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**Breaking the Boundaries: 11th Brno international conference of English, American and Canadian Studies: 12-14 February 2020**

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**BREAKING THE BOUNDARIES: 11<sup>TH</sup> BRNO  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ENGLISH,  
AMERICAN AND CANADIAN STUDIES: 12–14  
FEBRUARY 2020**

*Anna Mikyšková*

ON 12–14 November 2020, in accordance with a tradition which goes back to the mid-1980s, Brno hosted the conference of English, American and Canadian studies. The conference is held every five years by the Department of English and American Studies at Masaryk University in cooperation with the Czech Association for the Study of English (CZASE). The aim of this interdisciplinary conference is to provide academics with an international platform where they can share and discuss their research within and across various disciplines, including literary and cultural studies, linguistics, translation studies and ELT methodology. This year, that objective was emphasized in the conference topic “Breaking the Boundaries” which encouraged more than 130 delegates to rethink established methods of research, to question the limits of their fields and to bring new perspectives to scholarly dialogue.

The three-day conference offered four keynote lectures and seven blocks of multiple parallel sessions devoted to various disciplines and topics, which all took place in building B of the Faculty of Arts. The conference was officially opened on Wednesday by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Milan Pol, and by the Head of the Brno English Department and the Chair of CZASE, Jana Chamonikolasová.

At the conference opening, Libuše Dušková received a commemorative medal of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, for her life-long contribution to the field of English linguistics. Professor Dušková is a renowned Czech linguist, a member of the Prague Linguistic Circle, a Professor Emerita of English linguistics at Charles University, and the author of the influential *Mluvnice současné angličtiny na pozadí češtiny* (*A Grammar of Contemporary English with Reference to Czech*, 1988) which is still widely used.

Jan Chovanec then introduced the first plenary speaker, Professor Greg Myers from Lancaster University, UK, who delivered a lecture entitled *How Interviewees and Interviews Shape Stories for Oral History*. In his talk, Myers focused

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on the significance of storytelling in oral history interviews and argued that the method of oral history is shaped by the collaborative framing and reframing strategies of both the interviewer and interviewees, and has far-reaching implications for our understanding of the speaker's identity and time and truth in general.

The six parallel sessions that followed offered topics such as *Landscape as a Symbol and Myth*; *The Language of US Law, Politics and Culture*; *Functional Syntax* and *Resources and Outcomes in L2 Learning and Teaching*. The first poster session took place during the afternoon break. The posters presented were, for instance, *Political Party Fluctuation in Canadian Federal Elections in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A National and Provincial Analysis* by Kenneth Froehling, *Teachers' Perception of Foreign Languages in School Environment* by Barbora Kousalová, and *Beauty or a Beast? Angela Carter's Nights in the Circus Transgressing Seemingly Established Concepts of Beauty, Good, and Evil* by Barbora Kotucz.

The programme continued with a second plenary lecture *Breaking the Boundaries, or Redrawing Them? Multimodal Conversation Analysis in EFL Classroom Interaction Research* given by Olcay Sert from Mälardalen University, Sweden. Apart from the full attendance of conference delegates, the lecture attracted a number of academics from the Faculty of Education who also wanted to hear the talk about the use of conversation analysis in second language acquisition. Sert presented the results of his micro-analytic and multimodal research into L2 English classroom interaction (conducted in various European settings), and demonstrated that the multimodal conversation analysis approach has the potential to "break traditional methodological and conceptual boundaries, while also redrawing these boundaries with CA's exceptional power in describing social phenomena."

The following parallel sessions opened discussions, for instance, on *Grotesque Freakishness in Medieval Literature*; *In-Betweenness and Liminality in Fiction* and *Conversation-Analytic Perspectives on L2 Learning and Teaching*. The academic programme of the first day was concluded with a welcome reception which took place in the beautiful interior of the internal courtyard at the Faculty of Social Sciences, where conference delegates could refresh themselves at a buffet, enjoy the informal company of their colleagues and make new acquaintances from as well as outside their fields of expertise.

The reception was livened up by a performance of the students' choir *The Gypsywood Singers*. As their choir master, I have to say that we were honoured and thrilled to have the possibility to offer a sample of our singing repertoire to an international academic audience. The evening was spent in a friendly atmosphere which set the tone for the rest of the event.

The second day of the conference started with a morning block of six parallel seminars which offered sessions such as *Indigenous Cultures and Communities, Self-Representation in Media Discourse*, and a translation session on *Literary Translation & Culture*. After the break, Professor Ulla Haselstein from the Freie Universität, Berlin, gave a plenary lecture entitled *Braiding the Strands: Contemporary Indigenous Literature* in which she drew attention to the major shift in the development of contemporary American indigenous fiction. She explained how the early paradigm of Native American Renaissance had gradually changed into the bleak story of contemporary Urban Indians struggling with poverty, dissolution of social bonds and broken identity based on a catastrophic history and traumatic experience.

The Thursday afternoon programme proved to be the most diverse part of the conference. The afternoon was devoted to two blocks of parallel sessions and the second poster session during the break. Seminars such as *Healing, Experimenting and Struggling in Poetry; American Literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century; Cultural Conflict in Canadian Literature and Art* and theatre seminar *Gender and Character Conventions in Restoration Drama* engaged with all major forms of literature. Linguists discussed numerous current issues in seminars on *Negotiating Power in Public Discourse* and *Academic Writing*. Academics from the field of ELT methodology could take part in *Conversation-Analytic Perspectives on Correction and Repair in L2 Learning and Teaching* seminar, and, last but not least, delegates interested in translation studies appreciated the session on *Translation Didactics & From Data to Theory*.

The second day of the conference concluded with a final plenary lecture by Sue-Ann Harding from Queen's University, Belfast. In her lecture entitled *Walking, Breathing, Knowing: Insights from Anthropology for Practising Interdisciplinarity*, Harding offered a new way to rethink the boundaries and liminal spaces of various disciplines. Coming from the field of translations studies, Harding employed concepts from narratology and anthropology to sketch new pathways for interdisciplinary and intercultural knowledge, thus linking it with the conference's topic.

Additionally, conference delegates were invited on Wednesday and Thursday to take part in guided tours of Villa Tugendhat, the gem of Brno functionalist architecture. A considerable number of delegates accepted and enjoyed the visit.

The last day of the conference was devoted to literary and linguistic sessions. The morning started with a linguistic session on *Changes in Prosodic Behaviours* and was simultaneously accompanied by literary seminars on *Technology and Human and National Identity; Changing Perceptions in British Society and Popular Entertainment* and *Genres, Adaptations and Afterlives of Restoration Drama*.

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The latter was a continuation of the Restoration drama seminar from the previous day and it was also the seminar where I presented my paper on early 18<sup>th</sup>-century ballad operas. I am confident that the same amount of professional support that I was fortunate to receive on that day was typical of all thirty-eight seminars that had taken place during the conference. After the last break, conference delegates held the very last discussions of this wonderful event, for instance in the seminar on *English Renaissance Drama and Theatre* or in the last linguistic session on *Identity Construction and Cultural Accommodation*.

At half past eleven, all delegates gathered in the main auditorium hall for the official conference closing and multiple thanks were in order: to all conference delegates for their active participation, to the head of the English department Jana Chamonikolasová for her support, to the academic programme committee, organizing committee and also student volunteers, who all deserve our gratitude for making this engaging event possible.

The conference closing was followed by the general assembly of the Czech Association for the Study of English, but non-CZASE members were slowly embarking on their journey home, carrying away not only new professional insights and contacts, but also a heightened awareness of a friendly academic community which we are all happy to be part of. As Jana Chamonikolasová pointed out, the main purpose of such conferences is to “strengthen the researchers’ motivation to explore new research areas and facilitate the creation of new networks within English studies”, and I wholeheartedly agree with her that the 11<sup>th</sup> Brno International Conference of English, American and Canadian Studies has succeeded in both.

P.S. Little did the delegates and organizers know that our “Breaking the Boundaries” conference would be one of the last face-to-face events for some time as the coronavirus crisis struck later in Spring 2020. Let us hope that the time for such events where people can meet, share ideas, and form new friendships will soon once again become a reality.

Link to the conference program:

<https://anglistika.phil.muni.cz/brno2020/programme/final-programme>

Link to the conference book of abstracts:

<https://anglistika.phil.muni.cz/brno2020/programme/book-of-abstracts>



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