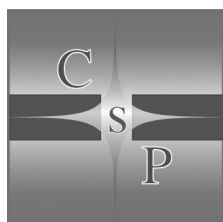


Freelance English Teaching in Eastern Europe

Freelance English Teaching in Eastern Europe: A Perspective from R.P.

By

Christopher Stanling



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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This book is dedicated to my wife whose support and patience has made
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INTRODUCTION

Following the colonialism of the 17th and 18th Centuries English language established a commanding position in world of the 21st Century. Today it has broader territorial scope than had the British colonists, even thriving in nations that weren't part of the British Empire. English Language Teaching (ELT) is a huge industry offering a multitude of exciting work opportunities.

The British Council estimates one billion people throughout the world speak English or are trying to speak it.¹ The number of people for whom English is a maternal language is generally thought to be up to 400 million. Within the remaining group there's potential demand for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) learning. In practice there are many reasons for needing to speak the language with English-speaking foreigners and necessary when living in an English-speaking country. In the era of globalization citizens of a number of nations who are eager to develop and take part in world economy in the form of outsourcing, work or study abroad, tourism, or international business need to communicate in English.

Hundreds of thousands of people come to the United States, Great Britain, and Australia a year to study English. Great Britain alone sees over 500-thousand language tourists a year who add 700 million pounds to the national economy. But the vast majority of those learning English study in their own countries, for the obvious reasons connected with work, family, and budget.

Since the fall of the iron curtain in 1989 there has been significant demand for improving communication skills in Eastern Europe and English began to replace Russian as the second language. Hence, there was a huge Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) boom in the former communist countries and millions of people identified with the language. According to the 2006 Special Eurobarometer report in Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia there are over 23-million people over 15 years of age who declare English as an additional language in which they're able to carry on some sort of conversation. Over 9-million of them are in Poland.² While the percentage of countrymen declaring English as an additional language compared to the years just after the revolution shows a whopping

growth, the figures leave much to be desired with Scandinavia and several Western European countries.

E. Europe's TEFL boom doesn't seem to have yet subsided throughout many towns and cities of this vast region. Many of those who know English still require assistance in raising or maintaining their proficiency level. Further, English is considered the number-one language that children should learn as their first foreign language³ and regarded as the most useful to know for career and personal development⁴.

One of the reasons for writing this book was to describe what living in the region and working as a freelance English teacher is like. The other was to provide insights and how-to knowledge to those specifically interested in going abroad and making a living from ELT. It should be quite useful teacher-traveler types who desire to broaden their horizons and combine work with travel, those wishing to learn about foreign culture, professional EFL teachers seeking to better informed, career-minded people who want to enrich their CV or resume, those aspiring to be more competitive in the international job market, and potential entrepreneurs for the ELT industry. While it's not written especially for most experienced career EFL teachers who already have a sufficient amount of knowledge and insight into various facets of the industry, the book is filled with exclusive info and they're likely to pick up a number of useful ideas or apply some principles in entrepreneurial projects. Many EFL schools have been offering part time, contract of mandate, or specific work. Also there's an increasing trend for students to seek private tutors and consultants for one-to-one, tailor-made lessons. Hence, a multitude of opportunities for freelance teachers exist. Those who wish to venture into the ELT market for the first time as freelancers and raise their chances of success should find the book invaluable.

It will provide general and specific info, anecdotes, and insights about freelance English teaching in Poland - an account based on this writer's experience there from Sept – Oct 2002, Fall 2003, April 2004 - June 2006, and Dec 2006 on. Much of the philosophy of the enterprise can surely be applied in other countries. Even though it's directed at helping you work independently (i.e. finding and teaching your own clients) language schools are discussed as well because it's common to teach a school's clients on a freelance basis. You should always know that working for or with someone else is one more option for success. Thus, I have illustrated the workings of a language school to show what it's about, how it may compete with you, or how you could work with it for mutual benefit. Also any organizational and some marketing concepts could be applied by those who want to teach other "foreign" languages as German, Spanish, or

French. As for English, Poland like other former eastern bloc countries where the demand for the language remains relatively high – in regions where the EFL boom hasn't yet subsided – has been a common training ground for new teachers.

The book's descriptive nature and is useful in understanding a number of issues about freelancing and the TEFL industry. It was conceived from first-hand experience in the enterprise and direct observations of the social climate surrounding it. There's also a section about the Czech Republic that has been quite popular with Americans as well as Budapest – the other tourist magnet of Eastern Europe. A discussion about ELT in the former eastern block wouldn't be complete without mentioning Prague. While Poland is often seen as more of a backwater, it's a bigger and more populous country of over 38 million offering greater scope of teaching opportunities.

The information herein can be a stepping stone to devising a brilliant business plan for a successful and memorable year or more abroad. Such an experience will surely enrich your CV or resume, and leave you poised to succeed in any occupation where similar skills will come into play. These include language communication in the form of speaking, listening, and writing. Such skills have a broader sphere of suitability beyond merely the job context. Also you can count on getting other transferable skills in teaching, tutoring, lecturing, consulting, sales and marketing, customer development and service among others.

Teaching English in a foreign land can be very rewarding but also involves a considerable amount of risk. Knowing what you want to do and how to get it done will position you to succeed even if this will be your first venture. Understanding reasons for some outcomes that significantly differ from your predictions, will keep you oriented. Also knowing what industry traps to look out for and sidetracks to avoid is equally important. But keep in mind that even occasional misfortunes that might come your way could only make your experience a greater adventure. And if you grow to like the challenges you'll be up against, you may discover for yourself the benefit of such a job in a foreign culture over any monotonous, nine-to-five local job. If you become assimilated in the foreign culture or just extend your stay, and ambitious about expanding your enterprise as well as able to invest you may be on your way to starting a language school of your own. Whatever the case may be, this book will certainly provide you with ideas, suggestions, and possibly even a viable direction for your project.

When preparing for my move from California to Warsaw, I gathered quite a bit of info from various sources and did some preparation - taking

with me all the materials and equipment I would need as a freelance English consultant. Once there I encountered circumstances that met predictions and some that didn't. Since 2001 I lived and worked throughout Poland in the cities of Warsaw, Poznan, Glogow, Krakow, Pszczyna, and Myszkow. The time spent abroad provided some of the most worthwhile work experiences and always a better pay rate than most locals. I also had the time and the means to travel for pleasure and engage in other leisure interests for a well-rounded life. Besides work, teaching English in a foreign country has a lot to offer in terms of cultural value, and helping people with language skills to better their life is very rewarding. I'm looking forward to continue freelancing in Eastern Europe.

THE NATURE OF WORK AND QUALIFICATIONS

Have you given teaching English abroad serious consideration, but are not sure which location to set out to? Reading about what teachers in different destinations around the globe have to say can give you an idea where you might like to go. But accounts can be subjective. It's human nature to characterize and even stereotype people of a country based on individual experiences as most of us do it at one time or another, evident in many reports of work experiences aiming to characterize not only ELT, but the society of a particular country on the whole. However the general characteristics of the nature of work in ELT are quite similar across different countries. This means that giving lessons looks remarkably similar whether you're in Milan or Warsaw.

The freelance English consulting manual and teaching methodology I followed was primarily designed for use in Italy based on its author's experience there. So naturally, the first question I had was whether I would have a similar impression of working with clients in Warsaw as the author of the manual had in Italy. I wondered whether applying some procedures outlined in the manual to my freelance project in Warsaw and way of doing things would carry over when dealing with Polish clients. Since conversations involve them discussing a wide variety of topics – many of which deal with things that are familiar and important to them, I took the bigger picture into consideration...

Milan and Warsaw present two different settings regarding cultural character and economy. Milan is Italy's financial capital widely held to be one of Europe's most important cities of commerce and investment, and the forefront of the fashion world. It's chic, trendy, expensive, and an epitome of Europe's capitalist west. By contrast Warsaw - Poland's political, financial, and commercial center - has a socialist past as a satellite of the former Soviet Union. Although it has seen much foreign investment since the early 90's and despite an explosive growth under market economy having given its skyscrapers, shopping centers, and latest housing complexes a western look, still has plenty of reminders of the past. Apart from the rebuilt old town and a few places here and there, most of the city center lacks in aesthetic value. Further out from downtown there are numerous housing districts known as "osiedla" comprised largely of monotonous, dull-grey communist-style apartment blocks from the 60's

and 70's. Milan has plenty of richly-decorated facades that impress upon the passing minds of pedestrians. Likewise cultural differences can be seen. Although socialism ended in the 80's it's still in the mindset of many Polish people, particularly the older generation. Many older people are quite chilled-out and expect the state to do everything for them. Among the older generation there are few entrepreneur souls. But like Milan, Warsaw has plenty of younger, neatly-dressed corporate people. Urban Italians can be business-conscious as well as expressive, creative, talkative, loud, and friendly. Italians are known to be talkers and can be quite eager to express themselves. By comparison Warsawians are quite serious-minded and socially-conforming. Like other Polish people they're generally less open-minded, but more reserved and often afraid to be original. Yet they can also be quite friendly, and can be particularly polite, cooperative, and eager to learn.

Besides all this there are more relevant differences like prevalent language which has an effect on the style of English spoken, the pronunciation, as well as the type of grammatical errors students make. They might have different method preferences. An Italian student with a need for expression might be a better candidate for a method requiring him or her to speak more than the consultant-teacher. In contrast, a student who's more reserved and prefers to be led by the teacher is a better candidate for a method that requires him to repeat in parrot fashion. Methods like *Callan* that use active reinforcement from the teacher, have been widely used in language schools with beginning students throughout Poland. Although as their level changes they become more and more capable to use their own power of expression and become better suited for conversation. However, the transition from sentence level to discourse level can be quite difficult and it appears that most of the methods on the market are effective with students either at the basic or advanced level with fewer options for those in between. For my lessons I sought mainly intermediate and advanced learners. Although I sometimes had pre-intermediates and it was necessary to use additional exercises that provided the nuts and bolts for conversation.

The method I used provided a practical approach for discussing business, career, or work-related topics. Some advantages of the method included giving maximum speaking time to the student with less interruption, 100% error correction and maximum self correction (assisted) to ensure improvement with each lesson, adapting English to the student's style of speaking, and emphasis on the creative power of expression for development of thinking skills. Despite consulting for some clients in Warsaw who were not the best candidates for the method

because of what they learned to expect from previous drilling, there were others who welcomed something different for a change. Even some of those who had had only drilling were able to adapt to more natural conversation. All in all, working with a method primarily designed for use in Italy I saw satisfactory results with my clients in Warsaw having 1st language and cultural differences. Later when I had more experience and began use it in combination with other techniques the results were quite good.

To make the information applicable to other places besides Poland, one underlying theme of this book is the nature of work. Another theme is work conditions although these can vary greatly among different schools in one city. Training and qualifications are the third thing discussed. Here there are exceptions. It's a common misconception that to teach in a country whose citizens have a relatively high level of English competence requires high qualifications. Typically such countries are thought to have only ELT institutes which expect nothing short of the highest standards from teachers. While this holds true in some cases we must remember that all job opportunities should be taken into consideration, not just those found in schools. Also there is something of a niche market almost everywhere with opportunities for fairly qualified private tutors to specialize in something.

Surely, there are countries that shouldn't even be considered by novices with few or no qualifications. But, if we exclude exceptions like the Netherlands where English can be heard practically all the time and very small countries like Luxembourg that don't offer much scope of opportunities, we can see that training and qualifications depend more on the school, what type of clientele it has, or the ELT niche under consideration than on the particular country as a whole. There are schools in France that require lower ELT qualifications than some in Czech Republic or Poland.

Also not only do requirements vary from one school to another, they are quite flexible. A school may put a notice for an applicant with a B.A. degree, a CELTA or equivalent, and one or two years teaching experience, but this isn't written in stone. Sometimes it's just worried it could loose its reputation if clients were to find out it hires teachers without full qualifications. Every school wants to advertise it has the most qualified and capable teachers but the reality is different. Native speakers are hard to find and when their recruiting department can't get an applicant to fill a spot they will take whoever they can get. Surely there are destinations throughout Europe that have become so popular (as Prague, Paris, and Rome to name a few) that their schools have a continuous pool of well-

qualified applicants to select from. Their major ELT organizations receive CV's on a daily basis and can afford to be highly selective. Even schools at the so-called bottom of the barrel have an oversupply of qualified prospective teachers. The qualifications under considerations are not merely limited to the CELTA and 2 years classroom experience. More frequently individuals with specialized training are sought to teach groups of professionals. In Germany and France, having solid teaching experience particularly in the business context, has become more desirable than advanced ELT qualifications.⁵ The question is not whether you know how to explain the difference between "were produced" and "had been produced", but whether you know enough on finance to teach a group of accountants or bankers. Both Germany and France are domineering members of the EU and have deeper business traditions than all the communist block countries. Despite some arrogant attitudes about the supremacy of their language more Germans have gotten past the English basics than Eastern Europeans.

On the European mainland urban Dutch people seem to have among the highest degrees of English competence after they finish their schooling. In fact, their minister of education had once suggested that English should become the main language used in the country's universities.⁶ Besides this many Dutch people frequently speak with each other and Scandinavians in English. The language institutes in the Netherlands are looking for applicants who have both teaching qualifications and extensive executive experience in the commercial or government context.⁷ There seems to be a common pattern among countries with a high proportion of business conscious citizens at the discourse level - they tend to higher qualification requirements in ELT. In Denmark, Netherlands, and Sweden most ELT organizations are not the place where just anyone with a college degree or CELTA can step into a position or hope to succeed self-employed.

There are more promising and fortunately equally charming locations to get ones start, and the vast area of Eastern Europe is filled with them. Prague, Budapest, Krakow, and Warsaw have become some of the main hotspots over the last decade and despite the overwhelming glut of foreigners, reasonably-qualified natives still have a fighting chance of employment. Further, there are many obscure and forgotten places in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia that are desperately crying out for natives. If you have a B.A., little or no teaching experience, and no CELTA - but you present a professional image and have clear dictation, you might get hired even in the city's most prestigious school.

Freelance English teaching can be a very rewarding experience

especially if you have planned out your business project well and know one or more good methods of teaching. It's important to note that while the Cambridge CELTA which has a section on classroom management is an invaluable certification (though not always required) for those who want to teach at a school where groups will usually consist of four to eight students, a college degree and knowing how to use one or two teaching methods – where you would be using active feedback, or both and active and passive feedback – is sufficient for teaching or consulting on a one-to-one basis, or with a group of two. On the same token having a high-school diploma and a CELTA is also a sufficient combination. There are course books for making lesson plans and manuals that describe in detail some of the most effective teaching methodologies on the market today. A manual should outline the procedures for using a particular method as well as indicate about how many hours it takes for students to reach desirable results. It should list its main advantages over other methods as well as any disadvantages or limitations. Take note what the method is based on. For example, the backbone of some methods is grammar and others vocabulary. Those reducing grammar are known as anti-grammar methods. Some are completely scripted and others are not. Some are repetitive and fast-paced to sharpen cognitive reflexes and memory. Others are slow and more natural to train for practical settings where original speech is required, and accuracy more important than speed. Although no previous experience is required to teach privately, some practice in using a method would certainly be an advantage in providing the best-quality ELT service to your clients. After all ELT is costing many of them a small fortune, so it's only fair they get someone who's sufficiently qualified to do a good job for them.

Experience has shown me that although I had no CELTA, but degrees in general liberal arts and psychology instead of the recommended English or linguistics, I had enough teaching and consulting experience to get hired by Glogow's most prestigious school. I was also given the option to transfer to one of their bigger schools in Poznan or Gdansk if I was to stay in Poland longer. It was no more difficult to get hired by a school than to find a single client. I was simply in the right place at the right time and advertised well enough. In the fall of 2005 when my advertisement ran for 6 weeks in the *JarMark* paper in Silesia, I was contacted by three schools offering work. The question here is what other industry do you know, either at home or abroad where an employer will call you offering work? Here's testimony to the opportunity that awaits you abroad if you know English and want others to know it too.

SOME HISTORY

Where did English come from? The roots of contemporary English can be traced to present-day northern Germany and Denmark whose tribes crossed the North Sea to England. Thus, 4th Century Low German Language is the predecessor of Anglo-Saxon language from which came Old English, and then Middle English. Diagrams illustrating the order of progression using specific language groups, show Old English coming from Gothic whose predecessor was Celtic. Today Celtic is merely an ancient group of languages primarily confined to Brittany, Wales, western Ireland and Scotland, while modern English is spoken throughout the world.

What did it take for English to grow to its present-day geographic proportions? It took a fleet and an army as well as a historical process enabling a nation to rise to a military, political, and economic power in the world. But it also required the language to be open to external forces and adaptable to social changes... because history has shown that the Spanish, French, Germans, Portuguese, Arabs, Russians, and Dutch also had political and military dominance at one time. Some also dominated economically. Yet none of these languages has endured the competition from English nor shown as much vitality. English presented more to the world than any of these languages. It presented an attractive offer of culture and civilization. The many varieties of English spoken around the world are proof of how open the language was to adaptation. The economic, technological, and democratic processes that have driven the advanced Anglo countries are a testament to the vision of the potential of the English-speaking world – a world that provided viable solutions to many of the problems that came out of the European continent. One of the most important historical events took place in the spring of 878 A.D. when king of Wessex Alfred the Great and his army defeated Danish invaders. Historians believe that this event saved the Anglo-Saxon language, the predecessor of contemporary English. It was spoken by German tribes that in the 5th century conquered what are now the British isles. Three centuries later King Alfred faced off a Viking invasion and in the process created a unified country. But when in 1066 Prince Wilhelm of Normandy defeated King Harold of England in the battle near Hastings, English faced a setback. Although this event was the last time anyone would invade the

isles, it marked the beginning of a cultural revolution. French and Latin took precedence in the King's court and became used in learning institutions, courts of law, churches, and literature. Over the next 300 years French language ruled the isles during which time some ten-thousand words borrowed from French and Latin were introduced. But in the end French could not replace English. English was making a comeback... Already when King Henry IV of England participated in the crusade expedition to Lithuania he voiced his royal speeches in the language of his people. Although the elite continued to be trilingual – using French, Latin, and English, the nation-building process incited English to rise in precedence and be revered. The Renaissance during Queen Elizabeth's reign marked the turning point when Latin was losing significance and English experienced a rebirth becoming the language of science and literature. Shakespeare, Isaac, Milton, and Newton all wrote their masterpiece works in English.

American English rose out of a rebellion to the British. As America was gaining political independence from Britain in the mid 1700's it also wanted a freer language which similarly went through its own revolution, in the form of linguistic transformation. The insurrectionists had envisioned an American variant - separate from the British - that would be based on truth and free from absurdities. Such an idea had been advocated by William Thornton, a philologist and lexicographer. But it was his colleague Noah Webster who gave the American republic the first unabridged and renewable dictionary – a true philological constitution to rival the fundamental British dictionaries of Benjamin Johnson and Oxford. Linguists began to distinguish between the two variants and later even Winston Churchill almost said that England and America were two nations that would divide a common language. But this hasn't happened... American English and British English have actually moved closer together over the last 75 years, particularly the latter half of the 20th century along with more transportation and communication across the Atlantic.

ENGLISH THE INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

The language derived from Anglo-Saxon was sufficiently open to change so that given a historical process involving expansionism and colonialism requiring communication and trade, evolved into its present-day form. Over the centuries the Germanic language was mixed in with thousands of words of Latin, Greek, and French origin. It also has a significant number of words borrowed from various other languages and this gives English quite an international flavor. But the most commonly used words are still of Anglo-Saxon origin. The agriculture-savvy Germanic tribes that conquered the isles in the 5th Century left clear traces in the language with terms such as “ox”, “sheep”, “trough”, and “plough”. Words of Greek origin include “harmony”, “philosophy”, and “politics” and those stemming from Latin include “cancel”, “major”, “elementary”, “identify,” and “create”. Among the vocabulary of French origin are “technique”, “perfume”, “perjury”, “attorney”, and “nobility.” During the period of French influence English also underwent profound changes to its grammar. Many old forms of declension died out and were replaced by the grammatical function of word order.

In linguistic circles there is notable mention of Esperanto – an international language that’s artificial in nature and based especially on words common to the main European languages. But any such international language hasn’t and will never play the role that Latin did throughout centuries, nor will it have the global usage and be as common as English. An effective international language is something quite different, and the language of the British Empire seems to have become the Latin of 21st Century.

English has been adopted as the international language of science, air traffic control, computing, diplomacy, travel, and is used widely in international business – particularly trade and export. As many as two-thirds of all scientists from some of the most various disciplines use English in their work, knowing that without it their research papers wouldn’t have the same chance of being read. While it has had broad world-wide use for quite some time in practice or in education in flourishing TEFL markets, only some regions have experienced a real ELT boom in recent years.

ENGLISH SPREADS AROUND THE GLOBE

Several important events took place in history that changed the fate of English and in turn the world. In 1607 the British arrived permanently in North America and seven years later on the other side of the world in India they opened the first factory. Through colonial expansion the language began to spread more and more. People realized it became an essential tool in communication and trade. The beginnings of this phenomenon can be traced to the 16th Century. Later the invention of the printing press and then the telegraph in the 19th Century were highly instrumental in increasing written English usage.

The phenomenon progressed further during the journalism boom of the 20th Century. Radio and television became a highly important medium and British BBC television as well as American CNN set global standards in journalism. English music also became a huge moving force for pop culture through programs like MTV which brought music videos to millions of young people throughout the world and many began to sing to the same tune.

In the last ten years the rapid growth in electronic communications technology - particularly the internet - has probably been the most instrumental tool, bringing English to some of the most obscure places making it a truly global phenomenon. About 90 percent of the world's electronically-stored information is in English which is utilized by the majority of the fifty-million or so internet users for communication⁸.

Today in over 75 countries English is the official or co-official language. It's also spoken extensively in a number of countries where it has no official status. The ten largest English-speaking countries include the United States with 226 million users, Great Britain (57 mil), Canada (20 mil), Australia (15 mil), South Africa (3.6 mil), New Zealand (3.4 mil), Ireland (3.3 mil), Jamaica (2.4 mil), Trinidad and Tobago (1.2 mil), and Guyana (0.7 mil). Seven Caribbean nations from St. Kitts southward to Trinidad and Tobago, and numerous islands dotting the Pacific from Papua New Guinea north to Micronesia, east to the Marshall Islands, and south to Samoa and Fiji have all made English their official or co-official language. Also there are 18 English-using nations on the vast African continent. Such far-flung countries as Namibia in Africa, Turkmenistan in central Asia, and Cambodia in south-east Asia have made English the cornerstone of their educational systems⁹.

OUTSOURCING, MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS AND ENGLISH – THE BIG PICTURE

Let's briefly look at something called outsourcing which has been on the rise using a country in South Asia as a model. One of the most notable and controversial examples is North American companies using subcontractors in India, since it's not limited to the manufacturing sector. Wage costs, global competition, and cheaper fiber-optic lines have led to the outsourcing of some 250,000 white-collar and technical jobs from the U.S to India and minimized job security for others. Accounting firms, income tax preparation agencies, airline offices, computer technical support enterprises, collection agencies, and some ISP companies have been using call center companies in Delhi and Bangalore to answer calls and communicate via internet with American and Canadian consumers. Even some U.S. government welfare benefit calls are handled by call centers in India. Today's global economy has made the world a much smaller place than it was twenty years ago. Distances don't seem to matter as much anymore, while telecommunications technology is cheaper and reducing labor costs is as important as ever. These conditions have helped the subcontracting industry to grow and it's having a profound impact on American economy. Who would have thought 20 years ago that workers in India would be speaking to North American clients? Today this is of no surprise since the country has a large number of educated people who also speak English. There are signs that more countries will follow India's example. Others are asking themselves whether they could soon jump into this market. But a key ingredient necessary for this to be possible is a common language. A high level of English competence is required of the Indian applicants in conjunction with relevant technical skills. Wage costs for Indian workers are somewhere between four and eight times less than for U.S. counterparts but the positions under consideration are highly sought after with less than 5% of applicants hired. Once on the job they can expect to earn around five times their national average. Such figures give meaning to the power of English.

Outsourcing companies hire language trainers to help their employees maintain proficiency and provide the best service. They've given classes in

how to speak to credit card holders who are missing their payments, how to instruct computer users and help them solve problems with their operating system, and how to provide info to passengers with lost luggage, etc. There's particular emphasis given to correct pronunciation and this is done through special phonetics classes to help them sound more like North Americans. In these "accent neutralization" courses participants are taught to roll their "R's" and soften their "T's".

Whether call centers in English will start popping up in Eastern Europe remains to be seen. The current perspective from Poland is that there are a number of subcontractors handling calls, but in German language for clients in Germany and Austria. Presently Poland doesn't offer the lowest costs in E. Europe to be competitive in the English-speaking call center market. The growth of the subcontracting industry seems to be most promising for accounting firms and a number of them have already been handling firms from abroad. Such firms are seeking employees able to speak on the phone, write electronic correspondence, and read and fill out forms in English.

Poland is one of the most attractive countries for multinational corporations - both big and small - and many of them use English. Even though the *Fiat* Car Company has headquarters in Italy, the *Fiat* car manufacturing plants in Bielsko Biala and Tychy use English as their internal language for documents and corporate governance. While Fiat has been around for a long time, a number of new multinational corporations have set up recently, reflecting the latest trends in market and technology in the new common Europe. I've had an opportunity to be my wife's personal English consultant when she was preparing for a job interview at a Krakow branch of a Belgian computer hardware company. In January 2007 we went on a business trip to Belgium for her training. I took note that even though Flemish is the prevalent language in eastern Belgium, all communication between the company and its Polish branch and staff was conducted in English.

WIDESPREAD YET STILL IN DEMAND

There's a double standard when those from English-speaking countries expect locals to speak and understand them in English but don't feel obliged to learn the local language. Perhaps it's because English has become so popular and common, that we are privileged to have others speak (or try to speak) English with us. But often their effort is merely a nice try in the scheme of linguistic competence.

If you've traveled on business or pleasure to non-English-speaking countries and have been able to communicate with people in your language, then you may have seen the benefit of their English ability both to them and you. Then again if you've been on trips in places where you couldn't be understood nor could understand others, you may have seen what a roadblock a language barrier can be. Hotel and resort staff, cruise-ship staff, tour guides, travel agents, airline representatives, and salesmen in shops surrounding tourist destinations can all benefit from speaking English if they want to earn the business of English speakers. Surely, in some situations all it takes is a little specific phraseology to get by, whereas others require broader competence.

Many urban people, particularly career-minded men and women including foreign teachers of English want to maintain or raise the level of their English competence. Hence, it's the native speakers from Britain, Ireland, North America, Australia, and New Zealand who happen to find themselves already possessing this highly sought-after commodity ¹⁰.

EASTERN EUROPE TURNS TO ENGLISH

When countries of the vast former eastern bloc became liberated from Soviet political control, they cast off Russian and turned to English instead of the other main European languages.¹¹ Although German is also taught as a foreign language for whatever historic and geopolitical reasons as the case in Hungary and Czech Republic, English dominates in most contexts.

While Russian was still declared by 23% of people in Poland as a foreign language in 2001 constituting the highest percentage, English ranked second with 16%. Although only four years earlier in 1997 this figure was a mere 9%. In 2005 English had a clear lead being declared by 29% of people over 15 years of age.¹²

A 2-3 week language trip from Poland to England costs between 4,500 and 6,300 PLN while 50-70 hours of English lessons and course materials at a school is about 1,000. At a top-notch school students can expect to pay up to 2,500 PLN. Thirty-five hours with a native speaker can cost somewhere between 700 and 1700 PLN. The average gross monthly income in Warsaw is around 2500 PLN, but many people in Poland make between 800 and 1400. Looking at these figures one can see that English training is costing folks a small fortune. But they're willing to pay because they've recognized that knowing English is a gateway to the world. Also, fewer and fewer job interviews – particularly in the business sector - have been omitting the question: “how much English do you speak?” Even those who aren't planning on travel or emigration view English as a way to get ahead in their careers at home. Sometimes they like to outdo their peers.

If you want to be independent of a language school and work privately, it's a good idea to find a niche in ELT. This is important because although the demand for English remains high, some markets have an adequate supply of general English, and a shortage of custom-made courses. The field of English for specific purposes (ESP) is a promising and profitable industry. Many people find a functional approach learning English very practical and desirable. Working professionals who devote much of their time to work often feel obliged to devote their free time to family. Thus people want to learn effectively for a particular purpose and in as little time as possible.

There is no shortage of people for whom English would be a valuable

or even necessary asset - either for work, school, travel, or personal reasons. Most people find attending English lessons a popular activity and a worthwhile investment in their future. Compared with many western European countries, Poland and much of the former eastern block still appear to have a much higher percentage of potential candidates who need general English at the pre-intermediate level, especially those who went through elementary and secondary schooling when Russian was still taught. There is an increasing demand for tailor-made one-to-one lessons to accommodate the complex and evolving needs of businessmen, lawyers, and other professionals. Even students of English philology departments in universities need such lessons, as well as those wishing to pass their entrance examinations into the colleges and universities, professors wishing to have English ability on par with their students, and folks seeking topic-centered conversations in their academic specialty. Hence, the phenomenal growth of English for specific purposes.

Adult learners typically don't have a sufficiently flexible schedule to dedicate to a regular school course, and the individual attention in a group is often not adequate to provide them with desirable results fast enough. Speaking skills are highly sought after in business, but often pose a challenge even to those learners who know the language passively. The reason is that in order to speak better, students must do just that. They must get as much controlled conversation practice as possible, and the amount they get in a group is typically insufficient. For example, in a typical conversation class of eight that runs for 45 minutes each individual learner would be allotted only a small fraction of that time to speak. A student devotes most of his/her time listening to the teacher and other students with little time to actually practice his/her own speaking skills. Consequently their rate of progress is typically slower. Although one-to-one lessons are more expensive per hour, the total cost to reach the same results can be the same or even less. Also, serious students in a traditional course know that if they can't come to class for whatever reason, they'll miss the material the teacher covered with the group. However, if they reschedule a lesson with a private teacher, they know he or she can pick up where they last left off. Many clients recognize these advantages and choose private lessons over traditional group lessons that schools offer. Hence, the popularity of one-to-one lessons.

FROM HEAVY INDUSTRY TO THE ELT BOOM

Since the early 90's demand for the language has been growing throughout much of Eastern Europe. Many private language schools have mushroomed in Poland and hundreds of thousands of people made a living from ELT. However, not all who took part in this boom were already linguists or became them overnight. On the contrary, many schools even today have owners, directors, or human resources personnel who know little about teaching English, and may not even speak English themselves. Today's school owners could have been yesterday's steel warehouse managers. In the 1980's much more people were in the steelworks, mining, and shipbuilding industry that supported the Russian market than the following decade when dramatic changes in the economic situation lead to lower production levels and significant downsizing. As these industries started falling many educated people, or otherwise skilled people turned to other enterprises and ELT was one of them.

You might wonder where those going to teach fit into this...Well, many native speakers report that teacher trainers and supervisors sometimes leave them to their own devices and even turn to them for ideas. Some of them know little or nothing about educating. They see their work merely as business - something that'll bring money. Of course they seek qualified people who will do the job for them. But not having specialized knowledge or experience in teaching puts them out of touch, hindering them from making the right decisions. It's one thing to understanding the effect of work output on production in a factory, and another to understand the true relationship between classroom teaching and the learning curve.

Some schools specifically look for "creative" teachers. Could it be that they don't know exactly how to get things done and need to employ someone who has some brilliant ideas ready to put to use? In part it's an effort to provide something unique to their clients that the rival school doesn't. On the other hand it seems they haven't yet discovered the magic formula to have every one of their adults learning effectively, at the same time keeping them happy and returning for more. Client retention can be a challenge for teachers employed in schools as well as private tutors.

THE WRONG SYSTEM

It's useful to understand something about the philosophy of education that's a remnant from years under socialism. Generally, in those days communist bureaucrats in politics and just about every part of the public sector including education were paid for autocratic talking in support of the system. Citizens found it was easier to go with the flow than to question things. One could not argue with the bureaucrats because they knew better. It was very much an autocratic system. People working in education were rigid figures of authority (even through the tertiary level) in a system having a top-down approach. Teachers and professors had something of an I-know image and students were obliged to obey and respect them. In autocratic teaching the lecturer was always right and the student's role was to absorb knowledge and trust the teacher.

Students had to pass oral examinations to defend their master's theses. This is still the case and should help a foreigner to understand what all the fuss is about in Eastern Europe when it comes to having good speaking skills. Oral examinations serve two purposes. Firstly, they allow students to show their professors they can convey the subject matter verbally. Secondly, they serve to convince them they were the authors of their papers. The need to have good speaking skills often carried over to other things besides university exams.

When people went into the workforce they continued to rely on their speaking skills, especially in positions of authority or management where they were dealing with the public. In a typical communist situation folks weren't allowed to do anything and criticized for what they actually did. Thus speakers generally voiced claims and grievances.

Still many were inspired by autocratic talkers and later became them. They continued to admire, respect, and even expect this quality in others - particularly teachers. Many English learners born before around 1975, but also some high-school students who have teachers of the old school have this mindset. There are plenty of adult clients who prefer things to be the way they were. For those who were in the workforce under socialism, autocratic speaking at work reinforced more and more productive speaking. If you teach adult professionals you'll be working with people who were educated and lived in the harsh communist regime still going strong in the 1980's. Teaching this age group might help a native speaker