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PROFESSOR GRUCZA AS THE FOUNDER OF GLOTTODIDACTICS

INTRODUCTION

Professor Franciszek Grucza's conception of glottodidactics is genuinely avant-garde, providing inspiration to a multitude of scholars at home and abroad. His contributions to the field of language learning and teaching, characteristically wide-ranging and deep, have been devoted to many topics, including the professional role of the teacher, materials design, communication and culture, to name but a few. Yet, I take this opportunity to concentrate on the fundamentals of glottodidactics as a discipline, which I have been fortunate to study under his guidance during my long period of apprenticeship and work at the University of Warsaw.

The innovative beauty of his conception lies in its undeniable logic and clarity:

- a) To be optimized, practical foreign language learning and teaching must be based on solid scientific foundations.
- b) Solid scientific foundations should not be confused with random borrowings from related, more mature disciplines, such as linguistics and psychology, erroneously called 'applications'.
- c) These foundations must be elaborated within an especially designated academic discipline in its own right, called glottodidactics, which, although it interacts with other related disciplines, is primarily guided by its own research concerns.
- d) To be constituted as a scientific discipline, glottodidactics must define itself as an empirical discipline with a unique subject matter and its own scientific research agenda, internally specialized for pure and applied research.

THE CONSTITUTION OF GLOTTODIDACTICS AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

In his numerous publications Professor Grucza has emphasized that his goal is to accelerate the process of modernization of teaching foreign languages in Poland. In order to accomplish this task he has chosen the route of constituting an

academic discipline aimed at researching foreign language learning and teaching, called glottodidactics, as a source of well-justified knowledge for this purpose. From the very beginning, Professor Franciszek Grucza has promoted glottodidactics first and foremost (although not only) as an academic research endeavour (Grucza 1974, 1976, 1983, 2007). Singlehandedly and against the dominating academic climate, he has founded this discipline by defining its status as equivalent to any other academic (scientific) discipline. This sharply contrasts with the prevalent views which treat the field of foreign language teaching as something special or mixed – part science/part practice, as pedagogical, normative or otherwise not fully-scientific. Inseparable from these ideas is the predominant scepticism that, because of the practical concerns of the field, the reflection and research on foreign language learning and teaching can or should become a typical academic discipline (i.e. science). These views clearly result from the intellectual inability to envisage such a framework by various specialists at home and abroad, who, therefore, openly disregard this option (e.g. Atkinson ed. 2011; Jordan 2004; Long 2015; van Patten/ Williams 2015). Related to these convictions is an underestimation of foreign language learning and teaching as sufficiently complex and intellectually challenging to merit its own science agenda and a mistrust in the feasibility of science to deal with these intricacies more successfully than the various alternative, idiosyncratic, routes of exploration suggested for the field of second/foreign language learning and teaching (Kumaravivelu 2012; Long 2007, 2015).

Professor Grucza hits the core of the problem. The distinctive property of any field constituted as an academic discipline/science, especially glottodidactics, is its subject-matter. Disciplines either have identified their distinct/unique subject matter or they are not academic disciplines (Grucza 1983). In contrast to prevalent views of American researchers (e.g. Gass/ Mackey eds. 2014; Long 2015), who emphasize research and data-based studies as units of investigating language acquisition, Professor Grucza sees glottodidactics as a fully-fledged science which makes use of all kinds of cognitive operations, such as definition of its subject matter, modelling as a constructive research method to define the distinct specificity of its subject matter among related fields, formulation of its descriptive-explanatory goals and, last but not least, theory construction and assessment. It is worth pointing out that second/foreign language researchers abroad have become aware of the functions of reasoning-based research steps only recently as they embarked upon qualitative research methods, meta-analyses of studies, theory construction and modelling of second language acquisition (Jordan 2004; Long 2007; Van Patten/ Williams eds. 2015).

In contrast to the ideas which deny the field of foreign language learning and teaching its right to cognitive autonomy, Professor Grucza emphasizes the discipline's right to be guided by its own specificity among other fields, i.e. to focus its research operations primarily on the functioning of its own subject matter. The

subject matter of glottodidactics is defined as a special case of communication, in which the main participants are human subjects: the learner and the teacher. Non-primary language in this system functions as the tool of communication used by people; language is an inseparable human property and it must be so represented in glottodidactics whereas the elementary form of language learning is language use (Grucza 1974). Professor Grucza stresses the fact that in the humanities research autonomy is not absolute, but a matter of degree, which affords strong links with other relevant, substantively-related human sciences, because their subject matter overlaps with glottodidactics at various levels (Grucza 1976, 1982).

The next distinctive property of glottodidactics as an academic as opposed to pragmatic or practical discipline is that it has explanatory goals, i.e. to describe and explain its subject matter which is not trivial. This stands in contrast with foreign language teaching methodology or methodics, aimed at designing methods of foreign language teaching. These explanatory goals distinguish glottodidactics as an academic discipline from foreign language learning and teaching as a practical activity. It is counterproductive to confuse such a discipline as glottodidactics with a purely or partly practical endeavour of foreign language teaching by assigning it purely practical goals. The usefulness of the field of foreign language learning and teaching to the society at large does not result from reducing it to being practical, underdefined, or mixed, but from its feasibility to generate its own applications, i.e. scientifically-derived, justified knowledge about language learning and teaching, which can be used in optimizing the functioning of the field's subject matter. In other words, the field's feasibility of dealing with practical problems is contingent on its feasibility of producing applicable knowledge; no scholar should take pride in the uselessness of his or her findings (Grucza 1983).

As a technical term, applications are understood as results of pure research useful in optimizing the phenomenon under investigation. Applications elaborated within glottodidactics are used to construct or restore the conditions for, and/or enhance the functioning of the glottodidactic system, as well as removing any obstacles therein (Grucza 1983). The sources and strategies of deriving useful, i.e. applicable, knowledge in our field are a serious matter, contingent upon the manner in which the discipline is constituted. Because legitimate applications of glottodidactics are elaborated and used primarily within its own confines, linguistic applications in the field of foreign language teaching are borrowings rather than applications in the technical sense of the term. This is to say that each of the two neighbouring disciplines, linguistics and glottodidactics, must have its own pure and applied levels (Grucza 1983). Information trading that occurs between these related fields should be interactive rather than based on power, i.e. on the one-way, top-down flow of information from linguistics to the field of foreign language teaching postulated intuitively, erroneously called applications, but as results of pure research conducted within this empirical academic discipline in its own right.

CONCLUSION

Professor Gruzca's conception of the discipline, whose origins go back to the 1970s and 1980s, still remains the most innovative and unrivalled system for the field of second/foreign language learning and teaching. Regrettably, the merit and inevitability of the route he has outlined has not yet been recognized and fathomed by international research community, especially in the Anglo-saxon world, in which researchers still grope with basic issues: what is the lure of being an academic discipline? what defines academic disciplines? what is their goal? what guides their research agenda? what is the function of their subject matter? what is the function of defining and modelling it? is this subject matter inhabited by human beings or by language forms? what are the legitimate research operations in human sciences? what is the function of theoretical research as different from the empirical research? what is the technical definition of applications in humanities? Etc.

At present, the situation in foreign language learning and teaching is marked by technological developments and social processes which have turned our planet into global village and made the knowledge of foreign languages a matter of absolute necessity, if not survival in the job market, rather than of satisfactory education. Such a situation creates demands for genuinely professional foreign language teaching of high quality on a mass scale at every stage of our educational system. It is clear in any field that professional expertise comes from scientific/academic/rational sources of knowledge; therefore studying foreign language learning and teaching within the framework of a scientific discipline is no longer a matter of choice resulting from researchers' predilections, but the only rational and ethical choice. This is how life, i.e. the sociocultural context in which non-primary languages are learned and used nowadays, solves the dilemma regarding the format and status of the discipline investigating foreign language learning and teaching.

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