EVERYDAY CZECH ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE NEW MILLENIUM

Adela Rechziegel

> *"If we can raise the status of everyday spoken language, we can hope for a better and more sober ideology of language."*
> Andersson, L. and Trudgill, P. (1990:188)

Abstract

After the political upheaval in the Czech republic in 1989, we were witnesses of a stormy development of the national language. The country, which in its modern history suffered first under the German rule and shortly after – during forty years – under the Russian rule, was suddenly looking freedom in the face. Numerous new things, facts and newly gained views on all aspects of life and society came to the fore. There was the reorganization of whole structures, such as administration, economy, law and education, the limitless supply of knowledge in the fields of ecology, communication and information, a boom in travelling abroad, an introduction of alternative health care and spiritual approach of life. But also, the confrontation with the underworld, which had previously been hardly visible, became a daily reality and the greedy adoption of all western things had taken place. The members of the Czech speech community were forced to handle these freshly introduced phenomena, also language-wise, and they did it rapidly and vigorously.
Notwithstanding this tendency towards the innovations, there arose a concern about the possible loss of the traditional qualities of the mother-tongue, too. The community is carefully watching the standard language, which in the recent period shows considerable signs of instability. In my paper I will discuss some of the ongoing processes in Czech and give my opinion on the question of whether or not the Czech language is falling into a decline, and is therefore in need of one form of protection or another.

1 The present state of the Czech language

To begin with I would like to give some characteristics of everyday Czech and introduce the main ongoing changes (section 1). In the subsequent discussion, I will go into greater detail about two important processes, i.e. the interference of English and the shift in sociolinguistic patterns of Czech (sections 2 and 3).
After the revolution in 1989 the country became open and hospitable and its cultural and natural treasures attracted many visitors from abroad. From that time onwards in the communication space available, a co-existence came into being between the Czech language and various new foreign languages. Their functioning was no longer restricted to (mostly written) information sources, such as the rare books and magazines that were allowed in the past, but became more widespread even in daily usage. The most prominent of the introduced languages was of course English, and therefore I will concentrate on its particular influence.

Not only the entry of the language, but also that of its speakers had a major impact. There is a whole group of young American and English professionals and artists who feel comfortable in modern Czech society and get inspiration from the waves of political, economic and cultural revival that it is undergoing. The Czech people gradually got used to the newcomers and learned to see the positive aspect of their presence. For, after a very long abstinence in this respect, the Czechs can finally come into contact with citizens from other countries and communicate with them in a direct manner. Moreover, Czech businessmen, investors and employees of foreign companies have to perform adequately in English, because this is in the world of business not only the source of professional terminology and expressions, but also the main conversation mean.

All these factors caused fundamental alterations of the Czech language, in the first place in the lexicon, and they soon became a subject of investigation by specialists. To this fact testify many publications, to begin with the in-depth volume *Český jazyk na přelomu tisíciletí* (Daneš a kol., 1997). The authors, linked to several universities and to the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, carried out a study of the current situation over a period of three years. The description of the present Czech proceeds along two dividing lines: one is that of function, the other that of geographical location. So are separate contributions dedicated to functional languages, such as 'language of politics', 'language of science', 'language of management', 'language of computers', 'language of advertisement', etc. On the other hand, the language is studied following the situation in different regions, including the capitol Prague. The book opens with an excellent analysis of the recent Czech from Daneš (1997:12-24), and closes, typically, with results of an opinion poll on the question if the Czech language became better or worse or stayed the same in the past five years (Kraus, 1997:288-292).

With respect to the changes in lexicon, there also is a growing amount of manuals available. First of all it is *Akademický slovník cizích slov* 'Academic dictionary of foreign words' (Petráčková-Kraus, 1996), which comprises 100,000 entries and gives information about phraseology, spelling, pronunciation and grammar. Two years later another important reference book came out: *Nová slova v češtině. Slovník neologizmů* 'New words in Czech. A dictionary of neologisms' (Martincová a kol., 1998). It is based on a large number of excerpts from newspapers and magazines in particular and also on recorded radio and television programs. It should be stressed that this dictionary is a revelation for everybody who is interested in the latest trends in the Czech language, and especially for Czech nationals living abroad like myself. On opening the book, one gets the feeling: Good Heavens, is this really Czech? Of course the words listed only represent a snapshot of the current situation, yet it is an exciting encounter with the present-day language reality.

A practical help in the quickly developing field of journalism, media and the modern information technology is offered by the *Encyklopedie praktické žurnalistiky* (Barbora Osvaldová, Jan Halada a kol., 1999). The many-sided volume gives an explanation for as much as 450 entries and shows more than 150 photographs.

As an illustration symptomatic for one of the recent social transformations, we would mention the English-Czech explanatory dictionary of slang expressions for drugs *Slangové výrazy pro drogy. Anglicko-český výkladový slovník* (Launer, 2001). This small handbook comprises not less than 2,500 entries, and in addition a concise Czech dictionary of the same terminological field. For the inexperienced reader it is quite a surprise to discover the expressive richness of these terms, many of which possess poetic value, such as 'early girl, dust of angels, kings habit, Dona Juana, clear light, magic mist, busy bee', etc. Also, extensive use is made of the names of colours,

cf. 'green ashes, green dragon, green frog, green goddess, green snow, green wedge, red bud, red chicken, red devil, red eagle, red lips'.

In spite of the knowledge already available, it is not an easy undertaking to give a clear-cut picture of the contemporary Czech language, precisely because of the speed and the extent of the ongoing changes. Besides, the individual functional fields, such as phonology, morphology, syntax or lexicon are not involved to the same degree in the stream of the transition processes. The functional field most exposed to significant changes is, of course, the lexicon.

The other, much more complex, important changes, take place in the area of co-existence of languages and language varieties in the new Czech society and are subject to a sociolinguistic study.

1.1 Changes in the lexicon

In the development of the lexicon we can distinguish at least three main processes:

a) the re-making of the Czech lexicon, i.e. the process by which the vocabulary spontaneously or intentionally renews itself by getting rid of words that are no longer functional (often those connected with communist ideology) and by creating new ones from its own sources, or by giving a different meaning to existing words, e.g. *béčkař* 'outsider' (derived from the letter 'b', i.e. the second one; of the second, not the first quality), *bezdomovec* 'homeless person' (literally who is without home, i.e. *bez domova*), *ledvinka* 'purse on the waist-belt' (based on the form of *ledvinka* 'kidney'), *lůžkoden* 'the hotel costs per person per day' (joining *lůžko* 'bed' to *den* 'day'), *mlžení* 'intentionally giving wrong information' (from mlha 'mist', literally 'making of mist'), *občasník* 'television program which is not transmitted on a regular basis' (from *občas*, adv. 'from time to time'), *tiskárna* 'printer, of computer' (before only the printing-office), *vstřícný* 'accommodating, of attitude' (from *vstříc*, adv., e.g. *jít v. někomu* 'go to meet somebody'), *vytunelovat* 'to embezzle money from a bank or a firm' (from *tunel* 'tunnel', i.e. to make a tunnel under a bank in order to pull out the money through it).

Also, some existing verbal expressions are extended by new valency complements (bringing an unexpected fresh meaning with them), such as *oslovit někoho **něčím*** 'to address somebody by something', e.g. *divadelní představení oslovilo i rodiny s dětmi* 'the theatre performance addressed even families with children', *ošetřit **něco něčím*** 'to treat, nurse something by something' (before only in medical sense), e.g. *ošetřit práva menšin zákonem* 'to nurse the rights of minorities by law', *přečíst **někoho*** 'to read somebody' (before only to read something), e.g. *voliči **ho** mají přečteného* 'his intentions are clear to his electors' (literally 'the electors have read him over'), *podepsat se na **někom**, něčem* 'to mark somebody, something' (literally 'to put one's signature to somebody, something'; before only with an animate subject and inanimate object), e.g. *to se na nás všech podepsalo* 'this has marked all of us', *na růstu podpory KSČM se podepisuje to, že lidé vidí ubohost české politické scény* 'the growth of the KSČM is caused by the fact that people see the misery of the Czech political scene'.

b) the making up of an international lexicon, by borrowing from English whole terminological clusters (concerning for instance computer equipment, administration, the environment, etc.), and in addition a large amount of individual loanwords, e.g. *airbag* 'airbag', *brífink* 'briefing', *image* 'image', *mainstream* 'mainstream', *laseroterapie* 'laser therapy', *one-man show* 'one-man show'.

c) the creation of a mixed lexicon for every-day communication purposes, i.e. the merger between Czech and borrowed lexemes. The latter often undergo (partial) adaptation to the Czech phonological and morphological system, cf. *antimanažer* 'a person lacking the qualities of a manager', *aparthotel* 'apartment hotel', *aromakompozice* 'mixture of aromatic oils', *biostrava* 'food from organically grown crops', *čenžírna* 'exchange-office, of money', *diskomóda* 'fashion worn by clubbers, visitors of disco's', *drogovat* 'to use drugs', *ekologista* 'a person who cares about the environment', *ekoturistika* 'tourism which does not harm the environment', *ekotaška* 'bag from recycled material', *entrovat* 'to use the Enter-button', *gamblerství* 'addiction to gambling', *homelesák* 'homeless person', *charterový* 'based on charter-transport', *macdonaldizace* 'adaptation of (life) style to that of the American company McDonald's', *makerní* 'macro-', *nasamplova*t 'make a sound-sample', *missák* 'male equivalent of elected 'Miss' in a beauty pageant', *misska* 'elected 'Miss' in a beauty pageant', *outsiderka* 'female equivalent of an outsider', *popík* 'music in the style of pop', *preso* 'espresso-coffee', *přelízovat* 'to transfer a lease contract from one person to another', *rychlodabink* 'dubbing audible simultaneously with the original', *saunér* 'owner of a sauna or person employed in one', *vizážista* 'cosmetician'.

An extreme example of the procedure mentioned is the terminology connected with computer-games, in which exclusive slang (for insiders only) is created; very interesting material and comment on this phenomenon can be found in Hoffmannová (1998).

1.2 Changes in morphology and syntax

The mentioned far reaching transformations in the lexical system of Czech are accompanied by less conspicuous, but nevertheless important changes in morphology, first of all in word-formation, and in syntax. As to the former, very active use of foreign prefixes can be observed for instance in the processes of compounding substantives and adjectives, cf. *biobrambory* 'potatoes grown by organic means only', *biolečivo* 'medicines made from natural ingredients', *biopekárna* 'bakery making products from organically grown ingredients only', *ekopomoc* 'help for districts affected by ecological damage', *ekozemědělec* 'farmer working without use of harmful substances', *ekojízdenka* 'ticket for environmentally clean means of transport', *superbike* 'super bike', *superklub* 'top-football club', *supernabídka* 'exceptionally advantageous offer', *superamerický* 'more American than American' (adj.), *superplochý* 'extremely flat, of computer equipment', *supervolební* (*rok*) 'super electoral (year)'.

On the other hand, the native Czech prefixes do-, pro-, roz-, vy-, z-, za- are also frequently used, but this time at places, where this was not common before, cf. *doprivatizovat* 'to finish privatisation of something', *dovolba* 'additional election round', *propařit* 'to spend time playing computer games', *prolustrovaný* 'screened for political activities during the communist regime', *rozléči*t 'to start medical treatment', *rozklíčit* 'get to the bottom of something', *vyspecifikovat* 'to specify exhaustively', *vytelefonovaný* 'used up by phoning, of a telephone card', *zohlednit* 'to take into consideration', *zviditelnění někoho, něčeho* 'making somebody, something visible', *zalobbovaný* 'influenced by lobbying', *zavirovat* 'to infect by virus, of a computer'.

In syntax, too, some remarkable processes take place, e.g. in the noun phrases, such as *mladý muž* 'young man' (masc.anim., sg.), *mladí muži* 'young men' (masc.anim., pl.), *krásné město* 'beautiful city' (n., sg.), *krásná města* 'beautiful cities' (n., pl.). In these noun phrases a specific rule is in force, which demands that the attributive adjective be in morphological agreement with the substantive. This means

that the grammatical characteristics like gender, number or the category animate/inanimate must agree with each other in both parts of the noun phrase. Moreover, the attributive adjective usually precedes the noun which it modifies.

However, in many newly invented noun phrases the attributive adjective is not in agreement with the substantive; this amounts to a typologically new grammatical phenomenon (Daneš, 1997:23). Moreover, this neglect of the mentioned rule surely can be seen as an adoption of a grammatical feature of English, cf. *hifi nahrávka* 'hifi-recording', *Premiéra TV* 'television-station Premiéra', *profi muzikant* 'professional musician', *profi volba* 'choice made in the professional way', *Brassica faktor* 'Brassica-factor', *second-hand oblečení* 'second-hand clothing' or *režim makro od 10 cm* 'macro-regime starting from 10cm', *u dealerů Opel* 'at the Opel-dealers'.

There are also attributive constructions in which the adjectives that are in agreement and those that are not are combined, and these really offer an exotic sight, cf. …*máte příležitost znovu si zazávodit na dnes už tradičních agility Nočních hrátkách* 'you have the opportunity to compete in the already traditional agility Night Games', *Intercanis agility o pohár Pedigree* 'Intercanis agility competition for the Pedigree Cup' (*Pes přítel člověka* 2000:5), *hokejová Staropramen extraliga* 'hockey super league Staropramen'. I also found an interesting example of a 'non-inflected' adverb, in the following phrase: *pustit se do něčeho* **profi** (instead of *profesionálně*, *jako profesionál*) 'embark upon something in the professional way'.

The examples mentioned give rise to the question whether we might be dealing with an increasing tolerance towards non-inflected forms in Czech, as far as the native speakers are concerned. If so, it could mean that at least **in some specific functional areas**, primarily in those of modern technology, the inflectionality of the Czech language could become less imperative than it has been up to now.

1.3 Language varieties

The new situation in the Czech society also gives rise to significant trends, concerning the relationship between two main varieties of the national language, the standard variety (literary language, *spisovná čeština*) and the non-standard variety (substandard, *běžně mluvená čeština*). In the development of these two varieties we can observe the shifting of the dominant status belonging traditionally to the standard variety, towards the substandard (*substandardizace*, as Daneš called it (1997:13)). It is precisely the substandard that is the scene of the majority of the ongoing language changes, and therefore naturally attracts the attention of native speakers. This shift can be seen as a predictable step in the development of the specific Czech language situation, the so-called diglossia (Ferguson, 1959). Diglossia means the existence of two language varieties within one language, each possessing its own (higher or lower) sociolinguistic status. All users of Czech (and all Bohemists and Slavists) are familiar with the functioning of these two language varieties (and thus two norms) in Czech, and with the theoretical and practical difficulties which this brings about. We will look more closely at some features of this development in section 3 below.

Furthermore, there is a reverse process of widening knowledge and usage of the standard language, which also has to do with movements in the society. This variety was in the past period used in the first place in the written texts, while the language spoken in the radio or at the television often had the characteristic features of the substandard. Moreover, good command of the literary language in speaking was easily brought in relationship with negatively evaluated intellectualism.

Nowadays, in the information media on the one hand the substandard is used, but on other grounds: it symbolizes the freedom of an individual to express his feelings or

thoughts in the way he chooses. On the other hand we can hear very nice and natural standard language, because there is a new, lively awareness of the national identity on the part of speakers, and they see the literary Czech as a token of it. Above all the new Czech establishment makes it its own, considering it necessary for an image as educated society members.

2 Co-existence of Czech with English

So far the manifestations of this co-existence are known from the publications on this subject, as well as from every-day practice in conversation, mass-media and the fast world of advertising. As opposed to the long experience of the Czech speech community with the German language (and partly also with the Russian language), characterized by aversion against it, the English language does not seem to meet obstacles in entering the Czech language space.

In general, this process proceeds along two ways. On the one hand English words function side by side with Czech words (2.1), and on the other hand English words are more or less adapted in order to look and behave 'Czech-like' (2.2). This phenomenon is not completely new, since there are many English words that have been in use for a long time, which underwent the same processes, cf. *fotbal* 'football', *tramvaj* 'tram', *džem* 'jam', *džus* 'fruit-jus', *tenis* 'tennis', and others.

2.1 Doublets

After a decade of this co-existence a growing number of doublets came into being, most often as instances of lexical redundancy, as the new English words join the Czech words normally used. Some examples are: *e-mail / elektronická pošta, cash / hotové peníze, comeback / návrat, farmář / sedlák* (Daneš 1997:20). All of the terms are already listed in the abovementioned dictionary *Nová slova v češtině. Slovník neologizmů* (1998).

The simultaneous functioning of these doublets can be seen as a temporary stage in the development of the national language: we presume that at a certain point in the co-existence the 'choice' will be made in favour of one of them. Thereafter one of the doublet terms will successively become a permanent part of the common vocabulary, while the other will grow to be marginal and obsolete in the end. In such a process, of course, a not insignificant role is played by what could be called 'a fashion', i.e. to call a thing by a name in another language can lend more significance to it, and to the speaker, cf. *horské kolo / bike, kapitálové sdružení / holding, pronájem výrobků / leasing, tiskové středisko / press Centrum, vícesálové kino / multiplex*. It should be noted that in the examples given the English term is equal to a syntagma in Czech. If it would be the English word which would prevail, then it would undergo – as far as possible – the process of adaptation.

2.2 Adaptation

The other way of intake of English words is their adaptation to the Czech language system. They are adjusted in such a way as to look like native lexemes: this assures an easier pronunciation and make them 'declinable' along the seven cases being characteristic for Czech. This process, too, can yield doublets, one of which is already adapted in its spelling, while the other remains in the original spelling, cf. *cash/keš*,

hot-line/hotlajn, leader/lídr, gambler/gembler, cornflakes/kornflejky, briefing/brífink, byte/bajt, etc. (Bozděchová, 1997:274).

It is obvious, that for many of the new words the inclusion in the Czech declination system was not a big problem at all, thanks to their clear phonetic form, such as *míting*, gen. *mítingu*, *summit*, gen. *summitu*, *klip*, gen. *klipu*, *laptop*, gen. *laptopu*, *sprej*, gen. *spreje*, monodisplej, gen. *monodispleje*. *Míting* (or *mítink*), *summit*, *klip* and *laptop* follow the masculine paradigm **pán** 'mister' (as they end in the so-called 'hard consonant'), *sprej* and *monodisplej* follow the paradigm **muž** 'man' (as they end in the so-called 'soft' consonant).

Some good examples of declination of foreign lexemes are found in instruction leaflets about new products, like photographic equipment, computers or cars, cf. *Nemusíte chodit až k cíli – přibližte si jej zoomem*! 'you don't need to walk towards the aim, get it closer by the zoom' (in Czech 'zoom' is put in instrumental, i.e. the 7th case), *Umožňuje přečtení snímků uložených na kartě Smart Media ve Vašem notebooku* 'it makes it possible to read the recordings stored on the Smart Medium card in your notebook' (in Czech 'notebook' is put in locative, i.e. the 6th case), *dva airbagy, boční airbagy* 'two air-bags, side-airbags' (in Czech 'airbag' is put in nominative plural, i.e. the 1st case plural). On the other hand, in cases where the form of the foreign word is totally different from Czech structures, the adaptation has not been carried out as yet, cf. *cartridge, know-how, talkshow* (Bozděchová, 1997:273).

2.3 Mixture

A combination of adapted and non-adapted lexemes in one sentence, one paragraph or in one publication is rather a shock for a language user accustomed to the homogeneity of Czech written texts in the past. Cf. the following sentence from Wodehouse, published in Czech: *Odkopl jsem míček kousek dál na holou vyvýšeninku, odkud se už dal snadno dostat vedží sedmi ráznými ranami na grýn* 'I kicked the golf ball further on at a small bare elevation, from where it was yet easy to get it on the green in seven vigorous strokes by the wedge' (observe that 'wedge', 'green' are adapted into '*vedž*' - here in instrumental, and '*grýn*', respectively). But in the same paragraph we read: *A jsou dny, kdy hraju druhou ránu ze sousední fairwaye...*'and there are days, when I play the second drive from the neighbouring fairway...' (Wodehouse 2000:99). Another example: *V komerční televizi je alfou a omegou všeho zisk a divák 'napočítaný' na peoplemetru* 'in commercial television the Alpha and Omega of everything is profit and the viewers, 'calculated' by the people meter' (Lidové noviny, 29th of July, 2000).

The following examples are an even more exotic mixture of English and Czech: *Motherboard je osazen chipsetem Intel Neptune a dvěma paticemi pro procesor Pentium 90 MHz nebo 100MHz* 'the motherboard is provided with the Intel Neptune chipset and two supports for the Pentium 90 MHz or 100 MHz processor', *Součástí dodávky je i double speed CD ROM mechanika Toshiba XM 3401B, která slouží nejen pro instalaci software, ale i jako sdílený CD ROM pro všechny uživatele sítě* 'part of the package is also the double-speed CD-ROM mechanics of Toshiba XM 3401B, which serves not only for the installation of the software, but also as a shared CD-Rom for all users of the network', *Tyto disky díky své unikátní konstrukci tall spindle design umožňují přejít na provozní rychlost otáčení 7500 ot./min.* 'these discs make it possible, thanks to their unique tall spindle design, to achieve the working speed of 7500 rpm'.

This shock-effect that the combinations of adapted and non-adapted English words bring about, together with Czech standard and non-standard words, has already been

discovered by the members of the speech community. Therefore, it is created on purpose for stylistic aims, as is the case in an article on Prague youngsters and their entertainment, cf. *Kdyby rodičové tušili, jak se jejich ratolesti bavěj, asi by pěkně smrákali, tedy hleděli, a nechápali vo co* go, *jinými slovy, o co se jedná* 'if the parents knew how their off-spring amuse themselves, they would be nicely getting dark, say they would goggle at it and wouldn't understand what's going on, with other words what is up' or *Travellers jsou komunity technařů cestujících po Evropě ve vojetejch náklaďákách, s sebou táhnou jídlo, pití, drogy, děti a soundsystémy čili jakési pojízdné diskotéky, který rozbalujou na tak zvaných open airech, tedy otevřených párty, akcích či kalbách* 'travellers are communities of techno-music fans who trek through Europe in used trucks, and they lug around with them food, drinks, drugs, kids and sound systems or rather a kind of mobile disco's, which they install at the so-called open airs, which are open parties, actions or *kalby*' (Lidové noviny, 19th of February, 2000).

3 The Czech language in transition

Thus in general the current situation of the Czech language gives at first sight an impression of instability, as a consequence of factors already mentioned. Among them is the strong influence of English and the weakening of the norm of the standard variety of Czech (*spisovná čeština*, literary language). This prestigious norm which for a long period ruled over the formal functions of Czech, i.e. it was exclusively used in education, administration, law, literature, the media and official conversation (term cf. Ferguson 1959, also Grygar-Rechziegel, 1984, 1990), is losing its dominant position in favour of the non-prestigious substandard (*běžně mluvená čeština*, non-standard, also colloquial Czech).

The weakening of the norm has, of course, many causes, and we will hint only at some of them. First of all we think about the overall liberalization of attitude of the Czech people towards traditional values, including those of language, history and classic literature. This trend can be observed even where it concerns things and activities in daily life. One of the ideas of the new society was put on the T-shirts of children (in English, of course), cf.: 'Come as you are or don't come at all!' Such statement could be extended with similar ones, e.g. 'Be yourself or don't be at all!' and 'Say it in good plain Czech or shut up!'.

To the instability of rules of the standard testify also the passionate debates about the new spelling for the literary language, which a few years ago dominated the media. The persistence on the traditional way of usage, and a want of freedom of expression are in the recent situation struggling with each other. With many Czech speakers - as we have said - there are the considerations of national pride and identity, because of which they want to maintain the priority and functions of the standard, literary language. Some categories of Czech speakers, however, prefer the substandard which is governed by the non-codified spoken norm only. It is their actual mother-tongue, and they feel free in its usage. Everything that is 'prescribed', is experienced as a kind of pressure, and is therefore less satisfactory to use.

There are still other reasons for the decline of the prestige of the standard norm. Previously unknown social mobility, the migration of individuals, or smaller or larger groups of people, resulted in a certain diminishing of contrasts between language varieties (and perhaps even languages). In my opinion, also the influence of a whole stratum of foreign users of Czech inside the speech community should not be underestimated. In general they possess only a limited knowledge of the Czech literary language and they are satisfied with it. Their exclusive objective (except for the

linguists) is to acquire the ability to communicate with the natives. Thus contrary to the situation Czech native speakers were used to all their lives, they now find themselves occasionally surrounded by speakers with a poor command of the (literary) language. It is not unthinkable that this undermines the native speakers' feeling of the necessity of correct language usage.

Yet, in this rather chaotic situation in which Czech finds itself, there also exists a lively interest on the part of the members of the speech community in the future development of the language and an inclination to protect it from possible decline. Moreover, in order to reduce the observed coarseness in language usage, suggestions are made as to how to restore polite speech, in particular when speaking to children, partners and friends (Daneš, 1997:7). Therefore the discussion about the quality of Czech, according to many native speakers represented by the standard language, is more topical than ever.

3.1 The attitude of Czech speakers

Czech traditionally belonged to the languages blessed with dedicated attention from their users, who claimed that the precious means of communication should be constantly and purposely nursed, guarded, trimmed and cultivated. This attitude has had several peaks during the development of the Czech language, for instance in connection with the ideology of so-called purism. As is well known, in modern linguistics this term has negative connotations, because of the basic idea of the purists that language must be protected from (external) factors that might cause its change.

As a matter of fact, in the past there have been reasons enough for a purist attitude and for the tendency to protect the Czech language. For centuries the country has been threatened by the expansion of its German neighbour and when in 1620 the actual German rule began, the longitudinal stagnation of Czech cultural development, including the national language, set in. Hand in hand with this take-over went the process of Germanization and the religious shift towards Catholicism. Higher positions in society connected with power and social status were mainly held by foreigners. This meant for the Czech population not only a deprivation of the possibilities to occupy good positions in public life, but also the deprivation of the possibilities for spiritual and intellectual development. In addition, there was the necessity to give up the traditional protestant faith.

As a consequence of all these factors, an extensive exodus took place of well-educated people and members of the higher social classes of the Czech people with their entire families. The ones who were not able to emigrate and stayed behind, were the common people in the towns and countryside. For several centuries they therefore became the only speakers of Czech (in its colloquial form). They were separated from the Germans by a social and ethno-linguistic boundary. This way, moreover, the traditional care for the literary language almost came to standstill. The final blow was the imperial decree in 1778 by which the Czech language was banned from all types of schools (Flajšhans, 1924:302).

At the end of the 18th century the so-called National Revival started: the national consciousness of the Czech people gradually increased again, as a consequence of the introduction of the ideas of Romanticism in Europe. At the same time this gave an impetus to a comeback of the characteristic Czech attitude towards the native language, which has been considered the representative of the national identity. The newly unified Czech society felt the need to create an adequate means to express everything which had until then been expressed by the German language. However, the grammarians of that time did not consider the colloquial Czech (non-standard),

spoken during the previous centuries by the oppressed Czech community, appropriate for this purpose. Therefore, a pure, rich Czech language had to be created and made ready for the actual linguistic needs. The philologists chose as a basis for it the old norm from the 16th century when the language was flourishing and at its peak. This decision was the starting point for the characteristic division of the language into two varieties, which coexisted from that time onwards: the standard (literary) language and the non-standard (common spoken language, substandard); see the comment at the end of this section.

Gradually, literary Czech, created in this way, resumed its functioning and appeared side by side with German in many fields of public life, administration, journalism, science and law. A good example of this stage of the development of the language is the German-Czech dictionary of scientific terminology by Pavel Josef Šafařík, published in 1853 (Německo-český slovník vědeckého názvosloví pro gymnásia a reálné školy). This very complex situation, however, gave rise to a strong purist movement and battles for the usage of pure Czech were fought far into the 20th century. As non-standard, colloquial Czech continued to develop in the way it did up to that time, after the creation of the literary language there existed two functional varieties of the Czech national language, with two different norms.

For the sake of illustration I will give here some of the features, differentiating the standard Czech from the non-standard; it concerns, of course, the recent, not the historical, situation. They are first of all phonological features, e.g. the redistribution of /i:/, which is replaced in non-standard in stems and adjectival endings by /ej/, usually after the so-called hard and neutral consonants /b, d, h, x, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, z/, e.g. *dýchat~dejchat* 'to breeze', *hýbat se~hejbat se* 'to move', *kýchat~kejchat* 'to sneeze', *mýt~mejt* 'to wash', *dobrý~dobrej* 'good', *tlustý~tlustej* 'thick', *laciný~lacinej* 'cheap', *hloupý~hloupej* 'stupid'. This difference projects itself through whole declination patterns, so that the morphological alternations are also different, cf. *dobr-ý* 'good', gen.sg.m.anim. *-ého*, dat.sg.m.anim. *-ému*, loc.sg.m.anim. *-ém* (standard)~*dobrej*, *-ýho*, *-ýmu*, *-ym* (non-standard).

In instrumental plural within noun phrases there are remarkable differences between standard and non-standard, cf. *s mladými pány~s mladejma pánama* 'with young misters'. Moreover, in nom.pl.adj. the non-standard offers only one form for all genders, for example *krásný*: *muži, domy, ženy, města* 'beautiful: men, houses, women, cities' as against *krásní muži, krásné domy, krásné ženy, krásná města* (three different forms of adjective *krásný*) in the standard.

Further we could mention the use of prothetic /v/ before initial /o/ in the non-standard which yields the difference *voko~oko* 'eye', *voběd~oběd* 'lunch', *voheň~oheň* 'fire', *votočit~otočit* 'to turn', *voznámit~oznámit* 'to announce'. Also, some consonant clusters are simplified in the non-standard, such as /kt/~/k/, /jč/~/č/, /jd/~/d/, e.g. *který ~kerej* 'which', *půjčit~pučit* 'to lend', *jdu~du* 'I go'.

3.2 What is proper Czech?

As has been said, nowadays two attitudes toward the national language exist side by side in modern Czech society. On the one hand there is a liberal, relaxed approach to the language and on the other hand the concern about the possible loss of its qualities. Remarkably enough, some other speech communities which find themselves in a totally different situation, display similar concern for their languages. So has a group of Dutch linguists described a new variant of the national language, called Poldernederlands (Polder Dutch). One of the linguists (Stroop 1998) even points to it as the reason for disappearing of standard Dutch. There is an interesting sociophonetic

aspect to Poldernederlands, because the carriers of it are young, well-educated women. The new variant is characterized by a typical shift in articulation of the diphthongs (they become lower and more open), as result of relaxed pronunciation.

A similar phenomenon can be observed in Czech phonetics with respect to the pronunciation of the high vowels /e/ and /i/, also as a consequence of the attitude of less effort on the part of the speakers, cf. *politika* > [poleteka] 'politics', *ovlivnit* > [ovlevnět] 'to influence', *policie* > [poleceja] 'police', *nicméně* > [nicmáňa] 'nevertheless' (Svozilová, 1999:78).

However, the 'errors' in the Czech language are not limited to pronunciation, but occur at all levels of the language system. At least, this is the opinion of some linguists and of a good part of the public. The position of prescriptive treatment traditionally was strong, as may appear from the big amount of reference books on proper Czech. The Institute of the Czech Language of the Academy of Sciences in Prague has at its disposal a special information department, for the problems concerning correct forms in Czech. The experts give advice and answer the questions coming in daily in large quantities by post, telephone or e-mail from the anxious or even angry users. At the homepage of the information department (www.ujc.cas.cz, choose *Jazyková poradna*) we find the description of the department's activities and also an instruction where to look for solutions of language problems. As the most prominent source of 'good Czech' is introduced *Český národní korpus*, the very extensive, representative computer corpus of recent Czech with more than 1 million words plus data about how it is used (more information about the corpus http://ucnk.ff.cuni.cz).

3.3 The sociolinguistics of errors

As an outstanding example of this attitude I would like to mention the book *Jak dnes píšeme / mluvíme a jak hřešíme proti dobré češtině* (Svozilová, 1999) 'How we currently write/speak and how we sin against good Czech'. The title already betrays the twofold approach to the native language, i.e. firstly the description how it is spoken and written and, secondly, how it **should be** spoken or written. In the contents of this refreshing book we find terms like: *nenáležité užívání* 'inappropriate usage', *chyba* 'error', *nesprávné tvary* 'incorrect forms', *nedbalosti* 'negligences', *hřešit proti dobré češtině* 'to sin against good Czech'. In addition the author also includes language phenomena which she evaluates as positive, i.e. original, witty, inventive.

The way in which judgments about correctness in language are formed has been convincingly analyzed by Andersson & Trudgill (1990), who proved that these judgments partly result from a sociolinguistic standpoint. The authors looked at the factors which cause language users to form the opinion that their language is declining. They found that: **1)** there is an overall fear of innovations, **2)** people still compare their language to the grammatical structure of Latin, **3)** the 'errors' are associated with social class. The authors argue that nothing in the language is correct or incorrect, beautiful or ugly as such, but that this is determined by the ideology of culture (Andersson & Trudgill, 1990:35). They question whether the native speaker is at all able to use his native language in an incorrect way. The answer is **no**: every member of the speech community who has learned his first language from the parents, possesses the ability of its proper usage.

However, most forms, expressions or pronunciations that are considered to be erroneous, are typical of the lower social classes. If we listen to expressions in a foreign language, pronounced in various ways, we lack the sociolinguistic information of what pronunciation is typical for which social class, and as consequence we cannot

decide which one is 'beautiful' (like the BBC English accent) and which is 'ugly'. The authors express their conviction that languages do not need to be protected against change; moreover, it may even represent progress, when it occurs together with social or technological innovations (Andersson & Trudgill, 1990:156,158). This surely applies to the situation in current Czech.

3.3.1 Witty Czech

In the course of my discussion I have given many examples of the wonderful and sometimes odd new forms, structures and expressions in modern day Czech. At the end I would like to state that to watch a language in gradual development of which the result cannot be predicted, is an exciting experience. My overwhelming feeling, however, is that the language is alive and kicking. Especially the examples, which are a mixture of standard and non-standard Czech plus English, testify to the ease and even the sense of humour with which native speakers handle foreign elements in order to achieve the communicative purposes. The Czechs treat the English units – in cases where no professional terminological questions are involved – almost as their own language devices and apply to them the grammatical rules of the vernacular freely. Thus the most amusing expressions have appeared like *mcdonaldí menu* 'menu like at Mc Donald's', *sekáč* 'second-hand shop', *androš* 'underground', and - typically - very many diminutives like *písíčko* 'PC', *cédéčko* 'CD-disc', *dýbejzka* 'dBase'. Only the native speaker of Czech can appreciate the pleasure and the language readiness involved in the generation of such forms. At the same time these two ingredients are important representatives of the ongoing development.

4 Conclusions

Despite the purist inclinations in the history of the Czech language, the expansion of English meets with only limited resistance up till now. The reason is perhaps that this language is not forced upon the Czech community by an occupation, and that it provides access to a new world of desirable knowledge and an attractive lifestyle. It is thinkable that - in connection with the European integration close at hand - this attitude will not significantly change.

It can be supposed that in some functional fields, e.g. in engineering, management, information technology and genetics among others, English (and other international) terms will stay in use because of their practical advantages. In other fields, that are more personal and private, the speakers will presumably stick to their own lexicon and go on with the creation of new items from this source. This could yield an interesting functional differentiation of the use of several languages in one speech community and this may become one of the features of globalisation.

With respect to the influence of English, it is justified to expect that the Czech language system is powerful enough to maintain its dominance. The degree of imagination and playfulness involved in the current process strengthens us in the conviction that there is no reason to fear for the quality of the Czech language and for its future. On the contrary, after being in a downward spiral during half a century, Czech is going through a spontaneous radical metamorphosis, which can inspire it and bring it to a previously unknown bloom.

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