A Review of a Final Thesis

submitted to the Department of English and ELT Methodology,
Faculty of Arts, Charles University

Name and titles of the reviewer: Luca Cilibrasi, PhD
Reviewed as: ☒ a supervisor ☐ an opponent

Author of the thesis: Tina Skočilová
Title of the thesis: The development of Czech pupils' L2 phonology assessed with a reading task

Year of submission: 2020
Submitted as: ☒ a bachelor's thesis ☐ a master's thesis

Level of expertise:
☒ excellent ☐ very good ☐ average ☐ below average ☐ inadequate

Factual errors:
☒ almost none ☐ appropriate to the scope of the thesis ☐ frequent less serious ☐ serious

Chosen methodology:
☒ original and appropriate ☐ appropriate ☐ barely adequate ☐ inadequate

Results:
☒ original ☐ original and derivative ☐ non-trivial compilation ☐ cited from sources ☐ copied

Scope of the thesis:
☐ too large ☒ appropriate to the topic ☐ adequate ☐ inadequate

Bibliography (number and selection of titles):
☒ above average (scope or rigor) ☐ average ☐ below average ☐ inadequate

Typographical and formal level:
☐ excellent ☒ very good ☐ average ☐ below average ☐ inadequate

Language:
☐ excellent ☒ very good ☐ average ☐ below average ☐ inadequate

Typos:
☒ almost none ☐ appropriate to the scope of the thesis ☐ numerous

Overall evaluation of the thesis:
☒ excellent ☐ very good ☐ average ☐ below average ☐ inadequate

Brief description of the thesis (by the supervisor, ca. 100-200 words):

This thesis presents an experimental study investigating the development of phonology in Czech children learning English in primary school. The study uses a standardised reading task as its methodology, and it includes two groups of 20 children, divided according to their age of onset to English. The results show that age of onset plays only a minimal role in the sample analysed, contradicting previous studies on different languages. In addition, the study also presents relevant experimental data on the strategies used by Czech children to read in English (that seem to favour grapheme-phoneme conversion, a strategy very effective in Czech but often misleading in English). Both these findings are original and may be informative for future research and for teaching practices.

Review, comments and notes (ca. 100-200 words)

This is an excellent thesis, completed by the student with methodological rigour and precision. The thesis deals with an interesting theoretical question (the role of age of onset in the development of L2 phonology) and it tackles this question investigating a group of children that has not received much attention in the literature, that of Czech learners of English in primary school. The choice of using a reading task is original, and it has the advantage of offering standardised measures of these children's skills, as well as offering additionally an insight into the reading strategies adopted by Czech children when reading in their L2.

Strong points of the thesis:

The study has a simple and clear design, and the student completed each part of the research with impressive reliability. The treatment of the data appears as particularly compelling, since the student provided an extensive quantitative analysis and a complete and fine-grained qualitative analysis. In this process the student showed an understanding of statistics that is not common in BA students, and it also showed a commitment to describing phenomena in their subtle nuances (especially when looking at the qualitative analysis).

Weak points of the thesis:

The qualitative analysis would have benefited from an inter-reliability assessment. Unfortunately, time constraints did not allow for it to be performed. There are a few formatting issues in different sections of the thesis, particularly in the reference list.

Questions to answer during the Defence and suggested points of discussion:

Your study shows minimal differences in the two groups with different age of onset. What would be your prediction if a group of simultaneous bilinguals was included in your research?

Can you think of alternative ways of assessing the development of phonology? What are weaknesses and strengths of the method you used?

Other comments:

The candidate showed great reliability, rigour and scientific curiosity. This is a great piece of work and I recommend grade one.

Proposed grade:
☒ excellent   ☐ very good   ☐ good   ☐ fail

Place, date and signature of the reviewer:
Prague, 24-08-2020