

LOOKING GLOBALLY, SEEING LOCALLY: EXPLORING SOME MYTHS OF GLOBALISATION IN ACADEMIA

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ABSTRACT

Globalisation is a buzz word in many discussions of current social and communicative change, where it resounds in different voices and in various keys. The present paper looks at some globalizing tendencies of today from the perspective of some ideologies and practices, whether past or present, including universalism (and relativism), (anti-)intellectualism, and the postulates of (non-)rhetorical research writing. The role of English as academic *lingua franca* is discussed against the pressures for new ventriloquation. This is done from the perspective of Polish, a “minor” linguistic and academic community, with special attention to the situation of English studies. An argument is put forward that a major effect of globalization is the rise of reverse, localizing, ideologies and practices.

KEY WORDS: English, Polish, academic rhetoric, intellectual styles, academic communities, glocalisation, market ideologies in academia

RESUMEN

Globalización es un término de moda que resuena con distintas voces y tonos en muchas discusiones sobre los cambios comunicativos y sociales que están ocurriendo hoy en día. Este artículo examina alguna de las actuales tendencias globalizadoras desde la perspectiva de ciertas ideologías y prácticas, presentes o pasadas, que incluyen el universalismo (y el relativismo), el (anti)intelectualismo y los postulados de la investigación (no)retórica de la escritura académica. El papel del inglés como *lingua franca* académica se aborda en el marco de la imposición de una nueva forma de ventriloquia. Estos temas se enfocan desde la perspectiva de una comunidad académica y lingüística “menor,” la polaca, prestando especial atención a la situación de los estudios ingleses. Asimismo se argumenta que un efecto significativo de la globalización es la aparición de prácticas e ideologías localizadoras e inversas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: inglés, polaco, retórica académica, estilos intelectuales, comunidades académicas, glocalización, ideologías mercantilistas en el mundo académico.



1. GLOBAL METAPHORS AND LOCAL CONTEXTS

It is not easy to add another paper to the large number of writings on globalisation *in* and *through* language. What complicates the task is not only the actual quantity of the productions already accomplished, but the polyphonic tone of the various opinions about the ongoing changes in human competencies, identities and discursive repertoires. Many questions rebound: Are current globalisation tendencies unique, or are they cyclical and patterned? Can they enrich cultures and languages, or instead, could they limit them, disfigure, if not destroy altogether? Who are the “real” winners and who are the losers of globalisation? And above all: should the linguistic effects of globalisation mean uniformisation or, on the contrary, diversification of the semiotic resources in human communication systems? What strikes in many of such discourses on globalisation is that they tend either to “mythologize” or to “demythologise” the power of the global. One way or another, globalisation often serves as a magic buzz word for meanings that are (still?) strongly indeterminate and transient. Yet, it seems, the global imagery in explaining social realities will defend its relevance on many agendas to come for debating research and practical social issues.

In coping with the global-local continuum, an apparent escape route comes with Robertson’s influential concept of glocalisation (“Glocalisation”) that I, too, strongly sympathize with. Once hybridised through its interaction with the local (regional), globalisation loses its sharp edge and comes out more of a “mediational” concept. Whether transported (or smuggled) across territories, globalised discourses on contact (impact) with the new environment get recontextualised, often resemiotised and start giving (“off”) new meanings, to invoke here Goffman’s well-known distinction between “giving” and “giving off.” As a result, globalisation cannot be observed, let alone estimated, otherwise than through the scrutiny of its glocal(ising) effects.

Naturally, it is easier to attribute the adjective *global* to some processes and effects, and less so to others. Many aspects of globalisation are perceptually and cognitively salient, easily recognizable and often stereotyped by common labelling. This includes the increased human mobility, information revolution due to technological advancement, global cash flows and spread of corporate culture, let alone many English loans that enter vocabularies of various languages, whether specialized or common. Thus, people are not likely to dispute the global ideology behind, or the English roots of such icons of the globalising world as Coca-Cola or CNN. On the other hand, much of the ongoing social and communicative change is more covert, and the discrimination between what is the effect of local (“own”) evolution and what comes through global (“othering”) influence becomes more difficult. This concerns various material, emotional, psychological, as well as cognitive aspects of human individual and collective life.

One of the reasons why globalisation (or glocalisation for that matter) is such a hot and controversial issue follows from the asymmetry of power between the parties involved: the dominant donor, on the one hand, and, on the other, the “weaker” recipient cultures and languages. Normally, the interaction between the



centre and the periphery means tensions in the “weaker” side that may eventually ease, but also inhibit, the various economic, political, cultural or linguistic incursions of the “hegemonic” influence.

This paper is written from the position of a “minor” language, and specifically, from the perspective of recent transitions in Polish academia. The emphasis is laid on communication in writing—publishing in particular—in the domain of humanities and social sciences. Necessarily, however, relevant issues are located within a broader ecology of academic realities. A major thrust of the paper is to argue that there are signs of “reverse” globalisation in Polish academic institutions. This would support the hypothesis that the pressures of the global may actually release (or invigorate) forces within the local that will direct their course inwards, working towards creating (or strengthening) local centres of power.

2. A LOCAL ECOLOGY FOR GLOBALISATION: A RETROSPECTIVE NOTE

It is hard to dispute that the reception of globalising tendencies depends on the histories of the localities. Any current pressures are intertwined with the past constraints and priorities. The impact of globalisation on the Polish society is then not to be dissociated from the sentiments and fears that have been created, cherished or denounced over the ages. This includes the overall social and political situation of the country, naturally having a bearing too on the position of academia. Therefore a retrospect note seems in order.

For a long time Polish scholarship has remained under a powerful influence of the West-European, continental, traditions more recently described as “Teutonic” (esp. Galtung). In practice this connotes a historical dependence of Polish scholarship on German intellectual values in knowledge construction and discursive manifestation (cf. Clyne; Duszak, *Culture*). The affinity to German intellectual style was then a matter of historical coincidence. Yet, Poland’s relations with Germany, and her neighbours in general, were always marked by tensions stemming from factors that did not involve science directly, but had to do with a host of general national concerns. Poland’s orientation to the outside world had for centuries been stigmatised by dynamic, contradictory and dramatic doings and sentiments. On the one hand, Poland had always looked West, be it to Germany, France and much later to America. On the other, it always nursed strongly centripetal and defensive attitudes to *otherness*, at times cultivating a parochial sense of national unity.

This state of national schizophrenia had its historical reasons: Poland had to defend her national identity against unwanted intrusions, territorial, ideological, and cultural. Namely at the at the end of the 18th century Poland lost her independence as a result of the country’s partitions by three powers, Austria, Prussia and Russia, to regain it only in 1918, and then after World War II to fall under political domination of the Soviet Union. For much of her history, practically until 1989, Poland had to defend her national identity. Language was indeed a part of that struggle, an asset and a weapon, so the protection of the native tongue was often



and dramatically elevated to the status of a national imperative. Not surprisingly therefore purist tendencies have always been an important element of the national policy of “language culture” (“Sprachkultur”), sometimes called “culture of the word” (cf. Zydek-Bednarczuk). Such a philosophy had its vectoring towards the development of language consciousness that was based on grammatical correctness and stylistic coherence, typical of written literary standards set by prestigious works.

More recently, Poland’s breakthrough opening to the West came with the victory of the Solidarity social movement, initiating the political changes in Central Europe that gradually paved the way for the entry of globalisation in its current guises. In some essential way, the first global impulses were associated with the overthrow of communism, heralding the awaited entry of “sound” market economy and civil rights. Globalising tendencies, including the invasive spread of English, came then as part and parcel of a “dream come true” scenario. This was the reason why they inspired attitudes of welcome and hope for economic advancement, democratic freedoms and a new style of living.

Today, the situation is much more complex with growing discrepancies between the past expectations and the current realities, between the (collective) “self” and the “other,” between the winners and the losers of democratic transformations. All this is leading up to a growing axiological polarization of the society, effecting divisions among social groups, value systems and styles of communication. Clearly enough the turmoil of transition does not leave academia immune to its challenges and its controversies (cf. Duszak, “Between”).

3. MANY VOICES OF GLOBALISATION IN ACADEMIA

It would seem that talking about academia can easily accommodate the global metaphor in that the very nature of scientific knowledge is to cross borders, and to colonize territories. Therefore, perhaps, it would not be an overgeneralization to invoke the global imagery when speaking of knowledge dissemination in general, and not only with reference to globalisation in the modern sense of technologisation of information transmission. By analogy to the glocal caveat, however, flows of scientific “truth” are filtered through local academic ideologies and institutions. Similarly, meta-languages of science must show tensions of power, wavering as a result between compliance to and subversion of the “hegemonic” idiom. Duszak (“Meta-languageing”) addresses some of such issues in terms of bridges and barriers in meta-linguistic communication. What follows in this section is based on some of the ideas voiced there.

It may be seen as a form of “globalising” thinking in science to talk about a universal language of science or about universal principles of how research is discursively constructed. From a meta-linguistic perspective, this position was epitomized in the myth of an *ad-rem* (or non-rhetorical) communication in the humanities and social sciences, in particular. This was an approach that stressed academic unity in knowledge and in style across linguistic barriers. It thrived on the assumption that values in narrating science are universal, and that a scientific text should



speak for itself. By downgrading, if not denouncing the presence of the author, this philosophy defended, whether overtly or implicitly, a de-personalized (impersonal) style of writing. Preaching the autonomy of the language of science, it also led to idealization of scientific knowledge and to an elitist approach to research and membership in academic community.

This was an aspiring ideology that however enjoyed various levels of endorsement across academic communities, intellectual styles and times. Thus, it was strongly and consistently articulated within the so called Teutonic intellectual tradition, to which Poland traditionally belonged, yet much less emphasized in the Anglo-Saxon spheres of scholarly influence, where support was afforded to more egalitarian and pragmatic approaches to science, and where “common” and “intellectualised” modes of exposition were less distinctly separated in terms of register and style.

On the other hand, the tenets of *ad-hominem* (rhetorical) academic communication, which took over with the cognitive-pragmatic twist in language studies, had a globalising edge too. While emphasizing cross-cultural variation in scientific registers, it saw academics as ventriloquists who were naturally constrained in their writing (and talking) by the regimes of their own languages, and whose text (and talk) carried the polyphony of their own biographies and of the discourses of other speakers of the language.

With the onset of globalisation, an academic pan-communication resurfaced as a major issue: invigoration of academic contacts thanks to CMC, easier access to research results, possibility to work in joint projects and teams, or better verification of research results. In a world of global heteroglossia, resounding in “various” languages of science, it became necessary to work (again!) towards a “universal” language of academic communication. Of course English came out as the best candidate for that function. The growing expansion of English, now on the brink of an academic *lingua franca*, has driven the non-native users of that language to try and unlearn many of their own writing habits. In theory at least, an encroaching academic mono-culture has already had its daring consequences: academics less skilled at writing according to the English conventions found it difficult to make their way on to the English-language publishing markets. Yet, in the opening world, language barriers were replaced by psychological attitudes of alignment, scepticism or rejection. While editing an international volume in English a few years ago, I had —for the sake of cohesion of the format— to negotiate with a contributor who saw no reason why the good continental tradition of having foot notes should be given up to having end notes, as it is preferred in English. It is a separate issue of course what is today the “right” style of “good” academic English, given the ongoing redefinitions of standards and the role of such constructs as “international” English (or perhaps even “Englishes”).

It is important to note here that no matter how “hegemonic” English actually is in its capacity of a modern *lingua franca*, the language itself falls an easy prey to globalisation in all its registers and genres, including the academic domain. A best way of exemplifying such changes-in-progress would be to describe them after Fairclough (e.g., *Critical*) as “colloquialisation, conversationalization, mediatization



or commodification” of modern discourses. Fairclough stresses the growing role of promotional strategies in academia as well (chapter 6). In a similar vein, Grabe and Kaplan argue that “the social construction of science requires “salesmanship” as an essential characteristics of scientific writing” (my emphasis). Quite naturally, however, academic communities may differ in how they position themselves to the growing “commodification” of scientific knowledge, and thus to viewing academic texts in terms of their market value. In more traditional settings, of which the Polish post-Teutonic community is a good example, such an ideology has to strike an alien note and resonate in disaccord. The new values and performance standards are in principle incoherent with the entrenched canon of scientific communication. In other words, globalization, with its new calibration of discourses, imposes a relocation of cultural (social) emphases and effects a redefinition of power relations in academia. This will be elaborated on in some detail in the remaining parts of this paper.

Today we may speak about “colonisation” of Polish academic writing by English-modelled globalising patterns. Yet the new style of writing often receives conflicting valuations. First of all, the new standards are seen as less “intellectualised” forms of scientific ideation for they come close to popular formats of writing which until recently were stigmatised as an “inferior” mode (task) of writing. Gajda, for instance, (“Język”) speaks about the rise of a “new rhetoric,” an academic style *sensu largo*, which obliterates the divisions between scientific and popular (scientific) discourses, thus undermining what were research priorities and what were didactic or popular goals. That the new style does not have to be invariably negative follows from simultaneous opinions that it is more “user-friendly” and that it generates better patterns for practical-action discourses, which Gajda terms “practical-scientific.” Among them are do-it-yourself manuals, leaflets, instruction materials and public notices, that is genres which were until recently rare or highly dysfunctional in the Polish discourse system.

There are other reservations too. The new standards are accused of damaging traditional academic values and eroding the national discourse system, of which the language of science is an important high variety. Apparently, the new writing standards depart from “intellectualized” patterns of scientific exposition and lead to “feuilletonisation” (“eseizacja”) of academic genres, undermining the real value of scientific ideation, and blurring the distinction between what is research and what is popularisation. As argued by Gajda (esp. “Język” 22, 28; “Współczesny” 18), with an increased use of imagery, hedging, analogies and quotes, the “new” argumentation is getting “laxer,” rhetoric replaces methodology, and meaning (truth) is not “uncovered” but “linguistically constructed.” Occasionally, national arguments are invoked too: some scholars believe that entering the supranational academic community through the “English gateway” leads to alienating oneself from the Polish academic community (cf., Gajda, “Język” 20, 21).

In the turmoil of post-communist transitions, paralleled by globalisation, such concerns among Polish elites can be interpreted not only, and perhaps not primarily, as an expression of academic conservativeness, but as calculated opposition to the growing de-intellectualisation of social life. This follows for instance



from Stawek's (68) discussion of the place of university in the new world of "corporations," or from the many public debates on rising "pragmaticisation of social consciousness" in Polish society (e.g., Stawek 12; Bralczyk & Mosiołek-Kłosińska).

The current redefinitions of academic discourse patterns are part and parcel of a sweeping change in Polish academic institutions. For lack of space I shall only mention some facts and tendencies. After 1989 it slowly became possible to open private schools and colleges, a tendency skyrocketing in the late 1990's. Over time, this has made education into a competitive business, with private institutions competing with the traditional state-run colleges and universities. If private schools could and simply had to charge tuition, the Constitution did not leave that option available to state educators. However, plagued by financial difficulties, universities started to open tuition-paying programmes parallel to their regular tuition-free studies. Quite naturally, the new and expanding market of education has led slowly to a redefinition of academic needs and standards, including the dominant idiom of teacher-student communication. A new ecology for teaching has emerged, with more of a business-like attitude to educational services replacing the *sacrum* approach to knowledge and authorities. Many teachers have found themselves under pressure from superiors and students to ease learning by using more interactive methods, providing syllabuses, lowering reading assignments and testing rather than examining in the traditional style. Education standards were often lowered with the admission of more students, often less skilled or less motivated, yet able to pay for their education.

The introduction of teacher evaluations by students has earned mixed reputation and brought debatable effects.

The recent "feuilletonisation" of academic writing, mentioned above, reflects stylistic preferences that come, in part at least, as a response to the social demand for "softer" academic texts and more mediated research narration. The status of popular-didactic communication is being upgraded as a social cause of modern academia. Academic and public debates are being launched in order to discuss the "mediational tools" that are needed to bridge the gap between theory and practice (e.g. Grucza & Wiśniewski). All this is taking place in a striking contrast with the Teutonic tradition epitomizing idealization of knowledge, and privileging theory and research to practical application of the ideas generated. However, as rightly noticed by Ivanic (66), there is no "natural logic" behind what are "privileged literacy practices" in academia other than "the interests of people with power in academic institutions at this particular sociohistorical moment." This, we might stress, interacts quite intimately with external realities in which research and teaching are done. The new market in Poland has effected changes in the publishing policies too. The major publishing houses have started to privilege educational materials and comprehensive overviews to theoretical analyses and narrow specialist monographs. On the linguistic plane, this means interest in dictionaries, text books, topical readers and, notably, Polish translations of foreign, mainly English academic books.

Lastly, I would like to return to the point made at the beginning of this paper: the "reverse" effects of globalisation in academic writing for publishing.



Globalisation has released social forces that are working towards the generation of (stronger) local centres of power. Over the recent years we have witnessed a rapid development of low-budget publishing enterprises, run by faculty members, and serving internal publishing needs of the university departments to which they are attached and by which they are often sponsored. Such businesses specialize in low-edition publications and often have practically no distribution on the general book market. To my mind, this situation is ambivalent. On the one hand, publication possibilities have strongly increased. On the other, the circulation of such materials is restricted. It is normally easier to learn about publications by international publishers than about books released by such local businesses. The verifiability of the results announced is more difficult than in the case of wider-access materials. Additionally, the refereeing procedures, prior to publishing, are normally limited, if they obtain at all. Nonetheless, and quite importantly, such “home” publications function as basis for academic promotion of individual scholars and for ranking of institutions in their “race” for state funding.

4. A CLOSE-UP VIEW ON ACADEMIA: ENGLISH STUDIES

In the final section I shall focus on some aspects of globalisation in English studies, starting with English philology and ending with its recent hybrids. This will be done from my own perspective of some 30 years of academic experience in applied linguistics at a major Polish university. Over that time interest in English has been strong among researchers as well as students, even though the internal and the external conditions of academia have changed radically.

Right from the beginning of my academic career in the mid-seventies, the prestige of English as a foreign language was strong and not indifferent ideologically. For many Poles the command of English was a counterbalance to Russian, an obligatory foreign language at school, stigmatised as a handy tool for social advancement and a symbol of compliance with the regime. In turn, learning English was a challenge, given the limited possibilities of education due to shortage of teachers and materials. Many of those who took to learning English in the early seventies, and who were good enough to make it through university entrance procedures, succeeded thanks to their own educational determination and enterprise. Thus, for instance, it was frequent to learn English on the Beatles’ music leaking into the country. Of course, learning (knowing) English was then an icon of ideological subversion. In some way, this attraction to English was like craving for a prohibited fruit, educational on the surface and ideological in its inside. English was a key to a “better” world even though it was much of a key “in waiting.”

In the seventies, major universities in Poland already had modern English departments with rapidly developing studies in literature, theoretical and applied linguistics. Studying English at that time had its shortcomings though. This was due to political and practical constraints: limited travelling abroad, limited access to materials, and limited exposure to good spoken patterns. Universities tried to repair this by launching exchange programmes and inviting native speakers of that



language, whose major task was to give students, and often teachers as well, the possibility to practice “natural” English. In hindsight, I would venture the opinion that some odd thirty years ago, English, as spoken or taught in philological departments, testified to emphasis on writing (reading) skills, on lexical proficiency and a general meta-knowledge of the linguistic system. Weaker pronunciation and interaction skills were not infrequent.

At the same time, writing in academic English was a natural consequence of being a student or a teacher at an English department: MA papers, PhD dissertations or scholarly monographs in the area of English studies practically had to be written in English. This made intercultural contact easier. It might be remembered that English was then an academic *lingua franca* for research in contrastive grammars: especially the English Department at the Uniwersytet Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań acted as a leading centre for contrastive studies in Central and Eastern Europe, assembling scholars from various linguistic backgrounds for conferencing and publishing in English.

The swing of the political pendulum in 1989 changed the situation of English in Polish society and brought up new dimensions into English curricula. The motivation to speak English found its “endorsement” in the overtly Western orientation of the new political elites. The knowledge of English turned into a sign of new prestige and English teaching programmes were skyrocketing, partly with the financial and organizational assistance of British and American institutions. Such incentives included for instance “express” courses in English for teachers of Russian. It is another thing that today much of this social drive to speak English remains lip service and, as public polls show, the practical knowledge of English in the society is low. Poland will need much more time to approximate the situation in Scandinavia or the Netherlands, if such analogies can ever hold water.

In universities and colleges, English ranks high among the most popular fields of study. Still, its situation is markedly different today from what it was like some twenty years ago. Many students enter colleges with a relatively good command of English, especially when it comes to prosody and interactional competence. It is in this area that a change for the better can be noted in comparison to their parents’ generation. Yet, as a rule, this also means a shallow knowledge of the language system considering above all lexis and style, and the motivation to develop it is normally weak or short-lived. Such attitudes are particularly dangerous in English language studies, where intellectual approaches to language seem a pedagogical must and a rationale for the existence of such institutions. Today, however, English is more and more often, and quite openly, treated as an instrument for communication and less so as an object of study for its own sake.

Indeed, more general changes in educational policies may have a say in how English is conceptualised today as an academic field of study and research. Nonetheless, external influences seem to play a most significant role too. If in the past philological studies created a relatively contained whole, today we can witness tendencies for fragmentation of the field, and consequently, for its integration with other theoretical and practical competencies. Students and academic officials alike choose to combine English studies with business, law, administration, psychology



or specialized translation. This is the result of a business-like attitude to education, yet pressures of the market are also eased by the growth of interdisciplinary research among academics. Somewhat paradoxically perhaps, on the wave of a rising “hegemony” of English, voices can be heard in favour of papers and dissertations being written in Polish. Only to some extent this may be the effect of interdisciplinarity of research topics. It may also be interpreted as lowering of standards, with students having difficulties with writing academic English despite their passive knowledge of that language or good fluency in speech.

5. CONCLUSION

It is a matter of fact that many scholars today choose to write in English and publish in English-language global journals, hoping that this will be advantageous for their academic reputation. Strelau (122), for instance, argues that some 95% texts in psychology are written in English. There are however areas of research, and among them various language studies, where this preference for English is seen as unmotivated if acceptable at all. This includes the use of English for disseminating research results concerning languages and speech communities other than English, and having no reference whatsoever to that language. Therefore, any institutional measures favoring English are easily interpreted as coercive academic policies. A case in point is the Philadelphia List adopted by the National Research Commission for the evaluation of publishing outputs of individual scholars and institutions. Its indiscriminate application has met resistance mainly among non-English philologies. Last January a conference of deans of philological departments at Polish major universities drafted a memorandum protesting this ministerial policy, and urging the educational authorities to revise their evaluation standards. It was officially raised that the current benchmark privileges texts written in English and designed for English-speaking markets even though they may address issues of no relevance to English, and most probably, of no interest to speakers (researchers) of that language. Indeed, it seems to be “naturally logical” to allow minor ethnic languages to speak about themselves, as long as such meta-discourses develop their own globalising networks of circulation.

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