



**KATARZYNA
NOSIDLAK**



**THE DISCURSIVE
CONSTRUCTION
OF FOREIGN
LANGUAGE
PEDAGOGY
AT THE
UNIVERSITY LEVEL
IN POLAND**



*against the Background
of the European
Qualifications
Framework*



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Kraków

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Cover design
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ISBN 978-83-8138-462-9 (print)
ISBN 978-83-8138-463-6 (PDF)
<https://doi.org/10.12797/9788381384636>

Publikacja sfinansowana przez Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny
im. Komisji Edukacji Narodowej w Krakowie

Publication financed by the Pedagogical University of Krakow

KSIĘGARNIA AKADEMICKA PUBLISHING

ul. św. Anny 6, 31-008 Kraków
tel.: 12 421-13-87; 12 431-27-43
e-mail: publishing@akademicka.pl
Internet bookstore: <https://akademicka.com.pl>

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Introduction

*We are full of discourses
that we only half understand and half mean*
– Rae Armantrout, American poet

The book addresses various social aspects which determine the construction of foreign-language didactics at the university level in Poland, considering both national and international influences. To characterise the nature of these influences from the viewpoint of their historical, legal, and social backgrounds, it analyses a number of selected discourse instances regulating the processes of formal foreign-language education in Europe and Poland.

Particularly, the investigative material encompasses official documents and legal acts of both national and international scopes, including instructional directives published and promoted by European Union institutions and those issued by Polish higher education institutions. Special emphasis is placed on the European Qualifications Framework, which constitutes an outcome-based system describing all types of qualifications and allowing for their comparison among different countries and institutions. Moreover, the processes of the framework's development and implementation in the Polish context

have been outlined, together with the presentation of the pioneering publications which accompanied the introduction of the Polish National Qualifications Framework. The systems of qualifications have been additionally collated with the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (cf. Council of Europe 2001), which, *inter alia*, serves as a Europe-wide guideline introduced to allow for the description of language abilities of foreign-language users.

In her exploratory undertaking, the author of this book adopts the perspective of social constructionism, which is a sociology-grounded theory of knowledge based on the assumption that the reality around us is socially constructed and every individual constructs his/her own reality shared with others through language. The theory was proposed by Peter L. Berger (1929–2017) and Thomas Luckmann (1927–2016) in their book *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, published in 1966.

Specifically, the focus of the following book is on the term *official pedagogic discourse* (OPD), first introduced and elaborated by Basil Bernstein (1924–2000), British educational sociologist, in the fourth volume of his series of books *Class, Codes and Control*. Vol. 4: *The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse*, published in 1971. It is argued, after Bernstein (1971), that OPD encompasses various state discourses on the topic of generally understood education, which define the character of social relations between governmental bodies and those actively involved in the field, including administrators, teachers, and students.

Subsequently, it is stressed that discourse theorists, inspired by the works of French philosopher and historian, Michel Foucault (1926–1984) perceive educational institutions as those wielding power and influencing the collective knowledge, attitudes, values, and moral standards of a given community. As thus presented in the following book, dominant and officially recognised pedagogic discourse, influenced by the historical context, politics, and economy of a given com-

munity, builds the foundations for both the collective understanding and the subjective perception of the educational field. It is also emphasized that the individual's interpretation of various instances of OPD forms this certain facet of reality for him/her, as OPD provides people with some schemata and patterns of thinking about education, including, for instance, the commonly shared vision of the ideal teacher and learner. Precisely speaking, the dominant discourse, used widely by those in positions of power making a strategic effort to fashion a certain understanding of the world, imposes some definitions for a given society, for example, definitions of *virtue* and *vice*, of *desirable* and *undesirable* personality traits, or other characteristics of teachers and students.

Through its focus on OPD, this work expands the traditional definition of educational discourse, usually defined as the language of communication between students and their teachers. These everyday interactions characteristic of in-class educational processes become more complex through the addition of one more "interlocutor" – educational bodies, which indirectly, albeit profoundly, shape the dialogue between teachers and students by setting out rules governing their communicative exchanges. Additionally, to the author's knowledge, the present book constitutes one of the very few presentations of OPD, especially when taking into consideration the selected context of Polish (philological) tertiary education. This apparent lack of interest in the field seems alarming, as the domain of OPD is crucial for any educator: OPD, which constitutes the basic and the widest-reaching kind of educational discourse, by its general and universal nature forms the prevailing rules of school/university life for a given community.

Drawing both on the Foucauldian vision of discourse and on Berger and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge, the author of this publication endeavours to demonstrate the unstable nature of the social order, as illustrated by the case of the field of foreign language

education at the tertiary level, as it is constantly shaped by powerful individuals, groups and institutions. The instability of the discourses shaping educational processes is also reflected in the character of the sources used by the author, especially when it comes to the fleeting nature of official and institutional websites, which constitute the most updated sources of information on the topic addressed here, but at the same time are constantly being revised to keep pace with nonstop political changes.

As for the structure of the book, it consists of three chapters. The first chapter, “Approaches to the notion of discourse and the criteria of its typology”, defines the broad notion of discourse, looking at the evolution of its meaning, not only through the prism of linguistics, but also when treated as a cross-disciplinary term. Here, special emphasis is placed on the works of the above-mentioned Michel Foucault, who inspired discourse analysis focusing on “power relationships” in society. Additionally, social and cultural factors contributing to the differentiation of discourse are described, including the following contextual dimensions of discourse: (1) domains, (2) genres, (3) goals, (4) participants, and (5) general types.

The second chapter, “The theoretical and methodological frameworks of educational discourse”, starts with the characterisation of the domain of official pedagogic discourse (OPD). The chapter defines the notion of OPD, specifying the role this type of educational discourse plays in the creation of modern society, with special focus placed on its importance in conditioning human behaviour, and it presents OPD as a type of formal institutional discourse. It also describes the complexity of the relations between language policy and foreign language pedagogy in the European context, with the area of tertiary education as the focus of attention. The chapter ends with a description of concrete instances of official pedagogic discourse which regulate the Polish system of foreign language education at the tertiary level, both directly and indirectly.

The third chapter, “The Qualifications Frameworks in the construction of key competences of lifelong learning”, focuses on a description of the systems of comparable qualifications frameworks. It presents selected examples of official pedagogic discourse, i.e. publications preceding the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (NQF-HE) in the case of Polish tertiary education, and it offers a description of the systems of European and National Qualifications Frameworks. Then, the instances of official pedagogic discourse which contain reflections of the described frameworks in the system of English philological tertiary education in Poland are provided. Finally, the author outlines the history of the creation of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe 2001), and its role in contemporary foreign language teaching methodology is discussed.

The publication also contains an unnumbered section, “Final remarks”, which contains some general conclusions stemming from the earlier discussion. It is followed by a summary in Polish and a list of references. The book ends with an author index.

In regard to the editorial solutions applied in this book, the author would like to point out that (1) the dates of the first printings of the quoted publications are specified in the “References” section in square brackets, and the main text contains only the dates of the editions used; (2) when referring to university or organisational websites, the Polish/English names of universities (as authors) are used to indicate that a Polish/English version of a particular website has been quoted; and (3) when quoting the content of these websites, for practical reasons home pages are usually cited as the source of a given quote in order to limit the number of the items in the bibliography.

To end with, the author would also like to note that the provided descriptions and information concerning the systems of the Polish and European Qualifications Frameworks as well as those related to the system of higher education in Poland were valid at the time of

writing this book. However, due to their progressive character, the described regulations of reference systems and frameworks as well as legal solutions could have changed since that time.

Katarzyna Nosidlak's book focuses on the theory and practice of foreign language pedagogy construed on a national scale for the needs of higher education systems in Poland under the pressures of international requirements. It raises contemporary issues of official educational discourses on language policy in Europe, which are significant for shaping the vision of the world shared by humans in interindividual communication in general and English as a second language in particular. Approaching the European Qualifications Framework and the Polish Qualifications Framework as tools for coordinating and comparing the content and results of education in the EU Member States at all levels, from basic to post-secondary, the book essentially enriches the knowledge of foreign language teaching and learning in the era of unification of laws on education. The notable achievements of Katarzyna Nosidlak's book lie in its emphasis on the role of discourses and discursive practices in social life, including the formation of the Polish education system on the example of language pedagogy, its revelation of the consequences of the application of the perspective of social constructivism for communicative practices in foreign language teaching, and its provision of a comprehensive overview of legal acts and publications on the qualifications framework for lifelong learning.

(by Elżbieta Magdalena Wąsik)



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