

WHAT DOES ENGLISH AS A WORLD LANGUAGE MEAN FOR UKRAINIAN FUTURE LANGUAGE TEACHERS?

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Learning European languages, especially English, is commonly recognized in Ukraine today as an educational task of primary importance. It is believed that foreign languages take the second place after Ukrainian in terms of importance and special attention [2].

At present, 16 foreign languages are available for learning in Ukrainian secondary schools. The first foreign language is studied in a general 11-year school from the 1st grade, and there is a tendency to introduce the second one from the 5th grade. Arguments for the inclusion of a certain foreign language into the school curriculum differ. In some regions that border on eastern European states, the languages of their neighbours with whom they share many historical developments, national roots and cultural traditions are popular – Polish, Romanian, Hungarian. But the group of majority languages ranged on a basis of a simple head count, say in the 2009-2010 academic year, includes Spanish – 25 685 pupils, French – 225 038 learners, German – 668 771 learners, and English – 3 630 475 pupils (about 90% of the total number) [2].

The figures mentioned above look extremely impressive if we remember that English gained entry into secondary education schools in this country only at the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century. Today, the popularity of the English language in Ukraine is strongly supported by its globally accepted position of the language of international communication – ‘a lingua franca’.

The perspective of using a lingua franca is well known to all former Soviet and eastern European socialist republics where all through the Soviet period of their history the Russian language was officially proclaimed and promoted as the

language of international communication for political and ideological reasons. The new generation of young people born in the independent post-Soviet states is quickly adjusting to new circumstances of the growth of English as a world language.

But in countries like Ukraine, where citizens are reduced in their possibilities to travel abroad freely and get exposed to the use of English in a natural setting, language teachers turn to be the first people to help learners understand the process of internationalization of English.

To be able to teach their pupils communicate more successfully across cultures in a multicultural world, language teachers should possess, in G. Willems' words, 'a global frame of mind'[3, p.19]. That is they should be encouraged, educated and trained to understand the importance of responsible and competent intercultural communication and of preparing learners for it.

With the idea in mind to stipulate the development of the language teacher's intercultural competence, his/her capacity for co-operation and social insights and skills, the student teachers of the Ukrainian and English languages of the Institute of Philology and Journalism of the Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University (Ukraine) are suggested to take an optional course under the title "Developing intercultural competence through English" within the framework of a joint Polish-Ukrainian project initiated by the English Philology Departments of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow (Poland, Prof. Anna Niżegorodcew) and Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University in Ivano-Frankivsk (Ukraine, Ass. Professor Yakiv Bystrov) [1]. The graduate student language teachers listen to lectures, do some reading tasks and analyse reading materials, participate in discussions and socio-cultural projects.

They discuss the role of English as a modern lingua franca from the perspective that it: serves representatives of different cultures as a medium of international/ intercultural communication in all spheres of activity; helps people to know more about other cultures and to make their native culture known to others; sets an educational problem of dissociation/ relocation of English as a language of international communication from the role of the language of English-native countries only; presupposes inclusion into school syllabi of teaching cultures both

of native and non-native speakers who use English to communicate with each other; suggests a multi-faceted view of culture in English course-books, which should include into the language learning content speakers of different native languages communicating with each other through English.

At the end of the academic course, students are given an essay topic “What does English as a lingua franca mean for me as a person, as a student, as a teacher?”. The points highlighted in answers to the question may be divided into the groups of personal, educational and professional meanings. To get a more specific idea of students’ answers, we can look through generalized keynotes and some quotes.

Among the *personal meanings*, the following ideas of English as a lingua franca (LF) dominate:

- it is a means of mutual intercultural understanding (e.g. "English as a lingua franca is used by me and my friends from the USA and Germany as a medium of mutual intercultural understanding. Every week I communicate with them", or “English is a worldwide language that helps us to communicate with people in another country and to learn their customs and traditions”);

- as a universal means of communication it may substitute other, more difficult, languages (e.g. “I’m very glad that English is a universal language because if I want to go to China, it is not necessarily to know Chinese. I may use English. It is simple”);

- a way to promote one’s own culture (e.g. “...to feel satisfaction of (...) discovery of Ukraine by people of other nationalities”);

- it also sufficiently increases the range of potential participants of communication from around the world (e.g. “If you speak English, you can communicate with over 400 million other people”);

- it allows more open communication (e.g. “Sometimes you can trust lots of things from your life to a stranger in the Internet than to the person, who's close to you”);

- it is important for personal development (e.g. “Any educated person simply must have English language as it is the key to the person’s future self-education and

self-improvement”, or “With a help of English as a lingua franca I would like become more culturally aware person”);

- it is an important factor of more comfortable and safer travel round the world with no fear of being not understood (e.g. “Travelling becomes more exciting and informative, when we know the language”);

- it is a tool for getting new knowledge and impressions (e.g. “It’s like a ticket for (...) some unforgettable memories”);

- it can give a better access to paper-based and technology-mediated (Internet, video, radio, TV) resources (e.g. “I had lots of occasions to ensure myself that English is a key to the information in the modern world”, or “Most international documents, articles, literary works written instructions are in English”);

- it gives first-hand access to Anglophone cultural pieces so that their original meaning would not get lost (e.g. “English as a lingua franca means for me (as a person) that I can read the works of British and American authors in the original, as well as books, translated into English from other languages; watch American and British films in the original”);

- it’s an added bonus, new opportunity in life which makes it more successful (e.g. “Not to know English is to lose the key to the doors of the world”, or “English is an international language that gives many possibilities”);

- it raises self-esteem, and gives a feeling of freedom, on the one hand, and a feeling of belonging to some special community of people, on the other (e.g. “Knowledge of foreign languages has always been something unusual, like a present or a super-skill”, or “To my mind, it makes me self-sufficient person”, or “Specially for me, English as a lingua franca is (...) the language of progressive humanity”);

- it is a possibility to be helpful to other people (e.g. “When you know English, it gives you an opportunity to help. For instance, when you see, that a foreigner has got lost or asks you how to get somewhere, you will have such a chance to help him and (...) be proud of yourself, because a lot of people want to help, but they don’t know language”).

The following *educational meanings* of English as a LF are expressed:

- it is a means of getting intercultural information (e.g. “There are a lot of students exchange programs, which help to expand our awareness about life of other countries and English helps to implement it in real life”);

- it is a source of most recent educational information in different academic subjects (e.g. “Also I can use scientific literature in my study, because English is the primary language of the world of science”, or “There are some web-sites where we can find online lectures in English by the famous professors and make our scientific outlook wider”);

- it sets new professional objectives for the student teachers of English (e.g. “The spread of English as an international lingua franca has implications for teacher education in that it challenges both the purposes for which learners are studying the language and the uses to which they put their developing language proficiency”);

- it influences the development of academic study skills (e.g. “Using English as a lingua franca helps to develop creative, analytical and lateral thinking skills of students, and to encourage individuality”, or “English as a lingua franca for me as a student is the basis for the development of my academic capacity”);

- it ensures more productive use of modern information and communication technology and products within a shorter time span (e.g. “It reduces the time lost on obtaining the necessary information”, or “In the web you can find a wealth of information in English, often such data are more recent and informative”);

- it is a tool of communication with peers abroad (e.g. “Students can travel to international conferences (...) if they know English”, or “As a student I can easily establish relations with students all over the world using e-mail, Skype, Facebook. We may discuss scientific projects, (...) talk about higher education in our countries, students’ life and entertainment”);

- it is a key to get education abroad which might open new prospects in life (e.g. “As a student, English as lingua franca provides me with a great opportunity to study abroad, to communicate with my peers from other countries (France, Denmark, Germany etc.) ...”, “Studying abroad is a ticket for better life, which can give paying job and financial independence”);

- it may be a source of some additional earnings for students (e.g. “... in our country, more and more people want to learn the language, so students can work in their spare time as tutors of English, or even at advertising agencies as a copy-writer of materials in English”);

- it raises linguistic awareness in general and helps to understand other languages better, L1 included (e.g. “I like English and I think that any foreign language helps to understand your own language”).

The group of ideas on **occupational meanings** of English as a world language includes the following sayings:

- teaching English as a LF opens a perspective of familiarizing learners with the cultures of other countries, both well-known and less-known, finding out differences and similarities between them (e.g. “We can provide activities that focus on the differences between the culture of the ELF speakers, target cultures and native speakers’ culture”);

- it inspires the teacher of English to focus on interlinguistic connections and intracultural awareness in teaching languages (e.g. “English as a lingua franca means for me as a teacher of English that using English, we can teach Ukrainian and on the contrary”);

- it needs some special professional skills (e.g. “The new use of English and resulting changes may lead to a need to modify particular traditions, models and content of teaching”);

- it demands constant updating of the teacher’s professional knowledge and skills (e.g. “English as the international language of communication is constantly updated, so the teacher should enrich vocabulary (...) and assimilate new information”)

- it sets some new social and moral responsibilities before the teacher in the eyes of his/her learners (e.g. “Teachers of English need to understand the implications of the unprecedented spread of the language and the complex decisions they will be required to take”, or “I hold the belief that education is fundamental to enable a nation to progress”);

- it gives access to other people's experience in the profession (e.g. "Also we can use foreign experience");

- it sets a new task of delivering to the learners the importance of studying English as a means of international communication and teaching them necessary communicative strategies (e.g. "Teacher of English is a person that shows that English is a foreign language that unites many countries. The main aim of the teacher of English is to make every pupil understand that English is an international language and it can be used to communicate with not only native English speakers but also with non-native speakers", or "... helping learners develop interaction strategies that will promote friendly relations");

- it opens new prospects of professional improvement (e.g. "English as a lingua franca means for teaches using a great variety of foreign professional magazines, newspapers and books that can help them to be prepared for the lessons providing English teaching with innovations");

- it is a big plus when applying for a good job in another field than education in the future (higher salary in the home country, a possibility to find a job abroad, better prepared CV, more chances to get promotion, a possibility of earning some extra money by teaching English or translating from or into English) (e.g. "It is a must for the XXI century professional, no matter what job to choose", or "By having good knowledge in English, I believe that I would be able to succeed well in a company", or "That is the opportunity to work abroad, have decent wages and provide family and others");

- it is beneficial for expanding business-contacts (negotiating, advertising, joint ventures) (e.g. "Plenty of companies and firms arrange deals with foreign partners, that's why English is essential", or "Who knows, maybe in future I'll be a businessman from Ukraine, who will have deals with representatives from hundreds of countries. In other words, English as lingua franca is my key for perspective life").

Respondents also admitted an opposite side of learning and spreading English as a LF by non-native speakers – it may also lead to simplification and deviation of the native English language norms with far-fetching consequences (e.g. "But from another side, lingua franca makes a lot of problems in pupil's education, because

lingua franca is a pared down and simplified version and it contributes to the appearance of mistakes and deviations from the norm. It's a reduced and simplified kind of English, it promotes errors and 'anything goes', it's a model for imitation, and therefore a single variety, monolithic ... – said scientist Jennifer Jenkins”.

To summarize it all, it is worth underlying that Ukrainian future teachers of English are open to recognizing the role of English as a modern lingua franca, but the problem of its implementation in the classroom remains.

References:

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