

**UKRAINE AND THE BOLOGNA PROCESS:
CONVERGENCE, PLURALISM, OR BOTH?**

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ABSTRACT

In 2005, Ukraine became a member country in the Bologna Process, a series of multi-national educational reforms intended to create a barrier-free European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The EHEA is to be characterized by “compatibility and comparability” (Papatsiba, 2006) among higher education systems while preserving educational and linguistic diversity. On the one hand, Bologna membership may strengthen Ukraine’s standing in Europe, promote linguistic diversity, and facilitate goals of European integration. On the other hand, this agreement raises concerns about the consequences for the Ukrainian educational system as it converges with the Bologna model, as well as the impact of Bologna on Ukrainian language policies. In this paper, the author examines multiple documents produced by the European Commission, Ukraine-based educational and policy organizations, the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian parliament), Ukrainian universities, and academics from relevant disciplines. Discourse in these documents is interpreted through the lens of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2003, 2006), an approach which aims to describe how oral and written discourse challenges or reproduces patterns of social dominance. The author concludes that in Ukraine, the convergence model is dominant over the diversity model in educational structure. In language policy, English is rising but is not necessarily impinging on national languages or national identity.

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A report from the Ukrainian Ministry of Education to the Bologna Process states, “Ukraine views its [educational] development within the context of integration into Europe” (Stepko, 2004). On the one hand, cooperation with the EU through the Bologna Process may strengthen Ukraine’s standing in Europe and facilitate goals of European integration. On the other hand, this agreement raises concerns about the future of Ukrainian education. From the perspective of political theory, transnational activities like the Bologna Process may eventually drive a need for greater supranational (i.e. EU) control (Beerrens, 2005). Additionally, there is a fear that the Bologna Process is pushing higher education institutions Europe-wide to use English as a lingua franca. Phillipson (2006) observes that “what emerges unambiguously is that in the Bologna Process, ‘internationalisation’ means ‘English medium higher education’” (p. 16). Tosi (2006) adds, “The unofficial but increasingly hegemonic role of English as a lingua franca is, despite the EU [European Union] official policy of multilingualism, a serious threat to national languages and multilingualism in Europe” (p. 9). These fears should be particularly acute in regard to Ukraine (and other post-communist countries) because the government and higher educational leaders have only had 18 years since independence to encourage the use of the state language in domains where Russian was historically the language of power.

The objective of this paper is to examine the degree to which the Bologna Process in Ukraine reflects a case of *hegemony*. Fairclough (2003) and Brand (2005) define hegemony as one person or group laying claim to a singular conception of the world and of knowledge—a conception that must become the sole basis of social and political action. Multiple documents produced by the European Commission (EC), Ukraine-based educational and policy organizations, the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian parliament), Ukrainian universities, and academics from relevant disciplines were collected. Discourses are interpreted through the

lens of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2003, 2006), an approach which aims to describe how oral and written discourse challenges or reproduces patterns of social dominance. Findings are discussed in terms of political hegemony, linguistic hegemony, and reproduction of social dominance in Ukraine and the EU.

POLITICAL PROCESSES AND GOALS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Being a member of the Bologna Process is officially a voluntary action (Beerrens, 2005; Papatsiba, 2006). However, rhetoric about joining the Bologna Process points more towards urging countries to join rather than merely inviting them. The Council of Europe (CoE) made a recommendation in 2002 that “calls on [EU] member states from South-east Europe to take practical steps to join the Bologna Process” (Council of Europe, 2002). While the words “call on” and “recommendation” are not legally binding or even politically coercive, the rationale for this recommendation is that higher education in the region is “crucial for social, economic, and cultural development, especially in the current circumstances of the need to consolidate peace and stability”. The terms “crucial” and “consolidate” indicate a stronger need to unify the region. In the Ukrainian context, the main conclusion of a joint Netherlands-Ukraine report is, “European integration must become the basis of reforming Ukrainian education” (Royal Netherlands Embassy in Ukraine & International Centre for Policy Studies, n.d., p. 3). The word “must” indicates that Ukraine should have no choice but to conform to the prevailing standards of European educational policy. Both documents show that Ukraine has likely not entered the Bologna Process entirely of its own volition, and that EU-nation political entities exert a stronger force than mere “international peer pressure” (www.coe.int).

Educational Reforms in the Bologna Process: Convergence versus Diversity

The crux of the Bologna Process is a series of reforms designed to making it easier for students to study abroad. As Nikitin (2008) observes, these reforms are “bureaucratic, not

substantive”. Member countries are expected to implement a 3-2-3-cycle of education: a three-year Bachelor’s, a 2-year Master’s, and a 3-year Doctorate (Stepko, 2004). Syllabi formats are to conform to Bologna guidelines (TP, personal communication). Diplomas or diploma supplements should be standardized and available in a “widely used European language” (Stepko, 2004). A European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) establishes a common grading scale, credits for degree completion, and learning outcome guidelines for all member universities who use the system. Finally, there should be quality assurance measures in place characterized primarily by self-reviews but also external reviews of programs and staff.

These moves towards education system *convergence* (Papatsiba, 2006), *harmonization* (c.f. ec.europa.edu) or *cooperation* (Prague Communiqué, 2001) should be balanced with maintenance of diversity. The Prague Communiqué (2001) states that higher education stakeholders must continue to be able to “benefit from the richness of the European Higher Education Area including its democratic values, diversity of cultures and languages and the diversity of the higher education systems.” This same document recognizes the “diversity of qualifications” at universities and the “diversity of individual, academic, and labour market needs”. These notions are echoed in the CoE Web site “Bologna Process for Pedestrians”:

One of the very valued features of Europe is its balance between diversity and unity... Therefore, even if degree systems may become more similar, the specific nature of every higher education system should be preserved. If not, what would be the point to go somewhere else to study?

These statements belie the fact that sometimes unity and diversity collide. In Germany, students are protesting the new cycles because they reduce students’ time in school and make studies a more intense experience (“German students protest university reforms”, 2009).

Papatsiba (2006) argues that Bologna reforms are uneven and depend on national objectives in member countries; she concludes with a statement which supports convergence: “national

systems have a longer or shorter way to go to meet the ‘Bologna’ model” (p. 93). The use of the definite article “the” indicates a singular model which countries should “meet”.

In Ukraine, transformation of the educational system is often described in categorical terms, suggesting stronger uptake of Bologna convergence discourses than diversity discourses. Stepko (2004) reports modernization of higher education in Ukraine is realized “in full accordance” with the provisions of the Lisbon Recognition convention, the Berlin Communiqué of 2003, and the Bologna Process. Concretely, Stepko writes that “*according to the Bologna Declaration the preparation of educated professionals at the level of specialists is abolished, and higher schools of learning have only bachelor’s and master’s courses*” (emphasis original). Both Nikolayenko (2007) and Babyn (2008) report 100 percent of Ukrainian universities have implemented the two-cycle Bachelor’s-Master’s system and the ECTS system. The Ukrainian government has also extended the school system from 11 to 12 years (Janmaat, 2008). Since those students will not graduate until 2012 and the 1999-2000 class will graduate in 2010, Ukrainian universities will have no freshman class with Ukrainian students in the 2011-2012 school year. It will have to scramble to fill the pedagogical and economic gap (Alexander Malygin, personal communication, February 9, 2010). Whether these decisions are a case of full consent or mere acquiescence is not clear. What is clear is the perception on the part of Ukrainian officials that full compliance with the Bologna Process is necessary—most likely because there is a presumption of negative consequences (e.g. no European integration) if Ukraine does not comply.

Mobility Goals and Reality

Mobility in education is central both to the Bologna Process and to the vision of being European in the EU. The roots of mobility programs can be traced back to the Middle Ages when scholars roamed from university to university (Beerens, 2005; Musselin, 2004). In

Ukraine, the prospect of mobility may be a strong motivator for buying into Bologna reforms at any price, as one music educator explained to me:

It's good and bad. On the one hand, we lose our serious professional basis in teaching classical music. On the other hand, we have the possibility to choose where our children will continue their education. Our students can go to Europe and feed their education with people not only from their country but also other sources (KM, personal communication, October 20, 2009).

For EU member students, this mobility is financially and structurally supported by the ERASMUS [European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students] program, which provides grants for students from ERASMUS registered schools to study abroad--that is, outside of their home country at a university in another country which is also registered with ERASMUS. It also fosters cooperation among ERASMUS-registered universities (ec.europa.edu, n.d.; Papatsiba, 2006). Papatsiba (2006) says ERASMUS has a two-fold goal: to promote mobility associated with a common European labor market, and to cultivate a "European consciousness".

As members of the Bologna Process, citizens of countries outside the European Union are not entirely excluded from mobility programs, but they participate in a more limited and compartmentalized fashion. Generally, it is prohibitively expensive for Ukrainians to study in European universities (Babyn, 2008; Getmanchuk, 2009; Stepko, 2004). Mobility for Ukrainians to Europe is therefore facilitated in two main ways. One is a series of "bilateral agreements on student exchange" (Babyn, 2008) likely financed through the TEMPUS program, a grants program which seeks to "support the modernization of systems of higher education in partner-countries in the western Balkans, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East" (European Commission, 2008). The second is the Erasmus Mundus program, a grants program with the purpose of "contributing to the socio-economic development of non-EU countries targeted by EU external cooperation policy" (eacea.europa.eu). While over 150 cooperative agreements have been reached in Ukraine

under the TEMPUS program according to grants records on the EC Web site, only 28 students from Ukraine are studying in Europe this academic year under the Erasmus Mundus exchange program (Getmanchuk, 2009). Thus, the scope of these programs in Ukraine is extremely limited. Moreover, education researchers argue that the Bologna Process may decrease mobility where students will have fewer years of study and more course requirements (Schriewer, 2009; YL, personal communication, January 22, 2010). Therefore, the chance that the mobility benefits will outweigh the costs of structural change in Ukraine is very low.

THE LANGUAGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Phillipson (2006) and Tosi (2006), referenced in the introduction of this paper, are not alone in decrying the hegemonic role of English in Europe. Tollefson & Tsui (2004) cite the Council of Europe as one of the international agents involved in the “gap between the rhetoric of linguistic diversity and the reality of its implementation” (p.5). Pérez de Pablos (2009, September 12) writes in *El Pais*, “The variety of languages in the EU is competing against the development of a common European higher education area that seeks, as one of its most important objectives, to foment student mobility” (author’s translation from Spanish). Coleman (2006) expresses concern that graduates of universities where classes are conducted in English may end up using English for social purposes and child-rearing, leading to language shift.

Despite these fears, other documents indicate institutions accept the role of English in education. In Sweden, Hult (2007) found Swedish teachers took the necessity of English to be axiomatic. In Portugal, Kerlkaan, Moreira, & Boersma (2008) say the Bologna Process “obliges European university policymakers to confront the language question and think about changing their curricula from local languages to the international standard: the English language” (p. 241).

In Ukraine, discourse around the language of higher education is more nuanced for now. Article 28 of the Law of Languages of 1989 specified that the language of higher education should be in Ukrainian (Verkhovna Rada of the Ukrainian SSR, 1989). The Ukrainian Constitution, ratified in 1996, promulgates the use of Ukrainian in all spheres of life, but also allows for the use of Russian among ethnic minorities and the use of languages of “international communication” (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2008). The Ukrainian law “On Higher Education” (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2984-III, 2002), primarily refers readers to these earlier pieces of legislation. However, the use of the word “languages” in Article 5 opens up the possibility of using more than one language in a Ukrainian university (original in Ukrainian, translation by the author):

Стаття 5. Мова (мови) навчання у вищих навчальних закладах
Мова (мови) навчання у вищих навчальних закладах визначається відповідно до Конституції України (254к/96-ВР) та закону України про мови.

Article 5. The language(s) of teaching in higher education programs
The language(s) of teaching in higher education programs are defined according to the Constitution of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Law of Languages.

English in Higher Education in Ukraine

None of the laws in Ukraine addresses English in education directly, but there is evidence of the increasing importance of English in this domain. Stepko (2004) writes, “new methods of English language learning are applied, to ensure the appropriate level of language competence, sufficient for professional activity and continuation of studying outside of Ukraine.” This statement suggests English is necessary to realize the promises of mobility offered by the Bologna Process. Perhaps more surprising is that the Bologna Process is leading one university in Ukraine to begin teaching subjects entirely in English. On the Web site of the Dnipropetrovs’k University of Economics and Law (DUEL) (www.duep.edu), the section labeled “European integration in DUEL development” says, “at the moment we are ready to teach 12 economic, law and philological [language as a specialty] courses in English.

Therefore, we can admit foreign students for studying some disciplines at DUEL within the framework of exchange with universities of Europe.” The word “therefore” in this text indexes a causal relationship between offering courses in English and competing globally for students. Sadly, the pool of students from which DUEL can recruit students is likely small. According to an Erasmus Mundus multi-university project fact sheet, “An approximate rate of more than 80% of total mobility will consist of third country to EU mobility and less than 20% will consist of students moving out into third countries.” The differential in participation between EU and third country students is framed in the final sentence as consensual. Even if the mutual nature of the agreement is taken as a fact, the desire to study in an EU country versus a third country at an 80/20 ratio indicates that EU countries are the perceived countries of power and status.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown in this paper that the Bologna Process is a mechanism of bureaucratic control over the educational system of its members and a form of political hegemony over members who are not in the European Union due to its promulgation of a singular vision of education that outweighs goals of “diversity”. While not officially part of the Bologna Process, English is increasingly becoming the language of instruction as a result of the competition for students. English does not appear to be a threat to Ukrainian (or Russian) at this time. More research is needed, however, on how stakeholders at Ukrainian universities view these programs and discourses in practice and on how languages are used and viewed at the university level. Finally, future workshops with scholars, educators and ministers across Europe should raise more critical awareness of the goals and processes of the Bologna Process.

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