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Anglistics as a Dialogic Discipline

Summary

In my article, dialogue is suggested as a basic direction for Anglistics. Such a perspective results from a normative notion of dialogue based on a set of particular criteria. In general terms, a case is made for (self)-critical and respectful confrontation with other viewpoints within and beyond Anglistics to further develop existing positions and to create new forms of co-operation. While in the first two sections this concept is introduced and applied to the discipline of Anglistics, the final section is focussed on an area of major conflict in contemporary ELT debates. In fact, a dialogic approach will be suggested for dealing with two opposite tendencies, one aiming for standardization and the other for a humanistic form of education.

Keywords: Dialogue, Anglistics, interdisciplinarity, culture, educational standards, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

Anglistika kot dialoška disciplina

Povzetek

Članek vidi dialog kot osnovno smer anglistike in izhaja iz normativnega pojmovanja le-tega, ki temelji na točno določenih kriterijih. V splošnem gre za predstavitev možnosti, ki predpostavljajo (samo)kritično in spoštljivo soočenje z drugimi stališči znotraj anglistike pa tudi onkraj nje za nadaljnji razvoj obstoječih dognanj ter vzpostavitev novih oblik povezovanja. Prvi poglavji uvedeta koncept in se navežeta na anglistiko kot disciplino, sklepni del razprave pa se osredotoči na področje poučevanja angleščine (ELT) in nesoglasja, ki se pojavljajo v sodobnem času. Dialoški pristop predlaga konsenz med dvema nasprotujočima si težnjama, med tisto, ki zagovarja standardizirano, in tisto, ki si prizadeva za humanistično obliko izobraževanja.

Ključne besede: dialog, anglistika, interdisciplinarnost, kultura, standardi izobraževanja, Skupni evropski referenčni okvir za jezike

Anglistics as a Dialogic Discipline

When I first met Meta Grosman in 1990, she was already a well-established professor of high international repute, while I was at the beginning of my career. Yet, when we discussed our ideas on literature teaching, she treated me like an equal partner in a most constructive professional debate. When she then invited me to Ljubljana for a public talk at the *Filozofska fakulteta*, this highly challenging and respectful sharing, testing and further developing of ideas was continued, and I am most grateful to her that we have carried on in this vein until the very present. In recent years, I have repeatedly made attempts to develop a normative concept of dialogue as a foundation for research in English Studies (cf. Delanoy 2002 and 2005). In fact, Meta Grosman's work and her personality have been a great source of inspiration for this project. In other words, I see her as a role model for a life lived in dialogue, and it is through people like her that I have kept my belief in the possibility of dialogue as a basic direction for human existence.

In the following reflections, a case will be made for Anglistics as a dialogic discipline. Such a perspective implies openness towards other viewpoints, a continuous questioning of the tried and tested, and the ability to forge new links both within and beyond disciplinary boundaries. First, this notion will be contrasted with other concepts sharing a similar agenda. In fact, attention will be drawn to areas of overlap and difference between the concepts of *dialogue*, *interdisciplinarity* and *culture* as orientations for English Studies. Secondly, the normative criteria underlying my understanding of dialogue will be discussed and related to the discipline of Anglistics. Finally, one concrete example will be given to discuss the relevance of a dialogic approach. Here, the focus is on the debate on what in German-speaking countries has been labelled as *educational standards* for English language learning.

1. Dialogue as a foundation for Anglistics

Suggesting *dialogue* as a foundation for *Anglistics* implies certain programmatic interests. As will be shown in the second section, my understanding of dialogue is based on a specific set of key convictions derived from a post-Gadamerian hermeneutics, Bakhtin's notion of *heteroglossia* and late-modern concepts of subjectivity. The term *Anglistics* refers to the discipline and the location from where I speak. Although *Anglistics* and *English Studies* will be used synonymously in the following reflections, *Anglistics* also has specific meaning implications. In fact, the term mainly occurs outside English speaking countries, thus indicating that my perspective is inextricably linked to foreign language studies.

Anglistics is also a reference to a specific field of enquiry and its institutional anchoring. In line with various other upper and lower case distinctions I also distinguish between an *Anglistics* and an *anglistics*. According to my understanding of these two concepts, the upper case variant refers to *English Studies* as a historically grown and institutionally established research discipline in its own right which has mainly concerned itself with the study of the languages, literatures and cultures of English speaking communities. On the other hand, *anglistics* stands for any concern with issues related to English-speaking communities going beyond the research practices of

Anglistics. Such issues may either fall into the domain of other research disciplines (e.g. history, media studies, geography, business studies), or they may still have escaped the notice of existing disciplines both inside and outside *Anglistics*. Following Rob Pope (2002, 12), I also favour an approach to English Studies which aims at preparing “... the way for subjects, disciplines and forms of knowledge which as yet have no name”. Such an approach implies a strong interest in the lower case variant. Yet, I am aware that in my research I have mainly argued from perspectives affiliated to *Anglistics*. Speaking of a dialogic *Anglistics*, therefore, is also a reference to what has so far served me as my ‘home’ discipline.

When one looks at the history of English Studies there has been a noticeable proliferation of research interests since the 1970s leading to the redefinition of old and creation of manifold new directions for the discipline. On the one hand, such development has greatly increased the scope of *Anglistics*. Also, new links have been forged across disciplines because of a growing interest in perspectives of a more general dimension (e.g. gender issues, cultural epistemes, ecological concerns). On the other hand, both internal cohesion and cooperation within and across disciplines have become a problem. As a counter movement, therefore, attempts have been made to create a new basis for communication and cooperation inside *Anglistics* and across disciplines. Making a case for a dialogic *Anglistics* is such an attempt. This raises the question how this concept compares to other suggestions.

The two other concepts which have been suggested in recent debates concern the notion of *interdisciplinarity* and that of *Kulturwissenschaft* (*culture studies*). Following Joe Moran (2003, 15), the term *interdisciplinarity* comprises (1) the creation of “... connections across different disciplines”, (2) the establishment of “a kind of undisciplined space in the interstices between disciplines”, and (3) attempts “... to transcend disciplinary boundaries altogether”. While in the first instance existing disciplines still wish to keep intact their institutional moorings, the other two imply transdisciplinary perspectives, which in the third case may lead to the dissolution of existing and the creation of new disciplines. In fact, English Studies itself came into existence through a reconfiguration of disciplines by replacing, for example, Rhetoric, and it may itself be subsumed under disciplines such as Cultural-, Communication- or Media Studies in the future (cf. Pope 2002, 13). The other perspective – namely that of *culture studies* – sees a shared interest in a wide-reaching notion of culture as a common basis for many disciplines. Culture, here, is defined as a symbolically constructed way of life including material, mental and social dimensions (cf. Nünning and Sommer 2004, 17–9).

A dialogic *Anglistics* shares important concerns with both, yet, it also differs from these concepts in significant ways. In fact, *interdisciplinarity* is an important dimension of a dialogic approach, and the different possibilities for interdisciplinary development as distinguished by Moran all feature prominently in my dialogic concept. A dialogic *Anglistics*, however, also draws attention to *intradisciplinary* plurality and (lack of) contact. According to Pope (2002, 48), the discipline of *Anglistics* has become a “richly variegated” set of approaches. Such plurality can serve as a joint resource for the discipline but also lead to its fragmentation. A strengthening of ties within the discipline, therefore, is needed to pool plural energies. Such an interest implies a strong

intradisciplinary focus which I find lacking in the concept of *interdisciplinarity*. Also, my notion of dialogue is an idealistic concept aiming for an equal distribution of power. Interdisciplinarity, on the other hand, is a descriptive rather than a normative term. It may, therefore, foster a dialogic agenda. Yet, it may also perpetuate old or create new hierarchies in the furtherance of academic empire building.

Culture as the epistemological foundation for how humans live their lives can serve as a key concept for all research disciplines. Yet, the notion of *Kulturwissenschaft* has been mainly used as an umbrella term for the humanities. As a result, it may be too narrow to include disciplines going beyond arts faculties. In his book *Doing English*, Robert Eaglestone (2000, 124 ff.), argues that the time is ripe for creating stronger links between English and science, since in recent debates both have expressed a strong interest in ecological and ethical perspectives. In the interest of a wide-ranging concept of dialogue, I would, therefore, suggest an approach where a distinction is made between *culture* and *Kulturwissenschaft*, the former inviting reflection upon the cultural implications of arts- and science-related research to help overcome barriers existing between the two.

2. A normative concept of dialogue as a basic direction for Anglistics

As mentioned above, my understanding of dialogue is a normative concept based on certain key convictions. In fact, I see dialogue as an idealistic suggestion for how humans should live their lives. In other words, such a concept goes far beyond research-related communication. Let me, therefore, briefly introduce what I see as key criteria for dialogue in general before the term is applied to the research discipline of Anglistics:

(1) *First*, dialogue is based on the conviction that all forms of human understanding are limited, since they are tied to concrete subjects and situated in specific socio-cultural contexts. Moreover, the environments in which humans live are seen as so complex that they can only be grasped in parts. Such a concept rules out any claims to absolute knowledge. This condition, of course, also applies to notions of dialogue which are always created within particular socio-cultural formations.

(2) *Secondly*, dialogue is seen as a chance to widen one's scope for reflection and action through (self)-critical encounters with other positions. Although these positions are also limited, they may be limited in different ways, thus offering insight going beyond one's existing knowledge base. The possibility to widen one's knowledge base goes hand in hand with the belief in a critical and partly autonomous subject which can take responsibility for his/her agency. Such a concept is in line with a late-modern understanding of human subjectivity (cf. Kögler 2003; Zima 2000), which acknowledges culture's shaping influence on the self without seeing the latter as fully determined by culture.

(3) *Thirdly*, a case is made for respectful confrontation with other viewpoints, where respect does not stop when other perspectives conflict with or call into question one's own convictions. In fact, one of the key aims of dialogue is to foster respect for difference and plurality. Also, difference can be more or less fundamental. On the one hand, groups may share the same key convictions and only differ on less fundamental levels. On the other

hand, difference may concern the basic values informing people's thought and action. For the model of dialogue as suggested in this article, respect, of course, also includes the latter. Finally, respect for difference also implies acceptance of unresolved conflict.

(4) *Fourthly*, dialogue is seen as an open and ongoing process where, in Bakhtin's (1987, 30) words, "there is no first word, and the final word has not yet been spoken". Also, the contexts in which dialogue takes place are so complex that the factors to be taken into consideration can never be fully determined in advance. Hence, the tried and tested needs to be continually reconfigured to meet changing situational demands.

(5) *Fifthly*, dialogue ideally is a meeting of equal partners. Engaging in dialogue, therefore, implies making attempts to equip its participants with equal rights and opportunities. To further this aim, existing power hierarchies need to be addressed, and, when possible, replaced by more egalitarian structures.

(6) *Sixthly*, dialogue is shaped by its participants. Hence, as many people as possible should be encouraged and enabled to become involved in dialogue to bring in and further develop their concerns.

(7) *Finally*, dialogue is seen as the interplay of two different logics, a constructive one, permitting potentially far-reaching coherent action and reflection, and a deconstructive logic, drawing attention to different possibilities and inviting a radical questioning of people's values and convictions. Following Ernesto Laclau (2000, 303), the terms *logic of equivalence* and *logic of difference* will be used for these two modes of thinking. For Zima (2000, 414 ff.) and Kögler (2003, 86) these two logics should inter-animate and contest each other in a continuing debate. Within this debate, one of the two may prove more important at times. Yet, whether one is temporarily preferred over the other is not a matter of principle but a decision to be reached through dialogue itself.

This notion of dialogue goes back to the following concepts and approaches. The belief in the contingency of human knowledge and a plea for respectful plus (self)-critical confrontation with different viewpoints can be found in a post-Gadamerian hermeneutics (cf. Bredella 2002; Kögler 1992) and in late-modern approaches to ideology critique (cf. Laclau 2000; Zima 2000). Another major influence is Bakhtin (1987) and his notion of *heteroglossia*. Bakhtin makes a case for dialogue as an open and continuing process, and his concept aims for the inclusion of as many different 'voices' as possible. Also, his understanding of novel writing is opposed to forms of hierarchical thinking, thus including the argument for a meeting of equal partners. A distinction between more or less fundamental difference is made by Zima (1991, 402), who contrasts *intersubjective* with *interdiscursive* difference. While intersubjective difference concerns variety within one discursively constructed thought and value system, the latter implies a clash of different systems. As indicated above, the interplay between the two opposite logics goes back to proponents of both hermeneutic (Kögler) and ideology-critical approaches (Laclau, Zima). A similar approach can also be found in Bakhtin's (1987, 272) writings, where a distinction is made between *centripetal* (unifying) and *centrifugal* (diversifying) forces. Finally, respect for unresolved conflict is a basic principle in recent research in hermeneutics (cf. Kögler 2003) and ideology critique (Zima 2000). Yet, such respect does not mean that no further attempts are made to gain a better understanding of the other viewpoint in the interest of finding new solutions. Dialogue,

here, includes a continuous search for *third places* (cf. Kramsch 1993, 233 ff.), where boundaries become fluid and concrete possibilities may emerge for cooperation.

Coming back to Zima's distinction between *intersubjective* and *interdiscursive* dialogue, let me add that it offers an important angle for reflection upon intra- and interdisciplinary cooperation and conflict in and beyond English Studies. Discourses represent particular ways of understanding and constructing realities. Also, certain academic discourses like positivism, (post-)structuralism, constructivism or liberal-humanism can be found within different fields of Anglistics and in different disciplines. Thus, *interdisciplinary* difference may be relatively small on a deep-level structure when the schools involved belong to the same or a similar discourse community. On the other hand, *intradisciplinary* difference can be radical when different discourse communities become involved.

Building on the above-mentioned criteria for dialogue the following characteristics are constitutive of a dialogic Anglistics:

(1) *First*, such a perspective sees all Anglistics-related inquiry as creating contingent and incomplete knowledge. Yet, through (self)-critical and continuing reflection upon one's own limitations and through exploration of other viewpoints the knowledge base of the people and schools involved can be considerably widened. In other words, a dialogic Anglistics views itself as a self-reflexive project where the quality of the research largely depends on the ability to interact with other viewpoints within, across and beyond disciplines.

(2) *Secondly*, a dialogic Anglistics is always in the making, and with reference to the two opposite logics *both* wider-reaching *and* situation-specific solutions need to be found and continuously reconfigured to meet *both* 'global' challenges *and* local needs and interests. Seeing the two logics as equally important also implies that in the light of certain contextual requirements the partners involved may opt either for a phase of consolidation or diversification.

(3) *Thirdly*, a dialogic Anglistics not only shows respect for difference but also cultivates plurality to create a rich basis for mutual enlightenment. To further such a project, an egalitarian approach is suggested which in ideal terms gives different individuals and groups in English Studies equal possibilities to bring in and develop their interests. I am aware that this is a utopian concept which may be in stark contrast to existing disciplinary and social hierarchies. Also, Anglistics does not possess the socio-political power to implement such change on a large scale. Yet, in the light of my professional experience I strongly believe in possibilities for developing more egalitarian structures both within and between research communities and in the learning environments where our teaching takes place.

Of course, this is *one* notion of dialogue among others. For example, in its hermeneutic orientation my concept follows Gadamer's rather than Habermas' notion of dialogue. While Habermas (1971) uncouples his ideal conditions for dialogue from real-life situations, the concept of dialogue as advocated in this article critically confronts ideals with realities. In other words, while in the case of Habermas the ideal conditions are not subject to critical questioning, a post-

Gadamerian approach dialogically links ideals and realities to question and transforms both in the light of the other. Also, a distinction needs to be made between normative and descriptive notions of dialogue. For the proponents of normative approaches, dialogue is informed by and oriented towards particular values. On the other hand, dialogue has been discussed in more descriptive terms as any conversation between at least two partners in communication or any meeting of two different logics. Here, a central focus is on what speakers or writers need to take into consideration to ensure that their messages reach their intended target addressees. In fact, I see both directions as central for the success of dialogue. While normative concepts draw attention to the ideals behind notions of dialogue, the other focus shifts attention to – in a linguistic sense – pragmatic concerns without which communication cannot take place in intended ways.

3. Dialogue as an orientation for ELT: *the case of educational standards*

In the following, this concept of dialogue will be applied to what I see as one of the central issues for ELT in a new Europe. In fact, attention will be drawn to the highly controversial debate on *educational standards*, where a clash between radically different notions of language learning has become noticeable. Inspired by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2004), attempts have been made to homogenize achievement standards for European countries, the emphasis being on empirically testable language skills. On the other hand, such a concept has met with fierce opposition from those viewing language learning as inextricably linked to wider-reaching educational perspectives. In German-speaking countries the major reference point in this controversy is the term *Bildungsstandards* (*educational standards*). While those interested in measurable output have claimed this term for their project, the other group has pointed to fundamental differences between education and standardization as objectives for language learning. For them, *educational standards* is a misnomer, which at a first glance seems to include both poles, yet, at closer inspection leaves very little space for educational perspectives.

From my dialogic angle, neither of these perspectives is to be treated as superior to the other in principle. On the contrary, each of them deserves equal attention in an open-ended debate, where they can mutually question, complement and enrich each other in the interest of both wide-reaching and local solutions. Yet, treating them as equal must not be mistaken for total relativity. Adopting a dialogic stance also implies reflection upon how dialogue-friendly these two orientations are.

(a) The Common European Framework (CEF) as a joint reference point?

The *CEF* marks an attempt to foster European integration in the field of language learning. According to Keith Morrow (2004, 6) the document originates from attempts in the early 1990s to define “purely descriptive” common achievement standards to facilitate mutual recognition of language-related qualifications throughout Europe. As a result different achievement levels were defined with the help of so-called ‘descriptors’ to provide a common basis for assessing competence levels. These descriptors are mainly related to the so-called four basic skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing). Also, criteria have been developed for grammar and vocabulary-related learning domains.

Yet, the CEF also addresses educational perspectives for foreign language learning going beyond a narrow conception of language competence. The document also makes a case for linking language learning to developing intercultural awareness and mediation in the interest of a democratic agenda for a new Europe (cf. CEF 2004, 6 ff., 103 ff.). This also includes positive assessment of “imaginative and artistic uses of language” (ibid., 56), and of critical abilities permitting a differentiated understanding of texts and issues in a foreign language context (ibid., 69). Finally, language learning is seen as connected to a form of personality development grounded in a variety of ‘existential’ competences, which potentially are highly conducive to a dialogic agenda. Such competences comprise “openness towards, and interest in new experiences, other persons, ideas, peoples, societies and cultures”, “[a] willingness to relativise one’s own cultural viewpoint and cultural value-system” or personality factors such as “flexibility, ... self confidence, [and] self esteem” (ibid., 105-6) plus “a high level of intrinsic motivation” (ibid., 161). Frank Heyworth (2004, 16), therefore, concludes that “the CEF provides a useful reminder to language teachers to extend the range of their teaching beyond the narrowly linguistic”.

On a general level, I would, therefore, see the CEF as an attempt to bring together standardization and a humanistic form of education in the interest of both generally acceptable achievement standards and democratic citizenship in a multicultural Europe. While in the first instance the emphasis is on standardization, the second area includes awareness of and respect for cultural diversity and (inter)-cultural exchange on national, regional and different social levels (cf. CEF 2004, 6 & 103). Such an approach seems in line with my dialogic agenda which also stresses the importance of a homogenizing (standardization) *and* a diversifying logic (respect for cultural plurality). Thus, on a general level the CEF can serve as a reference point for both tendencies. Yet, on more concrete levels the diversifying logic loses in importance. Concomitantly, the democratic and cultural learning aims at best recede into the background, while a narrow understanding of language competence with a focus on the four skills takes central place. Indeed, the term *educational standards* can be rather misleading on these levels, since the educational dimension has widely disappeared. Following Becker (2004, 17), I will, therefore, speak of *achievements standards*, where standardization is suggested for the above-mentioned areas of linguistic competence. Yet, I do not intend to give up the term *educational standards* altogether. In fact, I see the term as a steady reminder to keep in sight both dimensions and to constructively combine them within a dialogic agenda.

(b) Achievement standards:

There is a lot to be said in favour of common achievement standards.¹ Indeed, such standards provide clear guidelines for certification within and across countries. Also, such standards permit greater transparency for learners, teachers and administrators. As a consequence, different competence levels can be identified more easily. Such an app Anglistics as a Dialogic Discipline roach can help locate those learning areas that students still need to work on if they want to make further progress, thus giving people a clear idea of further learning steps. Moreover, such standards are formulated as ‘can-do statements’. In other words, they focus on learner

¹ For a more detailed discussion of what experts in ELT see as the CEF’s potential benefits, see the different contributions in Morrow (2004).

strengths rather than on their deficiencies. Such a concept can invite a reorientation where language teaching is primarily focussed on the learners' mistakes. This in turn can strengthen the students' self-esteem when learning foreign languages. Finally, these can-do statements concern communicative abilities, thus suggesting a communicative rather than a grammar-based orientation for language learning.

The CEF has been defined as an open-ended project by some of its proponents. Morrow (2004, 1), for example, points out that “the Common European Framework is not fixed in stone”, thus advocating its redefinition in different educational contexts. Also, its implementation can be organized along more or less dialogic lines. In Austria, for example, in a first step, the ministry responsible for education invited the Austrian Language Centre in Graz² and a group of teachers to discuss the CEF and to translate its criteria and descriptors into concrete materials for classroom use. Although the CEF as such was not really subject to critical questioning, the administrators and teachers involved at least were given space to bring in ideas and to revise them in the light of concrete classroom projects. Finally, the CEF need not lead to a predominantly functional and pragmatic orientation for language learning. In Slovenia, for example, the CEF has been read as confirmation of the importance of a humanistic, intercultural and communicative direction for language learning. In line with such a concept, a reader-related understanding of literature learning still plays a crucial role in Slovenian curricula and school-leaving exams. In fact, Meta Grosman has been a main influence here. In her work as researcher, teacher, teacher trainer and educational reformer she has shown how humanistic aims and common guidelines for language learning can be successfully integrated.

From a dialogic perspective, achievement standards, however, do become problematic where they are suggested as the sole or dominant basis for learner assessment. Where ultimately only those results count as valid information on language proficiency which can be empirically tested on a grand scale, language learning is narrowed down to what can be unambiguously assessed. Such assessment may invite a teaching-to-the-test, which widely ignores educational objectives such as empathy, creativity, critical competence, frustration tolerance, intrinsic motivation or self esteem, since all of them defy exact measurement. Furthermore, sheer concentration on what is clearly testable can create fixed hierarchies among areas of, and those concerned with, foreign language learning. As already mentioned, such an approach gives what is testable priority over other areas. As a backwash effect, teachers will lose most of their power to co-shape the ends of language learning. In line with Schön's (1983) notion of *technical rationality*, experts from outside define general solutions which are then to be implemented in a prescribed way.

(c) Educational perspectives:

As mentioned above, Morrow (2004, 6) claims that one of the aims of the CEF has been to define “purely descriptive” achievement standards. From a dialogic and culture-related perspective this comment merits particular attention. In my view, “purely descriptive” suggests that such standards are untainted by any bias (*pure*), by just describing an object (linguistic competence), which can be defined in no uncertain ways. A dialogic perspective, however, is based on the assumption that

² The German name for this centre is *Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum* (ÖSZ).

phenomena like language are so complex that they can only be 'described' in parts. Thus, what is left out becomes as important as what is included, which renders impossible sheer concentration on the quantitatively testable. Also, such a perspective views all understanding as always influenced by certain interests and values, no matter whether they are stated explicitly or not. Moreover, any attempt to construct a programme is seen as a cultural act with manifold implications for those concerned. From such a perspective, achievement standards, for example, have been criticized as indicative of a market-oriented, capitalist programme (cf. Barkowski 2005). What counts for such an orientation is measurable output in the interest of certain attainment targets. In education, these targets are related to competences that increase the likelihood of economic success without questioning the interests of a capitalist programme.

What is missing in such a programme is a form of humanism, which – in Edward Said's (2003, 21–2) words – stands for "a process of unending disclosure, discovery, self-criticism and liberation". In a similar vein, the economic scientist and philosopher Amartya Sen (2001) makes a case for seeing human freedom and not capital accumulation as the principle aim for human existence. For Sen, freedom is a substantive concept based on specific capabilities. So far, however, such capabilities have been defined in rather vague terms by those concerned about the educational dimension of foreign language learning. Here, ELT experts could learn from colleagues working in other disciplines (economic science, pedagogy, philosophy), where efforts have been made to further define such ability (cf. Elliot 2005; Nussbaum 2000). Also, the work done by those in favour of achievement standards can serve as a stimulus to create something equally elaborate for educational objectives. Of course, these objectives would spring from a different logic, which would not go for the easily testable. Yet, an elaborate ensemble of categories plus descriptors would definitely help to gain a clearer picture of dialogically motivated educational objectives and how they are achieved and redefined in ELT-classroom contexts.

In my view, the debate on educational standards results from a clash of two radically different positions. On the one hand, one can find a positivist, output-oriented concept of language competence bracketing out all those areas of language use which defy unambiguous assessment. On the other hand, language is seen as steeped in socio-cultural values and as the medium through which different value systems are constructed, re-activated and redefined. While the first concept seems in favour of a top-down approach where experts define the relevant knowledge, the latter approach has argued for a negotiation of meanings in and through wide-reaching dialogue. Whether and how the two can be reconciled has become a major issue for ELT. One solution is to establish a clear hierarchy, where one perspective marks the dominant pole. Yet, also more dialogic solutions could be found. One possibility is a mere co-existence of both, where each pole is weighted equally, and where communicative competence is seen as a complex phenomenon including clearly testable *and* value-related dimensions. A third solution would be in line with my understanding of interdiscursive dialogue. Here, both positions would see themselves as culture-bound discourses informed by certain values. Furthermore, they would use the other position to (self)-critically and respectfully reflect upon one's own and the other perspective to learn more about the complexities involved in language learning. Respect for the other implies that the legitimacy of both projects would be recognized. What is testable would be

tested and what goes beyond such a perspective would be given equal attention. Depending on local needs and interests one of the approaches may – temporarily – be preferred to the other. Yet, this would not rule out the possibility to try a different approach. In fact, it is the third option which I would prefer.

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