

Habilitation thesis reviewer's report

Masaryk University	Faculty of Education
Faculty	Education
Field of study	<i>PaedDr. Monika ČERNÁ, Ph.D.</i>
Applicant	University of Pardubice - Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, Department of English and American Studies
Unit	<i>Individual histories of learning English</i>
Habilitation thesis (title)	prof. zw. dr hab. Mirosław PAWLAK
Reviewer	Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań – Faculty of Pedagogy and Fine Arts in Kalisz, Department of English Philology and State University of Applied Sciences in Konin, Poland
Unit	

Reviewer's report (the extent of the text is up to the reviewer)

a. Topicality of the theme

The theme selected by the Applicant reflects the latest trends in second language acquisition research and the research questions posed are certainly worthy of investigation. Looking into how individual trajectories of language learners' histories evolve and how they are related to learning outcomes is important as the results are bound to shed light on how learner-internal and learner-external factors enter into interactions to create constellations of variables that are most and least conducive to the effectiveness of the second language learning endeavor. Importantly, being situated in a foreign language context, the study is bound to generate important insights into the processes of formal, non-formal and informal language learning that are not only of vital importance for the Czech educational context but can be generalized beyond it as well, and used as a point of reference for similar instructional settings, such as those in other countries of Central Europe.

b. Approach to the solution

The research project undertaken by the Applicant and her colleagues represents an appropriate approach to the investigation of individual histories of learning English. This is because of an adept combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, with responses to the survey administered to a respectable number of participants providing an impetus for a more in-depth analysis of specific cases. It is particularly interesting that the internal and external factors that were identified as important in participants' learning histories were later related to attainment in various aspects of communicative competence (in particular speaking and pronunciation). This surely allowed more valid observations than would have been possible on the basis of exam grades, scores on standardized tests or learners' self-evaluations.

c. Methodology

As already mentioned above, the choice of methodology, in particular skillful integration of the quantitative and qualitative approaches, is very appropriate to the aims of the study. What

is commendable is careful piloting and validation of the research instruments employed in the study (i.e., the tasks applied to generate spoken language, the questionnaire tapping different learner-internal and learner-external factors, narrative interviews and the corpus of learner language). All the tools have been carefully constructed and although there can be doubts, for example, about how the reading of a diagnostic text or a word list is capable of constituting a true reflection of pronunciation ability, the choices made by the Applicant and her colleagues should be respected, all the more so that the measurement of explicit and implicit knowledge of pronunciation features is bound to pose a major challenge. It should also be added that the quantitative and qualitative analyses have been carefully and meticulously conducted, the former with the help of appropriately selected statistical procedures. What is important, the Applicant is fully cognizant of the limitations that the study suffers from.

d. Quality and accuracy of results

The presentation of the results is extremely detailed, meticulous, and well thought-out. The analytical procedures have been carefully applied, which translates into high quality of the obtained results. With respect to the accuracy of the outcomes, judging from the description of the data-collection instruments, the research procedures and all the supporting information included in the appendices, there is no reason to assume that there are any problems in this respect.

e. Originality of results

There have been a lot of studies investigating the impact of internal and external factors on the process of language learning but in most cases only single pieces of the puzzle have been examined. This study is exceptional in that it looks into different constellations of factors and links them to attainment with respect to different aspects of communicative competence (e.g., pronunciation, grammar, pragmatics). While its results may not be particularly illuminating and some of them could even be called predictable (e.g., the importance of attitudes), the investigation of the link to specific aspects of target language attainment is enlightening. Additionally, I am not aware of many studies that would seek to provide an overall picture of factors shaping language learning histories and leading to certain levels of achievement, set in a particular, clearly-defined educational context. In this perspective, the research project is highly original, not only in the Czech context but also internationally. In fact, I am convinced that, if its results are published in international journals or disseminated in other ways, the study has considerable potential to provide an impulse for similar empirical investigations in other contexts.

f. Applicability of results for the field development and further research

The results of the study make a major contribution to our understanding of how internal and external factors shape the process of second language acquisition and ultimately influence the outcomes of the learning process. As stated above, they are bound to provide an impulse for further research studies that would address other combinations of factors in other contexts, also perhaps examining their effects on aspects of proficiency operationalized in a diversity of ways (e.g., other speaking tasks or tasks specifically addressing the subsystems and skills in the target language).

g. Applicability of results in practice

The results have important implications for both language education in the foreign language context and for the training of pre-service and in-service foreign languages teachers in such contexts. In particular, they point to the need to foster positive attitudes, effectively promote learners' motivation and encourage an autonomous approach to the task of foreign language learning. They also alert us to the fact that teacher training programs should be modified so that they are more effective in preparing foreign language teachers to successfully deal with the multitude of external and internal factors that are bound to shape the process and product of foreign language education in different contexts and at different educational levels.

h. Format and language of the work

The work has been carefully formatted and it has been written in very good English that fully complies with the requirements of the academic style. These factors only enhance the quality of the work and increase the chances of its becoming a major point of reference for the field.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence (number of questions up to the reviewer) ...

1. On the basis of the results you obtained, please discuss the evidence for the dynamic nature of the individual factors that you have investigated (e.g., motivation, attitudes).
2. What other individual difference factors could be addressed in the future to shed more light on individual histories of learning English. Please explain and comment on how the role of such factors could be investigated in future studies.

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis submitted by Monika ČERNÁ entitled *Individual histories of learning English meets* the requirements applicable to habilitation theses in the field of Education.

The evaluation is based on the habilitation thesis as well as the review of the Applicant's track of publications and conference papers.

In Konin on 23rd March, 2018

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