

## 'MACRO-SCALE' ATTITUDES TO THE FOREIGNER'S LANGUAGE

ADAM JAWORSKI

*Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań*

One can find an extensive study of problems concerning the sociological and psychological aspects of the foreigner's language (i.e. the language of a non-native speaker) in Janicki 1982. A significant part of the work deals with the native person's attitudes toward the foreigner's language and toward the possible mistakes (mainly sociolinguistic) that the latter can make. The author's framework for the study of these attitudes includes a list of variables to be accounted for, and analyzed in their totality:

"The native speaker's evaluation of the foreigner's sociolinguistic deviance in the foreign language situation is mediated on the one hand by the characteristics of the foreigner's pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, and on the other by a set of socio-psychological variables. The latter include social variables such as the foreigner's sex and age, para-social variables such as channel and setting, personality characteristics and the affective state of the foreigner" Janicki (1982:58).

In the list of variables influencing the native person's attitude to the foreigner's language and his/her sociolinguistic deviance that Janicki gives, one additional point needs to be made. The factors/variables discussed by the author pertain to the 'micro-scale' characteristics of the two persons involved in a foreign language situation. No mention is made of the 'macro-scale' characteristics of the interaction (foreign language situation), which may also significantly affect the native's attitude to the foreigner's language.

Attitudes to the foreigner's language may be influenced by the following macro-scale factors:

1. the degree of ethnocentrism present in the native's community and the feeling of uniqueness of one's own culture;

2. the type of attitudes revealed by the native community toward foreigners in general and toward particular foreign communities (nations, countries, etc.);
3. the feeling of (un)importance of the native language of the community in relation to other languages, and the degree to which foreign languages are learned successfully by members of the community.

Undoubtedly, the three factors may overlap to a great degree, and will also interplay with the micro-scale factors quoted at the beginning of this paper.

A classical example of a community whose ethnocentrism results in producing negative attitudes to foreigners speaking the native language of the community is Japanese society. Many authors agree that the foreigner's good or native-like proficiency in Japanese is looked down upon in Japan. For example, Condon and Yousef (1975:254) say that:

"To a great extent Japan is ... a nation ... where a foreigner who learns Japanese 'too well', being able to read and write as well as speak, is likely to be regarded ambivalently, with a mixture of curiosity, admiration, and suspicion. Japanese tend to regard their culture as unique, even feeling that only a 'pure Japanese' can really understand the culture and the language".

Loveday (1983:25) quotes several other experiences and observations about the Japanese, similar to that given above. Interestingly enough, not all foreign groups may face such "cold treatment" when attempting to speak Japanese in Japan. Loveday quotes Suzuki (1975) who says that such an attitude revealed by the Japanese "applies mainly to Caucasian L2 speakers" (Loveday 1983:25). Jordan (1980) confirms the selectivity of the Japanese rejection of only some foreign groups: "How often the statement is made that a Western face and colloquial Japanese are in conflict" (p. 228, quoted in Loveday 1983:25). Rubach-Kuczewska (1983:9) reports a similar observation: "One gets an impression ... that an average Japanese still cannot believe that the visitors from overseas are able to learn *nihongo* — the Japanese language" (translation mine).

A similar attitude has been observed among some Poles toward foreigners in contact with representations of Polish culture. (Although the following example is not a linguistic one it may be used as a good illustration of the central point).

At a show of six contemporary Polish films organized at an American university (Spring 1983), a Pole complained that none of the Americans would really "understand" these films or would get their "flavour". She remembered having seen "Ashes and Diamonds" (*Popiół i diament*), which was also included in the show, in England a few years back, and there, according to her, "nobody got it and everyone was bored". Actually, the majority of Americans that

saw all the six films, including "Ashes and Diamonds", seemed not only to have enjoyed most of them but also to have understood them.

In some cases the community's ethnocentrism and its dislike of members of various other ethnic groups speaking the native language may be a result of the feeling of cultural insecurity or the perception that the identity of the community is being threatened:

"Where tribal or sub-tribal languages are spoken in smaller areas within a nation, ... in Africa ... Latin America and Asia ... an outsider who speaks the language of the people may also be regarded with a mixture of delight and suspicion or even fear. By speaking their language he may implicitly flatter his hosts, but may also threaten them. As a Tarascan-speaking friend in Mexico said: 'The *gringo* who learns Tarascan may take from us all we have left — our secrets.'" (Condon and Yousef 1975:254 - 255).

Loveday (1983:25) comments on the two types of communities which may either favour or disfavour foreign speakers of their own (communities') languages:

"This antiintegrative, ethnocentric attitude toward L2 speakers has been called 'communalist' by Mazrui (1975) in contrast to 'ecumenical' linguistic communities which transcend the boundaries of racial or ethnic definition."

Americans seem to be an example of an 'ecumenical' community. One finds a brief account of this fact in Ferguson and Heath (1981). They link this problem with Americans attitudes' towards learning foreign languages, which, in turn, may be seen as a function of Americans' conviction that whomever they meet should speak English, anyhow.

"American attitudes toward languages other than English are ... confused. Many Americans regard the use of another language in the USA as a sign of inferiority and disadvantage — to be kept hidden in one's own case and educated away in the case of others. They view the study of foreign languages in school as not particularly useful in achieving a good education or preparing for a career. Yet some of these Americans are proud of a President who can speak a few words of Spanish on a public occasion and are enormously impressed by a European visitor who speaks several languages. Although Americans tend to believe that English is hard for foreigners to learn, they often feel that educated foreigners 'speak better English than we do'" (Ferguson and Heath 1981:xxvii—xxviii).

In Poland, where the majority of people have positive attitude towards those who learn and speak foreign languages but, judging from personal observation, where also the majority's success in mastering a foreign language is very small, the attitude toward foreigners speaking Polish is highly positive.<sup>1</sup> Poles (maybe even more than Americans) think that their language

<sup>1</sup> This seems to be true at least for the private relations between Poles and foreigners. As Professor Robert Herbert (personal communication) says, the situation may often be quite different on the official/business level, especially when the foreigner in Poland acts as a client visiting a shop, post-office, travel agency, etc.

is very hard for foreigners to learn, and even the most simple specimens of Polish produced by a foreigner effect genuine enthusiasm in Poles. The prevailing opinion exists that no foreigner can really gain native-like competence in Polish, so the really few foreigners who have achieved this (and sometimes may be seen and heard on TV, for example) are commonly admired. This 'ecumenical' feature in the Polish community is generated by several factors. Poles are generally open to mixing with members of other communities, and they also appreciate it if the latter tend to identify in some way with their host culture, the best exemplification of which is speaking at least some Polish. Besides, Polish is known not to be among the languages which are most frequently picked up for foreign/second language learning, and foreigners speaking the language must be seen as raising the prestige of Polish, and, consequently, of its speakers.

Also, however, the historically and politically conditioned ethnocentrism of Poles might be seen as a factor preventing the occurrence of any positive attitudes toward foreigners speaking Polish. Ethnocentrism is undoubtedly present among Poles, and may be found in a prevailing feeling of uniqueness of the Polish culture, of which merely one example has been given above. One may also find a reflection of this fact in the above mentioned belief of many Poles that a foreigner cannot speak Polish with native-like competence, and also in that some ways of expressing things in Polish cannot be matched with anything else in any other language. Once a Pole reacted in such a manner to an item of television news saying that Mickiewicz's epic *Pan Tadeusz* had been translated into English. The Pole expressed his concern that he could not imagine "a truly adequate translation" of this literary work into *any* foreign language. As a matter of fact, he would not question the adequacy of the Polish translations of other great literary works written in various foreign languages.

Another factor shaping the attitude to the foreigner's language, as indicated at the beginning of the paper, has been that of evaluating differently one's native language as used by a member of a *particular* foreign community. Following the results of the social psychologists investigating the attitudes toward particular social and/or regional varieties of a language (cf. for example, Giles and StClair 1979, Giles 1977), it is possible to hypothesise that attitudes and stereotypes about given communities and cultures will also play a significant role in how particular *foreign* 'variety' of somebody's native language will be judged.

A Polish student of one college has described her reactions (which may be considered typical of many other Polish students of the same or similar colleges, though would require further, empirical confirmation) to the Polish spoken by foreign students studying at the same school. The foreign students

have been grouped into three major "ethnic" classes: Arabs, Blacks (Africans) and Americans (White).

The Polish of the Arabs has been described in decidedly negative terms, as very "slow" (in the student's words: "just as they move in their hot climate"), and "sticky" (!) (*lepki*) ("just as they actually speak their own language"). The stereotypical attitude toward Arab culture and behaviour is reinforced negatively by the general image held of Arab students in Poland: they are usually thought of as lazy, snobbish and unjustifiably rich (thanks to "black market" operations).

In Poland seeing a Black on the street is still something of an unusual event for most passers-by. Blacks are, to some degree, thought of as not quite "real", and not to be taken very seriously since they are so "different". Hence, the Polish student has described the Polish of the Black students as "funny" and "child-like", but also "nice" and "pleasant to the ear". Possibly the evaluation of this accent as child-like may have been the result of the common stereotype of Blacks living in Africa as being not as intelligent as members of the white race, and rather dumb and backwards in political and economic development.

A positive, but otherwise "neutral" attitude has been reported toward the Polish of the American students. This may require the least explanation, as the American culture (and thus Americans) is generally viewed very positively in Poland, and most Polish students are very much attracted to it. Hence, the positive attitude to the American accent in the Polish language.

This brief discussion has attempted to show the significance of several large-scale social and political factors responsible for the foreigner's language by the native community. They can pertain either to the characteristics of the native community itself (e.g. feeling of ethnocentrism, attitudes and success in foreign language learning), or they may be directly connected with the attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes held of foreigners in general or of a particular community as well as the evaluation of the community's own position and language in relation to others. All these factors are significantly interconnected with one another, and with the micro-scale factors present in each foreign language situation.

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