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POLITE AS YOU CAN BE.

TEACHING TO BE POLITE IN ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA

[...] teaching of English as an International Language entails a mindset different from previous approaches to ELT

(Sharifian 2009: 11)

Theoretical considerations

Linguistic politeness in the world

For the purpose of this paper politeness will be understood in the spirit of Wierzbicka's criticism of Gricean maxims, which she describes as "exceedingly ethnocentric" (Wierzbicka 2008: 3), because based exclusively on Anglo-Saxon values. Rather than consider politeness from the perspective of universalism, we will venture to discuss it in terms of sociolinguistic knowledge of different ways of communicating politely: cultural relativism and ethnography of speaking.

Politeness can be realized by different communities and cultures through their use of different politeness strategies. The strategies form part of the communicative competence of the speakers, their knowledge of how to speak to whom, when and what about so that they are not only understood but also appropriate.

Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies, although universalists in provenience, can be used to discuss differences between communities (social variable) and cultures (cultural variable). Their typology includes positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record politeness and bold on record politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987). While positive politeness denotes the speaker's attempts to satisfy the hearer's positive face, that is their need to be noticed, accepted and liked, negative politeness covers attempts to save the hearer's negative face, that is the need for autonomy and independence. The two types can be exemplified with two different ways of offering help: "let me take this for you," where the value is solidarity, and leaving the hearer with a choice: "I can help you with that if you want me to," where the value is respect for independence and distance. Off record politeness is marked by the speaker's indirectness, attempts to save the hearer's negative or positive face by means of hints, allusions and hesitant suggestions, for example: "I have walked a long way" rather than "Can I have a drink?." The value here is lack of imposition, tact, and care for hearer's feelings. On the contrary, bold on record strategy, consists of direct expressions of wants, instructions, refusals etc, e.g. "No" rather than "nor really," "Give me a pen/hand/glass of water," where the value is honesty and low chances of misunderstanding. The level of accepted

directedness will be defined by the speakers' relative status and emergency of the situation but also the cultural preference for strategy choice, e.g. while Anglo-Saxon culture values indirect requests and disagreements in most contexts, cultures such as Russian, Israeli or Polish will see more "closeness" or solidarity in expressing wants and opinions directly (Wierzbicka 2003). The Dutch, opting for tolerance of opinion, express their views in a discussion mildly, which contrasts with a direct, almost aggressive participation style of the Germans (Hofstede 2002). Ways of speaking, like ways of thinking, are culturally-specific.

Speech community as a nest of politeness norms

As it is social and cultural groups who produce, share and carry forward certain norms of polite behaviour, from the perspective of ethnography of communication different cultures, ethnic groups and social strata can understand politeness in different ways. Speech community, understood as people who share a language or dialect, and more specifically, the rules of speaking, norms of interpretation, and discourse strategies, will be the central notion of the next section, in which we look at the differences between English as a Native Language and English as a Lingua Franca.

English as a Native Language and English as a Lingua Franca

Apart from being the mother tongue of approximately 400 million speakers, English is now a means of communication for a population of non-native speakers (including speakers of English as a second language) that outnumbers the native speakers by 3: 1 ratio (Crystal 2003).

The speech community of native users of English, however heterogeneous, is different from the world wide community of users of English as an International Language or Lingua Franca (called henceforth ELF). In fact the communities form inclusive groups: users of ELF can be native speakers, Kachru's Outer Circle speakers (e.g. Indian speakers of English) or Expanding Circle speakers (The Chinese, Poles, etc.). Seen in this light, the speech community of ELF speakers is much more heterogeneous than the Inner Circle (ENL) community.

An issue in this section is whether to be communicatively competent in English as a Native Language means to be equally competent in English in its Lingua Franca variety? If we assumed a positive answer, we would need to conclude that native speakers of English are perfectly competent in ELF. Henry Widdowson once remarked that native speakers of English should in fact learn how to speak ELF, which is a code separate from ENL (Widdowson 2004, public communication). Consequently, the sharing of norms, interpretations and strategies, characteristic for the original Anglo community may be questioned and subject to negotiation, and accommodation processes (in cognitive terms, to *normalization*, as Sifakis 2006 suggests). In this article the negotiation of norms of speaking will refer to the politeness face of communication.

Politeness in ENL versus ELF

As an alternative to Kachru's Inner Circle English, Wierzbicka mentions Anglo-English, as a specific core of values associated with English despite its variation

and change in the world. This core, she says, “is not culturally neutral” (Wierzbicka 2008: 5).

Today English is considered a shared property of native and non-native users and we can hypothesize that not all norms of ENL will be automatically used in ELF. Part of them may be carried through to that variety, as part of “heritage” of the previous “owners of English,” while some others will be not.

In ELF communication, where linguistic and cultural variation is a fact, a crucial issue is its speakers’ comprehensibility, that is the ability to adjust their speaking to the interlocutors’ communicative performance. Consequently, ELF communication is described as much more situation specific than norm driven (Sifakis 2006 after Giles et al. 1991).

Still, research focusing on intercultural pragmatics often shows that there seems to be a problem with the native speaker. The native speaker continues to “haunt” SLA studies and L2 users remain to be “the only group still judged by the standards of another” (Cook, <http://homepage.ntlworld.com>)

Speech acts of L2 users

When we look at studies of specific speech acts, it turns out that non-native speakers’ repertoire, for instance of requests, is much wider than the native speakers’. Ambrose, who studied Romanian teachers of English, observes: “The richness of routines does mark their utterances as non-native, but is that necessarily bad? The native speakers seemed downright inarticulate and dull in comparison” (Ambrose 1995: 5). However, when native speakers evaluate non-natives’ speech acts, often the non-English strategies of politeness used are considered rude and ineffective. For example, when offering cake at a formal dinner party, “encouragers are meant by the Romanians to be a mark of politeness, but for the native speaker of English they have the opposite effect” (Ibidem: 6).

The clue seems to be cultural values behind speech acts: in this case the Anglo rule of independence collides with Romanian value of hospitality, a value shared by Slavonic and many other world cultures.¹ Wierzbicka often quotes Russian as a language which norms differ drastically from Anglo norms. For instance, there is no norm in Russian against making personal remarks or saying what one thinks, or simply “is the truth” (Wierzbicka 2008: 11). On the other hand, a dialog between native and Chinese speakers of English will show the former as much more truth-than politeness-oriented, in relative terms.

Transfer of politeness strategies – research review

If the politeness norms of a speakers’ L1 and L2 differ, the speakers behaviour can be subject to pragmatic transfer. This frequently reported phenomenon can have several reasons: lack of proficiency, the ideas that a given speech act is governed by universal principles, perception of similarities of cultures, overgeneralization, oversimplification or reduction of sociolinguistic knowledge (Dogancay

¹ In this respect Poland’s core values: readiness to share and hospitality reveal our collectivist soul. Comparing our index for Individualism (60) with Anglo one (90) we also seem much more collectivist (or less individualistic). http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_dimensions.php

and Kamisli 1997). The following table shows some examples of studies confirming the differences between native speakers' and L2/L3 users of English.

Table 1. Sample studies dealing with the problem of politeness in multilinguals

Author, date	Sample	Research problem	Tools	Results
Dogancay and Kamisli 1997	Native Turkish speakers learning English as a Second Language (ESL)	Reaction to wrongdoing of a status-unequal interlocutor in the workplace	Situated role plays	Advanced ESL learners could diverge significantly from target language norms
Sharifian 2008	Persian students of English of intermediate level in English Language Institute in Teheran	Compliment behaviour	Discourse completion test	Speakers of Persian instantiated the cultural schema of <i>shekasteh-nafsi</i> ² , in varying degrees, both in their L1 and L2
Ambrose 1995	Native English speakers and Romanians with a very high level of English fluency	Requests	Questionnaire	Much higher frequency of encouragers, unconventional placement of "please" by non-native speakers ³
Prykarpatska 2008	Speakers of AE and Ukrainian	Complaints	Natural observation, questionnaires	Complaints made by Ukrainians are much more severe and informal, include greater directness ⁴

Significant differences in the politeness strategies employed by the native speakers and the non-native speakers were found. In the context of second language acquisition, the final judgment made is from the perspective of native-speaker norm: non-native speakers, who carry over pragmatic rules from their first languages are seen as inadequately competent. Researchers working more in the cross-cultural tradition simply observe that these patterns are different due to cultural differences. Such differences can be explained, for example, in terms of Hofstedian culture dimensions (Prykarpatska 2008).

It cannot be forgotten, though, that also positive transfer of pragmatic knowledge can occur (Kasper 1992, Takahashi 1996 cited by Martinez, Flor, Juan and Guerra 2003).

² Modesty.

³ For natives, there were hardly any "pleases" attached to requests (e.g. borrowing sth), instead they used other softeners, like "for a moment/minute/second" (Ambrose 1995).

⁴ While Americans often used conditional imperatives "Next time, please, call, if know you'll be late," or questions "What happened?" Ukrainians: "How long can you be late?" "I'm sick and tired of waiting," (slang in original), "You could have thrown an sms," "You are always late," "Next time I'll be late" or "Coffee is on you."

Polish politeness versus Anglo English politeness

Politeness strategies described by Polish politeness expert, Małgorzata Marcjanik, as “specific for Polish culture” seem to have at least some common ground with the Anglo world. For Polish learners of English this means the possibility of positive transfer of politeness norms.

For example, the symmetry strategy calls for being reciprocal in using polite phrases, so for example saying “thank you” requires an answer similar to an English “You are welcome.” Perhaps what is more problematic is the extension of this norm on “the whole of social relationships” (Marcjanik 2009: 4), which for Poles means that an invitation, memory or favours should always be paid back. The solidarity strategy seems to be an embodiment of positive politeness, in which the speaker feels with the hearer, invites them, offers to help. The English language as such is not devoid of this kind of politeness forms: “congratulations,” “we are having a party, why don’t you drop by,” or “let me carry this for you.” Some others, however, differ quite considerably.

The inferiority strategy is probably where Polish and Anglo rules differ most. It shows in such verbal behaviours as rejecting compliments (where the Anglo community would merely play them down or accept), or even congratulations, lack of assertiveness in admitting somebody’s fault: “nothing happened,” “no problem” as a reaction to irritating behaviour, such as being late, breaking a glass, entering with shoes on (Marcjanik 2009). The principle of magnifying one’s faults, e.g. “sorry for taking (wasting) so much of your time” said when leaving somebody’s house, after being invited as guest, would sound rather weird in English, especially in the native speaker’s ears.

Although the independence principle, as Marcjanik calls it, sounds familiar to a user of English: it says we should be discreet, should not address derogatory terms to the hearer, or third person, and should not impose, in fact the verbal behaviour of Anglo community and Poles often differs here. As Marcjanik observes, in Polish this principle is clearly broken in the context of receiving guests, where the value of hospitality overrules the independence principle: guests are encouraged to eat more than they can, as a response to which they do, not wanting to be impolite by refusing (ibidem, translation A.S.).

It is important to stress that awareness of one’s L1 community norms is an important element of the communicative competence of ELF speakers.

Research

The pilot research project was undertaken to check advanced students’ of English, future teachers’ of that language perception of politeness norms in English as a Native Language, English as a Lingua Franca and in their first language, Polish. The aim of the pilot is to test research problems and tools for a wider study of ELF usage.

Research questions

The following research questions were asked: What is the future teachers’ attitude to global English, specifically, which L2 norms, according to them, are present in ELF? What is the influence of L1 norms on teacher’s declared politeness

behaviour in ENL and ELF? What is the influence of ENL/ELF norms on teacher's declared politeness behaviour in L1? Additionally, it was interesting for the author to see if the multilinguals' understanding of politeness in L1 is different from that of Polish monolinguals.

Sample

The main sample consisted of fifth-year, almost-graduate students of English Department who participated in the research in the number of 35. Additionally, for the purposes of comparing the data on L1 norm perceptions I asked 28 students of Polish Philology to complete a simplified Polish version of the questionnaire described below. Four of them, who declared proficiency in a foreign language, were eliminated from the analysis. Both groups were students of the Pedagogical University in Cracow. The choice of this convenience sample was justified by the preliminary character of the survey.

Tools

A questionnaire including 21 statements referring to Anglo norms of politeness was selected as a research tool. The statements were largely based on Polish-American differences, described by a sojourner, Laura Klos Sokol, in her book "Shortcuts to Poland" (Klos Sokol 2010). The respondents were asked to decide if they would behave according to a particular norm when communicating with native speakers, non-native speakers in English or other speakers of their first language, in Polish. An option of "I do not use the rule in any of the contexts" was given, too.

As Labov writes in *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (1972), "people's overt claims about language are inaccurate and often contradict their own actual usage" (Ambrose 1995: 1). However, as the aim of the research was more to explore future teachers' awareness of politeness than usage, the author intentionally resorted to this kind of tool.

Data analysis and discussion

ENL norms versus ELF norms

The students were asked to identify norms, which, according to them, apply only in the native speaker context and those which will be more universally used in English as a Lingua Franca. The following table shows the results:

Table 1. To what extent ENL norms apply in ELF usage?

L2 norm of politeness	Only ENL	Both ENL and ELF	Not at all	Comment
1. Response to "how are you" – a positive statement	12 (34%)	18 (51%)	4 (11%)	Still, sounds problematic
2. Meeting a new person tell her your name, start conversation	3 (8%)	18 (51%)	7 (20%)	
3. Difference of opinion – avoid open conflict	7 (20%)	13 (37%)	9 (25%)	Non Anglo emotionality?
4. Offering help/a favour respect independence	4 (11%)	17 (48%)	1 (3%)	

5. Asking a favour, show that you do not want to impose	4 (11%)	19 (54%)	1 (3%)	
6. Invitation of the kind "we must meet some day" is treated as a conversation closing	11 (31%)	8 (22%)	2 (6%)	It's too Anglo?
7. A food offer – another helping, avoid coquetry	8 (22%)	8 (22%)	8 (22%)	It's too Anglo?
8. Do not offer advice if not asked to	5 (14%)	6 (17%)	22 (62%)	Poles like to give advice
9. Behave calmly in public even if angry	6 (17%)	14 (40%)	3 (8%)	
10. Offer compliments as a way of socialising with people	9 (25%)	14 (40%)	5 (14%)	Sounds problematic
11. Avoid moments of silence	1 (3%)	16 (45%)	7 (20%)	
12. Do not ask how much people paid for something	4 (11%)	19 (54%)	7 (20%)	
13. Working in the services, speak cheerfully, be enthusiastic serving others	11 (31%)	14 (40%)	2 (6%)	
14. Entering a party or a group meeting greet everyone but don't shake hands	2 (6%)	15 (42%)	10 (28%) 5 NN	for Poles handshake still important
15. A friendly conversation, respect other's private zone 45 cm	5 (20%)	17 (48%)	9 (25%)	Quite many feel its "too far"
16. Say "excuse me" if invading other people's space (60 cm) in public places	7 (20%)	18 (51%)	3 (8%)	
17. Make room for other people to pass through	7 (20%)	14 (40%)	1 (2%)	
18. When expressing critique of others always stress the good points	7 (20%)	14 (40%)	10 (28%)	Poles have a different style
19. When criticised, accept responsibility	6 (17%)	18 (51%)	5 (14%)	
20. Be modest when talking about your achievements	3 (8%)	17 (48%)	4 (11%)	This rule is stronger than no 19
21. When making a presentation (public speech) smile and be friendly to the audience	6 (16%)	17 (48%)	2 (6%)	

As we can see, only a few norms (1, 2, 5, 12, 16, 19) are accepted by the majority of student teachers as ELF norms. What is more, the majority is rather vast. In most cases, the division of students' views, as well as students' opting out can indicate that application of a rule might depend on a number of situational factors. The rules which obtained less than 40% support, would seem to remain Anglo rules only (3, 6, 7, 8).

The influence of student L1 norms on suggested ELF norms

A hypothesis that if the user's L1 community practices a given L2 rule, the rule will also be used in ELF context was tested. The table shows students' responses.

Table 2. Does L1 influence ELF norms perception?

Norm in ENL	LOW/HIGH L1 usage	LOW/HIGH ELF usage	Comment
1. Positive response to "how are you"	L 8%	H 51%	Cultural awareness
2. Meeting a new person tell her your name, start conversation	H 62%	H 51%	Positive transfer
3. Difference of opinion – avoid open conflict	L 20%	H 37%	Cultural awareness
4. Offering help /a favour respect independence	L 21%	H 48%	Cultural awareness
5. Ask a favour, show that you do not want to impose	H 82%	H 54%	Positive transfer
6. "We must meet some day" is just a conversation closing	H 60%	L 22%	Cultural awareness
7. A food offer – another helping, avoid coquetry	L 40%	L 22%	ELF ownership
8. Do not offer advice if not asked to	L 31%	L 17%	ELF ownership
9. Behave calmly in public even if angry	H 80%	H 40%	Positive transfer
10. Offer compliments as a way of socialising with people	H 65%	H 40%	Positive transfer
11. Avoid moments of silence	H 65%	H 45%	Positive transfer
12. Do not ask how much people paid for something	H 65%	H 54%	Positive transfer
13. Working in the services, speak cheerfully, be enthusiastic serving others	H 45%	H 40%	Positive transfer
14. Entering a party/ meeting greet everyone but don't shake hands	H 57%	H 42%	Positive transfer
15. A friendly conversation, respect other's private zone	H 62%	H 48%	Positive transfer
16. Say "excuse me" if invading other people's space (60 cm) in public places	H 68%	H 51%	Positive transfer
17. Make room for other people to pass through	H 77%	H 40%	Positive transfer
18. When expressing critique of others always stress the good points	L 32%	H 40%	Cultural awareness
19. When criticised, accept responsibility	L 37%	H 51%	Cultural awareness
20. Be modest when talking about your achievements	H 71%	H 48%	Positive transfer
21. When making a presentation (public speech) smile and be friendly to the audience	H 62%	H 48%	Positive transfer

* The median for L1 usage is 44%

** The median for ELF support is 35,5%. All above the median results are treated as H, below the median as L

In many cases (2, 5, 9–17, 20–21) a rule declared by the students as L1 rule is positively transferred into ELF. Polite introductions, respect for others' private zone, modesty, lack of inquisitiveness (not asking about the price of something) as well as enthusiastic service and friendly presentation style are the patterns of behaviour which Polish advanced students of English/future teachers seem to find universal – they exist in Polish and are suggested as ELF norms. Interestingly, many of these norms are not typically Polish behaviour patterns (we used to like to ask the price of something, grumble at service providers and ignore the audience' friendly feelings as speech givers). This may point to the changing thinking and speaking patterns in the Polish speech community, which start from the young generation.

In just few cases students' responses indicate that although a rule is not practiced in Polish, it is to be accepted as an international norm. This is the case of

positive response to “How are you,” avoiding open conflict in public and respecting others’ choice, as well as treating non-specific invitations as closings and expressing balanced critique. It seems that the typically Polish values of solidarity, emotional arguing for one’s case, collectivistic help without asking or blunt critique for the sake of improvement are suspended in an act of cultural awareness.

In some cases, low occurrence of a norm in L1 makes users negate its legitimacy in ELF. This is the case with coquetry at the table and advice giving. Young Poles admit practicing these behaviours and, as it seems, they do not see acting against them in ELF legitimate. For this reason, such cases were commented as “Ownership of ELF.” They can mark ELF user’s right to ignore the Anglo rules, as too remote from his cultural identity.

The difference between multi- and monolinguals on L1 norms perception

The mean support for all the rules presented being also L1 rules was only 52% in the group of multilinguals while in the group of Polish speakers as much as 79%. This was contrary to the author’s expectations that students of English might reversely transfer some English rules into Polish. However, it was the students of Polish who expressed more support for the rules presented.

Concluding remarks

The ethnolinguist’s claim that Polish culture entails a different set of patterns for social situations from the native speaker model (Wierzbicka 2003) supported with observations of sojourner native speakers of English, such as Klos-Sokol (2010), does not seem to be supported with young Poles’ politeness declarations. The responses provided betray almost no traces of collectivistic thinking, emotionality, robust hospitality or imposing “togetherness” spirit ascribed to collectivists speech communities. Young or, as Klos Sokol says, New Poles claim to respect independence and individual space, they propose themselves as enthusiastic service people and speech givers. In some situations, however, they might still readily “deviate” from native speaker norm, inspired by values pertaining to the heart of their home culture.

We may ask ourselves the question, which models of politeness in English will be presented to learners in teaching English as Lingua Franca. Sifakis (2006: 152) calls this area of ELT “trendy, ever-fascinating but largely underexplored.” Although much talked about, ELF seems to be difficult to observe with the naked eye in the English teaching materials. Some authors suggest that it would be the teachers’ responsibility to prepare materials based on authentic exchanges from the context which they find most useful for their students. In order to do this, teachers need to be aware of L1 differences, other cultures and the fact that not all Anglo norms will be present in ELF. It seems that Polish student teachers of English are well suited to do that.

On the other hand, in the face of lack of defined norms specific to ELF, instruction in English remains largely a native speaker norm-bound process, leaving the situational decision making for the students to perform outside of it. Will they

know how to behave verbally? More research pointing to the ELF users' success or failure at negotiating polite behaviour is definitely needed.

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Tak grzecznym, jak to możliwe.**Nauczanie grzeczności w angielskim jako lingua franca****Streszczenie**

Grzeczność w języku obcym, a zwłaszcza w języku używanym do celów komunikacji międzynarodowej, wymaga nie tylko opanowania odpowiednich środków językowych, ale również modyfikacji kulturowo uwarunkowanych wzorców zachowania. To, co normalne w jednej wspólnocie językowej, w innej wydawać się może dziwne lub niewłaściwe.

Dążąc do rozwijania kompetencji pragmatycznej w języku angielskim jako międzynarodowym, napotykamy na szereg pytań. Czym grozi nawet częściowe porzucenie własnych wzorców grzecznościowych? Czy przyjmując wzorce anglosaskie spotkamy się ze zrozumieniem rozmówców z jeszcze innych kręgów kulturowych? Czy istnieje inne rozwiązanie?

Opisane w artykule badanie jest próbą określenia norm zachowań grzecznościowych świata anglosaskiego wchodzących do repertuaru zachowań osób, które posługują się angielskim jako lingua franca, w odróżnieniu od norm, które budzą zastrzeżenia i zostają modyfikowane. Czy modyfikacja ta odbywa się pod wpływem kultury rodzimej? Respondentami badania są studenci anglistyki kończący cykl nauczycielskich studiów magisterskich.