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Language Norms in Action

The Normative Orientation of ‘Language Management’

Paper presented at *Norms, Rules, and the Social Order*. Rabat: Netherlands Institute Morocco (NIMAR), 13-14 March 2023

The outline of the talk

1. Early mutual courtship of sociolinguistics and EM/CA
2. What is 'language management'
3. Examples of simple language management
4. How to write about Jews in Czech: On the category work being done with the new letter 'midsize ž'
(an example of highly organized language management manifested in a dialogical network)

Early mutual courtship of sociolinguistics and EM/CA

- Gumperz, J. J. & Hymes, D. (eds.) (1972), *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*. Blackwell (here, the papers by Garfinkel, Sacks and Schegloff included, pp. 301-380)

But see:

- Lee, J. (1991), Language and culture: The linguistic analysis of culture. In G. Button, *Ethnomethodology and the Human Sciences*. Cambridge University Press, 196-226 (here, a profound critique of (socio)linguistics approaches to the analysis of language)

Norm (linguistic) [an entry from *A Dictionary of Sociolinguistics*, 2004]

Linguistic practices which are typical or representative of a group. Two types of social norms are commonly distinguished in sociolinguistics and sociology: (a) **regularity norms**, i.e. linguistic practices or customs as well as behavior patterns which occur repeatedly and habitually within a speech community (sometimes also called **subsistent norms**); and (b) **oughtness norms**, i.e. behaviors which are expected within a community: individuals who do not conform to these norms will be ridiculed, excluded or even punished. [...] The overtly prescriptive norms of standard languages are a special type of oughtness norms. [p. 225]

What is 'language management' (LM) and 'language management approach'

- Language management is understood broadly, as **any sort of activity aimed at language** (“behavior-toward-language”)
- The actors often pay attention to language when they ‘notice’ a ‘deviation’ from the language ‘norm’ and ‘evaluate’ it negatively. They may label such a deviation as ‘problem’ and attempt to design a solution (‘adjustment design’) to the problem and, finally, ‘realize’ the adjustment design.
- Corresponding practices / actions may be relatively simple or highly organized (a repair in a particular interaction vs language reform though between them there may be demonstrable mutual orientations)

Examples of LM: Czech TV, a debate

- TV presenter: ... *témata o kterých bude dnes řeč, možná poznáte už podle jmen pánů který kteří přijali dnešní pozvání.*
- [... the topics which will be talked about today you may recognize even from the names of the gentlemen **who** (*Non-Standard*) **who** (*Standard*) have accepted today's invitation.]

A French minority school located in a large English-speaking city in the territory of Ontario, Canada; an interaction in classroom (from Heller 1999: 130)

Teacher: pourquoi lit-on?

Michel: pour relaxer

Teacher: pour se détendre, 'relaxer' c'est anglais

English transl.

[Teacher: why do we read?

Michel: to relax

Teacher: to 'se détendre' (relax), 'relax' is English]

From an interview with a Czech manager in Skoda-Volkswagen car factory, 1995

1. M:...when holding workshops, (..) so for example in
2. the sphere of personnel matters the workshops are
3. held **without the Germans** in ninety nine percent
4. of cases, (..) or **without the experts**.
5. S: [hm]
6. M: **[I] don't like the wording without the**
7. **Germans, so, eh (..) ...**

(translated from Czech)

From a fitness center in the Czech Republic:
PLEASE DO NOT BRING AND LEAVE ENY VALUABLE THINK HERE. IF
YOU HAVE SOMETHINGS VALUABLE PLEASE ASK RECEPTIONIST TO
KEEP IT IN SAFE

DONESETE-LI SI DO STUDIA CENNOSTI, ULOŽTE SI JE
NA RECEPCI DO TREZORU.

PLEASE DO NOT BRING AND LEAVE ANY VALUABLE
THING HERE.

IF YOU HAVE SOMETHING VALUABLE PLEASE ASK
RECEPTIONIST TO KEEP IT IN SAFE.



Summary so far and the issue of introducing new normativities

- In the given examples the actors managed various aspects of the use of 'language', that is varieties of language (standard / non-standard), translanguaging (French / English), choice of categories (ethnic / non-ethnic), spelling (correct / incorrect).
- The actors' management activities were intelligible and accountable due to particular norms that they accepted, shared and put in action (these norms can be clarified in detail through ethnographic research)
- However, actors may also treat norms as a problem, reject them, try hard for their adjustment, and the like

How to write about Jews in Czech – an example of highly organized language management

Situation and the problem:

The current Czech orthography imposes a particular identity on a group of Jewish people – either ethnic or religious – through the choice of the capital letter (i.e. "big" letter) or lowercase letter (i.e. "small" letter) at the beginning of the word (cf. Cz. *Žid* or *žid*). However, it is difficult or even impossible to categorize a particular group of people in terms of the Jewish ethnicity (capital letter) or Jewish religion (lowercase letter) in particular socio-historical contexts.

Management:

This problem was managed by multiple actors, journalists, historians, or specialists in Jewish studies. Recently an original solution has been designed and implemented by Martin Wein in his book *Dějiny Židů v českých zemích* [History of the Jews in the Bohemian Lands]. Here, he has introduced 'midsize ž' as an avoidance strategy, freeing the language user from the above categorization dichotomy.

The author's account

“My preceding book published by Academia in Czech with the title *Slovanský Jeruzalém* [Slavic Jerusalem] in Prague 2018, dealt with Czechoslovak-Israeli relationships. While translating this book, we found out that “the rules of Czech orthography cannot capture the complexness of Jewish identities” as put recently by the Czech historian Zbyněk Tarant in the introduction to his thesis of habilitation. Thus in the text of the present book we are proposing to use a new letter, the so-called "midsize ž" which, within one word, can unite both the ethnic identity (Žid) and the religious one (žid).”

Collecting materials, preferably mutually relevant, displaying features of a 'dialogical network' (Leudar & Nekvapil 2022)

- The book itself
- The author's accounts of his orthographic innovation
- Book endorsements
- Email exchanges between the book editors and specialists (historians, linguists ...)
- Email exchanges with the author
- A Wikipedia entry
- Email exchanges among Wikipedia editors
- Field notes from the talk about the book taking place at a book festival
- Conversations with the representatives of the publishing house
- A promotional video
- A radio program

The author and his book

- Who is Martin Wein (Tel Aviv University, New York University, Charles University)
- The author of several books:
- *A History of Czechs and Jews: A Slavic Jerusalem*. London, New York: Routledge 2015.
- *History of the Jews in the Bohemian Lands*. Leiden, Boston: Brill 2016.
- *Slovanský Jeruzalém. Jak Češi založili Izrael* [A Slavic Jerusalem: How the Czechs established Israel]. Praha: Academia 2018. [translated by Jan Čábela]
- *Dějiny Židů v českých zemích – od Hilsnera po Slánského* [History of the Jews in the Bohemian Lands – from Hilsner to Slánský]. Olomouc: Vydavatelství Univerzity Palackého 2021. [translated by Jan Čábela, Ingeborg Fialová, Roman Sailer]

„O tom, jak obtížné může být pro českou veřejnost pochopení komplexity židovských identit, vypovídá už onen nekonečný a patrně neřešitelný jazykovědný spor, zda v češtině používat velké či malé písmeno ve slově ‚Žid/žid‘. Pravidla českého pravopisu totiž nepočítají s možností nedělitelnosti náboženství a etnicity a naopak striktně žádají, aby byl pojem ‚žid‘ psán s malým písmenem u vyznavačů náboženství a s velkým písmenem u příslušníků etnika. Každodenní realitě židovských komunit je však takovéto striktní oddělování náboženství od národnosti velice vzdálené, když tedy nepočítáme specifické výjimky v podobě ateistů, konvertitů nebo asimilantů. Pokud bychom se měli striktně držet litery Pravidel českého pravopisu, tak bychom kvůli každé banální zmínce museli lustrvat, zda je námi zmíněný žid/Žid aktivním vyznavačem judaismu, nebo zda má skutečně židovské předky. A pokud nemáme bližší informace, tak by nám nezbývalo než si hodit mincí. Právě publikace Martina Weina přitom na mnoha příkladech ukazuje, jak byly každodenní zkušenosti českých Židů, jejich identita, náboženské i politické přesvědčení komplexní, rozmanité a navzájem provázané. Tento jazykovědný gordický uzel kolem malého a velkého písmena se tak Martin Wein rozhodl rozetnout netradičně – v knize používá ‚střední ž‘. Čeština sice takové písmeno nezná, avšak třeba tento akt pravopisného punktu přispěje k veřejné a odborné debatě ohledně tolik potřebné reformy.“

– Mgr. Zbyněk Tarant, Ph.D., Západočeská univerzita v Plzni

„Zavedení ‚středního ž‘ ve Weinově knize je dalším dokladem toho, že česká jazyková situace se stala příznivou pro utváření variantního pravopisu češtiny, specifického pro různé funkční oblasti spisovného jazyka. Osobité pravopisné jevy lze nalézt v jazyce spisovatelů nebo vědců (a ti je sami proti uniformním snahám tvůrců kodifikace veřejně hájí), osobitými pravopisnými jevy oplývá e-mailová komunikace. Jinými slovy, je zřejmé, že stále více se prosazuje tato tendence: jednotný pravopis pro celý spisovný jazyk se decentralizuje a diferencuje se na pravopis pro jazyk umělecký, pravopis pro jazyk odborný, pravopis pro každodenní potřebu atd.“

– doc. Jiří Nekvapil, Ústav obecné lingvistiky, Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy



Dějiny Židů v českých zemích — Martin Wein

Dějiny Židů v českých zemích

Od Hilsnera po Slánského — Martin Wein

Typographic work on the new letter

Edita Book – Žžž

Jákob, žák Žida z Židovských Židlochovic.

Edita Book Italic – Žžž

Jákob, žák Žida z Židovských Židlochovic.

Edita Bold – Žžž

Jákob, žák Žida z Židovských Židlochovic.

Edita Bold Italic – Žžž

Jákob, žák Žida z Židovských Židlochovic.

Actors in the emerging dialogical network

- The author of the book (Martin Wein)

- The book editor
- The typography designer
- The graphic designer
- The head of the publishing house
- The marketing manager

- Scholars of Jewish studies
- Institutional linguists
- Participants in the talk about the book taking place at a book festival (Svět knihy)
- Wikipedia editors

Forming a dialogical network: an appeal to act

– one example

Z. Tarant, scholar of Jewish Studies : “[...] True, Czech doesn’t have such a letter, but this act of orthographic punk might compel The Czech Language Institute to propose that much needed reform in this regard.” (from the draft of his book endorsement to be placed on the back cover)

The actors' work on the category 'midsize ž'

- At the beginning the category 'midsize ž' was almost intersubjectively empty and the actors in the network were 'fleshing it out' by binding various 'predicates' to it, such as
 - a typographic rarity („typografický unikát“)
 - an act of orthographic punk („akt pravopisného punku“)
 - a crazy typographic whim („bláznivý typografický nápad“)
 - a Jewish joke

Activities conducted through category work

- Clarifying
- Supporting
- Promoting
- Advertising

- Problematizing
- Rejecting
- Ridiculing

Is the introduction of ‘midsize ž’ an act of language management? – proof

- The last comment in the talk about the book taking place at the book festival was: “It’s a pity that we paid attention to the ‘midsize ž’ instead to the content of the book, it was a waste of time”.
- „škoda že jsme se věnovali střednímu ž, ne obsahu knihy, byla to ztráta času“.

Technological constraints

An extract from an English email to Martin Wein (the author) written by his colleague:

“And it is funny you mention the middle zZ - as I just saw it in one upcoming dissertation where the author argues in favor of your suggested variant. However, due to the Czech keyboard's limited options, she ended up with the small z.”

Concluding remarks

- The working of language norms are especially visible when actors ‘manage language’ (starting with noticing a deviation from the norm, evaluating the deviation, designing an adjustment and possibly ending up with its realization).
- (Some) ‘repairs’ display the participants’ orientation to language norms, linguistic in a narrow sense or conversational maxims (Grice).
- The introduction of the ‘midsize ž’ was perceived as a specific kind of ‘breaching experiment’ revealing the remarkable stability of orthography and typography systems including their normative force.
- Standard language may be worth researching as a ‘pervasive generalized system’ which the actors made relevant in multiple social activities, thus reproducing it but also trying to change it.

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An analogical case: **Muslims** in languages of the former Yugoslavia (Balkan countries)

- “How to write about **Muslims** in Serbian, Croatian ...”:

musliman (religious identity)

Musliman (ethnic identity)