



English Studies

A Journal of English Language and Literature

Founded by R. W. Zandvoort

75th

Anniversary
Volume

Edited by

J. Blom

Nijmegen

Associate editors

R. Derolez

Ghent

B. Engler

Basel

J. Gerritsen

Groningen

L. Hartveit

Bergen

C. Schaar

Lund

K. Sørensen

Aarhus

JOSEPH CONRAD'S MULTILINGUALISM: A CASE STUDY OF LANGUAGE PLANNING IN LITERATURE

Introduction

Language planning has been defined as a 'longterm, sustained, and conscious effort to alter a language's function in a society for the purpose of solving communication problems'.¹ It is usually conceived of as a national or speech community process; however, individuals often engage in language planning in their familial or professional lives. Sometimes their decisions are mere reflections of macro-level policies, while at other times the individual's choices among available language resources may represent the cutting edge of change in that particular speech community.

Surely there is no more dramatic example of language policy at the personal level than the writer who chooses a non-native language as his or her vehicle of literary expression. There are numerous examples of such individuals — Milton, Wilde, Beckett, and Nabokov spring immediately to mind. Nevertheless, Joseph Conrad's case is particularly compelling, involving as it does many social, political, and psychological factors.

What follows is an in-depth examination of the development of Conrad's multilingualism, how he and others regarded it, and how it affected his writing. It is hoped that this analysis may shed some light on the nature of language policy decisions at the individual level.

Conrad's linguistic development

Józef Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski was born in 1857 in Berdyczow in the Ukraine. He was the son of Apollo Korzeniowski and Ewa Bobrowska, Polish aristocrats exiled in 1862 to Vologda in northern Russia during the Russian-occupation of Poland because of their anti-Czarist sentiments. As a result, while Polish was his native tongue, he learned Russian early in childhood,² although he chose to discount it as one of his languages and bore a lifelong animosity to-

¹ Ronald Wardhaugh, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, 2nd edition (Oxford, 1992), p. 346.

² We know that he must have had at least a smattering of Russian because his father had studied at the University of St. Petersburg and knew the language well. Also in a 1893 letter, Conrad's uncle Tadeusz warned him to 'send a telegram from Brzeze for the horses, but in Russian because Oratov does not accept or receive telegrams in any foreign language' [Gerard Jean-Aubry, *The Sea Dreamer: A Definitive Biography of Joseph Conrad* (1967), p. 193].

ward the language and its speakers.³

In 1865 Conrad's mother died of tuberculosis, and in 1868 his father, who was seriously ill with the same disease, was pardoned and allowed to return to Cracow, where he set up household with his little son.

Apollo Korzeniowski had a pronounced influence on his son's linguistic development. He provided the boy with strong models of literary Polish. Conrad later indicated that the Polishness in his works came from having repeatedly read Mikiewicz and Slowacki under his father's guidance. Since Korzeniowski was an invalid and Conrad suffered greatly from headaches and nervous attacks as a child, they spent a good deal of time together, and the child acquired very definite ideas about linguistic esthetics and class distinctions. Korzeniowski was particularly concerned about his son's exposure to the working-class Germanized dialect current in Cracow where he was sent to school. Korzeniowski wrote in 1866: 'I only watch to see that during his lessons Polish is not changed into the Galician language'.⁴

Korzeniowski earned a living as a translator, and Conrad gained an early appreciation of English and French literature through his father's translations of Shakespeare, Hugo, and other writers. Very early on the young Conrad took an interest in his father's literary pursuits and even wrote short plays in French.⁵ Conrad always played down his early writing, preferring to give a more mystical account of his sudden calling to literature, but, in truth, that he went into writing is far less surprising than that he became a seaman.

Korzeniowski taught his son French at home, and this training was continued throughout Conrad's youth even after his father's death, resulting in a balanced bilingualism of Polish and French. A diglossic⁶ relationship existed between French and the Slavic languages of the 19th century, and French newspapers, literature, fashions, and language circulated freely among the Polish and Russian intelligentsia. For a time, Conrad had a French governess, a Mlle. Durand, whose last words to him were: '*N'oublie pas ton français, mon chéri*'. He noted in his autobiography that 'simply by playing with us she had taught me not only to speak French, but to read it as well'.⁷

German and Latin were also taught in written form in school, and Conrad

³ It's interesting to note in this regard that Conrad's russophobia was carried to such an extreme that he claimed to be unable to read Dostoyevski [Joselyn Baines, *Joseph Conrad* (New York, 1960), p. 360], and he refused to sit on a platform of a convention for world peace which also included Russians (Jean-Aubry (1967), p. 268). This russophobia was no doubt enhanced by the fact that his cousin Stanislas Bobrowski was arrested in 1892 for having given clandestine Polish lessons. Nevertheless his prose, in particular *Under Western Eyes*, shows strong Russian influence, and he named his son Borys, a typical Russian name.

⁴ Jean-Aubry (1967), p. 19.

⁵ Baines, p. 22.

⁶ Diglossia is the situation in which two or more language varieties are used for intrasocietal communication. The varieties are functionally differentiated — the High being used for religion, education, government, and the Low being used principally at home and in the streets [Charles Ferguson, 'Diglossia', *Word* XV (1959), 325-40].

⁷ Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Remembrance in The Collected Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad* (New York, 1927), pp. 64-5.

caught on very quickly, although in actuality he spent little time in formal classes due to poor health. Later in *Lord Jim* and *The Arrow of Gold*, he displayed his knowledge of Goethe's ballads. His facility in language later led him, aside from English, to pick up some Italian and Spanish.⁸ He even learned some Malay during his travels.⁹ In later years, he could never understand why his own sons were so slow with their language studies. At one point, his wife reported that he said of his eldest son's efforts: 'Disgusting! I could read in two languages at his age. Am I father to a fool!'¹⁰

When Korzeniowski died, Conrad, then only eleven, remained in the care of his uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, who served as his main economic support until he was past thirty. He was a moody, temperamental youth who shunned the company of others. Since he was almost always alone, he developed a passion for reading and devoured Cooper, Hugo, McClintock, and other adventure writers who would later influence his own creative production, as well as Trollope, Dickens, Scott, and Thackeray, in Polish translation.

In 1874, at the age of seventeen, he left Poland for Marseilles in order to improve his health (which was never good) and learn a trade. Leaving the country was also necessary to avoid conscription in the Russian army. The move to France was relatively easy since his French was excellent. He joined the merchant marine in Marseilles and developed a southern French accent which would later strongly color his English. Despite his accent and preference for French in oral expression (which was to last him all his life), he was known in Marseilles as the 'Polish mascot' and on ship in the South Seas as the 'Russian Count'. He spent four years working on French vessels in the West Indies and South America.

Conrad would have remained in France; however, a law was passed in that country forbidding the employment of young foreigners eligible for military service in their home nations, so he looked further west and in 1878 seized upon England as a place of refuge. While his adjustment to French ways had been easy, the move to England was another matter. He had an irregular knowledge of the language, no friends to smoothe the way, no cultural connection beyond that of the sea. His first job in the English merchant navy came as a result of a small ad he placed in *The London Times*. On board ship, he picked up English from the relatively few English sailors among the international crews and from British newspapers.

Conrad's progress in the English language was thereafter very rapid. He passed his second mate's exam barely two years after first making contact with the English world. This was particularly significant because as the test manual indicated, 'foreigners must prove to the satisfaction of the Examiners that they can speak and write the English language sufficiently well to perform the duties required of them on board a British vessel'.¹¹ He passed his first mate's exam in

⁸ Although he did mangle them a bit, as evidenced by the title of this tale 'Il Conde'.

⁹ When he suggested a collaborative publication of *Almayer's Folly* with Marguerite Poradowska, he was going to use 'Kamudi' as a pseudonym. This means 'rudder' in Malay.

¹⁰ Jessie Conrad, *Joseph Conrad and his Circle* (Port Washington, NY, 1964), p. 104.

¹¹ Zdzislaw Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A chronicle* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1984), p. 66.

1884 after several attempts. J.H. Retinger noted in his biography that Conrad 'enjoyed talking about his examination ... although the fact that his English then was not too good rather jarred on his nerves even in remembrance'.¹² In 1886, again after several attempts due to linguistic limitations and a certain weakness in navigational skills, he managed to pass the master's exam which then qualified him to serve as ship's captain, a post which he only filled twice and very briefly in his sailing career. At this point, he also became a British citizen.

Throughout the years, he studied from a battered volume of Shakespeare (which he dearly loved) and John Stuart Mills' *Political Economy* (which he deemed soporific). Because of his tendency to avoid social interaction, his English language proficiency was mainly the result of exposure to the written word. In later years when he gave his first and last public reading, it was apparent that he had never heard many of the words but had learned them only through reading.¹³ His habit of using extravagant gesture further added to the foreignness of his English speech.¹⁴

During his sea career, Conrad made a number of voyages to Malaysia, India, and one memorable trip to the Belgian Congo. However, life as a sailor was very arduous for Conrad, and he was often ill. In 1894, when between ships and short on funds, he began to write *Almayer's Folly*, based on his adventures in the Malay Archipelago. He published the novel under the Anglicized name of Joseph Conrad¹⁵ and officially joined the ranks of British writers.¹⁶ There is a great deal of speculation in the critical literature as to why he decided to begin a writing career, but writing had been part of his childhood formation, so it was not a completely absurd proposition that he return to it. There is also very clear indication in his correspondence with his Uncle Tadeusz that he was increasingly dissatisfied with seafaring, especially since he could not find positions suitable to his training, and that he was casting about for an alternative career. His marriage in 1896 to an English woman named Jessie George was one more reason for dedicating himself to a life of letters. He soon had a family to support, and prospects of a ship berth grew dimmer every day. His health would probably not have permitted him to continue long at sea, for malaria (contracted in the Congo) gave way to a debilitating gout which periodically crippled him. So he looked to writing as a less physically demanding way to make a living.

As it turned out, writing was to be more physically and emotionally taxing for him than sailing ever had been, yet over the 29 years of his writing career, he was amazingly productive. In all, Conrad wrote eighteen novels, twenty-nine

short stories, three play adaptations, and five collections of autobiographical and personal essays in English. His output may be divided into five basic groups: the Malay cycle (*Almayer's Folly* [1895], *Outcast of the Islands* [1896], *Lord Jim* [1900], and other shorter tales); the 'sea yarns' (*The Nigger of the Narcissus* [1897], 'Youth' [1902], 'Typhoon' [1903]); the South American odyssey (Conrad's greatest effort *Nostromo* [1904]); the Congo stories ('Outpost of Progress' [1897], 'Heart of Darkness' [1902]; and the political fiction (*The Secret Agent* [1907], *Under Western Eyes* [1911]). In all of these works, we find evidence of Conrad's lifelong personal preoccupation with the themes of multilingualism and cultural adaptation.

Conrad's language choice

There are many reasons for a multilingual to select one language over another for personal expression. In medieval times the selection would have been according to the literary genre, not the nationality of the author. Leonard Forster points out that many famous writers have used non-native tongues to present their intellectual ideas. The use of a foreign language is often liberating. It cuts away many of the natural inhibitions standing in the way of fluent writing. The use of the new language can be a sort of intellectual game, a new way of flexing one's linguistic muscles. It may mean a new way of thinking, a fresh approach to life's experiences. 'The use of a foreign language affords a further possibility: the words are not burdened with irrelevant associations for the poet, they are fresh and pristine'.¹⁷

There is much argument among Conrad's literary critics and acquaintances as to his language choice. Olivia Coolidge and others have simply dismissed the issue by concluding that since Conrad's topic was experienced in English, he therefore wrote about it in English. However, the issue is complicated by the fact that most of his personal interactions while sailing took place in French, not English. Then again, contradictorily, while in the Belgian Congo in 1890, he kept his personal diary in English rather than French.

Hugh Walpole almost lost Conrad's friendship by reporting that Conrad 'thought in Polish, arranged his thoughts in French, and expressed them in English'.¹⁸ Conrad quickly straightened him out on that in a personal letter in 1918:

I began to think in English long before I mastered, I won't say the style (I haven't done that yet), but the mere uttered speech ... Is it thinkable that anybody possessed of some effective inspiration should contemplate for a moment such a frantic thing as translating it into another tongue?

¹² J.H. Retinger, *Conrad and his contemporaries* (New York, 1943), p. 48.

¹³ Edward Garnett, *Letters from Joseph Conrad* (Indianapolis, IN, 1928), p. xix.

¹⁴ Olivia Coolidge, *The Three Lives of Joseph Conrad* (Boston, 1972), p. 62.

¹⁵ Conrad never officially changed his name. In 1921 he finally requested a passport in the name of Conrad for safety while travelling during wartime. His tombstone bears the name of Korzeniowski.

¹⁶ *Almayer's Folly* was not actually his first attempt at writing in English. In 1886, he wrote 'The Black Mate' for a competition sponsored by *Tit-Bits* magazine, but then rewrote it many years later for publication.

¹⁷ Leonard Forster, *The Poet's Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature* (New Zealand, 1970), p. 66.

¹⁸ Filson Young, 'French literature in England', *New York Times Book Review*, August 24, 1924, p. 8. It is also interesting to note that Ford Madox Ford reported that Conrad had once told him: '... my intimate, automatic, less expressed thoughts are in Polish; when I express myself with care, I do it in French. When I write, I think in French and then translate the words of my thoughts into English. This is an impossible process for one desiring to make a living by writing in the English language' [Ford Madox Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (1924), pp. 36-7].

In the same letter, Conrad spoke of having thought in English for years before writing *Almayer's Folly* (certainly the 16 years in England had endowed him with that ability). He also mentioned the appeal of the cadence and rhythm of the language. In the 'Author's Note' to *A Personal Record* (pp. v-vi), Conrad explained why he wrote in English:

The truth of the matter is that my faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born. I have a strange and overpowering feeling that it had always been an inherent part of myself. English was for me neither a matter of choice nor adoption. The merest idea of choice had never entered my head. And as to adoption — well, yes, there was adoption; but it was I who was adopted by the genius of the language, which directly I came out of the stammering stage made me its own ... All I can claim after all those years of devoted practice, with the accumulated anguish of its doubts, imperfections, and falterings in my heart, is the right to be believed when I say that if I had not written in English, I would not have written at all.

F.R. Leavis supports Conrad's own assessment. 'Conrad's English, as we read his supreme things, compels us to recognize it as that of a highly individual master, who has done his creative thinking and feeling — explored most inwardly the experiences leading him to creation — in that language'.¹⁹

In another part of the 'Note' to *A Personal Record*, Conrad declared his fear of trying to express himself in French, a 'crystallized' language. He saw English as more tolerant and flexible. Yet in 1890, he was apparently considering publishing in French. In that year, he made the acquaintance of Belgian writer and translator Marguerite Poradowska, the widow of an uncle of his, who very much impressed him with her literary ability. In fact, when no word came from the publishers as to the fate of *Almayer's Folly*, he even played with the idea of having her translate his work into French and publish it under both their names. This plan was never carried out. Eventually André Gide would become the French translator of the early Conrad work.

As for Polish, Gustav Morf points out that 'to write in Polish would not only have meant for Conrad to translate into another language (and a language then very poor in nautical terms) events lived in English, but to live in Poland and to wrestle with the language for years'.²⁰ As knowledgeable as Conrad was in his native language, he had not studied the fine art of literary Polish. And in fact, his only written output in Polish, aside from personal letters, consisted of some translations of Polish short stories and a play. He did not even consider his Polish to be up to the task of translating his own works from English and left that to a young Polish cousin, Aniela Zagorska.

Najder (p. 116) feels that Conrad's language selection was psychologically motivated:

Writing in a foreign language admits a greater temerity in tackling personally sensitive problems, for it leaves uncommitted the most spontaneous, deeper reaches of the psyche, and allows a

¹⁹ F.R. Leavis, 'The shadow line', in *Anna Karenina and other essays* (London, 1967), p. 84.

²⁰ Gustav Morf, *The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad* (New York, 1968), p. 207.

greater distance in treating matters we would hardly dare approach in the language of our childhood. As a rule, it is easier both to swear and to analyze dispassionately in an acquired language.

Bernard Meyer concurs in this psychological analysis, and asserts that the fact that Conrad learned English late in life after his personality had been formed, allowed him to use it as a tool. 'To have written in the language of his early youth ... would have imparted an element of immediacy and a quality of autobiographic proximity to his tales which, causing his tongue to stammer and his pen to tremble, might well have wrecked his art upon the shoals of personal involvement'.²¹

Let us examine the very real language policy decision involved.

By the time Conrad began to write in earnest at the age of 36, he had become aware of the need to settle down and establish national loyalties. Because of the political situation in the Czarist empire, he could not return to Poland. In fact, he viewed Poland as rather a lost cause, though he never relinquished his desire to see her liberated. Conrad's uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, tried to interest him in writing for Polish periodicals:

As thank God you do not forget your Polish (may God bless you for it, as I bless you) and your writing is not bad, I repeat what I have already written and said before — you would do well to write contributions for the *Wiedowiec* in Warsaw ... It would be an exercise in your native tongue — that thread which binds you to your country and countrymen, and finally a tribute to the memory of your father who always wanted to and did serve his country by his pen.²²

Despite the emotional appeal, Conrad declined. Leo Gurko comments that 'something in him resisted the idea of forming intimate literary ties with his native country'.²³ It may be that he could not write in Polish, given the great emotional scars received in his early life as exile and later orphan. There is considerable anecdotal evidence in the literature on bilingualism that points to the role of emotional trauma in language choices.²⁴

We must also consider the possibility that because Poland no longer existed as a nation and he had acquired British citizenship, the English language represented his sense of comfort and security. In a letter to a Polish friend, he wrote: 'When speaking, writing, or thinking in English, the word "home" always means for me the hospitable shores of Great Britain'.²⁵

For Conrad, English represented civilization on a grand scale. Conrad's choice of English as a literary language grew quite naturally out of his early childhood associations with England as a noble nation. Just as he had looked

²¹ Bernard Meyer, *Joseph Conrad: A psychoanalytic biography* (New Jersey, 1967), pp. 359-60.

²² Najder, p. 70.

²³ Leo Gurko, *The Two Lives of Joseph Conrad* (New York, 1965), p. 46.

²⁴ Cf. François Grosjean, *Life in Two Languages: An Introduction to Bilingualism* (Cambridge, MA, 1982).

²⁵ Baines, p. 79. Then again, we must consider the fact that in 1924, Conrad declined the offer of a British knighthood. This may have been his way of asserting pride in his Polish aristocratic background, or of reducing negative criticism from Polish countrymen.

to England as a naval power from his reading of the British adventurers, he looked to English as a literary language from his reading of Shakespeare. Interestingly enough, Chaucer had no appeal for him. In a letter to Robert Cunningham-Graham, February 26, 1899, he noted: 'I am afraid I am not English enough to appreciate fully the father of English literature'.²⁶

In addition, there were practical considerations. Britain, as an imperial power, commanded international respect in a way Poland could never hope to achieve. Novels in English were assured a wide audience. Polish works were appreciated only in Poland. This also explains the virtual lack of Polish subjects or characters in his writing. As he pointed out to a reproachful Polish friend, writing in Polish or about Poland would be most unwise: 'Ah, mon ami, que voulez-vous? I should lose my public'.²⁷ We must also consider the fact that there had been another Józef Korzeniowski who wrote in Polish during the early 1800s and whose son (with the same name) then worked as librarian in Cracow. (Conrad definitely thought of this when he selected his *nom de plume*). And then there was the issue of Russian censorship of all Polish writers.

Since being a Pole was legally prohibited (and anything was better in his eyes than being a Russian subject), Conrad became an Englishman to the best of his ability, and that meant suppressing the Polish element in his work. While there are no end of German, Russian, Spanish, and French characters in his work, there is only one minor case of a Polish character in the seldom read tale of 'Prince Roman'.

Gurko gives the following assessment of Conrad's language choice:

His art, expressed in English, was his only hope of establishing some sort of English identity. Conrad did not want to be regarded as a Pole who had somehow strayed into the English language as an exotic outsider and who did not really belong there. He wanted very much to be taken for an English writer, since he obviously could never pass for an Englishman in his manner, appearance, or speech. The break with Poland had to be complete in his works for there was no possibility of becoming English in any other form. (p. 167)

When young Polish philosopher Wincenty Lutoslawski (who had also published in English) asked Conrad why he didn't write in Polish, Conrad answered that he lacked the necessary talent to contribute 'to our beautiful Polish literature'.²⁸ Lutoslawski's article on the immigration of talent (published in Poland) highlighted Conrad and brought him under the attack of various Polish writers who saw him as turning his back on his homeland in her hour of need. A particularly virulent attack came from the pen of Eliza Orzeszkowa, Polish novelist and moralist, in 1899:

Speaking of books, I must say that this gentleman who writes popular and very lucrative novels in English has almost caused me a nervous breakdown. My gorge rises when I read about him. Why ... creative talent forms the very head of the tree, the pinnacle of the tower, the life-blood of the nation. And to take away that flower to remove that pinnacle, to drain away that life-

blood from the nation in order to pass it on to the Anglo-Saxons who anyway lie on a bed of roses because they pay better! It is hard to even think about it without shame! And to make matters worse, that gentleman bears the name and possibly is a very close descendant of Józef Korzeniowski whose books when I was a teenager brought tears to my eyes, the first tears of compassion, and fired me with my first noble enthusiasm and good resolutions. But over Mr. Konrad Korzeniowski's novels, no Polish teenager will ever shed a single altruistic tear or make a noble resolution'.²⁹

Conrad was very sensitive about this issue and commented on it at various points in his life. He refused to read any of Orzeszkowa's books. In 1901, he wrote to the writer and librarian Józef Korzeniowski to clarify matters:

It is widely known that I am a Pole and that Józef Konrad are my two Christian names, the latter being used by me as a surname so that foreign mouths should not distort my real surname — a distortion which I cannot stand. It does not seem to me that I have been unfaithful to my country by having proved to the English that a gentleman from the Ukraine can be as good a sailor as they and has something to tell them in their own language. I consider such recognition as I have won from this particular point of view and offer it in silent homage where it is due'.³⁰

Another attack which stung Conrad came in the 1908 review of a collection of Conrad's short stories written by Robert Lynd in the *New York Daily News*. Lynd averred:

Mr. Conrad, as everybody knows, is a Pole, who writes in English by choice, as it were, rather than by nature. According to most people, this choice is a good thing, especially for English literature. To some of us, on the other hand, it seems a very regrettable thing, even from the point of view of English literature. A writer who ceases to see the world coloured by his own language — for language gives colour to thoughts and things in a way that few people understand — is apt to lose the concentration and intensity of vision without which the greatest literature cannot be made. It was a sort of nationalism of language and outlook that kept wanderers like Turgenieff and Browning from ever becoming cosmopolitan and second rate ...

Mr. Conrad, without either country or language, may be thought to have found a new patriotism for himself in the sea. His vision of man, however, is the vision of a cosmopolitan, of a homeless person. Had he but written in Polish, his stories would assuredly have been translated into English and into the other languages of Europe; and the works of Joseph Conrad translated from the Polish would, I am certain, have been a more precious possession on English shelves than the works of Joseph Conrad in the original English, desirable as these are'.³¹

Thus Conrad was repeatedly assaulted by critics with reference to his language choice. Let us now examine his proficiency in each of his three languages.

Conrad's English

Throughout his entire life, despite an incredible grasp of the flow and rhythm of the English language, despite a prodigious vocabulary and luxurious phrasing, despite even his own insistent claims, Conrad remained essentially a foreigner, an exile, an unassimilated outsider to the English culture and people.

²⁶ Gerard Jean-Aubry (ed.), *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, I and II* (New York, 1927), p. 273.

²⁷ Baines, p. 353.

²⁸ Najder, p. 204.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 256.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 272.

³¹ Norman Sherry, *Conrad's Eastern World* (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 210-11.

'His very mastery of the language, advancing from early richness and exoticism to later ease and sparseness, never lost the conscious dignity of an acquired speech'.³²

There are many comments among his friends regarding his English. H.G. Wells wrote in his autobiography that Conrad spoke English 'strangely ... not badly altogether' but that he had the habit of pronouncing the final *e* of *these* and *those*.³³ Galsworthy described Conrad's speech as being in 'a strong but fascinating accent'.³⁴ Paul Valéry, the French poet, was astonished by Conrad's 'horrible' accent in English.³⁵ The Countess Eleanor Palffy observed that 'Conrad spoke English with a guttural Polish twist. Good came out ringingly as "gut" and blood as "blut", which fitted in curiously with the complex beauties of his phrases'.³⁶ Ford Madox Ford, Conrad's sometimes collaborator, opined that:

He spoke English with great fluency and distinction, with correctitude in his syntax, his words absolutely exact as to meaning but his accentuation so faulty that he was at times difficult to understand and his use of adverbs as often as not eccentric.³⁷

Interestingly enough, Ford's own biographer Douglas Goldring described Conrad's prose as 'largely pastiche Flaubert translated into English by someone with no great ease in the use of the language'.³⁸

Conrad's family also commented on the strangeness of his English. Jessie Conrad often referred to her husband's erratic use of English grammar, and Borys Conrad remembered his father rendering *iodine* as 'you're a-dyin', startling the young boy.

Many of his mispronunciations came from the fact that he learned English so late in life, after the so-called 'critical period' of brain lateralization³⁹ and had acquired much of his vocabulary from reading. Jean-Aubry commented on the difference in pronunciation between Conrad's French and English:

The fact that Conrad was always incapable of accenting English correctly when he spoke is singular enough in a writer who had such a strong grasp of the peculiar cadence of the English language ... Conrad spoke French, not only with absolute grammatical correctness, but also with an accent so perfect that it never betrayed his Polish descent ... when he spoke English it was ... with a very strong French accent.⁴⁰

Conrad was very sensitive about his poor accent and his linguistic limitations.⁴¹ He turned down offers to lecture in embarrassment. In a 1922 letter to Elbridge L. Adams, an American who invited him to speak in the U.S., he explained his refusal: 'I am not very anxious to display my accent before a large gathering of people. It might affect them disagreeably'.⁴² When he did finally read in public in 1923, not even the stenographers were able to record what he said, so quiet was his voice and so strange the pronunciation.

His sensitivity with regard to his accent almost lost him the friendship of his trusty agent Pinker after a tiff in which Pinker cried that he should speak English if he could. Conrad screamed: 'Speak English ... if I can ... what does he call all I have written?'⁴³ Conrad carried on this argument through the mail as well and became very formal with his friend:

As it can't have escaped your recall that the last time we met you told me that I did not speak English to you I have asked Robert Garnett to be my mouthpiece at any rate till my speech improves sufficiently to be acceptable.

The unfortunate thing in trying to analyze Conrad's speech is that we have no tape recordings or transcriptions, only his friends' remembrances, his wife's memoirs, his own purposely misleading statements, and conjecture. However, Conrad need not have worried so much about his language. According to linguists Larson and Smalley:

When a language learner has reached the point where he can translate from his mother tongue into the new language in a style and a dimension appropriate to a given situation and can do so fluently, so that his translation is received by native speakers of the new language with ease, appreciation, and interest, and when he can preserve the intentional meaning of the message from which he is translating, he has proved without a shadow of a doubt that he has become bilingual.⁴⁴

There is no doubt that Conrad's written English was received 'with ease, appreciation, and interest'.

Early on in his writing career, Conrad had the good fortune to make the acquaintance of Edward Garnett, who became a life-long friend and faithful editor of his work. Garnett pored over Conrad's manuscripts, excising Polish and

³² Morton Dauwen Zabel, *The Portable Conrad* (New York, 1947), pp. 113-14.

³³ Baines, p. 233.

³⁴ John Galsworthy, *Reminiscences of Conrad*, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book Collection, Typescript (1924), p. 2.

³⁵ Paul Valéry, 'Sujet d'une conversation avec Conrad', in *Nouvelle Revue Française* 12 (1924), 663-5.

³⁶ Eleanor Palffy, 'Drunk on Conrad', *Fortnightly Review* (Oct. 1929), 534-8.

³⁷ Ford Madox Ford, pp. 34-5.

³⁸ Douglas Goldring, *South Lodge Remembrances of Violet Hunt, Ford Madox and the English Circle* (London, 1943), p. 151.

³⁹ See Eric Lenneberg, *Biological Foundations of Language* (New York, 1967).

⁴⁰ Jean-Aubry (1967), p. 160.

⁴¹ Conrad also expressed irritation with the English phonological system. He once declared to Richard Curle that the English 'pronounced all words alike ... no ear' [Curle, *The Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad* (1928), p. 248].

⁴² Najder, p. 408.

⁴³ Jessie Conrad, p. 142.

⁴⁴ D.N. Larson and W.A. Smalley, *Becoming Bilingual: A Guide to Language Learning* (New Canaan, Connecticut, 1972), p. 398.

French influences from the syntax.⁴⁵ When *Almayer's Folly* was accepted for publication, Conrad made three rounds of corrections of the galley proofs and changed 800 words. Conrad confessed to Garnett in a letter in 1898: 'The more I write the less sure I am of my English'.⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that while Conrad generally wrote very formally in English, his letters to Garnett were full of puns, slang, and dialect forms. It seems that only with his editor who knew him at his worst could he relax and use colloquial English.

It is clear from Conrad's correspondence that he found writing in English arduous. He confessed to his confidante and fictitious 'aunt' Marguerite Poradowska that English for him was still 'a foreign language and its use requires a formidable effort on my part'.⁴⁷ He also complained to Garnett that when writing English, he had to 'work like a coal-miner in his pit, quarrying all my English sentences out of a black night'.⁴⁸

Conrad's French

While English was the only language in which Conrad developed his literary creativity, nevertheless the degree to which he was able to retain fluency in his second language, French, was remarkable. Even in his native Polish, code-switching into French was common. In fact, much of his correspondence with family in Poland and with literary friends in England contained phrases and entire sections in French. When he visited Poland, his friends noted that 'he talked in Polish, but occasionally lacking a word he would replace it with an English or French expression'.⁴⁹

The circle of cosmopolitan, well-educated authors and artists with whom he surrounded himself served to preserve this old linguistic habit. H.G. Wells observed that 'he would supplement his vocabulary — especially when discussing cultural or political matters — with French words'.⁵⁰ Wilbur Cross commented that Conrad tended to use a French expression where an English one would be more idiomatic: *resumed* for *summed up*, *arrested* for *stopped*, *made a step* for *took a step*.⁵¹

⁴⁵ When I went over Conrad's manuscripts in the Beinecke Library at Yale University, I found recurrent misspellings, misused prepositions, confusions of verbs like *feel* and *touch*, redundancies, etc. But the most noticeable tendency was that of adjective placement. Conrad was very fond of inverting noun-adjective syntax in English, probably in accordance with both French and Polish syntax. His impulse was to place a long string of adjectives to the right of the noun being modified. Thus, we find phrases like this from 'The Lagoon': 'the forests, sombre and dull' / 'an immobility perfect and final' / 'the tracery of small ferns, black and dull' / 'a ditch: tortuous, fabulously deep'. And from *An Outpost of Progress*: 'he was a grey-headed savage thin and black' / 'Makola taciturn and impenetrable' / 'The Director was a man ruthless and efficient'.

⁴⁶ Najder, p. 208.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 326.

⁴⁸ Garnett, p. 225.

⁴⁹ Letter from K. de Montresor to Jean-Aubry, Nov. 18, 1927, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book Collection.

⁵⁰ Baines, p. 233.

⁵¹ Wilbur L. Cross, *The Illusions of Joseph Conrad*, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book Collection, Typescript (n.d.), p. 13.

The general assessment of Conrad's French varied among his friends. Baines considers that his French was excellent but lacking in imagination. However, Jean-Aubry describes Conrad as having 'a nice feeling for French style and a knowledge of the precise meaning of words which many a Frenchman might have envied'.⁵² The French director of the firm chartering one of Conrad's ships, Paul Langlois, noted in 1931 that Conrad spoke both French and English purely but preferred to speak French which he managed with great elegance.⁵³ Karl and Davies, however, point out that Conrad made numerous mistakes of grammar and spelling in French which some of his biographers (like Jean-Aubry) cleaned up to preserve his image.⁵⁴

Conrad preferred French for daily self-expression. His correspondence with Cunninghame Graham is ample proof of his ability to switch in and out of French with ease:

There are people from whom I would beg on my knees the favour of an eternal oblivion. Would I get it? *Croyez-vous qu'on se retrouve, la bas? La bas* appears something as a big hole ...⁵⁵

Borys Conrad commented on his father's ability to 'carry on a brilliant conversation in three languages without interfering with his enjoyment of the meal, and still find time to "damn" his manservant'.⁵⁶ In fact, from what is presently known about code-switching, Conrad's rapid switching among English, French, and Polish should be regarded as proof positive of his extraordinarily high level of multilingual competence.

The importance that Conrad gave to French can also be seen in the fact that, while he didn't teach his sons Polish, he did see to it that they received a good preparation in French. He even sent them to live in France for certain periods to improve their proficiency.

Conrad's Polish

In times of stress or sickness, Conrad tended to revert to his native Polish.⁵⁷ Polish also affected the phonology and phrasing of his English. The most surprising element of all is the degree to which Conrad was able to maintain his Polish given the fact that he left Poland at the age of 17 and only returned a few times during his life. His uncle Tadeusz commented at various points that he was pleased to see Conrad was not losing his Polish. Wincenty Lutoslawski, the philosopher, supported this observation: '... after his wife had retired for the night, we changed from English into Polish and I soon realized that after all those years of wandering in the world, Conrad Korzeniowski retained a good

⁵² Jean-Aubry (1927), pp. 28-29.

⁵³ Baines, p. 97.

⁵⁴ Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies (eds.), *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, Vol. 1, 1861-1898 (Cambridge, 1983).

⁵⁵ Jean-Aubry (1927), p. 230.

⁵⁶ Borys Conrad, *My Father: Joseph Conrad* (New York, 1970).

⁵⁷ Jessie Conrad (1964).

command of his native tongue'.⁵⁸ However, it was only in 1924 (his last year of life) when his cousin Aniela Zagorska came from Poland that Conrad had the opportunity to speak Polish again on a regular basis.

Nevertheless, there is clear evidence that Conrad's Polish did suffer some changes over the years. In 1921, when he was translating Bruno Winower's comic play *The Book of Job* from Polish into English, he left out words and phrases and missed some of the nuances of the Polish. Later when he was supervising the Polish translation of his own works, he suggested certain changes that showed that his sense of shades of meaning and style in Polish was incomplete and uneven. Najder points to deterioration in the Polish syntax of his letters to relatives in Poland and signals that Conrad avoided using Polish for complex arguments, preferring instead to switch to French. Again, this is understandable considering the uneven formal education he received in Polish, the young age at which he left the country, and the number of years spent using French and English as an adult in serious literary and political discourse.

There is evidence that Conrad felt guilty about his decision not to teach his sons Polish. At one point he wrote to his cousin Karola Zagorska asking her if she would ever forgive him for not having taught his sons Polish.⁵⁹ Borys Conrad wrote in 1970: 'Throughout my life I have regretted my inability to speak my father's native tongue'.⁶⁰

Some commentators regard Polish, his first language, as being the most influential in his writing. Gustav Morf makes quite a case for the Polish influence in Conrad's English. He cites in particular the use of proverbs and social formulae as evidence of the essentially Slavic nature of his writing. For example, 'turning whips out of sand' is a popular Polish way of expressing work done by bluff. Conrad's 'pleased as a dog with two tails' is also Polish in origin. The normal Polish gentleman's way of signing a letter is echoed in Blunt's 'Américain, catholique, et gentilhomme' in *The Arrow of Gold*. The Polish proverb: 'Man discharges the piece, but God carries the bullet' is cited in 'Gaspar Ruiz' but presented as Russian. In *Under Western Eyes*, Kostia requests entrance with the words: 'May one come in?', the typical Polish formula. In 'Amy Foster', Yanko's English phrases are often translations of Polish — e.g. 'iron track' for *railroad* is a direct translation of the Polish *kolej zelazna*.

Conclusions

As we have seen, Joseph Conrad is an excellent example of an individual involved in language planning at the personal level. At each stage of his life, he was obligated to make certain decisions regarding the deployment of his language resources. Among the determining factors in his personal language policy-making were: place of residence, occupation, social and familial milieu, linguistic function, esthetic concerns, affective associations, political ideology, etc.

⁵⁸ Najder, p. 254.

⁵⁹ Baines, p. 353.

⁶⁰ Borys Conrad, p. 51.

In essence, Conrad's life represents a microcosm of multilingualism and the decisions that condition engenders on a global scale. While his experience is perhaps unique in terms of the impact of his personal language policies on others, it is at base the experience of every multilingual who tries to survive in our linguistically complex world community.

University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras

ALICIA POUSADA