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COMMUNICATIVE PROCESSES, CULTURE  
AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING  
IN THE SPACE OF THE POLISH HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM:  
THE TRANSCOMMUNICATOR VS.  
THE IMPACT OF THE LANGUAGE OF THE INTERNET

The paper demonstrates selected communicative phenomena characteristic of the Polish high school classroom, i.e. classroom communicative inertia and students' communicative snippiness, which are assumed to originate, inter alia, from the popularity of Internet social networks, the language of which has been partly shaped by such globalising tendencies as the rise of the dominant position of the English language and Anglo-Saxon culture. The remedy for the aforementioned negative aspects of classroom communication may be sought among the premises underlying the concept of the transcommunicator. It is assumed that the above theory should be applied to English language teaching and learning in Poland.

KEYWORDS: communicative processes in public space, the language of Internet social networks, transcommunicator, culture, English language teaching and learning

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the article is to draw the reader's attention to selected negative aspects that determine the communicative identity of the closed public space of the Polish high school classroom. Accordingly, this work will concentrate on one communicative tendency that characterises the space under analysis, i.e. classroom communicative inertia, and will make an attempt to find reasons for it. The paper will also refer to a proposal, i.e. the idea of the transcommunicator by Puppel (2007), that may be regarded as a solution to the problems in question and, in a wider perspective, as a method contributing to resolving international and intercultural conflicts. The study presented below is undertaken within an ecolinguistic-communicological approach to glottodidactics concentrated on the analysis of language with reference to the dynamism of cultural-linguistic-communicative processes.

## SELECTED COMMUNICATIVE ASPECTS OF THE SPACE OF THE POLISH HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

The paper contributes to the research which has been conducted by the author of this article and devoted to the communicative profile of the Polish high school (Bielak 2015, Bielak in press a, b) and the Polish high school classroom (Bielak in press c, d, e). The space of the Polish high school, divided into a number of subspaces (e.g. classrooms, corridors, administrative offices etc.), is approached as a carved fragment of space characterised by a plethora of communicative phenomena.

According to the research by Bielak (in press c), the space of the Polish high school classroom is in possession of the communicative profile characterised by the lack of communicative spontaneity which results in the poorness of communicative forms applied by students during classes. The aforementioned classroom communicative inertia contrasts with the communicative richness of the corridor, where one can encounter the high intensity of occurrence of energetic body movements, laughs, different reactions to the behaviour and utterances of other people, gestures, facial expressions and loose ('relaxed') talks.

The Polish high school classroom communicative inertia described above may partly result from the non-equality of teacher-student relations, i.e. the dominance of the teacher over students. The space of the high school classroom is therefore characterised by the predominance of the teacher's verbal communicative resources, students' verbal communicative resources being non-dominant (Awramiuk 2008: 12, Bielak in press d, Borawska-Kalbarczyk 2008: 6-7, Synowiec 2005: 183). In other words, the linguistic relations in question, described by Krawczak (2015: 109) as the teacher's communicative power, may cause learners to refrain from expressing their opinions and make students remain silent during classes (Bielak in press d). The Polish teacher's dominant status in the classroom has also been highlighted by such authors as Dusza (2009: 300-305) and Groenwald (2009: 291) *inter alia*.

The lack of spontaneity and the resulting communicative inertia characteristic of the Polish high school classroom may be also the effect of ritually determined educational processes involving a variety of repetitions. The research by Bielak (in press e) points to the strong ritual determination of the process of English language teaching and learning. The students participating in the research identify a variety of English lesson schemata (i.e. repetitive patterns) in relation to the beginning and end of English lessons, reading, listening, writing and grammar exercises. Repetitive elements are also detected in the teacher's verbal communicative behaviours and both teachers' and students' non-verbal communication. The aforementioned occurrence of repetitions generally results in boredom and in effect may be considered as one of the causes of the non-spontaneity and communicative inertia characteristic of the Polish high school classroom.

The phenomenon of high school students' low activity and boredom during classes has been also emphasised by Dusza (2009: 304) who states that only 4%

of students surveyed by her are communicatively active during all the classes and over 60% of them never participates in discussions with the teacher. The research participants do not take part in such communicative activities as they do not see any reason to do it or they are too bored to get involved. Significantly, the students under analysis point to one more problem, i.e. they state that asking questions during classes and initiating discussions is not appreciated by teachers.

The Polish high school classroom communicative inertia is therefore the effect of the existence of a complex set of facets. This paper will describe one more factor that seems to have an impact on the occurrence of the classroom verbal inertia. It will be assumed that the silence in question may also partly originate from the fact that a number of Polish teenagers are in fact in possession of communication skills based on non-high communicative resources which are generally not expected in the classroom. One of the most authoritative documents which points to the level of students' communicative skills is *The Report on the State of Protection of the Polish language for the years 2003-2004*. The results of the research into the aesthetic aspects of communication used in the space of the Polish school described in the aforementioned document show that school communication, used not only by students but also by teachers, rests mainly on colloquial language with elements of slang. The language used by students is also becoming increasingly affected by vulgarisms. The report in question also points to such phenomena characterising the communication of young Polish people as the general lowering of linguistic norms, communicative brevity, use of abbreviations and informality in terms of speaking and behaving. According to the interview conducted with some Polish high school teachers (Bielak 2015: 22-23), high school students are schematically snippy while communicating or, in other words, communicatively impoverished. In consequence, they have difficulty discussing issues associated with painting or other types of art. In this paper it is assumed that the communicative snippiness under analysis is the result of contemporary cultural and/or linguistic contacts, which will be explained in the subsequent section.

#### GLOBAL STATUS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, THE POPULARITY OF ANGLO-SAXON CULTURE AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE INTERNET VIS-À-VIS STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE SNIPPINESS

The English language has unquestionably acquired the status of the primary *lingua franca* of the contemporary global communicative framework (Crystal 2004, Phillipson 1992: 47, Pfeiffer 2001: 204, Singh/ Kell/ Pandian 2002 inter alios). As emphasised by Ciprianová and Vančo (2010: 123-124), “[n]one of the previously established *lingua francas*, whether it was Latin in the times of the flourishing Roman Empire, French in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Russian imposed as the common

foreign language in Eastern Europe after the Second World or the artificially created Esperanto, influenced international communication on such a large scale as English has done in the past few decades". As a consequence of the above, the present world constitutes an arena of globalising phenomena determined by the global rank of the English language and the ensuing rise of the popularity of Anglo-Saxon culture, out of which both (being interrelated) exert a profound impact on other linguistic-cultural-communicative communities in reference to different walks of life. With reference to the Polish language and its culture, one can identify, *inter alia*, changes in the rules of Polish politeness which are associated with the adoption of the ease of manner (i.e. the informal manner of behaving and communicating) characteristic of the American lifestyle (cf. Kowalikowa 2005: 465). The phenomenon in question in turn leads to lowering of Polish linguistic norms, which in the final effect contributes to Polish language deterioration (Gajda 2008, Gajda 2012, Kita 2012, Nowowiejski 2005, Podracki 2012, Zydek-Bednarczuk 2012). The ease of manner mentioned above is clearly detectable in the language varieties of the media (Bugajski 2006: 208, Bielak 2013, Grzenia 2006), among which the communication of social networks constitutes a particularly rich source of examples of informal communicative forms. As stated by Wrona (2014: 11), the variety of communication characteristic of social networks is based on colloquialness, emotionality (including both humorous and aggressive aspects), borrowings (especially of English origin), violation of orthography, punctuation and rules of politeness and no use of formal ways of addressing people. Notably, the language of social networks also rests on abbreviated communication, i.e. it is regulated by language economicalness realised by syntactic minimalism, acronyms and emoticons. The presentation of information on an Internet profile, therefore, exemplifies communicatively terse messages (Tez 2011, Facebook zmienia nasz język).

Since Internet communication enjoys immense popularity among teenagers, the language of social networks (affected by the American ease of manner generating the lowering of Polish linguistic norms) may be expected to influence high school students' communicative resources and their application in the classroom. Accordingly, the research presented in the subsequent part of the paper will be devoted to identifying interdependencies between social network communication, high school learners' communicative skills and the occurrence of communicative inertia in the Polish high school classroom.

## RESEARCH

The research is aimed at identifying the communicative profile of the space of the Polish high school classroom in reference to the impact of the language of Internet social networks on high school students' communicative skills and

the influence of the aforementioned skills on the occurrence of communicative inertia in the Polish high school classroom. In consequence, the research seeks to find answers to two basic research questions complemented by a number of assumptions.

Research questions:

1. Does the language of social networks have an impact on high school students' verbal resources that are applied in the classroom?
2. Does the influence under analysis, if any, contribute to the occurrence of high school students' verbal inertia in the Polish high school classroom?

Assumptions that underlie the research questions:

1. The communicative terseness of Internet social networks is directly reflected in the language of Polish teenagers.
2. In other words, the communication of some Polish high school students is characterised by snippiness to some extent originating from the language of social networks influenced by the ease of manner of American origin.
3. The snippiness in question in turn contributes to the occurrence of communicative inertia characteristic of the Polish high school classroom.

The research is based on an interview which was conducted with 30 students learning at different Polish high schools. The interview consisted of the enquiries presented below.

1. How often do you communicate via social networks?
2. What role does social network communication play in your life?
3. Do you pay attention to orthography and punctuation while communicating via social networks?
4. How do you address people while communicating via social networks?
5. What are your messages and/or posts like in terms of language style?
6. What language do you use while talking without any preparation about literature, poetry or art during classes?
7. How do you evaluate the participation of students in discussions held in the classroom?
8. How do you evaluate the language skills of students participating in discussions in the classroom?
9. Do you think that the way you communicate in social networks affects the way you communicate in the classroom?

The responses of the students participating in the interview have provided material that will be analysed in reference to the questions underlying the research. In other words, the aforementioned basis will enable one to sketch the communicative profile of the space of the Polish high school classroom in terms

of the influence of communication used in social networks on high school students' verbal communicative resources and the impact of the above on the appearance of communicative inertia in the Polish high school classroom.

## ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

This section of the paper will demonstrate the analysis of the responses given by the research participants. The interpretation of the research material will be provided with reference to the order of the questions underlying the interview scenario used to gather required information. The information presented in this section will be provided in the form of a numbered list.

1. The opinions expressed by the research participants clearly point to the extreme popularity of social network communication among high school students.
  - a. The responses provided by the students that highlight the popularity of social network communication:
    - all my friends and I communicate via social networks exceedingly often,
    - today I've been writing with my friends all day,
    - I've been communicating via Facebook all the time both at school during lessons and breaks and after school either at home or anywhere I stay,
    - I communicate via social networks very often: at school during boring or not very important lessons and all the afternoon and evening when I'm at home,
    - I contact friends via social networks even at night,
    - the first thing I do when I come back home after school is to enter Facebook and I start writing and I do it till the end of the day,
    - I'm aware that I am addicted to social networks. I can't help it – but my friends are even more obsessed as they spend all their school classes writing on Facebook, whereas I personally do it only during the lessons which I'm not interested in or in my free time,
    - we talk to peers and, meanwhile, we write on Facebook,
    - in my case contact via social networks takes place every day but not all day, e.g. one hour on average or once or twice a day.
    - I communicate via social networks several times a week, e.g. three or four times.
  - b. The answer that indicates no use of social network communication:
    - some students have no Facebook but these cases are really rare and such teenagers are treated as dissenters or strange.
2. The research participants identify two basic functions of social network communication, i.e. the social and informative one.

- a. The opinions that point to the informative function of social networks:
  - if one wants to obtain information from classmates, the most popular way is to contact them via the classroom Facebook group,
  - if some information appears on Facebook, within a short period of time (e.g. five minutes) almost everyone knows about it.
- b. The answers that express the social function of the networks under analysis:
  - social networks provide the source of basic contacts with peers,
  - without Facebook one cannot function among teenagers,
  - if you have no time to meet with peers, you can always contact them via social networks (even when you are involved in some other activities, you use Facebook just in the meantime).
3. On the basis of the above it is assumed that social network communication, performing two key functions (the informative function and the social one), plays a significant role in the life of teenagers and constitutes an integral element of their everyday existence.
4. Significantly, the students' responses point to a careless attitude to the problem of orthography and punctuation with reference to social network communication:
  - I pay attention neither to orthography nor punctuation while writing on social networks,
  - I write disregarding the majority of orthographic and punctuation rules; from time to time I only check capital letters,
  - I don't use Polish characters while writing on social networks, there is no time to do it,
  - I write anything to express the meaning,
  - orthography – yes, punctuation – no,
  - I pay attention to grammar but other things don't count.
5. The answers of the research participants also allow one to characterise the way of addressing people on social networks as informal, occasionally rude or even vulgar:
  - I use names or nicks to address peers on Facebooks,
  - I address people using very informal expressions, which would be offensive when used in the case of people you don't know well,
  - I don't pay attention to polite addressative forms on social networks,
  - I generally try to be polite while addressing people on social networks but if I know someone really well, I sometimes address them using rude or vulgar words, which is supposed to be funny,
  - I address peers using such not very polite forms as 'parówko', 'cwelu', 'kupsztalu' or even more vulgar expressions that shouldn't be cited.
6. Additionally, the research participants point to communicative terseness that is typical of social networks:
  - information on social networks is most important and not the form of language, i.e. the language of social networks conforms to the rule: 'The maximum of information and the minimum of form',

- since it is the content of a message that is significant, there appear many abbreviated forms (bd, xd, nq, jj, kk, thx, spoks),
  - the forms that are easily encountered on social networks are elliptical sentences and emoticons.
7. Other characteristic elements of social network communication enumerated by students include informal and slang expressions, mistakes and swear words.
  8. On the basis of the above it is concluded that the communication under analysis, apart from being characterised by communicative terseness, clearly rests on low communicative resources.
  9. Since social network communication is extremely popular among teenagers (they communicate via Facebook continually), it becomes evident that high school students are regularly exposed to the restricted code of social networks based on communicative terseness and low communicative resources.
  10. It is assumed that the aforementioned exposure of high frequency must have an impact on the use of high school students' communicative resources in formal situations.
  11. Additionally, the responses provided by the research participants highlight the limited participation of students in discussions held in the classroom.
    - a. The answers that point to students' low communicative activeness during lessons:
      - only several people in my class are active and talk a lot during classes. The others are silent,
      - in my class generally 7 people out of 25 express their opinions in the classroom forum during a lesson,
      - in all the classes I know very few students are active,
      - 12 people out of 35 students in my class talk willingly in the classroom in front of the teacher,
      - in my class one half of the students participates in discussions – but our teachers say that we are a good class and in other classes the situation is worse.
  12. The students' answers also point to the necessity of improving students' communicative skills presented in classroom discussions on literature, poetry and art:
    - I talk about literature, poetry and art in a very informative and short way. I simply can't talk about a given subject for 10 minutes,
    - two thirds of my class, while talking, only transmits information paying no attention to the beauty of speaking. They communicate in an abbreviated way saying what is important,
    - only five people in my class can talk without any preparation about poetry, art and literature using formal language and presenting high language skills (in terms of talking with preparation, the group of speakers is a bit larger),

- I can discuss various problems using formal language during classes and I can speak formally about art or literature both with or without preparation but not everyone can do it,
  - some people cannot talk formally in the class forum at all (even with preparation).
13. In view of the above it may be stated that the communication of some Polish learners represents communicative snippiness which resembles the terseness of social networks.
14. It is therefore postulated that the aforementioned communicative snippiness and limited participation of students in classroom discussions partly derives from the influence of social network communication.
- a. The students' answers confirming the above assumption:
- there is influence of social network communication on our communicative skills. If we frequently communicate in a given way, we get used to this style – so the form of language that is used in social networks is copied in the classroom by some students,
  - the impact of social network communication on one's communicative skills depends on a person. The situation is difficult for some students as among teenagers, when we meet with each other, we also use the type of language similar to social network communication. However, only some of us are able to shift from very informal communication of the social network type (which is used so frequently both in the net and in reality) to formal speaking required in the classroom. Some have difficulty doing this.
15. Taking into consideration the opinions presented above, it is asserted that social network communication characterised by communicative terseness exerts a considerable impact on high school students' verbal resources, inclusive of those applied in the classroom.
16. It must be highlighted that the communicative terseness typical of both social networks and Polish high school students constitutes the reflection of the American ease of manner.
17. Additionally, it is presumed that the communicative terseness characteristic of the Polish high school classroom contributes to the occurrence of classroom verbal inertia represented by Polish high school students.
- a. The students' responses that constitute the confirmation of the above assumption:
- students who possess high communicative skills talk freely in the classroom but they represent the minority,
  - those who can't speak formally keep quiet. They don't talk voluntarily. If they are questioned, they start answering but they don't talk for long and don't represent a high level.
18. In other words, the terseness of social network communication (shaped by the rules of the American ease of manner) is reflected in the communicative resources

of Polish teenagers applied both in classroom and everyday communication, which provides good grounds for the appearance of communicative inertia in the Polish high school classroom.

19. In the face of the above, it is suggested that the communicative terseness traced in the Polish high school classroom can be reduced by applying the concept of the transcommunicator by Puppel (2007) to English language teaching and learning in Poland.

### TRANSCOMMUNICATOR

The communicator in question is defined in reference to the transnational-transcultural-translanguage context. In other words, the transcommunicator constitutes the output of communicative processes characteristic of the TRANS-perspective of language contact based on the parity of the native and non-native language and their cultures (Puppel 2007: 85-90). While entering linguistic contacts, the communicator in question strives to preserve their linguistic-cultural identity and approaches both their native language and culture and non-native languages and cultures as structures possessing equal status. The aforementioned equality relations originate from the appropriately generated awareness of native communicators with reference to the status of their own native language and culture as opposed to the status of the non-native language and its culture. The equal awareness status of the native and non-native language and their cultures existing among the members of a given language-communication community prevents pushing the native language (of usually weaker strength in comparison with the vitality of the non-native language) to the lower (i.e. looser) awareness position. The concept of the transcommunicator therefore refers to the idea of strong identification with one's native language and culture and its protective role in native language preservation described by Labov (1963), Gumperz/ Blom (1971) and Trudgill (2002) *inter alios*.

In consequence, the transcommunicator aims at developing the bilingual competence founded on the native culture of their linguistic community and affected by the process of broadening during which the cultural competence of the native language constitutes a strong foundation on which the cultural competence of the non-native language builds on (Puppel 2007: 89).

The concept of the transcommunicator, based on the parity of cultures, is an idea which carries implications for the field of foreign language pedagogy and allows equipping students with the communicative skills of global communicators who are able to maintain their language and cultural identity in language contacts (Puppel 2007: 90). In the case of the Polish language-communication community, the transcommunicator should be formed in the process of English language teaching and learning. The English language classroom in Poland exemplifies a space which

is not characterised by transcommunicative processes, i.e. the process of English language teaching and learning in Poland rests on the unequal relationship between the English language and the Polish one. The analysis of the awareness of Polish students of the English language with regards to the status of their native language as opposed to the English one shows that the relationship between the English language and the Polish language is of the winner-loser type (Puppel/ Puppel 2005). In other words, the English language possesses the dominant status, whereas the Polish language has been pushed to a lower awareness position, which means that the aforementioned awareness of Polish students learning the English language should be raised. As described by Bielak (2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2014), the process of raising the awareness in question via cultural competence widening should constitute some part of general communication skills development (numerous elements of communication are deeply culturally determined) as the awareness of the existence of communicative aesthetics among the Polish students of the English language is low. In other words, the formation of the transcommunicator in the process of English language teaching and learning should be aimed at evolving the communicative style based on language beauty (i.e. high communicative resources). Therefore, the above approach, while focusing on general communication skills, enables one to develop the communicative resources of both the Polish language and the English one. Since communication is strongly culturally conditioned, the introduction of Polish elements of communicative style and their presentation on an equal footing with English aspects of communicative style will lead to strengthening the awareness status of the Polish language, general communicative skills being developed.

In accordance with the above, the formation of the transcommunicator in the English language classroom in Poland may be viewed as a framework whose application may contribute to modifying the negative facets of the present communicative profile of the space of the Polish high school classroom, i.e. the impact of the communicative aspects of social networks on high school students' verbal communicative skills and the occurrence of communicative inertia in the Polish high school classroom.

## CONCLUSIONS

The paper has provided the analysis of the space of the Polish high school classroom with reference to a set of interrelations and interdependencies existing between such phenomena as Polish-English language contacts, social network communication, classroom communicative terseness and classroom communicative inertia. The remedy for the negative tendencies described in the article can be provided by the idea of the transcommunicator, i.e. the communicator who manages to retain their linguistic-cultural identity by viewing both their native language and

culture and non-native languages and cultures as equal. In view of the fact that it is usually the distortion of the idea of equality that leads to different clashes, the concept of the transcommunicator based on the parity of cultures may be also regarded as a supportive method used to resolve conflicts of the international and intercultural type. The idea of cultural equality promoted by the theory in question is of vital importance especially at present – when the world has already become a global village in which intercultural conflicts of any type are exceedingly dangerous and many countries must face problems connected with immigrants.

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