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Comparison of national language teaching systems. Introduction

Methodology and comparison

Comparative literature as well as methodology are well established fields of science. University departments of comparative literature were set up at the beginning of the 19th century and teaching concepts and methods had been disused much earlier¹. Nowadays, many universities, also the ones based in Cracow, offer comparative literature courses, and in Europe one cannot find a university that does not have departments of subject methodology. Similarly, to methodology, comparative literature has been developing rapidly over the last 50 years. It is represented by numerous concepts, from the classical, 19th century and typically focused on literary studies, as well as concepts critical towards them², through interdisciplinary and cultural³, which allow to see the possibility of a non-system search for common interpretation of knowledge about ourselves and relationships with others⁴.

There are many active and brilliant comparatists who publish in Poland such as Tadeusz Sławek⁵, Bogdan Bakula, Andrzej Hejmej⁶, Adam F. Kola⁷ and Tomasz Bilczewski⁸. An interesting

¹ See A. Mackowicz, *Z problemów kształcenia literackiego w Polsce międzywojennej*, Wrocław 1984. *Teoria kształcenia literackiego w latach 1918–1939. Antologia, Cz. 1: Główne idee i koncepcje kształcenia literackiego w latach 1918–1939*, wybór i opracowanie L. Jazownik, Zielona Góra 2001. L. Jazownik, *W kręgu historii i teorii edukacji polonistycznej. Studia i szkice*, Zielona Góra-Warszawa 2011; P. Kołodziej, *Dzieje dydaktyki języka polskiego*, in *Dzieje dydaktyk przedmiotowych w 65-letniej tradycji Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego w Krakowie* red. J.R. Paško, K. Potyrała, J. Zielińska, Kraków 2011, pg. 175–181.

² B. Croce, *La "letteratura comparata"*, "La Critica. Rivista di Letteratura, Storia e Filosofia" 1903 vol. 1, pg. 77-80. H. Markiewicz, *Zakres i podział literaturoznawstwa porównawczego*, in *Przekroje i zbliżenia dawne i nowe. Rozprawy i szkice z wiedzy o literaturze*, PIW, Warszawa 1976.

³ See A. Hejmej, *Interdyscyplinarność i badania komparatystyczne*, in *Muzyka w literaturze. Perspektywy komparatystyki interdyscyplinarnej*, Kraków 2008, pg. 81-107;

⁴ R. Wellek, *Kryzys literatury porównawczej* [1958], trans. Z. Łapiński, "Pamiętnik Literacki" 1968 z. 3, pg. 269-279. *Badania porównawcze. Dyskusja o metodzie*, Radziejowice, 6-8 Feb 1997., red. A. Nowicka-Jeżowa, Izabelin 1998.

⁵ T. Sławek, *Literatura porównawcza: między lekturą, polityką i społeczeństwem*, in *Polonistyka w przebudowie. Literaturoznawstwo – wiedza o języku – wiedza o kulturze – edukacja. Zjazd Polonistów*, Kraków 22-25 Sep 2004, vol. 1, ed. M. Czermińska et al., Kraków 2005.

⁶ A. Hejmej, *Komparatystyka. Studia literackie – studia kulturowe*, Kraków 2013.

⁷ A.F. Kola, *Nie-klasyczna komparatystyka. W stronę nowego paradygmatu*, "Teksty Drugie" 2008 no. 1-2.

⁸ See T. Bilczewski, *Komparatystyka i interpretacja. Nowoczesne badania porównawcze wobec translatoologii*, Kraków 2010.

series of comparison of contemporary Slavic languages has been initiated by Stanisław Gajda⁹. In the works of Polish specialists emerging from the strands of literary and cultural studies which strongly dialogue with Western comparative literature, one can find a lot of inspiration for comparative studies of national language methodologies. It is possible to move from the modern hermeneutics of Steiner¹⁰ to, a more extensive in its interest, cultural comparative literature and its non-classical frames, or as Kwiryna Ziemia¹¹ points out, study local cultural conditions by building up internal comparative literature outlined by Władysław Panas at Polonist Convention in 1995.

Changing social mood and attitudes towards European Union are also of importance to comparative studies regarding first language methodology. They give important and additional reasons to rethink the assumptions related to multilingualism and the place of national languages in EU projects, as well as the role of education systems in internal and transnational view.

The aim of comparative studies in Polish language didactics.

It may seem that the specialists of a particular system of education can relatively easily start to conduct research by comparing that system with other ones. Such research can be conducted in chosen, specially narrowed frames. However, if one begins to compare methodologies from, e.g. the ways of language teaching, interpretation of literary works (on different levels) and reading matters at school or the presence of history of literature there, one might not necessarily find reliable comparative diagnoses. Due to a large number of tasks and numerous educational documents and texts to study, it is only possible to reach the acceptable level of comparison of systems through extensive study conducted not by a team of few people, but international research groups. Making such research international is essential and constitutes the starting point for the following and responsibly constructed various internal comparison elaborations. The point of designed research will not be a careful stock-taking of features, similarities and differences in methodologies. As Mary Louse Pratt points out, rejecting any definite answers is becoming more meaningful lately in comparative procedures. Also, the illusions of definite cultural borders and national language systems are diminishing¹².

Comparative education system research would aim towards defining project specification, their constructivist foundations and, at the same time, searching for the area of hospitality and openness to differences, as pointed out by Jacques Derrida, in particular models of national language didactics. Such inquiry would protect from drawing hasty conclusions regarding what is different. It would be – recalling Tadeusz Sławek's opinion and regarding didacticians, "practising responsibility"¹³ for younger generations, which is the task that is difficult and impossible to omit in rapidly changing social and political systems.

⁹ See *Komparacja Systemów i Funkcjonowania Współczesnych Języków Słowiańskich* (vol. 1-4), series ed. S. Gajda, Opole 2003-2009. In series see W. Lubaś, *Komparacja Systemów i Funkcjonowania Współczesnych Języków Słowiańskich* (no. 4). *Polityka językowa*, Opole 2009.

¹⁰ G. Steiner, *Czym jest komparatystyka literacka?*, trans. A. Matkowska, "Porównania" 2005 no. 2, pg. 13-26; G. Steiner, *Po Wieży Babel. Problemy języka i przekładu*, trans. O. and W. Kubińscy, Kraków 2000.

¹¹ K. Ziemia, *Projekt komparatystyki wewnętrznej*, "Teksty Drugie" 2005, 1-2, pg. 72-82.

¹² See T. Sławek, *Literatura porównawcza...*, pg. 391.

¹³ *Ibidem*, pg. 393.

From detailed comparative studies to language policy

Teaching native language and literature is one of the most fundamental elements of language policy in European countries. Education, theory and didactics are met with wide and common socio-cultural practice in this subject. Due to research conducted by didacticists regarding ways of language status and corpus, as well as its acquisition (issues discussed by Robert Phillipson¹⁴ in his now classical work), we have the chance to draw new and relevant conclusions regarding current role and function of first languages in our societies. Undoubtedly, these could be the key analyses for designing language policies which are unavailable without the contribution of scientific communities of literature and language didacticists.

Furthermore, in education systems there is a tempting view of discovering so called weak totalisation or forms of subtle neo-colonialism of our didactics through discourses dominating in world humanities. That is why, it would be worth devoting slightly more attention to the presence of older and modern literary and language theories in teaching concepts, as well as consider the influence of concepts on education system promoted by methodologically strongest universities or educational institutions supported by ministries, which result in being awarded with largest grants. At the same time, it is necessary to ask about foundations of language policy that are already existing in education systems; about potentially promoted or rejected cultural essentialism, care for permanent and long-lasting cultures, about nationalism or the lack of it, as well as the assessment of language policy conducted by particular countries in terms of education.

It might be surprising to notice that in Poland, although comparative studies in pedagogical research have extensive bibliography, the field of methodology of national language teaching and its system approach does not contain more significant works, or at least ones that could serve an introductory discussion about the ways of mother tongue teaching used in neighbouring countries. Obviously, research regarding the content of textbooks presenting works of other cultures has been conducted earlier¹⁵, as well as the analysis of the space of cultural dialogue in education related to Polish language¹⁶. Also, there were attempts to find inspiration in British and Swedish education system¹⁷, and an interesting study of European education systems has been created¹⁸. Nevertheless, more extensive comparisons of the way native languages education systems function in our region of Europe have not been made despite moving elements of transcultural studies to the field of view related to Polish language.¹⁹ It is worth reminding that systems of teaching Polish in Poland and English in Australia were compared by Anna Ślósarz in the aspect of ideological matrixes three years ago in her broad work²⁰. Comparatives studies on natural sciences in Europe have also been performed by Educational Research Institute in Warsaw²¹. Reading such works reveals the

¹⁴ R. Phillipson, *English-only Europe?: Challenging language policy*, London, New York 2003.

¹⁵ See A. Szpociński, *Inni wśród swoich: kultury artystyczne innych narodów w kulturze Polaków*, Warszawa 1999.

¹⁶ *Dialog kultur w edukacji*, ed. B. Myrdzik, M. Karwatowska, Lublin 2009.

¹⁷ See A. Janus-Sitarz, *W poszukiwaniu czytelnika. Diagnozy, inspiracje, rekomendacje*. Kraków 2016, pg. 177-230.

¹⁸ *Systemy edukacji w krajach europejskich*, ed. E. Potulicka, D. Hildebrandt-Wypych, C. Czech-Włodarczyk, Kraków 2012.

¹⁹ A. M. Szczepan-Wojnarska, *Polonistyka transkulturowa*, in *Polonistyka dziś - kształcenie dla jutra*, ed. K. Biedrzycki, W. Bobiński, A. Janus-Sitarz, R. Przybylska et al., vol. 3, Kraków 2014, pg. 139-147.

²⁰ A. Ślósarz, *Ideologiczne matryce. Lektury a ich konteksty. Postkomunistyczna Polska - postkolonialna Australia*, Kraków 2013.

²¹ *Podstawy programowe w zakresie przedmiotów przyrodniczych w wybranych krajach*, ed. E. A. Muzioł et al., Warszawa 2014.

existence of a new field of study which is constantly growing alongside cultural dynamics of postmodernity and which has not been given proper attention despite redefining the place and aims of first language didactics.

Due to the lack of proper research and the immediate need for the comparative studies to arise in the field of national language didactics, it is difficult to focus on clearly theoretical problems aiming to, e.g. define this subfield, its research area and borderland fields. It is not clearly known how to conduct research in a comparative way of such a large field of function of language and literature didactics in so many countries simultaneously. Premature and too simplified assumptions (such as the ones formed from the inside of one system and its positive or negative assessment) could seriously weaken the project's conclusiveness and its social and geopolitical significance, as well as make the understanding between research teams impossible. Nonetheless, the time will come for such declarations so that the assumptions, aims and research methods could be established on a wider scale.

By the project of comparison of national languages didactics, I would like to encourage researchers and teachers to a more courageous approach towards the space of comparative view of educational practices. Making use of the possibilities opened for us, if we would like to see beyond one, well-known system, in our field or practices we have the chance to notice elements and assumptions treated so far as obvious and non-negotiable. I think that due to analyses and concepts going beyond "Polish neighbourhood", which are also related to first language education, we can experience enriching inspiration which would allow to look at our methodological problems from the outside.

The look at native didactics from beyond of a well-known education system helps to reveal its relativity in comparison to other solutions and allows to discuss factors influencing the way national language teaching functions in our countries. After an initial outline of fields of interest, resulting from first shared discussions, there could appear considerations regarding what is the most pressing to describe and to analytically compare in education system comparative studies both from the external and intrasystemic aspect. However, in order to comparatively analyse chosen elements of educational solutions and in order to think about the ideas used to teach particular native languages (and e.g. with related to them or not visions of national literature), we should create international space for exchanging educational ideas. Taking under consideration the area of economy and language policy, as well as the projects of functional positioning of native language education in the policy of particular cultural area (e.g. in the area of Slavic languages) will be even more inspiring and significant if it will result from discussed opinions of the researchers coming from common geopolitical area and not from one-sided, individual sources.

In the context of such projects, it is important to underline the exceptional role of practicing methodologists and didacticists. We play a very special role in the process of cultural exchange, passing on tradition and designing language tasks. The position of teachers and researchers should make us stand out and promote us to take leading places in solving problems regarding language policy. Methodology, despite its social meaning and long history, is still regarded to be at the service of other areas of research, drawing from various fields and thus eclectic and undefined in a methodological sense. Will adding to that wide field another specialisation, i.e. comparative system research and educational discourses make our ambitious actions of examining new cultural diagnoses more credible?

I believe that the courage to ask new questions and going beyond well-established literature-specialist, linguistic, sociological and socio-political diagnoses towards own, deeply anthropological and (in terms of post-humanities and neurodidactics) complementary

diagnoses of modern world could characterise didactic research supported by comparative literature. Another interdisciplinary walk of didactics related to Polish language²² towards comparative literature turns out to be the sign of our time where single-disciplinary diagnoses, limited to one literature, culture and one language could not be enough. Comparative didactics should also (in terms of common and comparative culture and literature research) ask questions about the role of language or languages embodied in social practices as a non-reducible ingredient of life and functioning of national and public collectivity. It is not only the question of the role of speech and literature as culture, memory, experience and social thought transmitters. It is the question of performative, causative, productive function of being and living in a collectivity integrated and educated mainly (despite not only) by native language.

Raising awareness about the shown processes, whose integral part we are as teachers and didacticians, allows us, and not sociologists and culture specialists, to see the full spectrum of being here and now in a particular culture. Comparing these diagnoses with those coming from teachers from neighbouring countries could give us a lot of information regarding the role of language policy in a particular country, the function of designed exams, core curriculums and education system organization. All these diagnoses aim to point out the best and most efficient methods and education systems of national language. Nevertheless, even the most cursory review of education systems in Central Europe shows that particular countries teach national languages in a different way and they set their goals differently.

Comparison as a method: examples of *case studies*

The process of discussing system and methodological similarities and differences in European teaching will not be taking place by itself. In order to create shared, European or Central European methodological awareness we need time and proper research tools. Should we rely on extensive infrastructure and data bases of EU institutions, e.g. conducting world-wide PISA tests or on reports from institutions cooperating with governments and working for ministries influenced by transitional politics? Independent research should address such issues. Such discussions are inspired by special atmosphere in Europe, where political situation and social mood show that particular national and regional collectivities are forced to redefine their positions and renegotiate them in terms of European economy and social policy.

It is worth adding that another serious reform of education system related to the change of government and cultural policy is taking place in Poland. The knowledge regarding the way it will be implemented is limited. The fate of secondary schools has been unknown until recently and the new core curriculum for an 8-form primary school has not met with an approval from specialists. In these special circumstances, comparative literature could give us the chance to relativize local-national educational solutions. By learning from experience of other countries, we could look at our own concepts and polemic from a distance, check the possibility of totally different projects of national education. The discussions could also be the introduction to international cooperation to create geopolitical humanity awareness in our part of Europe through, in a way cross-border and transnational, integrated educational actions. How it would happen, take place and whether this project is possible and necessary, it is worth asking each other – to the south and north of Bratislava.

²² M. Bał, *Wędrujące pojęcia w naukach humanistycznych. Krótki przewodnik*, trans. M. Bucholc, Warszawa 2012.

Due to the need for an international discussion of methodologists, it is worth pointing out inspirations emerging from, and being shared by foreign methodologists' questions and doubts. This is a clear encouragement to deepen and extend these kinds of research. I had the opportunity to see the need for transnational didactic interpretational communities to come to existence in May 2016, while meeting with a group of about twenty people constituting the Department of Literature and Language Didactics in Belgrade. After finishing the series of lectures which were a part of Erasmus+ programme, I discussed the circumstances which encourage to create theory of interpretation for schools, theory of language teaching and the model of history of literature for schools deriving from experiences in our cultures and languages. The offer was met with a special interest. As it seems, it is more and more clear that in education of our national languages, we follow delocalised theories or Anglo-Saxon education, which has a totally different history and mechanisms of culture transmission, e.g. pop culture dominated by English language. I wonder if it would be possible to outline the educational form in order to recover, metaphorically speaking "stolen history"²³ and create discourses which would animate relationships with environment and explain the world (in the context of localised and inclusive theory emerging from ecological humanities²⁴). I am also curious to hear opposing opinions that point out we are doomed to function in the global market of ideas and the most influential concepts deriving from the strongest world universities and political offices.

It is not easy to settle allusive issues and surely, they cannot be considered only in the dualistic context of locality/globality. This was shown by a project which was larger than the visit in Belgrade mentioned above. While taking part in so called Small Visegrad Grant between 2015 and 2016 together with our colleagues dealing with Hungarian, Czech and Slovakian language didactics, we organised a series of scientific conferences in Budapest, Prague, Nitra and Cracow. During those meetings we did a comparative analysis of main features of language teaching systems in our countries. The result of these discussions was the comparative, multi-author monography entitled *Teaching of national languages in the V4 countries*²⁵ published a couple of months ago. This work, despite being the first step in comparative research on didactics, reveals fascinating and large quantity of new research perspectives/views, especially for native language methodologists who would like to take up the task of comparatively reconsidering the aims of literature and language teaching and noticing the possibility of cross-border and transcultural humanistic education.

Multiple opinions and a dialogue in considering the role of mother tongues in the cultures of European countries are necessary, as it would allow to avoid closing the systems in well-established, intranational concepts of education. They could reveal totally new and surprising needs in terms of developing national languages in the same way as a different face of Europe has been revealed in the context of so-called Brexit. "Live" observation, without the use of the media, of the reaction of the European Parliament to the results of United Kingdom referendum in July last year allowed me to see how strong the system tendencies clash with the goals of particular countries in Strasburg. MEPs demanded, everyone in their own language, to seriously treat the motions from their countries. There were numerous remarks about ignoring the result of democratic referendum in the United Kingdom and it turned out there

²³ J. Goody, *Kradzież historii*, trans. J. Dobrowolski, Warszawa 2009.

²⁴ E. Domańska, *Humanistyka ekologiczna*, in *Od pamięci biodziedzicznej do postpamięci*, ed. T. Szostek, R. Sendyka, R. Nycz, Warszawa 2013, pg. 15-39.

²⁵ *Teaching of national languages in the V4 countries*, ed. M. Pieniążek, S. Štěpáník, Prague 2016.

were a lot of actions behind the scenes to prevent Brexit. Members' of European Parliament authentic involvement created a moving theatre of struggles for being right and the positions of motions. MEPs called for rejecting the language of economy and profit and suggested entering the area of thought on values and axiology of EU societies. Very often there were complaints about passiveness and lack of commitment of Parliament leaders in EU matters which were not related to economy. The observation of MEPs' clashes against bureaucratic system showed that it is necessary to enrich EU Parliament's discourse with the thought of local cultures and international community.

"European Parliament" of native language didactics

The "visitation" of the European Parliament proceedings allows to point out (by no means in an ironic way) the sense of creating an extensive European agora which would serve the purpose of exchanging opinions regarding the current role of native/national language education. This matter is only slightly regulated by the EU and is the subject of internal policy of its members. It does not mean that our education systems should function in international and, particularly in geopolitical isolation. Maybe discussions over the projects of national language education could work out the missing axiological space of view in the proceedings of EU Parliament. Thus, it is worth ensuring the development of subsequent initiatives that would make methodological research conducted by didactic environments more international²⁶. One of them could be involving Didactic Committee which is a part of International Committee of Slavists. The first actions were taken during *17th Autumn School of Literature and Polish Language Didactics* held in 2016 entitled *National language didactics in Central Europe. Methodology and comparative literature*. Being inspired by Stanisław Gajda, the superintendent of International Committee of Slavists between 2008 and 2013, together with dozens of Polish methodologists and researchers of didactics from Belgrade, Moscow, Prague, we organised a two-hour seminar discussing the aims of comparative didactic research. The conclusions were shown to Peter Žeňuch, the chairman of ICS, who with the help of Ljiljana Bajić, the Didactic Committee chairwoman, made it possible to extend the team with the researchers representing the environment of language and native literature methodologists. It could be said today that the Cracow's initiative made the ICS board agree to create a "round table" of national languages didacticians during International Committee of Slavists in Belgrade in 2018. We can hope that this planned meeting will provide the opportunity to start an institutionalised, international dialogue within the environment of researchers of native language teaching systems. Regardless of success of similar initiatives, it is worth taking care of the parliament of didacticians which will allow the scientific research and status comparison of national languages in Europe, both in education systems and in a wider, politico-cultural view. I would particularly underline the issue of social significance of native languages, as well as identity and economical gains resulting from their proper stimulation. I would see the need of discussion about activating transcultural dialogue. However, the questions whether younger generations still see a fundamental opportunity for a personal, professional and biographical development in native languages should be asked in a serious tone. The emergence of a new

²⁶ It is worth pointing out scientific community concentrated around ARLE (*International Association for Research in LI Education*, Tallinn University, Estonia) which has been conducting research on native language didactics for decades.

universal identity²⁷ from the social practices does not necessarily go together with the respect or attachment to the native language²⁸.

The intentions of research pointed out could be essential for the whole European community. In the language policy, both on a national and regional level, there are a lot of contradictions which result from various, protectionist, imperial or even protective stances towards the language²⁹. In order to determine the view of European language policy in a more detailed way, it is worth taking up a deeper research being part of scientific grants and consortiums such as the programme Horizon 2020. The attempts to gain support from the EU financial programmes for research and innovation, e.g. ERC, cooperation of scientists through Erasmus+ and RISE programmes should contribute to the revival of international thought regarding the current position of national languages in European education.

In the end, as the linguists have been pointing out for a long time, the position of the language results from the prestige of its users. Due to different language policies in education in countries of Central Europe, one can hope that through comparing their efficiency, we will get closer to the best system of increasing the strength and position of native languages. It is worth pointing out the sources of educational calming of dialogue between Slavic cultures in Central European *curriculum*s. Their opening to the world is not related with being open to geopolitical conditions³⁰.

We could try to look after each other as a multinational community, taking care of the prestige of our languages and their proper place in internal and transcultural communication.

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²⁷ Cf. L. Witkowski, *Edukacja wobec sporów o (po)nowoczesność*, vol. 1, Warszawa 2007, pg. 173.

²⁸ These changes could be observed in the behaviour of the youth in the country (also as the effect of education policy), but they are the most intense in the community of economic migrants. While observing classes and talks with teachers of Polish schools in Brussels and Leuven (Nov 2016), I clearly noticed such a process. In Polish communities children learn Polish at the ages of 12-14. When the child gains acceptable communicative competence, sufficient to exchange information within the family or during visits in Poland, the stress is put on official language (used in compulsory education in Belgium, i.e. French, Dutch or German) which ensures social promotion and integration. Cf. Z. Melosik, *Teoria i praktyka edukacji wielokulturowej*, Kraków 2007. Cf. R. Ritzi, *Multiculturalism as an Education Policy*, Victoria 1985, pg. 22-23.

²⁹ S. Gajda, *Nowa polska polityka językowa*, in *Przyszłość polonistyki. Koncepcje – rewizje – przemiany*, ed. A. Dziadek, K. Kłosiński, F. Mazurkiewicz, Katowice 2013, pg. 50-54.

³⁰ See B. Myrdzik, *Dialog z Innym w przestrzeni kultury w wybranych koncepcjach*, in *Dialog kultur w edukacji...*, pg. 18.

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