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Sociolinguistic aspects of the functioning of English in post-1989 Poland

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Introduction¹

Fine-grained examinations of sociolinguistic phenomena should be pursued with reference to the wider contexts in which they occur. In the era of globalization, numerous phenomena have global reach and investigating the sociolinguistics of English, an unsurpassable *lingua franca* of the present day world, without reference to the broader context of its functioning is like turning a blind eye to an invaluable insight allowing one to gain a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to its actual role and status in a specific locale. Accordingly, sociolinguistic aspects of the functioning of English in a given country, even though locally shaped, should be seen as determined by external, more *global* forces as well. In this light, the present dissertation strives to form solid theoretical and descriptive foundations for the following discussion of the sociolinguistics of English in Poland. This broad state-of-the-art outline gains even greater relevance since it seems to be the first attempt at adopting a holistic integrative approach to elaborate on this subject matter (in Poland). Just as importantly, to do justice to the exploration of the theme one should also take heed of the general, national (synchronic and diachronic) context in which the functioning of English is to be examined. These two perspectives, national and global, seem to be in the case of English of almost equal (profound) importance when pursuing sociolinguistic research concerning its actual role in a given location. Clearly, they allow one to discern, problematize, theorize and comprehensively account for a wide range of the sociolinguistic phenomena occurring in Poland connected with English in the back- and frequently in the foreground.

In line with global (and, importantly, European) trends, the English language in post-1989 Poland has been steadily growing in its importance. The fall of communism fully opened Poland to the processes and phenomena operating in the ever globalizing world (including the unprecedented international spread of English). The sociolinguistics of English in post-transformational Poland cannot, thus, be analyzed and investigated without referring to relevant global forces determining its dispersion and the very formation of its power bases. The selection

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of themes recognized as especially worthy of further examination is based on theoretical and descriptive state-of-the-art knowledge (Chapter 1) concerning the worldwide spread of English and its sociolinguistic functioning in global and local contexts. Specifically, some of the most important aspects discussed in the thesis with respect to the sociolinguistics of English in Poland are the following: (1) the formation of the power bases of English, (2) the dispersion of English in post-1989 Poland (globalization, Europeanization, and language learning), (3) Englishization and Americanization of the Polish language and culture, (4) the stratificational function of English, (5) language planning and policy, (6) English language teaching in Poland, (7) attitudes towards and beliefs about English and its role. In addition, the empirical part of the dissertation examines the *perceived power of English* (i.e. the folk perception of the functioning of English in Poland pointing to its power) by adopting and operationalizing the Kachruvian idea of the concept.

Aims, means and methods

The *prime aims* of this dissertation are to give a comprehensive picture of the selected sociolinguistic aspects of English in post-1989 Poland (Chapters 2, 3 and 4) and to strive for their theorization and generalization (see Conclusion) in the light of recent theories, models and approaches as well as general sociolinguistic patterns and principles emerging from the analyses of its coming into contact with various communities, cultures, and languages around the world (Chapter 1). A vital *secondary aim* of the project is to develop a research procedure (integrated with the insight from the discussed subject matter) allowing one to probe into the perceived role played by English in a specific region (Chapter 4). All of this may be thought to serve the purpose of pursuing the ultimate goal of sketching the sociolinguistics of English in post-1989 Poland. To specify, in order to achieve the particular aims of the project presented above, a decision was made to employ a holistic integrative approach utilizing relevant theoretical, descriptive, and empirical insights from a variety of sources and disciplines. The state-of-the-art knowledge is supplemented with a variety of relevant data and both are treated as indispensable elements of the delineation of the sociolinguistic functioning of English in post-transformational Poland and its theorization. Accordingly, bearing in mind the extensiveness of the task, it has been necessary to rely heavily on relevant synchronic and diachronic research of numerous investigators as well as the following types of data: (1) state-of-the-art evidence, (2) observational evidence, (3) newspaper data and information, (4) research data, (5) statistical figures, (6) national surveys, (7) survey research data. To elaborate, the *means* and *methods* employed in the dissertation to attain the particular aims encompass the following: (1) presenting a comprehensive theoretical state of the art concerning the relevant subject matter and applying it to theorize about the role of the English language in post-1989

Poland, (2) showing the relevance of global forces for the molding of the sociolinguistics of English in Poland, (3) discussing general trends and patterns resultant from the functioning of English in Outer- and Expanding-Circle countries and juxtaposing them with the situation to be found in Poland, (4) integrating relevant discussions, analyses, surveys, reports etc. to build up a comprehensive picture of the functioning of English in post-transformational Poland, (5) complementing the current research with an original empirical study integrating the current theoretical and descriptive insights to examine the *perceived power of English*.

The order of steps taken to fulfill the aforesaid aims of the project is the following:

- Chapter 1 gives an overview of recent approaches and models concerning English as a world language and, thus, provides a conceptual framework which constitutes the general theoretical background, the importance of which is especially great for the theorization of the sociolinguistics of English in Poland. It also provides a broad overview of various sociolinguistic phenomena, issues, and patterns related to the functioning of English as a world language in the global context; accordingly, the chapter serves as a reference point for the complementary discussions concerning English in Poland and facilitates, by enabling a comparison, the comprehension and theorization of the role of English in post-transformational Poland;
- Chapters 2 and 3 delineate the sociolinguistic developments of English as a world language in post-1989 Poland by means of applying a comprehensive approach utilizing state-of-the-art knowledge, various reports, surveys, statistics, and other data compiled by the author from a variety of fields;
- Chapter 4 completes the picture by sketching and discussing Poles' beliefs about and attitudes towards English and its functioning in Poland. It also probes into the folk perception of the power of English (empirical investigation). In contrast to single surveys (frequently unrelated or contradictory to the state-of-the-art knowledge) which focus only on tiny segments of the problem, the one devised by the author was designed in such a way as to integrate it with the mainstream research (its objectives, methods and procedures) and to obtain an insight into a wide array of issues;
- In the concluding part (Conclusion), the author strives to: (1) juxtapose and compare the phenomena found locally in Poland with more general tendencies and patterns as well as (2) to theorize and account for the sociolinguistic functioning of English in post-transformational Poland in the light of recent theories about and approaches to English as a world language.

The holistic integrative project is argued by the author to have numerous implications of a theoretical, descriptive, applied, and methodological nature.