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Review of the doctoral dissertation by Emiliana Russo
entitled *An investigation into Shakespeare's Original Pronunciation (OP): Systematising*
debates and data, and exploring OP at the Globe in the 21st century
prepared under the academic supervision of
Prof. Iolanda Plescia and Prof. Rafał Boryśławski

The thesis submitted for review contains two volumes: the first volume includes an introduction, four chapters, conclusions and bibliography, and consists of 335 pages; the second volume contains 9 appendices (A – F) amounting to 256 pages. As stated by the author, the main aim of the thesis is to “systematise 21st-century scholarly debates and information on OP and related theatrical productions”, the task that has been successfully performed.

Structure of the Thesis

Although the body of the thesis is divided into four chapters, there is also quite a clear division into two parts depending on the main topic. The first two chapters deal with

linguistic issues: the reconstruction of Shakespeare's Original Pronunciation (OP), the literature on the subject, as well as the similarities and differences between the quality of postulated sounds in given words. Then the author moves on to the discussion on the theatre productions that used OP: an analysis of actors' performance, a reception of plays, and an impact of OP on the interpretation of the plays. The text is supplemented with tables and several appendices containing quite impressive additional material. The whole thesis is well-organized, it is obvious that the author is confident about the employed methods and, consequently, reaches the goals that have been established.

Substantive evaluation

1. Significance of the research problem

For her PhD, Emiliania Russo has chosen the topic that has so far not been presented in such a way. As mentioned before, it falls within the area of linguistics, literature, and theatre studies making the thesis truly interdisciplinary. This combination of various perspectives allows the author to provide a link between the linguistic level of Shakespeare's plays, their new interpretations, and the way the productions using OP are received by the 21st century audience. In this, the thesis is undoubtedly innovative and attempts to present the problem of pronunciation in a very wide context and from unique perspective.

The shape of OP has been the subject of debate for many years now and so far little consensus has been reached among linguists. With the figure of David Crystal and his works, the topic has become much more popular leading to the employment of OP in theatrical productions. Emiliania Russo's dissertations systematises and compares alternative approaches favoured by several authors of dictionaries published in the 21st century. Of those, the reconstruction by David Crystal stands out throughout the dissertation, which, however, is quite natural since it was his system that served as the base for Globe performances discussed in the text. Since OP has been more and more often used for theatre productions in the 21st century, all the problems surrounding it are very real: especially its historical credibility, consistency, sociolinguistic variations, articulation, and comprehension. Emiliania Russo attempts to refer to all those issues, which makes her

dissertation exceptional and valuable for wide audience, including both academic and non-academic societies.

It needs to be added that the author herself quite convincingly explains the choice of the topic and the scope of the dissertation in the Introduction and at the beginning of chapter 1. She points to the incompleteness of the early studies on OP and the evolving Crystal's system, and stresses the fact that there is no work that would gather the 21st century voices concerning the value and reception of OP. I also wish to emphasise that, contrary to what the author expected, saying: "One may then counter that the scope of my thesis is too broad, and that, given my specialisation in English linguistics, I should have limited myself to selecting the 21st-century reconstructions without an exploration of the theatrical sphere and its debates" (p.8), although a linguist, I consider the part on theatrical sphere almost equally valuable to that on linguistic reconstruction.

2. Research methodology (assumptions, objectives, hypotheses, methods)

The author employs various methods which are selected each for a particular problem. OP material presented in chapter 2 is the result of critical comparison of five different sources (p.32-33), while the discussion on theatrical performances relies on the selected reviews and interviews, which are then further interpreted. The production of sounds by actors was evaluated by the author herself on its comparison to the transcript and then collected in the tables. The methods are adapted to the problems tackled and they bring expected results. Obviously, one may here question the reliability of a "human ear" and wish for a more objective method of evaluation, still the sounds in question do not seem to be difficult for identification. Moreover, what actually counts in this analysis is whether the sounds are identical to the pre-transcribed ones or not rather than their exact quality.

What deserves much praise is the author's tendency to question the meaning of all terms. Even terms that in most sources are treated as obvious, such as e.g. *rhyme*, *pun*, or even *appreciation*, are discussed in detail and given a precise definition in the dissertation. And although this is a truly scholarly approach to the problem and the most obvious solution to avoid misunderstandings, I regret to say that it is still not a very common procedure in doctoral dissertations.

The research questions are clearly stated in the abstract and within the body of the dissertation. To those belong:

- an attempt to provide an outline of OP and its use in theatre,
- a systematisation of 21st -century scholarly debates and information on OP and related theatrical productions,
- questioning the complete reliability of some tools, and
- showing greater or lesser differences between scholarly reconstructions and within the reconstructions by the very same linguist.

The author comes back to those issues not only in the final conclusions but also in the concluding sections present in each chapter, which much facilitates reading. Since various aims are the subject of different chapters, I further discuss them in the next part of this review.

2. Detailed assessment of particular chapters of the dissertation

The first chapter of the dissertation discusses Original Pronunciation with the focus on its presentation in the 21st-century literature. It begins with the tools used for reconstruction and then presents phonological systems postulated by five sources. Although the dissertation focuses on the 21st-century, earlier publications are also presented, which well shows the roots and development of the linguistic thought. It needs to be underlined that already here the author begins questioning the often postulated importance of rhymes in the process of reconstruction, using as arguments their various types and the common presence of impure rhymes. She treats this and also other tools with caution as befits a true historical linguist. The phonemes are discussed one by one with the information what realization each of the five sources assumes with reference to the lexical sets provided by Wells (1982). I find this last element problematic – while it is quite clear in the case of sets such as, e.g., KIT (for /ɪ/), DRESS (for /e/), or GOAT (for /o:/), some other sets are quite controversial. One of those is NURSE. On pp.37-38, we read “Lass seems to put forward this phoneme [i.e. the phoneme /ɪ/, AW] but to associate it with the NURSE set; yet, the question mark next to the lexical set shows the uncertain nature of my assignation. Lass asserts that “[b]ird, heard and word would have distinct vowels (before a pronounced r) [...], namely the vowels of modern *bit*, *bet* and *put*” – this statement is unclear to me as I do not see how it

can justify associating the phoneme [ɪ] with the set NURSE. The same set is listed under /e/ and /ʊ/ (always with a question mark), which seems to suggest that the words belonging to the NURSE set were all pronounced with three different sounds, which is misleading. I find it odd that the author provided NURSE in those places without any explanation as to the nature of this set back in EModE. And while the discussion on vowels is well illustrated with tables, I believe that an addition of another table/chart showing how a certain word was pronounced according to various scholars would be of great benefit. And would much help in the case of sets like the above-mentioned one.

Chapter 2 focuses on suprasegmental dimension and regional and foreign sounds in OP. Discussed here are elements such as metre, tone, intonation, contractions, which are often omitted in publications of Shakespeare's language. This makes the sections quite a valuable piece of linguistic literature. Equally beneficial are the passages on regional varieties of English and foreign sounds in OP, especially that Appendix C provides an excellent illustration of regional features. I believe a similar appendix for French-accented English, in spite of the scarcity of the material, would also be welcome and much regret it was not included. And even though at this stage, the sections on non-standard pronunciations do not add much since it is almost impossible to find concrete examples in Shakespeare's texts, that part is much appreciated as an introduction to the later passages on actors' pronunciation during the performances.

Chapter 3 moves away from pure linguistic discussion to the field of theatre. And just like the two previous chapters reveal the author's broad knowledge of linguistic literature, this chapter shows that she is also proficient in the area of theatre studies. One cannot but appreciate her meticulous tracing of OP performances, search for details concerning the productions, identification of academic and non-academic texts and utterances on the plays, etc. Here the author advocates an interesting idea that the usage of OP instead of RP results in the disconnection of characters from the posh variety, which has positive influence on their perception. In one case, the phrasing should be corrected: "the repetition of the sound [aɪ] – absent in Modern English" is not an accurate statement since the diphthong exists in many varieties, thus "Modern English" should be replaced here by "Standard English". The chapter covers issues which are difficult, if not impossible, to measure: associations, actorial effects, movement, interpretation, etc., thus it has to be underlined that numerous

statements are merely impressions. However, the author is aware of that fact and never falls into authoritative language, always reminding the reader what is not objective and should not be fully trusted. She also attempts to find all types of data that could contribute to the assessment of OP, including testimonies, time of applause, members of audience's words, and others. To those, she adds a thorough analysis of reviews extracting passages referring to comprehension. My suggestion to this chapter is to include the way of pronunciation in the case of all puns quoted – many of them are mentioned without stating why they are puns in OP and a transcription in brackets would be helpful.

The final chapter focuses on two performances of Shakespeare's plays in OP, i.e. "Romeo and Juliet" and "Troilus and Cressida". The discussion of the language includes the list of recovered rhymes and their production on the stage. The analysis shows that not all rhymes that appear in OP were correctly rendered by actors and thus they were never truly recovered. Those that were produced, the author claims, sometimes intensify certain notions in the play (e.g. the notion of death in "Romeo and Juliet"). This is a valuable hypothesis that, however, needs to be further tested for other Shakespeare's plays. I have one doubt here: the definition of a rhyme adopted for the thesis is that of "the linkage in poetry of two syllables at line end [...] that have identical stressed vowels and subsequent phonemes but differ in initial consonant(s) if any are present— syllables that, in short, begin differently and end alike" (p.191) – so it mentions "identical stressed vowels". I understand then that the author assumes that in the pair like *remedy* – *die* the former word have two stresses (on the first and last syllable), as mentioned on p.200, but that still does not explain the pair *joy* – *lady*, listed in Tables 4.6. and 4.7., as it would be impossible to move the stress in *lady* to the second syllable (another such example is *ready* – *die* in Table 4.13.). Why was then this pair listed? I also wonder whether the pair /alo:ne/ – /o:ne/ (Table 4.5.) was indeed transcribed by Crystal with /e/ at the end (should it not rather been schwa if anything?) – the transcription provided in his dictionary (2016) does not contain the final vowel. Due to the comparison of two different plays, the author reaches interesting conclusions concerning their comprehensibility, which, at least to some extent, seems to have depended on the spectators' previous knowledge of the text. The whole discussion, which takes under consideration numerous factors, leads the author to conclude that on the one hand, the usage of OP restores rhymes that may contribute to the theme of the play and can affect the

interpretation and delivery of the text, but on the other hand, the comprehensibility of OP may be problematic since it depends on many different factors such as acquaintance with the text, acoustic equipment, and actors' performance. She also questions the too-optimistic opinions of linguists assuming almost complete comprehensibility of OP. These conclusions logically follow from the discussion and open space for further examination of OP's impact not only on Shakespeare's texts but also on the audience. I must admit that I find the last sections in this chapter problematic. The passages on "Henry V" contribute very little, if anything, to the whole dissertation and I cannot understand the decision to include them. This seems like an introduction to another work rather than the concluding sections of this PhD dissertation. And much as I appreciate the huge effort put in the transcription of the play, it fits neither the place nor the topic and adds nothing new to the discussion. Similarly, the information about the structure of Crystal's dictionary could be placed at the beginning of the thesis, where this publication is introduced but not in the place that should be devoted to conclusions reached by the author. Perhaps the author could justify her decision to include those sections in the text.

The last part entitled "Conclusions" summarizes the whole dissertation and groups all the results and conclusions that have been reached. The author stresses those elements of the thesis that are typically omitted in literature on OP, including the discussion on regional and foreign sounds, and poses further research questions concerning the relation between reconstructed sounds and their employment in theatrical performances. The section on advantages and disadvantages of OP in the theatre smartly sums up all the pros and cons of such a connection which could, in fact, serve as a manual for theatre directors willing to stage Shakespeare in OP.

3. References

The bibliography is really impressive and includes all the main publications concerning the language of Shakespeare, Early Modern English, and performing Shakespeare in the theatre. To those are added dictionaries, articles, reviews, blog entries, video and audio recordings, etc. The publications are mostly dated to the 21st century, with the most recent coming from 2024 (i.e. the year of submission of the dissertation), but there are also texts published at the beginning of the 19th century. All this shows that Emiliana Russo is very well acquainted


with relevant literature. Additionally, as the references in the text show, she has the ability to critically assess the texts, select appropriate passages, and properly refer to them. With so many entries in bibliography, she almost managed to avoid mistakes: only in some entries one may see the lack of consistency regarding the usage of small vs. capital letters in titles of articles.

4. Language and editorial aspects of the dissertation

From the linguistic and editorial side, the reviewed doctoral dissertation can only be assessed as more than satisfactory. The author has an exceptional command of academic English and it is almost impossible to find any flaws in the text, lexical or grammatical. A few things I noticed fall into the category of typos (e.g. additional full stops) – the text reads more like a published book than a PhD dissertation. The thesis is also very carefully crafted in terms of document editing, which is logical and consistent throughout the text with much attention paid to details.

FINAL CONCLUSION

Regardless of some doubts and questions listed above, I highly evaluate Emiliana Russo's PhD dissertation. The candidate shows general theoretical knowledge that goes far beyond historical linguistics, or even linguistics, she proves her abilities to think critically, individually conduct academic research, and suggest original solutions. This work demonstrates that she is a fully developed scholar. Therefore, I readily acknowledge that this thesis under review meets the statutory requirements (Article 187 Law on Higher Education and Science of July 20, 2018) and may constitute the basis to confer a PhD degree in linguistics. I request that this thesis be permitted to be defended publicly.



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