

A Conference Report: ‘Symposium on Language in West Slavic Bible Versions: Shapes and Shifts’ (2 July 2021, Catholic Theological Faculty, Charles University, Prague)

J I Ř Í H E D Á N E K

The fourth international symposium at the Charles University Catholic Theological Faculty on 2 July, 2021, drew on the already well-established tradition at the venue of meeting scholars interested in Bible versions the West Slavic peoples has used since the very dawn of their literacy till the present time. Given that it covers the linguistic variety of five to ten languages and dialects while the earliest versions of e.g. the whole Bible in Czech come from as early as the mid-14th century preceded by 11th–12th c. glosses and late 13th c. evangelaries and psalters), it is a formidable task that an attendance of several dozens of scholars from four countries (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Germany) found attractive.¹ Quite a few of them took part in earlier symposia as well.²

The day-long event was structured in four blocks interleaved with opportunities to meet, eat and discuss together in one of the four communicating Slavic languages. The *Novissima* block paid attention to Bible versions following 1900 as well as translation experiments. The *Media* block dealt with versions of the 16th to 19th centuries which were often formative for the Bibles that emerged in modern times. The *Vetera I* block focused on Psalms as texts that enjoyed the deepest impact from as early as Old Church Slavonic. The *Vetera II* block then examined various features of the language used in the four earliest Czech versions prior to book printing.

1. *Novissima*

‘Treatment of passives in modern Slovak gospel versions’

Mgr. Helena Panczová, PhD.³

Though Slavic languages generally prefer active verbs and switch subjects easily, passives are available both for altering viewpoints as well as concealing

¹ See www.ktf.cuni.cz/KTF-2475.html. One of the contributors was absent due to illness.

² See Hedánek (2020) *AUC Theologica* 10/1:197–202, Conference Report: ‘A Symposium on West Slavic Bible: Language and Style’ (3 July 2020, Catholic Theological Faculty, Charles University, Prague).

³ Trnava University (Slovakia), Faculty of Theology, Chair of Biblical and Historical Sciences.

the subject (which, in the Bible, acquires a specific meaning). The study explored passives in eight different Slovak gospel versions (from 1946 to 2013) and compared frequencies of five stylistic forms of expressing a passive meaning. The development of strategies throughout the decades might be of use for translators especially of Bible texts who may often be at a loss which passive to use if any.

‘The 2020 Lower Sorbian Bible: The situation and specifics of the new translation’

PD Dr. Timo Meškank⁴

The editors of the 2020 Bible, a new Lower Sorbian version after 150 years, revised the language and spelling of the 1868 version, considering dialectal conditions and specific needs of liturgy. Timo Meškank took the opportunity to examine the development of language and approaches from 1548 through 1650, 1709, 1822 New Testaments and the 1868 Bible up to the 2007 liturgy.

‘The Bible in non-standard languages demonstrated from the Masurian translation of The Holy War by John Bunyan of 1900’

dr. Artur Czesak⁵

The translation of Bunyan is the only substantial witness to Masurian dialect in the Polish literature. Jakub Sczepan translated it from German and dr Czesak was specifically interested in Bible quotations, which are numerous in Bunyan. Sczepan borrowed from the Protestant Bible of Gdańsk, adapting it to his own native tongue. Despite that the language is not known to exist nowadays, it is a topic of current interest, revival attempts and printing (such as a translation of *Le Petit Prince*). Discussion turned to comparable phenomena in other languages such as *‘hantec* [‘hantets] of Brno as an extinct but artificially cultivated sociolect.

2. Media

‘On Moravian dialectisms in two Bible versions of late 1700s’

doc. PhDr. Josef Bartoň, Th.D.⁶

The translation of Psalms printed in Brno 1790 is a free rendition with notes and additional texts. It probably relied on the 1778/1780 Imperial Bible (a 1677–1715 St Wenceslas Bible in its 3rd, revised edition). The translation to compare with was the 1791 NT by Pollášek⁷ which also aimed at common people. The translation of Psalms is explicative, and prefers contemporary

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⁷ The Pollášek’s NT was dealt with in *AUC Theologica* 10, no.1 (2020): 200.

language to be read with ease. The approach is similar to the one of Pollášek. Dialectal Moravianisms in more linguistic layers throughout the Psalter and the NT were probably to help the text sound more familiar. The discussion pointed out that shaping of literary Czech can be observed in the texts as well as directions later development avoided.

“Pokuta” and “pokutować” lexems in the NT of the Bible of Gdańsk (1632): A return to Polish translating tradition, or a case of impact of the Czech Bible of Kralice (1579–1594) patterns?”

prof. dr hab. Tomasz Lisowski⁸

The two equivalents for μετάνοια, μετανοέω associated with Roman Catholic penance (*pœnitentia*, *pœnitentiam agere*). Throughout the 16th c., attempts to find equivalents more in line with Martin Luther’s theology of repentance can be witnessed such as *upamiętanie*, *uznanie*, *upamiętać się* and *uznać się* (mainly trinitarians) and *(po)kajanie*, *(po)kajać się* (antitrinitarians) while the Roman Catholic translations of the time (1561, 1593) kept the traditional terms. The Bible of Gdańsk, however, looked to the Czech Bible of Kralice with its *pokání* and *činit pokání*, which motivated the translator Daniel Mikołajewski to put it back in texts – a clear example of restraining to project too much theology in Bible translations. While theologians do count among Bible users, the job of translating and selecting words is translators’ responsibility.

“Přiodítí” / “przyodziać”: Related forms in Czech and Polish Bibles of 1500s and early 1600s’

dr hab. Jarosław Malicki⁹

The two words were formed and used in a similar way both in Czech and Polish Bibles of the times, and are considered obsolete today, though the Polish word is used four-times as much (the incidence is still low). Synonymous ‘přiobléci’ / ‘przyoblec’ gain similar connotations such as ‘to put on *something new or special*. It exemplifies linguistic usage shaped by the Bible rather than the other way round, unmotivated by literalness (Greek and Latin structure differently).

‘Philological asset of the Kralice New Testament of 1601’

PhDr. Robert Dittmann, Ph.D.¹⁰

The 1601 NT is a crest of Kralice philology. Though little is known concerning its background and people (the extant documents of the Unity of the Brethren do not cover the period), the available prints are enough to appreciate

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¹⁰ Charles University (Prague), Faculty of Arts, Institute of Czech Language and Theory of Communication.

the achievement. The notes were reworked, it differs how much but overall there is more text than in its 1st edition 1593/1594, e.g. more Grecisms, synonyms and additional semantic explanations are introduced. The text reflects the Greek more precisely at about 150 locations in Matthew and Mark solely, both in vocabulary and word order. The Czech improved, too, for instance the pronoun 'svůj' that is easy to ignore in translating literally from unrelated languages is seen to be back again (to stay in Czech until today), redundant auxiliaries in 3sg/pl and otiose conjunctions with direct speech are reduced, to name just a couple of linguistic features that put the Czech 1601 NT ahead of its competitors (such as the Melantrich Bible). It is obvious that this NT, so far in the shade of its older and later more renowned siblings, still awaits the appreciation it deserves.

3. Vetera

'Adnominal genitive as rendered in Old Czech Psalters'

Mgr. Kateřina Voleková, Ph.D.¹¹

Considered were four Czech Psalters: a version of the late 13th c. (preserved in the Wittenberg Psalter, rev. 1596 in the Poděbrady Ps.), a mid-14th c. version (as in the Clementine Ps., rev. 1580s in the Ps. of the Canons), a 14th/15th c. version (as in the Boskovice Bible, rev. 1410 as in the Padeřov Bible) and the first printed Psalter (1487). Latin adnominal genitive can be rendered in Czech most often with an adjective, or with a genitive, dative or prepositional noun phrase, or possibly with a clause. The latter approach is less frequent. Often an adjective can be produced in place of the original noun. Alternatively, a genitive adnominal such as is typical in Latin can be supplied. Genitive is employed in all Slavic languages while dative is marginal apart from South Slavic languages. The pattern of development shows increased use of genitive adnominals in most of the Psalters prior to 1500, especially if the phrase is qualified. Some later versions seem to prefer prepositional structures. It appears as if the translators of the Psalters tried increasingly to make their versions feel closer to Latin.

'Old Czech Psalters between the 3rd and 4th versions'

Mgr. Hana Kreisingerová, Ph.D.¹¹

This study took a different angle in viewing essentially the same body of texts, stressing the later versions. The reason is apparent when all the Psalters are put side by side: The 1st version Psalter (13th c. and on) was originally a word-focused interlinear. The 2nd version Psalter (14th c.) tried to translate anew considering Latin sentences and style. The 3rd version Psalter (14th/15th c.) aimed at clear, coherent Czech sentences. The 4th version Psalter (15th c.)

¹¹ Academy of Sciences (Prague), Czech Language Institute, Department of Language Development.

considered *Ps. iuxta Hebraeos* as well. Also, it seems to be a relatively independent new translation. These four versions witnessed gradual refinement of translating technique as well as growing confidence and erudition of the translators over these three centuries.

4. Vetera

‘The *ó* → *uo* diphthongization in selected texts of the Bible of Dresden’

Mgr. Anastasia Rozhkova¹⁰

If the variations in word selection, style and translation technique get us closer to identifying groups of translators as previous studies may suggest, phonological variations put us yet closer as variations in spelling may be another trace of idiolects. The oldest well documented complete Bible version speaks the mid-14th.-c. Czech. The chief scribe of this Leskovec-Dresden Bible put down texts from two groups of translators. One processed Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song, Wisdom, Sirach, Luke and John. The other produced prophetic books, Tobith and all the books from 2nd Thess. to Heb. 12:24. The *ó* → *uo* diphthongization varies between the two groups as well as inside them, and it seems individual translators might not be always consistent, too. It may be due to the scribe, and certainly stems, affixes and positions do differ. Statistical methods may confirm that the Czech of the former group of translators (as defined by specific religious terminology) displayed indeed a different (regional and social) background from that of the latter group.

‘The New Testament of the Bible of Prague (1488): language and style’

Mgr. et Mgr. Katarína Džunková¹²

The first print of a complete Czech Bible was made in 1488 and offered the 4th Czech version. It took up the earlier NT of Martin Lupáč which it developed further. The language is more modern, as seen in more finite verb clauses (which also Lupáč preferred to non-finite forms), fewer duals, aorists and 3sg/pl auxiliaries. Apart from natural development, however, intended edits were made. Old Czech imperfects were re-introduced, domestic vocabulary preferred and additional words were put in wherever it clarified the sense. Expressivity was enhanced. The intention to make the text clearer and more precise was supported by additional resources available to the translators. Provided examples show they succeeded in finding specific terms unlike more general words of their predecessors. On the other hand their unnecessary expressivity was not followed by later translators. And imperfects were doomed. Still, their re-introduced ‘Hospodin’ as a unique equivalent of the Divine Name significantly helped improve the word stock Czech Bible translators have available till today; no LORD/Lord distinction is needed in Czech.

¹² Charles University (Prague), Faculty of Arts, Department of East European Studies.

‘How stable is the style of Czech Bible versions: a diachronic stylometric analysis’

prof. Mgr. Pavel Kosek, Ph.D.,¹⁵ doc. Mgr. Radek Čech, Ph.D.,¹⁴
doc. Mgr. Ján Mačutek, PhD.,¹⁵ Bc. Michaela Nogolová¹⁴

As it has been obvious through many of the previous presentations, contemporary translators of the Bible in Czech are privileged to draw on an exceptionally rich heritage. Their responsibility includes uneasy decisions on what to re-introduce and what to invent; where to maintain the tradition and where to voice the message in a novel way. They face the same challenges their colleagues had to cope with centuries ago. The statistics of a few quantifiable properties suggests a few points: The Czech versions of the Bible across eight centuries (1360, 1417, 1570, 1593–94, 1677, 1909, 1969/1992 Petrů, 1995 ČEP, 2009 ČSP, 2014 B21) keep remarkable stability in some parameters as well as trends. If the B21 Matthew is compared to, the earlier versions decrease in almost linear proportion from ca. 70 % (2009) to below 30 % (1360) of identical forms: the closer in time, the more words are the same. Surprisingly, mean word lengths, despite variable spelling, keep around 6.4 letters in Matthew and 6.1 in Revelation. In lexical diversity, most versions stick to ca. 15 % of new words (esp. in Matth.) \pm a few % in Rev. of 1417, ČEP and Petrů. Also word count in Matth. shows a small margin (well under 10 %). Where a notable decrease can be observed, is the word count of Revelation that started to fall with the Kralice Bible 1593 while ČEP and B21 seem to need the fewest words (ČSP and Petrů are slightly higher). Apparently, less explicative versions are in demand today.

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