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The peaceful expansion of the English language in Europe. A tool of integration or a facet of quiet colonization?

Pokojowa ekspansja języka angielskiego w Europie.
Narzędzie integracji czy nowe oblicze cichej kolonizacji?

Streszczenie

Rozważania dotyczą korzyści i negatywnych zjawisk towarzyszących ekspansji języka angielskiego w Europie w kontekście historycznym, politycznym, kulturowym i społecznym w optyce pedagogiki społecznej, teorii krytycznej i myśli post-kolonialnej.

Wieloaspektowe spojrzenie na zagadnienie ekspansji języka angielskiego w Europie obejmuje przykłady polityki „English as the second language” i „English as the foreign language”, przytoczone zostają dane statystyczne dotyczące nauczania języka angielskiego w krajach europejskich. Omówione zostaje zjawisko hegemonii języka angielskiego wśród języków obcych w Europie, specjalizacji języka angielskiego na potrzeby biznesu, nauki, medycyny czy nowych technologii. Przywołany zostaje fenomen tzw. „Pidgin English” i przejęcie integracyjno-komunikacyjnej misji uwspólnienia języka komunikacji międzynarodowej przez angielski, uzurpowanej sobie przez Esperanto. Poruszona zostaje teza, że język angielski jest pewnego rodzaju narzędziem kolonizacji, z pozycji władzy i uprzywilejowania, lecz równocześnie jest zawłaszczany i re-kolonizowany przez kraje poddane jego misji cywilizacyjnej, w akcie oporu i odzyskania sprawczej roli przez podmioty podporządkowane jego oddziaływaniu. Motywem przewodnim zawartych w tekście analiz są rozważania nad tym, na ile znajomość języka angielskiego lub jej brak staje się coraz istotniejszym polem ekskluzji/inkluzyi społecznej, powiązanej w znaczącym stopniu z kapitałem społecznym, kulturowym i ekonomicznym jednostek z różnych warstw społecznych.

Słowa kluczowe: kolonizacja, integracja, język, tożsamość, globalizacja

Abstract

The paper serves as an invitation to rethink the global growth of English. It refers to the benefits and adverse effects associated with the English language expansion in Europe, in historical,

political and cultural contexts. The findings of the paper are framed by the optics of social pedagogy, critical theory and post-colonial thought.

The analysis includes issues of expansion of the English language in Europe, reflected in the policy of „English as the second language” and „English as the foreign language”. Statistical data on the teaching of English in European countries is presented. Furthermore, the discussion draws on the phenomenon of English language hegemony amongst foreign languages in Europe and the specialization of English for business, science, medicine and new technologies. The emergence of so-called „Pidgin English” is discussed, along with the subtle acquisition of Esperanto’s mission by the English language, which was to find a common language for integration and communication between different nations. The paper stresses that the English language may be viewed as a tool of colonization, from a position of power and privilege, but at the same time becomes appropriated and re-colonized by the subjects of its civilizing mission, in an act of resistance and repossession of the participatory and empowered role of the subordinated entities of its impact. The leitmotif of the paper can be summarized by a question to what extent knowledge of English or the lack of such knowledge may increasingly become a significant field of social exclusion / inclusion, linked to social, cultural and economic capital of individuals from different social strata.

Keywords: colonization, integration, language, culture, identity, globalization

Introduction

English has undoubtedly become one of the dominant international languages of our time. The estimates by British Council (2013, p. 2) suggest that 1.75 billion people (one fourth of the global population) speak English to some extent. English language has an official language status not only in its nucleus, Great Britain, but in many different countries entangled in a colonial past: USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Barbados, Bermuda, Botswana, Hong Kong, Eritrea, Falklands, Figgie, Ghana, Gibraltar, India, Ireland, Jamaica, Cameroon, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Malta, Mauritius, Micronesia, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Rwanda, Samoa, Seashells, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe and more.

This paper contains questions about the beneficiaries and the disadvantaged of this language expansion, making a claim that an enabler of communication may also be viewed as a dangerous extension of a post-colonial power. The paper does not aspire to look at studying English from a linguistic, neo-linguistic, or semiotic point of view, but from a socio-political one. The findings form a theoretical contribution based on: the desk analysis of statistical data about learning English in Europe and historical accounts that demonstrate the links between language, politics and the colonization processes. The framing of the latter consists of a variety of post-colonial discourses and critical theories, engaged with power relations and their academic deconstructions.

English dominance in numbers

In the year 2013 Eurostat agency published statistical data that has shown that over 80 percent of European Union pupils in elementary schools, learn English as a foreign

language¹. Studying English at elementary school level is compulsory in 14 EU countries. According to Eurydice (2014), the starting age for the compulsory learning of English, varies between the countries, ranging from 4 to 10 years old, with the majority of countries starting at age of 6–8. The effectiveness of this early start for studying English as a foreign language is backed up by the theory of Penfield and Roberts who proved the plasticity of the 7–9 year old brain, which allows for easier and permanent absorption of a foreign language's system models (Pamula 2004). The statistical indicators of studying English as a foreign language grow with transition to higher levels of education, reaching 94 percent of students learning English as a foreign language in the EU's upper secondary schools. Moreover, learning English as a foreign language in majority of the EU member states is obligatory in secondary education².

The popularity of English increased with the accession of new member states, that wanted to break up with their „soviet” past and open towards the western ‘English-centric’ future. New member states wanted to accomplish a similar level of scholastic achievement to their western EU peers. The expansion of the English language in recent years may be observed when looking at the age cohorts of the EU citizens and their knowledge of English. There is a clear trend showing that the younger the person is and the better educated that person is, equates with a better knowledge of English. European education promotes English as the second language (Fig. 1 and 2).

Although the European Union as a transnational institution has 24 official languages in use for EU business, politicians and civil servants choose English as the most efficient and most common language of international communication. The Bologna process for the unification of higher education across the EU, initiated foreign language certification at university level and the English language is currently the most commonly chosen by students. English is the official language of NATO and the UN. Participation in these international organizations makes English a desirable asset. English is the only foreign language towards which all EU countries have some legal regulations at all educational levels. EU programmes related to vocational activation, entrepreneurship and the development of professional personnel in various sectors of employment, often offer courses in English as support tools. The popularization of English is enhanced by mobility programmes for students and staff. Amongst them the most commonly spread are: ERASMUS, Lingua, Step traineeships, CEEPUS „Central European Exchange Program for University Studies”, EURAXESS for the mobility of researchers, Visegrad Fund, Copernicus, Kosciuszko Foundation, Fulbright Foundation and the European Social Fund (devoted to the promotion of international cooperation and studying English).

Globalization and the corresponding Americanization is deeply rooted in the global expansion of transnational corporations, international governmental and non-governmental organizations, financial and quantitative dominance of US cinematography pop-culture and the transfer of new technologies dominated by Anglo-Saxon

1 European Day of Languages. More than 80% of primary school pupils in the EU were studying a foreign language in 2013, Eurostat newsrelease164/2015 – 24 September 2015, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7008563/3-24092015-AP-EN.pdf/bf8be07c-ff9d-406b-88f9-f98f5199fe5a>.

2 Foreign language learning statistics, Eurostat, January 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Foreign_language_learning_statistics#Secondary_education.

vocabulary. According to Swales (1997) the increasing domination of English in global communication is absolutely unstoppable. McArthur (2004, p. 3) shows that the expansion of the English language is a substantial expression of socio-economic globalization. This concept agrees with Anthony Giddens' outlook into the results and means of globalization, achieved through intensified contacts. Such contacts are facilitated by the use of a single language. English can be perceived as taking on a mission once reserved for Esperanto, only more accepted, educationally desired and supported by the joint forces of global politics and business with a long-term history of conquest and dissemination.

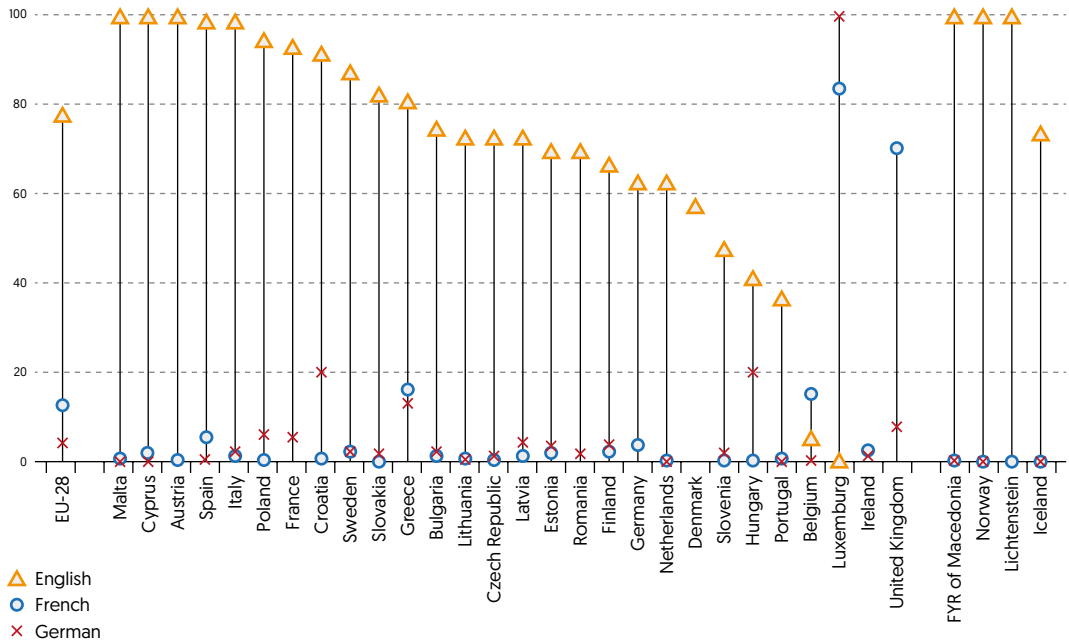


Fig. 1. Most popular languages taught in the EU

Source: Foreign language learning statistics, Eurostat 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Foreign_language_learning_statistics#Secondary_education

A brief look back in history

English was used in the Transatlantic slave trade, during the times of Imperial Britain, placing British settlers in multiple locations around the globe, leading to a wide spread of English around the world (Sekhar, 2012). A good example of the fast growing population of English speakers come from trading with native Americans in English and the war with the French in North America in the eighteen hundreds, leading to linguistic dominance there (Gramley, 2012). Crystal (1997) proves that within 200 years of colonization, English speakers grew in numbers from five million to a 250 million by the mid nineteenth century.

Longmore (2005) studied the impact of native tongues of other, non-English colonial settlers (mainly from Ireland, Scotland, Sweden, Netherlands, Germany, Spain,

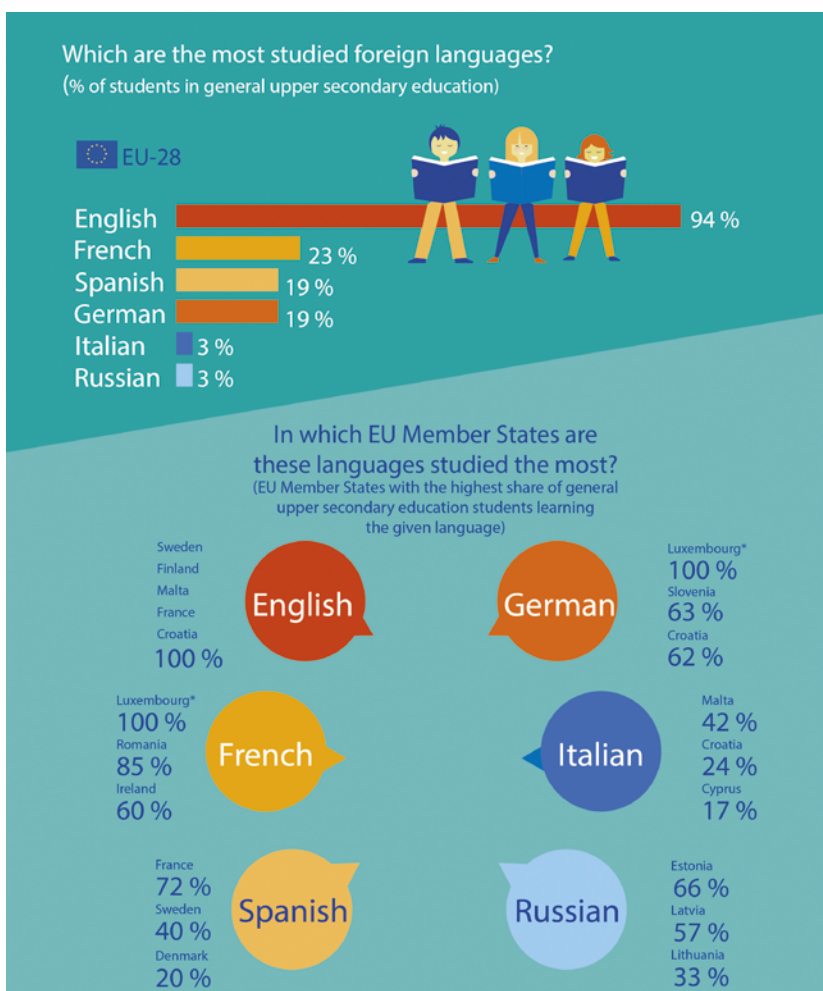


Fig. 2. Most studied languages in the EU in upper secondary education

Source: Foreign language learning statistics, Eurostat 2016, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Foreign_language_learning_statistics#Secondary_education

France or Portugal) on the English language itself. He also found evidence of some influence of the indigenous people's languages in the colonized lands on the English language. His study shows that the linguistic exchange was not solely one-way. However, it is English that turned out to be dominant, expanded and became a global language.

Imperial powers took control of the education policy in colonized areas, imposing the study of English at schools and at universities. The Foucauldian concept of 'governmentality' (1997, 2007) comes to mind when confronted with commonly shared myths created by policy makers in India and other states controlled by Imperial Britain. Myths, related to personal success and prosperity, through solid education with a good standard of English. Moreover, the industrial revolution and technological expansion of the nineteenth and early twentieth century were heavily dominated by English speaking powers. Successful trade and business contracts required knowledge

of English, German or French (the historic colonial powers and the core of Europe's present integration). Furthermore emigration to the USA, UK or Australia was – and perhaps still is for many – a dream.

Language acquisition = culture acquisition?

Language is a tool of the representation of our internal and external world as much as it is for communication between each other (Gleason & Ratner 2005). Language is also an ingredient of one's social skills and of one's thinking about the world (Schaffer, 2013). Wygotski thought that language is a pre-condition for any change in the way of thinking and in the system of brain functioning, whilst Piaget gave it a more limited role, as a tool of secondary expression of pre-thought ideas.

N. Chomsky claimed that we are all equipped from birth with a „language acquisition device” (LAD), which allows us to incorporate grammar and learn the deeper structure of our own language (Pamuła, 2004). But what about acquiring a foreign language? N. Chomsky tried to prove that languages have similar grammar and do not differ from one another in a significant way, therefore the differences in learning different languages do not lead to differences in thinking. B.F. Skinner's behavioral theory of language acquisition in the social environment, shows that language acquisition happens by copying others, who reinforce the correct use of language (Schaffer, 2013). This theory is rather appealing when applied to learning a second language, but in conflict with naturalists who do not affirm the behavioral conditioning of language acquisition. J. Burner introduces an apt and more up to date theory within the interaction based a „Language Acquisition Support System” (LASS), where the social environment offers different forms of support and help in learning language, through dialog and interaction (Ibidem). This theory would be applicable when learning English as a second language in a natural English speaking environment, but also if the learning of English as a foreign language were to take place in controlled, laboratory conditions of full immersion in English. These highlight the main difference between learning English as a second language and as a foreign language. The difference lies with the context, the intensity of contact and the duration of immersion within the language. Learning English as a second language occurs in a natural, non-formal environment in a country, a community or a family, which uses English for natural everyday communication. Meanwhile, learning English as a foreign language occurs in a classroom, in the artificially created circumstances for its use, outside of a social environment that functions in English (Szpotowicz, 2009). Furthering this analysis, J. House (2003), distinguishes between two types of languages: „languages for communication” and „languages for identification”. In this strict division, English becomes the tool of communication for the international community, enabling a transfer of information and exchange of communication, whilst shading away from the cultural implications. This seems to be only applicable when a conversation takes place between two non-native English speakers. Moreover this division seems to mask the aspects of cultural transmission within the language acquisition. The most commonly quoted early reference

to the cultural dimension of a second language is by Charlemagne, the ninth-century King of Franks, who apparently said that to „have a second language is to have a second soul”. Culture is an important element of understanding and learning true meanings in the „foreign language”, therefore studying of English requires the study of the culture as well as the language system itself (Arabski, 1997).

James D. Marshall (1995) notices that the new role of information technology entrenched with English has the effect of power over the IT users, which he calls the ‘bus-nopower’. He also claims that languages shape both individuals and societies confirming the growth of the global English language power matrix. The inevitable impact of cultural transmission is noticeable and may lead to the perception of the wide spread of English language through the lens of post-colonial imperialism.

Peaceful colonization by language dominance?

Language distinction as a tool of stratification was widely discussed by Bourdieu when referring to class divisions. Similar phenomena may be observed amongst social groups with differing competencies in English. David Crystal (2003, 16) writes about the phenomenon of „linguistic power”, which promotes native speakers of English and disadvantages non-native users of this global language. Szymczak (2014) supports the hypothesis that knowledge of English as a second language affects people’s position in the social strata of EU countries and vice versa, in that social conditioning affects access to different levels of language acquisition. Caramella (2012, p. 107) goes even further with this critical hypothesis and makes claims that English is a cannibalistic language that slowly takes over other languages, bereaving them from their original identity.

Al-Dabbagh (2005) claims that English has become the „Latin” of today’s civilized world. Robert Phillipson (1992) perceives English as a form of linguistic imperialism, which does not reflect a traditional militarized power, but rather a softer form of power, which is based on cultural and economic dominance. Whilst colonialism can be defined as a „relationship between an indigenous majority and a minority of foreign invaders (Osterhammel 1997)”, the softness of the post-colonial power is observed in the ‘invitation’ from the indigenous majority to learn the language of the dominant players of the globalised economy. Modiano (2001) warns about the dangers to cultural identity of those who use English in everyday practice. Badry (2011) questions the level of homogeneity and heterogeneity of English, followed by Pan and Seargeant (2012) who also see the spread of English as a potential danger to some groups and communities.

Reading through the UK’s recommendations for teaching English as a foreign language prepared by British Council, one may find confirmation for the key arguments raised in this paper³ that highlight the advantages for the native English language

3 „English has huge economic value for the UK, it supports trade and exports around the world and a thriving ELT sector at home. **It provides a significant competitive advantage in everything from soft power to commerce, to the media, to universities and academia; and delivers**

countries in the areas of: soft power, commerce, media, universities, global market, cultural industries and education systems (2013, p. 16). The recommendations recognize that English is an international asset, which gives the English native countries an underestimated advantage and a „competitive edge” (2013, p. 2).

This is not to say that the people of countries who share the experiences of learning English as a second language, could be treated as a homogenous „subaltern” collective (cf. Spivak 1988). Their experiences and their positions in the power equations must be as diverse as the heterogeneity of the global population. Nevertheless, they are subjected to a pre-existing linguistic domination regime, within which versatility is limited by the language origins, with a set of rules that control vocabulary, orthography, grammar, writing styles and so-called correct pronunciation. Salman Rushdie (1992), acknowledges the phenomenon of the colonizing effects of the English language, however he also claims that people who were colonized by the English language in the past seem to have „remade it, domesticated it and have relaxed about the way it is used” (1992, p. 64). The suppleness and richness of English allows the colonized to „carve out large territories for themselves within its frontiers (Ibidem).” The early twentieth century ‘Pidgin English’ originating from China, has a deformed and culturally adjusted structure and pronunciation can be found in multiple variations in many parts of the world, including Europe. This common ground for communication changes the view and the original form of English, whilst sustaining its extraordinarily popular status amongst the other languages of the world.

Nevertheless, if we consider Fanon’s (1967) argument that the colonization of people can be achieved through the colonization of their minds, which changes their identity, their culture and even their nature, then the expansion of English and the creation of a need or even a deep desire to learn it maybe an example of the embodiment of Fanon’s hypothesis. Ashis Nandy (1983) perceives two forms of colonization: violent, militarized invasion of land and a peaceful civilizing influence on a subjugated culture, nation or community. The second category is to be feared more, as it creeps into the unconscious of the subjects of the peaceful colonization, disarming them and changing them into inert marionettes in the hands of the colonizers. The impact of joint politics and social-economics directed towards learning English can be observed in policies and the educational curriculum of EU countries as well as in corporate and private business strategies and employment requirements. Acceptance, compliance and approval from EU citizens (Szpotowicz, 2013) may be an expression of successful Foucauldian governmentality mechanisms, closely related with peaceful colonization by the English speaking global powers.

a ready and growing global market for the UK’s impressive cultural industries. It is a critical component of trust building and, in turn, **trade and prosperity.** Around the world there is enormous demand and **need for English in the state and public education systems,** especially in developing economies. The UK is uniquely placed to support the development of high quality English teaching. This is the right thing to do to support improved prospects for countries and individuals in low and middle income countries, but also in the long term it will help to build closer relationships with the UK as well as **growing the market for UK goods and services.** [emphasis were added by the author of this paper]. (*The English Effect 2013, p. 16*).

Conclusions

The enabling of efficient and clear communication, between nations, together with greater integration through linguistic ability, reveals and enhances the understanding of the cultural differences and barriers between those nations and makes the world a more open and a more cultivated place. Nevertheless, embracing the norm critical pedagogies' approach⁴ (Odrowaz-Coates 2015), one must ask which groups and individuals benefit from the expansion of English across the EU and beyond and who is disadvantaged? From a subaltern studies' perspective, the identification of those who become marginalized or excluded, due to language deficiency is important. Pennycook (2001, p. 81) notices that knowledge of English has become a prerequisite for progression to higher education, improved employment opportunity and enhanced social status. Conversely, it is also a powerful tool of social and economic exclusion. This negative view of English language expansion has not yet been widely recognized, with societies focusing on the positive effects. Is this an expression of the successful biopolitics (Foucault, 1997) of an integrated Europe in relation to one dominant language? Equipping the citizens of the future with one common language of communication would reverse the biblical Tower of Babel effect. However, whilst this may be an innocent and benevolent gesture for the common good, the process is deeply rooted in the power matrix of post-colonial politics and business, and may create, sustain and reproduce new areas of inequality and dominance.

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4 **Norm critical pedagogy** aims to reveal how social norms create fields of exclusion and inclusion at school and in society. Norm critical pedagogy intend to **expose power relations**, questioning who benefits from creation of certain norms or their reproduction and how norms dictate what is considered to be **'normal'** and what is vied as **'abnormal'** by the majority.

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