



THE MULTILINGUALISM OF JOSEPH CONRAD

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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" (Wardhaugh 1992: 346). 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 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

Jozef Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski was born in 1857 in Berdyczow in the Ukraine. He was the son of Apollo Korzeniowski and Ewa Bobrowska, Polish aristocrats who were sent in 1862 to live in exile in Vologda in northern Russia during the Russian-occupation of Poland because of their anti-Czarist Polish National Messianist sentiments. As a result, while Polish was his native tongue, he learned some Russian early in childhood, although he chose to discount it as one of his languages and bore a lifelong animosity toward the language and toward all things Russian.

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 very 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 a member of the Polish *szlachta* or aristocracy and did not want his son to pick up the lower-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" (Jean-Aubry 1967:19).

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 as a child (Baines 1960:22). 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 diglossic 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 *A Personal Record* that "simply by playing with us she had taught me not only to speak French, but to read it as well" (64-65).

German and Latin were also taught in written form in school, and Conrad 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. He even learned some Malay during his travels. In later years, he could never understand why his own sons were so slow with their language studies, and he became very intolerant of their abilities. 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! (Conrad, Jessie 1964: 104).

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 30. 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 novelists 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 17, 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, which in his case (as the son of political undesirables) could have been for as long as 25 years. The move to France was relatively easy since his French was excellent. He joined the merchant marine and used Marseilles as his center of operations. As a result, he 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. He later claimed to have become involved in running guns for Don Carlos de Borbón, the Carlist pretender to the Spanish throne, but there is no hard evidence that he really did. He also claimed to have been involved in a duel over a woman; however, the correspondence between Conrad and his uncle Tadeusz reveals that in reality he shot himself trying to commit suicide due to his chronic depression and money problems (Najder 1983).

He would have remained in France; however, a law was passed in that country forbidding the employment of young foreigners eligible for the military 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 smooth the way, no cultural connection beyond that of the sea. His first job in the English merchant navy came from his own efforts with a small, hesitantly formulated ad in *The London Times*. On board ship, the English language was not vital, as a loose lingua franca sprang up among the multinational sailors, but when in port, he experienced difficulties in making himself understood. 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 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" (Najder 1983: 66). He passed his first mate's exam in 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" (Retinger 1943: 48). 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 (Garnett 1928: xix). His habit of using extravagant gesture further added to the foreignness of his English speech (Coolidge 1975: 62).

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 Conrad and officially joined the ranks of British writers. There is a great deal of speculation in the critical literature as to why he decided to begin a writing career, but we should remember that 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 Taddeusz that he was increasingly dissatisfied with sea life, 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 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 *Nostramo* (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

From a linguistic standpoint, it is more interesting to ask not why Conrad wrote, but rather why he chose to write in English. Why select an unmastered language for the plunge into a new career?

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 (1970) points out that many famous writers (Milton, Wilde, Beckett, Nabokov, and others) 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" (Forster 1970: 66).

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. This is borne out by linguistic studies which show that thoughts learned or associated with a certain language will usually be discussed in that language. 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" (Young 1924: 8). 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?

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* (1919: 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 me. 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.

Leavis (1967:84) 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."

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" (Morf 1968: 207). 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 (1983: 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 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.

Meyer (1967) 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. (359-360).

Let us examine the very real language policy decision with which he was faced.

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 *Wedrowiec* in Warsaw...I 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 (Najder 1983: 70).

Despite the emotional appeal, Conrad declined. Gurko (1965: 46) comments that "something in him resisted the idea of forming intimate literary ties with his native country." 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 (cf. Grosjean 1986).

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" (Baines 1960:79).

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 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 Cunninghame Graham, February 26, 1899, he noted: "I am afraid I am not English enough to appreciate fully the father of English literature." (Jean-Aubry 1927: 273).

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." (Baines 1960:353). We must also consider the fact that there had been another Józef Korzeniowski who wrote in Polish during the early 1800's 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 of the period.

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. (Morf (1968) shows how ineffective the suppression was.) While there is 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 (1965: 167) 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.

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" (Najder 1983:204). 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 Jozef 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." (Najder 1983: 256)

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" (Najder 1983: 272).

Another attack which stung Conrad came from America, in the 1908 review of a collection of Conrad's short stories written by Robert Lynd in the 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" (Sherry 1966: 210-211)

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 language proficiency in 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. "His very mastery of the language, advancing from early richness and exoticism to later ease and spareness, never lost the conscious dignity of an acquired speech" (Zabel 1947: 113-4.)

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 (Baines 1960: 233). Galsworthy (1924:2) described Conrad's speech as being in "a strong but fascinating accent". Paul Valéry, the French poet, was astonished by Conrad's "horrible" accent in English (Valéry 1924: 663-665). The Countess Eleanor Palffy (1929: 534-538) 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." 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 "(34-35).

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" (Goldring 1943:151).

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 lateralization (Lenneberg 1967) and had acquired much of his vocabulary from reading. Jean-Aubry (1967:160) 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.

Conrad was very sensitive about his poor accent and his linguistic limitations. 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" (Najder 1983: 408). 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?" (Conrad, Jessie 1964:142). Conrad carried on this argument through the mails 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 often fatuous memoirs, his own purposely misleading statements, and conjecture. However, Conrad need not have worried so much about his language. According to Larson and Smalley (1972: 398):

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.

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 French influences from the syntax. 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" (Najder 1983: 208). 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 require a formidable effort on my part" (Najder 1983: 326). 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" (Garnett, 1928:225)

Conrad's language proficiency in French

Najder (1983) makes an interesting point: while English was the only language in which Conrad developed his literary creativity, nevertheless it is remarkable the degree to which he was able to retain fluency in his second language, French. 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" (letter from K. de Montresor to Jean-Aubry, Nov. 18, 1927, Yale University collection).

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. (Baines 1960:233). 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 (Cross typescript n.d.: 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 knowledge of the precise meaning of words which many a Frenchman might have envied (1927: 28-29). 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 (Baines 1960: 97). Karl and Davies (1983), 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.

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:

My wife (She's a good girl *et pas du tout gênante*) shall cook...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... (Jean-Aubry 1927:230)

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" In fact, from what we know nowadays about code-switching, Conrad's rapid switching among English, French, and Polish would 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 language proficiency in Polish

In times of stress or sickness, Conrad tended to revert to his native Polish (Jessie Conrad, 1964). 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 command of his native tongue" (Najder 1983: 254). 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 (1983) 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 (Baines 1960: 353). Borys Conrad wrote in 1970: "Throughout my life I have regretted my inability to speak my father's native tongue" (Conrad, B. 1970: 51).

Some commentators regard Polish, his first language, as being the most influential in his writing. Gustav Morf (1968) 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*. following the Polish pattern (Karl and Davies 1983).

Conclusions

So there we have him--Conrad the multilingual, the 'homo duplex', as he often called himself. While it is clear that his decision to write in English caused him great problems of both a personal and professional nature, it also appears that his multilingual repertoire enriched his literary production. As Jeremy Hawthorne (1979: xi) put it in his analysis of Conrad's stylistics, Conrad's writing was blessed with:

...a more than commonly developed consciousness of language...an awakened philosophical curiosity about language, more easily developed when one speaks and thinks in more than one tongue...

Although we cannot compare Conrad directly to the bilinguals who live in Puerto Rico because of the great differences in their material conditions and also his own peculiar psychological make-up, the general patterns are quite similar and point to certain universal characteristics of bilinguals the world around.

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