

ІННОВАЦІЙНІ ПІДХОДИ ДО МЕТОДИКИ ВИКЛАДАННЯ У ВИЩІЙ ШКОЛІ

УДК 811.111:378

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ENGLISH IN A UKRAINIAN UNIVERSITY: A LINGUA FRANCA, NOT A LINGUA FRANKENSTEIN

This article presents research on attitudes towards English in a Ukrainian university where English is being used as a medium of instruction—that is, where academic classes are taught in the English language. The data show that individuals do not see English as a threat to Russian or Ukrainian. English is perceived as a necessary language for international communication. Moreover, it is one of many foreign languages that are necessary for international communication.

Key words: English as a medium of instruction, English for international communication, Ukraine

Previous analysis on the role of English in Western Europe can be grouped into three themes:

1. People feel they have no choice but to study English, and English is therefore a threat to additional languages in the region. Wilton and De Houwer write, «English is currently a lingua franca that educated people throughout Europe are expected to know...whatever variety of English is used—one has to learn it» [14, p. 5–6]. Tosi says, «the unofficial but increasingly hegemonic role of English as a lingua franca is, despite the European Union's (EU's) official policy of multilingualism, a serious threat to national languages and multilingualism in Europe» [13, p. 9]. Phillipson asks, «Are scholars whose mother tongue is not English...involved in a Faustian pact with a devilish linguistic cuckoo in building up the knowledge society that the European Union proclaims its commitment to?» [7, p. 14]. In Denmark, there has been extensive discussion about the loss of Danish to English in the universities, or at least the threat of loss [3].

2. English is at the top of a hierarchy of languages. Seidlhofer says, «all languages are supposed to be equal but English is obviously 'more equal than others'» [10, p. 139]. Risager alludes to English-only policies in universities as a practice of language hierarchization—choosing a language that «simultaneously excludes all other languages, specifically the language(s) that compete with it in the context in question» [8, p. 115]. Josephson notes that in Sweden, Swedish and English take supremacy, followed by «major» European and Scandinavian languages, then Scandinavian minority and immigrant languages [5]. All these researchers demonstrate the presence of both English and additional languages—and the power struggles between them—in the European ecology of language.

3. English is the lingua franca of Europe, but people still have possibilities for multilingual language development. Cenoz and Jessner refer to English as the «second language of the European Union» [1, p. viii], while also pointing out that people are learning English as a third language if they already speak or study a national language, a regional minority language, and/or a language from outside the EU (e.g. Chinese, Turkish). Ethnographic research in a university in Sweden found that teachers allowed for dynamic use of multiple languages for exams, and students use Swedish during discussions where English might be expected, marking that switch to

Swedish discursively [11]. Hélot and Laoire describe research studies conducted in England, Luxembourg, and France (among other places) that advocate for what they call the *pedagogy of the possible*, which encourages teachers and learners «to respond to all possibilities and potentialities at the classroom level, thus forging one's own policies that are locally effective and empowering» [4, p. xvii].

The relationship between the view of English as a Lingua Franca and the use of English as the medium of instruction (i.e. teach non-language focused classes in English) is noticeable. In Portugal, it has been said that European university policymakers must «confront the language question and think about changing their curricula from local languages to the international standard: the English language» [6, 241]. Phillipson quotes the president of Universities UK: «The concept of the bilingual university is already being widely discussed in Eastern Europe; you can now do a medical degree in English in Hungary, for example. *And that's a trend that is going to continue*» [7, p. 16, emphasis added]. These statements demonstrate a sense of resignation about the inevitable role of English in European higher education closer to research theme 1.

In practice, the number of universities in the EU offering at least one degree program in English varies widely but is generally higher with each passing year. In Italy, the percentage of Italian universities offering programs taught entirely in English ranges from 10% to 44% depending on whether it is a Bachelor's, Master's, or Ph.D. program [2]. The number of programs is increasing not only in areas that emphasize English for business communication, but in social sciences as well [2]. In Finland, the number of international degree programs quadrupled between 1996 and 2008; of the 280 international programs in 2008, all but 7 were conducted in English [9]. The data from Finland suggest that in the context of international higher education programs, even a national majority language can become minoritized due to the popularity of offering some university programs in English.

In terms of Ukrainian government policy and reports, English cannot be understood in Ukraine to be a minority language. Individuals in Ukraine who speak English as a native language were not even counted in the 2001 census. In reports from the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science (MON) to the Council of Europe, English is regarded as a foreign language and a lingua franca in an age of globalization, but not as a medium of instruction.

At the university level, English-medium programs for specialties other than foreign language philology, foreign literature, or translation are rare compared to European countries. Two graduate assistants at the University of Pennsylvania reviewed the Web sites of Level III and IV public and private universities in 4 major areas of Ukraine (Kyiv city, Dnipropetrovs'k, the Crimean peninsula, and L'viv). They found only 6% of universities (10 out of 156) stated that they offer English-medium courses (in this context, understood both as programs of study and groups taking their subjects in English) outside of EFL, translation, or literature courses. Nevertheless, the growth of English-medium programs in Ukrainian higher education is likely to continue [12].

An in-depth understanding of the role of English in Ukrainian higher education comes from a year-long ethnographic study I conducted at a private university at a large city in eastern Ukraine. The purpose of the research was to determine the degree to which studying in English represents a threat to Ukrainian, the state language, or Russian, the language of wider communication in large cities in eastern Ukraine. I observed discipline and practical classes taught in English and conducted interviews with teachers and students in those classes (n=30).

In interviews, teachers and students agreed that English operates as a foreign language in this context. Moreover, because English is a foreign language, they believe studying in English is not a threat to Russian or Ukrainian. Aleksandr Nikolayevich¹ noted the following about English: «As for English, the strategy is to give students an opportunity to improve their *foreign language* skills as much as they can» (paraphrased quote in original English, field notes, March 25, 2011). Sveta said it's «impossible» for English to limit the native language because «we're living in our country» but «maybe if we moved to some [English] native speaking country there would be some difficulties with our language» (original language from audio file, April 7, 2011).

¹All names of teachers and students in this article are pseudonyms. As in classrooms, teachers are identified by first name and patronymic. Students are identified by first name only.

When I asked students more specifically if they worry that studying in English will limit their development of Russian or Ukrainian, four students and one teacher said no because they speak Russian at home or elsewhere. Ksenia described studying in English as follows:

Ksenia: Um, for example, uh, my friends and I when we go something, somewhere to relax, to the cafe or the cinema, we sometimes just speaking and uh, forget the Russian word, forget the Ukrainian word, we start to think about English words. And it's always we just speaking and using Ukrainian, Russian, English, three languages at all. We just forget a word in English, use Russian, use Ukrainian, forget the word in Ukrainian, use Russian, use English, forget the word in Russian, use Ukrainian, English all the time.

Bridget: Wow. So what does that mean for you in terms of your development in those languages?

Ksenia: It means that I need to learn more. To learn how to just, (pause) turn off English and start to speak Russian. Turn off Russian, and start speaking English. Not mix them at all.

Bridget: Okay. And how does taking classes in English affect that problem?

Ksenia: Mm, taking classes.

Bridget: Does it make it harder to uh, develop your Russian and Ukrainian? Do you worry that it's hurting your Russian or Ukrainian?

Ksenia: No, it's not hurting our language, it just uh makes us think on three languages. On the one time. We just uh think one idea on Russian, then we just automatically translate it on English, automatically translate it in Ukrainian. (Original language from audio file, February 24, 2011).

In this passage, Ksenia acknowledges that she occasionally forgets words in any of the three languages she knows; when that happens, she simply substitutes a word from another language. When I asked her if she saw any connection between taking classes and her development of Russian and Ukrainian, she immediately replied that studying in English gives her an opportunity to be trilingual. In other words, in Ksenia's view English as a medium of instruction adds a third language to her life rather than subtracting Russian or Ukrainian from it. Her worries are not about the development of one language or another, but rather learning more vocabulary and developing her ability to keep the three languages separate.

Consistent with the view of English as a lingua franca, when I asked students whether they saw any connection between studying in English and European integration (i.e., Ukraine's political, economic, and or social integration with the European Union) many students said the connection was related to English's position as an international language. Nina answered: «almost every European countries speaks English, so Ukraine also has to develop the level of the knowing English» (original language from audio file, March 10, 2011). Pyotr said it is important because English is an international language, and therefore one needs to study it.

When I asked about the future of languages in Ukraine in 25 years, one student, Nikolai, said that all people in Ukraine will speak English. When I asked him why, he also replied with a reference to Europe, but insisted Ukrainian and Russian will be present and are just as necessary in Ukraine:

Bridget: Which languages do you think will be common in Ukraine? **Общепринятый в Украине?** In 25 years? **Через 25 лет?**

Nikolai: You said about Russian and Ukrainian or...

Bridget: Which languages, yeah.

Nikolai: Ah, Russian, Ukrainian, English? Three. I don't know how it will but I want to, to, (short pause)

Bridget: Ну, давайте по-русски.

Nikolai: Да нет, я знаю, просто думаю, какой язык.

Bridget: Ok, хорошо.

Nikolai: I think it will be, there are, all of our people will talk in English.

Bridget: Uhu, А почему? Why?

Nikolai: Er. because all Europe speak English. Not all but almost. We must have a native language, for example Ukrainian or Russian but I think that all people in our country must know English. (Original language from audio file, February 24, 2011)

Nikolai further supported his point of view by explaining his understanding of communication in Spain: «Not a lot people in Spain knows English... and I'm think it's not good. Because, for

example, [if] I come to Spain, and I don't know Spanish and I cannot talk with them because they don't know Russian, Ukrainian or English. It's not good» (original language from audio file, February 24, 2011). Another student, Lyuba, retold a story she heard from her teacher. Allegedly, a German came to Ukraine for a business project and found that Ukrainians who were to participate in the project (who were in their 40s) did not know English. Her teacher concluded from this story, «it's a problem for our country, that people don't know any languages» (original language from audio file, April 4, 2011). This story suggests that being able to speak English in Ukraine is important in order to have business relationships and joint business projects with people from European countries. Both stories indicate the perceived importance of using English as a *lingua franca*, that is, for communication between people with different native languages.

The most surprising finding in my research was that students viewed not only English, Ukrainian, and Russian but also additional foreign languages as necessary for communication in the future. Ksenia's answer to another interview question illustrates this point:

Bridget: Okay. Um, how important are these languages for finding work in the future?

Ksenia: I think, uh, that these languages are very important just for nowadays. Because uh, when people apply for work, they have to know not less than three languages. For example, Ukrainian, Russian, and German. Or, Ukrainian, Russian, and (pause) English. Ukrainian, Russian, or Spanish. Because you have to know, uh, one mother tongue language, um but the other mother tongue language, Russian, in brackets of course. And the other foreign language. For example, I want to learn Chinese, to know four languages. To use them in future. I think it will help me to apply for work. (Original language from audio file, February 24, 2011)

Another student in English-medium classes, Evgeny, also talked about his desire to learn Chinese in the future because it is important to have economic ties to China nowadays. He has already studied Ukrainian, Russian, and German, so his chances of learning to speak Chinese proficiently are high. At the same time he expressed shame that he speaks Russian more frequently at home because «our national language is Ukrainian» (original language from audio file, March 3, 2011).

In practice, students of the third year at the university were studying a second foreign language such as French, Spanish, or German. In one English-medium class, I observed a group of these students switch among five languages: English, Russian, French, Spanish, and German! While the last three languages were mainly expressed as «yes» and there was much giggling while using those words, the fact that these languages appeared in the conversation at all indicates that the students are in an active process of learning and using those languages.

Conclusion. The data presented here from my research study show that of the three models or themes mentioned at the beginning of this article, the best fit from the point of view of teachers and students is number 3. Students and teachers do not feel forced to teach or learn English, and it is not replacing Ukrainian or Russian at the top of a language hierarchy. While English is the only foreign language used as a medium of instruction for non-language classes, students in these classes recognize that they have ample opportunities to develop their skills in additional foreign languages.

Of course, one university cannot be understood to represent all universities in all parts of Ukraine. More research is needed in other universities where English is or is not used as a medium of instruction and especially in predominantly Ukrainian-speaking areas of Ukraine to see if attitudes and practices are similar. Nevertheless, these initial findings suggest that English is a *lingua franca*, but not a monster (*lingua Frankenstein*) poised to take over the country.

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У статті розглянуто ставлення до англійської мови в українському університеті, де вона використовується як мова навчання. Отримані дані свідчать про те, що ця мова не сприймається як загроза українській або російській мові, а лише як засіб міжнародної комунікації. Більш того, вона сприймається як одна з багатьох мов, які потрібні для міжнародної комунікації.

Ключові слова: викладання англійською мовою, англійська мова для міжнародної комунікації, Україна.

В статье рассмотрено отношение к английскому языку в украинском университете, где он используется как язык обучения. Полученные данные свидетельствуют о том, что этот язык не воспринимается как угроза украинскому или русскому языку, а только как средство международной коммуникации. Более того, он воспринимается как один из многих языков, необходимых для такой коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: преподавание на английском языке, английский язык для международной коммуникации, Украина.

Одержано 12.09.2013.