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Review of the PhD entitled

DEFINING THE FORTIS/LENIS AND VOICELESS/VOICED DISTINCTION OF CONSONANTS IN WELSH AND ENGLISH (DEFINIOWANIE PODZIAŁU NA SPÓŁGŁOSKI MOCNO I SŁABO ARTYKUŁOWANE ORAZ DŹWIĘCZNE I BEZDŹWIĘCZNE W JĘZYKU WALIJSKIM I ANGIELSKIM)

written by mgr Michał Grzegorz Baran

The present doctoral research has effectively provided phonetic evidence that supports the assertion that Welsh is a fortis-lenis language as opposed to a voiceless-voiced language. Consequently, this has led to the establishment of distinctive minimal pairs, which are notably dissimilar from those in English. This confirmation underscores the classification of these languages within separate language branches and prompts scholars of English to reconsider their explanations regarding the nature of the English consonant system.

The title of the work could imply that it is a contrastive study of Welsh and English, but the focus of the research is on the Welsh language. This can easily be justified by the fact that there are much less works on Welsh than there are on English, that Welsh is endangered and English is not (at least not in the same way and not by Welsh), that Welsh is much more prone to be destabilised by English influence and distorted teaching than the other way around, but it should still be mentioned. For a full contrastive study, the author would have to collect data from English speakers and analyse them the same way he did for Welsh. This he has not done which means that he did not use the same methodology for both languages.

The author starts by defining the research question whether distinctions in the Welsh laryngeal system should be regarded as voiced vs. voiceless or rather lenis vs. fortis and also discusses the implications with regard to the Initial Consonant

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Mutation (ICM) which is a rather unique feature of the insular Celtic languages and one which is often perceived by learners as weird and complicated. He also discusses English as a contact language which is highly necessary because a) the long language contact must have left traces in the system of both languages b) English is the language usually used to teach Welsh c) most learners have English as their first language or at least they have a decent command of English. b) and c) can easily have influence on the language being taught so given the comparatively large number of learners compared to the number of native speakers with full linguistic competence there is a danger of distorting the language.

Next, the author discusses the theoretical phonetical background such as airstream mechanism, place and manner of articulation and so on; while this should not be strictly necessary for fellow phoneticians and phonologists, it is still required to make the work palatable for a wider linguistic audience. He closes the chapter with a comparison of Welsh and English again.

The main part of the research, the phonetic study of the selected Welsh consonant, comprises about a third of the whole book. The author's methodology consists of well-established field-work methods with the usual, but for practical reasons unavoidable (theoretical) shortcomings of using carrier phrases. Twelve speakers also seems a good number; much more could hardly be handled in the scope of a PhD project (phonetic analysis is extremely time-consuming) without promising to give significantly different results.

The results and there discussion reveal that the results are astonishing. I would have expected that the fortis consonant would correlate strongly with [-voiced] and the lenis ones would correlate with [+voiced] in a similar manner. However, Mgr Baran has shown that this is not the case: The opposition fortis - lenis is the distinctive one. Voiceless/voiced seems to be triggered by something else and does not correlate with fortis - lenis.

Upon reviewing the author's research outcomes, it becomes evident that the Welsh phonetic system remains largely intact and has the potential to thrive in its current contact situation with global English in spite of being rather different. Therefore, it needs to be accurately described and taught in order to preserve the language in an authentic state, especially since the conventional classification typically applied to Indo-European consonant inventories does not align well with the Welsh language. The same is true for the sonority feature which is usually even regarded as a linguistic universal.

These findings have practical implications for efficient teaching of Welsh and a more straightforward access to this language. The doctoral research also establishes a clear connection between Welsh phonetics and the language's grammar, particularly the Initial Consonant Mutation (ICM) system, which has not been identified in any other Indo-European language group and is rarely found in languages worldwide. Consequently, the implications of this research extend to comparative linguistics, theoretical linguistics, and sociolinguistics. Of course, the results need to be verified and discussed in native-speaker discourse.

Scholars who have previously questioned the universality of the voice-voiceless distinction in all languages now have an additional example to challenge this claim. The sonority scale requires reevaluation, the categorization of consonants needs adjustment for Welsh (as also seen in research on Breton by Bednarska). Moreover, Welsh language manuals should incorporate minimal pairs such as *ei merch - ei ferch*, *ei drws - ei ddrws* based on the Welsh phonetic system rather than rely-

ing on imitated pronunciations from various English varieties, especially for consonants that do not exist in English (ie. ch, rh, ll) or those produced differently from their English counterparts with similar graphemic representations. Currently, most Welsh manuals use English phonetics as a foundation for illustrating the p-Celtic Welsh language, which can lead to confusion among potential learners.

The doctoral candidate has demonstrated an ability to formulate innovative ideas for describing linguistic features, even if he diverges from conventional or self-defined "standard" publications. Furthermore, he has shown his capacity to test these ideas by crafting a suitable methodology and subsequently engaging in rigorous theoretical analysis.

During the process of developing his methodology, the doctoral candidate recognized the critical importance of conducting fieldwork. This is a dimension that is notably absent from most widely recognized publications on Welsh phonetics and phonology by leading publishers. His research underscores that fieldwork is indispensable for reaching conclusive conclusions that accurately characterize language-specific structures and mechanisms. This is in contrast to relying on assumptions influenced by globally dominant contact languages that are widely spoken and promoted. However, the author had to rely on the relatively small number of samples he had at his disposal which means that some things are not covered in his research like variations of pronunciation (especially in the examples for [dʒ] on p. 43). Mgr Baran is well aware of that since he has also formulated a set of desired improvements associated with this project, which he hopes will be addressed in subsequent studies. These future studies should build upon a substantially enlarged dataset to provide a more robust foundation for his findings and theory, and a base for possible further refinement. Another lesson learned from the current investigation is the importance of engaging in extensive international discourse regarding one's ideas.

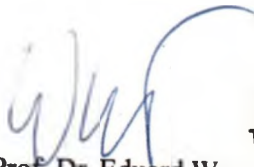
The PhD thesis has been composed in accordance with the academic English standards mandated by our universities. To illustrate his discoveries effectively, the author has incorporated an appropriate number of graphs displaying his measurements and figures, presenting his innovative findings in a comprehensible and visually appealing manner.

Finally, the candidate illustrates that there is value in drawing inspiration from historical concepts and reevaluating them in the context of contemporary research methodologies.

So the work has no substantial shortcomings, the few very minor glitches should have no impact as they can easily be edited before publishing. E.g., the author says that there are three main approaches to analysing the laryngeal features but names only two (p. 7). The interpretation of yn as a preposition in sentences like Yr wyf yn darllen, although logical from a diachronic point of view, would need further explanation (at least a footnote) because the verbal noun darllen does not exhibit ICM in this position. On p. 41 he contests the „fact that /p, t, k/ are unaspirated word-finally“ which is slightly confusing since facts cannot be contested, only claims or assertions. On p. 46, I found it surprising both from my own experience with Welsh as from the theoretical standpoint of this work, that the author did not note aspiration (only devoicing) in mhen, nhad, nghi. Since all three are ICM forms of pen, tad, ci (all three with word-initial aspirated plosives) it would be interesting to learn whether the aspiration gets lost due to nasalisation which I doubt. And it is even more doubtful that the author has really been able to use a late-2017 Macbook Air back in 2013 (p. 59).

The candidate showed that he can develop a valid theory for phonetic description based on a) substantial reading of relevant historical and latest research literature and their analysis and b) a valid methodology he developed himself. He also showed that he is capable of collecting and analysing linguistic data to support his theory.

The PhD-thesis most definitely meets all the requirements of a qualification work to obtain the Doctor's degree and I highly recommend initiating all the necessary procedures to confer the title upon the doctoral candidate.



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