

*Beata Karpińska-Musiał*  
University of Gdansk

## Two Kinds of Critical Approach Towards Change Among the Academic Staff of Modern Language Faculties at Polish Universities

Change cannot be implemented by force.  
Change is a process and does not follow ready-made schemes.  
Problems are inevitable and need to be liked.  
Establishing a vision too early as well as strategic planning may blind you.  
Individual and team activities are equally important.  
Neither centralization nor decentralization will work separately.  
Relations with a wider environment are necessary.  
Every person is a change agent<sup>1</sup>.

### Introduction

In the light of the above mentioned attributes of change, the presented article attempts to study critically the way in which the community of modern language faculties staff and language education researchers perceives the institutional and paradigmatic change associated with the implementation of the reform that has occurred in higher education<sup>2</sup>. The purpose of this text is to diagnose by means of a survey the situation arising after or during work on adapting syllabuses to the guidelines of the National Qualifications Framework that were introduced by the amendment to the Act of 18 March 2011, on the law on higher education, entering into force on 1 October 2012, and signed on 5 April 2011<sup>3</sup>. The aim is also to observe whether or to what extent the modifications generated by the reform affect the representatives of this discipline i.e. change the perception of their work, their self-image or the surrounding social and professional conditions. The issue

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<sup>1</sup> Based on: M.G. Fullan, *The Complexity of the Change Process*, [in:] *Change Forces: Probing the Depth of Educational Reform*, Falmer Press 1993, pp. 19–41.

<sup>2</sup> The text discusses the reform that took place at the turn of 2011/2012 [translator's note].

<sup>3</sup> J. Jabłkowska, A. Różalski, *Zmiany w ustawach [Amendments to Acts]*, "Kronika. Pismo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego" 2011, No. 2 (124), p. 7.

is specifically noteworthy as this professional group is in a way “double marked” in the current context of change. On the one hand, it may seem privileged due to its high competence in foreign language command, enabling more adroit functioning on the global labour market. The group is in possession of tools that, by principle, allow crossing cultural boundaries, provide a profound insight into the mechanisms of other cultures (through the language), and give a sense of control over international literature in particular disciplines. Considering the purely economic dimension, language competence may also bring profits connected with doing oral and written translations. On the other hand, the current situation of modern language faculties staff might not necessarily be as comfortable. They are commonly regarded as “language engineers”, masters of language and its didactics. Language studies educate humanists – after all, elements of history, cultural studies and literary criticism are part of their curriculum. Yet, in recent decades, characterized by linguistic and cultural turns and thus methodological and paradigmatic breakthroughs, the academic staff of modern language faculties appear primarily as good speakers, experts in foreign language and teachers. However, the flagship language competence, even supported by broad cultural and historical knowledge, has already lost its value on today’s labour market. On this market, which is inevitably under the influence of neoliberal tendencies, this knowledge being merely humanistic is simply considered insufficient. It is hardly surprising, then, that this situation is not very welcomed by representatives of the discipline – especially in the face of the ever-increasing conflict between advocates of the Enlightenment university tradition associated with Kant, emphasizing the role of universal reason and freedom<sup>4</sup>, and those who claim that the 19<sup>th</sup> century abuse in power of reason led to violence, even if symbolic, and forced the university to undergo neoliberal standardization. Thus, all possible procedures that aim to change the established situation, which produces a quality of education incompatible with the standards adopted today throughout the Bologna process and EU regulations, become a hot button issue. A polemic arises, debating if this quality is worse or simply different. There is a dissonance in beliefs on whether this is a negative phenomenon or simply one necessary to adhere to. Using the words of Tomasz Szkudlarek, who reflects upon the future of education and trends within it, the option of “adhering” may turn out to be a fantasy of education for the masses, while the option of “ignoring” – for the elite<sup>5</sup>. Following Szkudlarek’s thought: we are now witnessing the formation of new divisions resembling the revolutionary creation of a society of knowledge which comprises elites “fleeing from mediocrity” and masses following the new authority, i.e. the EU legislation.

<sup>4</sup> M. Gdula, *Władza krytyczna i siła wyobraźni* [Critical Authority and the Power of Imagination], [in:] *Uniwersytet zaangażowany. Przewodnik krytyki politycznej* [Engaged University. The Guide to Political Critique], Zespół KP, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warsaw 2010.

<sup>5</sup> T. Szkudlarek, *Edukacja przyszłości: Tendencje, fantazje i scenariusze* [Education of the Future: Trends, Fantasies and Scenarios], <http://www.instytutobywatelski.pl/2285/komentarze/edukacja-przyszlosci-tendencje-fantazje-i-scenariusze>, accessed on: 31.08.2011.

The profile of contemporary students to a large extent fuels this type of controversy. For several years young recruits of English studies have exhibited disturbing attitudes. As they are people of a new era: competent in media and culture, and often socially capable, they struggle with the education system that still cherishes practices and methods rooted in the past. Many of these young people show great adaptation skills, and therefore, in order to complete formal education, they stop thinking, as the system sends the message that *There is no alternative*. They start to live in a certain schizophrenia between life and their own abilities (as they often already work during studies), versus the knowledge offered at the academy, the method of passing it and the competences that are supposed to guarantee the quality of education, but which are increasingly incompatible with the labour market. Before the higher education reform formally empowers students (since in their opinion they are not properly empowered), and teaches them to construct their own knowledge, students who in the after-school life have already performed social functions that would surprise the older generations, are still startled when they are given the right to voice their opinions in ordinary classes and seminars. Perceived by multigenerational staff as overly emancipated (laptops, choosing faculties, students' rights, etc.), they themselves feel caught in the trap of an education system still reminiscent of the school drill. They are accused of a lack of reflectiveness in their own actions, but at the same time they are not taught or encouraged to be reflexive. According to Ryan, students aspiring to be teachers often try to meet reflection-based tasks that would result in professional learning, change, and self-improvement<sup>6</sup>. This requires immense effort, since, quoting Altrichter: "professional learning is not just an intellectual process (a process of acquisition and application of knowledge), but also a process of practical action in which knowledge is enacted in reflecting and developing a specific action"<sup>7</sup>. Students should therefore be able to translate their ambitions and learning strategies into action, and to implement the *learning by doing* model. This turns out not to be so easy, however, because it entails a complete redefinition of the desired and reinforced competences, including the linguistic ones. This situation is related to the attitude of the academic staff towards change, both in the institutional aspect, and in the new rendition of the content and level of education. This attitude is fundamentally critical: not in action, but, rather, in passive rejection. The two types of critical approach mentioned in the title of this article are to indicate the following two meanings: critical as negating, and critical as radically seeking, or urgently important. The purpose of the discussion presented below is perhaps to reveal which type of criticism is prevalent among the staff of modern language faculties. Following Gdula's suggestion, the question arises: is the critical perspective, if it ever touched the community of modern language faculties staff at all, closed "in a vicious circle of resistance and disclosure" and "giv-

<sup>6</sup> T. G. Ryan, *The Reflexive Classroom Manager: a Required Pre-Service Mode*, Networks, 2006, vol. 9, issue 1.

<sup>7</sup> H. Altrichter, *The Role of the 'Professional Community in Action Research'*, "Educational Action Research" 2005, 13(1), p. 11; T. G. Ryan, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

ing testimony” or is the community wondering what language to use “to expand areas of freedom”?<sup>8</sup> Might this community stand a chance to not only distance itself and criticize, but create new solutions in new situations by following the encoded respect for different cultures and otherness, pursuing the Humboldtian idea of a research university that incorporates the researcher’s autonomy and external culture, treating it as a link, not a wedge?

Negative criticism can be justified. It suffices to refer to the scolding article of Ewa Nawrocka in “Gazeta Wyborcza” of 5–6 May 2012, quoting opinions delivered on 18 May 2012, at the University of Gdansk conference “Rage and indignation. Images of revolts in contemporary culture”. Listening to the argument cited by the author, it seems obvious that the intellectual and linguistic level (which is the most outrageous for the staff of language faculties) of young people applying for university language studies is plummeting<sup>9</sup>. What we are facing at university is considered an unwanted bitter fruit of the reform of the lower levels of education, because these schools “produce” graduates who are trained to do tests and to think in a schematic, fragmented and technical way. Those young people are quick, more or less capable, ambitious and adept, but not in the way desired by the humanist academic tradition. This applies to a large extent to the tradition of language education, as the rhetorical education assumptions have been formulated precisely within the language studies framework. Indeed, attempts have been made to help young people to develop the art of expressing themselves, the ability to understand oral and written texts, and the competence to compose and decode texts. The discrepancy between the original assumptions and today’s “consequences” is to be dealt with by language studies lecturers. Perhaps it would be easier to do so if the criticality in the sense of being a *transformative intellectual* (of H. Giroux) was more supported in the community. For the time being though it is only calling for its voice and looking for its place in the language studies faculties. A voice of dissent against reality is heard, but specific actions that could be taken to eliminate or satisfy this dissent are yet to be defined.

## The research grounds and method

Curious about the level of this dissent about reality, and also in the name of academic reflectiveness promoted by Ryan, in February and March 2012 I conducted an anonymous diagnostic survey among staff of the modern language and culture faculties of seventeen<sup>10</sup> classical universities in Poland. It concerned the attitude

<sup>8</sup> M. Gdula, *op. cit.*, pp. 221–222.

<sup>9</sup> E. Nawrocka, *Na diabla nam taka edukacja?* [What the Deuce do We Need Education for?], “Gazeta Wyborcza” of 5–6 May 2012.

<sup>10</sup> The research covered the following universities: University of Gdansk, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Jagiellonian University in Cracow, University of Warsaw, University of Silesia in Katowice, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University and The

towards the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework for higher education at language faculties and was carried out via the Internet. The obtained results and quoted remarks of respondents show quite clearly, and in a surprisingly emotional way, how difficult it is to reformulate one's beliefs about the academic reality undergoing change. It is not the purpose of this article to assess whether the quoted statements of the respondents are justified or not. No assumptions were made while compiling this survey. Its goal is purely diagnostic and is supposed to show the experiential nature of the attitude towards change, without assessing its advantages or disadvantages. On the other hand, this research was also intended to serve as an example of a thought-provoking activity for teachers who, when answering the questions of the survey, were "requested" to reflect on the situation. Following Lewis's thought: self-examination is a popular trend in contemporary studies on education, as improving and building from within constitute the broadly defined goal of education. As Ryan puts it: "We are committed to questioning in order to examine and improve teaching, our curricula, and ourselves. The teacher-researcher is continually adding to current knowledge and skills by building onto what exists. Often new constructions require significant modification to overcome inertia, existing structures, and established norms"<sup>11</sup>. What is more, Ryan quotes Lewis, according to whom the reflexive teacher-researcher resembles social constructionists who are always faced with the problem of having to "parenthesize" their substantive claims, distancing themselves from these claims in a way that constantly undermines their legitimacy, in order to foreground the anti-objectivism in judging the world and the self. But such an "outsider stance" towards your own opinions is an enormously powerful (and activating) tool of critical attitude towards your actions and thoughts. It allows for development and active change<sup>12</sup>.

In addition to the results of the study given in the form of percentage calculations regarding selected answers in the survey, I will also present the qualitative analysis of respondents' remarks, obtained as comments to specific questions. These are statements that speak for themselves: we have a huge problem and we do not know how to solve it so that everyone is satisfied. Undoubtedly, the presented examples are only a drop in the ocean of issues, but through a certain exposure of resistance to change, they point to the two abovementioned types of critical approach. In spite of the prevalent criticism and indignation, some remarks supplied by teachers let us believe that the necessity of change is well-recognized and accepted. However, the manner of its introduction is deficient, infrastructure facilities are inadequate, and, importantly, teamwork is not welcomed. The concept of key competences, which involve teamwork as well, is at times quite unrecognizable as a theoretical concept.

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John Paul II Catholic University in Lublin, University of Wrocław, University of Łódź, University of Białystok, University of Szczecin, Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, University of Opole, University of Zielona Góra, and The University of Rzeszów.

<sup>11</sup> T.G. Ryan, *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Y. Lewis, *The Self as a Moral Concept*, "British Journal of Social Psychology" 2003, 42(2), p. 231; T.G. Ryan, *ibid.*, p. 4.

Although key competences play a vital part in the democratization and universalisation of education (at the expense of presumed decline in quality), they seem to be a foreign notion to some representatives of the discipline. Nevertheless, certain respondents, however small in number, seem to be ready for change, even if for the time being it exhibits resignation rather than approval and the willingness to act.

## Procedure and results of the survey

The attitudes of modern language faculties staff were examined by an anonymous online survey in February and March 2012. A return was obtained from 188 respondents. The selected questions and answers presented below are grouped into two thematic blocks. The first concerns the general attitude to the higher education reform, and the process and elements of institutional change understood as a set of new procedures (5 questions). The second block focuses on the stance towards change in the context of language education research (3 questions)<sup>13</sup>. These questions concerned the assessment of the general situation in language education research in the context of teaching competences, self-perception of the function and position of the modern language faculties staff in the process of the higher education reform, and the most controversial problem in the reform's assumptions: lowering the language competence threshold for candidates and graduates of language studies. The last, summarizing question asks about the respondents' individual attitude to change.

### General attitude to reform and institutional change

Criticism towards the implemented reform is revealed in the answers to two of the questions regarding the formulation of objectives and learning outcomes whilst creating syllabuses of academic subjects. These questions and response statistics are shown in two diagrams: Chart 1 and Chart 2.

These charts show that for more than a half of the respondents, the need to adapt to the National Qualifications Framework guidelines was a hindrance and a "time-consuming task, with little substantive meaning". Also the comments placed under these questions indicate a definitely negative attitude of respondents towards the procedure of introducing the National Qualifications Framework in higher education. The criticism is so profound that it reaches even the entire Bologna process and its negative effects that are, according to respondents, already observable. The respondents criticized for instance a lack of appropriate training for employees ("Employees have not been introduced in detail to the objectives and

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<sup>13</sup> The entire questionnaire entitled: *The Process of Implementing the National Qualifications Framework at Classical and Modern Language Faculties*, consisted of 22 questions.

nature of the National Qualifications Framework; we received only rudimentary data, what purpose is it supposed to serve?”).

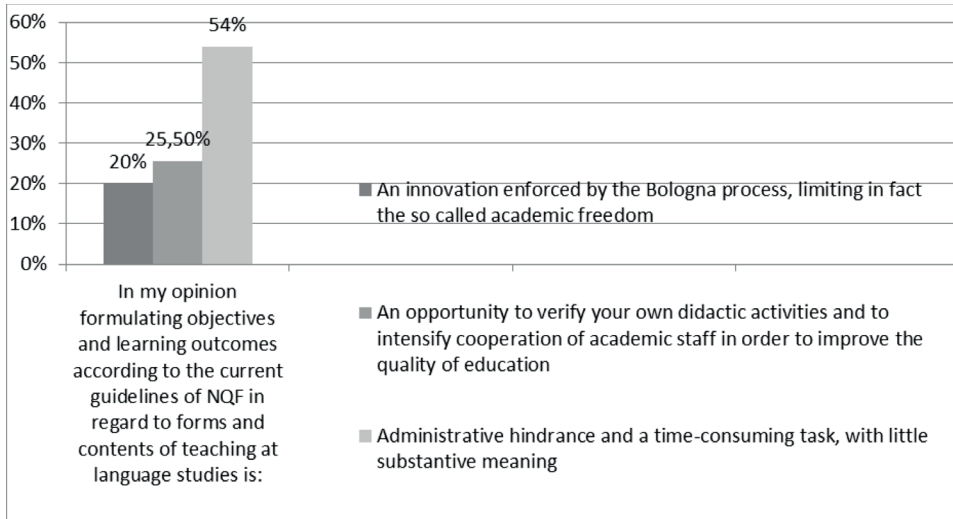


Chart 1.

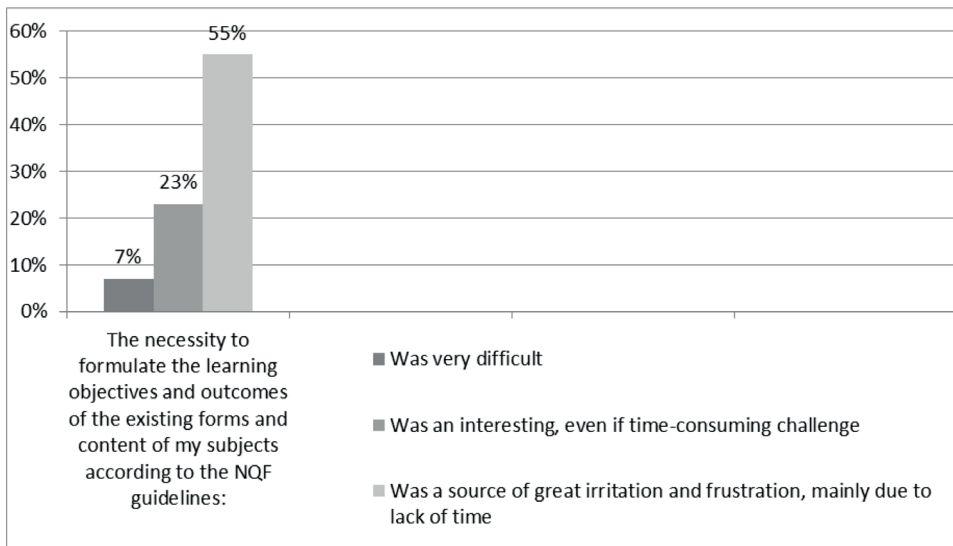


Chart 2.

Opinions indicating a high level of criticism were expressed both in stern statements:

What limits academic freedom (not “so-called!”) is the generalized and thus extremely primitive criteria. In addition – reversing the order of operations: the effects are first



described (WHAT A GRADUATE IS SUPPOSED TO KNOW) and then the curriculum that leads to the effects. As you know, effects are something that lies within expertise of glib journalists and PR specialists, and not to academic teachers who give knowledge, the basis of all SKILLS.

The Bologna process, just like the so-called enrolment rates, is definitely negative in the long run, as it results in lowering the level of Polish education (the fact now evident in language studies faculties). Well, I understand that this is a deliberate action aimed at destroying Polish education, because it is common knowledge that stupid people are easier to rule.

as well as in more moderate ones:

The method of implementing the National Qualifications Framework, especially the obligation to create syllabuses during the academic year, makes the new syllabuses a burdensome administrative duty. I have many other duties, I will prepare the syllabus in a hurry and at the last minute.

In many situations the expressed opinions indicate the lack of information for employees and their general confusion in the subject. This problem has already been mentioned above as the absence of training:

I took part in the preparation of the National Qualifications Framework for under-graduate studies in our faculty, and when the tables and charts returned to us from the Institute, they looked completely different. Most of us, including those who work on it, have no idea what is going on, others are happy that they did not have to get involved, the information provided was confusing, and the result in our faculty makes me feel dissatisfied...

There were also comments indicating the inadequacy of reform procedures to the higher education processes, specifically while formulating objectives and learning outcomes in the recommended way:

It complicates a didactic process because it reduces the teacher's formal contribution into copying standard phrases from a template. It's worth consideration whether the term "reform" used here is not a semantic abuse...

It complicates the process, but not because it requires diligence. A lecturer may well be diligent without frames. The suggested learning outcomes are not transferable to academic studies. People used to go to university for knowledge, because the candidate was supposed to possess "skills", i.e. by definition "abilities to apply knowledge and solve problems", and without the "social competence" no one would have been admitted to university.

There were also those statements that forecast the future of the reform concisely and to the point:

Just a short appendix: the reform (if successful) will eliminate trustworthy knowledge and truly profound reflection. We'll be left with titles, degrees and reports (even if nice and orderly).



General lack of information and organizational hindrance in didactic activities during the year seem to be the dominant arguments against the NQF. There is a certain conviction in some statements (albeit less numerous) that if it were not for these difficulties, the procedure itself would make some sense and have a positive aspect. These few opinions suggest that with better process organization, more effective guidance and perhaps more time available, creating syllabuses would not cause so many negative emotions.

It makes sense, generally, but the form of these descriptions is far too complicated, confusing and unclear for the average recipient – only a trained official is able to break through such description.

It is also an opportunity to sort out some things, but I do not think this is the best possible way for such verification.

It is good to reflect on didactic activities, but creating charts does not make this happen. It could be beneficial if it stopped at the stage of determining what knowledge and skills a student should possess after completing a given course.

Only one result from **Chart 1**. allows for a small dose of optimism: over 20% of the answers suggest that the NQF has been an opportunity to verify one's didactic activities and intensify cooperation between academic staff. Similarly – there is the 20% result in **Chart 2**., reflecting an opinion that the NQF was an interesting though time-consuming challenge.

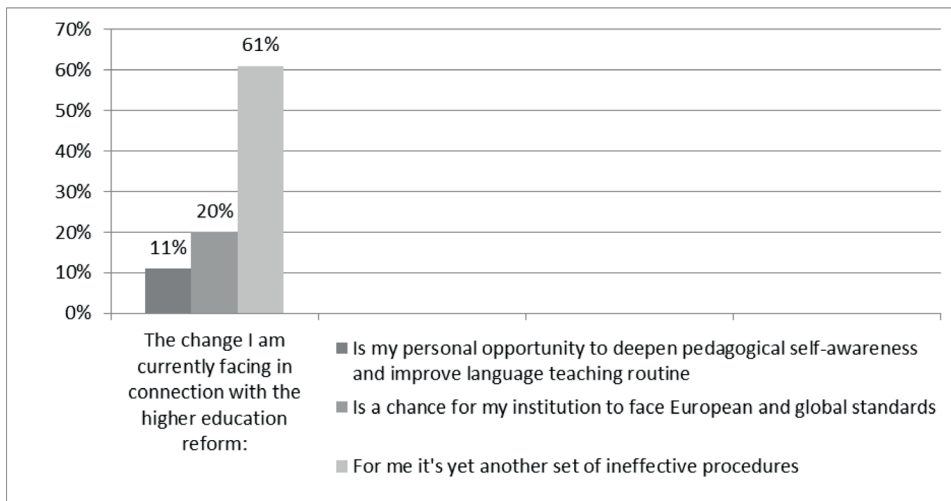


Chart 3.

The next question from the questionnaire indicates, with surprising consequence, a similar percentage of responses showing negative criticism. This time

the question concerned a change in the institutional perspective (whether it is perceived as a progression towards European standards) and in the strictly individual context (whether it is an opportunity to develop one's own competences).

As you can see, again the majority of respondents (over 60%) consider the change to be "yet another set of ineffective procedures". For 20%, however, this is an opportunity to follow European standards, and only 11% of respondents consider the reform to be an opportunity for professional development. The supplied comments confirm the modest score of the last answer, describing the change as follows:

It is the next level of disintegration of the Polish academic culture.

It will radically lower the level of students who will later become teachers.

It also deepens the frustration and desire to leave the Polish academic community.

They [the changes – author's note] will be very effective when it comes to destroying the critical thinking community at universities.

There is one more comment that seems critical: "We follow 'global patterns' blindly and mindlessly". The light in the tunnel, sought in the aforementioned 20% of responses about the perception of change as an opportunity, could shine in the comments such as: "The idea of introducing new models is the most inspiring, the problem is THE WAY IT IS IMPLEMENTED, with the bureaucracy obscuring the meaning of the whole operation; or: On the one hand, it is an opportunity, but with the minimum requirements for the student and lowering the threshold of requirements it becomes ineffective". Obviously the administrative side of the reform obscures its splendour at least for the time being. ("It could have been worse, there are some positive aspects, but basically the reform is defective").

In the group of questions about the general attitude to change caused by the reform, there was also one asking about a new system for submitting research grant applications to the National Science Centre. This is one of the few questions that received the highest percentage (41%) of responses that recognize the new system as an "understandable necessity, considering the way research is funded". It is hard to assess whether this is an optimistic or simply an adaptive attitude – especially in that the option that the system is a "procedural impediment without tangible benefits" – which constitutes a plain negative criticism – was chosen by 31% of respondents. The message is similar in comments emphasizing the financial aspect of this procedure ("I believe that research grants cannot replace the pay raises that are due for academic teachers"). The responses to this question were as follows:

Worth noting is also the remark about the competences necessary to apply for a grant, suggesting that it should really be a task given to specialists. The necessity to follow all the rules and requirements of the research grant application, which entails completing about a sixty-page form, is indeed a demanding and time-con-

suming task, which might appear intimidating to some. This comment is a good example of such an opinion:

I believe that this idea could work efficiently, if institutions decided to invest in employing a "grant advisor"; I find it completely absurd that everyone should individually study ministerial rules and break through the tangled bureaucratic web. I have a vision of dividing academic staff into two groups: 1. handling grant applications and 2. dealing with academic work.

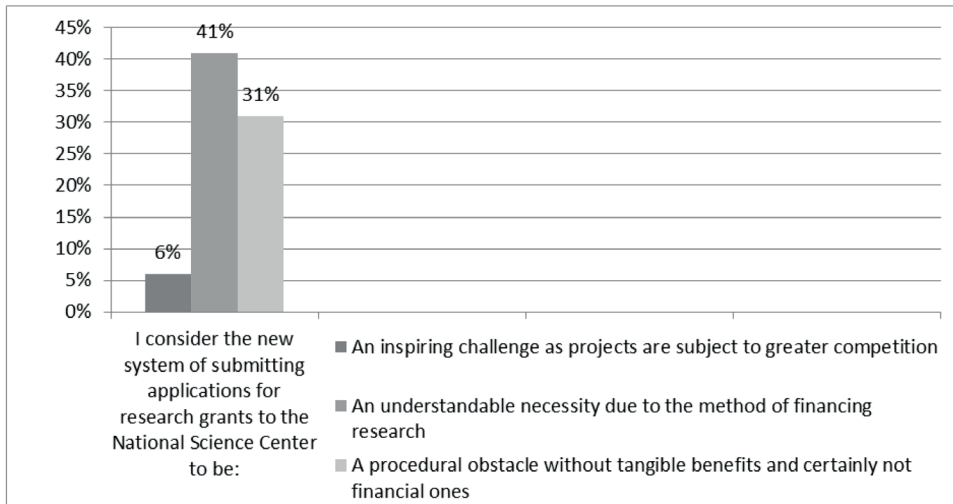


Chart 4.

Only one person posted a comment: "An inspiring challenge, but radically reducing the possibilities of financing the elementary needs of an individual".

### Attitude to change in the context of language education research

As the context of the article and the whole research is primarily connected with research in language education, some of the questions in the questionnaire concern issues more directly related to modern language didactics. Three of them will be quoted for the purposes of this text: the first asking about the relationship between the theory and practice of language education research, the second probing the perception of the staff of modern language faculties in the reform process, and the third tackling the key issue of lowering the expected competence level of a language studies student. Among the comments given here, what struck me most was more or less the direct confession of the respondents that it was not entirely clear to them what the terms "theoretical description of competences" or "theoretical compilations" meant when referring to issues of language educa-

tion research. ("I do not know what the 'theoretical description' is based on and where it came from. I would do some further reading, but the survey does not provide bibliographic data; I have no idea what the 'key competences' or 'substantive competences' are"). Perhaps the wording is too general, indeed. Therefore, I would like to explain here that it was simply about the subject literature on the development of research in language education, theoretical issues, the description of teacher's competences, updating the teaching methodology and the growing demand to satisfy the specific needs of particularly gifted students or those with specific learning disabilities.

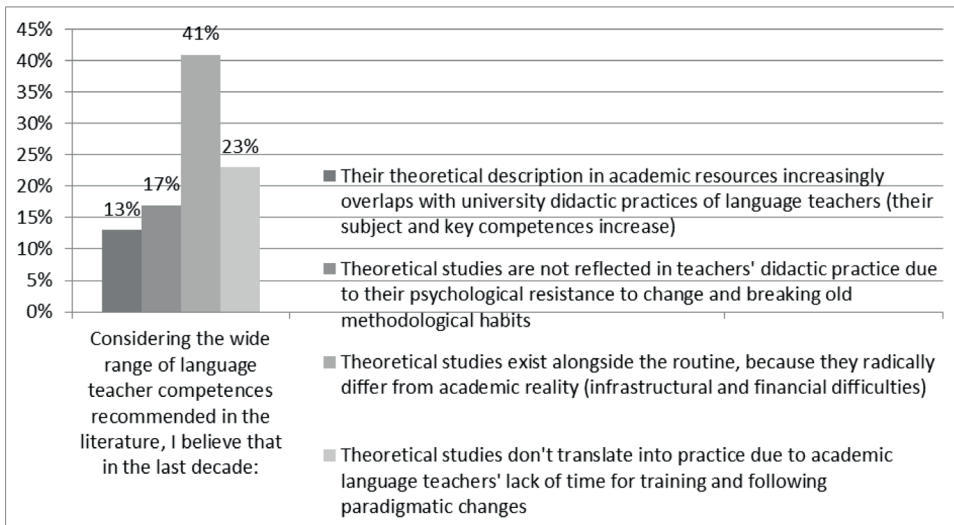


Chart 5.

I assumed that the subject literature points to desirable situations and solutions, ones which are worthy of application and imitation. Questions about the relationship between theory and practice were aimed at getting respondents' opinions on the reasons for possible disparities between the theory and practice or the lack thereof. As it turned out, the highest percentage of respondents (41%) believe that the theory differs from the practice due to the financial and infrastructural problems of the school and university reality. The second argument was the lack of time for the professional training. Only 13% agreed that developing theory entails good practices thanks to the growth of both key and substantive competences. Such a result seems to show the sharp self-criticism of teachers and a valuable form of self-reflection. It is reinforced by the comments provided:

Language teachers are less and less humanists, and more and more ordinary menial workers who cannot understand a longer press article, let alone an academic one.

I don't read the subject literature.

Especially this last sentence should arouse concern and reflection on the reasons for this state of affairs. With this question it is also worth paying attention to the response chosen by 20% of respondents indicating that the disparity between theory and practice is because of the psychological resistance to change shown by academic teachers in general. You can probably look at this result positively, referring to the principle of a glass that is almost empty, and not incompletely full. It could mean that respondents feel more entangled in external circumstances that are not dependent on them, rather than that they personally dislike or resist new solutions. This allows a light to shine again at the end of the tunnel, if we consider the light to be an openness to formal and administrative transformations aimed at establishing the reform regulations. Still, the reform's potential benefits are too distant and cannot overcome the intense bitterness that is evident in the following commentary:

As for a teacher at an academic level, the whole problem is that nothing motivates him to do a good job and nobody, absolutely nobody, can control him. For a senior lecturer it's enough to be in class, stay sober and present. People in academic positions have to do a lot to keep up, a lot in the field of science... In terms of didactics, no points are awarded. Besides, we all have to make money... on such salaries that we get, we all work three jobs... How can we work well? How should we care to learn, change, read in a field of interest which generates zero points?! It is very sad (because the way we educate our students will then project on the quality of the nation), but it is what it is.

The aim of the next question was to check whether the surveyed respondents perceived their position as staff of modern language faculties as different than that of academics representing other humanistic disciplines or generally other sciences. Here, "different" should be understood with reference to language competences theoretically facilitating access to the texts of other cultures. **Chart 6.** shows a strong belief (44% of answers) about the irrelevance of the substantive competences of foreign language teachers and researchers, as well as specialists in other philological subdisciplines (e.g. literary studies) for the process of implementing the NQF and coping with writing syllabuses. The following comments seem to confirm this conviction:

I have no influence on anything, so my language skills are good for nothing.  
Of course, substantive change DOESN'T HAVE TO correlate with foreign language skills.

I see no substance of the change.

No matter, because there is no substance. Contrary to the pseudo-reform, we will do our job, i.e. educate humanists who will be able to understand the surrounding reality of the human relationships, cultures and politics. Only such people can make the right civil and economic choices.

It should not matter for an academic mind (command of languages is obvious).

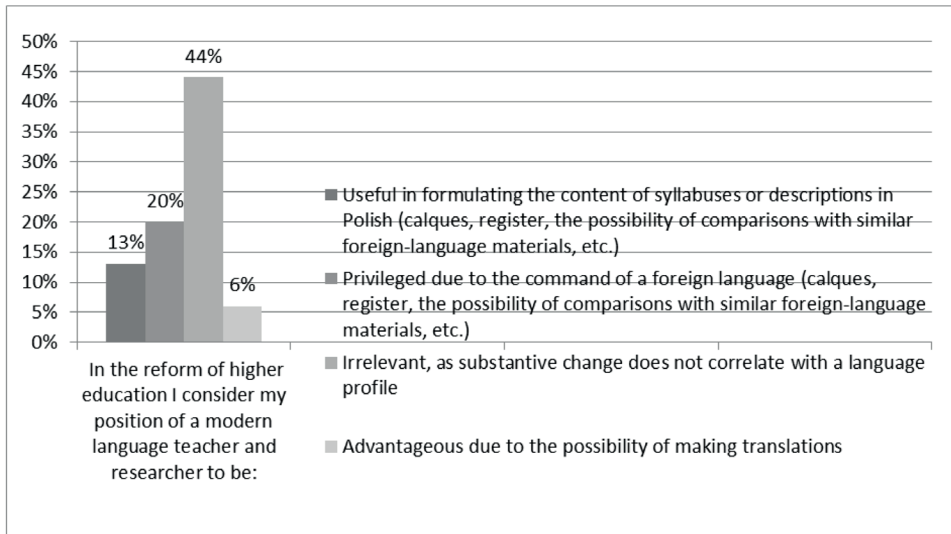


Chart 6.

Still, 20% of respondents consider their position to be privileged, and few (6%) see it as “advantageous due to the possibility of making translations”. One of the comments seems significant: “It is not so much command of the language that is important but rather knowledge of education systems in other European countries, where this system has been working for years”. This remark allows for some hope, as it indicates the direction of finding solutions for a difficult situation in the Polish higher education. It does not imply whether other countries have succeeded or failed, but it does suggest that understanding the mechanism and attempting to relate to the domestic issues would be useful. It seems a good example of a budding action criticism, and an opposition to opposition; it is a proposal to look critically at our own issues.

The question that raised perhaps the most emotions and extensive comments among the respondents was the one enquiring about the need to formally lower the language level expected from students at the beginning and at the end of their studies. Practical foreign language teaching has always been a key element of the syllabus of language studies and it vouched for their status and quality. Therefore, lowering the requirements in this respect is the most criticized result of massification in university education. This fact is considered wrong by 63% of respondents, while only 14% found it reasonable. In order to interpret this result, we should focus on those several per cent of respondents constituting a small yet present group of people who regard the descent from the level of current requirements as sensible. What could be the reasons for such an opinion? It may be, for example, transferring the emphasis from substantive to key competences, which is a European and global trend, or perhaps these people see the massification of education as a chance to improve the functioning of society in the broad sense?

Unfortunately, most comments reinforce the sharp criticism of the situation:

Terrible! Unreasonable and shameful. It is a compromise resulting from the ruined secondary education. Tragic and pathetic.

This is the downfall of English studies – going back to pre-war times and equalizing the language level of a graduate with the level of a talented upper secondary school student. English studies will accommodate candidates who are only little better than beginners.

A large part of respondents devoted time to supplying extensive comments describing how they perceive the reality and the causes of the current situation:

For years there has been an on-going deterioration in the level of language mastery and general philological knowledge among students. Language studies are slowly becoming a slightly more advanced language course, because nothing can be required from students any more. The National Qualifications Framework did not take into account the one competence that the university did develop: the student was able to think. Today the student has to be practically prepared for work.

As a language school instruction supervisor, I've been observing a constant decline in the language competences of teachers starting work in the profession, which in turn translates into lowering the level of language education of students.

These requirements apply to all students of humanities (e.g. history or philosophy) who should know a foreign language (usually English). In language studies, specific learning outcomes should indicate a higher exit level of language knowledge (otherwise we accept the fact that language education in language studies is comparable to language education in philosophy, where students are obliged to have foreign language classes).

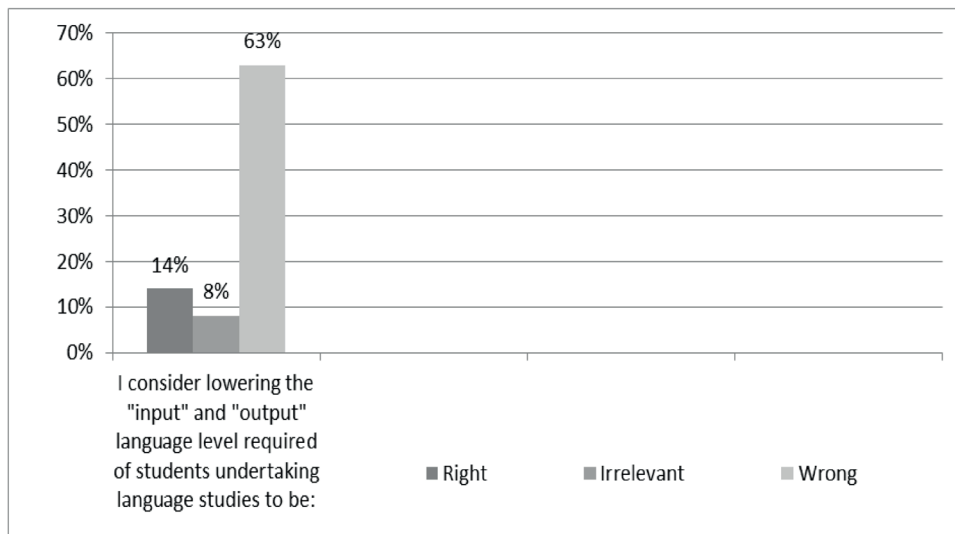


Chart 7.



One more comment is worth noting: the one in which a respondent addresses the problem of the general decline in the intellectual condition of young people. The remark emphasizes the difficulty in transforming those young people into foreign language teachers in just three years:

This is a big issue: first thing – the general level of students in the last two years has dropped dramatically, those young people can't even speak their native language, they don't read books (at the start of language studies they're surprised they'll have to read books), they don't know how to learn!!! Secondly, in the current situation, when we only have three years to teach them the language and make them teachers, while the number of hours allocated for classes has been reduced, our work and all kinds of requirements become an absolute abstraction. I keep wondering when those who formulate these fantastic requirements will come down and take an interest in the actual condition of education in Poland.

However, this question also caused a lot of responses of a different kind, namely: resignation and acceptance of the inevitability of the described circumstances. With all its controversy, many respondents admit that it is “wrong, but unfortunately necessary, or wrong for substantive reasons, but understandable for economic reasons, otherwise we wouldn't have students”. This common-sense approach is revealed in the commentary:

Lowering the level is simply necessary because in recent years, with an average of 100 admitted persons, 15 were at level C1, and then the level dropped to A0. Faced with the choice of either not admitting 90% of candidates and the dismissal of 90% of employees or lowering the level, the conclusion is obvious.

Pragmatism and a utilitarian approach are revealed in remarks of the following type:

We are faced with a population decline and we have no choice, if we bet on quality from the start, we will not get enough quantity... We all want to have a job... Therefore, let us admit all and let us trust in progress... Of course without overdoing it, but let's trust in progress rather than believe that we will educate Oxford graduates.

## Self-identity in the face of change

In the general question summarizing the survey, which concerned the perception of the respondents' attitude towards change, almost half of the respondents declared that although they were sceptical to the changes, they nevertheless “follow them carefully and conscientiously”. Furthermore, also 40% of the respondents stated that they “like professional challenges and easily adopt to new requirements”, and only 1% considered themselves to be people who do not like change in general. These results are presented in **Chart 8**.

These responses seem to contradict the opinions expressed in previous questions. The earlier declarations fundamentally negated the systemic change that is

currently changing place. However, it is arguably this very change and the way it is implemented (probably this aspect above all) that provoke resistance and criticism, and not the change itself understood as a process that involves development and new challenges. Looking back at the aspects of change formulated by Fullan and quoted in the introduction to this article, we should remember that change as the great unknown will always generate resistance. On the other hand, “everyone is a change agent”, so one’s own contribution to the process can bring satisfaction and a sense of agency. Perhaps this was on one respondent’s mind when they commented on their answer as follows:

Provided I see SENSE in the proposed changes. I am constantly astonished at the reform proceedings so far – do people who work on the reform have at least a shadow of the notion about the job of an academic in a modern language faculty, its conditions, and its specificity? I dare doubt. Therefore, if I see an interesting challenge, I undertake it, as for me constant development and self-education is an indispensable condition to be a scientist. But the attitude of the ministry to humanists and the humanities in general... I have no words.

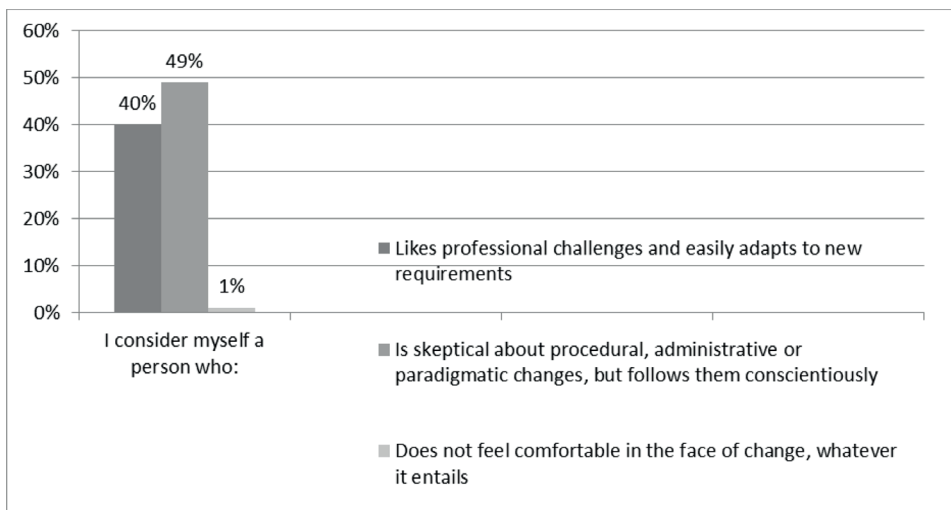


Chart 8.

## Summary and conclusions

The elements of the study presented above illustrate opinions of the academics who represent university faculties of modern languages in Poland about the elements of the higher education reform implemented in 2011. Despite the assumed impartiality of the process of research, I tried to find a shadow of doubt in the dominant negative criticism among the respondents’ comments, suggesting that perhaps the reform does not necessarily mean only the degradation of the

Polish academic tradition and that it can be regarded as renovating the scaffolding around a new building. In other words, I tried to identify two types of criticism, one of which would be based not only on dissatisfaction but on different reasons than just being horrified by the decline in quality of education, caused most often by the difficult economic situation of universities and Polish higher education; perhaps also on accepting that this new quality should be treated as different, not worse. This quality is described by other parameters, criteria of applicability, supported by already existing scientific studies (*English Lingua Franca Core*<sup>14</sup>, methodology of teaching English as an international language – *International English*<sup>15</sup> etc.). Also, the attitude and competence of a language education researcher as an Intercultural Speaker have changed since the prior ideal of aspiring to be a nearly native speaker<sup>16</sup>.

The conclusions that arise in relation to the results of the survey do not allow us to believe that the teachers and researchers of language faculties in Poland have accepted the new regulations. With the high theoretical awareness developed in academic publications, there is still a problem with translating the theory into practice. The scope of knowledge about the modern school and methods of teaching foreign languages in connection with culture is being diligently expanded, but the conviction still remains that transferring this knowledge to young adepts of the teaching art, as well as teaching them the language up to the level of British Received Pronunciation, are the core of language teaching activity. According to the research, the majority of language faculties staff in Poland consider, in the name of the Kantian tradition, that by adopting this knowledge and skills, the young generations are supposed to build an intellectual (and linguistic) quality as high as years before. Certainly, this attitude includes the old critical tinge, a voice of a uni-

<sup>14</sup> For example, J. Jenkins, *The Phonology of English as an International Language*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000; J. Jenkins, *A Sociolinguistically Based, Empirically Researched Pronunciation Syllabus for English as an International Language*, *Applied Linguistics* 2002, 23, pp. 83–103.

<sup>15</sup> For example, B. B. Kachru, *Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: the English Language in the Outer Circle*, CUP, Cambridge 1985; B. Seidlhofer, *A Concept of International English and Related Issues: From 'Real English' to 'Realistic English'?*, Language Policy Division, Council of Europe, Strasbourg 2003; A. Mauranen, E. Ranta (eds.), *English as a Lingua Franca: Studies and Findings*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2005.

<sup>16</sup> For example: E. Bandura, *Nauczyciel jako mediator kulturowy [A Teacher as a Cultural Mediator]*, Tertium Publishing House Cracow 2007; L. Bredella, *For a Flexible Model of Intercultural Understanding*, [in:] G. Alred, M. Byram, M. Fleming, *Intercultural Experience and Education*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 2003, pp. 31–49; M. Byram, *Intercultural Communicative Competence: the Challenge for Language Teacher Training*, [in:] *British Studies: Intercultural Perspectives*, A. Mountford, N. Wadham-Smith (eds.), Longman 2000; M. Byram, K. Risager, *Language Teachers, Politics and Cultures*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 1999; B. Karpińska-Musiał, *Intercultural Speaker jako odpowiedź na współczesne wyzwania globalnego społeczeństwa wiedzy. Analiza procesu nabywania kompetencji międzykulturowej przez ucznia i nauczyciela języków obcych [The Intercultural Speaker as a Response to the Contemporary Challenges of the Global Society of Knowledge. Analysis of the Process of Acquiring Intercultural Competence by a Student and Teacher of a Foreign Language]*, [in:] *Komunikacja językowa w społeczeństwie informacyjnym [Language Communication in the Information Society]*, J. Krieger-Knieja, U. Paprocka-Piotrowska (eds.), Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, Lublin 2005, pp. 261–272.

versity, which, being aware of the necessity of transformation, is still fighting to maintain the old *status quo*. At the same time, it is also a sentimental tinge. It is true that the traditional education at language faculties, i.e. before the reform of education in 1989, which most of the respondents remember, was first and foremost humanistic, and teaching to speak a foreign language was only a subsidiary activity. This is why one should perhaps agree with Klaus Bachmann, who expresses criticism of neoliberal tendencies, stating that “universities are not able to predict how the labour market will develop in 4–5 years, and even if they could, they would not be able to teach students specific professions, because university staff have neither the knowledge nor the skills to provide training in a particular profession”<sup>17</sup>. Academics do not consider themselves masters who train an apprentice teacher or translator (although this is exactly the goal of under-graduate studies). A large part of them claim that “a university graduate must demonstrate a required minimum of encyclopaedic knowledge in their field of interest”<sup>18</sup>. Bachmann, however, criticizes the traditional elitist form of university education, claiming that the encyclopaedic content should give way to demonstrating how to update your knowledge and how to find practical applications for the slogans of creativity or interculturalism in teaching practice, or how to teach culture in connection with language using a demonstrative method. This is the way academics should de facto practice academic studies: moving from positivist to transformational attitudes.

Surrendering to neoliberal tendencies in university education is all too evident in the area of language education and it is hardly surprising that foreign language teachers and researchers are at a crossroads. What is expected of them in the first place is practical occupational training, while they would like to offer something more: humanistic, cultural and linguistic awareness. Such idealistic aspirations are justified when we take into consideration the fact that the marketization of education, referring to Woods, Courpasson and Clegg<sup>19</sup>, promotes certain goals, assumptions and practices, marginalizing others at the same time. It promotes treating young people as potential units who are subject to economic activities, in which such skills as flexibility and team-work must be included alongside qualities that will maintain social cohesion (e.g. a sense of civic responsibility). And although such features are not detrimental in themselves, the educational approach which reinforces them, and whose vision emerges from the reform procedures so far, sees education as shaping a human according to a precisely defined pattern and evaluates a student in terms of instrumental congruence to a given socio-economic system. As the above-mentioned authors say, “the dominant goal, the planned effect

<sup>17</sup> K. Bachmann, *Co z tego, że wiedzą, jeśli nie potrafią* [What Good Does It Bring If They Know But They Don't Know How To], “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 12–13 May 2012, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> K. Modzelewski, *Uniwersytet musi czuć problemy swojego czasu* [University Must Sense the Issues of its Times], [in:] *Uniwersytet zaangażowany...* [Committed University...], p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> D. Courpasson, S. Clegg, *Dissolving the Iron Cages? Tocqueville, Michels, Bureaucracy and the Perpetuation of Elite Power*, “Organization” 2006,13/3, pp. 319–343; *Alternative Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Philosophies, Approaches, Visions*, P. Woods, G. Woods Palgrave Macmillan

that can be institutionalized in the system, is to shape people in such a way that they become an entrepreneurial, instrumentally oriented personality, an object of rationality, believing that anything goes as long as it leads to the goal. Such a personality is highly valued by modern markets and new forms of bureaucracy"<sup>20</sup>. Where do we have the space for development beyond the instrumental functional congruence? Defenders of an elite higher education have clear grounds for discontent and resentment.

It is not my intention to defend the vision of a student and teacher adapted to the new system, nor to advocate for the previous system of university language studies. The problem for each of us is to find a way to deal with this inevitable situation and its inherent contradiction, and to find our way around it. According to McCormack<sup>21</sup>, it requires a lot of internal strength and skills of reflexivity. Certainly, reflexivity on one's own practices is the basic tool for adopting a critical attitude: either towards innovation, following the path of non-constructive negative criticism, or towards traditional ways, accepting the challenge of constructive criticism. Critical pedagogy, whose contemporary, imposed role (which is also criticized for not going beyond mere fault-finding), among other things, reveals problematic situations and discloses the social reality created in discourse, could be a useful tool for confused academics. By acquiring critical awareness, they could regard the evolving educational reality from a wider perspective, and then use their own voice (and this survey is an example of this voice) to move to the action stage. This action may be, as Gdula puts it, the other variety of criticism, which is defined as "openness to politics and the necessity to seek allies for creating a world that better accommodates a larger number of agents"<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, the traditional, emancipatory feature of critical theory, which in this case entails resistance to utilitarian administrative procedures in order to defend elite structures and quality, may prove ineffective. Emancipation itself or even awareness of the problem, which the presented research attempted to raise, will not engender comfort and good practice. We should rather be less emancipatory (in the sense of mere rebellious unmasking), and more systematic and rational, and aim at building a new quality. This rationality, however, must be free of dogmatism and should depend on a translation of the old rationality into the rationality that meets the expectations of today. Perhaps, following Zalewska's train of thought<sup>23</sup>, it is the duty of foreign language teachers to attain the post-conventional level of awareness of their professional identity, one that allows for distance, reflexivity and autonomy "to-

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<sup>20</sup> P.A. Woods, G.J. Woods, *Introduction. Alternative Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Philosophies, Approaches, Visions*, Palgrave Macmillan 2009, pp. 2–3.

<sup>21</sup> A. McCormack, *Classroom management: problems, strategies and influences in physical education*, "European Physical Education Review" 1997, 3(2), pp. 102–113; [in:] T.G. Ryan, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> M. Gdula, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>23</sup> E. Zalewska, *Tożsamość zawodowa nauczyciela w „edukacji otwartej” i „edukacji zamkniętej”* [Teacher's professional identity in "open" and "closed" education], [in:] *Inspiracje, otwarcia, krytyki w edukacji* [Inspirations, openings, criticism in education], E. Rodziewicz (ed.), University of Gdansk Press, Gdansk, 1995

wards”, not “from”. Having this special key to multiculturalism, which is a foreign language, they have a chance to follow the kind of criticism that Gdula describes as “taking responsibility for every particular solution as if it were their choice – an opportunity among others”<sup>24</sup>. Thanks to this, they may be able to co-create “a university model that can act as a channel of articulation in a case of opening to politics, seeking allies and creating new forms of social life”<sup>25</sup>. In such a vision of university (that may be a modified version of Humboldt’s idea), the National Qualifications Framework or other code systems will not scare anyone, because they will simply be a mere administrative formality, one of the channels for an “articulation of interests” that does not threaten the essence. And above all, it does not threaten the personalities of the change participants. For this to happen, however, we must remember about the purely human, psychological aspect of change and its complex manifestations, which comprise many factors. Their analysis goes beyond the size and the thematic framework of this article, so in the ending let me just quote after Schwahn and Spady a few “rules” of the social aspect of change. And my conclusions and reflections based on the presented research may serve as a starting point to develop further analyses on the subject of the attitude to institutional change in modern language university studies.

People will not change unless they have a good common reason to change.

People will not change until they have their own share in the change.

People will not change until their leaders show that they treat the change seriously.

People will not be willing to change until they get a particular vision, what this change will give them in the personal dimension.

People will not change or consolidate the change effects unless they receive organizational support in this area<sup>26</sup>.

### Summary

#### *Two Kinds of Critical Approach Towards Change Among the Academic Staff of Modern Language Faculties at Polish Universities*

The text addresses the issue of how the academics at modern language faculties at Polish universities perceive selected aspects of the change implemented by the Higher Education Reform since 2011. The main objective is to present the results of empirical re-

<sup>24</sup> M. Gdula, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>26</sup> Based on C. Schwahn, W. Spady, *Why Change Doesn't Happen and How to Make Sure it Does*, “Educational Leadership. ASCD”, April 1998, vol. 55, no. 7, pp. 45–47; P.M. Keys, *Empowering Teachers in School and University Partnership*, “Learning Communities. International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts”, March 2008, no. 1, pp. 53–67.

search (an online questionnaire) based on opinions concerning work over adapting the programs and syllabuses of foreign language studies to the requirements of the NQF (National Qualification Framework). A secondary research objective was to observe whether the necessity to perform additional and demanding tasks to meet these requirements had induced teachers' reflection as to their own competences and the quality of their social, as well as professional work conditions. The two kinds of critical approach included in the title refer to the author's attempt to juxtapose a critical attitude of an emancipatory character, which is demonstrated predominantly in the research results, with the signs of a more transformative and constructive criticality: the one that would suggest building new quality on the new grounds. Foreign language teachers and researchers seem to be in the possession of tools that are especially helpful in meeting this challenge. Nevertheless, it is not yet clear how and to what extent they can be useful. The paper speaks with the voice of those academics who fight to maintain the high quality of philological education in the face of its "massification" and marketization processes.

*English translation: Anna Moroz-Darska*

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