

31 May 2013

Dear Ing. Jeníčková, Ph.D., and Committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to evaluate Patricie Kubáčková's dissertation „Reflexe přechodové zkušenosti...“.

I understand the dissertation as the author's reflection upon the transition of a migrant from one cultural environment to another framed as a descriptive study that was inspired by three sociological studies, as the author wrote. However, from my point of view, the dissertation lacks a thesis, research questions to pursue as well as specific scholarly arguments. Although the author uses the lens of language usage to explain the transitional experience, among others, she does not study it in such a way that it would clarify what the experience was all about but focuses mostly on metaphors and borrowings, which is limiting.

Primary sources: The author chose a thirteen informants of different ages as well as educational and social backgrounds. Their choice was given by their accessibility, which is inadequate, in my opinion. They do not represent prototypical immigrants because such an individual does not exist. Yet, their motivation for migration and complex personal history were not taken into account in presenting their cases. Social networks and communities affecting their acculturation and language usage were neglected as well although they certainly determine both the migrant's self-identity as well as sociolinguistic and cultural outcomes of the migration experience. The author ignored the context of the sending and receiving societies that were also relevant as well as their ideologies (such as that of nation, migrations, social integrity, minority, standard language et al.) and discourse affecting migrants' reception and acculturation.

The author applied the oral history method to elicit her data but failed to complement it by additional research strategies that would yield convincing results. May I suggest that if the focus was to be oral history the author should have focused on specifics of how and for what purpose the informants constructed their biographies (other than the interview itself). For whom and what purpose did the immigrants present their histories? For their real or imagined grandchildren, posterity, oral history project or their own sense of identity? The author did not provide any pre and post interview evaluation. Although all the informants were of the first generation reflecting upon a seemingly identical experience they must have constructed diverse personae despite having shared certain metaphors. Also, many such narratives and personal constructions of one's history are available through immigrant press. I suggest that the author would have a richer database if she complemented her oral histories with written narratives.

The personal histories yielded very unbalanced repertoire of migrants' self-portraits due to unfamiliarity of the author with the individuals she interviewed. The unfamiliarity precludes depending on interviews as the main source of data if PK's goal was to explain transitional experience of first generation migrants to the U.S. Although the author often alludes to limitations of that approach it is also a critical reason for complementing the interviews with additional ways to gather data.

The author presents the immigrant's status as a stigma that discredits his or her social presence and marginalizes his or her activity without taking into account cultural expectations of the majority society at any given time. The immigrant is not an invariant and differences in self-reflections must have yielded important information about his or her cultural and social context.

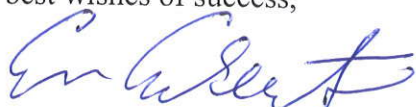
Language is the locus of one's identity and always refers to the culture that operates with and through it the author failed to analyze the actual usage satisfactorily although she intended to, in my opinion. Immigrants' language usage is affected not only by their language management and capacity for self-reflection but also the factors of intercultural communication, personal and social attitudes and maintenance effort. The author elaborated in a limited way on borrowings and calques but failed to provide their typology or to analyze convergence and code-switching although her data must have included a plethora of examples documenting them. I suggest that the transitional experience is documented in the migrant's language a priori, and scholarly literature on the topic abounds.

Czech immigrants' experience in the U.S. was not unique. Their reasoning for passing their first language onto their children or avoiding doing so is common not only among first generation migrants but also minorities, and PK could have elaborated upon that fact. At a doctoral dissertation I'd expect the author to attempt to give at least a partial comparative perspective since she investigated a rather general issue. That way she would also gain a substantial basis for her conclusions.

If the author chooses to rewrite her thesis may I suggest that she focuses on migrants' transition from the scholarly perspective of contemporary intercultural studies and studies in self-identity. If she chooses to pursue the double perspective of explaining both oral histories of the individuals and their language usage I suggest she elaborates upon specific interconnections that have so far been missing in her work. Also, her scholarly framework is very traditional and fails to benefit from contemporary approaches to analyzing language maintenance.

The work lacks a scholarly conclusion that would identify specific theoretical outcomes. From my perspective, this is a critical failure that discredits a dissertation presented at the doctoral level. Having said all that, I have no doubts that the author will successfully defend her research in the near future once she gains the theoretical depth, identifies a scholarly focus that will drive her to solid research findings, learns from additional secondary sources, and provides substantial social and cultural context for the first generation immigrants. At this point, I cannot recommend the dissertation to be approved at the doctoral level.

With best wishes of success,



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