

Norms vs conventions. A commentary on Ulrich Best

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By referring to the critical geography of geography, Ulrich Best has successfully joint my discussion with Jerzy Bański on the sociology of Polish geography. In the context of centre-periphery relations U. Best accurately points to the universal vs particular categorisation of the relevance of scientific outcomes, labelled as 'America unlimited'. During a conference held in Cracow in 6 December 2011, J. Bański provided in his presentation a case, hopefully be developed some time in *Przestrzeń Społeczna (Social Space)*, of his paper submitted for a publication consideration in a reputable journal in the core of the geographical world-system, commented by an anonymous Anglo-Saxon reviewer who condemned the author of the paper for referring to a 'local' source of a concept the reviewer 'had never heard about' instead of referring to 'recognised' (i.e. Anglo-Saxon) sources. In this context, the Anglo hegemony of language comes to appear as merely one aspect of Anglo hegemony of thinking, in accordance with the aphorism by Ludwig Wittgenstein that 'limits of my language are ones of my world'.

It may be easily argued, as Ulrich Best seem to do in his critique, the same applies to norms. What I, however, tried to suggest, certainly not very clearly, in my editorial was that the category of *norms* should be contrasted to that of *conventions*. While I call for following the scientific norms of the core, i.e. the quality of published papers and transparency of the procedure of their acceptance, I appeal to recognise the application of English as a useful convention in the communication and propagation of values of the semi-peripheries, especially productive

(semi)peripheries. The best evidence of my – and our in *Przestrzeń Społeczna (Social Space)* – attitude to the possible Anglo domination of language is that we decided not to be a monolingual English journal, even though the acceptance of this rule would facilitate us to gain a higher Ministry's score. It was because I think the modernisation may not result in a cultural liquidation. Moreover, against the 'world' standard, we neither follow nor accept American orthography in our journal and demand monetary units referred to in texts we publish be converted in euro rather than US dollars or GB pounds. This is the way I understand my suggestions to counter the structural violence Ulrich Best argues I do not make.

Limited attempts of critical geography of geography is, however, another story. A critical history of Polish geography is still to be written. Two milestones of the history could, however, be identified already now. The conference in Osieczna in 1955, as one part of the only intrinsic scientific revolution in the history of Polish geography, was the first of them, which resulted in the only one solid change in the structure of power within the discipline, not without, however, the explicit relation to the political environment. The conference in Rydzyna, importantly from the symbolic point of view, located a dozen of kilometres from Osieczna, in 1983, as a classical example of a scientific counterrevolution, was the second milestone. U. Best seems, however, misidentify the aims of the Rydzyna's radicals. Again not without the explicit relation to the social environment, they aimed at a challenge to neopositivism, with its value free quantitative methodology, accepted in the same time of the late 1960s as in West Germany, perceived, however, as a safe asylum for those who profited from the late Stalinist structure of power without being explicitly engaged ideologically. In this context, the history of the Rydzyna conference seems interesting to be written some time.

I am less optimistic than Ulrich Best in the maintaining there is no hegemony of English-language geography in Polish geography. To my mind, the main body of the latter, especially among the post-Rydzyna generation, is dominated by those who are intellectually dependent on English-language literature so much that they are hardly able not only to propose original concepts but even translate English terminology, including individual phrases, into standard Polish, proposing pidgin-Polish instead. While therefore in Germany the discipline resembles that of a centre

resting in itself, self-sufficient, and enclosed, in Poland the progressive marginalisation, resulted from a voluntary self-isolation, is attempted to be cured by the application of developmental dependence on pure conventions rather than norms.

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