

**Veronika Quinn Novotná, "World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca: a reflection of global paradigmatic changes in the Czech Republic."**

Ph.D. dissertation assessment

**Reader: Mgr. Tamah Sherman, Ph.D.**

The dissertation is an in-depth exploration of the paradigms of World Englishes (WE) and English as a lingua franca (ELF), and their connections to the situation of English teaching in the Czech Republic at present. This topic is highly contemporarily relevant, providing a wealth of information on paradigms of English in the world, as well as some background on the situation in the Czech Republic. The dissertation is clearly the first of its kind in the Czech Republic and will thus play an important role as a springboard for quality research in the future.

The text consists of four chapters, a list of references, a complete bibliography and a set of twelve appendices. Chapter 1 introduces the problem and the author's approach to it, a set of research questions, divided into five areas: 1) the place and conceptualization of the ELF paradigm in the area of World Englishes, particularly in regard to terminology and its local perception, 2) the evolution of the ELF paradigm and accompanying linguistic and pedagogical issues; 3) the issue of 'mistakes', 'standard' and correctness in the context of the ELF paradigm; 4) WE, ELF, and the situation of language teaching in the Czech Republic; and 5) the perceived problem of non-native speaker status and its management. The author also formulates a set of predictions which, in sum, presume that the influence of the WE and ELF paradigms is not high in the Czech Republic, either in teaching or in learning.

Chapter 2 consists of the brief history and terminological analysis of the emerging paradigm of ELF, above all in the context of World Englishes, including, among others, its relationship to the paradigm of EIL (English as an International Language), various simplified Englishes which have been created over the years, and the concepts of pidgins and creoles.

Chapter 3 is a description of quantitative and qualitative empirical research conducted by the author, the quantitative section consisting of a series of questionnaire surveys conducted with students of English (what is known in pedagogical research as a "needs analysis"); teachers of English (examining their declared qualifications, backgrounds, awareness of different paradigms, the management of their own English skills and their evaluation of issues of correctness) and scientists (representing users of ELF, dealing with the communication situations in which they find themselves). The qualitative section consists of semi-structured interviews with representatives of English departments throughout the Czech Republic, exploring the way in which these teachers regulate and manage (my paraphrase) the varieties of English their students learn, and the degree to which WE and ELF are included in their curricula.

Chapter 4 contains a conclusion and an extensive summary of implications for English teaching in the Czech Republic, above all with a focus on a plurality of teaching models.

The dissertation contains a number of praiseworthy aspects. They are:

- In general, the dissertation is well-organized, the chapters are logically ordered, the connections between various sections and intratextual references are well marked, and the citations are clear.
- The overview of terminology and approaches to World Englishes in chapter 2 is extensive and thorough. Of particular interest is the compilation of various models of simplified Englishes created over the years (page 80), which appears to be one of the most up-to-date and comprehensive summaries of this particular act of organized language management. The extent of the material included in the “models of spread” summary is also impressive.
- The author focuses on a point which, in my opinion, has thus far been overlooked, that is, that the centers of research on the ELF paradigm are not arbitrary, but rather, linked to the specific language situations and dominant research paradigms of their locations.
- The data was collected from a number of different areas in the Czech context of English teaching, learning, and use (students of English, teachers of English, scientists), which are interrelated in an interesting manner. Also, in her interpretation of the results, the author integrates data from the Czech School Inspectorate on language teacher qualifications which point to what I believe to be one of the most essential sociolinguistic issues at hand in regard to English in the Czech Republic – the relationship between socioeconomic issues (such as the local supply and demand of English teachers in this case) and the resulting language biographies, varieties and perceptions of local learners and users.
- The integration of Language Management Theory in one section of the survey research, albeit minimal, is interesting, though its use here is pilot in character. It serves to open the discussion on how this theory could be further used to analyze the rest of the results and the situation of English in the Czech Republic in general.
- The text contains an extensive set of appendices, including an index which is highly useful (though it appears that a few of its items are lacking a page number).

In general, the overview section of the dissertation is one of its stronger aspects, and, in a shortened, slightly reworked version (including the addition of a bit more analysis and the evaluation of the applicability of these paradigms to the Czech situation), would be an appropriate candidate for submission to a journal such as *Brno Studies in English*.

I also have several points of critique. They can be divided into two areas – general, conceptual issues and individual points and formulations.

General conceptual issues:

- The dissertation tries to answer a significant number of questions at once, and it does occur to the reader at certain points that in Chapters 2 and 3 in particular, breadth comes at the expense of depth, i.e. if it would not have been better to select a smaller number of issues for exploration and devote more analysis to them.

- The quantitative section overall lacks generalizability of results, of which the author is demonstrably aware, and she did always provide her respondents with an opportunity to provide further comments, and these further comments are integrated in the analysis. As a reader, I will state up front that quantitative survey research is not my area of expertise and in the ideal case, the text should also have been read by someone whose area of expertise it actually is (e.g. a quantitatively oriented sociologist). What I can offer as a qualitative researcher, however, is the question, particularly in the cases of the surveys with the university students and the English teachers, whether it would not have been more appropriate to instead do a more extensively qualitative study with fewer respondents, for example through semi-structured interviews, ethnographic work in classrooms or meetings of teacher associations, focus group discussions, the analysis of teacher discussion forums, and the like. This is all the more a relevant question given the fact that English as a lingua franca and the approaches to it by the relevant actors in the Czech Republic is a nearly unexplored topic, and thus *ideal* for qualitative analysis. In other words, the author should be able to explain in the defense why the survey method was selected, and furthermore, given that she did choose a quantitative approach (albeit a partial one), how issues of sampling were handled and why the results were not subjected to any sort of statistical analysis.
  
- In the vein of the previous point, overall, there are several places in the quantitative research section in the reporting of the results where the author appears not to properly distinguish between fact and what is reported in her formulations (despite the fact that otherwise she seems to be aware of this difference in other parts of the text). Formulations of varying problematic character in this sense include (but are not limited to): page 116, last paragraph (“students perceive...”, “students would accept...”); page 117, first paragraph (“students identified...”, “students described...”); page 118, second paragraph (“the overwhelming model at elementary schools was...”); page 123, first paragraph (“most students of English (53.8%) consider native-like competence important.”); page 154, statements regarding gender and age. Ideally these results should be formulated as *what was reported during a single survey* (including categories such as gender and age), not as in any way interpretable as fact, which is very much a question of the careful selection of words and formulations.

Selected individual points or formulations:

Page 24 – “The quantitative research part subsumes five different questionnaire surveys in which answers from 587 respondents have been received.” This is slightly misleading - it would be more appropriate to specify that this number was the total of all respondents for all surveys combined.

Page 51 – “Corpus research currently lies at the heart of any empirical linguistic analysis.”. While corpus research may be one recently predominant paradigm in some departments of English, Linguistics, or other philological disciplines, it still remains one of many different forms of empirical linguistic analysis, all of which complement one another. To state that it lies at the heart of this analysis is thus misleading.

Page 68 – The statement “Statistically, there will always be more pre-intermediate to intermediate level speaking users of English than highly proficient ones.” is not explained, and should be.

Page 107 – In discussing the pyramid model, the author states “The proportion will, of course, significantly differ regionally. A larger amount of users of English from more developed regions of the world will have higher English proficiencies than in the less developed ones.” While the first sentence here is appropriate, the second is highly problematic, as it is not clear what “developed” here means, and, overall, what empirical basis exists for this assumption. What if, for example, we were to compare Kenya to Italy in this sense?

Page 227 – the author states “I have interviewed representatives from five cities out of nine (i.e. 56%).” Would it not be better to state the number of relevant departments that were represented in relation to the total number of such departments in the country (earlier it is stated that there are seventeen to twenty)? Also, are we to presume that only state institutions are represented? Also, why was the teacher from Orlová included?

Appendix 12 – It is not entirely clear how the pictures labeled “examples of ELF” are related to the rest of the text.

Finally, I pose several questions for discussion:

- 1) What makes ELF specific, i.e. what is characteristic for ELF communication that cannot be found in communication in other languages, varieties, codes, etc.?
- 2) Given that one of the main topics of the dissertation is the idea of the paradigm shift, what is the connection between research paradigms and social/political activism? How is this reflected in the ELF paradigm?
- 3) If it were possible to formulate an issue through which the Czech situation adds to the overall academic discussion on World Englishes and ELF, what would it be?
- 4) What is the author’s reaction to the criticisms of the ELF paradigm provided by Robert Phillipson and summarized on page 66?
- 5) The use of visualization in order to integrate previously-existing theoretical concepts is the selected method at several points in the dissertation (e.g. models of English spread and use). In footnote 167 on page 98, the author quotes Alastair Pennycook (2009), who states that we ‘need to escape from the circles, tubes and boxes based on nations that have so bedevilled world Englishes and linguistics more generally’. Building on this statement, what advantages and disadvantages arise in this choice of method? What alternatives exist?
- 6) How would the author respond to the argument that ELF is the natural result of the teaching and learning in what were initially referred to by Kachru as ‘outer circle countries’, and thus not necessary to implement as a teaching paradigm?
- 7) What advantages would have come about by taking a qualitative approach in the sections which are labeled as quantitative? Which methods could have been utilized?

In sum:

The text contains some problematic points, yet author clearly put a significant amount of work into it and collected extensive data that is thus far unseen in the Czech academic context (let alone in the field of English Linguistics). The author should thus orient to the problematic issues in the text listed in this assessment, the explanation of their origins and how to improve upon them in reworking individual sections for publication (which may include additional data collection or more extensive analysis of selected data), as well as to the questions posed above in the previous section. Satisfactory responses to these points are thus, in my opinion, a necessary condition for a successful defense.

Tamah Sherman

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