

Kateřina Králová, Czenglish: A Basic Outline of an EFL Variety

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Reviewer's report

The rapidly increasing pace of globalization in recent years has been accompanied by the rapidly increasing spread of the use of English. In the process, there has been a marked increase in, and of scholarly interest in, local varieties of English. It is one of these, "Czenglish", or the local version of English found in the Czech Republic, that forms the subject of Kateřina Králová's Master's thesis.

Ms Králová's thesis comprises four basic sections, devoted in turn to the theoretical background to the topic, a discussion of the concept of Czenglish and the methodology she has chosen to describe it, the actual description of Czenglish, treated from the point of view of seven levels (phonetic, grammatical, syntactical, and so on) – this forms the bulk of the thesis – and a final brief conclusion. It is followed by two Appendices, the first giving a list of Czech-English false friends, the second consisting of six examples of "Czenglish" texts, analyzed to show the mistakes that have been made.

The first section discusses a number of views on the state of English in Europe, in particular those calling for "the recognition of local varieties of English" (Crystal, p. 8) and for a somewhat simpler version of "European" English (Mondiano, p 9); Ms Králová does not favour any particular view, but opts ultimately for the empirical and pragmatic observation that in any case these local varieties exist and can be studied (it would have been interesting to pursue the question of what Crystal's "recognition" might mean). This stance is linked with the second part of this section, on interlanguage, where the features of an interlanguage are presented, with Czenglish being defined in terms of this concept. Here it might have been worth considering how useful this term is, given that by definition each individual is using a different version of any given interlanguage, and indeed that this is continually changing: in this case, what exactly is gained by calling Czenglish an "interlanguage"? The third part of this section, on "missing categories", is useful and relevant, though as it covers only one of the aspects that will be treated in the consideration of Czenglish that follows, the question perhaps arises as to why this aspect specifically has been accorded special treatment.

"Czenglish in literature and methodology", which follows, offers a good account of the principle works dealing with problematic aspects of the use of English by Czechs (error analysis). The main shortcomings these works point out are summed up, providing a useful background for the more detailed analyses that follow in section three. The second part of this section is not so much "methodology", however, as a straightforward presentation of the categories that are to follow in section three. One point might perhaps be made in this connection: only here, on page 16, is the aim of the thesis clearly stated. For an English-speaking reader, this comes very, very late – rather ironically, a good example of Czenglish in the broadest sense of the word (see chapter 8, "Stylistic level")!

The core of the work follows in chapters 3 to 9, dealing with Czenglish at seven different levels. These are comprehensive and skillfully constructed, weaving back and forth between technical descriptions of various features and phenomena and examples of them in practice. The range of knowledge and references is impressive; Ms Králová shows wide reading and an admirable ability to sum up concepts briefly and clearly and select relevant examples. As the overall quality of these chapters is high, with much useful and accurate information that is well presented, here I will not deal systematically with each of these chapters, or even with this series of chapters as a whole. Instead, I will only make two general comments.

First, one aspect not treated is that of Czenglish over time. This is of course almost a topic in itself, but it raises some basic questions. Is Czenglish changing, and if so, which features are changing most, and why? If there has been change, has this been in a direction that brings it closer to standard English or

away from it? Or, on the contrary, has there been little change over time, indicating that Czenglish is in fact an “interlanguage” whose main features are fairly fixed? And – a related but crucial question – has the impact of English on Czech in the past twenty years been such that “Czenglish” has become less marked simply because Czech itself has moved in a direction closer to English?

Second, there is the question of the relative detail in which the various phenomena are treated. Most exhaustive are chapters 3 and 4, partly because the phenomena under discussion are more or less discrete. As the thesis progresses, however, the topics become less easy to handle in this fashion. This is perhaps inevitable, given that they are unwieldy, but it is a pity more attention could not have been given to some. At the lexico-semantic level, for example, 5.3 “Collocations” could have been expanded. And chapter 6, “Pragmatic level”, with the rich findings of sociolinguistics, could have been very fruitfully treated at greater length. I realize, of course, the limits of a Master’s thesis, and the unbounded nature of the issues in this area; I am mentioning it merely to point out a certain discrepancy in the thesis between highly detailed treatment of some classes of phenomena and very general indications of issues in other areas. This can be seen quite clearly in two chapters found side by side, “Stylistic level” (8) and “Level of Orthography” (9). Whole lines of enquiry are merely referred to in passing in the former, while the latter deals with a few specific problems, some of which are of fairly marginal importance (for example, word division in English).

The conclusion to the thesis is brief, not so much a summing up of the previous chapters or a synthesis of the analyses presented as a brief *adieu* to the reader.

Finally there are the two Appendices. I am not sure how useful the first is, with its list of false friends. It is only one of many such possible lists, and as such strikes me as somewhat arbitrary. Nor is it used to make a point. Moreover, to be fully functional, the Czech meanings of the English “friends” would have to be given. Lastly, not all the entries are entirely correct. “Historie”, for example, can in fact in some cases mean “history”, “process” “process”, and so on.

Appendix 2, with its examples of a range of Czenglish texts corrected, is a very appropriate addendum to the thesis, displaying concretely many of the phenomena described in theory in the course of the work, though it might have been beneficial to include a brief analysis of the most common categories of mistake that occur, in order to compare these with some of the findings in older research quoted in the course of the thesis. These texts are also very useful as a reminder of just how tricky the whole subject is: certainly there are some cases regarded by Ms Králová (and/or her Anglophone colleague) as Czenglish that I would find “normal” (or at least acceptable) in standard English, as well as a few places where I would have made corrections. The frustrations (and glories) of languages not shaped by Academies!

To sum up, this is a very wide-ranging survey of a whole series of phenomena that can be brought under the rubric “Czenglish”, interpreted with a good knowledge of linguistic theory and presented in a clear fashion. As such, it accomplishes very well what it sets out to do – provide an account of Czenglish in which “all the important features at all relevant levels are covered” (page 16). The absence of original research is offset by the way in which Ms Králová has drawn skilfully on such a wide range of reading and presented a valuable synthesis of the research done so far in the form of a systematic outline of the state of Czenglish. As such, I would recommend that the thesis be given a mark of

výborně.

Brno, 16 May 2010


Don Sparling