

Prefixes and Ideologies – Linguistic and Political Interpretations of the Historical Character of Slovak

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Presentation outline

Slavic-Eurasian Research Center 2024 Winter International Symposium

I Theoretical framework

1) Prefixes and the linguistic continuum

To characterize and explain the nature and status of a language with respect to its historical relations to other languages and its internal variation we use terms in which this nature, status and its relations are specified by various prefixes:

- Proto-Slavic / ancestor vs. descendant
- convergent vs. divergent
- heterogeneous vs. homogeneous
- standard – non-standard
- majority – minority
- etc.

In the linguistic dialect continuum, which represents the Slavic linguistic territory, these terms and prefixes (which express the relations between languages) create (and in the historical perspective change) certain hierarchies, the boundaries of languages determining their place or status within the continuum. This is what turns a linguistic **continuum** into a **mosaic** – something that has a structure, and within this structure languages and dialects acquire a “category”. Structuration creates the preconditions for the emergence of hierarchies and **classifications**.

2) Classification of languages in the Slavic continuum

In Slavic studies, the most widespread one is the trichotomic classification based on the genealogical aspect, i.e. based on the divergent results of the oldest Proto-Slavic changes. Despite the existence of other classifications, this classification is given prestige by tradition.

From other – less known – genealogical (qualitative) classifications we can mention a very detailed overview by Václav Blažek including also quantitative classifications based mainly on glottochronology.

(*Classification of Slavic Languages: Evolution of Developmental Models*. *Slavia Occidentalis* 2020, 77/1 – available: <https://pressto.amu.edu.pl/index.php/so/article/view/31068>; and https://www.czechency.org/slovník/KLASIFIKACE_SLOVANSKÝCH_JAZYKŮ)

And from other types of classifications, the most recent work of Matej Šekli, who presents a classification of Slavic languages from 3 aspects:

- 1) genealogical (or genetic) – trichotomic classification (geolects)

2) typological – convergence areas (Sprachbund) within *European linguistic area (Standard Average European – SAE)*; classification of Slavic languages to *Central European convergence area* and *Balkan Sprachbund*.

3) sociolinguistic – sociolinguistic continuum (sociolects as standard, register, dialect etc.), or historical sociolinguistic classification to *Slavia Romana* and *Slavia orthodoxa* (also distinguished alphabetically into Latin and Cyrillic).

(On the genealogical linguistic classification of Slavic languages and their dialect macro-areas. *Dialectologia*. Special issue, 11 (2023), 5-49. Available:

<https://www.edicions.ub.edu/revistes/dialectologiaSP2023/documentos/1937.pdf>)

3) Classifications as a result of historical background and linguistic ideologies

Despite the fact that the sociolinguistic classification into sociolects (and the literary/standard languages distinction) should not be confused with the genealogical classification (geolects), the two categories overlap when constructing the status of a language.

Reasons:

- divergent and convergent processes in the development of languages have been influenced by the historical circumstances, migration, and a wide range of political events;
- in shaping sociolinguistic categories and the status of literary/standard language, politics and ideology play a key role;
- the understanding of inter-language relations, which bring hierarchy into language classification, is influenced by language ideologies, more or less conscious (we can mention ideologies concerning the nature and qualities of language, its national value and autonomy, language diversity, language change, etc.)

(The term language ideologies - according to Lanstyák: *Jazykové ideológie (všeobecné otázky a glosár)* http://languagemanagement.ff.cuni.cz/system/files/documents/wplm-01_lanstyak.pdf).

The presence of language policy and language ideologies modifies linguistic interpretations of the place of language in classification and in hierarchy (and also the selection of linguistic examples that support a particular interpretation) and motivates the emergence of different views and consequently discussions about the origin, development and status of language.

II Case studies from Slovak

In the linguistic interpretation of the origin and development of Slovak, we have encountered discussions since the beginning. Whether about its heterogeneous or homogeneous Proto-Slavic base, its genetic links with old Czech, Polish and other Slavic languages, its historical autonomy or originating in the old Czech (in the concept of a common Proto-Czechoslovak language) or even about its central position among other Slavic languages.

Accordingly – in separate case studies three examples from the historical development of the Slovak language will be presented.

Example 1: The origin of Slovak (or Middle Slovak) and its place in the trichotomous classification of Slavic languages

In general, Slovak is classified as a West Slavic language. However, its “membership” in this group is problematized by a group of (phonological and morphological) elements widespread mainly in the area of Central Slovak dialects, which are reflexes of South Slavic character (or parallels with elements in South Slavic languages).

In numerous works on the subject, individual authors (p. Czambel, I. Kniezsa, F. Ramovš, N. van Wijk, S. B. Bernstejn, F. Trávniček, L. Novák, J. Stanislav, E. Pauliny, Zdz. Stieber and others; the discussions on this issue are ongoing until nowadays.) differ in the identification (and selection) of elements of South Slavic origin and also in their temporal ranking in the development of Slovak dialects.

In the context of various theories (summarised in Krajčovič *Slovenčina a slovanské jazyky* 1974), a special place is attributed to the hypothesis of S. Czambel (*Slováci a ich reč* 1903), who came up with a thesis about the South Slavic origin of Central Slovak, i.e. he identified Central Slovak as a South Slavic language (whereas he considered Western Slovak to be Czech, and Eastern Slovak to be partly Polish and partly Ukrainian). The question is whether his reasoning might be related to the fact that, as the author of codification manuals, he preferred Central Slovak forms to emphasize autonomous character of standard Slovak.

Example 2: Czechoslovak language as a common ancestor (or even descendant) of Czech and Slovak

In the context of the discussions on the previous topic (on the origin of Central Slovak), there appears a hypothesis of a common Proto-Slavic basis of Slovak and Czech, the so-called Proto-Czechoslovak (Trávniček – *Historická mluvnice československá* 1935). This hypothesis is part of the long history of Czech-Slovak linguistic relations, it is related to the long period of Czech used in Slovakia in the pre-codification period and to the ideas of linguistic unity of Czechs and Slovaks. The historical background of this hypothesis was the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1939), where the ideology of Czechoslovakism played a key role in language policy. The idea of the need for the convergent development (and final convergence) of the two languages was reiterated in the modern history of the 1960s as part of the critique of bourgeois nationalism.

(On the question of Czechoslovak linguistic relations: Nábělková (2016): The Czech-Slovak communicative and dialect continuum: With and without a border. In: *The Palgrave Handbook of Borders, Identity and Language in the Modern Slavic World*. Eds. M. Nomachi – T. Kamusella – C. Gibson. London: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 14–184.; Jarošová (2016): *Prítomnosť češtiny na Slovensku a aspekt spisovnosti*. In: *Jazykovedný časopis*, pp. 5–30.; Múcsková (2017): *The ideology of bourgeois nationalism and standard Slovak*. In: *Rapsprave: Časopis Instituta za hrvatski jezik i jezikoslovlje*, pp. 125–141; Múcsková (2017): *O slovenskom purizme a anti-purizme v kontexte jazykových ideológií*. In: *Jazyky a jazykové ideológie v kontexte viacjazyčnosti na Slovensku*. Eds. I. Lanstyák – G. Múcsková – J. Tancer Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského, pp. 39 – 79.

https://fphil.uniba.sk/fileadmin/fif/katedry_pracoviska/ksj/publikacie/G._Mucskova/O_slovenskom_purizme_a_anti-purizme.pdf

Example 3: The autochthonistic theory of the central position of Slovak among the Slavic languages

The theory of the central position of Slovak, as the ancestor of the other Slavic languages (descendants), is based on the hypothesis of the original settlement of the Slavs in the area of the Central Danube. Its initiator was P. J. Šafárik (*Slovanské starožitnosti* 1837), who drew on Nestor's work from the beginning of the 12th century (*Повѣсть временныхъ лѣтъ* (Tale of Bygone Years)). A proponent of this theory in modern times was O. N. Trubachev and it is still discussed among historians. (*Yazykoznaniiye i etnogenez Slavjan. Drevniye slavjane po dannym etimologii i onomastiki. Voprosy jazykoznanija* 1982; *Etnogenez i kul'tura drevnei slavjan. Lingvisticheskiye issledovaniia* 1991)

This theory played an important role in the 19th century, when it represented an argument for scholars who attempted to have Slovak recognized as an independent language in the Hungarian Empire (e.g. Ľ. Štúr).

Although nowadays it is considered to be outdated and marginal, it still has its supporters, especially among lay national enthusiasts, but also among some scholars. On its basis, the recent debate on the Slovak base of the Old Church Slavonic language arose. It is also sometimes misleadingly associated with the view that Slovak is known as the “Esperanto” of Slavic languages, because it is regarded as the most comprehensible language for the speakers of other Slavic languages (<https://slovak.ee/intro/language?hl=en>).

III Conclusion

The presentation is not meant to prove the correctness or incorrectness of these individual interpretations and arguments (moreover, in some cases this is possible only to a certain extent). Its aim is to show the extent to which they may be conditioned by the cultural, social and political context of the times in which they emerged, or the times in which they serve as an argument in promoting other (often politically conditioned) intentions. It also seeks to highlight the potential of such knowledge in reflecting current trends in language policy and planning or – in extreme cases – in creating misinformation.