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Introduction: English in Central Europe¹

With its international prominence in today's world, English is in contact (to greater or lesser degrees) with most languages and societies around the globe. The results of that contact vary from location to location, depending on both the linguistic and the socio-cultural factors of the particular local context. This special issue of *ELOPE* focuses on the presence of English specifically in Central Europe and its interaction with the languages and societies of the region.

English began its global spread in the 18th century with the rise of the British Empire and its colonization practices, where English was the language of power and opportunity in the colonies. The rise of English to the status of a truly international language began after the Second World War, in part due to the influence of the economically powerful USA. But what is perhaps surprising is how quickly English has spread around the world to date (McKenzie 2010, 1). The majority of English speakers today learned English as a second language – the ratio of speakers of English as a first language to non-first language speakers is estimated to be 1:3 (Peterson 2020, xvi).

In continental Europe, English is now widely used in private and public life and education, and is therefore, in many locations, more an additional language than a foreign language (Phillipson 2007, 124). Contributing to this status are the facts that: English has become the most widely taught foreign language in the world (Peterson 2020, 131); it is currently the most widely used language on the internet (Jeon, Jullien, and Klimenko 2021); and it is highly dominant in the music and entertainment industry (Hjarvard 2004, 86). In Europe, pupils start learning English at school mostly between the ages of 6 and 12 (Peterson 2020, 4). English was the most widely spoken foreign language in 19 of the 25 EU countries surveyed in 2012 that did not have it as an official language. As many as 67% of Europeans considered English to be one of the most useful languages, and 79% saw English as the most useful language for their children's future (European Commission 2012, 5–7, 21, 69, 80).

This special issue seeks to provide a series of vignettes of the role, status, and influence of English in Central Europe. We readily acknowledge that Central Europe is a concept that is difficult to pin down geographically, socially, and politically, since it is in some cases defined by historical roots (despite differences in 20th-century social and political developments; see, for example, Becker and Wheatley 2021; Caragliu 2022), while other conceptualizations build specifically on more recent commonalities of experience (in the last 50–100 years; see, for example, Berend 1996; Labov 2019). At the same time the concept persists precisely because

¹ We gratefully acknowledge the textual and bibliographical contributions of Ina Poteko to paragraphs two and three of this introduction.

it is a useful one, in that it captures an area with some common socio-cultural traditions that in many ways create a recognizable milieu and a feeling of familiarity.

The contributions to this special issue on “English in Central Europe” span the present-day geo-political space of Slovenia, Slovakia, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Austria; and they cover a disciplinary span from phonetics to discourse, and from linguistic landscapes to experimental psycholinguistics. What is common across this geographical and disciplinary variety and scope is a focus on the effects of English in contact with local languages and in the context of local cultures. This special issue brings together research that includes the history of English language use in local contexts; variation and change in linguistic structures of local languages induced by contact with English; English in competition with local languages across societal domains of use; societal reception of the use of English in local contexts; as well as acquisition of English conditioned by local L1s, which can perhaps be seen as resulting in contact varieties of English developed through contact with local languages.

The papers are organized according to the language(s) with which English is in contact. Nada Šabec guides us through the linguistic landscape of Maribor, Slovenia, drawing our attention to the increasing presence of English in Slovene public signage and the potential legal and societal ramifications of that phenomenon. Monika Kavalir and Ina Poteko report on a large-scale survey of the attitudes and practices of Ljubljana university students toward the significant presence of English across many facets of their daily lives in Slovenia. Adela Böhmerová assembles a diverse array of scattered historical information to weave together the story of the earliest contacts of Slovak speakers with English, taking us from Slovakia to the United States and back again. Martin Ološtiak and Soňa Rešovská then demonstrate some of the present-day outcomes of English-Slovak language contact, giving a thorough linguistic description of the borrowed lexicon of English words in the most recent 30 years of Slovak language development and change. The effects of English on present-day Polish are the focus of Magdalena Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn’s examination of dominant English discourse practices in the societally influential world of capitalist marketing. Markéta Malá, Gabriela Brůhová, and Kateřina Vašků then turn to the field of economics to investigate the acquisition of international English academic writing conventions in the use of reporting verbs by Czech university students. Continuing in the field of language acquisition, Eva Maria Luef, Pia Resnik, and Tomáš Gráf deploy psycholinguistic experimentation to study the learning of new phonetic detail in English by Czech and Austrian university students. And last, but certainly not least, Jiřina Dunková and Veronika Quinn Novotná offer a plaidoyer for a more extensive and inclusive view of the world of literary production in English in the teaching of English as a Second Language in the Czech Republic (and beyond).

The range and variety of the work in this volume provide strong evidence of the significant presence of English in the social and linguistic fabric of the Central European region, and also evidence of the vibrant community of researchers investigating that presence of English in the region. We are grateful to the authors for their dedicated work on the articles that appear in this special issue, and we would like to thank the following scholars who contributed to the volume by reviewing manuscripts: Kozma Ahačič, Jason Blake, Gregor Chudoba, Biljana Čubrović, Markus Giger, Adam Jaworski, Helen Kelly-Holmes, Vesna Lazović, Christina

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