

Celebrating EUROMOSAIC vs. language policies: the case of the Czech language

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1. The EU language policy and the European Commission Project EUROMOSAIC

The EU has a positive policy towards regional and minority languages which is enshrined in Article 22 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. It states that “*The Union respects cultural, religious and linguistic diversity*”. The European Commission has been providing several projects supporting regional and minority languages, one of them being the NETWORK PROMOTING THE LANGUAGE DIVERSITY. It is a pan-European Network which covers regional, minority, indigenous, cross-border and smaller national languages with the task to promote linguistic diversity in Europe. The main focus is providing information about and easy access to a large network of organisations that can share ideas, information and best practice regarding the promotion of less widely used languages.

In 1992, wishing to take stock of the situation of the various language communities in Europe, **the Commission initiated a study on minority language groups in the European Union. The purpose of the study, entitled "EUROMOSAIC"** (later EROMOSAIC I), was not only to support the regional and minority languages, but also to find out about the different regional and minority languages in existence and to establish their potential for expanding, i. e. for their production and reproduction, and to examine the difficulties, the barriers and the challenges they could encounter in doing so.

This was followed by additional studies assessing the situation and condition of each language (see the comparative study *Regional and minority languages in new Member States*).

Following the 1999 enlargement of European Union, EUROMOSAIC compiled further individual reports on the regional and minority language groups of Austria, Finland and Sweden (see EUROMOSAIC II).

In September 2004 the extended study covering the ten new Member States of the European Union was performed (see EUROMOSAIC III). The team of experts and scientists who performed the study also drafted a comparative summary providing a general overview of the situation obtaining in the new Member States and a point of comparison with that

obtaining in the fifteen pre-enlargement Member States. Next studies then appeared in 2009. While the Euromosaic I study (EU12 Member States) listed 48 linguistic communities, in the new Member States there are approximately 90 minority groups that can be distinguished on a linguistic basis.

The mosaic project of European regional and minority languages is certainly very meritorious, perfectly complying with the 10th anniversary of the European Day of Languages (26th October 2011). Unfortunately, neither of those studies reflects the internal diversification of the so called official languages and the language policy of the majority population towards “the minor regional/local languages/variants“.

2. Internal diversification of official/national languages (regional variants)

NATIONAL LANGUAGE from the functional point of view is not a homogeneous language, but is rather a continuum of lexical and grammatical device. In the Prague Linguistique Circle theory (see Mathesius, 1936) the usage of a language by a speaker consists of two acts, i. e. the onomasiological act (giving names to the segments of reality) and the grammatical act (expressing the relations between the segments of reality). According to the functional criteria the principal factor for functional stratification of a national language are the spheres of official communication vs. non-official communication. But traditionally the criteria are social and territorial. According to them the so called varieties of a language are distinguished: regional dialects + interdialects and social dialects. The **interdialect** is the result of the last stage of dialects' development when on the hand the most marked features of the dialects of a certain region have been eliminated and on the other hand their common features have been strengthened. Some of the interdialects may have undergone the process of koinesation. To sociolects mostly various slangs, argots, etc. are ranked.

What under normal circumstances dominates in the realm of official communications, whether written and spoken, is the so called **STANDARD LANGUAGE** (literary language). Its status is representative and symbolic. This most important and prestigious variety of a language generally serves as a symbol of a nation. Its dominant function is the integrative function – the standard language provides the mutual communicative platform for the whole language community, i. e. it is the language of state administration, judiciary, education, science, media, etc. It is often regarded as a sign of intellectual and cultural level of the language community. In this context it should be emphasized that unlike the other varieties of the national language the standard language is polyfunctional!

For obvious reasons the standard language is usually somehow regulated and institutionalized – mostly by state administration and/or state institutions, governmental education/language policies, academies of sciences or significant research institutes, language councils, prestigious universities, major publishing houses, relevant public media, etc. In view of all mentioned features and functions it is necessary to accept that the standard language is, or rather must be a “construct“, a communicative tool that is considered as somewhat “artificial“.

Despite of its nationwide integrating function the standard language is not entirely homogenous. Going back to the history the interwar Czechoslovakia (1918–1938) could be mentioned as an example: Czech and Slovak were in the spirit of the former Czech and Slovak politics considered as two variants of one standard (literary) language. Or if we take

an example from the present a reference to the situation in Norway may be made: as established by law and governmental policy there are two forms of „written“ Norwegian – Bokmål (literally „book tongue“) and „Nynorsk“ (literally „new Norwegian“). The Norwegian Language Council has taken responsibility for regulating both forms. The recommended terms in English are Norwegian Bokmål and Norwegian Nynorsk.

3. The case of the Czech language

3.1 Basic facts

The Czech Republic occupies the territory of 78,866 square km and has the population of 10 504 203 inhabitants (data according to the Czech Statistic Office from 31. 12. 2011). The Czech language belongs to the language family of the West Slavonic languages and it has a high degree of linguistic proximity to Slovak, but also to Polish and Upper and Lower Sorbian. From the typological point view Czech is prevalingly the so called inflectional language.

3.2 Specifics of the „inflectional“ word

What in a short survey of specific characteristics of an inflectional word could be mentioned are:

- a) separate inflectional morphology for nouns, verbs, and adjectives;
- b) cumulative morphemes – see *Tehdy vstal, otevřel okno mouše*. The word *mouše* represents an ideal structure of a prototypical inflectional word. It consists of a root *mouš* and one affix *-e* which is polyfunctional, i. e. several grammatical functions are cumulated in it. The difference between lexical and grammatical parts is clear, till there is a strong feature of synthetism – the fusion of morphemes as the instance of palatalization *ch~š*. The dative form of the word is not an obligatory complement of the verb *otevřel*, but a loose (non-valence) dative with adverbial and communicative functions, here *dativus commodi* bringing inclusion of the action to the sphere of one's interest. Thus communicative function is expressed by inflection which proves the highly inflectional prototypical value of the language;
- c) overlapping morphemes (portmanteau morphemes), like in *ruský slovník: rus + sk(ý) → ruský*. The phonological boundary between the root *rus* and the derivational suffix *-sk(ý)* is unclear, the overlapping morphemes thus causing the so-called morphological knot;
- d) relation of morpheme to morph not being 1 : 1. Hence counting with the 1 : 1 relation is a sort of morphological naivety;
- e) the rich variability of inflectional endings may have a stylistic value: compare *píšu x píší* (colloquial vs. bookish).

3.3 Standard Czech vs. diglossia?

3.3.1 Contemporary status of Standard Czech

The current geopolitical situation does not encourage the symbolic function of the standard language (the Standard Czech) to be stressed very much, even it is possible to state that it has been rather ignored. But what remains is its representative function and the function of nationwide **INTEGRATION**. What else should be stressed is that the Standard Czech

(traditionally “literary language“) does not match any of the local variety, thus not being discriminating any region of the Czech Republic.

3.3.2 Linguistic self-confidence

The standard Czech is perfectly and thoroughly capable of complying with all communicative needs of the educated speaker (see for example Uhlířová – Svobodová – Pravdová, 2005). Significantly, the linguists’ self-confident formulations draw on the “linguistic confidence” of a considerable section of the Czech society. Yet there are different opinions questioning the role of the so called “literary Czech” (the Standard Czech). An old cliché appears about “violent changes of language development” for example in Cvrček (2010). They argue that the first generation of national revival at the beginning of 19th century codified a 200 years old language of the period of humanism. But the counterargument is that at the turn of the 18th and 19 centuries the language in use was also contemporary: there was the language of literature (not very ambitious though, rather the mass literary production), based on commonly spoken language usage in Central Bohemia, and there also was the language of church communication which developed the advanced language of the 16th century – see the St. Wenceslaus bible prepared by the Jesuits in the Baroque period – this conservative standard had to fulfil high communication functions of written language and helped to return Czech to those functions (it was also used by Slovak protestants in Evangelic church).

3.3.3 A “diglossia“ in Czech

The imaginary diglossia in Czech is has been often attributed to a bad and elitist language policy (see for example Čermák, 2003). What is actually meant by a “diglossia“ is the relation of the so called Common Czech and Standard Czech. Besides the traditional stereotypes about the responsibility of the Czech national revival and besides the strong ahistorism other (strange) arguments of some linguists (typically and exclusively /?/ from Prague) have appeared: Common Czech is the language they have been born into to be told only six years later, when entering school, that there is something wrong with their language and that the correct language is to be expected from the teacher.

The first problem is purely terminological. The so called Common Czech is **an interdialect** limited to a particular territory, thus one of interdialects of the national language. It is not the spontaneous spoken language of private and semi-official communication, referred to as substandard Czech, used in Bohemia but spreading to the whole territory of the national language as it is understood by the supporters of diglossia.

The second problem deals with the territorial expansion itself. The proponents of the Czech diglossia argue that most Czech speakers use, in their everyday speech, Common Czech. The only difference might appear in the eastern peripheral parts of the Czech territory, i. e. in Moravia, which according to them is a much smaller linguistic area. But it should be reminded that in those “peripheral parts” live more than 4 millions inhabitants (according to the Czech Statistic Office exactly 4 146 361 Moravians of a total of 10 504 361 inhabitants in the Czech Republic!).

The third problem reveals the lack of understanding of the functional differentiation (stratification) of the national language. Private (family) communication is different from the official or semi-official and public communication, the spoken language must necessarily be different from the written one.

The pro-diglossia linguists argue that children in Prague are frustrated by being forced to learn the Standard Czech, but so are the children in Moravia and Silesia. As they also speak an interdialect or even a local dialect (there are two basic interdialects in Moravia and one in Silesia) they have to learn the Standard Czech as well. The opinion about the Common Czech

(the Central Bohemia interdialect in fact) being a more natural variety even for being included into the codification (in contrast to the Standard Czech) shows not only a serious misunderstanding of the basic functions of the Standard Czech, but it also shows evidence of a sort of “pragocentrismus“.

The estimated diglossia is neither a diglossia, nor it is a code switching, because most of the language devices are shared by both varieties of the national language: according to the research in a dialogue of 5000 words only 10 % of the text showed some “deviations“ from the standard (see Bláha, 2010). The differences concerned mainly the sound qualities – pronunciation and morphology – endings.

3.3.4 The only “genuine“ grammar of Czech and the Czech National Corpus “LEADERSHIP“

Since the 90ies there have been new attempts to write a new, representative, alternative grammar of the Czech language. They have been based on acceptable premises:

- a) any decision and judgement about language have to be based on modern, sufficient data and relevant research about the language usage;
- b) a prerequisite to any further research, is to be found in a large, representative corpus (see Čermák, 2003).

The newly published grammar by Karolinum, i. e. the publishing house of the Charles University of Prague (see Cvrček, 2010), presents itself as the first grammar description which shows “how the grammar actually looks“ and as the first guide that tries to describe not only written but also spoken language.

In spite of its promising methodology the representative corpus of spoken Czech was reduced to the so called Prague Spoken Corpus. The authors of the grammar consider the corpus of one of the interdialects, i. e. of the Common Czech (the Central Bohemia interdialect) as a suitable and sufficient representative of the spoken Czech, thus ignoring the spoken language in Moravian territory at all.

To put an example of the “corpora grammar” interpretation one may use the form of the 3rd pl. of the verb *sázet*:

Ex.:

SÁZET = to plant (flowers), 3rd pl. (they)

6 % (oni) sází

10 % (oni) sázejí

84 % (oni) sázej

However, the most frequent form according the Prague Spoken Corpus, i. e. the form used by 84 percent of the language users, is not used in Moravia at all. On the contrary that form is considered regionally and stylistically marked. Thus the grammar misrepresents the language situation.

The putative leadership of the Czech National Corpus is based on statistical data: what has a high frequency in the corpus is supposed to be used and thus it is correct.

The Prague Spoken Corpus considers itself a **leading** spoken corpus (others are ignored) and a relevant **base for codification**. The ambition of the grammar (see Cvrček's *Mluvnice*) is to be enforced as the school grammar by the Czech ministry of education.

But such a grammar (rather being a set of statistical tables) as a potential base for codification would disrupt the integration function of the Standard Czech. Should such a grammar be enforced as a school grammar it would jeopardize the local language(s) used in Moravia.

4. In conclusion

According to the criteria as number of speakers, spread of the language, status of speakers, how the language is "elaborated", and its prestige, the Czech language is rather a medium-sized than a small language. The linguistic self-confidence both of the considerable part of the Czech society and the linguists working in this field may be expressed in their belief that the Standard Czech is capable of complying with all communicative needs of the educated speakers. On the other hand there is also a considerable group of linguists questioning the role of the so-called literary Czech in the spoken communication. Their arguments oscillate between the (a)historical concept of violent changes of language development at the beginning of the 19th century and "a diglossia" in Czech, a fact which is to be viewed as a result of a bad and elitist language policy in Czechia over the past decades. According to them most Czech speakers use, in their everyday speech, the so-called Common Czech as their first language. None of those arguments takes into account the situation in one third of the territory, i.e. Moravia, where other interdialects are used. The newly published grammar by Karolinum (the publishing house of the Charles University of Prague) even ignores the spoken language in Moravian territory at all, arguing (as an example) that more than 90 percent of the verbal inflection uses the endings documented in the Prague Spoken Corpus. Should such a grammar be enforced as a school grammar it would jeopardize the local language(s) used in Moravia.

Having this in mind one cannot speak of LEADERSHIP, but rather about a DICTATORSHIP.

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