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THE LANGUAGE TEACHER IN THE GLOBALISED WORLD – A CASE FOR USING TELECOLLABORATIVE INSTRUCTION IN INTERCULTURAL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Teacher training needs to respond to the changing reality, making students better equipped to meet the challenges of teaching in multilingual and multicultural contexts. The traditional paradigm of teacher trainers, trainees and prospective students all sharing the same mother tongue and home culture is no longer valid. Thus, reflection on how to infuse intercultural teaching into the teacher training module is needed. One way to do that is to apply the model of telecollaborative training.

KEYWORDS: teacher training, intercultural teaching, cultures of learning, language assessment, telecollaboration

1. INTRODUCTION

Current demographic changes, migrations and openings in the job market make it more and more probable for language teachers (most notably, English) to deliver foreign language instruction to multilingual classes, either at home or abroad. While a great amount of research has been devoted to defining and developing intercultural communicative competence of learners, fewer studies were geared at intercultural teaching competences needed to choose materials and methods, plan, organise and implement tasks in a culturally-sensitive way. Thus, intercultural teaching competence should find its place into teacher training programs, in order to prepare a new generation of language teachers, even though this might be difficult given overloaded curricula and overcrowded classes.

The present paper will start by reflecting upon English teachers' language awareness in the current English as an International Language (EIL) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) frameworks. Then, some reflection on intercultural teaching competence will be made, together with justification for implementation of culture-sensitive teacher training. Finally, telecollaboration will be presented as a vehicle helping to make language teachers better prepared for the instructional challenges of the present-day classroom.

2. STUDIES INTO TEACHERS' LANGUAGE AWARENESS IN EIL SETTINGS

Increased mobility of English language users, achieved through student study and exchange programs, migrations, job openings abroad or travel, results in the changes to English nowadays (Graddol 2006; Brown 1994). 'Standard-non standard English' distinction was traditionally viewed as an 'RP-non RP' dichotomy for British English as an established variety in English language teaching in Europe (Kerswill 2006). This reinforced the monolithic model of English, in which native-speaker models were promoted because they were codified and had a degree of historical authority (McKay 2003).

However, together with criticism of the traditional view on standards undertaken by, among others, Phillipson (1992), the pluricentric idea of English is promoted nowadays, acknowledging that language contact necessarily leads to language change and the development of new varieties of English is a natural result of the spread of English. For McKay (2003) today's language use is often not just English but a mix of a variety of languages that highlights the speaker's identity and proficiency. Pennycook (2003) shows that conflicting attitudes towards English remove "the homogeny position" (the spread of English as leading to a homogenization of world culture – Crystal 1997) in favour of "the heterogeny position", where World Englishes (Kachru 1990, 1992; Jenkins 2003; Kirkpatrick 2007) are to be appreciated and valued as valid components of the target language and as a sign of plurilingualism.

Previous studies into teachers' language awareness (e.g., Carter 1995; Crystal 2010; Farrell and Martin 2009; Hazen 2001) isolated three major areas of TLA, namely, knowledge *of* language (i.e. language proficiency), knowledge *about* language (i.e. declarative knowledge of subject matter) and knowledge *of* students (especially the cognitive knowledge of learners as it relates to subject matter) – Hall 2010. Research to date has focused on correctness, standards and variety introduced by different contexts in which English is used (Nelson 1995; Wach 2011), trying to answer the question of "Which English to teach?" – Dziubalska-Kołaczyk (2005), Farrell and Martin (2009), Rinvolucri (2006), Niżegorodcew (2014). At the same time, teaching World Englishes was supposed to help promote intercultural awareness and increased understanding (Matsuda 2002; Matsuda 2003; Modiano 2001). As it transpires from the previous studies, teacher trainees perceive ELF in language pedagogy not so much as the goal of the learning and teaching process but more as a flexible approach to the linguistic and other resources at the learners' disposal (Jodłowiec 2012). Positive perception of ELF as part of civilizational changes in the contemporary world, the facility with which people communicate across the globe, is strengthened by a shared language (Niżegorodcew 2014). Polish TTs' familiarity with the concepts of EIL/ELF (Niżegorodcew 2014; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Bielak 2014) does not lead them to feelings of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson 1992) nor to a threat to national/linguistic identity (Niżegorodcew 2014). Teacher trainees are

definitely aware of the lingua franca use of English, nevertheless, despite realizing that most interaction happens between NNSs, they express a strong preference for native varieties (Timmis 2002; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Bielak 2014).

3. TOWARDS INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE TEACHING

Rather than focusing on language only, greater attention nowadays needs to be devoted to methods, techniques, resources and tools used while developing ICC at all levels and in all instructional contexts. Communicative methodology of today is very strongly learner- and ICC-oriented, which is also reflected in the assumptions of the European language policy as delineated in *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001), which views major objectives of foreign language teaching as preparing the learner "to fulfill the role of cultural intermediary between one's own culture and the foreign culture and to deal effectively with intercultural misunderstanding and conflict situations". Bandura (2011) also underlines important role of intercultural learning, advocating choosing the following components of intercultural skills as foci of instruction:
- "the ability to bring the culture of origin and the foreign culture into relation with each other",
- "willingness to relativise one's own cultural viewpoint and cultural value system",
- "willingness and ability to distance oneself from conventional attitudes to cultural difference".

However, while coursebooks, methodology handbooks or teachers' books abound in recommendations on developing learners' ICC, much less attention is devoted to intercultural language teaching (Liddicoat 2011), with scarce studies devoted to the competences needed to choose materials and methods, plan, organise and implement language teaching in a culturally-sensitive way (e.g., Farrell and Martin 2009; Krajka 2010; Wysocka 2013). Fenner and Newby (2000) see great importance in teachers' ability to adapt instruction to fit global contexts, with teachers' readiness to suit the way the target language is taught to learning styles, needs and preferences, learning expectations of target learners, the perceived status of English in the country, the view on the relationship between the teacher and learner, the degree of similarity or difference between L1 and L2. Interviews with student teachers who did Comenius internships in different countries of the world and returned to complete the teacher training module at a Polish university (Krajka 2010) indicated the problems of establishing rapport, finding a lingua franca to conduct teaching, seeking practical ways of maintaining discipline or coping with the multitude of mother tongues in the classroom, especially during grammar explanation, as major problems encountered during internships. Most interesting issues put forward as intercultural teaching problems are given below (after Krajka 2010):

- inability to use the students' mother tongue – quick to learn the basics and use body language/pictures/gestures;
- adapting to a different philosophy of grammar learning – no explicit rule expected, focus on discovery learning;
- evaluating and adopting new approaches and techniques relevant to students rather than the ones used in Poland;
- presenting meaning of abstract lexis and grammar – used a lot of songs, articles, videos to contextualise;
- finding practical ways of maintaining discipline with limited language resources – Ss pretending not to understand English;
- coping with students' distrust towards the new teacher – unwillingness to cooperate;
- explaining grammar of L2 in L3 (e.g., English through French);
- dealing with Ss' inadequate TL pronunciation or strong L1 interference;
- encompassing learners from different cultural backgrounds in mixed ethnic classes (e.g., Mali, Iran, Romania).

Specific recommendations for teacher skills that would need to be implemented in teacher training programs, according to Fenner and Newby (2000), are as follows:

- highlighting the international character of English;
- focusing on various cultures when choosing teaching material;
- avoiding focusing on the cultures of native speakers only;
- getting to know one's own culture;
- trying to cater for the needs of all the students by understanding them;
- using a collaborative standard for assessment, conduct, presentation and practice;
- agreeing upon clear in-class norms and rules taking into account T-Ls' culture discrepancy;
- evaluating coursebooks and classroom techniques for cultural sensitivity.

Quite interestingly, some "survival" solutions as worked out by untrained Comenius interns (Krajka 2010) could be substantiated with theoretical positions and methodology recommendations to constitute ready-made instructional guidelines:

- promoting creativity, innovation, openness, avoiding bias, stereotyping;
- diagnosing learners' needs and interests;
- gaining knowledge about the characteristics of the teaching process and its organisation at the target school, the system of education in the country, preferred methods;
- gaining knowledge of language families, similarities and differences between pairs of languages;
- being ready to adapt fast to the reality and exploit opportunities offered;
- having a range of assessment schemes to choose from;
- collecting and preparing teaching materials beforehand;
- learning survival „classroom" lexis in Ss' mother tongue;

- learning how to plan for diversified contexts/adapt these plans;
- practising microteaching with no Polish and very limited English;
- being ready for initial failure and avoid discouragement.

Both practical reports from teachers (Komorowska & Aleksandrowicz-Pędich 2010) and theoretical positions put forward by English as an International Lingua Franca researchers (e.g., McKay 2010) call for reflection on how language teachers are to be ready to conduct teaching, adapt instruction, evaluate materials and choose assessment measures in order to be successful at responding to learners' needs. This 'socially-sensitive EILF pedagogy', according to McKay and Bokhorst-Heng (2008), encompasses the following aspects:

- Foreign and second language curricula should be relevant to the local linguistic ecology;
- EILF professionals should strive to alter language policies that serve to promote English learning only among the elite of the country;
- EILF curricula should include examples of the diversity of English varieties used today;
- EILF curricula need to exemplify L2–L2 interactions;
- full recognition needs to be given to the other languages spoken by English speakers;
- EILF should be taught in a way that respects the local culture of learning.

Out of these, especially the last issue, that of respecting the local culture of learning, is of particular importance for our discussion in this paper. Finding ways of increasing teacher trainees' awareness of the significance of local culture of learning is a major challenge faced by teacher trainers. Bringing the global context of English language teaching through exposure to such artifacts as lesson plans, forum messages, teachers' books' lesson scenarios, teacher-made reflections or video recordings of classroom sequences from some other countries is one possible solution to be implemented (see Appendix for a sample material used during the case study described in the second part of the paper). While this should result in stimulating reflection and gaining knowledge of different instructional contexts by student teachers, it might not be enough to develop the practical skills of intercultural teaching.

The second solution, then, is putting student teachers in telecollaborative activities focused on debating a selected aspect of foreign language teaching methodology (e.g., teaching language skills, presenting vocabulary/grammar, organising classroom learning, assessing learning and giving feedback, correcting errors) in the countries of collaborating partners and shaping teaching competence by producing, revising, evaluating and redrafting teaching materials (co-construing lesson plans, tests, scenarios for games, etc.). The combination of both approaches will be analysed in the final part of the present paper, together with some guidelines for successful implementation.

4. THE INTERCULTURAL DIMENSION OF LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT

Just like other aspects of English language teaching methodology, language assessment is most vulnerable to all kinds of influences on the national and societal levels. As Jin and Cortazzi (2011) claim, there may be different perceptions of "traditional methods" for different languages — and learners from different language backgrounds will find it a challenge to go beyond a comfort zone not only into new languages and cultures with new levels of proficiency but also into new ways of learning. At the same time, as Cortazzi, Jin and Wang (2009) show, rather than assume that one single method of teaching (and assessing) is applicable in all possible contexts of the ELT world, the way students' performance is to be assessed is shaped to a large extent by local "cultures of learning", or frameworks of expectations, attitudes, values and beliefs about successful learning and teaching, about learning and using different language skills in classrooms, and about how interaction should be accomplished (see Cortazzi and Jin 1996a, 1996b). For instance, on the whole, communicative methodology did not prove to be fully applicable in Asian contexts, accustomed to transmission- and examination-oriented language teaching culture (see, for instance, Chow and Mok-Cheung 2004; Wang 2007). It resulted in teachers' rejection of official CLT policies, adaptation of its practices, reconciliation of CLT methodology with local educational practices into a localized form of methodology (Wong and Ho 2004; Rao 1996; Li 1998).

Language assessment is to a large extent subject to the influences exercised by local and national language policy guidelines on the one hand and learners' requirements conditioned by the local culture of learning on the other. As it is argued by Ross (2011), language assessment involves values, ideologies, and sometimes interests driven by nationalism, xenophobia and also vested interests that may be motivated to acquire, retain or expand economic or strategic power. Thus, language assessment cannot be understood exclusively as limited to the technical issues of reliability and validity and is, instead, infused with issues of power, identity, national sovereignty, macro- and micropolitics, as well as macro- and microeconomics (Bachman and Purpura 2008). This is especially the case if one takes into account internationally-accredited examinations, which due to their preference for particular language standards as evidenced in answer keys, selection of geographical and social domains for texts used in receptive tasks or models of expected oral performance, already exercise quite a notable impact on the way language teaching is conducted in particular countries of the world. Ross (2011) adds that tensions exist between competing ideologies and practices that promote language assessment for managerial and accountability purposes and those seeking alternatives predicated on the belief that locally-decided assessment practices are ultimately more democratic.

Therefore, the significance of language assessment as a topic for intercultural collaborative exchange is conditioned by a number of dimensions that it can actually exhibit, showing differences in the participants' attitudes towards

- traditional vs. alternative assessment;
- suitability of assessment measures with different age groups;
- expected level of L autonomy/T power in the classroom;
- predominant methodology/ies – e.g., the local variation of Communicative Language Teaching or other methods;
- teaching/learning preferences for the choice of tasks, select vs. construed responses, the way of wording instructions;
- designing scoring procedures, answer key and feedback.

5. LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT IN THE SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT – A STUDY IN TEACHER TRAINING

5.1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY – TELECOLLABORATIVE EXCHANGES IN BLENDED TEACHER TRAINING

Telecollaborative tandems or intercultural exchanges have become one of the major vehicles for technology-assisted language instruction at the university level these days (Helm, Guth & O'Dowd 2012). Previous studies on the effect of telecollaboration on language learning have proved, among many others, increased learning gains through providing real interaction opportunities and exposure to non-native or native speakers of TL (Grosbois 2011) in written (Guth & Marini-Maio 2010) and oral modes (Bueno-Alastuey 2010, 2013), an increase in language learners' motivation (Jauregi & Bañados 2008), as well as the development of intercultural competence (Tian &Wang 2010).

More interestingly for our focus here, the studies reporting upon the implementation of telecollaboration in teacher training programmes are relatively scarce, indicating an increase in pre-service teachers' competences in CALL and CMC (Guichon & Hauck 2011), showing how the adoption of telecollaboration leads to the enrichment of trainees' own repertoire of teaching techniques (Antoniadou 2011) as well as how it results in an increased awareness of the difficulties inherent to these projects (Dooly & Sadler 2013). Moreover, studies show increase of techno-pedagogical skills (Koehler & Mishra 2009) as well as enhanced awareness of how to develop learners' intercultural competence through telecollaborative exchanges (Dooly & Sadler 2013).

However, the implementation of international computer-mediated telecollaboration in teacher training is not devoid of problems and pitfalls. As indicated by an earlier study in which tandems of undergraduate students worked on specific methodology

topics in mixed groups (Krajka et al. 2013), interaction may be limited to few isolated, single posts; with longer discussions restricted in the number of participants (involving 3–4). On the management side, unequal participation and varied response times on both parts of the project led to discouragement and demotivation of participants. Rather than created together, products (here, glossaries) were made individually by students and uploaded to the course Moodle. Finally, in-course interaction was mainly teacher-directed, with few student-initiated tasks.

Thus, we conclude elsewhere (Krajka et al. 2013) that telecollaboration cannot be taken for granted nor can it be expected to appear on its own. Much greater attention in telecollaborative teacher training course design needs to be paid to fostering collaboration and providing participants with scaffolding to actually reach their goals. The systematic approach to knowledge co-construal in TT telecollaboration as indicated by Bueno-Alastuey (2014) showed effectiveness of a structured approach to achieving instructional goals through a series of steps and stages, monitored by the two instructors and spread over the longer time span.

5.2. FROM EXPOSURE TO GLOBAL INPUT TO TELECOLLABORATIVE KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUAL – A CASE STUDY

Informed by the previous studies, most importantly, Bueno-Alastuey (2014) and Krajka et al. (2013), a telecollaborative project was set up between tandems of graduate students from University of Social Sciences and Humanities from Warsaw and Mehmet Akif Ersoy University (Burdur, Turkey). Both classes participated in a specialised teacher training course of a similar focus ("Language Testing"), which was due in the same semester and which followed the same main textbook (Brown 2014).

Ss got divided into 3–4 person groups mixed from the two classes and were supposed to create their own tests on a specific topic – vocabulary/grammar, receptive skills, productive skills. Partners provided feedback on student-made tests using different technologies selected on their own – screen recording/online whiteboard discussions/forum posts/social networking sites. These environments were not set up, managed and controlled by the two instructors, but it was where student teachers were in charge. On the other hand, in order to balance that and ensure some whole-class impact as well, Moodle forums were used to stimulate in-group and individual reflection that all the participants could actually benefit from.

At the end of the winter semester the pre-project phase took place. A relatively brief period of 4 weeks of preparatory instruction on both sides aimed at making Ss familiar with the tools (Moodle forums/diaries, selected screen recording applications, online whiteboards, interactive quizzing tools), creating project groups and allowing Ss to establish informal contacts, negotiating milestones and timelines and familiarising students with diversity of ELT contexts, as well as exposing them

to possible differing culture-dependent views on assessment (see Appendix for sample materials). Students became familiar with the project goals and procedure, instructors' expectations and course requirements. They gradually started to interact with their prospective partners, sending messages and getting to know one another.

The project proper was to follow in the second (summer) semester, which is in progress at the moment of writing this paper. In the main project phase, the "Language Testing" course is going to be taught parallelly by both partner instructors, with a common online discussion and quizzing space created to assist acquisition of knowledge. At the same time, student teachers are going to prepare tests on selected topics and exchange these to give feedback on the applicability of their partners' tests to the alternative sociocultural setting (Polish or Turkish). In the end, student teachers' reflections on variations or modifications needed in tests will be collected, as well as whole-class discussions will be summarised.

6. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of telecollaboration in teacher training is not devoid of potential drawbacks and pitfalls. Ample care needs to be devoted to the process of preparation of the tandem project in terms of content, intercultural competence and technologies used. In particular, negotiation of course syllabi by both instructors, setting realistic timelines taking into account the academic year schedules of the partners and coming up with challenging yet achievable tasks will guarantee success of the project.

Also, a significant amount of work needs to be devoted to familiarizing student teachers with the specificity of the partners' English language teaching context, encompassing, among others, national regulations on language examinations, expectations on the language standard, preferred ways of learning (so-called "culture of learning" – see Jin and Cortazzi 2011), status of English in the country, perceived role of teacher and learners. The understanding of all these aspects, together with some informal contacts with partners before the start of the course, should create better conditions for collaborative knowledge co-construal.

At the same time, given maturity and motivation of pre-service teacher trainees, involving them in the process of coming up with the deadlines and expectations should ensure greater ownership of the course and prevent previously diagnosed lack of involvement. Especially timelines become an important issue here, for instance, with extramural students having to reconcile their family, work and study obligations.

Finally, rather than complain about the slowness of the process or excessive response lags, the instructor needs to acknowledge the fact of double learning space (traditional face-to-face and collaborative online) and take this fact into account while establishing assessment details.

Even though the proposed teacher training model does not feature technology-enhanced activities as the centre of the course, they will play a significant part in the process of raising prospective teachers' awareness of the English language, the way it is taught and assessed. Blended learning is naturally used to create a context for culture-rich acquisition of teaching skills in the ways that are impossible to be achieved in a traditional classroom. While there may be logistical, administrative and instructional considerations to overcome which call for skilful integration of TC activities into regular TT instruction, it is possible to design the degree and mode of online participation in such a way so that both local and global requirements are satisfied.

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APPENDIX

Teacher's views on alternative assessment (messages retrieved from *The Landscape of English Language Teaching* MOOC available at Coursera.org, January–February 2014, grammar and spelling original).

Jahzeel • 20 days ago
Good day everyone!
Assessment is used by teachers everyday not only for evaluating how the students are doing so far but most especially to evaluate whether the strategies employed in the classroom on a specific topic is effective or if it works well with that particular learner. It is indeed true that the most exploited for of assessment is the paper and pencil test, which can also be considered as one of the traditional forms of assessments. That is why in my classes, I seldom use this type of assessment especially in my Language class in which the most effective, I think, form of assessing my students' performance is through performance-based or personal-response assessment. I usually let them perform authentic tasks in which I could observe their use of the English Language. That way I would know if they can already use it in the mainstream. Just like what the video has suggested, during their performance I take down notes and corrections which I later read after the performance. What I usually do is to list their strengths and the areas where they need to improve (I do not call them weaknesses so it wont have a negative effects on students). By mentioning their strengths they would be motivated to work on the areas that need improvement.

Ana • 23 days ago
I think that the way we give importance to assesment is an error, at least here in Spain, students memorise and study to pass an exam instead of for learning, which is really sad. Do we want parrots or people prepare for dealing with the real life? It is useful if they know a lot of vocabulary just translating from english to spanish? or is better if they know hoow to use in a real contest? in my opinionwe should change that, asses the whole process and not only the final tests

Lola • 22 days ago
I totally agree with you, Ana. In Spain, laws – and, therefore, the whole education system – pay too much attention to summative assessment. And I really do not understand it. It may be part of the assessment process, but it should not be at the core of it. When pupils are four or five years old, they have a portfolio to see their progress, and no test is taken at all. I do not understand why that method is no longer valid for 6-year-old pupils and older. A simple traditional test is not representative of the pupil's efforts throughout the school year at all. These

assessment criteria only bring about more anxiety into the classroom atmosphere, preventing them from effective long-life learning. Balance is the right option in my opinion.

Tahsina • 19 days ago

The place where I work has summative assessment in focus. We have two exams (midterm and final) with quizzes, assignment and presentation during the course. Students get all the scripts back with feedback except the final exam scripts and they receive grades for each course. But there are scopes for teachers for formative assessments as quiz and presentation are teacher directed. So there are role plays, speech & poster presentations, dramatized presentations etc in my class. What I noticed is students are more interested in these kinds of tasks but it is not always that they remain anxiety free. An introvert student will always be anxious about coming in front of the class and play a role. I have never used dialogue journal or portfolio in my courses and found these ideas of alternative assessment very interesting.

Pauline • 24 days ago

Yes! I work in Korea too, and everything is standardized! It is so frustrating, I have to try to convince my students that real English isn't at all like what they are studying. I have also faced similar grading situations, and I especially hate the lack of recognition for partial credit. I have to administer a particularly difficult writing test twice a year, and students will often make nearly perfect sentences with extremely minor mistakes, but I am forced to mark the whole thing wrong. They get the same score for all that work, that a kid who didn't even attempt it gets. Its heartbreaking sometimes!