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Opponent's review of the habilitation work entitled

English as an International Vehicle: A Glottodidactic Approach
(A Selection of Topics on Various Aspects of Intercultural Conversational Competence)
by

Dr. Krzysztof Polok, PhD
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Dr. Krzysztof Polok has submitted a habilitation work to the Scientific Committee of the Pedagogical Faculty of UKF Nitra and requested that a habilitation process be carried out on his behalf. As an opponent of his habilitation material, I will review his teaching habitus and evaluate his research achievements with the aim of expressing officially my view about his competences concerning the qualification of a habilitated doctor at UKF in the Specialization Field Didactics 1.1.10.

Dr. Polok has been teaching English at higher educational institutions in Katowice, Częstochowe and Bielsko-Biała since 1978, after receiving his master's degree in English Philology from the Jagiellonian University in Cracow in 1977. He received his PhD in English Linguistics at the Silesian University of Katowice in 2002 for a dissertation "Pedagogical Implications of the Process of Acculturation during the Acquisition of the Second Language: From Theory to Practice". He conducted pedagogical practice at KLIS PF UKF during the academic year 2012/2013. The focus of his involvement in language pedagogy has been directed to didactics of the English language, the development of intercultural communicative competence, descriptive linguistics, lexical studies and semantics, historical grammar, translation studies, business English and English in sports in the course of the past 15 years. He has supervised over 35 BA and 20 MA theses and has produced numerous opponent reviews during his teaching career.

Dr. Polok has actively published his scientific results in national and international journals and publications. He has participated in numerous national and international conferences, especially since he obtained his PhD degree in 2002. He has been a permanent speaker on the IATEFL conferences in Poland since 1999. However, it has to be observed that his professional interests in the didactics of English, bilingualism, intercultural communication, distance learning, CLIL and the language of sports has obtained a solid focus in the past 10 years. It can be stated that the sciento-metric data of his professional result fulfil the requirements for a habilitated doctor (a professor-to-be).

The habilitation work Dr. Polok submitted is a published monograph under the title "*English as an International Vehicle: A Glottodidactic Approach*" (A Selection of Topics on Various Aspects of Intercultural Conversational Competence), Nitra: ASPA, 2014, ISBN 978-80-89477-17-3, which is a fresh and brisk attempt at integrating current concepts of international English, bilingualism, intercultural conversational competence and the multifaceted, non-technical role of teachers of foreign languages.

The habilitation work presents a novel approach to understanding the function of languages in interaction, showing the complexities of involving cognitive skills (grammar, vocabulary, semantics), social-psychological skills (intercultural communication, cognitive dissonance of meaning-imprecisions, stereotypes) and pedagogical skills (focusing on the acquisition of the four basic skills in language learning, especially listening and comprehension) while creating a social-cognitive space for the parallel and simultaneous use of mother-tongue and foreign language or foreign languages.

A word of warning is in place here. The monograph is supposed to treat the topic of Intercultural Conversational Competence (ICC) in a homogeneous framework by discussing the "various forms to be possibly applied for shaping one's ICC", such as the phenomena of lingua franca, international English, the use of stereotypes, bilingualism of young children, distance learning or teacher roles. This is more or less what the Author promises at the beginning of his book. However, each of these forms is an independent entity which turns out to play an indirect role in the shaping one's ICC. The thrill is that the Author does not seem to be convinced about the homogeneity of the approach himself either! Instead, he offers a highly interesting, intellectually vibrant philosophical treatise about individual chapters of our heritage of language philosophy, recalling ideas by Boas, Wittgenstein, Malinowski, Whorf, McLuhan, Putnam, Grice, Hymes, Halliday, Sperber & Wilson, Hofstede, Langacker, Damasio, Lakoff & Johnson, you name them. For this reason, the book becomes a different genre: instead of providing guidelines for didactically committed readers, it presents a plethora of interesting topics in connection with linguistic perception and social comprehension. It goes without saying that his explorations about the social construction of meaning are – by all means – about the development of communicative and conversational competences under the conditions of bilingualism and intercultural encounters.

The most elaborate chapters are chapter two "On the Function of Stereotypes in Language", chapter three "The Notion of Intercultural Conversational Competence" and chapter seven "On Various (Bilingual) Issues of a Young Learner". The former two chapters are the most philosophical in their thematic choice and the latter chapter is the most empirically-based analysis. In this sense, the book can be considered to be balanced in its style as both theoretical and empirical consideration find their due place in the discussion of the main theme: Intercultural Conversational Competence.

No doubt, there are some strong tenets expressed and adopted by the Author to support his view on the development of ICC. One of these is the claim that no proper understanding in the inter-language system can be inherently expected of sheer lexical exactness since no full semantic scope of lexical items can be obtained in the transfer from mother-tongue (MT) to target language (TL). Therefore, the notion of language awareness has to be introduced which makes use of the pragmatic contribution of verbal interaction. Thus, gradually, the notion of language awareness (which is to be seen as a process rather than a mental state) gets amended with additional notions of context awareness and finally cross-cultural language awareness. The Author rightly arrives at the conclusion that language awareness is a bridge between grammar and vocabulary on the one hand and culture on the other.

The discussion touches upon the notion of the mental lexicon, although it is not the core concept in the Author's train of thoughts. However, the mental lexicon could also be seen as a conduit or catalyst between lexico-grammatical structure and contextual-conceptual structure in the construction of social meanings. This interpretation is implicitly present in Dr. Polok's model of glottodidactics.

Another strong claim is the Janus-face of stereotypes in everyday language use and conversation: with due reference to language awareness, we realize that there has to be something that connects language-internal reality with language-external reality. One of the social-cognitive skills – inevitable for the development of ICC – is to master stereotypical and figurative expressions in the mental lexicon.

The chapter on young learners is an impressive analysis which offers the most for didactically-oriented readers. Besides discussing the relevant literature on a variety of research contexts and results, it also presents the results of the Author's research and experiments carried out with children of the kindergarten age. While the Author admits the complex variability of the conditions on bilingualism, he rightly advocates the view that the cognitive aspects in L2 teaching should consciously be reduced and instead natural, authentic conversational contexts should be preferred.

At this point I have a question to the Candidate. It has been widely acknowledged that the motivation in foreign language learning of adolescent children is greatly influenced by parental norms and expectations, parental patterns of inter-cultural behavior and by peer norms and expressed attitudes.

Do we have evidence for the motivational variants and motivational determinants of very young children? Is it the behavior patterns of the reference persons (parents, kindergarten teachers) or the playful behavior and expectations of their peers? Does your research give any answer to such motivational parameters?

I need to voice a critical remark about the habilitation work as a whole as well. It would have been very useful to add one more chapter to the book. After reading the detailed discussions of fairly separate issues, the reader would need a comprehensive summary. In its present form the book lacks an explicit conclusion which could have provided an integrative thread to hold the part together. It is not obvious, as I observed earlier, how the different phenomena discussed in the chapters cohere and in what ways they support the development of intercultural conversational competence of learners of foreign languages.

I find the habilitation work of Dr. Polok an important contribution to the methodology of language learning. It contains useful discussions about the fundamental characteristics of language learning – both native and foreign languages – presented in a wider framework which takes into consideration pedagogical, psychological, cognitive and social aspects of the study of foreign language teaching and learning. I recommend the Scientific Committee that the habilitation work under review be put for defense, and after a successful defense of the habilitation work and the completed habilitation procedure, **the title “associate professor” /docent/ in the Specialization Field Didactics 1.1.10 be granted to Dr. Krzysztof Polok.**

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Prof. Dr. László I. Komlósi