
English in Europe Conference

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Over the weekend of March 22 and March 23, the Faculty of Arts at Charles University was host to the conference ' [English in business and commerce: Interactions and policies](#) '. The conference was part of the English in Europe project, an academic project sponsored by The Leverhulme Trust and coordinated by the [Centre for Linguistic Research at the University of Sheffield](#) , which aims to investigate the role of the English language throughout Europe. The conference at the Faculty of Arts was the fifth and final conference of the project, which brought together academics from all the over the world. Previous conferences have been held in Sheffield (UK), Zaragoza (Spain), Copenhagen (Denmark), and Thessaloniki (Greece). The conference was also hosted with the support of the Czech Language Institute at the Czech Academy of Science.

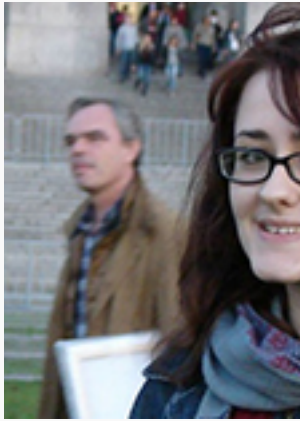


The conference started early on Saturday morning, and ran until Sunday afternoon. Although the theme of this conference was business, the talks hosted touched on a diverse range of topics, from language research, to foreign language skills in native English-speaking countries, to the use of English in European universities, to the role of English as a business lingua franca. Individual talks were followed by question and answer sessions; however, these had to be kept brief as the conference had a very strict schedule to adhere to.

The three keynote speakers were Nkonko Kamwangamalu, from Howard University in Washington D.C., who talked about the use of English in African Commonwealth countries; Rebecca Piekkari, from the Aalto University School of Business in Helsinki, who discussed language research in international business; and Jo Angouri, from the University of Warwick, who talked on language use in the workplace.

The conference also had a special Czech section, which focused on language use in the Czech Republic: Neil Bermel and Luděk Knittl, both from the University of Sheffield, gave an interesting talk on the visual presence of languages in the Czech heritage site of Hrubý Rohozec, a castle in the town of Turnov; Charles University's Vít Dovalil discussed the use of German and English in the Czech Republic; and Petr Kaderka and Martin Prošek of the Czech Language Institute talked about the influence of English on the Czech language. As neither an economics or a linguistics student, I felt a little out of my depth at times; speakers would sometimes list theories and researchers I'd never encountered before but, overall, the talks I attended were very interesting and I was able to follow most of the discussion.

The full title of the main project is 'English in Europe: Opportunity or Threat?'. Some of the talks I attended at the conference touched on this theme: as a lingua franca of business, higher education, tourism, and so on, English is able to unite large groups of people under a common language; at the same time, its high position in these spheres may be off-putting for some, and can even have a detrimental effect on local languages. Even for native English speaking countries, the dominance of English can have a negative effect, as populations don't have strong enough skills in foreign languages to continue to compete on international markets. I wasn't around to hear whether or not the conference deemed English as an opportunity or a threat in Europe, but it was very interesting nonetheless to hear arguments about why English is harmful as well as useful as an international lingua franca in many important areas.



Natalie James is an undergraduate history student at University College London, currently studying at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague. Her interests include history, literature, politics, and current affairs. She joined the online magazine I-Forum to become more aware of and involved in student life at Charles University in Prague, and also to meet other likeminded Erasmus students.