

# Krzysztof Polok

---

## On the cultural aspects of text and context in the glottodidactic process of L2 learners

---

Acta Neophilologica 15/1, 125-142

---

2013

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

**Krzysztof Polok**

Akademia Techniczno-Humanistyczna  
Bielsko-Biała

## ON THE CULTURAL ASPECTS OF TEXT AND CONTEXT IN THE GLOTTODIDACTIC PROCESS OF L2 LEARNERS

**Key words:** culture, language, text, context, L2 teaching

Text is generally considered as one of the most important elements in the process of deliverance of procedural knowledge to L2 learners. It is through texts pupils are expected to discover the world of mutual information exchange, which is to take place between any two (at least) members making use of it on the daily basis. It is through texts of various type and degree that L2 pupils are informed about many facts that matter when the issue of clarity of the process information is considered (e.g. factual coherence and/or cultural background of communication-connected process of message exchange). It also is with the help of text analysis that L2 pupils are thought to discover the peculiar web of pragmatics-bound reasoning techniques applied in any culture-connected message transmission process which can be observed in any situation of message exchange in the world. As one can discover, texts function as a very salient element of the whole process of learning; therefore, it may seem interesting to look at the array of segments that can be found there, as well as the ways any of them is made use of when it is considered as an educational means in the moment the whole picture of conversation construction is being delivered to L2 pupils.

### **1. On various glottodidactic issues concerning text and context deliverance to second language pupils**

From the glottodidactic point of view a text is considered to be a reading and/or a dialogue which can be found in a handbook and/or any other source meant to help L2 pupils in their process of L2 education [Ur 1991: 94]. Besides a number

of clearly pragmatic elements, such as various forms of deixis, antecedents and/or anaphoras (spotted in a text and, subsequently, discussed), pupils can often find a number of culture-connected pieces of information which strengthen the logic of a text, thus making it coherent and comprehensible. According to a popular definition [Yule 1998: 141], coherence makes any text connected with the external world, so that its readers find a text probable and logically fitting the situation described there.

An approach like this lets a reader discover the notion of context [Thornbury 1997: 152] as a linguistic phenomenon in which a given text matches the external world, in this way being its more or less faithful description. What matters in this situation is the cultural background of both text and context as – in case any of the text/context-connected issues differs from the ones actually conceived of by the text readers – there appears a construction mentally different from the ones generally accepted by the text readers. It appears then that what makes a text logically probable is its external concord with the contextual situation actually believed in (and conceived of) by its readers. Any reader, while trying to make sense of any of the consecutive elements of a text (as well as its completed structure), will pay subconscious attention to a number of details which should inform him/her about the external world (actually existing in its cognitive description by the text author), involving him/her in the processes of redistribution and re-categorization of the issues described by the text author(s) to the ones existing in the reader's internal world. It usually happens that any such description of the text-functioning world also informs its readers about various culture-connected facts which matter in the world of the characters of a story, but which may be differently perceived in the world of current text readers. From this point of view, any text (even if it has been squeezed down to a single sentence) is a mine of culture-connected information for L2 readers who are thus given a possibility to discover the ways of functioning of the worlds different than theirs; in this way the readers are given a possibility to automatically extrapolate from the world accepted by them so far to the one totally new to them, i.e. the world they have not been aware of so far.

In this way, when a pupil reads a sentence: *Mary kissed Martin nervously at the bus-stop yesterday* he/she can not only discover that Mary was head over heels in love with Mark (what may also happen in his/her own culture), but also that Mary was bold enough to kiss him openly at a bus-stop (a situation that may strikingly differ from the one approved of by the reader's own culture); an assertion which could let him/her conclude that this form of behavior is actually permitted in the culture of the sentence to allow girls to demonstrate their feelings in the public, that bus-stops may also be considered as parting places for people in the text culture, that public kissing of a representative of the opposite sex is considered to be a form of serious demonstration of one's feelings towards the other person and so on.

It is important to discover a context for a sentence like that (so as to make it coherent). The context is searched for on the grounds of the information found in the sentence; in case a sentence is one of the many, the context searched for is a grouped one; it is being established on the grounds of the information received from many various sources, i.e. on the grounds of text analysis that allowed any of the sentences to appear. It is fine when a sentence describes the environment the readers are aware of; but when such readers are given a sentence which provides them with the factual information (actually strange to them), they have been given a message currently strange to them; in this way they discover the world of the native users of the language, immediately confronting it with the world familiar to them and while drawing appropriate conclusions, they are expected to have become knowledgeable about the various rules and/or principles which have to be observed in the process of current communication handling, to be effectively performed in the language different for the native one.

Such crumbs of information are invaluable to L2 learners as it is in this way they are often provided with new and still new forms of instruction connected with the cultural environment of the language they currently learn. While reading various texts of whatever form and/or type their readers are always informed about the real world in which both the texts and the the opinions such texts contain may definitely function. This is the way they learn about the external, i.e. contextual, world as well as the logical connections that can be found there. In this way all texts function as a mine of ready-made information of various type which bring the real text-conveyed world to the eyes of the readers thus letting them understand it and providing them with the necessary knowledge to appreciate the system of logically set rules of social and environmental functioning presented there.

As all text readers find the texts read by them to be functioning as cultural transmitters of various situations concerning the world presented to them in the texts, the questions referring to the validity of different culture-connected items formed by text readers have to be answered at the very beginning of any text analysis; such questions are usually the ones that permit the readers to imagine the context the information delivered to them in the text may function in a coherent way there. One must never forget that what actually happens in the minds of L2 text readers is a complicated process comprising continuously generated imagination of the situation just described in the text, adjustment of the particular elements of the situation to the coherent – known by the readers – rules of logic and, last but not least, a parallel process of discovery of different culture-bound factual pieces of information, which allow L2 learners to acquire various aspects of the procedural knowledge as well as adjust themselves to the culture-triggered requirements that emerge from the knowledge obtained by them. In this way any sentence delivered to L2 learners is important to them from the perspective of their L2 education. Not only are they provided with the necessary L2 environmental instruction, but also illustrations of particular forms of culture-bound social and

linguistic behaviour have been presented to them. Such description should help L2 learners to develop a process of cognitive understanding of the text-conveyed world as well as the patterns of the definition of the world found there on the one hand and the definition of themselves in this world as opposed to the one they do exist on the other. When discovering such mutual culture-bound similarities and differences, L2 learners obtain the necessary knowledge permitting them to imagine themselves as more or less competent performers of the demands and expectations of the society they may find themselves in. They are not only instructed about many culture-bound activities and the traditional ways of performance of such activities, but also about the linguistic patterns which assist such traditional forms of behaviour. Finally, they are given a possibility to find out that what matters in any culture whatsoever are different ways of communication that are effectively made use of by the representatives of a culture in question; and that just because of the fact that these forms of communication are culture-dependent, they are ultimately important for anybody attempting to reach the level of successful communication with a non-native.

This is where the cognitive theory of language comes out as an important element of both our text and context analysis and their culture-depending trends. Following Ronald Langacker [2003], language is viewed as a “structured inventory of conventional linguistic units” [Langacker 2003: 40] and all of them function within human cognition as knowledge providers required to enable people construct meaningful expressions. All expressions which can be produced by people in the form of language can be divided into the ones which function as real (actual) elements appearing in various lingual productions, or as the elements which emerge from them on the grounds of the processes of abstraction or categorization.

In this way, the habitual process of list-like language formation [Fife 1994: 14], i.e. the process which is based upon one’s individual enlargement of one’s mental lexicon, due to one’s ability to discover and internalize (new and still new) cognitively fresh language-defined extra-linguistic constructs, can be observed. As James Fife explains,

when a given linguistic-semantic, phonological or schematic unit becomes internalized so well that its activation does not require any mental effort at all, it becomes [...] one of the elements glued to [...] the list [Fife 1994: 14].

Any piece of information, recognized by people as necessary to help them upgrade their individual level of environmental functioning, must be given a name and, subsequently, appropriately adjusted to be indicated appropriate place and position in their process of possible message production (communication). Thus, the cognitive theory of human development, in its classical form constructed by Jean Piaget [1972], can be evidenced one more time. Language, being an important element of human cognition, strongly influences the whole process of human development, helping to discover all the segments of human environment necessary to be accommodated by any individual to be allowed to function there at

some level of (popularly understood) comfort. But this process of accommodation of the environment by people must be assisted by their cognitive processes of its discovery, the processes which let people describe the environment in the way it really may exist (at least, from the point of view of each of its directly experiencing participants). The more they learn about the rules existing and functioning in the environment they are being informed about, either directly or indirectly, the more complete the picture of the world will appear. As there is no information about context without its direct participation [Halliday, in: Bernstein 1973: 353], it is context, in particular, which starts functioning as some form of knowledge provider, where the required units of declarative and procedural knowledge about the world surrounding any of the participants of a speech act can be found and made use of. While learning (reading?) about different forms of human performance, it is in the context each of such contextual threads can discover these pieces of information which will let the readers establish their place in the world they are learning (reading?) about. Additionally, it is also the context, where they can find as many various details concerning the language and the culture they hope to be functioning in as would appear necessary to secure the completeness of the internal picture which ought to be produced. Thus, the whole process of language acquisition, fully based upon the earlier processes of categorization and/or re-categorization of the existing world, would have to follow the tripartite model [Gorczyca 2007: 30] presented below:

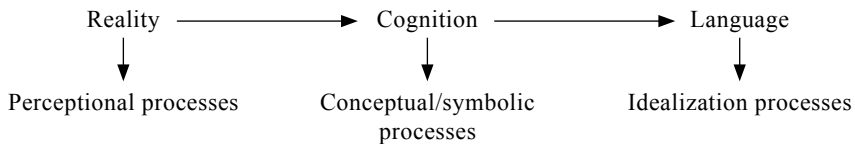


Fig. 1. The tripartite model of context perception [after: Gorczyca 2007: 30]

It is this practical application of the model which would let the readers discover the exact proportions of the world existing on the grounds of the information received from the text and an additional amount found in the context, at the same time bringing the fictional text-existing world closer to the one functioning within the minds of the readers.

## **2. Culture and language (or: language and culture?)**

Following Richard D. Lewis,

any human being can see as far as their horizon and that is the limit. [...] Unless we make [...] efforts, our horizon remains a British horizon, an American horizon [...] or one of many other world views. [...] each culture enjoys a certain segment of experience which is no more than a fraction of the total possible available experience [Lewis 1999: 85].

The “efforts” Lewis means in the quotation refer to the application of the denotative system formed by the culture it belongs to if only one wishes to succeed in the appropriate, conventionally approved of, presentation of the world views perfectly understood within the limited range of the “horizon”. It is only when one has jumped into the shoes normally used by the members of some other culture that one is able to understand their points of view referring to the external reality that surrounds them as well as the reasons that forced them to accept their unique system of cognitively guided approach applied for the description of this reality. This is what is actually meant by “broadening one’s horizon”, so succinctly pointed by Lewis. It is such purposeful application of some different system of description of the external reality, devised by the members of some different culture, that lets one see that a given item may be understood and practically made use of differently from the approach traditionally accepted by the culture one belongs to; it is in this way one’s horizons can be broadened when he/she has become aware that any two things in the world may be perceived identically and that there always exists another approach to cognitively understand and described an issue, which may appear to be as good and congenial as the one he/she has traditionally been functioning in. Lewis [1999: 94] rightly remarks that any language, while being used for communication is actually “much more than that; it has its strengths and weaknesses which project the national character and even philosophy”. In the paragraphs that follow this quotation, Lewis elaborates on his opinion that all people belonging to one speech community generally reveal the features characteristic for the local culture whenever they are involved in the process of message production. His stance is that different world communities produce their philosophical approaches to understand and describe their cognitively perceived world, which duly illustrates the most important features of the culture a given community belongs to. Following the theory presented above, Lewis claims that it is the diachronic features of a culture built-in by a community, that are mostly responsible for the actual picture of the language used by the community in question, as well as various communicational strategies applied by the community members in the moment they start verbalizing their opinions, judgements and/or beliefs; to support the claim Lewis produces a list of features that are – in his opinion – characteristic for some chosen European and world languages.

The features that have been considered as decisive for British English (not to be mistaken with American English) are: tendency to produce vague and coldly polite expressions; phrases stressing an inherent belief that the presented opinions are the ones that cannot be objected to; phrases that permit their users to be recognized as fair-play proponents; round “elegant” expressions which permit their users to demonstrate respect to debate opponents [Lewis 1999: 95ff]. Contrary to the above set of expressions, the ones characteristic for American English are: “quick, mobile and opportunistic” forms of verbalisation of one’s points of view; expressions that “boil with power, verve and an impulse to act and get doing”;

expressions that illustrate the tendency to participate in “tough talk”; a tendency to simplify the necessary information to the “indispensable minimum”; and – last but not least – many “exaggeration and hyperbolic constructions” [Lewis 1999: 96].

It is the difference that can be found in the historical and social heritage of the two societies that seems to have influenced the general tenor of the language system used by each of them. Whereas British English is characteristic for its dignity, majesty and the experience derived from years of toil of many generations, American English illustrates a nation impatient in their achievements, risky in their business activities, and unsophisticated in their descriptions of the world; this is a language of a young community which has no time to waste and which firmly believes in the convincing powers of the expressions produced by them. The two languages are so much different not only because of their historical past, but also because each of them has been formed on the grounds of another, totally different, set of beliefs. For example, although the two communities accept the idea of common sense [Lewis 1999: 12] the concept is differently perceived by the two nations: the British perceive it as derived from “experience rather than study”, whereas Americans find it as an idea which is “sound but unsophisticated”. Similar examples can be produced to illustrate a number of other concepts, such as: approach to nature, the mutual position of business and leisure, or even the attitude to silence. Although the two communities apply the linguistic system that derives from the same root, many of the phrases are different in detail. One of the reasons for the appearance of two so clearly differing systems of world description is the general attitude of the two communities to life and their expectations from the world, what usually results in the application of various phrases/expressions chosen to carry out the messages; there must be a realistic explanation for the fact that it is American English where so many phrases with *get* have been formed, that the issues of possession are differently described, that there are important differences in the understanding of the present perfect vs. past simple approach, that the use of prepositions varies in the two languages etc. Obviously, mostly because of the external sociological conditions, best illustrated by the famous MacLuhan’s expression describing the world as a global village, there are small chances that the two languages amass the differences between the two cognitively perceived systems of description of the world, but the ones that have appeared so far let some ethnographers and ethnolinguists claim that there exist two different languages formed by two different communities, which understand differently not only their function in the world but also the aims they are expected to perform in it.

The above stance can also be found by the approach the two languages are perceived by many foreigners. While most of them agree that the system of description of the world found there can be described as “a code within a code” [Lewis 1999: 109], mostly because of plenty of highly figurative expressions (British English) or an excessive number of neologisms (American English), the two systems of conversational reasoning applied by the members of any of the



two communities have resulted in attributing the name of a “muddling though language” to the British variant of English and recognizing its American variant as an “enthusiastic” form of language [Lewis 1999: 111]. Whereas British English has earned its name in the excessive number of various constructions valuing impersonality and/or cleft-like sentences, such constructions are not so popular in American English, where impersonal speech is applied in clearly defined cases. A situation like this can be commonly observed in business talks where the elegance of British English mixed with unremovable distance, fair play respect and cold matter-of-fact politeness strictly counteracts impatience and hasty, nervous-like reasoning of American English.

Having presented some of the most important features of both British and American English (at least from Lewis’s point of view) it may be of interest to speculate upon similar features of Polish culture/language which may be discovered during a debate, discussion or some form of conversation. Apart from the everlasting “soul” which has been reported to be a dominant feature of any Slavic language (Polish included), the Polish culture seems to be occupied by the approach (less rather than more) similar to the one observed in France and/or some other southern/eastern European countries. Lewis describes the Polish communication patterns in this way:

The Polish communication style is enigmatic. [Poles] can ring all the changes between a matter-of-fact pragmatic style and a wordy, sentimental, romantic approach to a given subject. When in the latter mode, they are fond of metaphor and their speech is rich in implied meaning, allusions, images and ambiguity. Irony and even satire are used to a great effect [Lewis 1999: 257].

Definitely, the linear attitude to time, so important in Anglo-Saxon communities, has never become a strong point in our community. Even when a schedule for work performance has been set, a feeling that some segment of the work planned may be postponed, or even changed, is always a friendly one for a great number of Poles. Hardly any decision has been recognized as final and an approach that anything already established may always be bettered up is quite popular. What is more, a belief that anything can be organized in another (i.e. different) way seems to cherish such a popularity that changing the ideas already agreed upon is not considered a flaw.

The forms of reasoning are not particularly refined; the ideas are hardly ever produced in a straightforward way so that – as Lewis observes – one has to learn to “read between the lines” [Lewis 1999: 258]. A conversation is often deprived of a feeling of compromise and respect to the arguments of the other party; quite the contrary, a person convinced of his/her rights is willing to defend them at high costs. Debate etc. members are prepared to face the facts, but when they find such facts unfavourable they often tend to either disregard them or interpret them in a way more favourable to their line of argument. The ideas of politeness and fair play, so distinct in the American and British variants of English, are not particu-

larly popular in the modern version of Polish, which is additionally heavily littered by a great number of borrowings from both British and American English. A very good illustration is the gradual replacement of the honorific expressions (which are traditionally produced in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular or plural) by the manner of introduction of straightforward (but alien to Polish culture) “you”, which is falsely expected to function as a symbol of one’s familiarity, friendliness and a successful attempt to “break the ice” between the two people. The very structure of the application of the expression that exists in both British and (mostly) American culture unfortunately has not been borrowed at all.

The discussion presented above is meant to stress upon the importance of the internal character of language, as well as its presence in the process of L2 education. It is not enough to instruct the pupils on the rules and principles of language when – at the same time – no mention has been uttered on the ways such principles are being applied to meet the mental construction functioning within each language. As no language is ever used for the sake of its use, but has to fulfill the tasks it was formed for, the internal character of language seems to reveal an extremely important function of language use; the way one uses a language always follows one’s internal ideas thus bridging one’s understanding of the world and the existing culture-bound denotative system of its description. An approach like this always requires the application of the expressions characteristic for a given culture/language able to define one’s argumentative potential found within the language used during a talk.

Business negotiations function as a very important segment of the modern world. Being a competent representative of a business talk crew among others requires the knowledge on the reasoning techniques normally applied by the members of a given community. It is thus not enough to be able to apply the structural system comprising the grammatical rules that can be found within a language, but also the principles generally applied to the presentation of the argumentative matter, the words, phrases and expressions used to convince the remaining members of the business negotiation to one’s business ideas. A belief that the ways of reasoning are culture-dependent and differ among themselves just as much as the cultures do is one of the most important forms of evidence testifying to the necessity of culture implementation during the process of L2 education.

### **3. The mirror reflection: text-observed contexts of culture**

Following our earlier remark that any text (and context which assists it) provides its readers with certain culture-connected information, it seems worth analyzing the forms of contextual information a text reader is able to find there. Any text furnishes its readers with a certain picture of life just as it is understood by a given community. All the denotative expressions that could be found there serve

to help the readers imagine the cognitive picture of life as it is experienced by the community the text author comes from. Even if a text is translated into another language it has to be translated in such a way as not to lose and/or distort this picture which definitely is the most important element of a text. In this way, it is possible to find out whether the members of the text-existing community perceive their life similarly to the one the text readers are familiar with, whether they accept similar (or different) moral and/or ethical values, approve of similar (or different) social laws and regulations, accept similar (or different) forms of social behaviour etc. Many of these forms of culture-connected data are obtained in a straightforward way as a text itself can inform its readers about many of such details. But apart from the information one can get in such direct way, there are many indirect forms of culture-connected information which can be obtained by text readers after their attentive scrutiny of the context. By means of a thorough analysis of many text-containing facts there may be drawn many conclusions informing the readers about various aspects of the world views to be experienced by the text-described community. Not only can there be deduced the reasons explaining the behavior of some text-appearing characters (functioning as the representatives of the community discussed in the text), but also the beliefs, attitudes and convictions, as well as inherent forms of reasoning traditionally accepted by the members of the community presented in the text.

All the readers, who are thought to be culturally competent in respect to their native culture (as this is the most commonly found situation), are involved into a contrastive process of matching the foreign text-derived data with the native ones they have possessed knowledge of. A process of contrasting the facts occurs regardless of the situation and is conditioned by the data that can be found in the text. In case no difference has been spotted the readers map the pieces of information possessed by them onto the ones obtained from the text, at the same time coming to the conclusion that similar (or even identical) cultural patterns are being cherished by the two communities (i.e. theirs and the one they are reading about). However, in case some differences have been spotted and the readers have become convinced about them by means of the information they were able to find in the text, they realize that there exist some areas of the culture alien to them, i.e. a fact which has to be understood before the text-connected information is internalized and, subsequently, made use of. A process like this helps the learners to place themselves in the just discovered reality, instructing them on the forms of behaviour (oral behaviour included), which are expected in the situation(s) just found.

Such a process of cross-cultural confrontation hardly ever goes undisturbed. There are at least three reasons which clearly influence the smoothness of the process in question: various forms of denotational difficulties, differences in the appearance of the cognitive concepts and – last but not least – problems with the techniques responsible for the construction of messages of various type used for various forms of reasoning observed in the discourse.

The first form of cross-cultural limitation which results in numerous drawbacks in the process of the comprehension of the text-presented culture is formed by differences in the denotational systems accepted by the two communities. When describing the surrounding environment, the array of expressions used by any of the communities to describe it may be different and the fact that one is not competent enough to decipher the semantic idea hidden behind the denotational coating, even if the idea itself is popular enough in the semantic system approved of by the reader's native community, may bring about a situation in which the reader is effectively stopped in the process of the comparison of the two cultures. Obviously, a situation like this clearly results from the reader's current level of his/her L2 competence and influences the amount of motivation he/she may have to continue the process of such cross-cultural confrontation. A special group of such denotational difficulties is formed by the so-called "false friends", i.e. the expressions, which – despite their identical graphic/phonological appearances – mean two different things in the two culturally-bound languages. Unless one of the two languages in question has adopted a phrase like this and effectively installed it within its lingual constructions instead of the native phrase, the "false friends" unknown by the text readers may make the whole process of text comprehension enormously difficult, if not impossible at all. Many examples illustrating the discussed situation can be found when comparing Polish with either British or American English on the one hand or when comparing British English with American English on the other.

Another drawback limiting the correct understanding of the text may be discovered when two different culture-bound cognitive issues have appeared. As any process of logical comprehension of text-presented cognitive issues is always based upon prior correct understanding of the native concepts of this type [Arabski 1996, in: Gabryś-Barker 2005: 49], these readers who are not competent enough in either the semanticity required by their native culture, or who have not properly discovered (and internalized) the appearing cross-cultural differences, will face problems when attempting to grasp the meaning hidden in the text/context analysis. The way the first group of readers must take is to find out the actual meaning of the idea in their native language, so as to find out the ideas represented by the L2 denotational system; the way of the second group of readers is even more complicated as they have to discover themselves as if standing within the L2 culture, attempting to be able to describe the surrounding environment from the point of view of L2 culture community.

Many such culture-bound items that require the text readers to perform this difficult operation are approached by them at the beginning of their L2 education when they are very often not competent to take part in the task. The whole logically bound system of family relations that can be found in (British and American) English, so different from its Polish counterpart, offers many traps to unexperienced learners of the language. It is approximately easy to understand the

idea of a mother/father-in-law for them, but how to differentiate between an aunt/uncle and a sister/brother-in-law? One has to be able to discriminate between the conventional and the legal system establishing the expressions used in the above mentioned issue in order to find out the differences between the two forms of expressions discovered there. And apart from such situations, there appear concepts which are totally untranslatable into another culture and which still have to be understood if they were to be accepted by the text readers. This is where the process of acculturation begins and which has to be recognized as an important segment in the process of gaining one's L2 competence.

One more situation which – as it seems – clearly influences the process of cross-cultural comparison is the one which concerns syntax-entailing organization of message production. It is here where the classical elements of culture can be discovered, mostly in the forms of pragmatic reasoning characteristic for the culture in question. While observing various written (textual) products of reasoning, one can discover many different thought patterns verbalized by culture-dependent language constructions. Despite the fact that many different culture-inherent cognitive pictures appear in this way, they are coated in similarly different manners of reasoning, characteristic for one specific culture. Whereas, as Lewis observes, British English generally approves of distance-observing, polite and impersonal forms of factual presentation, hardly anything like that can be found in American English, where impersonal expressions are reserved for special occasions, having been replaced by many forms of statistical analysis which is meant to sound convincingly to the listeners [cf. Lewis 1999: 132]. Even the way humour is revealed is different, as Lewis tries to convince the readers; many of clearly formal constructions, ascribed to the British variant of English, where humour can only be inferred, are simply replaced by straightforward and not particularly formal wisecracks of not too subtle quality, characteristic for American English.

The two forms of reasoning are to be confronted with the one characteristic for Polish, where pragmatically-based, long and complex sentences are expected to contain the right words and expressions, aptly informing the readers about the ideas which should sound convincing to anybody reading them; what is more, because of the fact that Polish, unlike English, is a fully inflectional language, the authors of many such sentences do not observe various deictic requirements too attentively. One more difference is the use of the reflexive voice in Polish where either the passive or the active voice appears in English. Apart from that, the general rules of the application of the passive voice are different in Polish and English, what results in the appearance of a belief, popularly uttered by many approximately competent Polish speakers of English, that the use of any of the voices is nothing more but a form of stylistic figure (and, therefore, a matter of the personal decision of the speaker which voice to use). Similar problems can be observed in the application of conditional sentences (mostly because of the disappearance of the third conditional form in Polish) and the subject – verb concord,

where different rules of application are applied in the two contrasted languages. All these (as well as many other, not mentioned here) differences may result in a situation where different linguistic forms are used to indicate a similar cognitive concept. Finally, the application of culture-bound and – up to a point – semantically different expressions (such as the misuse of the idea of *big* for the idea represented by *large*, a mistake very popular in Polish, due to the fact that the idea of “largeness” is not observed in Polish culture) may bring about the appearance of the mental pictures that do sound strange to native message receivers; the consequence of such a situation is the physical occurrence of the “third language” largely discussed by Alan Duff and other linguists interested in translation problems [cf. Duff 1981: 124] i.e. the language which does not sound natural to the ear of a native speaker despite the fact that its foreign authors do think they have produced a linguistically correct message.

The fact that such semantic pictures may appear is also connected with culture-dependent mental blocks and the ways of information processing that appear quite natural in one culture, being considered as artificial in the other, at the same time. Following Geert Hofstede’s definition of culture, what really matters there is “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another” [Hofstede 1991: 4]. As the definition offered above makes it quite clear that there are no two identical cultures and that everything, culture-specific manners of factual reasoning included, makes any two cultures differing from one another, it may seem of interest to have a look at the organization of some chosen cultures and the way(s) such organization influences the language(s) emerging from them.

The general division of world-existing cultures, offered by Lewis [1999: 35ff], is performed from two at least points of view. Lewis observes that there are cultures preferring action rather than reaction, as well as that the understanding of the very idea of action from the point of view of time can be different (i.e. the activities can either be performed according to the previously planned order, i.e. one after the other, or they can be effected in the way without such a plan, i.e. one together with the other). In this way, a suggestion to divide the world cultures into linear- (or multi-) active ones, on the one hand and reactive, on the other is offered. Quite independently from the division presented above, Lewis [1999: 67] suggests another important division of world-existing cultures, this time taking the process of data collection into the account; while analysing the most salient world cultures he comes to the conclusion that all cultures have to be divided into dialogue-oriented and data-oriented ones. The first group of cultures are the ones which base the process of data collection upon various forms of dialogue-oriented collection of the data; members of these cultures prefer asking questions rather than collecting the data from various impersonal sources of information (such as computer-based ones, for example). Contrary to this form of data-collection, the other group prefers to collect the necessary data from many impersonal (i.e. not

dialogue oriented) sources [Lewis 1999: 49]. According to Lewis, while excluding various individual inclinations, many West European cultures, as well as the culture found in the USA, are included into the second group of (“computer-prefering”) cultures, whereas a culture, such a Polish, prefers collecting the data on the grounds of oral research [Lewis 1999: 49], although obviously, Poles were placed far behind the leading dialogue-oriented world cultures, such as Latin Americans, Spaniards, or French.

Apart from the above presentation, Lewis [1999: 46] observes high correlation between data-oriented and recative cultures on the one hand and multi-active and dialogue oriented cultures on the other (illustrating his observation that the members of leading data-oriented cultures, such as Spaniards or Italians, far more prefer to get all the necessary data they need to construct a message from a conversation than to spend long hours searching for them upon a computer screen). At the same time Lewis writes that the leading linear-active cultures, such as German, British, American, Australian or the one found in New Zealand, stand somewhere between the data-oriented and dialogue oriented ones: the situation is explained by the fact that many of developed world cultures are of the opinion that finding out the necessary data in a more impersonal way (i.e. the one different from being dialogue-involved) may speed up the very process of message construction (what, in turn, may appear as important for many business-minded people) [Lewis 1999: 51]. Lewis is of the opinion that such a division of world cultures is not only the result of culturally-bound comprehension of the world, but also does influence its linguistic description, as some world-describing concepts (such as the ones referring to time, space, leadership, group organization etc.), are cognitively differently perceived by the members of a culture (as well as that the details necessary for the description of the world are collected according to different, culture-dependent patterns). People, when involuntarily inheriting a culture, act according to the forms of behaviour the culture expects them to, what may result in many misinterpretations of the actually obligatory forms of performance, language performance included, expected in a given culture. A situation like this actually underlines the necessity of obtaining the necessary culture/language-oriented knowledge by any of the participants of a process of language learning/acquisition and excludes a possibility of the deliverance of culture-devoid elements of a language. During any whatsoever process of deliverance of L2 to non-natives it is hardly possible to separate a language from a culture and any attempt to deliver culture-deprived knowledge must most certainly end with some form of a glottodiadctic disaster.

#### **4. Attempting to conclude**

It appears to be a generally known truth that the way a given activity/item is described, fully depends upon the way it has been understood by its author. This seems to be the way the weaker version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis [cf. Kramsch 1998: 11ff] finds its practical evidence. World views are dependent upon the culture the author(s) of such descriptions come from and their – i.e. the author(s)' – approach to the understanding of the world, as it is conditioned by their comprehension of the actually obtained abilities to grasp the native culture. Such an approach must influence the attitude of individual message of the author in the moment the presentation of the text-revealing world views of the text-presented community is taken into account on the one hand and its text readers involved reception on the other. The approach observed here has to take into account not only the traditionally described (and defined) forms of understanding of the world, but also these which are generally observed as excluding the commonly accepted form of perceiving (and describing) the current world by its readers. Any text provides its readers with various culture-connected pieces of information of various kind and its negligence means abandonment of an L2 teacher to stress upon the culture-connected issues which appear to be obligatory to grasp the currently-described meaning of an expression. Apart from various text-connected pieces of culture-bound information, which can be spotted within a text, there appear the items which are indirectly connected with the text-based information, but which, nevertheless, add to the general (i.e. culture-connected) understanding of the text, in this way making its communicatively logical (and coherent). Such items are of invaluable importance to text readers as they provide them with many subconsciously obtained pieces of information (and enable them to appropriately understand the text dealt with).

Such text-containing pieces of information appear to be important in the process of any L2 text comprehension. Not only do they matter when an attempt to grasp the L1/L2 cognitive ideas is undertaken, but also they have to be taken into account when the process of L1/L2 contrastive items has been performed. An attempt to match the speakers' native culture and the one actually obligatory in it seems to become a very important issue in the process of L2 implementation, an activity which is to be underestimated in the process of L2 language implementation.

Finally, just to give the readers a chance to find the links between text and context-connected issues, let me offer them an exercise. The text below is a short newspaper notice taken from the "Times of India", which was originally placed in the invaluable Scott Thornbury's book:

FOTEDAR VISITS HOSPITAL. By A Staff Reporter; New Delhi, September 25. It was Safdarjang Hospital's turn for "spring cleaning". The minister for health and family welfare, Mr M. L. Fotedar, kept his appointment with the hospital today. With a team



of officials he went about inspecting the place, this morning. "The casualty has never looked so clean before", says a doctor [Thornbury 2004: 121].

Some of the text-connected questions are: Who is Mr Fotedar? Why did he visit the hospital? Who did Mr Fotedar visit the hospital with? How did the casualty look? Etc.

A few context-connected issues can be: What is "spring cleaning"? Why is it necessary for a minister to inspect hospitals? How clean are hospitals in India? What is the attitude to dirt in the country? Are Indian doctors as dirt-sensitive as West European doctors are? Etc.

As one can see the text-connected questions are easy to answer and any reader attentive enough will certainly answer any of them in a very short period of time. However, the answers to the context-connected issues will not be given that fast. One may infer the answers to many of them, and may even answer them correctly, but they will mostly be based on the speculative knowledge, not strong facts. And some of the information obtained in this way may even sound annoying to the readers who will attempt to learn about the actual level of health service in many Indian hospitals in this way: 1) many Indian doctors do not pay enough attention to the level of septicity of medical service rendered by them; 2) many Indian hospitals are usually cleaned in spring; 3) as the level of acceptance of dirt is common in Indian hospitals, it is necessary to involve a minister to exert the spring cleaning obligation on them; 4) the general level of medical service to be rendered by Indian hospitals is low; 5) even if one has been admitted to an Indian hospital when suffering from some disease, one should be aware of the fact he/she may get infected with another one while being there.

I am not saying that many of the above mentioned conclusions are right; quite the contrary – they may not only be utterly false, but even harmful to many Indian doctors and the hospitals employing them. But such conclusions can logically be inferred from the text, thus allowing its readers to draw a context-based mental picture concerning the general situation that will have to be faced when one has been unfortunate enough to be admitted to an Indian hospital. And, just on the grounds of all these conclusions one general, mostly of stereotypical nature, practical instruction is drawn: beware of Indian hospitals as you may have problems with being appropriately cured there.

This is the way such context-connected information lets the readers construct their views upon various culture-connected issues that refer to the community a text is about (at the same time letting them store the knowledge concerning the fictional, text-depending world). Naturally, the information obtained in this way will later be used by them in a number of situations that would require its retrieval for the sake of production of a message in their message processing activities of any kind. One's topical opinion on the issues of medical care to be found in India, will not only instruct another person about something he/she was interested in, but will also illustrate one aspect of culture a probable visitor to India has to be ready to face.

In this way the process of one's acculturation in respect to a given text-presented community has begun. The process itself may be far-detached from the one which should have taken place if it were to be carried out appropriately and following the actually existing cultural standards a given community adheres to; but just because of visible lack of any more appropriate culture-presenting instruments, the ones that can be found within a text must suffice. They may be misleading and grossly inaccurate sometimes, but they will always tend to instruct the readers about a couple of culture-connected aspects of the community even if they are not really anxious about them. Following Lewis's opinion [Lewis 1999: 29], one may call this form of culture presentation a text-connected cultural event; many such events usually carve the readers's cultural beliefs towards a given culture. Whether they are truly accurate or stereotypically-based is quite a different question.

### **Bibliography**

- Chłopek, D. (2008). *Angielskie partykuły topologiczne „on” oraz „in” – konstruowanie opozycyjnych scen przestrzennych*. *Języki Obce w Szkole* 1, 5–11.
- Duff, A. (1981). *The Third Language: Recurrent Problems of Translation into English*. Pergamon Press.
- Fife, J. (1994). *Wykłady z gramatyki kognitywnej. Wykład I*. In: H. Kardela (ed.). *Podstawy gramatyki kognitywnej*. Warszawa, 9–24.
- Gabryś-Barker, D. (2006). *Aspects of Multilingual Storage, Processing and Retrieval*. Katowice, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.
- Gorczyca, W. (2007). *Kognitywizm w glottodydaktyce. Wykłady*. Bielsko-Biała, Wydawnictwo Akademii Techniczno-Humanistycznej.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1973). *The Functional Basis of Language*. In: B. Bernstein (ed.) (2003). *Class, Codes and Control*. Vol. 2. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 343–364.
- Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind, Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance of Survival*. Maindehead, McGrawHill.
- Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and Culture*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Langacker, R.W. (2003). *Model dynamiczny oparty na uzusie językowym*. In: E. Dąbrowska, H. Kubiński (eds.). *Akwizycja języka w świetle językoznawstwa kognitywnego*. Kraków, Universitas, 28–115.
- Lewis, R.D. (1999). *When Cultures Colide: Managing Successfully Among Cultures*. London, Nicolas Bradley Publishing.
- Polok, K. (2010). *Culture Patterns, Language Patterns, Thought Patterns... What's Next?* In: *When Teaching Matters.... A Collection of Papers on Linguistic, Language Education and Classroom Dynamics*. Central Milton Keynes, AuthorHouse.
- Thornbury, S. (2004). *About Language*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Ur, P. (2007). *A Course of Language Teaching*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Yule, G. (1987). *The Study of Language*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

### **Summary**

#### **On the Cultural Aspects of Text and Context in the Glottodidactic Process of L2 Learners**

The paper discusses various culture-connected forms of context that can be inferred from a text in the moment it is being dealt with. While presenting mutual counter-dependencies of language and culture the paper offers an analysis of culture-bound aspects of context as they are found to have been functioning from the point of view of one's text comprehension. This is where the cognitive theory of language as offered by Ronald Langacker [2003] is briefly discussed and mutual forms of correspondence between the text-existing language and the context which comes out as a symbolic unit to be recognized as the cognitive basis of the (con)text-connected reality for the readers are analyzed. Finally, the paper discusses the forms of influence of various culture-connected issues of reasoning upon the linguistic forms of cognitive illustration of the approach towards the description of local environment as they are generally observed in different forms of L2 communication.