Review of Doctoral Tesis

Author of Thesis: **Ewa Kusz**

Title of Thesis: **Musical Intelligence and Its Impact on English Pronunciation Skills in the Process of Second Language Acquisition**

University: **Rzeszów University, Institute of English Philology**

The doctoral thesis under review is aimed at investigating the intriguing sphere of musical intelligence and its correlation with linguistic intelligence. The scholars accepting the existence of multiple intelligences have been spotlighting this relationship since several centuries ago, though due to its cultural and time-related complexity with only partial and rather inconclusive results, and indicating the need for further research. Hence, the theme of the present thesis is both theoretically topical and pragmatically relevant, as the author focuses her research on the correlation of musical intelligence with the second language acquisition and the particular aspects of the spoken command of second language, as manifested and tested on the pronunciation of the Polish University students of English philology.

The thesis of Mrs. Kusz is transparently and logically structured into five chapters. It progresses from a historical survey of approaches to the study of the concept of intelligence and the place of musical intelligence within the sphere of multiple intelligences, to the review of related recent theoretical literature, together with outlining the author's own research methodology. The core of the thesis is represented by the author's defining her research procedure and its results, while the last chapter presents the discussion of the results, followed by a concise conclusion.

With regard to the overall structuring of the thesis, the surveys of the existing related literature, together with introducing the tools for measuring musical intelligence, take up more than 80 pages, which in a thesis of 195 pages (moreover, part of the space taken up by numerous Figures and Tables), seems rather disproportionate. Of course, a thorough overview of the existing works is welcome for outlining the development of thought on the concept of intelligence by philosophers, logicians, psychologists, etc., for placing the research into a wider context and highlighting the historical progress and evolution of different opinions, but this survey covers as much as nearly half of the thesis. It is based on incorporating and/or recapitulating statements in the sources, some questionable with regard to their status in the thesis. This has been found to be the case of subchapter 1.3 entitled *Historical views of intelligence*, where the selection and enumeration of earliest and later European philosophers

(*Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Montaigne, Hobbes, Pascal, Locke, Kant, Smith, Mill, Darwin and Galton*, and *James*) and all the information about them (pp. 21 to 31) is practically taken over from one book, i.e. Sternberg's *Metaphor's of Mind: Conceptions of the Nature of Intelligence* (1990) (pp. 23-31). This also includes the same quotes from the works of the given scholars as they appear in Sternberg's book, as well as the references to other authors (mostly Gardner), but presented as if the references were made by the author of the thesis. In addition, at the beginning of the chapter or later, no mention can be found that would indicate that the historical survey is based nearly exclusively on Sternberg. Moreover, his text is incorporated into the thesis in a rather specific way, with modifications involving occasional replacements of his words by synonyms, changes in the order of sentences, or dropping parts of the text, while otherwise the text in the thesis and its content and its structure is the same as in Sternberg. On the whole, such approach is not only to the detriment of the given sections of the thesis, but also weakens the credibility of the author and potentially throws negative light on the authenticity of the rest of the work, too, regardless of its other possible or actual merits. At the defence of the thesis the author should state whether with regard to the sources also in other parts of the text of Chapter 1 she used the same or similar approach.

The above reservation/criticism might also concern the form and the contents of Chapter Two, though otherwise it is a systematic introduction to the theme of musical intelligence and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, including also a presentation of the means of measuring and testing musical intelligence. As presented in the thesis from the sources, and as generally acknowledged, both music and language are auditory phenomena – and, it should be added, that primarily acoustic – and they share some characteristics. Thus, there is a natural link between their production and perception, which also leads to their correlation in L2 acquisition and namely in pronunciation. While it is often ascertained that training in music has a positive influence on learning a foreign language and on the level of pronouncing it, the author points out the finding (e.g. by Stokes 2001) that in adult second language acquisition there might exist a link between it and musical intelligence, rather than between music training. This view is addressed in the central research part of the thesis of Mrs. Kusz.

The research sections of the thesis are very systematically designed. The research is based on an experiment with 94 Polish students of English philology selected in such a way that none of them had earlier any musical education and had not been to an English-speaking country for more than three months, which made the group homogeneous in this respect.

The author states (p. 121) that with the aim of providing an unbiased assessment, as well as supporting or refuting the hypotheses formulated for the research, the research was continued

for two academic years. However, in the Tables representing the data from the tests there do not seem to occur any slots for the different years of carrying out the experiment, nor any comparisons of the achievements in two different years. Have the data for the different years been somehow presented and specifically used in the research to indicate the progress in the development of second language acquisition?

The major aim of the thesis was to review the empirical contributions that demonstrated the interdependence between musical intelligence and L2 skills in the process of second language acquisition, and secondly to confirm or refute this hypothesis on the basis of the research.

The research primarily involved identifying the level of the musical intelligence of the participants based on their responses to three subtests (parts) from among the 136 tasks of Wing's test of musical intelligence. Then their pronunciation of ten English statements (in the thesis at first referred to as sentences, but later as sentences/phrases, while only 6 of them are sentences *per se*) from *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary* was assessed by three native speakers of English and experienced teachers, from the aspects of intelligibility, fluency and native-like articulation, of course, based on their subjective perception and evaluation. Finally, with the aim of comparison, their pronunciation was automatically evaluated by the tool Praat to objectively elicit fluency as F_o (Fundamental Frequency) Range Difference (lowest frequency in a harmonic vibration), Speech Rate, Articulation Rate, Average Syllable Duration and Pause Duration.

Based on the results of her research, the author concludes that although it is not possible to state that overall musical intelligence correlates with overall L2 pronunciation ability in the tested group, there have been found some potential benefits to having a high level of musical intelligence, namely as to the F_o Range Difference. These conclusions are based on numerous meticulously recorded and statistically processed analytical findings allowing for multiple generalizing statements or, on the other hand, for statements on the limitations of possible generalizations, many of them based on the complexity of both musical intelligence and L2 pronunciation ability, together with the possibilities of its objective assessment. The statistic processing of the data is of special merit. However, there arises the question whether it is the author herself who is so skilled in statistics, or whether the formatting and the processing of the data was delegated to an expert in this field. In the latter case, a relevant statement should duly have formed part of the thesis, and not the author of the thesis herself should be the person taking credit for the statistic input.

The thesis is written in academic English, with only a few minor mistakes (missing articles and typos), and has an appropriate graphical design.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the thesis has addressed a currently topical theme of the potential correspondence and relatedness of musical intelligence and L2 proficiency in pronunciation, and has arrived at consequential and valuable findings supported by pragmatic evidence. While the author is aware of the fact that much future research is needed in this sphere, it can be stated that her research has outlined reliable methodology for continued investigations, including interdisciplinary, cross-cultural and contrastive approaches.

In view of the above, I recommend that the thesis submitted by Mrs. Ewa Kusz be accepted for its defence at which the author should react to the several reservations and comments made in this review. In case of successful defence, I recommend that her thesis be considered as basis for the award of the academic degree of Doctor Philosophiae.

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