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Classroom politics

Summary

What we are faced with at present is a blatant neoliberal transformation of universities, whose social relevance depends increasingly on the ability to serve the needs of neoliberal capitalism. If we see this as a problem – as many of us do – then we also feel the need to defend (and develop) the traditional practices of universities, such as "pure" research and critical reflection on society. Yet such a response, inevitably, goes hand in hand with critique of and struggle against ideology behind capitalism itself, against the logic of competition and profit. Drawing on the legacy of Freire and Althusser, the article highlights some of the links between the English language teaching and the neoliberal politics, and gives suggestions about ways in which departments of English in general, and language classes in particular, can be a part of the socially critical forces rather than a part of the so-called liberal-progressive camp.

Key words: critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire, neoliberalism, language and ideology

Politika v razredu

Povzetek

V današnjem času smo priča transformaciji univerz po neoliberalnem diktatu, ki družbeni pomen univerz vse bolj povezuje s sposobnostjo služenja potrebam neoliberalnega kapitalizma. Če se nam to zdi problematično, potem čutimo potrebo po obrambi (in razvoju) tradicionalnih praks Univerze, kot so, denimo, čiste temeljne raziskave in razvoj družbene kritičnosti. Tovrstni odziv pa je neizogibno povezan s kritiko ideologije kapitalizma kot takega, z bojem proti logiki tekmovanja in dobička. Izhajajoč iz teorij Freirea in Althusserja članek osvetljuje povezave med poučevanjem angleščine in neoliberalnimi politikami in predlaga načine, na katere so lahko oddelki za anglistiko (in jezikovni pouk nasploh) del družbeno kritičnih sil, in se ubranijo trendu, po katerem humanistični oddelki postajajo del tako imenovanega liberalno-progresivnega tabora.

Ključne besede: kritična pedagogika, Paulo Freire, neoliberalizem, jezik in ideologija

Classroom politics

1. Introduction

It is safe to say that the global challenges set before us by the current economic and political situation are unprecedented in their scope and complexity. While the role universities play in this crisis is being redefined along the lines of the neo-liberal agenda – with particularly grim effects for humanities – the syllabi of individual departments continue to promote ideals of critical thinking and active citizenship. In other words, they continue to acknowledge the commonly accepted idea, efficiently phrased by Terry Wrigley, that

> schools and colleges should be a space where creativity is developed, where we learn to live together, where we learn empathy and sensitivity towards one another, where young people can reflect on their relationships. Schools […] should be places where we can acquire a cultural heritage and reshape it for our own times, were we can engage in critical thinking about our society and world. (2006, 95)

In other words, schools *should* be a space where people become genuinely empowered, where "critical thinking" is not an empty phrase, where knowledge and action, theory and practice are considered together rather than separately, where mutual respect is nurtured through dialogue, where the much praised and commonly used idea of "active citizenship" is brought to life. Do universities really cater for such needs and aspirations? Or, more importantly perhaps, do they foster awareness about them? How come all the reforms carried out in the spirit of democratization have not resulted in many more as well as much more active citizens? Should we, linguists and language teachers, feel responsible? Should our students be able to use English in a politically conscious and socially responsible way? Do we teach that kind of English?

The way the article addresses these questions is fundamentally informed by Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses (cf. Althusser 1970) and by the legacy of Dewey and Freire, who both, especially Freire, call for what is termed critical (or radical) pedagogy. Our basic assumption is indebted to the uncontentious fact that any educational system both mirrors and perpetuates the political and economic system it serves. Such a stance was fully legitimized in England and in the United States as early as in the 1970s, as a response to the prevalent conservative view of schools as mere instructional sites. Left critics "provided theoretical arguments and enormous amounts of empirical evidence to suggest that schools were, in fact, agencies of social, economic and cultural reproduction" (Giroux 1985, xv), which, in turn, led to the articulation of emancipatory education, of a link between ideology critique and collective action. However, a number of more recent studies of (higher) educational institutions on both sides of the Atlantic report of the same realization: in the market culture of neoliberal capitalism, emancipation through education has become an obsolete idea (cf. Laval 2005; Giroux 2007; McLaren 2010; Orlowski 2011). The pressing requirement for educational programmes to follow the needs-means model has taken its toll; such an approach is a form of social control, subservient to the interests of capital.

The approach defended by this article has to do with general aims and responsibilities of educational institutions in the world of today, and with the expansion of quality further and higher education accessible to all who have the ability and motivation to pursue it, and is perhaps best summarized by the following words:

> Opposing neoliberalism in higher education should be part of the struggle for a society that really does give everyone an equal chance to realize themselves. […] What neoliberalism ultimately represents is a particularly pure form of the logic of capital. Therefore, the struggle for better universities can't be separated from the movement against global capitalism itself. (Callinicos 2006, 7)

The article intends to demonstrate that any serious response of the kind is rooted in Freireian critical/radical pedagogy and requires both a critique of the ideology of neoliberal capitalism and a critique of neoliberal discourse in English. It also seeks to identify the problem of hegemonic ideological discourse and present the need to tackle it, giving some suggestions regarding critical teaching practice. However, given the open-ended nature of such an orientation, the article raises questions rather than provides answers, and in doing so highlights the rationale legitimizing the need for a more politically engaged pedagogy.

2. Why Critical Pedagogy

At the current stage of political and economic crisis in the EU and the world it must indeed be recognized as insufficient to make students read, say, a text about the threat to biodiversity and to social justice posed by our economic paradigm, hoping a personal response to the unsustainable and inequitable economic system will not only be triggered, but will also turn into a willingness and capacity to critique, and to take steps to enact change. It is more naïve still to think that putting a poster of a black athlete or Roma musician on the classroom wall is enough to teach students about the intricate ways in which discriminatory discourses work. Analyzing (and changing) discriminatory discourses and raising awareness of numerous social issues are demanding tasks requiring professionals on all levels of education. Which is why decades old principles of "progressive education" and "radical pedagogy" need to be continually re-considered and re-applied – in all areas of education and in all subjects.

Reading through our secondary school syllabi for the English language, it is not surprising to find a fairly ambitious set of aims regarding education of critically thinking individuals, who will be able and eager to take part in democratic processes. Globally, the concepts of *an informed citizen* and *an active citizen* have shaped the rhetoric of all political parties, and found their way into the language used in national curricula across the countries of the (so-called) West. There is a need for such rhetoric, for, clearly, most of us still think democracy is the optimum political system. And yet people are increasingly disinterested in political participation, including voting at general elections. In other words, the basic forms of democratic rule seem to be on the wane.

The 19th-century thinkers and partisans of democracy (e.g. Tocqueville in the US and John Stuart Mill in Britain) were aware of the pitfalls of democracy, such as uninformed/misinformed people or powerless/disinterested people. Like Mill, who considered *education* to be most important in order to safeguard democratic society from degenerating into despotism, John Dewey too believed in "the potential of public education to strengthen democracy. In *Democracy and Education* (1916), [he] argues that public education offers the best hope against the possibility of despotic regimes" (quoted in Orlowski 2011, 151).

Speaking of the tension between democratic and despotic tendencies, Freire's view of power seems to be a combination of Althusserian theory and his deep Christian beliefs: he acknowledges the ubiquitous nature of power, noting that power relations are inscribed everywhere, not just in the more or less repressive activity of the police, the courts and the military. Like Althusser, he is

also among the first to speak of the more subtle ways in which those in power secure their own stability through various social and cultural relations; he acknowledges the essential ingredient of domination – self-oppression, explaining how we are bound to internalize the dominant ideology, rendering ourselves blind to the means and ways of our own subordination. In other words, he too speaks of the double bind that secures the status quo. But unlike Althusser and other radical theorists whose views are defined by structural determinism and thus deprived of optimism, he "stresses that there are always cracks, tensions and contradictions in various social spheres such as schools where power is often exercised as a positive force in the name of resistance" (Giroux 1985, xix). He also, both directly and indirectly, speaks of hope and possibilities for a fairer world, for a true liberation (from mental oppression) that should be the result of a different kind of education. Establishing a link between ideology critique and collective action, Freire creates the theoretical basis for a radical pedagogy that combines hope, critical reflection, and collective struggle.

Addressing the question of what it means to teach for democracy in North America, Orlowski (2011) finds that the critical left discourse is the least represented in educational contexts in both the USA and Canada. In both countries voter turnout is decreasing steadily (with the exception of the 2008 Obama election), with both systems "suffering from citizen apathy" (ibid., 157). (The voter turnout in Slovenia is decreasing too, with young people shunning political involvement.) To affect some change for the better, Orlowski, unsurprisingly, suggests critical left education and teaching about ideology critique, teaching critical media literacy and teaching about flaws in our democratic system (ibid., 158).

Alongside Orlowski, many contemporary authors stress the need for vigorous debate and public dialogue (e.g. Laval 2005, McLaren 2010, Giroux 2007, Snider 2002, Shuster 2005), which, again, presupposes creative and critical citizens, informed and active citizens. The trouble is, however, that people are not well informed. (We teachers are seldom exceptions.) And this is so despite all the media coverage, an unprecedented variety of TV stations to choose from, newspapers, radio broadcasts and internet sites. The trouble is the language used by politicians and (at least part of) the media tends to be deliberately opaque, making the political ideology behind it difficult to grasp. Since schools and universities are seldom the places where knowledge and skills needed to penetrate these discourses are acquired, it is no wonder so many people are disincentivized to take part in activities that can redefine (and reshape) their social contexts. Moreover, it should come as no surprise that even those who are, in fact, eager to get involved, often suffer from what has been described as *false consciousness*, and vote against their own best interests (the considerable opposition to Obama's plan for health care reform is a case in point). Without learning to think critically and creatively, and act accordingly, people are apt to acquire a kind of self-contradictory consciousness that allows them either to take a conformist attitude and accept a situation/position as normal (even if to their own detriment), or to be aware of the situation/position but refuse to make an effort to change it.[1]

Analyzing the social and political consciousness in the USA and Canada, Orlowski (2011) suggests progressive teachers should do two things: "first, help students understand the insidious ways in which power operates to shape individual consciousness and ways of seeing; second, not run into difficulty with people threatened by such activism" (ibid., 152). Focusing on the first has to do with

1 In *The Politics of Education* Freire studies how the various "myths", as he calls them, are internalized in schools at all levels of education, including University. He writes of those who speak the language of freedom and democracy, but – mostly unconsciously – conform to the very ideology that negates it all: "Many want a humanistic education, yet they also want to maintain the social reality in which people find themselves dehumanized." By studying how such myths are internalized, Freire was among the first to call our attention to what has become known as *false consciousness,* explaining "the contradiction between forms of action and actual choices made by many people" (Freire 1985, 119).

close reading/listening, discourse analysis, language awareness, the relationship between language and ideology, etc.; focusing on the second has to do with communication and debating skills as well as principles of bohmian dialogue (cf. Bohm 1996). If anything, higher education should equip individuals with tools and understanding instrumental for deconstructing "hegemonic forms of meaning making" (ibid., 154), and this double focus keeps us well on track. Moreover, it also keeps us very much within the four language skills paradigm, which requires language instructors to constantly seek a balance between reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Ken Robinson, a British educationalist currently living in the USA is one of the most popular contemporary theorists of change in education practices. In his latest book, *The Element* (2009), he makes an impassioned plea for a radical transformation of educational institutions. Faced with an unprecedented rate at which global society is both changing and growing, faced with the negative consequences of human activity on the earth's geology and natural systems, we have never before known so little about the future young people are to be prepared for. Robinson is certain that the enormous challenges before us cannot be dealt with if we stick to the old educational paradigms. These paradigms need to be *transformed* rather than *reformed* if we are to benefit from the many and varied talents people possess but rarely if ever develop within the current system – the many and varied talents we might, as a species, soon enough be in dire need of. And while the development of one's potential is of utmost importance for the individual in question, it is with this common need and with the concern for the health of our communities in mind that he makes a number of claims and suggestions: "The curriculum of education for the twenty-first century must be transformed radically. […] First, we need to eliminate the existing hierarchy of subjects. […] Second, we need to question the entire idea of "subjects". […] Third, the curriculum should be personalized" (2009, 247-8). He speaks in favour of the focus on individuals in educational contexts, by which he does not mean only students but also teachers, asserting that most reform endeavours concentrate on the curriculum and the assessment, ignoring the potential of teachers and pedagogy (ibid., 235), while "the most successful systems in the world […] invest in teachers" (ibid., 249).

Robinson identifies two main problems of traditional schooling: the first one is the unnatural and illogical hierarchy of disciplines in schools, which reflects the image of industrialism, and "the other is that conformity has a higher value than diversity" (ibid., 230). While criticizing the former, he builds a strong case for the idea that the creativity of individuals is hampered and lost; shedding light on this, he points to the organic nature of communities as well as to the danger of groupthink – it can dull the individual judgement.

Robinson has a lot in common with contemporary proponents of Freireian pedagogy: while "creativity" is a broader concept than "critiquing", the act of critical thinking is by definition creative. Generally speaking, critique springs from the ability and willingness to think outside the box, and is intrinsically at odds with unquestioned conformity. Robinson's noteworthy emphasis on the dangers of conformity is but a rephrasing of critical educators' commitment "to make the political more pedagogical, that is, to make critical reflection and action a fundamental part of a social project that not only engages forms of oppression but also engages a deep and abiding faith in the struggle to humanize life itself" (Giroux 1985, xiv).

3. Neoliberal Capitalist Ideology and an "Informed Student"

In *The Politics of Education* Paulo Freire (1985) finds the ultimate challenge in the multitude of educated people who are actively passive, who seem to refuse to learn more about their own

powerlessness in the face of social, religious and/or political inequities. His radical pedagogy seeks to understand the very conditions of imposed and self-imposed oppression in its many forms; it seeks to inspire open-minded and critical educators to address these conditions in class in ways that are both illuminating and engaging.

The distressing results of the Asch conformity experiment in 1951 put an end to any doubt regarding the human need for acceptance and unanimity: "The tendency to conformity in our society is so strong," wrote Asch, "that reasonably intelligent and well-meaning young people are willing to call white black. This is a matter of concern. It raises questions about our ways of education and about the values that guide our conduct" (in Robinson 2009, 146). Combined with the way the ruling ideology works on and through us, the forces that shape our decisions – and ultimately our lives as individuals and as interconnected communities – are too important not to be scrutinized. And since the world is currently under the dictate of neoliberal ideology, schools and universities should be engaged in what Freire termed "conscientization" and raise awareness about its implications.[2]

Theorizing from the experience of students and faculty in higher education in Great Britain, Alex Callinicos says that "any real attempt to open universities out and democratize them would run slap against the drive by the government, supported by big business, to harness higher education to the priorities of competition and profit" (2006, 39). The situation in Britain is indicative of the trend apparent everywhere in the West. Throughout Europe, the gradual turn to the job market, which seems to have been progressing according to the inherent logic of the system, has found its administrative scheme in the Bologna Process.

If we see this as a problem – as many of us do – we might be wondering whether we should focus more on developing "critically thinking citizens who are able to address serious societal issues in a sophisticated manner" (Orlowski 2011, 7). There is no recipe as to how this goal is to be achieved, but there are many theoretical signposts (and much practical experience) to be critically appropriated. As already stated, in doing so within the humanities and EFL teaching, we can avoid neither a critique of the ruling ideology nor a critique of English as *the* language of the ruling ideology. It is in the best interest of every individual as well as in the best interest of the global community to have some understanding of the concepts and processes these areas comprise.

4. Critiquing Ideology

One of the documents that is indicative of the trends and plans set in motion by the neoliberal agenda is *EU 2020 Strategy* (2009). The passages that discuss education and research place a heavy emphasis on innovation and creativity, calling knowledge, quite appropriately "the engine for sustainable growth" (ibid., 5). The text acknowledges the fact that Europe has some of the best universities in the world, and professes the plan to create even more centres of intellectual excellence. However, it places this plan in the context of innovative business start-ups in which "universities and research institutions (will) "raise capital through the commercialization of their ideas" (ibid., 5). While universities have always helped to reproduce the existing social system and provide people with socially useful skills, they have also been a space of "pure" research, of individual self-fulfilment and of critical reflection on society. Yet what we are faced with at present is a blatant neoliberal transformation of universities, whose social relevance depends increasingly on the ability to serve the needs of neoliberal capitalism.

2 It is interesting to note that one of the most systematic attempts to develop and critique Freire's legacy has been made in Australia. For more information cf. the work of Allan Luke, an Australian linguist and educator.

While the main problems of the current capitalist economic paradigm spring from its unsustainability, the main problem of the current neoliberal globalization seems to lie in its demand "that societies should be governed by the rules of trade and understood only in terms of its economic rationality. According to Berthelot, "the much vaunted 'global village' is turning out to be a 'global pillage'" (quoted in Orlowski 2011, 183).

The problem is this neoliberal economic dictate has taken over the whole world. The problem teachers will find difficult to ignore is that the public sector is being run increasingly under the same dictate. The problem is that there is a particular language use that helps to make this tendency – this reality, as it were – seem like an inevitability. Although billions of people feel increasingly oppressed by the system, it continues to be upheld as the most appropriate. Neoliberal ideology is gradually monopolizing the discourse used in the spheres of the upbringing and education of young people. The same international organizations that write economic policy and parliamentary legislation (the WTO, the World Bank, the IMF) are creating a global discourse whose power rests in achieving a symbolic normalization of neoliberal practices, and in creating a codified template that might soon enough turn into a common denominator of national education systems throughout the world (cf. Laval 2005).

There is a general consensus among critics of neoliberal educational policy about the root cause for damage inflicted upon public education: education is regarded as a subsector of economy (cf. works by McLaren 2010, Orlowski 2011, Giroux 2007, Pennycook 2007). American educators Karen Anijar and David Gabbard (2009) have examined neoliberalism's effects on the American public school system and report on the devastating effects (cf. Orlowski 2011, 187). Assessing the situation in France, Christian Laval in his book *School Is Not a Company* poses the following question: "Is it all about adapting the school system to the capitalist economy and liberal society […] or are we dealing with a more serious attempt to abolish the school as such?" (2003, 18; my translation). While he professes agreement with Gilles Deleuze, who believed the latter to be the case (cf. ibid.), Laval is one of the theorists who warn against premature conclusions about the death of the public education sector. Nevertheless, he presents a number of tendencies pointing to the seriousness of the neoliberal attack on the public sector in general and schools in particular.

Schools are subjected to the processes of deinstitutionalization (as "flexible organizations" that are shaped by the dictates of the market), devalorization (the classical values of emancipation and self-betterment have given way to the imperatives of productivity and efficiency) and desintegration (as a result of consumerist conception of individual autonomy and reproduction of social inequalities). Rather than considering knowledge to be of high social, cultural and political relevance, neoliberal ideology understands knowledge as a professional category. Yet the neoliberal agenda continues to be presented as a perfect and universal solution to all social problems, including those related to the educational system. As mass education has not managed to significantly reduce social disparity and to solidify meritocratic values, Laval acknowledges the fact that schools are indeed in need of reform (2005, 21). The neoliberal approach to this reform is not the answer, though. It uses the language of "equal opportunities", but its market logic cannot abolish the existing inequalities; instead, it deepens them.

His study shows how in France general accessibility of scientific and technical culture remains a utopian goal. This is so for two main reasons. The first one has to do with the superiority of capital accumulation above any other social goal, which, in turn, translates into tuition fees and private schools, compromising the right to education, let alone equal access to it. The other restriction is linked to media industry and the fact that in the market society consumerism has a stronger pull than

pleasures derived from intellectual pursuits (2004, 17). By offering hedonistic solutions to invented needs, advertising policy aims to pacify the masses, creating, in the process, submissive subjects – seekers of enjoyment, comfort and status symbols. In other words, the system restricts rather than opens up the space of quality education for all, at the same time conditioning individuals to become alienated from the allure of intellectual pursuits. Crucial in this conditioning is – advertising.

Laval's estimate is compatible with that of Paul Orlowski, who contrasts the North American public schools mission of "educating future citizens in possession of critical thinking skills" with the present "viewing of students as human capital in need of training for their future jobs" (2011, 187). By promoting the latter the neoliberal position creates the citizen's identity that could not be further away from the active citizen pursued by the classical ideals of state education.

Analyzing the educational policies in the USA and Canada, Orlowski suggests that "teachers should be aware of the latest research in the social sciences and cultural studies, especially how it pertains to schooling" (2011, 9). He claims that public life in general and all state apparatuses in particular are determined by hegemonic discourse, defining hegemony as "the ideal representation of the interests of the privileged groups as universal interests, which are then accepted by the masses as the natural order rather than as a demonstration of the construction of power along the lines of race, class, and gender relations" (2011, 6). And that is where critical pedagogy steps in, educating students to be aware of the fact that discourse is always connected with power.

Orlowski's view is, in part, informed by Apple's *Ideology & Curriculum* (2004), which provides an analysis of hegemonic discourses embedded in the formal curriculum. Apple points to an obvious link between the curriculum topics and the dismantling of the social welfare state. In other words, he calls our attention to the relation between the educational programmes and our silent consent to political decisions that have negative long-term effects for the majority. He shows the relation between the (covert) racist attitudes of Americans and the textbooks used in American and Canadian schools, stating that liberal pluralist forms of multicultural education maintain racial and cultural power structures rather than combat them. While a significant majority of sociology students "recognize the horrors of the colonial past", most of them don't understand the ways in which the powerful colonial legacy affects social relations still today, staying blissfully unaware of "systemic racism or the privileges of 'whiteness' in contemporary society" (quoted in Orlowsky 2011, 9). [3]

Furthermore, Orlowski points out the strategic value of omission, listing a number of topics, such as social class, use of taxes, trade unions, the social welfare state, to mention a few that have been removed from the curriculum, demonstrating how "omission as a hegemonic strategy is used to further entrench corporate interests in the United States and Canada", and how both the curriculum and the attitudes of teachers help perpetuate the white middle-class bias as the hegemonic norm. It is particularly noteworthy how the disappearance of class concerns from the curriculum coincides with a specific emphasis on the individual. As a matter of fact, the removal of class consciousness seems to go hand in hand with "the hyper-emphasized individual" (Orlowski 2011) in the educational rhetoric and programmes. Wilkinson and Pickett explained the effect of this trend on society itself: "Instead of a better society, the only thing that almost everyone strives for is to better their own position – as individuals – within the existing society" (quoted in Orlowski 2011, 4). In other words, "the hyper-emphasized individual" is addressed as a consumer, whose choice to invest in their education will improve their position on the job market. The other side of the same rationale is the attitude to the unemployed and homeless, who – such is the

3 And they are equally unaware of how this could be connected to the superiority of capital accumulation. For more on the symptomatic lack of "genuine understanding" within American educational system on all levels cf. Gardner 1995.)

discourse – have only themselves to blame for their predicament. In words of Orlowski, "these social problems are *not* seen as political issues with political solutions" (2011, 185). Instead, they are seen as logical outcomes of bad decisions and poor choices of which individuals have to suffer the consequences.

In the wider social context the paradigm leads to feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, which, in turn, creates an atmosphere of ultimate disinterestedness in political participation, further exacerbated by political parties, whose pro-business policies render differences between them more and more insignificant. Such a social climate is the background of yet another byproduct of neoliberalism: "an apathetic and cynical citizenry without much of a political consciousness" (2011, 186), too busy satisfying their own wants and ambitions, or dealing with threat of eviction from their home, with financial difficulties or unemployment – which they are held personally responsible for – to be interested in active involvement in social and political issues. Orlowski is wary of the dire consequences following a decline in political consciousness around issues of social class and civil rights (such as the Patriot Act or threats to the Canadian universal healthcare system).

It turns out that the identity of the ideal citizen has nothing to do with active citizenship; it turns out that the neoliberal subject is a result of serious corrosion of social values: "Brown (2003) contends that the American individual is being re-made as "calculating rather than rule-abiding" (quoted in Orlowski 2011, 186). This conception of the ideal citizen "renders the concept of the public to be subservient to the needs of capitalism. In other words, we are clearly in a period of regression in terms of supporting the common good" (ibid., 186).

A Slovene sociologist, Kovačič (2010), has come to a similar conclusion, suggesting that the current economic paradigm and the corresponding values fostered within the educational system have created a mass of students whose attitude to knowledge is rather cynical. They have realized that our economy does not appreciate in-depth knowledge, that a degree no longer guarantees a job, let alone a respected and well paid job. The system thus generates an attitude of indifference and disillusionment regarding their professional prospects, at the same time encouraging resourcefulness and flexibility that, translated in pragmatic terms, often equal trickery and bluffing (Kovačič, 2010). In the system that pits one person/worker/candidate/job-seeker against another, the idea of the common good is losing ground. And since the pro-neoliberal governments service corporations rather than the public interest, we are inclined to agree with Orlowski, who believes that social studies teachers and teacher educators (which is what most university teachers of English are) "are in excellent position to make the next generation of citizens aware of the deleterious effects of neoliberalism on civil society", adding that "the classroom is another place where hope resides" (2011, 192-3).

5. Critiquing English

Over the past decades serious concerns and reservations about teaching and/or learning English, the language of oppression and unfair globalization, have been voiced. A number of teachers feel reluctant to accept the role of propagators of things and ways characteristic of North America, Great Britain or Australia. Some have even suggested that the teaching of English should be discouraged, as this is the oppressive language (cf. Pennycook in Tollefson 1995, 34-58).

Twenty years ago the issues addressed within the fields of critical pedagogy and applied linguistics included state language policies (and what/who they serve), ELT in the context of the spread of English as a world language, and a critical self-examination within the fields of applied linguistics and language teaching. These issues started to be observed against the background of

two underlying realizations (and research topics in their own right): the first one postulated that "research in applied linguistics must incorporate, as a central concept, the issue of *power"*, and the second one stated that "language policies are both an outcome of power struggles and an arena for those struggles" (Tollefson 1995, 3). In other words, the relevant studies tend to fall on either side of the continuum, or else they are marked by a dynamic tension between a stress on structural determinism and a belief in human agency.

If we acknowledge the fact that schools are an effective ideological apparatus, that they act as agents of social and cultural reproduction, then – of all discursive practices – the spread of English must be granted a special status. It is, after all, the language of ex-colonizers as well as the language of contemporary economic, financial and political elites. It is the most widely used lingua franca, whose spread tends to be seen as natural, neutral and beneficial (cf. Pennycook in Tollefson 1995, 37). While the presence of English in the world is undisputed, Pennycook addresses the important issue of the world in English: English is dependent on forms of Western knowledge; its spread "went parallel with the spread of the culture of international business and technological standardization"(ibid., 42); it is perceived as "*the* language of international capitalism", as "an integral part of the global structures of dependency"(ibid., 43). In other words, the ways of the world are imprinted in English, English is the language of the current division of the world, English is in the world just as much as the world is in English.[4]

Marnie Holborow, an Irish academic and member of the global educational association TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) confirms that "over the last few years English as a discourse of colonialism and resistance to its dictates are themes which have moved centre stage within ELT (Pennycook 1998; Cangarajah 1999) and the controversial nature of them accepted" (Holborow, M. 2007).

The sensitivity regarding the role of English in the world in general and the role of teachers of English as promoters of the language of imperial ideology, of American might, of world domination, as it were, has been heightened especially since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. That was a time of massive public outrage against American aggression, and a time when the global anti-capitalist movement gained new momentum. The way a critique of global capitalism became popular was unprecedented. Millions of people throughout the world saw Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* and read Naomi Klein's *No Logo.* The overlap between neoliberal capitalism and war was suddenly made more apparent; the overlap between language and ideology, and the issue of ideology transfer across cultures were, again, held in the focus of heightened attention.

Ideology and language are not the same thing, though. "One is not reducible to the other and interconnections between language and ideology are not given or even predictable. They are in a constant state of flux since speakers can select, interpret, and contest the ideological underpinnings of any specific use of language" (Holborow 2007, 3). Holborow adopts a humanist attitude, but is concerned – like thousands of teachers of English – about her conscious and unconscious

4 This interpretation echoes Freire's perspective on literacy acquisition, which, in his view, should always be related to the learners' social contex; "…"reading the word" and "reading the world" must go hand in hand (Freire and Macedo 1987)" (in Tollefson 1995, 12). The idea behind it is that literacy is not deserving of its name unless it is "emancipatory literacy". Emancipatory or critical literacy empowers learners to make meaningful relations among different pieces of information they learn at school on the one hand, and questions of power and social issues (such as class division, discriminatory policies etc.) on the other; it teaches them how to contextualize knowledge. While emancipatory literacy potentially leads to social change, the literacy programmes that refuse to address pressing social issues and ethical questions "perpetuate ignorance or, as Macedo puts it, stupidification" (1987). To put it differently, this is yet another verbalization of the fact that educational practices either contribute to the status quo or they challenge it. In either case, they imply an ideological stance.

involvement in propagating, through mere language teaching, the ways, attitudes and values of the neo-liberal corporate world.

Every ideology reflects and sustains specific beliefs and values, and offers an elaborate interpretation of the ways of the world; every ideology does so on the premises of specific interests of a specific social class. Language is, of course, a crucial ingredient in this interpretation. It is used in the way that renders the interpretation as a self-evident one, as the only natural understanding of the way things are. As speakers we "inherit" a specific language use (and ideology) by being born into it. Although we choose the words and register and language use, much of the choice is unconscious, for speakers are always socially-positioned and thus ideology-specific.[5] Althusser claims "that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation*" (1970, 25). Does that mean that ideological interpellation is a process that turns a pre-ideological individual into a subject proper? Althusser, in fact, claims that "in reality these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing" (ibid.)

It seems we cannot but acknowledge the primary role of the social context we belong to and the ideological nature of the language we cannot escape, but at the same time, we cannot accept the anti-humanist view of the subject as a mere effect of social relations. It goes against the liberal humanist tradition embedded at the very heart of the pedagogical professions. We therefore uphold the dialectic understanding of the relationship between language and ideology, believing that if we can teach *about* interpellation, we can also teach *resistance to* interpellation. While ideology always presents itself as common sense, as natural, whenever language is used to challenge or question "the way things are", it suggests an active thinker/speaker rather than a passive product of a certain ideology; it suggests a more potent position of an individual otherwise determined by one's social placement and hence by a specific ideology.

Raising awareness about these relations and processes is no small feat. Yet it makes perfect sense to consistently draw our students' attention to the connection between language and ideology, starting with (written or spoken) texts that are easier to grasp. An example that springs to mind is the language used for American Indians in the past. When they were referred to as "savages" and "primitives", the expressions reflected a specific ideology, a specific attitude to American Indians, which was instrumental in making it sound acceptable to persecute them.

Another example would be sexism in language: a bulk of research has shown that the habitual use of the so-called "generic man" and "generic he" produce distorted mental pictures of reality, that they result in both children and adults visualizing males rather than females in about 90% of the cases where "generic" he/man is used. Moreover, confronted with the sentence *Dr Jones is a busy person: a clinic to run, medical students to supervise…* my students normally assume that we are talking about *a male* doctor – even without a "generic he/man". When I show the last part of the sentence *…and a husband with polio*, they never fail to react with an audible expression of surprise.

Every aspect of language (spoken or written, productive or receptive) is culture-specific; in every function language (use) is intricately connected with specific modes of analysis, with specific rationalizations of what is considered logical/acceptable/natural etc. When teaching students how to write, for instance, we are favouring certain conventions over others, we are promoting certain

5 One language can, of course, contain several, at times contradicting, ideologies, but it is the ruling ideology that prevails. Hence the call for a conscious struggle to articulate one's "counter discourse".

principles of, say, register, lexical density, and/or structure that are related to certain standards of credibility – which are, inevitably, approved by the ruling ideology. In the article Developing literacy across cultures, Urška Sešek confirms that "in each culture, new generations are taught through writing to prefer certain ways of thinking and conceptualizing of the world" (Sešek 2004, 294).

Language choices have been adopted, normalized and internalized as part of the process of socialization. It takes a conscious decision and some intellectual effort to dive under the surface of language use, and to understand the delicate interplay of forces within language politics. So if people stop to think whether to say "policemen" or "police officers", whether to "let someone leave" or to "fire them", whether to describe a military attack as "a pre-emptive counterattack", "a proactive approach" or as a "we-attacked-first case", they choose their language to reflect their personal preferences, their moral standards etc, and exercise their freedom to adopt their own attitude to "common practices" or to established policies.

In her article Ideology and Language Marnie Holborow (2007) shows how the language of neo-liberal capitalism penetrated into everyday language use, how other fields, from humanities and health care to political speech, have been "colonized" by the economic field. She starts explaining this semantic stretching by turning to Bourdieu (1998), who defined the neo-liberal language (of flexibility, competitiveness, free market, individualism etc) as "a 'strong discourse', an 'infernal machine', whose necessity imposes itself across society, even on those who stand to lose from its imperatives" (Holborow 2007, 5). Referring to Bourdieu, Holborow reminds us of how today his visionary delineations regarding neoliberal capitalism – its self-presentations that defy opposition and its socially destructive effects – "sound all too familiar almost anywhere in the world" adding that "he showed powerfully the mechanisms by which we are all drawn into the neo-liberal net and assume, almost nonchalantly, its language" (ibid.)

Knowing the situation in North America, especially in the States (where aggressive marketing of "for-profit schools" is a common thing), she draws parallels with that in Ireland: every hospital has a "mission statement" and nearly every local council, government department, GP surgery and tax office all pledge themselves to the highest standards of "customer care". Public language, she writes, has been taken over by corporate jargon and language itself has become part of brand-image, or 'nice-speak'.

In the last decade in Ireland the language of neo-liberalism has spread where it is perhaps least expected – in Higher Education. Referring to Graham, Holborow writes:

> Universities as *competitors* and students as *the target market*, education in global *competition* and *the knowledge economy, value-for-money education, world-class educational provision, managing change, the university industry, delivering and packaging courses, research outputs, teaching outputs, units of resource* (i.e. students*),* the *pursuit of excellence* and the (fairly vacuous) *international best practice*, as Graham points out, are repeated endlessly in the colossal quantities of electronic communication that flits across campuses (Graham, 2004). (Holborow 2007, 9)

Scrutinizing the OECD Report on Higher Education in Ireland in 2004, Holborow notes that rather than on the type or content of education the report focuses on "recruitment, organization, administration and management" – which is made clear by a most telling presentation of the frequency of certain expressions in it:

*Table 1: "**Word count: OECD Report/Higher Education Ireland***

R&D	42	research	294
competitive	27	student	179
change	23	learning	48
market	20	teaching	21
organisation	16	Study	18
industry	15	learner	2
business	13	lecturer	2
manager	9	intellectual	2
competition	5	library	1
		private study	0
		literature	0
		reading	0
		tutorials	0

> Significantly, the words used most frequently are *research* and *R&D* and, despite their quite different connotations, they are used interchangeably. For example:
>
> [A] number of measures need to be put in place to create a sustainable *research culture* which will provide the depth of resource necessary to attract overseas companies in far greater number than currently to invest in *R&D* in Ireland and to sustain and enhance indigenous industry… (Holborow 2007, 11)

Such examples are indicative of the significance of understanding the ways in which ideological battles are fought in and with language, of who has the privilege to determine meaning, of how slowly/quickly certain practices are naturalized and certain values accepted. If students are aware of how different vocabulary (uses) – as well as different speaking and listening styles – serve different ideological purposes, they are better able to avoid being misled by often ambiguous and elaborate rhetoric used in various social and political contexts.

Our students still have a chance to decide (and strive) for a different meaning of, say, "research", but the next generation might well be born into the world in which the "dehumanizing overtones" of "human resources" (ibid., 16) are no longer questioned, and where no one opposes the use of "customer" for as diverse groups of people as patients, students, asylum seekers, immigrant workers and passengers, for no one feels such language use "degrades human experience by reducing it to the cash nexus" (ibid.).

6. Conclusion

If the world is always and already in the word, as stated and demonstrated above, then English as a global language spreading the ideology of neo-liberal capitalism occupies a unique position, which teachers of English have the responsibility to communicate to their students.

Alongside many other theorists and educators, Pennycook urges us – linguists and teachers of English – to explore and question the connection between our work and the political/cultural interests it serves; he often warns us against the claims that the spread of English is "natural,

neutral, or beneficial" (in Tollefson 1995). In effect, he reminds us of the fact that English can – unwittingly – be taught as a language of subservience, a language that perpetuates the status quo, but that it can also be taught as a tool for empowerment. In other words, he explores the relationship between language, culture, and discourse, addressing the difference between the (use of) English that encourages people's unproblematic acceptance of their own oppression, and the (use of) English that is potent with new meanings and perspectives, that is capable of carrying idiosyncratic experiences of diverse nations and social classes. In response to some linguists and teachers who believe the teaching of English should be discouraged (as this is the oppressive language), Pennycook says that "as long as English remains intimately linked to the discourses that ensure the continued domination of some parts of the globe by others, an oppositional programme other than one that seeks only to limit access to English will be necessary" (Pennycook in Tollefson 1995, 55). More generally, he suggests that "counter-discourses can indeed be formed in English and […] one of the principal roles of English teachers is to help this formulation" (ibid.). Inviting us to approach our EFL classes in this manner, he echoes the Freireian call for an education that requires students to create their own words, to re-claim the familiar words and use them in ways that are instrumental for their own emancipation, and to be, as listeners and readers, always on the lookout for hidden meanings:

The theme of an essay is not merely what appears on the surface in words. There is always something hidden, something with a deeper meaning that is the key for complete understanding. Accordingly, whenever possible, writing on or toward real issues entails an extensive effort to see through deceiving appearances that may blur our vision. (Freire 1985, 113)

Between Freire and Pennycook there is a diverse group of scholars (e.g. Giroux, Orlowski, Holborow, Luke, McLaren, Tollefson) highlighting both the relation between power structures and educational practices, and educators' responsibility to raise awareness about the power of neoliberal ideologies. As we are directly and indirectly involved in both education and international communication (which are largely conducted in English), and as social and political change is both reflected in and constituted by language, we need to be able not only to recognize hegemonic cultural discourses, but also resist those discourses and produce what Pennycook terms "counter discourse".

As long as English is THE lingua franca and as long as the so-called "democracy promotion" is still on the agenda of Western countries' foreign policies, teachers of English will be faced with the pedagogical challenge of introducing power politics into the classroom. This text has attempted to clarify the nature of this challenge: it is not really a matter of choice; power politics is already part of EFL teaching – whether we want it or not. What we can – and perhaps should – decide on, however, is whether we want to tackle it in a more controlled and informed way.

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