

JANINA WIERTLEWSKA

Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika w Toruniu
Collegium Medicum w Bydgoszczy

Ecolinguistic approach to foreign language teaching on the example of English

ABSTRACT. The paper deals with the problem of balance maintenance of natural languages in the context of foreign language teaching. A new paradigm of foreign language teaching in the following triad: native language – global language – second foreign language is proposed. Translingualism is treated as the only means of maintaining linguistic balance between natural languages viewed from an ecolinguistic perspective.

KEYWORDS: ecolinguistics, robustness, foreign language teaching, the triad, natural language diversity maintenance

1. INTRODUCTION. ECOLINGUISTICS

Ecolinguistics was originally defined in 1972 by the Norwegian linguist Einar Haugen “as the study of interactions between any given language and its environment” (Haugen 2001: 57). Haugen understood language ecology as an approach to linguistics.

The first serious sociolinguistic trials aiming at exploring the subject of ecology of language in depth called researchers to set linguistics in society and to take into account changes occurring in it. The innovative articles published by Trim (1959) and Haugen (1971) forced scientists to undertake multidisciplinary studies and multilingual scientific research (eight of his own works cited by Trim were written in English, six in German and the following four in French; as a result of the globalization process the scientific milieu had become nearly monolingual).

Current interpretations of ecolinguistics differ widely. Many linguists relate the term ‘ecology’ to context or language environment in order to describe problems associated with the language which is embedded either in a sociolinguistic, educational, economic or political setting and is not de-contextualized. In this sense ‘ecology’ becomes a very fashionable term used

for placing a language or some linguistic investigations concerning the given language within the confines of a certain scientific field; in this case 'ecology' simply becomes a metaphor.

Some leading ecolinguists formulate very precise definitions of 'ecolinguistics' and even make subdivisions of it (e.g. in articles published by the following authors: Fill and Mühlhäusler 1996, 2001, 2003; Mufwene 2001; and in scientific works published by the pioneers of ecolinguistics: Jörgen C. Bang and Jörgen Door, <http://www.cjbang.dk/main/ecolinguistics/index.php>).

In the present work Wendel's (2005: 51) definition of ecolinguistics has been accepted as the author of this article considers it to be the most appropriate one, which is formulated as follows: "the ecological approach to language takes into consideration the complex network of relations occurring between environment, languages and people speaking these languages". The 'environment' in the above-mentioned context concerns biological, physical and social environment.

2. CHANGES IN THE STATUS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

According to the information presented by Joshua Fishman in his book entitled "Post-Imperial English" (1996) the status of English as a foreign language changed noticeably after World War II when most North European countries "...downgraded German and at the same time upgraded English as a school subject" (Fishman 1966: 250). At that time French was chosen as a foreign language by a minority of students (before World War II the situation was reversed – French dominated as a foreign language or 'lingua franca' in the majority of European countries). "At present English as a foreign language has an overwhelming lead over all other foreign languages in schools of EU" (Fishman 1996: 251).

Especially interesting may seem the changes that took place in Eastern Europe during the so-called transformation period. In these countries German was traditionally a 'lingua franca' and the major foreign language taught in schools. After World War II the situation changed as a consequence of the Soviet victory and Russian was introduced into schools as the first foreign language. German retained its second position. The situation changed radically after the collapse of the Soviet Union around 1990 due to which the political upheaval in Eastern European countries took place. As a result a tremendous increase in English and simultaneous decrease of Russian could be observed. Worth mentioning is the fact that English was preferred as a foreign language also in Germany especially in more demanding school forms and tertiary education. The spread of English as the first for-

eign language in Eastern Europe caused its acceptance as the language of higher education, science and worldwide communication:

When we move on from the teaching or studying of languages to their application in communication, it seems useful to distinguish different spheres, or, in a special sense, 'domains' of language use like industry and commerce, science and others" (Fishman 1996: 253).

Concluding, it can be stated that during the post-World War II period English became a dominating foreign language both in education and commerce as well as in worldwide communication. It gained tremendous popularity and became a global language.

3. NATURAL LANGUAGE ROBUSTNESS AND LANGUAGE PLANNING

A natural language is defined as one which emerged in the way of natural and spontaneous development. Natural language robustness is a term introduced in recent years to Polish ecolinguistics by Stanisław Puppel (Puppel 2007b). The problem of language robustness occupies an important place in the scientific field dealing with language competition. According to Puppel (2007b) language competition may have either a positive or a negative course. If the course of language competition is negative, languages with weaker robustness may become extinct in favour of those with stronger robustness. Contrarily, in the case of a positive course of language competition, such a tremendous reinforcement of a given natural language may take place that this language takes the role of a hegemonic leader and becomes a global language.

The author of this paper treats as binding the following factors proposed by Puppel (2007b) determining natural language robustness:

- (1) The use of auditory-vocal modality.
- (2) The use of visual-tactile modality.
- (3) The use of joint auditory-vocal and visual-tactile modality.
- (4) The use of a given language in various communication niches.
- (5) The size of root-periphery habitat of a given language.
- (6) The geographical diversity of the territory of the habitat root of a given natural language.
- (7) The influence of space on migration behaviour of communication communities:
 - a) the centrifugal emigration effect - native speakers of a given natural language migrate outside the root of their habitat
 - b) the magnet emigration effect - occurring when a given natural language attracts speakers of other languages

- (8) The influence of demographic factors on the strength of a given natural language.
- (9) The structure of the habitat of a given natural language.
- (10) The age structure of a population using a given language as its own natural language.
- (11) The urbanization level of a given language-communication community.
- (12) The local status of a given natural language in the educational system of a certain language-communicative community.
- (13) The status of a given natural language in the educational system of a certain language-communicative community.
- (14) The history of contacts of a given natural language with other languages:
 - a) invasive contacts
 - b) defensive contacts
 - c) neutral contacts
- (15) The participation of a given language in programmes of natural languages protection.

The established programmes of natural languages protection have an influence on language policy and language planning and may face up to language imperialism.

(16) The consciousness of a given language-communicative community in relation to the status of their own native language with regard to other national and ethnic languages and the status of other languages in relation to their own language.

In accordance with the division of languages proposed by Puppel (2007b) the author of this work accepts the following division of languages on account of the total number of native speakers of a given language.

1. 'super heavy' languages (pol. 'superciężkie', transl. J.W.) - used by over 100 million indigenous speakers (e.g. Chinese, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian)
2. 'heavy' languages (pol. 'ciężkie', transl. J.W.) used by a population ranging from 100 million to 50 million (e.g. German, Italian, Turkish)
3. 'moderately-heavy' languages (pol. 'średnio-ciężkie', transl. J.W.) used by a population ranging from 50 million to 20 million (e.g. Polish, Ukrainian, Azeri)
4. 'light' languages (pol. 'lekkie', transl. J.W.) used by a population of 10 million to 1 million (e.g. Byelorussian, Slovak, Swedish)
5. 'super light' languages (pol. 'superlekkie', transl. J.W.) used by a population below 1 million (e.g. Estonian, Chechen)

6. 'endangered languages' (pol. 'języki bezpośrednio zagrożone wyginięciem') used by a population of 10.000 people or even less (e.g. Papai, Were)

7. 'extinct languages' (pol. 'wymarłe języki', transl. J.W.) - (e.g. Polabian).

In relation to the natural tendency of 'super heavy' languages to eliminate languages of weaker robustness, ecolinguists suggest developing more widely the branch of applied linguistics called language planning. Mühlhäusler (2003: 306) formulates language planning in the following way:

In an ecological approach language planning is seen as a process which is part of and closely interrelated with a large range of natural and cultural ecological factors. It is focused on the question of maintaining a maximum diversity of languages by seeking to identify those ecological factors that sustain linguistic diversity. Linguistic diversity is seen, in turn as a precondition of maintaining cultural and biological diversity. The ultimate aim of ecological language planning is to bring about an ecological balance which no longer requires management (Mühlhäusler 2000: 306).

Language planning is constrained by the assumptions of structuralists and derived approaches in modern linguistics. The emergence of ecolinguistics has provided an opportunity to develop holistic ways of dealing with language problems.

4. TRANSLINGUALISM

In the opinion of the author of this paper maintaining such a linguistic balance as Mühlhäusler proposes in his work entitled *Language Planning and Language Ecology* (2000) can be achieved only through deliberate actions leading to equalizing proportions between 'super-heavy' languages (e.g. English) and other national languages characterized by weaker robustness.

The author of this article learned a lesson from the results obtained by Stanisław and Joanna Puppel in their experiment performed on a group of students at Poznań universities in 2005. This revealed that Polish, a 'moderately-heavy' language has been downgraded (either consciously or subconsciously) by a representative group of the participants in an experiment to a substratic position in relation to English, a 'super-heavy' language which in turn in the consciousness of the examined students adopted the position of a superstratic language, and German, a 'heavy' language received the title either of an adstratic or superstratic language. The lesson calls for translanguaging and transcommunication (Puppel 2007a) instead of the present dominating interlingualism and intercommunication.

4.1. Differences between communication of “INTER”- and “TRANS”- types

The above-mentioned differences were described in detail by Puppel (2007a) in his article entitled “Interlingualism or translingualism? Intercommunication or transcommunication? Remarks in the context of natural languages coexistence in the boundaries of the global cultural-linguistic-communicative community” (pol. “Interlingwalizm czy translingwalizm? Interkomunikacja czy transkomunikacja? Uwagi w kontekście współistnienia języków naturalnych w ramach globalnej wspólnoty kulturowo-językowo-komunikacyjnej transl. J.W.). The differences will be quoted below after the author of the above-mentioned article:

The linear placement of two languages may be described as “INTER”- as it allows the possibility of occurrence of competition between the native language (L1) and the second language (L2). The competition often gives a result in a form of ascribing the latter the conscious status of a substratic language by native communicators of a given language (see: S. Puppel and J. Puppel, 2005), while the second language achieves the superstratic status...It is harmful to the native language which often, as a result of the external linguopressure on the consciousness level of native communicators, both individual as well as collective is downgraded by them, more or less consciously to the role of a communicative tool of a subordinate status in relation to L2 which is an “invading” language. The negative results of the “INTER”-perspective could possibly be prevented by the application of the “TRANS”-perspective which allows the language contact of a more “characterized” type which means that the latter takes into account participation of less or more developed cultural-linguistic-communicative awareness of native speakers of a given language. The formerly mentioned awareness, should, first of all, comprise the positive attitude of native speakers of any language to this language and to their own cultural-linguistic-communicative community. It is worth stressing that the existence of such a community cannot be established in advance – it has to be intentionally generated “vis a vis” the second language (L2)...so that it could enable the initiation and maintenance at least a minimal programme of the native language use, the so-called “language loyalty” use” (Puppel, 2007a: 57, transl. J.W.).

Conclusions derived by the author of the present paper from the above mentioned reasoning are as follows:

1. The “INTER”-perspective puts emphasis on language-communicative skills of the dominant language.
2. The “INTER”-perspective allows the marginalization of a given native language (L1) in the consciousness of native speakers of this language.
3. The “INTER”-perspective does not create favourable conditions for linguistic diversity maintenance.

4. The "TRANS"-perspective helps the native communicators of a given language to acquire the highest possible level of the cultural-linguistic-communicative competence in the scope of L2 and simultaneously it requires from the native communicators the improvement of cultural-linguistic-communicative competence and skills in the scope of L1 – the native language.
5. The "TRANS"-perspective leads to multilingualism on the level of individual native speakers as well as the whole national and ethnic communities.
6. The "TRANS"-perspective creates an opportunity for ecological sustaining of the highest possible number of natural languages.

5. THE "TRANS"-PERSPECTIVE – THE BEST WAY OF SUSTAINING NATURAL LANGUAGES

Foreign language teaching requires application of the "TRANS"-perspective if it is to aid the sustaining of the largest possible number of natural languages as, according to Puppel (2007a) the "INTER"-perspective

[...] continuously generates communicators educated in the confines of free economic language contact biased to continue the external linguopressure within the boundaries of certain national languages (L1). Contrarily, the "TRANS"-perspective assuming socially controlled economy of language contact allows shaping both appropriate cultural-linguistic-communicative awareness and language-communicative practice of adstratic (egalitarian) character (Puppel, 2007a: 61, transl. J.W.).

The author of the present article is fully convinced that the only way of teaching foreign languages in an ecologically balanced way is teaching them in the following triad; native language – global language – second foreign language.

The first experiments concerning the above-presented paradigm of foreign language teaching were performed by Stanisław Puppel and Joanna Puppel in 2005 and the results of their experiment were described in the article entitled "The problem of natural language perception in the following triad: native language – global language – the neighbouring language on the instance of German in the following triad: Polish language – English language – German language, ecolinguistic approach. A trial of typology" (S. J. Puppel 2005, pol." Zagadnienie percepcji języka naturalnego w triadzie: język ojczysty – język globalny-język sąsiedni, na przykładzie triady: język polski – język angielski – język niemiecki w ujęciu ekolingwistycznym: próba typologii", transl. J.W.).

6. THE EXPERIMENT

The author of the present article performed a pilot experiment on a small group of English teachers (7) working in a secondary school ("Liceum") in Bydgoszcz. All the teachers held a master's degree in English language received from the universities of different Polish cities: Bydgoszcz (UKW - 5 teachers), Toruń (UMK - 2 teachers), Poznań (UAM - 1 teacher). Their students came from Bydgoszcz and the neighbouring villages. The teachers were asked to fill in a questionnaire which consisted of 25 questions concerning the teachers' and their students' attitude to the following languages: native language (Polish), English (global) second foreign language (e.g. German, Spanish) in relation to the following values: 'being better', 'importance' and 'usefulness'.

On the basis of the performed experiment and the obtained final data the author draws the conclusions that English teachers and their students consider English to be better, more important and more valuable than Polish. The same attitude was presented both by the English teachers and their students as far as the second language was concerned - the second language appeared to be better, more valuable and more important than Polish.

The results obtained in the pilot study make the author pose the question whether English teachers in Polish secondary schools are interested in developing native language resources in their students. The answer to the above question confirms the author's prediction concerning the weakening of Polish language robustness in favour of global language and other foreign languages which are included in the group of greater robustness than Polish.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The issue that should be explored and undertaken is strengthening the role of Polish as a native language with its cultural-linguistic-communicative heritage in order to restore its adstratic position in relation to global and other foreign languages. At this point one might ask how this can be achieved by an English teacher in a Polish secondary school? Should he/she act on his/her own or should institutionalized action be taken?

The author of the present article is of the opinion that two types of activity should take place simultaneously: individual ones performed by English teachers and institutionalized ones on the level of the Ministry of Education.

The author postulates introducing the new subject of ecolinguistics to universities where future foreign language teachers are being prepared for their future profession.

The individual actions undertaken by English teachers in Polish secondary schools should be, in the author's opinion either conscious or subconscious. The 'ecolinguistically shaped' teacher of English should act in favour of sustaining Polish ethnicity and robustness of Polish language "vis à vis" the global language and other foreign languages taught in Polish secondary schools. The teacher's individual activities should derive from his/her own internal consciousness connected with the ethnic group identity which he/she should consider to be good, valuable and important.

In order to maintain the balance between the 'super-heavy' language – English which has become a global language and Polish, of weaker robustness, another foreign language should be taught in Polish secondary schools which correlates to the European Union Document entitled "The Promotion of Foreign Language Teaching and Linguistic Diversity". (2007).

REFERENCES

- Baker, C., 2001. Review of Tove Skutnabb-Kangas „Linguistic Genocide“. In: *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 52, 279–283.
- Duff, P., N. Hornberger (eds). 2008. "Encyclopedia of Language and Education". *Language Socialization*. New York: Springer Science and Media LLC.
- Fill, A., 1998. Ecolinguistics – State of Art 1998. In: *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 1, 1–16.
- Fill, A., 2001. Language and Ecology: Ecolinguistic Perspectives for 2000 and Beyond. In: *Applied Linguistics for the 21st Century: AILA Review* 14, 60–75.
- Fill, A., P. Mühlhauser (eds), 2001. *The Ecolinguistic Reader. Language, Ecology and Environment*. London: Continuum.
- Fishman, J, W. Conrad, A. Rubal-Lopez (eds), 1996. *Post-Imperial English. Status Change in former British/American colonies, 1940–1990*. Berlin–New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Hajer, M., 1995. *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Halliday, M., 2001. New ways of Meaning: Challenge to Applied Linguistics. In: A. Fill and P. Mühlhauser (eds): *The Ecolinguistic Reader: Language, Ecology and Environment*: London: Continuum Press. 175–186.
- Haugen, E., 1971, The Ecology of Language. *The Linguistic Reporter*. Supplement 5, 19–26.
- Haugen, E., 1972. *The Ecology of Language. Essays by Einar Haugen*. London: Stanford University Press.
- Jacobs, G., A. Goalty. 2000. The Treatment of Ecological Issues in Coursebooks. In: *ELT Journal* 54, 256–264.
- Jung, M., 2001. Ecological criticism of language. In: *The Ecolinguistic Reader. Language, Ecology and Environment* 68, 4–10.
- Mufwene, S., 2001. *The Ecology of Language Evolution*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mühlhauser, P., 1996. *Linguistic Ecology. Language Change and Linguistic Imperialism In the Pacific Region*. London: Routledge.
- Mühlhauser, P., 2003. *Language of Environment – Environment of Language. A Course in Ecolinguistics*. New York: Battlebridge.

- Mühlhäusler, P., 2005. Language Planning and Language Ecology. In: *Current Issues in Language Planning* 1, 347-255.
- Pennycook, A., 1994. *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*. London: Longman.
- Phillipson, R., T. Skutnabb-Kangas, 1996. English Only Worldwide or Language Ecology. In: *TESOL QUARTERLY* 30 (3), 429-452.
- Puppel, S., J. Puppel, 2005. Zagadnienie percepcji języka naturalnego w triadzie: język ojczysty – język globalny – język sąsiedni na przykładzie triady: język polski – język angielski – język niemiecki w ujęciu ekolingwistycznym: próba typologii. In: *Scripta Neophilologica Posnaniensia* VII, 55-96.
- Puppel, S., 2007a. Interlingwalizm czy translingwalizm? Interkomunikacja czy transkomunikacja? Uwagi w kontekście współlistnienia języków naturalnych w ramach globalnej wspólnoty kulturowo-językowo-komunikacyjnej. In: *Scripta de Communicatione Posnaniensi, Seria: Prace Naukowe Katedry Ekokomunikacji UAM* I, 27-43.
- Puppel, S., 2007b. Tężyzna języków naturalnych. In: Halina Chałacińska-Wiertelak / K. Kropaczewski (eds.), *Dyskurs wielokulturowy*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 15-25.
- Puppel, S., 2007c. Ochrona języków naturalnych. In: *Scripta de Communicatione Posnaniensi. Seria: Materiały Dydaktyczne Katedry Ekokomunikacji I*, 221-230.
- Ruiz, R., 1984. Orientations in language planning. In: *National Association for Bilingual Association (NABE)* 8 (2), 15-34.
- Shultz, B., 2001. Language and the Natural Environment. In: Fill, A. and Mühlhäusler, P. (eds) *The Ecolinguistics Reader*. London: Continuum, 109-114.
- Skunabb-Kangas, T., 2000. *Linguistic Genocide in Education – or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?* New York: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.
- Trim, J., 1959. Historical, Descriptive and Dynamic Linguistics. In: *Language and Speech* 2 (1), 9-25.
- UNESCO, 2003. Language Vitality and Endangerment. In: UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Unit's Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages. Approved 31 March 2003 by the Participants of the International Expert Meeting on UNESCO Programme Safeguarding of Endangered Languages 1, 10-12.
- Wendel, J., 2005. Notes on the Ecology of Language. In: *Bunkyo Gakuin University Academic Journal* 5, 511-516.
- Widdowson, H., 1999. Coming to Terms with Reality: Applied Linguistics in Perspective. In: *12th Congress of Applied Linguistics, AILA* 99, 69-76.
- Wilson, G., 1999. Environmental Education in Taiwan: The Mountain Program. In: *Global Issues in Language Education Network Newsletter* 1, 12-13.

INTERNET SOURCES

- (http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php=URL_ID=8270&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
- Martin, P.W., Creese, A., Bhaat, A. and Bhojani, N., 2004 Final Report on Complementary S. Schools and their Communities in Leicester. Leicester University/University of Birmingham. http://le.ac.uk/education/research/complementary_schools/index.html
- Pitts, M., J.F. Nussbaum, 2006. „Integrating the Past and Paving the Future. Examining the Current Trends and Extending the Boundaries of Language and Social Psycho-

-
- logy Research. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*. Vol. 25, N 3, 197-202, Sage (<http://online.sagepub.com>).
- UNESCO, 2003. "Recommendations for Action Plan". International Expert Meeting on UNESCO Programme Safeguarding of Endangered Languages, UNESCO, Paris
- Fontenoy, 10-12 March 2003. (http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php.URL_ID11992&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).

