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HISTORY OF CZECH LANGUAGE AS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARY TASK

1 Introduction

Diachronic language study, bound to take into account both linguistic and historical factors, is of necessity an interdisciplinary task. This holds especially for its sub-discipline named traditionally history of language (language history) which in the recent years experiences both renewed interest of scholars and considerable widening of its interdisciplinary perspective. The aim of the present study is to discuss some interdisciplinary aspects of this approach to language on an example of the history of Czech language.

Language history (*Sprachgeschichte, histoire de la langue* ; in the structuralist tradition often called « external history of language »¹ and after the socio-pragmatic turn named also *soziopragmatisch orientierte Sprachgeschichtsschreibung*²) we perceive here as distinct from, or broader than both traditional historical grammar of individual languages (called by the structuralists also the « internal history of language » and focusing mainly on historical phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics and reaching its peak in the neo-grammarians period)³ or, more modern and more general, historical or diachronic linguistics (treating types of sound, semantic and syntactic changes, analogy, grammaticalization, linguistic contact, principles of reconstruction etc.).⁴ Both these disciplines study, from different perspectives and on different levels of generality, predominantly the changes in language system and its individual levels, treated as basically independent of their source texts and intentions and opinions of their authors, historical context and extra-linguistic factors as the level of literacy,

¹ See e.g. Jucker 2000 : 11 or Reiffenstein 1990, both of whom stress basic mutual inseparability of external and internal history of a language, but for practical reasons advocate the prevalence of one or the other in individual works.

² See Reichmann 1998 : 19-21, listing also diverse possible sub-orientations in the works of individual authors.

³ For Czech see Gebauer 1963-2007.

⁴ See e.g. Bynon 1985; Hock 1991; Lehmann 1992; Lass 1997; Campbell 2006; Janda & Joseph 2008.

functioning of school system, paleographical and typographical factors etc.⁵ In contrast to this, language history tries to grasp the causes and circumstances influencing the gradual change of a language from its beginnings to contemporary state in broadest comprehensiveness possible, taking into account all factors that may leave their traces on it and placing language in the context of the cultural, intellectual, political and social history of its nation.

2 The model: history of Czech language

2.1 Beginnings and development

The history of the modern history of Czech language begins with the history of modern Czech itself. Its first outstanding student was Josef Dobrovský (1753-1829), the founder of Slavonic studies and the greatest figure of the first phase of the Czech national revival. In his *Geschichte der böhmischen Sprache und Literatur* (1792), written in German, he sketches in a chronological order the development of Czech language and literature from their beginnings to his days.⁶ Here, the level of language development and its social role, studied in the historical, cultural and social context, served as a criterion for the assessment of literature. Characteristic features of his approach were : the development of language and the development of literature were seen as a unity,⁷ only written works were analyzed, and quite a wide concept of literature comprising all « standard » written texts (i.e. including professional, legal, administrative etc. documents, but excluding e.g. dialectal texts, texts written for personal needs or popular reading), was applied, and among professional texts, preferentially Czech grammars and vocabularies were discussed. Among other its influential features belong Dobrovský's periodization of the history of Czech language and literature and his appraisal of individual periods, his encompassment of Old Church Slavonic tradition into Czech tradition, or his dichotomy of native (i.e. Czech or Old Church Slavonic) and foreign (i.e. Latin or German) tradition, with the emphasis on the Czech-German linguistic and cultural

⁵ Different works contain more or less different and extensive lists of relevant factors and approaches ; e.g. Jucker (2000 : 11) names « political events, social, spiritual or economic developments, and technical innovations » as well as « [c]onquests, language contacts through colonisation, and the invention of new communication system ». See also the discussion below.

⁶ The preliminary, journal version in 1791 appeared under the title *Geschichte der böhmischen Sprache* ; the second, revised edition in 1818 was entitled *Geschichte der böhmischen Sprache und ältern Literatur*. All three editions were reprinted in Dobrovský 1936.

⁷ This conception was according to Benjamin Jedlička (1951 : XXVIII-XXIX) close to, and partly inspired by contemporary German approach, especially by Adelung. It, however, brought about also the substantial limitation (today seen as unwelcome) of the Czech literary history only to works written in Czech, leaving out those composed on the Bohemian and Moravian territory in German, Latin etc. and obscuring thus the multilingual aspect of Bohemian medieval and early modern culture.

rivalry. As we shall see, these features in many aspects survived (almost) to present days.⁸

Thus, the history of Czech language started as a philological rather than a linguistic discipline, or (seen from today's perspective) as an interdisciplinary enterprise, closely connected to, or interwoven with, literary history. In this approach, Dobrovský found successors in Josef Jungmann (*Historie literatury české* 1825, 2nd ed. 1849), Alois Vojtěch Šembera (*Dějiny řeči a literatury české* 1858, 2nd ed. 1861) and František Bačkovský (*Zevrubné dějiny českého písemnictví* 1886)⁹ and it marked the treatment of the history of Czech language also in much later works: most of the standard books still in use treat the history of Czech language as a history of more or less outstanding literary works.

2.2 Contemporary state

Unlike histories of other languages, the history of Czech language belongs even today among the most neglected bohemistic disciplines. Among the works recommended to university students, mostly works more than twenty years old rank, namely *Vývoj českého spisovného jazyka* (1936, 2nd ed. 1979) by Bohuslav Havránek, *Spisovný jazyk v dějinách české společnosti* (1979, 2nd ed. 2009) by Dušan Šlosar, Radoslav Večerka, Jan Dvořák and Petr Malčík, and *Vývoj spisovné češtiny* (1985) by František Cuřín. The only contemporary one, *Cesty ke spisovné češtině* (2003, 2nd ed. 2006) by Josef Marvan, is not really a monograph or a textbook, but a commented anthology of text extracts.

Bohuslav Havránek's *Vývoj českého spisovného jazyka*, although written from the structuralist perspective, pertains fully to the tradition founded by Dobrovský. First of all, it focuses almost exclusively on written texts, which, together with the general structuralist emphasis on standard (or, in their terminology, « literary ») language, leads to a substantial narrowing of scope and distortion of perspective expressed already in the title: not a « history of Czech language », but the « development of standard Czech » is its subject. (The author claims that spoken standard language is the subject of his study, too, but in reality spoken language is present only as an extrapolation from written literary texts.) Such an approach is highly problematic in several ways: not only it tends to adoption of a teleological perspective, treating all past stages and varieties of Czech language as precursors to the contemporary state and assessing them according to their similarity or dissimilarity to it, but it also marginalizes « nonstandard » spoken language and its variability, both territorial and social. In accordance with this limitation to standard language, Havránek does not pay much attention to socio-cultural factors and their influence on language. Thus, not only his work but also those of his followers stay close to literary history in their focus on the language of literary or other public

⁸ This lingvo-literary tradition affected also Czech literary history, causing that also here grammars and vocabularies and their authors were extensively discussed as late as at the beginning of the 20th century (see Jakubec 1910-1911, 2nd ed. 1929-1934).

⁹ Jedlička 1951 : XXXVII.

(legal, administrative) texts – paradoxically, although they verbally appreciate presumed convergence of language of some of these works to the spoken one, they pay only marginal attention to works written in dialects or not perceived as literarily valuable (prayer books, hymn books, street ballads, entertaining reading, cookery and recipe books etc.).

Havránek's text represents a constituent part of the above mentioned tradition also in the fact that it deals exclusively with texts written in Czech, i.e. marginalizes other language traditions on the Bohemian territory and their mutual relations with the Czech one. In this he is followed by both newer works, written by Šlosar et al. and Cuřín. Those differ from Havránek in their emphasis on the rivalry of native (Czech, Church Slavonic) and foreign or international (Latin, German etc.) language and culture, described often in terms of «competition» or even «struggle». They tend to stress (implicitly, but noticeably) on the one hand the mutuality of Czech and other Slavonic languages, on the other hand the «danger» or «oppression» caused by German and its speakers to Czech. In addition, they differ from Havránek also in broader treatment of historical events. However, these events are presented more as a general background than as an important factor in the process of language development and, moreover, neither of the authors pays much attention to cultural and intellectual history: in Cuřín, mainly political and economic history is mentioned, depicted from a highly simplified Marxist point of view, in Šlosar, also the history of population is summed up.

2.3 Future

As we have seen, the most recent treatment of the history of Czech language is now 25 years old and was written still during the communist era. Moreover, the discipline is still far too much rooted in the tradition dating back to the beginning of the 19th century. It stands at the crossroads and chooses its further direction, both regarding methodology, and content. In this, the problem of interdisciplinarity, its desirable degree or its advantages and risks, is a primary one and some discussion on this theme has already started.

3 Approaches

Interdisciplinarity can take different forms. It may entail simply using the results of other disciplines, but also a closer collaboration with them, or lead to a new, essentially interdisciplinary approach. Also the question, which disciplines should be involved and which type of interdisciplinarity do we have in mind, is not an easy one. Thus, probably more questions than answers will follow.

3.1 Intra-linguistic

First, we are going to mention briefly the «intra-linguistic» interdisciplinarity, i.e. relations within the boundaries of linguistics itself. As we have already said, in the diachronic study of Czech language, two disciplines were traditionally distinguished: historical grammar (internal history of language), and (external) history of language. Today, different branches of diachronic linguistics make the situation even more complicated, but still a predominantly system-oriented

and a predominantly context-oriented approach to history of language can be distinguished. However, mutual relations of these two approaches are far from clear and differ both in different national traditions and within them: while in the Czech tradition they are usually more or less separated (dealt with in different books and different university subjects, often also by different authors), we can name a number of histories of other European languages treating the whole field, e.g. the monumental *Sprachgeschichte: Ein Handbuch zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und ihrer Erforschung*.¹⁰

As shown above, we conceive the history of language as a discipline transcending the boundaries of historical linguistics. However, also a reverse approach is possible, seeing the history of language as a subdiscipline of historical linguistics.¹¹ Besides it, there are diverse other, more specifically defined concepts of (external) language history, e.g. conceiving it as a discipline focusing on texts themselves, their reception and their authors' intentions and opinions,¹² the history of conscious, active building of a language as a linguistic environment, a « spiritual ecosystem » of man,¹³ or *histoire externe* of Ferdinand Brunot, defined in 1905 as a chronicle « de tous les succès et de tous les revers du français, de son extension au dehors de ses limites originelles – si on peut les fixer ».¹⁴

Thus, the question can be posed whether there exists just one discipline which may, according to the momentary needs, put more emphasis either on language system, or on language use in context, or whether there are two distinct disciplines, and if so, where does the boundary between them lie, whether any of them is « more basic » than the other, to which extent should they incorporate in their manuals the results of the other's research etc.

To this, another question is closely connected, namely whether the history of language should be a discipline at all. Is it not simply a traditional university subject or a textbook genre, a residue from the times when such disciplines like historical pragmatics,¹⁵ historical sociolinguistics (and socio-historical linguistics),¹⁶ historical text linguistics or historical dialogue analysis¹⁷ did not exist? Thus, should

¹⁰ Besch, Werner & Betten, Anne & Reichmann, Oskar & Sonderegger, Stefan (1998-2004). However, such a wide scope is possible only in a collective work comprising several thousands of pages.

¹¹ See Malicki 2008 : 244.

¹² Šlosar & Večerka & Dvořák & Malčík 2009 : 7.

¹³ Marvan 2006 : 7, 8, 15. The role of language as an environment, albeit without explicit ecological metaphoricalness and with emphasis on cultural identity of a nation, is stressed also in Rey, Duval and Siouffi (2007 : I) : « Les langues sont l'air que respirent chaque communauté humaine, la maison qu'elle habitent ; elles ont des images, aimées ou négligées ; elles fondent les identités culturelles. »

¹⁴ Quoted in Droixhe 1990 : 437.

¹⁵ As examples see studies in Jucker 1995.

¹⁶ See e.g. Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 1996.

¹⁷ For a brief survey see Jucker 2000 : 101-110.

it not be simply replaced by them or fuse with some of them? Should e.g. all the history of language adopt the sociolinguistic perspective, like R. Anthony Lodge's *A Sociolinguistic History of Parisian French* (2004)? Although all these new disciplines can supply many new and interesting insights, I do not believe that any of them could completely replace history of language: their distinct methodology derived from synchronic disciplines of the same names makes them one-sided and excessively dependent on a special type of data not available for all languages and all periods. Thus, neither of them is broad enough to satisfy variable needs of language history.

Logically, the histories of individual European languages can represent important methodological inspiration to each other. Although this at the first glance does not seem to be interdisciplinarity at all (we do not usually distinguish « Czech history » and « German history », for example, as different disciplines), I would like to mention it, as the study of the history of language is (or used to be?) usually confined within the boundaries of individual national philologies and it is not common to pay much attention to methods and results used and achieved by the histories of other languages. Although this may change gradually with greater emphasis being put on comparative approach stemming from cultural historians (see below), still there are great methodological differences between individual traditions and less discussion than desirable. And still the question remains, whether methods applied to the study of the history of one language can be applied to another without any modifications.

3.2 Intra-philological

Second, there is an « intra-philological » interdisciplinarity, i.e. the relations of the history of (Czech) language to other disciplines interested in language or languages but not belonging to linguistics proper.

Although the authors of the histories of Czech language often mention the rules of classical rhetoric as determinative for the language of older texts, they do it only cursorily and do not elaborate on it. Thus, an interdisciplinary guidance from the history of rhetoric would be more than helpful ; if we should be more specific, we would probably find more suitable for our purposes its systematic treatment (which is, however, often combined with a historical survey, as in *Grundriß der Rhetorik : Geschichte – Technik – Methode* by G. Ueding and B. Steinbrink, 2005, or two-volume handbook *Rhetorik und Stilistik* by U. Fix, A. Gardt and J. Knape, 2009-2010) than the theoretical and chronological one (as in e.g. T. Conley's *Rhetoric in the European Tradition*, 1990 or G. A. Kennedy's *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, 1999), but both of them have much to offer.

Among the texts extensively analyzed in the histories of language belong grammatical and lexicographical works. For better comprehension of and new approaches to them, collaboration is needed with the history of language sciences

and the history of philosophy of language.¹⁸ Besides the description of past theories of language, also the research of past professional and non-professional attitudes to language, their origins and their functions could profit from the collaboration with these disciplines, standing on the borderline of linguistics and other disciplines – especially the status of the history of language sciences is unclear, by some authors,¹⁹ it is counted among linguistic disciplines, by others²⁰ among historic or other (e.g. epistemology).

Another boundary type of approaches is represented by those studying the history of writing (as distinct from the history of writing systems, which belongs fully to linguistics) and reading. From recent achievements in this field, we can mention works like *Histoire de la lecture dans le monde occidental* by G. Cavallo and R. Chartier (2nd ed. 2001), which aims at grasping the history of reading as « celle de l'historicité des modes d'utilisation, de compréhension et d'appropriation des textes », ²¹ or *Histoire et pouvoirs de l'écrit* by H.-J. Martin and B. Delmas (1988, 2nd ed. 1996).

Finally, we are going to mention two disciplines belonging properly among auxiliary historical disciplines, but according to their subject of study very close to philology : paleography and history of typography and printed book. From them, especially the history of printed book and typography tends to be overlooked. In the history of Czech printed book, a monumental encyclopedic work by Petr Voit entitled *Encyklopedie knihy* (2006, 2nd ed. 2008, almost 1400 pages) recently appeared, treating all the aspects of early modern typography, book printing and publishing. Here, and in his other works, the author postulates the existence of a strong influence of technical capabilities of printing offices and the printers' conventions on (at least) the orthography of early modern prints and the necessity of taking it into account e.g. in the study of chronology of sound changes.

But – to return at the beginning – also the mutuality of language history and literary history is far from dated. A promising attempt, coming from the literary side and showing also a possible direction for our discipline, is *Histoire de la France littéraire* directed by M. Prigent (2006), informed by most of the disciplines mentioned above and representing interdisciplinarity in practice.

¹⁸ They are represented today by a vast range of works, among the most comprehensive of them are the handbooks, three-volume *History of the language sciences : an international handbook on the evolution of the study of language from the beginnings to the present* by S. Auroux et al. (2000–2006), and two-volume *Sprachphilosophie : Ein internationales Handbuch zeitgenössischer Forschung* by M. Dascal et al. (1992–1996), and then e.g. *Histoire des idées linguistiques* by S. Auroux et al. (1989–2000), *History of linguistics* by G. Lepschy et al. (1994–1998), or *Geschichte der Sprachphilosophie* by E. Coseriu (2003).

¹⁹ E.g. Koerner (2006); for Arens (1987) it represents an auxiliary linguistic discipline.

²⁰ E.g. Gardt (1999) sees it as a subdiscipline of history of mentalities, Aarsleff (1982) or Law (2003) as belonging to intellectual history.

²¹ Cavallo & Chartier (2001 : 9).

3.3 Inter-disciplinary

Third, we will consider the interdisciplinary perspective proper which can be once more subdivided into the interdisciplinarity consisting in subject matter and the interdisciplinarity consisting in methodology.

By the former one we mean the breadth of context which the history of language should take into account to capture all the relevant factors influencing the changes undergone by language in time. To those already mentioned above, we would like to add facts pertaining primarily to the fields of cultural history, history of ideas, historical sociology, historical demography, codicology, history of school system and literacy etc. Although many scholars are aware of this task and try to fulfill it, they are not always fully successful due to relative isolation of individual disciplines, their methodological divergence and impossibility of being an expert in all of them. And it is also legitimate to pose the question, how to escape the danger of arbitrariness of the context chosen and its entire dependence on the author's interests and stock of knowledge, criticized by Reichmann (1998 : 20). Could there be any general rule for the selection of relevant context data? We will postpone this question and try to offer an answer in the conclusion.

The later type of interdisciplinarity is the most difficult of all : which methodology is the most proper for the history of language? Considering the above mentioned breadth of its subject matter, is it still a linguistic (or philological?) discipline? Or should we, like Richard W. Bailey,²² better treat it as a branch of the history of ideas? Or, like Peter von Polenz, as a constituent part of broadly conceived social history?²³ And does this mean that it should become the realm of historians, sociologists or anthropologists, as for example Dell Hymes claims (« the social history of language will ultimately have to be written by historians »²⁴) and as some works indicate, both collective (besides the just mentioned one e.g. its predecessor named simply *The Social History of Language*²⁵) or individual (cf. Peter Burke's *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, 2004)? Peter Burke advocates his approach, which he labeled a « cultural history of language » by assertion that language is a sensitive indicator of cultural change²⁶ and thus should be studied predominantly from this point of view. Not only historians, even many linguists situate history of language in the proximity of cultural history (Besch, Betten, Reichmann and Sonderegger speak of « die generelle Verflechtung der

²² *Images of English. A Cultural History of the English Language*, 1991.

²³ « Sie [Sprachgeschichte] ist sogar ein zentraler Bestandteil von Sozialgeschichte, vergleichbar der Rechtsgeschichte oder Mediengeschichte, da Sprache für Aufbau, Erhaltung und Veränderung von Gesellschaftsstrukturen und gesellschaftliche Tätigkeiten konstitutiv ist » (von Polenz 1998 : 41).

²⁴ Hymes (1991 : 334).

²⁵ Burke, Peter & Porter, Roy (1987).

²⁶ Burke 2004 : 1. On another place (9) he calls it « ecology of language » because its aim is « placing language in its cultural and social environment », i.e. studying languages in mutual relations.

Sprachgeschichte mit der Kulturgeschichte »²⁷). Or should the history of language be left to linguists after all, at least to those with slightly idiosyncratic interests? (To quote Dell Hymes once more: « In sum, if linguists are to be involved in the social history of language, one must choose some kinds of linguist, and not others. »)²⁸ Or, to put it differently, should the historian of language be a subspecies of the historical linguist, of the social/cultural historian, or should he or she be the intersection of both?

The collaboration with cultural historians can bring about some changes and advantages. Probably the most important one would be widening of perspective beyond the borders of national philologies. Cultural historians approach the history of language from a comparative perspective, which is relatively new in the discipline – traditionally, histories of individual languages were usually written, even if in context of other relevant languages. The danger hidden in such an approach are of course superficiality and selectiveness. However, the comparative approach is perceptible also in some recent histories of languages written by linguists. In the new edition of *Sprachgeschichte : Ein Handbuch zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und ihrer Erforschung*, a new chapter was added entitled *Aspekte einer europäischen Sprachgeschichte*, because the authors were convinced

« daß sich die Geschichte einer Einzelsprache innerhalb der kulturgeographischen Einheit Europa immer nur in wechselseitiger Beeinflussung, teils in Anbrenzung, größeren Teils in oft nicht erkannter Analogie mit derjenigen anderer Einzelsprachen vollziehen kann ».

(Besch, Werner & Betten, Anne & Reichmann, Oskar & Sonderegger,
Stefan 1998 : XXXV)

4 Conclusion

The aim of the article was to consider some interdisciplinary relations of the history of language. A vast theme, difficult to exhaust. Are there any conclusions that we can draw? It is not difficult to enumerate many disciplines and claim the necessity of their taking into consideration by historians of language. The problem is, how to put this claim into practice without ending up with a heterogeneous, arbitrary and confused mixture of approaches, how to delimit a seemingly infinite field and transform it into a unity.

As we have seen, the history of (Czech) language started as a philological discipline, closely connected to the study of literature. In the course of the 20th century, it gradually crossed these boundaries and widened its perspective. Today, the results of cultural history, as well as of other linguistic and non-linguistic disciplines cannot be overlooked any more. And even the focus on communicative function of language or on socio-historical context does not seem broad enough. So where to look for a common denominator?

²⁷ 1998 : XXXII.

²⁸ Hymes (1991 : 333).

We find suitable the perspective of the authors of *Mille ans de langue française*:

« Ce qui nous a conduit dans cet ouvrage, c'est la priorité accordée à l'expérience humaine sociale, à ces humains qui parlent, écrivent, comprennent et lisent le français parmi d'autres idiomes, à leurs sentiments et à leurs opinions. »

(Rey & Duval & Siouffi 2007 : III)

That is to say, we offer an approach, the main focus of which is on speakers (scribes, printers) and recipients²⁹ – and thus, consequentially, on all factors influencing their production and reception of language : social, cultural, political, religious, technical etc. But not only the communication itself is in the spotlight – also the attitudes to language, its conscious regulation and technical conditions of text composition are stressed. And as most language users do not live in a strictly monolingual environment, mutual relations among languages come into play as well, other languages used on a given territory being ascribed a more differentiated role than that of competitors. Such an approach, centered around human users of language (rather than around sectors of reality), can supply both a suitable basis for methodological considerations and a flexible starting point enabling to adjust the focus and scope of study according to each period's specificity. It provides a wide interdisciplinary potential, but offers a common denominator holding its structure together.

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²⁹ This conception is close to, but not identical with the solution suggested by Burke, who stresses reception only as a suitable unifying element of structure-oriented and speaker-oriented approaches (Burke 2004 : 13).

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