

Slovak as a Central-European Language*

(On the Domestic/Foreign Opposition)

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The paper characterizes Slovak as a language relatively open to borrowing international loans and their integration in its language system. According to Gyula Déczy's scale (1973) it is at the middle level of openness. This situation was significantly influenced by the role played by Latin in the history of Slovak (Latin as an administration language was used in the Hungarian part of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy as long as 1867). The proportion between international elements and domestic (Slavonic) words in series of synonyms and in various lexical-semantic microstructures is an integral part of its typological characteristics.

Key words: international loans, Latin, anglicisms, words of domestic (Slavonic) origin

1. Introduction

Borrowing as a process taking place through entire epochs of the development of languages and the resulting internationalization of languages have long been burning issues of linguistics. Not surprisingly, one of the topics outlined for the 12th International Congress of Slavists in Cracow in 1998 was *Language changes (controlled and uncontrolled development)*, which was to include internationalization and terminologization. The reason that this topic is so much discussed among Slovak linguists is that the current rise in the number words being borrowed from English provides enough stimulus to consider how, not only in the theory of standard language and language culture, but also in everyday recommendations of linguists one of the *Theses about the Slovak language (Kultúra slova 1, 1967: 36)* is applied: “*The basic developmental feature of the present-day Slovak language is development according to its own inherent rules.*” The Slovak language only admits necessary words from foreign languages. It marginally follows from the context that with regard to the need for delimitation, the original idea of the thesis was to grasp the essence of admitting Czech words into Slovak.

This article presents arguments for three partially paradoxical theses which seem generally to reflect the factors determining the coexistence of domestic (i.e., etymologically Slavic) and international lexical units in the system of the Slovak language and in the realization of this system in communication. The theses are as follows:

1. Slovak is a language relatively open towards admitting internationalisms. In comparison with some of the neighboring languages, it occupies a central, neutral position.
2. Slovak, as a language of a relatively small nation, is one of the languages where linguists traditionally play an important role in cultivating and raising the level of the standard language as well as in spreading language culture among the users of the language (this includes instructions on the degree to which foreign words should be used).
3. One part of the identity of Slovak as a standard and national language is constituted by the proportion to which, both on the level of system macrostructure and on the level of various word formation and lexical-semantic microstructures, domestic and international elements coexist. The participation of internationalisms in expression variants, in functional (semantic and stylistic) differentiation and in different ways of functioning in various

communication spheres is one of typological characteristic features of Slovak language. This proportion is the result of a long process of development, of cultural and social traditions and of some other more recent tendencies (e.g. the aforementioned rise of Anglicisms) may not alter them in a substantial way.

Before discussing the individual theses in more detail, I would like to add a terminological comment. The term 'internationalism' is often used as an empirically obvious category without any more specific definition. To compare, look at the following definition:

Internationalisms are foreign words of primarily Greek and Latin origin, used in several related and non-related languages (at least three languages without closer relation), denoting phenomena of international nature in the fields of philosophy, politics, culture, science, technology, art and sport, etc. (*Encyklopédia jazykovedy* 1993: 196).

An attempt at a closer specification of the theoretical status of internationalisms was made by Schaefer (Braun, Schaefer and Volmert 1990: 34-46). In addition to defining the lexeme of one specific language, he suggests the level of interlexemes as a second-degree abstraction. For instance, the lexemes *Zivilisation* in German, the English *civilisation*, the French *civilisation*, and the Russian *civilizacija* as lexemes of different languages form one interlexeme. Hence, internationalism is an interlingual unit of differing complexity, an intermorpheme or interlexeme, through which corresponding, formally congruent and content-equivalent monolingual units appear (ibid.: 46).

2. The open nature of Slovak

2.1 The place of Latin in the history of Slovak

Since internationalisms are mainly expressions with Latin or Greek bases and affixes, the statement that Slovak is a language relatively open towards admitting internationalisms, can, in my view, be supported primarily by a fact of diachronic nature, namely the importance of Latin in the history of Slovak language. This strong impact of Latin in Slovak linguistics has been adequately explained (cf. especially Pauliny 1961, 1983, Doruľa 1977, Blanár 1977). To this can be added what can be more clearly seen from a generalized, European view. Haarmann (Haarmann 1975, cf. Gross 1987, Buzássyová 1991), who in his work focusing on historical sociolinguistics studies how long Latin survived as the official language in individual European countries, shows that Latin maintained this function longest in the Hungarian Empire. Nominally, it was the official language until the time of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, although Hungarian is known to have rivaled it since the beginning of 19th century. This case differs significantly from French, for instance, which managed to break free from the influence of Latin as early as 14th century. As a result of the long use of Latin in Hungary (and admitting Latin words into Slovak in various stages and in various communication fields), objective conditions were created for a continuous, but also vague, transition of Latinisms, often used as Older Slovak loans, towards internationalisms. These, then, although etymologically Latinisms or Greekisms, acquired their specific, modified meanings through English, or more precisely through American English mainly in the 20th century. This unclear transition leads to a problematic phenomenon which we have

called *repeated internationalization* (cf. Buzássyová 1991). Some researchers refer to this phenomenon as *successive borrowing*.

The characteristic openness of Slovak towards internationalisms is especially true when compared with neighboring languages. Décsy (1973) uses the degree to which international words permeate the system of a given European language to differentiate between the so-called mixed languages ('Mischsprachen'), such as English and Romanian (in these the foreign element is present to a great degree); neutral languages; and, finally, introvert languages, such as Finnish, Hungarian, Modern Greek, or German as one of the so-called world languages (in these the foreign element does not reach the average degree typified by the neutral languages). According to P. Braun (Braun, Schaeder and Volmert 1990) the whole history of the German national language shows that processes of borrowing foreign words in different developmental stages was seen from the perspective of the national language itself as an offensive process. One interesting example from the publication cited (ibid.: 36) involves Weinrich's wish to use the word *Taxi*, which is used in many languages around the world, in German. However, contemporary German dictionaries map the use of the lexeme *Taxi* in Swiss German alone; in Germany the form *Mieteauto* is used. The introvertedness of Hungarian, when compared with other languages, has been influenced by an extraordinarily strong tendency to form new words on a local basis, the so-called 'nyelvújítás' (language restoration) which took place in the end of 18th and beginning of 19th century. According to L. Benkő (Benkő and Samu 1972: 221) the number of newly-created forms within such a short period of time, with these words establishing themselves firmly in standard Hungarian, makes this reform movement stand out among other languages. For example, this movement initiated the following forms: *eszme* for "idea", *eszmél* for "to realize something", *elmélet* for "theory", *röp-irat* for "pamphlet." The fact that these became part of the standard language is in contrast to the reformation neologisms in Czech, which did not typically become solidly established in the standard language.

Comparing the attitudes towards foreign words in Slovak and Czech shows that even though the process of internationalization in related languages is currently happening in a similar way, there are marked differences resulting from different cultural and social traditions (Horecký 1975). The Czech national restoration, with its rich efforts at new word formation, was unparalleled in Slovakia; neologisms were fairly rare even in the period of Štúr and his followers. The development in Slovak followed the path of gradually eliminating of an, initially very abundant, number of word formation variants. The difference in attitude towards foreign words in Slovak, as opposed to Czech, remained the same in the 1920s and 1930s, as pointed out by J. Horecký. In the lexicographical works of those times, such as *Strojnícky nemecko-česko-slovenský slovník (German-Czech-Slovak Dictionary of Engineering)* published in 1935, the column with Czech terms often lists domestic words next to the Greek-Latin terms; the Slovak column rather frequently features international terms only. Analysis Slovak and Czech lexicons for the degree of existence of international and domestic lexemes in both languages (Buzássyová 1989) proved that several equivalence types can be identified based on the relations of parallelness, symmetry, assymetry. Czech, for instance, has both a domestic and international term; Slovak only uses the internationalism: Czech *sdělování, komunikace* – Slovak *komunikácia*; Czech avoids the German loan *Zigzagwuchs* – Slovak *cikcakovitý rast* – by its own domestic expression *klikatý růst*.



3. Central-European languages – a tradition of purposeful cultivation of literary language (and prescription trends)

A common trait of central-European languages is the existence of strong language culture cultivation efforts on the part of linguists. It is certainly not a matter of coincidence that a strong tradition of conscious standard language cultivation efforts (including prescriptive tendencies) has existed especially here in central Europe, where a large number of language communities live in a relatively limited area and language borders do not always coordinate with country borders. This is true of Slovak, Czech, Polish, Hungarian, Slovenian, even though concrete steps toward language cultivation vary to a certain degree (the unique situation of standard Austrian German, which has no codified standard, is described in Moosmüller and Vollmann 1995). In all of these countries a national and standard language is thought of as a cultural value, as part of the national heritage. This is different, for instance, from the pragmatic attitudes of the British and North-American speakers of English, for whom the mother tongue is merely a practical tool for realization of personal and national goals (Garvin 1995); the author came to this conclusion by comparing the sociolinguistic situation in Czech and in the French spoken in Quebec against the background of American English. We assume this probably accounts for the opposition of a large group of Czech linguists to the concept of Petr Sgall (Sgall et al. 1992) and his sympathizers who would like to accept the most frequently used elements of colloquial Czech into codified standard spoken Czech. Even though Petr Sgall does declare the need to balance the prescriptive and the descriptive, or more precisely the informative pole of linguistic activity, some researchers may view this as actual support for a pragmatic approach towards the mother tongue.

In the process of internationalization and domestication of loan words, linguists do, however, encounter various problems and tensions with which the language and linguists are trying to cope. On the level of linguistic reflection, researchers can sometimes have a problem identifying whether expressions from two or more languages, as “candidates for the status of internationalism,” meet the criterion of equivalence as a constituent feature of this concept. One area of difficulty has to do with the fact that in recurring, English-mediated internationalisms, linguists encounter a problem of greater or lesser semantic, as well as formal, discontinuity, in relation to an earlier Latin loan. Therefore, the question becomes whether this is a case of increasing the degree of polysemy of one lexical unit or of homonymy between the two units (in general terms, this is a problem of indentifying morphological and lexical units; for more information about this phenomenon, which we have called ‘repeated internationalization’ see Buzássyová (1991)). Another problem of (in)equivalence follows from the fact that in language L1 the candidate for internationalism is a supra-regional unit while the corresponding unit in language L2 is valid only regionwide. Candidates for internationalism can differ in social or stylistic status in two different languages (neutral – literary, neutral – emotionally colored); they can also differ in timeline (neutral word in L1, but obsolete in L2). For instance the Slovak word *advokát* and the German *Advokat* are technically equivalent in Slovak and Austrian German, yet in the German spoken in the Federal Republic of Germany this word is felt to be obsolete.

Tension can also exist in communicative use and/or among language users. It has already been mentioned at this conference that when ordinary language users are familiar with one meaning of the word, they are reluctant to adopt updated information on another added meaning as this requires some effort. One such case (Buzássyová 1995: 198-205) involves the broadening range of words used to describe the ‘presentation of a new book’ in recent years:

vernisáž ‘official opening’, *prezentácia* ‘presentation’, *promócia* ‘promotion’. In this regard, tension and collisions occurred between the meanings of the word *promócia* [in the older sense of the word ‘graduation’ – the ceremony when university diplomas are conferred – (communication field of education) and the newer meaning, based in a word borrowed from American English *promotion* ‘publicity campaign’ (communication field of advertising)]. It seems that Slovak, or more precisely ordinary users of Slovak, have sought to relieve the tension by means of using the term *krst* (*baptism/christening; of a book, CD, etc.*).

4. Co-existence of internationalisms and words of domestic (Slavonic) origin

Part of the identity of Slovak as a standard and national language is created by the proportion to which domestic and international lexemes co-exist on the macrostructural level (i.e., overlaps and transfers from terminological lexis into general vocabulary) as well as on the level of various microstructures. This proportion, as well as actual particular relations, between two or more units creates the configurations of domestic and international elements which, in the end, either constitute the typological characteristics of the language (Slovak) or at least strongly influence those characteristics.

4.1 *The role of internationalisms in the process of semantic and stylistic differentiation of words*

The role of internationalisms in semantic and stylistic differentiation of Slovak (and its error-free functioning in individual communication fields) can nicely be seen in the latest edition of *Synonymický slovník slovenčiny* [Slovak Thesaurus] (1995). Very many synonym groups feature, in addition to domestic lexical units, some international units with slight shifts in stylistic or denotational meaning. This happens whether the dominant word is domestic or international. This can be seen in the following synonyms (individual meanings and examples have been eliminated for reasons of simplicity): *hádká* ‘quarrel’. *škriepka* . *spor* . *priek* . *incident* . *konflikt*; // *flegmatizmus* ‘phlegmatism’ . *ľahostajnosť* . *nevšímavosť* // *horlivý* ‘zealous’ . *agilný* . *fanatický* . *prepiaty*.

4.2 *Correlation between words with identical roots and domestic and international suffixes*

In Slovak (cf. Horecký, Buzássyová, Bosák et al. 1989: 278-287) there is a marked correlation of words derived from the same root with domestic and international suffixes *-ita/ -osť, -ácia/- (ova)nie, -izmus/-stvo*. The frequent use of system synonymy of formations with the international formant *-ita* and the domestic (Slav) formant *-osť* makes Slovak closer to South Slav languages as opposed to Polish, for instance, where there is a difference in the range of suffixes (descriptive accounts of Polish language do not record any instances of *-ita* suffix: compare the Polish *solidarność* and Slovak *solidarita*). The same is also true of Russian, where the functional frequency of this correlation is very different (there is only a handful of words with the suffix *-itet*, such as *suverenitet*, *neutralitet*, *imunitet*; otherwise formations with the suffix *-osť* prevail) (Buzássyová 1991a: 41).

The fact that within the language situation in Slovakia there existed a need to delimit two closely related languages and that Czechisms always presented more of a problem than loans from other languages may in part explain why linguists' cultivation efforts have for

years been rather informative to the public, rather than strictly prescriptive. Owing partly to this, contemporary internationalization as a process of gradual increase in the number of foreign words and elements primarily of Latin and Greek origin and mainly in the technical lexis has been happening organically and naturally with respect to the Slovak language's environment. The process of gradual domestication of foreign words has also been natural, even though many words are still synchronically felt as foreign. Until now there have been no occurrences of mass borrowing without proper selection. There still exists a counterweight in the form of continuous formation of words from domestic roots and activation of such formation. One part of researching internationalization in Slovak (as well as in other languages) rests in observing the tension of the rival relationship between domestic and international devices and subsequent opportunity to use domestic and international language elements in a stylistically or semantically differentiated ways (cf. chapter titled *Tendencia k internacionalizácii* in Horecký, Buzássyová, Bosák et al. 1989: 272ff.). When considering Anglicisms in contemporary Slovak, one needs to make a more detailed distinction determining whether the form is used simply on the textual level (*parole*) in various functions (such as a striking heading in a political journalism piece) or the case is one of a 'full' loan, incorporating the word into the system, into the lexicon of the standard vocabulary of contemporary language. It is also important to consider what the function of the Anglicism is. Dvonč, drawing on Blanár (Dvonč 1978: 185, Blanár 1971) recommended that three different cases be distinguished for borrowed foreign words and their use them in Slovak: a) use of a new naming unit to denote a new concept; b) use of a new naming unit with the aim of denoting a familiar concept for which there is no lexeme (independent of other languages); c) use of a new naming unit to denote a familiar concept in a language that already has its own expression for this concept. However, the situation can be much more complicated when discussing specific examples than this classification suggests. This is caused in part by the fact that in type c) instances, which broaden the stock of synonyms, the case is very often not one of absolute synonymy, but rather of expressions differing slightly in denotational meaning or stylistically. Another reason seems to be that distinguishing between the examples mentioned, namely a), b), and c), can be made more difficult as several different factors can play the role of stimulants when creating a new expression for a new concept. The rather-recent compound *tvorivá dielňa* '(creative) workshop', for instance, can be considered a good example illustrating the activation of word formation from domestic sources as a counterweight to internationalization. An internal prerequisite for forming this expression lies in the denotational structure of the word *dielňa* 'workshop', which enables polysemy, adding another, new meaning to this word through metonymic transfer which is reflected in the broadening of the range of lexical and semantic connectibility of the word. The primary meaning may be expanded as in the following: 1. a room where artisan or manufacturing activity takes place: *obuvnícka, montážna dielňa* (*shoemaker's, assembling shop*); 2. a happening where some intellectual (scientific, artistic, educational, etc.) activity takes place: *tvorivá dielňa, hudobná dielňa* (*creative workshop, music workshop*). Within this denotational meaning a certain specification exists: "a professional/scientific meeting of practical, discussional nature, which is a part of a larger event". The English word *workshop* and its tendency to permeate into Slovak could play the role of a catalyst, an agent facilitating and/or accelerating the process of forming the new expression *tvorivá dielňa*. Even after ten years it is still in use, mainly in situations when the event is international. Therefore, statements like "workshop is a redundant, non-functioning loan used instead of *tvorivá dielňa*" seems an oversimplification.

4.3. Differences between languages in the use of internationalisms in the expressive function

A relatively general tendency (heading towards the universal) is for terminological concepts of internationalisms to exhibit formal congruence and conceptual equivalence in related as well as in non-related languages, while formal congruence and conceptual (meaning) equivalence ends with metonymic and metaphorical transfers accompanying the transfer of international lexeme of one language into real-life use of the language as, for instance, an emotionally colored expression. For instance, the Slovak verb *nominovať niekoho niekam*, *nominovať niekoho do národného družstva* (to nominate someone for something; to nominate someone for the national team) in the communication field of sport has a corresponding expression in German: *jemanden für die Nationalmannschaft nominieren*. The Slovak derived lexeme and its verb pattern, both colloquial and emotionally coloured, *nanominovať sa niekam* (lit. to nominate yourself for something) has only a figurative corresponding expression in German *ich selbst irgendwohin einladen* (an expression with the same international root does not function in emotionally colored speech).

Among Slavic languages used within the area of Central Europe many different kinds of asymmetry can be found in expressing the same concepts using domestic and international lexemes. These different kinds of asymmetry result from differing cultural traditions. For instance, the traditional link between Polish and French cultures is reflected in the languages mentioned, as can specifically be seen in the fact that Polish often features common, everyday expressions formed from Latin and/or international roots even in expressions where the Slovak language uses a domestic root. Expressions in the field of scientific communication do, in contrast, exhibit a greater degree of correspondence and symmetry as can be seen in the similarity between Polish *pri tej okazji* and Slovak *pri tejto príležitosti* 'on this occasion'; the existence of the term *okazionalizmus* 'nonce-formation' in both Slovak and Polish; or in the parallel between Polish *decydować się, decyzja* and Slovak *rozhodovať sa, rozhodnutie* (although Slovak uses the expression *decízna sféra* 'decision-making sphere', i.e. executive government unit, government. There is, in contrast, a rather large group of lexical units testifying to the opposite kind of asymmetry in Slovak-Polish language relation, i.e. Slovak units with international roots as opposed to their Polish equivalents with domestic roots: Slovak *genocída* – Polish *ludobójstwo* 'genocide'; Slovak *internacionála* – Polish *miedzynarodówka* 'international'; Slovak *subjekt medzinárodného práva* – Polish *podmiot prawa międzynarodowego* 'subject of international law'.

5. Conclusions

1. The thesis that Slovak is a central European language relatively open towards admitting internationalisms can diachronically be supported by the important role Latin played in the history of the Slovak language.
2. For long years, internationalization has been happening organically and naturally in contemporary Slovak, with respect to the environment in which Slovak is developing and existing. When considering Anglicisms in contemporary Slovak, linguists should make more detailed distinctions between loans functioning merely on the textual level (*parole*) and full loans, where the new word is incorporated into the lexis of Slovak. Fighting the adoption of new Anglicisms should not grow into artificial efforts aimed at already functional loans.

3. The validity of the thesis that part of the identity of Slovak as a national language is constituted by the proportion to which, on both macrostructural and microstructural levels, domestic and international elements coexist is proved mainly by configurations of domestic and international words in synonym groups, by correlations between derived words with both domestic and international affixes, and by the specifics resulting from determinologization.

Note

* First published as Buzássyová, Klára. 1997. "Slovenčina ako stredoeurópsky jazyk (Na okraj protikladu domáce / cudzie)." In: S. Ondrejovič, M. Šimková (eds.) *Slovenčina na konci 20. storočia, jej normy a perspektivy. Sociolinguistica Slovaca. 3.*, Bratislava: Veda, 69 – 78.

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