promotes “a pluricentric view of English” (McKay 2011: 125), which questions the legitimization of its standard variety

ies (identified by B. Karchu 1983 as the Inner Circle) as models of English to be learnt. As a result, the notion of the native language norm to be targeted in English language instruction has been severely undermined. Previously looked up to as one of the key reference points in English language pedagogy, now the native speaker is frowned upon as “a political construct carrying a particular ideological baggage” (Hackert 2009: 306). In fact, the very idea of the English native speaker is nowadays considered a pernicious myth (Alptekin 2002), to be replaced with a proficient language user or even a successful bilingual speaker, or as House (2003: 573 cited in Doerr 2009a:4) puts it, “an expert in ELF [English as a lingua franca] use.” On the one hand, the very fact that native speakers constitute a minority among English language users, and, on the other, that it is virtually impossible to answer the question about who should be recognized as the ‘real’ native speaker, render the notion heavily value-laden and highly controversial.

Globalization and heterogeneity of English, the blurred distinctions between L1 and L2 in certain situations, sensitivity to issues of language policy, national identity and multiculturalism, to mention just a few crucial problem areas, severely destabilize the native speaker construct (Doerr 2009b). However, the questions about which or whose English should be taught and learnt remain as pertinent as ever (Pauwels 2011).

Two dominant trends continue to compete here. On the one hand, advocates of the *exonormativity* strongly argue for the British, American, Australian etc. (i.e., Inner Circle) English to be recognized as the target language norm to be followed by English language teachers and learners. On the other hand, there is a growing body of supporters of *endonormativity*, who promote new varieties of English as legitimate models to be targeted in language education (cf. Luke *et al.* 2007, Pauwels 2011).

3. Fundamental controversies in modern English pedagogy

All these developments necessarily affect English language pedagogy and have provoked many scholars into raising a number of probing questions. How should the status of English affect English language instruction in the new millennium? Should the English language syllabus be based on the new varieties of English rather than the standard Inner Circle varieties? Should Euro-English be adopted as the variety to be taught and learnt for international communication in Europe?

As it is only to be expected in the period of transition, no simple and straightforward answers to these queries can be offered. The dubious status of the English native speaker and problems with identifying the standards of use

and usage to be targeted in English language courses provide a powerful impetus for the redefinition of the goals of instruction to be pursued, and reevaluation of the linguistic norms to be focused on. As a matter of fact, the idea that the Inner Circle varieties should be the standard version of the language to be taught and learnt is seriously challenged nowadays.

A lot of the debate aimed against the hegemony of the hitherto dominant British and American varieties is fuelled by political and socio-political considerations. The notions of *self*, as represented by the less-than-competent and defective learner, and *other*, the idealized native speaker, which underlie the value-laden anti-native discourse understandably generate a lot of negative publicity (McKay 2011: 134–6). English, as the above opening quote from Widdowson (2003) highlights, belongs to many, and it is these masses who use, modify and shape it, taking possession of the language.

If the mainstream varieties are treated with suspicion, what kind of English should be selected by language teachers? One of the options would be a ‘common core’ syllabus based on most commonly attested non-native forms, for which Jenkins (2006) makes a strong case. This suggestion does not seem a very appealing solution though: teaching and learning English reduced to a kind of fossilized interlanguage system shared by the non-native majority may be viewed as a democratization of the language but is not likely to be seen as a particularly empowering and attractive compromise. A standard international variety, that is a lingua franca version of English, is postulated as another possibility (Ur 2010). In Europe, the so-called Euro-English is this kind of variety.

4. Should we teach Euro-English?

In most European countries (in fact, with the exception of Belgium and Luxembourg), English is the most commonly taught L2 at the primary school level. Over 90% of European secondary school students learn English as an additional language (Cook 2011: 141). Therefore, the question of which English should be taught appears very relevant in the European context.

In view of the worldwide changes on the English language scene, it seems useful to consider the possible advantages and disadvantages of shifting to the Euro-English variety. Selecting this model rather than British or American English would lead to defining teaching and learning objectives in more realistic terms: Euro-English is a kind of contact language that is actually used by European speakers of different vernaculars to communicate in various contexts and for various purposes. In certain ways less complex and demanding than the Inner Circle standard varieties, as it is simplified at the level of phonology and

syntax to match the prevalent attested non-native use (cf. Jenkins 2007 and Seidlhofer 2004, both cited in Cook 2011), Euro-English should be easier to internalize for the learner. Furthermore, the native speaker ideal and the surrounding controversies could be effectively eliminated from the instructional horizon, with the principal goal in English language instruction redefined in terms of the target English language user who “is not just someone who can go to another country and speak the language like a native, ... [but rather] someone who can successfully use the language for the purposes of their life and who has reaped the mental benefits of learning another language as well as its utilitarian use” (Cook 2011: 152). The emphasis then is on a conscious socio-pragmatically aware student.

Focus on Euro-English also means that English teachers will no longer be required to teach the model that they themselves have failed to fully master, and students will not have to learn the forms that are foisted on them and with which they are not likely to be very successful (cf. MacKenzie 2009: 229). Likewise, the problems of inequality and inferiority of non-native speaker vis-à-vis native-speaker teachers that trouble theoreticians and practitioners alike will be circumvented.

While these considerable tactical advantages appear very attractive, at the moment they seem to be outweighed by powerful arguments against replacing the (good?) old standard British or American variety with Euro-English. In the first place, it is one of the notable characteristics of Euro-English that it is flexible, so – as if by definition – difficult, if not impossible, to codify. This creates a major stumbling block to nominating it as the language to be taught and learnt in instructional contexts: without clear rules and principles that Euro-English is based on, it can hardly be taught as a coherent system. It is frequently described as an emergent language, which, as MacKenzie (2009: 230) echoing sociolinguistic descriptions rightly points out, “suggests a perpetual process in which there is a constant movement toward a complete structure, but completion is always deferred.” Thus raising the status of Euro-English from a variety of use to a model to be followed would actually amount to putting “the prescriptive cart after the descriptive horse” (Prodromou 2007: 52). At this juncture, an important fact about this variety needs to be acknowledged: users of English as a lingua franca tend to produce language that faithfully adheres to the formal standards of the Inner Circle varieties. In the studies reported by MacKenzie (2009: 230) more than 90% of the English utterances collected from Outer and Expanding Circle speakers showed syntactic regularity and conformity with the native speaker norms.

In fact, many students want to learn native speaker norms (cf. Cullen and Cho 2007, Hynninen 2010, Kuo 2006, Timms 2002). This is by no means surprising: as hinted at above, the native speaker standards provide an impor-

tant point of reference for learners of English. Many of them, apart from using English for interpersonal purposes, need it for educational and professional contexts, therefore a good command of the language may prove a precious asset in the intra- and international competition on the job market (Kuo 2006: 219).

It should not be forgotten that it is in British and American English that many prestigious periodicals and books are published. For the same reasons for which Esperanto has turned out to be less successful than anticipated, because it was not a natural language so it could offer much less than any living language, Euro-English is not a good candidate for a universal European language, since what it offers fails to be as versatile and useful as what the mainstream varieties provide.

5. Further implications for English language teaching

Even though at the moment it seems that neither Euro-English nor any other variety of English developed in the Expanding Circle is likely to win recognition as the model to be taught and learnt in English language courses, there are a number of important implications of English functioning as a language of wider communication for language pedagogy.

Firstly, the status of English as a global language indicates that the major emphasis in English pedagogy should be put on learners using it as a contact language in international communication contexts. So while the target is *not English as lingua franca per se*, the focus of teaching and learning should be on *functioning in English as a lingua franca* in cross-cultural communicative situations. As Prodromou (2007: 50) aptly puts it, “rather than set up a code which all users of ELF have to follow, it is surely time that we recognized the diversity among users and multiplicity of uses to which English is put worldwide and think in terms of varied *processes of interaction* rather than a *single prescriptive model*” (emphasis original). One of the major pedagogic goals then should be to equip the student with the repertoire of language resources and strategies that would make it possible for him or her to communicate efficiently. It can be achieved by implementing language pedagogy based on adopting the C-bound perspective, which “prioritizes the process of cross-cultural comprehensibility between learners as a communicative goal in itself” (Sifakis 2004: 239), rather than the N-bound (i. e. norm-bound) pedagogic profile. This should not be thought of as a major innovation in language teaching, as the teaching objectives defined in this way are very much in line with the communicative approach, apparently ruling the world of English methodology for almost half a century.

The second implication, which directly follows from the point just made, is that English language syllabuses need to exemplify the diversity of forms used today. In other words, there should be place in the language classroom for information about and examples from different varieties of English as well as illustration of non-native speaker discourse. This has got nothing to do with teaching an amalgam of different Englishes or a sub-standard variety of English, but simply means raising the learners' awareness of the diversity of forms used and preparing them for functioning in lingua franca encounters.

Thirdly, both *product* and *process* orientation should be given due attention in English language instruction. This indicates that while proficiency in English should be viewed as the vital goal to be worked towards in terms of the product of language teaching and learning, the process of developing the ability to make use of the available, even if sometimes insufficient, language resources at the learner's disposal in order to communicate the intended meaning should be constantly emphasized and adequately attended to. All this needs to be done in a manner that gives due respect to the local culture of learning (McKay 2011) and promotes multi-culturalism (Cook 2011).

6. Concluding remarks

While concerns for language imperialism, national identity, language attrition and other socio-political issues remain weighty matters on other continents, they do not appear very relevant in the European context (Cook 2011). However, the status of English as a global language, the rejection of the native speaker ideal, and the development and recognition of new Englishes cannot be underestimated as factors that exert influence on language policy and pedagogy also in Europe. The central question addressed by many theoreticians and some practitioners concerns the variety of English to be selected as a teaching and learning target relevant for international communication and global multi-cultural encounters. Euro-English might be viewed as a viable option in the European educational context. However, as it is argued in this paper, at this moment the advantages that nominating Euro-English as the variety to teach and learn might bring are counterbalanced by considerable disadvantages. The latter mainly stem from the fact that by belonging to the community of European English language users, Euro-English has no true power of a living language with its historical, artistic, literary and cultural heritage. In fact, since – as any emergent variety – it can hardly be codified, so its teachability is highly questionable.

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