Language purism as a type of language correction

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Purism is one of many corrective processes directed towards culture. M. Weingart, one of the theoreticians of linguistic anti-purism in the pre-war Prague School, correctly pointed to phenomena in culture which parallel linguistic purism and in particular to purism in areas such as literature, arthitecture, and music.[1] Purism in literature concerns the language of literature but applications of other than linguistic rules are also affected: purism thus bears upon the use of literary genres, poetic rules, content, and ideology which is transferred through literary works. In English dictionaries a "purist" is defined as a "stickler for, affecter of, scrupulous purity esp. in language" (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*) or "a person who is extremely careful or too solicitous about purity or nicety, esp. in language" (*Webster's Students Dictionary*). Language purism is deservedly treated as a special case of a wider phenomenon which is not restricted to language.

A view of purism as a distinctly linguistic phenomenon may thus be too narrow. A wider interpretation of purism introduces a point of view that is essential for its deeper understanding. However, to focus on linguistic purism has advantages of clarity of issues and tradition of scholarship. In the present paper I shall concentrate on the question of purism as it concerns language and only return briefly to the wider issue in my conclusions.

This paper will attempt to formulate a theoretical framework for the study of purism. It will identify some new dimensions of the problem and conclude that the one-sidedly negative evaluation of purism in modern (structural) linguistics was too simplistic.

1. Purism: discourse interaction, idiom, and ideology

At least three related but distinct types of purism exist. Firstly, purism can be a fact of *linguistic interaction*, of what speakers actually do in

discourse. Secondly, the term may refer to *ways of communicating* about certain linguistic processes. It may concern not linguistic but metalinguistic facts. Purists act in a particular way towards language but they may act in one way and (unwittingly) communicate about what they do in another way. In other words, their linguistic activities and metalinguistic idiom do not necessarily coincide. Thirdly, the term purism may also designate an *ideology*, a relatively independent system of thought about language with particular political objectives to be achieved. Since speakers do not necessarily say all what they mean, it is necessary to distinguish the ideological dimension from the ways of communicating about purism. All three types of purism are interconnected in many ways.

The first type of purism will be referred to as DISCOURSE PURISM. The term can be used with regard to a certain set of language correction acts (Neustupný 1978:ch. XII, 1985a; Jernudd and Thuan 1983), which are employed to remove certain undesirable segments of speech acts.[2]

PURISTIC IDIOMS, as I propose to call purism as a way of communicating about this type of language correction, are easier to define. Puristic idioms consist of discourse that refers to correction processes which are supposed to "purify" or "authenticate" language. One also frequently speaks of "indigenization" or "traditionalization" of language. The corrective processes included under these headings vary depending on the community under investigation; in some communities the application of the term purism is limited to the removal of full loans (the surface form of which is demonstrably foreign), in others it is extended to cover the removal of structural loans (in which the surface form is indigenous though the content is not), or it may include the removal of some elements of native varieties as well. In the last case, the elements considered as unauthentic and purged from language can be neologisms, elements of relatively recent varieties, elements of other than folk varieties, or even some features of non-contemporary varieties of language. Purism is thus not limited to the removal of loanwords as the popular usage of the term assumes.

The puristic idiom is, in turn, conditioned by criteria which are of ideological nature. IDEOLOGICAL PURISM, defined by the political aims of the idiom and the discourse correction processes involved, represents the third basic term necessary for the understanding of the complex phenomenon.

One can thus assume that three types of purism, to some extent independent of each other, must be taken into consideration. Actual

correction processes should be distinguished from the ways in which they are referred to in metalinguistic idioms, and idioms should be distinguished from ideologies which accompany the correction processes.[3]

2. Discourse purism: correction of inadequacies

Can discourse purism be clearly delimited from other correction processes on the basis of a set of particular structural characteristics? My answer to this question is negative. Many correction processes take place in language and it seems that they form a continuum, no part of which can easily be singled out as "puristic" on a purely structural basis. In this section I shall therefore abandon the attempt to define discourse purism on the basis of its specific structural features. A set of correction acts can only be called puristic because the processes involved have been referred to as puristic in a puristic idiom.

The general structure of puristic acts, defined in this way, can be described in several steps (cf. Neustupný 1985a):

(a) Firstly, a feature of the speech act may represent a DEVIATION from a norm. In the tradition of the Prague School the word "norm" denotes a fact of language, not a fact of (normative) linguistics. A norm is a rule the violation of which potentially leads to a negative evaluation (cf. Neustupný 1985b). The deviation may remain unnoted by participants in the speech act, but when it is noted, it becomes a VIOLATION of the norm.

(b) Secondly, violations may be evaluated in various ways. When they are negatively evaluated in a speech situation, they can be called INADEQUACIES. Note that in the theory of correction expounded here the term inadequacy refers to negative evaluations by speakers in particular discourse, not to any sets of pre-established deficiencies of language, such as traditionally discussed by language mentors – cf., for instance, Tauli 1968.

(c) Inadequacies can be dealt with in a variety of ways. They can elicit attitudinal-affective behaviour (Fishman 1972:140) without leading to correction, or they can result in CORRECTIVE ADJUSTMENT, i.e. the removal of the inadequate features of the speech act.

The important question is what are the *real* sources of negative evaluation of speech in puristic correction acts in discourse. Such

sources are legitimized in various ways in puristic idioms, but here our interest lies not in the legitimations (facts of the idiom) but in the actual facts of discourse. Several types of the real sources can be established:

(1) Structural incongruence in the language system
(2) Lack of stability
(3) Communicative ineffectiveness
(4) Historical impurity
(5) Foreign dependence and
(6) Lack of distinctiveness.

Each of these types will be discussed in more detail in the following part of this paper.

2.1 Structural incongruence

Features which do not agree with general strategies already accepted in the language are negatively evaluated. It seems likely that some grammatical strategies within languages support loanwords while others support indigenous word formation. If so, some types of puristic correction would have their motivation in strategies already present in the grammatical structure of the language.

Vladimír Skalička, the typologist of the Prague School, has claimed that languages in which the "isolating"[4] type is strong (French, English, etc.) easily admit loanwords, because word formation using derivational suffixes or compounds is not highly developed. On the other hand, languages in which the "agglutinative" (e.g., Hungarian) or "inflectional" type (e.g., Czech) strongly assert themselves prefer word formation through suffixation or other procedures, using indigenous lexical elements. The "polysynthetic" type (German or contemporary Chinese) favors compounds which are normally produced from indigenous morphemes (Skalička 1979).

This scheme may seem crude but the general idea of broad strategies (grammatical "types") which operate in languages and produce particular grammatical rules is undoubtedly correct. Its applicability to the area of word formation is also beyond any doubt. Indeed, we can see that Hungarian, Czech, German, and Chinese possess very few loanwords, while the English and French lexicon is full of Latin and Greek words. Of course, the situation is more complicated in French which also has a strong metalinguistic policy against loanwords even

if in practice loans are easily accommodated. The grammatical principle obviously cannot explain all: compare also the puristic Czech with non-puristic Polish or Russian, all with a very similar typological profile but different degrees of puristic correction.

Structural incongruity along these lines leads in some languages to corrective adjustments which remove (or exclude through pre-correction) foreign words. This normally occurs without any meta-linguistic attention by speakers, and without the interference of any sociopolitical ideology. It is not a matter that would be discussed in the communities characterized by purism. Nevertheless, much of the German, Czech or Hungarian purism might have been based on this factor.

On the other hand, there are cases of corrective adjustment based on metalinguistic evaluation of real or assumed structural incongruity. The leading Czech purist of the 1920s and 1930s, J. Haller, purged the word *listovat* 'to turn pages (in a book)' because it was, in his opinion, formed in accordance with a German semantic principle. He claimed that while in verbs German emphasises how things react to an action (hence the element *list* 'page' in *listovat*, following the German model of *Blatt* 'page' vs. *blättern*), Czech verbs point to what the acting person does, i.e., take a more subjective, less impersonal stance. Jakobson (1932:94) in criticizing Haller, showed that the structural semantic principle postulated by Haller does not exist. There is a host of examples in which German verbs are more subjective and Czech verbs more impersonal. However, those who took Haller's view marked the word *listovat* as inadequate and adjusted its use in discourse.[5] This is an example of a metalinguistic structural principle which (though wrong) leads to adjustments in discourse.

2.2 Lack of stability

An important source of puristic acts can be identified in the lack of stability of language means in the Early Modern period. Many adjustment processes which belong to the realm of purism are acts which simply confirm the incipient majority usage against an infiltrating (foreign) element. However, the fact that the element marked as inadequate is foreign should be seen as a coincidence. It is deleted because it does not agree with usage, rather than because of its foreignness.

For instance, the authoritative *Brus jazyka českého*, published in 1877 by a special committee of the *Matice Česká* (Brus 1877), contains

a large section called "Morphological Part" (Tvaroslovná část) in which only a handful of corrective rules is directed against German influence[6] or defends a historically older stage of language.[7] Most of the correction adjustments required in the book aim at the stabilization of actual usage.

It is of course possible to argue that this type of stabilization which is necessary if the language shall fulfill its function as a Modern Literary Language is not a puristic correction. As stated above, discourse purism cannot be defined on its own: it includes correction processes which are referred to as "puristic" when speakers communicate about language. We should not easily dismiss the fact that the corrective adjustments quoted above are often legitmized through a puristic idiom and appear in what has generally been accepted by the society as puristic manuals.

2.3 Communicative ineffectiveness

Features of language that are unequally distributed in the community (limited to those with special education) may be negatively evaluated. In other words, some features of language may hinder communicative effectiveness. This fact can lead to corrective adjustment of foreign loans. The mild form of Czech purism of the 1950s and early 1960s which I had the opportunity to experience myself seemed to be at least partly motivated by this factor. In my experience, this instance of purism was a result of social rather than political pressure.

It may be true that Standard English, Russian or Polish — all without strong puristic tendencies — have been developed mostly by members of an intellectual class which, to a considerable extent, derived from the highly educated upper classes of the respective societies. The same is true of Japanese. On the other hand, one might argue that Standard German or Czech are to a larger extent connected with the lower middle class, and that this accounts for the dislike of loanwords in both. One could refer to the different percentage of foreign loanwords in the German language in Germany (with stronger purism) and in Austria (with weaker puristic tendencies, cf. Clyne 1984:100). However, even if the factor did work in all these cases, it could hardly be claimed that it was the only decisive one. Notice that Hungarian is a strongly puristic language, in which, apart from modern marxist terminology, a casual foreign reader cannot recognize a single word, because of the purely indigenous character of the vocabulary. This

is so despite the fact that Hungary's multilingual aristocracy had a substantial role in its formation.

The requirement of equal access can either be promoted in the interest of social equality of individuals or in the interest of economic or social development. In the former case, one argues that differential access to untraditional elements is unfair to some members of the community. In the latter case, the concern of the purist is with the fact that unequal access to language hinders social and economic progress of the community at large.

This source of negative evaluation of "impurities" in language mostly works without any accompanying metalinguistic theory and does not normally appear in the idiom of language purism.

2.4 Historical impurity

A puristic negative evaluation of language can also have its source in a disagreement with an older stage of the same language. This can perhaps happen quite naturally and automatically, i.e., without any intervention of a metalinguistic idiom, in the case of philologists whose competence in the historical variety is (almost) native. Normally, the evaluation of language as inadequate because of historical impurity starts in the idiom: such evaluation has a strong symbolic meaning and shows intimate connections with a nationalistic ideology.

2.5 Foreign dependence

Features of language and culture serve as symbols of association with certain social realities and this relationship may be undesirable. This is the basis of the most widely recognized form of purism. Foreign elements are evaluated negatively not because they would be in disagreement with the character of the language, not because they would be harmful to the stability of the language, not because they would be inaccessible to some parts of the population, or historically impure, but because they are foreign. This factor can perhaps occasionally work in discourse without reference to idioms and ideologies, but normally it starts as ideological purism, is transferred to the idiom, and only then begins to operate in discourse.

It is interesting to note that the purging of foreign words is often limited to loans from a particular language only. For instance, most

Czech purist literature of the end of the nineteenth century focusses on German words and German calques. Yet, at the time when the German elements were successfully being eliminated, a considerable number of French words entered the language with an occasional grudge but without an effective counterpolicy. Loans from Latin, if removed at all, were removed because of the requirement of communicative efficiency, but not because they would be felt as symbols of any undesirable relationship.

2.6 Lack of distinctiveness

Another possible source of negative evaluation of language in puristic acts is the feeling of a need for distinctiveness. This is a factor different from the fear of foreign dependence as defined above. The argument here is that since the language is a different language, it is only natural that it shall have its own different means of expression.

The need to express one's distinct identity in language should not be underestimated. Of course, in individual cases it may be difficult to separate it from the need to purge foreign elements because they serve as symbols of undesirable relations. To what extent should one believe that occasional coinage of a purely Slovak term, different from its Czech counterpart, is a case of "delimitation", rather than the removal of an unwanted Czech connection?

In summarizing discussions on purism at the 1976 Liblice conference on the cultivation of language (Kuchař 1979), Jelínek accepted that delimitative trends are likely to be retained by some smaller Slavic languages (e.g., Slovak) which are being strongly influenced by larger ethnic groups. On the other hand, he concludes that within contemporary Slavic languages "defensive" purism is already anachronistic and lacks any justification (Jelínek 1979).

3. Puristic idioms

Discourse correction can be effected without speaking about it at all. Speakers can correct without communicating about such adjustments to anyone. Much of pre-corrective purism in contact situations is of this type. For instance, when I speak Czech in Melbourne, I systemati-

cally pre-correct all English words in my discourse, but I have hardly ever communicated about this phenomenon with anyone.

The next step up on the scale towards a full metalinguistic idiom is a formulation which says that the expression A is "incorrect" and should be replaced by B. This is the most common principle used in many puristic manuals. No reason is given for the correctness or incorrectness of the expressions concerned.

A more strongly metalinguistic approach is to explain why correction is carried out. This can be done by using some words or routine formulae (e.g., "impure", "foreign word", "influence of German"), or by articulating reasons in some detail.

Finally, a puristic correction can also be commented upon in an indirect way. The situation and the context, rather than an implicit formulation, become communicative in this case. For instance, a text may not mention the problem of English loanwords in an explicit way, but all examples of "incorrect" expressions it gives may be English loans. This fact, together with a general context of anti-English purism (in language or other areas of culture), may constitute a very strong statement within the metalinguistic idiom concerned.

Metalinguistic statements of the idiom may be statements which support the negative evaluation of the corrected form, or the positive evaluation of the correcting form. The former type includes statements such as ". . . is of new origin, with no basis in old documents and, moreover, unnecessary" (Brus 1877:11). The latter type covers such statements as "this word was used by Veleslavín as well as by Comenius", implying that the word must be good (Brus 1877:4).

Preliminary analysis of the puristic idiom of the *Brus jazyka českého* indicates that:

— Most puristic statements in the book are of the "incorrect" vs. "correct" type.
— There are no routine labels which would be consistently used throughout the book to justify adjustments (such as, for instance, *germanismus* "germanism" or *cizomluv* "foreign word").
— Positive evaluations outnumber negative ones.
— Reference to foreignness and to a negative attitude to German is obviously played down, though it may be retrieved from the context.
— Reference to historical facts is often made, even if contemporary usage is normally preferred.

The obvious question in this context is: what is the relationship between discourse correction and the metalinguistic puristic idiom?

The following tentative suggestions can be made:

1. Some sources of puristic adjustment (such as structural incongruity) may play an important role in discourse purism without receiving any attention in the idiom.

2. Some sources of adjustment may be strongly emphasized in the idiom, without actually being used much in the correction processes. In the author's view, the principle of historical purity works in this way in the *Brus jazyka českého*.

3. As already mentioned above in the case of the factors of "historical impurity" and "foreign dependence", purism may start in the ideological or idiom component and gradually transfer to discourse. Speakers may then develop competence in labeling the use of "impure" elements as inadequate without much recourse to the puristic idiom or ideology. Of course, in some cases the ideology/idiom processes may remain and accompany the processes of discourse correction. This mixture of metalinguistic and linguistic factors is a general characteristic of all correction processes.

If what I have suggested above is correct, two adjustments to our thinking about purism will be necessary. Firstly, we must not confuse what actually happens in discourse (discourse purism) with the ways people talk about it (puristic idioms). The two phenomena do coincide to a considerable extent, but in some instances they show important differences. Secondly, the relationship between discourse purism and puristic idioms may vary characteristically in different types of purism. For instance, while in the early stages of modernization the metalinguistic idiom may play only a secondary role, in later stages (such as the stage at which the Prague Linguistic Circle developed its anti-puristic activities, cf. Havránek and Weingart 1932), purism may be almost fully based on metalinguistic evaluations which lack any real support in discourse inadequacies.

To those interested in the study of purism the phenomenon has primarily been available through the idiom and the knowledge of accompanying ideologies that the purists (and anti-purists) developed. *Claims concerning the importance of historical purity and the undesirability of foreign elements were most strongly developed and attracted the widest attention. Other factors of the puristic processes, as outlined above, were neglected. Purism was mostly taken to be what the purists and anti-purists themselves thought and claimed it to be.* One of the aims of this paper is to show that actual interaction should be studied separately from the pronouncements speakers make about it.

4. Ideologies of purism

Although ideologies are normally expressed in an idiom, they are not necessarily fully and correctly reflected in it. One cannot assume that people mean what they say.

Some puristic movements may have a strong overt ideological background, while others may be based more on unconscious and unpolitical evaluations. The ideological background of purism may be of an economic nature (defense of markets), it may be "political" (struggle for political independence), or perhaps of a "cultural" character. An interesting argument has been put forward by Jakobson (1932:121) who claimed with regard to the Czech purism of the 1930s that its ideological basis consisted in hostility towards modern society in general.

Correct identification of the ideological values of a system of purism is of considerable importance for its evaluation. The Modern (structural) period of social thought often tended to give purism a predominantly negative evaluation. All purism was unnecessary, deplorable, and in most cases harmful. The attitude of the Prague School represented in its sharpest form in the volume *Spisovná čeština a jazyková kultura* (Havránek and Weingart 1932), is a good example. While it should be admitted that the Prague School did contribute significantly to our understanding of one particular type of purism, we cannot forget that its analysis was limited to a single historical specimen of the phenomenon.

The structuralistic attitude to purism still survives. However, contemporary evaluations of purism should be based on a full analysis of all the processes concerned and should explicitly state what criteria, on whose behalf, are being employed (Neustupný 1983). The analysis of purism in this paper has shown the great variety of factors involved in the discourse processes of puristic correction. It is impossible to accept the simplistic assumption that all correction processes which qualify for the designation "purism" are undesirable and that this negative evaluation represents an "objective" judgement which can be made on behalf of the whole society. We need a full analysis of all factors involved in puristic correction in discourse and the idioms and ideologies of purism. This analysis should include not merely language conceived in the narrow traditional way as grammatical competence, but all non-grammatical processes of communication

and human culture in general. Of course, the final conclusion cannot be attempted before we also understand the opposite process of linguistic internationalization (Befu 1983, Passin 1983) in all its complexity and variability.

Notes

1. Weingart gives examples of the historicizing purism in French, German, and Czech architecture of the nineteenth century, such as Sainte Chapelle, "old German" houses in Nűrnberg, the restoration of the Czech castle Karlštejn and the principle of "restitutio in integrum" through which valuable later additions to buildings have been destroyed in the interest of "stylistic purity" (1934:29). In music, Weingart refers to attacks on Smetana because of the non-Bohemian character of his music (34), an objection which appears absurd from the contemporary point of view but which was often raised by Czech cultural purists of the nineteenth century.
2. In accordance with usual practice in linguistics the term "speech" will be used as a surrogate for "speech/writing" and refers thus both to spoken and to written language.
3. The author has partly suggested the distinction already in 1970 when he spoke of a different *depth* of different instances of language treatment (cf. Neustupný 1978:259). A "surface" account based on folk taxonomies and other accepted ways of speaking about language problems has little depth. This is what within a wider framework can now be described as a fact of the idiom. For instance, in varieties of Japanese language treatment which rely on surface accounts, all language problems are usually expressed as problems of the script. On a "deeper" level, i.e., the level of what actually happens in discourse, they appear as problems ranging from stylistic and lexical to phonological issues (cf. Neustupný 1978:259).
4. Skalička's typology, although using classical terminology such as "isolation", "agglutination", "inflection", etc. differs radically from its 19th century predecessors. For instance, for Skalička, more than one type can be present in the same language (cf. Skalička 1979, Neustupný 1978).
5. Such people remained in the minority. Today, the verb *listovat* is generally used and does not carry any negative evaluation at all.
6. The possibility of a German influence in the grammar of Czech is of course very remote. The only clear case in the *Brus* (p. 10) is the rejection of *Marie Wagner* in favour of *Marie Wagnerová*.
7. Restoration of an older usage is only required in a couple of cases and in each of them there is an additional non-historical reason (such as the loss of communicative distinction) which accompanies the historical argument.

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