

Book Reviews

Christoph Haase, Natalia Orlova, and Joel Head, eds.
The Foundations and Versatility of English Language Teaching (ELT)
Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018

The research papers collected in this volume reflect the current trend of ELT diversification and the increasing sophistication of this field, which is expanding in two dimensions: while horizontally the field includes more and more approaches and methods, it is also expanding vertically, employing the latest technological advances. As the editors mention in the preface, the possibilities brought about by the boom in digitalization, social media or online learning have enabled linguists to deepen their analyses of corpora in the quantitative as well as qualitative sense, which is apparent in all studies presented by this monograph.

The collection is divided into three sections: *Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching*, *Approaches in English Language Teaching Methodology*, and *ELT Perspectives on Cultural and Literary Studies*. Being a split-personality linguist and didactician myself, I commend any attempts to interweave systematic linguistic research with applied approaches, thus facilitating the encounter of theoretical work with the practical utilization of new research findings. Due to the spatial constraints of this review, the focus here will be on one particular sphere of interest, namely applied phonetics and phonology studies, represented by three contributions: two corpus linguistics studies conducted by Kateřina Šteklová and Christoph Haase, and a study on the differences in the phonemic realization of monophthongs in Czech and English, by Dušan Melen and Monika Hřebačková.

In her study *The Corpus of Czech Adult English: Design, Analysis and Future Expectations*, Kateřina Šteklová presents the process of compiling a large-scale but narrowly-focused spoken corpus consisting of a number of audio recordings which form a database of Czech adult English speakers. This corpus – which has been necessary for a long time – enables broader comparative research to be carried out from both the diachronic and synchronic viewpoints. On one hand, the focus might be placed specifically on the sound of ‘Czenglish’ and its evolution over time, as the data capture is conceived as a longitudinal project of the Department of English at the Faculty of Education in Ústí nad Labem. On the other hand, as the compilation of the corpus was inspired by similar corpora compiled abroad, e.g. the corpus of *Polish Adult English* and the *Eastern European English learner corpus* (gathering Russian, Ukrainian and Slovak spoken English), opportunities for comparative studies of EFL have been created. The fact that “the character of the sound of *Czenglish* might change considerably within the course of a decade” or even “actually slowly disappear”, as Šteklová proposes, can only be ascertained through a longitudinal linguistic analysis – which may now be finally possible. Whether or not such a venture will prove to be a fruitful one may be a matter of sociolinguistic trends; recent developments in the concept of *pronunciation mistakes* seem to favour ELF approaches and respect for linguistic identity over pronunciation modelled on native-spoken or even BBC English

(Jenkins, 2000 and 2007; Walker, 2010).

Kateřina Šteklová and her colleague Christoph Haase offer another corpus-based study focusing deliberately on the *mistakes* produced by non-native students of English in a controlled setting. This second corpus was initiated in cooperation with primary schools in Leeds, forming the basis of the paper *The Leeds Corpus of Czech Learner English: Design Features and Data Collection*. The impetus for the creation of the LCCE was provided by the *Longman Learner Corpus* and the *International Corpus of Learner English*, which includes Englishes from 14 European countries. Apart from an insight into the lexicogrammatical study of learner behaviour in English, the authors again focus on a phonetic analysis of the corpus – in this case promising to focus not only on segmental features, but also on prosody. Nevertheless, the examples provided by section 3.2 of the paper (*Phonological results and future expectations*) include only the different inventory of Czech and English vowels and difficult dental fricatives causing “obvious pronunciation errors”. The terminological problem caused by the interchangeable use of the terms *pronunciation mistake*, *pronunciation error* and *pronunciation problem* poses a question of functionality. Would these *mistakes* be considered problematic in real life communication where context is provided? Could not such segmental *errors* as “producing e or ʌ where æ should be pronounced” be considered as non-native or even non-RP accent features? Specifically, the vowel sound example provided for words like *bag*, *cat* or *man* varies in different parts of Britain, with many northerners pronouncing it as [ʌ]. What about the General American standard pronunciation, which might serve as a model to many of the investigated speakers and thus confuse the pronunciation of [æ] vs. [ɑ:], e.g. in words like *aunt* or *can*? Should not the strict dependency on archaic RP or formal BBC English as model pronunciations in ELT classrooms be contested?

Dušan Melen and Monika Hřebačková from the Masaryk Institute of Advanced Studies in Prague certainly think otherwise, as their contribution *Teaching Vowel Sounds: Differences between English and Czech* continues the criticism of Czech learners of English who “tend to use the Czech vocalic system in their target language”. In accordance with the previously mentioned study, they attribute importance to just two reasons: the lack of early childhood exposure to English and the negligence of instructors; however, the problem of imitating model pronunciation in TL acquisition is much more complex. The authors nevertheless present an erudite theoretical account explaining the differences between BBC English and Czech monophthongs, accompanied by an extensive list of minimal English-Czech pairs for practicing these nuances: e.g. words like *sheet* vs. *šít*, *dull* vs. *dal*, or *doom* vs. *dům*. This practical exemplification of the vowel sounds in question will need the mouth of a skilled instructor and the ear of a trained researcher, but it is definitely worth contemplating for further linguistic as well as pedagogical inquiry.

Bibliography

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