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Multicultural character of Slovak standard lexis

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Abstract

The paper deals with the multicultural character of Slovak standard lexis, which is based on the acquisition of foreign lexemes and their adaptation into the language system of Slovak. It focuses on languages that have left important traces on Slovak lexis. The paper also considers five main factors that determine the multicultural character of Slovak standard lexis from the point of view of language ecology: language status, linguistic similarity, linguistic contrast, particularities of language, and codification of language. The influence of these factors on the hosting language represents a complex eco-linguistic phenomenon that is regularised in and by communication.

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1. Introduction

Slovak as a language is relatively open to the enrichment of vocabulary and the penetration of foreign elements. It is a mid-open language, which means that many foreign words enter Slovak lexis but linguists keep a very close eye on them – i.e. their penetration is not unrestrained. In addition to that, foreign words pass through a so called “word market” – only if there is demand on the part of language users, these words actually become part of the system (Ondrejovič, 2009).

The process of internationalisation of Slovak lexis by means of borrowing foreign-language elements was more or less present in the past and is still present nowadays. Already in the first half of the 19th century, Ľudovít Štúr, the codifier of the standard Slovak language, readily borrowed and actively used some Czech words. The same applies

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today – we enrich Slovak with foreign-language neologisms and adapt them naturally to our grammatical system. Such new words take gender and case suffixes, they are inflected and further used for different word-formation processes. When communicating, Slovak speakers systematically employ Proto-Slavonic and Old Slavonic words along with those that came into Slovak from other languages, during its long history or just recently. A considerable part of foreign-language elements in Slovak has been naturalised to such a degree that most Slovak native speakers perceive them as expressions coming from their own language, without even suspecting their foreign origin.

Many Slovak linguists consider borrowing of foreign-language elements into Slovak as a proof of “vocabulary dynamics” (Horecký, Buzássyová, Bosák et al., 1989) or a “universal way of enriching the lexis of a language” (Dudok, 2012, p. 271). This language phenomenon is also characterised as a process in which “the dominant, donor language exercises an influence on paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations of the hosting language – i.e. on its innermost system” (Tibenská, 2007, p. 136), as a “constant communicative coping with foreign-language innovations on the part of a language community” (Dolnik, 1999, pp. 77-78) or as “communicative penetration” (Böhmerová, 2012). Slovak contemporary linguistics publications focus mostly on English loans; papers and other contributions dealing with foreign words in Slovak also usually dedicate the biggest part to English borrowings (one can find more facts about English borrowings in Slovak and about Slovak linguistic publications and papers in the paper written by Škvareninová (2015)). This situation is undoubtedly provoked by the fact that English is the language from which most loan words currently come (not only) into Slovak.

At the moment, more than 100 languages are unequally participating at the evolution of Slovak lexis. A large majority of these languages has only a limited or no real impact on Slovak vocabulary (Dudok, 2012, p. 264). However, they increase its multicultural character.

Our initial question therefore stands as follows: From the point of view of language ecology, which factors participate at the building of the multicultural character of Slovak standard lexis? We suppose that there are several different factors and their influence on language is rather complex.

2. Data and methods

The basic materials that we work with in this study are two Slovak codification manuals: *Pravidlá slovenského pravopisu* [Rules of Slovak Spelling], used for the purpose of correct writing, and *Krátky slovník slovenského jazyka* [Short Dictionary of the Slovak Language], used for vocabulary – both are available also online at <http://slovniky.korpus.sk/>. The data we offer were also checked in *Slovenský národný korpus* [The Slovak National Corpus], which is an electronic database containing real-world, authentic Slovak texts (available online at: <http://korpus.juls.savba.sk/>).

The research is aimed at those factors that determine the multicultural character of Slovak standard lexis from the point of view of language ecology. Our research methods include analysis of Slovak codification manuals, scientific literature, and desk study. We focus our attention especially on those donor languages that have left more important traces on Slovak lexis and that traditionally provide it with multicultural elements. Among non-Slavonic languages, we should mention Latin and Greek (borrowings of which came into Slovak mostly through Latin), French, German, Hungarian and, of course, English, and, as a Slavonic language, Czech.

3. Results and discussion: factors that determine the multicultural character of Slovak standard lexis

On the basis of the study of linguistic literature, material analyses and desk studies, we systematised and defined the following factors that determine the multicultural character of Slovak standard lexis from the point of view of language ecology: (1) language status, (2) linguistic similarity, (3) linguistic contrast, (4) particularities of language, and (5) codification of language. The influence of these factors represents a complex eco-linguistic phenomenon. It is not possible to establish a clear hierarchy of individual factors; we do so only for methodological reasons.

3.1. Language status

There is a direct proportion between language status and its influence on other languages: the higher the status is, the bigger the influence that it exercises on other languages (compare S. Ondrejovič: “the higher the language status

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