

УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У БАЊОЈ ЛУЦИ
ФИЛОЛОШКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ

ФИЛОЛОГ

ЧАСОПИС ЗА ЈЕЗИК, КЊИЖЕВНОСТ И КУЛТУРУ

IV 2013 8

PHILOLOGIST

JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE, LITERARY AND CULTURAL STUDIES



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HOW ENGLISH AS A RHIZOME CHALLENGES THE NORMS OF STANDARD WRITTEN ENGLISH?

Abstract: *In this paper, it will be shown how Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of a rhizome can be applied to depict a new status of English. Due to the presence of Englishes, the reality is pluralistic. The rhizomes likewise resist structures of domination, such as the notion of "the mother tongue" in linguistics—it does admit to ongoing cycles of what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as "deterritorializing" and "reterritorializing" moments (1987). Whether we call language varieties New Englishes or just Englishes, the reality is heterogeneous. Nowadays, English students speak many variations of English, every one of them subject to change as they mix with other varieties of English and other languages. There is a diversity of contexts in which English co-exists with other languages around the world. Moreover, globalization is deterritorialized because cultural and political dynamics involving English are varied, and yet interconnected in the multiple locations where English is spoken. Therefore, the paper will demonstrate that Englishes quantify the English classroom because each new instance of language brings the need to develop new ways of using the language.*

Keywords: *Englishes, globalization, rhizomes, variations, culture, deterritorialization, territorialization*

Introduction to the question of rhizomes

Because English diversifies into different varieties, its structure can be considered rhizomatic. English as a rhizome is a heterogeneous system because the language and cultural background of its speakers is highly varied. Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 7) explain that there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages. Teachers work with language and cultural multiplicities. Therefore, we can say that the current structure of the English classroom is rhizomatic.

However, a rhizomatic structure of the English classroom problematizes the ways in which English teachers view the norms of Standard Written language. If

teachers view and teach the norms as fixed, we can align their practices with the movement of territorialization of both the students and the classroom. Conversely, if the teachers make an effort to respond appropriately to the changing learning context, we can align their practices with the movement of deterritorialization. In spite of the fact that official grading tends to reflect territorialization, the movement of deterritorialization will prevail as the most desirable model eventually. Deterritorialization will prove to be the most appropriate teaching model because it aligns with the current globalized rhizomatic context. This paper will demonstrate that English teachers will foster better English language education for students through the development of a new definition of Standard Written English. The new definition will

account for the increasing presence of dynamic rhizomes.

The concept of multiplicities in the English classroom

Namely, a growing number of English teachers and scholars of writing recognize that traditional ways of teaching 'educated English' and responding to it are inadequate for the current language and learning context. Smith concludes that what matters most in the new context is a familiarity with as many Englishes as possible: "Being a native speaker does not seem to be as important for intelligibility, comprehensibility and interpretability as being fluent in English and familiar with several different national varieties" (2006: 8). Rather, what matters most is being open to other varieties of the language because language users constantly modify the language. Also, the integration of English varieties in the classroom means the integration of heterogeneous cultures as well.

Strict adherence to fixed norms of Standard Written English means that the reality is monolingual, while quite the opposite is true. Horner defines what the norm is under new, deterritorializing circumstances. In his definition, he concurrently tells us that we need to view the norms as being polyvalent in a broad socio-political context: "The norm assumed the context of writing, and writing itself is imaged to be monolingual, a monolingual native-English speaking writer who is writing only in English to an audience of English-only readers" (2000: 569). However, the definition of the Standard Written language should be redefined, responding to the changing context. Lu says that what constitutes acceptable language in terms of its standards is neither fixed nor determined but negotiated instead (2006: 150). We need to reconcile a whole spectrum of rhizomes in the classroom, if we want to provide better education for our students. However, the reconciliation of rhizomes

can be a challenging task because the structure of rhizomes is multiple and highly complex.

Rhizomes contain lines of territorialization and deterritorialization. Rhizomes both territorialize and deterritorialize their various speakers. Schneider argues that on the one hand English is the world's leading language, while on the other hand it has been damned as a "killer language" (2003: 233). Due to its global spread, English tends to homogenize other socio-cultural identities it comes into contact with. English homogenizing tendencies territorialize the composition of the classroom and its speakers. But, the teacher and students should actually work to preserve unique identities. For example, if we strictly insist on students' compliance with the fixed norms, students may think that their socio-cultural identities need to be modeled according to one homogeneous model. Students may even think that they fit better if their identities do not differ from their peers. On the other hand, students need to perform the basic function of every language—to communicate. We see that communication deterritorializes the speakers. English as a rhizome performs a two-fold function: It connects and disconnects.

Moreover, strict insistence on the norms implies students' immersion into another world of writing conventions. Schneider concludes his study on Englishes that both the movements of territorialization and deterritorialization of English look at English in an idealized, homogeneous, standardized form (2003: 233). When teachers ask their students to comply with the standard norms of English, they ask them to immerse themselves into the Western world which has its own unified writing conventions. Students need to start making logically coherent arguments, which may be foreign to some of them due to different cultural influences. By the same token, Purves says that in demanding that students write Standard Written Eng-

lish, and use a deductive, linear argument, we are asking them to situate themselves within a particular sociopolitical context (1998: 10). Actually we ask them to resituate themselves in order to produce a crystal clear, argument-driven piece of work. Furthermore, we require our students to share and reproduce in their writing a western world view. Equally important is the fact that students will be graded to what degree they comply with the Standard Written norms of the target community. However, we will see that teachers cannot grade students' work according to his/her expectations only.

International variations are equally important as the national variations. And yet, in his discussion of Englishes, Schneider argues that there have been tendencies to regard and portray native English countries as the "centers" thus entitled to establish the norms of correctness, and conversely, "New Englishes" as peripheral, deviating from these norms (2003: 233). By insisting on fixed norms, teachers implicitly ask the students to accept the predominance of English with its Standard Written norms. In a rhizomatic structure, however, there cannot be a unified language model. On the contrary, teachers will want to use the language resources available in the classroom to promote peace and justice in the world. If teachers ignore the importance of language varieties, some students could feel discrimination or other negative feelings in classes.

The users of Englishes are not just passively absorbing English. They are reshaping the language. Lu presents the varieties of the language underlining what they *do* in real life, and what function they have. She says that even though these language varieties are regarded as peripheral, they are still alive and vibrant because they depict the lives of people in situations designed to submerge them (2006: 21). Rhizomes are considered vibrant because their users are vibrant. Language users tend to

connect with other language users. A rhizomatic structure is so dynamic that multiplicities connect and reconnect with other multiplicities forming a unity of multiplicities. Englishes adapt to meet the needs of their students. Because of the fact that there are varieties in the classroom, students intermingle, reacting and opposing to one another. Groups of them use Englishes and in that way they deterritorialize the classroom. Deterritorialization is the maximum dimension because Englishes do not belong to one specific location only.

Non-native English teachers deterritorialize the classroom in a specific way. Their non-English language and cultural background in the classroom is the result of deterritorialized globalization. In a rhizomatic classroom, the binaries between the native and the non-native tend to evaporate. Kachru explains that these innovations are to be regarded not as violations of the so-called prestigious norms of native varieties, but as a process by which English is acquiring various international identities and multiple ownerships (1996: 241). A non-native English teacher himself speaks some variety of English. The presence of such a teacher is important because both the native and non-native students learn to be more receptive toward Englishes. Students learn that there are many international varieties of English. Moreover, students can become more curious about the non-English culture of their teacher. The teacher can openly integrate his culture in the classroom discussion, which can help students erase some prejudice about the cultures.

The new form of multilingualism is rhizomatic. Traditionally defined, multilingualism is reduced only to the number of languages one knows. The number one knows is usually to the exclusion of other languages and language variations, which are parts of students' identities. However, teachers want to recognize the full linguistic repertoire of our students. English as a

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rhizome has multiplicities that do not divide. For example, an English classroom is considered multilingual for two reasons: The first reason is due to the fact that non-English students know other languages besides English. The second reason is the fact that non-English students bring different variations of English to communicate with their diverse peers. In the complex communication process, there is a linguistic exchange between the varieties.

Furthermore, we also want to recognize the students considered monolingual in the sense they speak only English. They are nonetheless multilingual in the varieties of English they use. There are only multiplicities of multiplicities forming a single *assemblage* (Batholomae 1987: 34). Of course, we do not want to obstruct these multiple multiplicities in the current classroom. Teachers' goal can be to recognize, and support a continuous growth of rhizomes' multiple structures. By the same token, Horner says that in such a complex multilingual landscape, attempting to teach students to reproduce a single standardized version of English in their writing is both futile and inappropriate (2011: 571). Rather, teacher's practices will show that students can produce meaning out of wide range of reading done in classes. Teachers can even regard monolingual texts as linguistically heterogeneous because texts differ in genre and register. Students will respond to those tasks actively incorporating their multilingual backgrounds. As we see, teachers can even base practices on the growing rhizomes.

The classroom has been destabilized because rhizomes act to evaporate language differences. Due to the fact that Englishes do not belong to one specific territory, reterritorialization tends to "stand for" the lost territory (Horner 2011: 508). Teachers' new practices open students' horizons. But, the movement of reterritorialization pushes deterritorialization even further. In spite of the danger that teach-

ers' grading can imply a unified language model, there is no return to the old system. Reterritorialization implies grading under new conditions. Bartholomae clearly says that native students may produce the work that is off the track (1987: 68). Teachers need to evaluate students' work based on the content. Teachers want to evaluate to what degree students use rhizomes' multiplicities.

Teachers want to avoid evaluating students exclusively on formal linguistic level, as is often the case. Horner underlines that we need to refocus lightly on what we think about the students' errors: "As long as students are judged not for what they write or think, but how they write (with correct spelling), no "political" controversy need ensue" (2000: 77). In a rhizomatic setting, teachers can channel students to be responsive to language differences of the other students in the classroom. Those practices can even develop students' social positions and identity perspectives. Students need to stay firm about who they are. Also, teachers want to be sure whether students' papers are open to differences. We want to see what students *do* and *how* they work across differences.

Teachers need to redefine what standards they employ to assess good writing. If teachers strictly ask students to comply with the ideal norm, some students can be silent because some of them are not able to apply the norms. Lu stresses that non-native English students are forced to silence themselves instead of speaking aloud: "Speakers lacking the legitimate competence are *de facto* excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence" (2006: 438). Teachers surely do not want their students to be silent because of their English variation, or because they fail to meet teachers' fixed norms. Instead, teachers do want the students to be part of the community, to communicate—to deterritorialize.

Conclusion

This discussion on the shifting standards of the norms of the language does not deny that there is an officially recognized notion of Standard Written English. Of course, writers are expected to do their best to produce a high-quality piece of writing. Horner says that the definition of the fluid and negotiable standards of the language does not deny the ongoing, dominant political reality that posits and demands “standards” (2011: 301). The official textbooks used in classes promote the ideal model to be imitated. My discussion attempts to show what a rhizomatic classroom *does*. Horner again underlines that standards are variable, negotiable, and historical (2011: 301). Teachers need to understand that standards change because teachers and their working environment change.

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KAKO ENGLISKI JEZIK KAO MULTIPLICITET UTIČE NA MENJANJE NORMI STANDARDNOG PISANOG ENGLISKOG JEZIKA?

Rezime

U ovom radu prikazano je kako se Deluzova i Gatarijeva metafora o multiplicitetu može primeniti da bi se opisao trenutni status engleskog jezika. Zbog prisustva različitih varijeteta engleskog jezika, realnost je pluralistična. Na sličan način, multipliciteti se odupiru strukturama dominacije, kao što je ideja o „izvornom govorniku“ u lingvistici – govori se o „deteritorijalizaciji“ i „reteritorijalizaciji“ (1987). Bilo da jezičke varijante nazivamo novim engleskim varijantama ili samo jezičkim varijantama, realnost je heterogena. Trenutno, studenti engleskog jezika koriste različite varijante jezika, pri čemu je svaka od njih podložna promenama u procesu mešanja sa ostalim varijantama engleskog jezika i ostalim jezicima. Postoje različiti konteksti u kojima engleski jezik koegzistira s drugim jezicima širom sveta. Štaviše, globalizacija je deteritorijalizovana zbog toga što su kulturne i političke dinamike u okviru engleskog jezika različite, a ipak međusobno povezane na više različitih lokacija. Stoga će ovaj rad pokazati da se korišćenjem različitih jezičkih varijeteta engleskog jezika uvećava učionica, jer svaka nova upotreba jezika donosi novu potrebu za razvijanjem različitih upotreba jezika.

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