

Czech Diglossia: Dismantling or Dissolution?

Neil Bermel

Abstract This contribution looks at two trends in the evolution of Czech diglossia over the past 100 years that can be described as the ‘dismantling’ and ‘dissolution’ of the diglossic language situation. *Dismantling* concerns official attempts to reach a ‘rapprochement’ between H and L by modifying the prescribed description of H to incorporate elements from L. *Dissolution* concerns unofficial changes resulting from societal upheaval and technological advances that have caused a blurring between public and private space and between the formal and informal spheres. The evident retreat of the H code, ‘Literary Czech,’ calls into question the extent to which Ferguson’s classic definitions still apply in the Czech lands. Official changes have attempted to maintain the functionality and prestige of H, but have frequently merely enriched H with previously proscribed features of the dominant L code, ‘Common Czech.’ Unofficial changes have seen L expand into domains that were previously the exclusive preserve of H. Attitudes characteristic of diglossic language situations continue to sustain the distinction, while the actual functional uses of the two varieties have already departed substantially from a diglossic language situation.

Keywords Diglossic retreat • Dismantling • Dissolution • Literary Czech • Common Czech • Language attitudes

Introduction

Diglossia can be defined as a type of register variation, a “linguistic variation that is stratified by context of use only and not by the social identity of the user” (Hudson 2002, 3, paraphrasing Halliday 1968). This more traditional and narrow view of

N. Bermel (✉)

School of Modern Languages and Linguistics, University of Sheffield, Sheffield
e-mail: n.bermel@sheffield.ac.uk

diglossia effectively differentiates it from societal bilingualism, which was the focus of much research into diglossia in the 1970s and 1980s. It will prove useful as it allows us to focus on certain aspects of social attitudes towards diglossic codes without wading into the waters of imperialism, colonialism, post-colonialism, and other factors that play a role in societal bilingualism.

Ever since the emergence, in the mid-nineteenth century, of a *de facto* national standard based on an archaic variant of the written language, Czech has served as the Slavonic world's best-known example of a diglossic language situation; most contemporary descriptions start from this assumption (see, for example, Janda 2005; Short 1991; Janda and Townsend 2000; Grygar-Rechziegel 1990; Micklesen 1978) even though some go on to question it (for example, Giger 2003; Dickins 1995; Eckert 1993). The Czech linguistic tradition has taken note of, but not typically worked with, the term *diglossia*, preferring instead concepts like *functional styles* or *functional varieties* that are more generally applicable and less specific to the Czech situation (see, for example, Daneš 1999 [1988]; Sgall et al. 1992; Cvrček 2008, although note its greater applicability in Čmejrková and Hoffmannová 2011).

The belief in Czech diglossia is rooted in the pervasive and noticeable differences between H and L varieties of the language on the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical levels. In Bohemia, where 60 % of the country's population resides, the H variant known as 'Literary Czech' is learned at school and serves as the medium for official and formal communication, both spoken and written, while the L variant, 'Common Czech,' fulfills all other language functions. The absence of 'Common Czech' in the eastern third of the country, where various local dialects and interdialects occupy the L position, has supposedly helped to maintain the prestige and functionality of 'Literary Czech,' which is said to have a 'superdialectal' range that makes it the only truly national code.

This contribution will first recap the geography and historical sources of diglossia in the Czech language community. It will then examine the contemporary language situation and how paths of diglossic retreat in Czech can be classified either as attempts at dismantling or as trends in dissolution. My focus will be on the attitudes towards variation, oscillation, and mixing of codes rather than on proving the existence of examples of such variation. The reasons for this are twofold. First, examples are plentiful in today's media-saturated world, whereas only a couple of generations ago the preservation and dissemination of non-published texts was rare. Any sounding into the prevalence of codes will yield a plethora of non-H data from contemporary language and reveal a paucity in the records before the advent of cheap storage and public dissemination of oral works; however, this tells us nothing about the actual prevalence of such data. Second, I will contend that attitudes, rather than actual usage, are perhaps the only key means of measuring the degree to which Czech can still be considered a diglossic language situation.

Geography and Historical Roots

Czech is spoken by roughly 10.5 million speakers in a geographically compact and monolingual area in Central Europe. There are diaspora communities around the world, but few have maintained Czech beyond the second or third generation. Roughly 60 % of the population of the Czech Republic lives in the country's western (Bohemian) dialect zone, which is geographically the largest dialect area and includes the capital, Prague. The dialects here are differentiated minimally, and their more marked features tend to be confined to the smaller towns and villages. The term 'Common Czech' (*obecná čeština*) is typically applied to all the spoken varieties in this region and especially to the variety that is essentially superregional across the Bohemian speech area. The eastern third of the country, which dialectally and historically divides into the larger region of Moravia and the smaller area of Silesia in the northeast, shows much more variegation. Dialects are more profoundly differentiated here and there is no unifying "Moravian" or "Silesian" superregional code.

The historical roots of Czech diglossia can be traced in any number of publications. They stem from the changing fortunes and status of Czech during the period (1500–1850) in which the modern European standard languages took shape.

Prior to 1620 Czech enjoyed the status of an emerging literary and administrative language. Despite the occasional attempt at standardizing, no single standard or set of orthographic conventions existed. The 1620 defeat of Czech Protestant nobles by Habsburg Catholic forces at the Battle of White Mountain set in motion a train of events that over time reduced the importance of Czech in many official contexts and is often referred to as the "time of decline" (*doba úpadku*, for a discussion of this see Starý 1995).

The imposition of more direct rule from Vienna and an expansion of the use of German at the expense of Czech caused a contraction in the spheres of use for the Czech language. As early as 1627, German became the language of transaction throughout the empire, supplanting Czech as the language of administration, education, and commerce. Czech retained its official status alongside German, but it gradually vanished from the major urban registers (*desky*) between 1730 and 1774 (Havránek 1980 [1936], 72). Higher education in Czech ceased in the 1600s; there were moves to restrict the primary teaching of Czech, but it continued sporadically and at a low level throughout the period (Gammelgaard 1996, 23; Auty 1956, 243).

This functional contraction was by no means uniform or complete. Writing in Czech continued, and there were even efforts to expand the language's functional domains. Linguists like Rosa attempted to write grammars in Czech in order to demonstrate its applicability in linguistic discourse (Jelínek 1971, 19–20).

The period from 1300 to 1600 had seen many profound changes in the phonology and morphology of Czech, which were only partially reflected in the conservative writing practices of the time. These processes continued, albeit at a slower pace, throughout the Baroque epoch; one notable feature of Baroque Czech was the

gradual opening of the written language to some of these innovations, which had previously been ignored. There was considerable variation in written practice where it existed: “Baroque Czech” was often inclusive of certain innovative linguistic features, although each author treated them differently (Havránek 1980 [1936], 73–74; Jelínek 1971, 18–20; Stich 1987, 121).

The end of the eighteenth century marked the beginning of the National Revival (*národní obrození*) in the Czech lands, as elsewhere across Central and Eastern Europe. Renewed interest in the Czech literary patrimony manifested itself first in the appearance of several grammars of Czech (Tomsa 1782; Dobrovský 1792; Pelcl 1795), which took as their starting point the written language of the sixteenth through to eighteenth centuries. The choice of grammatical forms and phonological features sanctioned in each handbook was largely a matter of the author’s personal taste. Although the so-called Kralice Bible of 1579–1593 was a significant reference point for all the authors, some legitimacy was granted to features and forms that had not appeared in that relatively early work (details in Havránek 1979, 88–89).

The National Revival soon passed from a renewed interest in things past to a concerted effort to resurrect the language’s use in more spheres. The period from 1810 to 1820 saw the ascendance of Dobrovský’s relatively conservative feature set as a model for contemporary writing and even for speaking as previously Germanized households underwent voluntary “Czechification” (Čuřín 1985, 192).

Following a phase of expansion and consolidation of this standard, the period from 1850 to 1890 can be characterized as the rise of the so-called knife-grinders (*brusiči*). The term is based on a metaphor in an early Czech grammar, Jiří Konstanc’s 1674 *Lima linguae bohemicae* (*Whetstone of the Czech Language*). In it, he proposes that the language is a tool, much like a knife. The grammar book we use to shape or hone our language is thus the whetstone. By extension (and by slightly mixing the metaphor), the grammarian who writes the grammar becomes the maker of the whetstone, or the knife-grinder (see Thomas 1991, 21–22). These “grinders” attempted to return the language to an even purer and less sullied state than that described in Dobrovský’s work. They were determined to root out real and perceived adulterations (mostly Germanisms) to the language and thereby make it fitter for use. In so doing, they introduced a slew of real and mock archaisms into the written language of the period.

At the end of the nineteenth century the most common spoken code, which was by that point quite far removed from the “approved” standard, was labeled insufficient for prestigious forms of communication. The standard code, meanwhile, had undergone a process of lengthy differentiation from the most common spoken code, so that it was understood to have sufficient prestige to present an alternative to German. It was promulgated as a variety for the whole nation—with an established literary pedigree stretching back centuries—and was supported by a growing educational establishment and standardization industry. The entire situation, as Gammelgaard (2002, 613) notes, was characterized by a consistent preference for “quality over efficiency” and this formed the basis for the current language situation.

The Basics of Czech Diglossia Today

In his 1959 article, Ferguson sets out a number of criteria that make a language system diglossic. These can be summarized as follows: (1) Coexistence of two varieties, of which (2) one has a prestige connected to the (3) history of letters that the other lacks. The (4) H form is learned, while L is acquired as a native variety; as a learned variety (5) H has codified standards found in handbooks, which L lacks, having only a set of generally accepted norms. The position of both varieties vis-à-vis each other (6) is stable. As regards the differences between them, (7) the grammatical inventory of L is a reduced version of H, and (8) much of the lexicon is shared, although there are numerous doublets in everyday vocabulary that distinguish the two varieties from each other, while (9) the varieties share a phonemic inventory (Ferguson 1959).

In general, Bohemian Czech can be mapped onto many of these criteria.

1. There exist two varieties, ‘Literary Czech’ (LitC) as the H code, and ‘Common Czech’ (ComC) as the L code. The differences can be seen in parallel versions of referentially identical pairs of sentences, which exhibit phonemic, morphological, and syntactic differences (Table 1):

Overlap between the varieties (i.e. situations where both are suitable) remains uncommon. In the vast majority of situations only one variety is felt to be suitable. LitC (H) is used for scholarly, technical, discipline-specific, legal and administrative writing, on TV, and in newspaper and radio reporting. ComC (L) is used in ordinary informal spoken communication. Selection of the “incorrect” variety causes embarrassment or creates a feeling of inappropriateness (Ferguson wrote of “ridicule,” but this is too strong for Czech).

2. LitC (H) has a prestige that ComC (L) lacks. This is a critical point that we will return to. The prestigious position of LitC holds not only in Bohemia with respect to ComC but also obtains in the standard/dialect situation found in Moravia and Silesia.
3. The heritage of Czech letters belongs to LitC (H); ComC (L) is not directly connected with classical literary activity. This again holds true for Moravian dialects.
4. LitC (H) is not acquired actively in natural conversation; speakers must consciously learn to express themselves in it (i.e. to write and speak) through formal instruction. They will, of course, be exposed to LitC even before school age, seeing it on television, hearing books read aloud, etc., but active acquisition for most people occurs in school. Hudson (2002, 5) labels this the one marker shared by all diglossic situations: the fact that L is the “native tongue” of all speakers as distinct from non-diglossic dialect/standard dichotomies, where class or social differences may mean that some people are “dialect speakers” and others are “standard speakers.” In Czech the use of the H and L varieties is still said to be governed by functional and/or situational criteria, not by social stratification.
5. LitC (H) has codified standards that can be found in prestigious handbooks, whereas ComC (L) has generally accepted norms; that is, a common “inventory

Table 1 Examples of differences between literary and ‘Common Czech’

H:	S	Takovými	lidmi	bychom	nemluvili
L:	S	Takovejma	lidma	bysme	nemluvili
	With	Such _{INSTR-PL}	People _{INSTR-PL}	Would _{1PL}	Not-talk _{PL}
	O		tvém	bytě	
	Vo	Tom	tvym	bytě	
	About	That _{LOC-SG}	Your _{LOC-SG}	Flat _{LOC-SG}	

We would not talk about that flat of yours with such people (Sgall et al. 1992, 4)

of linguistic devices used by a language community” (Nebeská 1996, 17), but it lacks codified standards.

6. The position of both varieties vis-à-vis each other is changing but its general outline has existed since the beginning of the nineteenth century. For Fishman (2002) this stability, rather than the learning dichotomy, is the one absolutely necessary characteristic of a diglossic situation.
7. The grammatical inventory of ComC (L) is in some respects a reduced version of the grammatical inventory of LitC (H). The complexity and diversity of categories is largely the same in both varieties (e.g. there is no wholesale asymmetry in the number of cases or tenses available), but in ComC there is a reduction in the diversity of patterns and forms available for each function: the L variety has fewer separate paradigms and more syncretism.
8. LitC and ComC share the vast majority of their lexicon, but nonetheless there are numerous doublets in their everyday vocabulary that allow us to describe an utterance as “belonging” to H or L. For example, in kinship terms we can note *otec* > < *táta* (father), *matka* > < *máma* (mother), *bratr* > < *brácha* (brother), *sestra* > < *ségra* (sister), *strýc* > < *střežda* (uncle); in other everyday words we see *duň* > < *barák* (house), *tlačítko* > < *čudlík* (button), *dívka* > < *holka* (girl), *hoch* > < *kluk* (boy).
9. LitC and ComC together share a single phonemic inventory, although the distribution of these phonemes and their relationships to each other are different in each variety.

Diglossic Retreat

In evaluating the retreat of diglossia in the Czech lands, I will use two shorthand terms: *dismantling* and *dissolution*.

By *dismantling* I mean efforts “from above” to reduce the frequency of functional differences between the two varieties. There have been efforts at a *large-scale dismantling* of the existing written standard that includes opening it to all elements of the L code used widely across Bohemia; these have some currency in the academic mainstream as defensible language policy options, but are not viewed as being acceptable to the general public. Among the proponents have been

prominent Czech linguists like František Čermák (in English see e.g. Čermák 1993, 39, or on the “cultural ‘terrorism’ of the written language” see Čermák 1987, 140) and Petr Sgall (see in particular contributions such as Sgall 1990, 1998–1999; English publications include Sgall 1994; Sgall et al. 1992, among others) and younger Czech scholars like Václav Cvrček, who have focused on the role of codificatory practice in keeping ordinary usage originating in L formally excluded from the sphere of H (Cvrček 2008), as well as some distinguished foreign scholars of the Czech language situation like Charles Townsend (2003). A view favoring *partial dismantling* is more widespread among the linguists who write the officially sanctioned codificatory manuals; their approach is to evaluate each ComC element individually over time and where these are judged to have achieved a degree of “neutrality” in register, the codifiers admit them to LitC. This, of course, entails a series of subjective judgments by a committee of the appointed, and their particular decisions are always subject to heated debate *ex post facto*.

Dissolution is the result of developments coming from below in which a blending and mixing of the two codes occurs, blurring the perception of a clear boundary between the two varieties. By *blending* I mean changes in the evaluation of items. For example, what was a colloquial/conversational form in L begins to be perceived as a neutral spoken form; or what had been neutral written H at one time comes to be perceived as archaic, stilted, or learned. *Mixing* refers to the development of new hybrid genres, in the Czech context typically favoring the expansion of L forms into domains previously reserved for H. For example, in underground and *samizdat* literature of the Communist period, the use of spoken forms, idiom, and syntax from L emerged as a narrative style (e.g. in works like Jiří Svoboda’s *Autostopem kolem světa* and in the fiction of Bohumil Hrabal, which moved from official publication to *samizdat* and back again, see Svozil 2008). In contemporary literature, this preference for L forms has now moved into mainstream fiction as a common form of confessional first-person narration (witness the widely acclaimed novels *Hrdý Budžes* and *Paměť mojí babičce* as well as the monumental *Sestra*, to name but a few). The growth of television also fostered the use (sometimes inadvertent) of L forms in public settings; as film and video-making became cheaper and moved into amateur realms, this tendency intensified and today amateur videos free of any “standardizing” influence can be made available to the world on YouTube. Ferguson’s main example of a hybrid written genre was the informal note (to a relative or servant), but the explosion of informal, practical, and immediate forms of writing such as e-mail, texting, tweeting, and instant messaging have made aspects of writing more akin to that of speaking, thus fostering the use of L forms in writing.

Dismantling as an Historical Process

LitC in its modern incarnation was, even at the beginning of the nineteenth century, somewhat different from other H codes in that it had always been intended as a “language of the people,” not of the elite. It was revived, after all, to challenge the

dominance of German in the kingdom, and the Czech language was at the time predominantly known as the spoken language of the rural population. However, as LitC was propagated extensively to the Czech public starting in the 1820s, Czech schooling spread rapidly. For instance, Newerkla (2003, 191–193) shows that by 1875, 80 % of Czechs in Plzeň attended Czech schools (where German was, of course, taught, but Czech was the primary language of instruction).

As noted earlier, in the corpus planning plane LitC took on an ever more puristic bent after the mid-nineteenth century. At the same time, on the status-planning plane, extremes of belief about the spheres in which LitC should apply were moderated. There was a growing recognition, even among purists, that ordinary speech behavior cannot be substantially modified. As opposed to the earlier revivalists (*buditelé*), many later knife-grinders resigned themselves to a diglossic situation in which they could influence only certain aspects of people's linguistic behavior. We can observe a change in the way linguists understood language, moving from late nineteenth-century positivism to early twentieth-century determinism.

By *positivism* here I mean a view in which speech is moldable and language habits can be assimilated to the desired norm. For example, the linguist Martin Hattala wrote:

In this action [i.e. language], men of course are led by laws, which are in general so esoteric and secret that not even an educated man knows all of them nor can he recognize them until he has learned for himself the great majority of them; that is, aside from those concerning sounds and declension and conjugation, everything else is primarily a matter of habit, which inevitably prevails in every language. The uneducated man then speaks only according to this [habit], which is of course completely regular in its own way and adapted to the laws of the language, being similar in its way to bees, who make their honeycomb with amazingly precise regularity and fill them with honey, without ever having learned any of what they might need for this purpose or have to spare. For this reason M. Muller is right to describe the strength of habit in this way among others:

"Like everything in the world, language too of course changes unceasingly; but man is not able to master these changes as he wishes, that is, to create them or stop them when he might want. It would be just as pointless to attempt to change the laws governing language or put a stop to the arbitrary invention of words as it would be to attempt to change those laws by which the circulation of blood in our bodies is governed or by which our body over a particular time to one extent or another puts on weight. For man can only gain mastery over nature to the extent that he knows her laws and keeps them: in this way, poets, wise men and linguists can master language only to the extent to which they know its laws and can dispose them" (Hattala 1877, 120; translation by Bermel).

Hattala thus still believes in the power of the individual to overcome his linguistic predestination and influence his own language, but he clearly views this as an activity for the social elite, while the masses will continue to speak "as their beaks have grown," to translate a Czech saying. This sort of attitude sets the scene for the Czech purism of the twentieth century.

In concert with this, we can see a *determinist* trend growing throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In this account, speech is a natural phenomenon and language habits cannot be altered reliably; codification should therefore, out of necessity, adjust where current recommendations diverge greatly from

habit and practice. Thus, throughout this early period the focus of diglossic practice narrowed to the arena of public discourse, namely in writing and speech fulfilling some official function or role.

The following statement found in *Naše řeč* (*Our Language*), a journal founded to combat the “decline” in standards during the early part of the twentieth century and widely regarded as a purist organ, is characteristic of this *determinism*:

Although the humanists returned to classical Latin, it was still a dead language. Live speech forges irrepressibly forward in its development, and even in times of so-called decline, language does not go backward but forward, even if the arc of its development is broken. Every attempt to revive expressions that have died off must therefore end in failure. If by some chance, through pressure from an authority such as schools, etc. we managed to revive e.g. the genitive of negation in all the places it had formerly appeared, [. . .] once the pressure let up just a little, the elemental wave of linguistic development that had abandoned it in the first place would sweep it away (*Naše řeč*, unsigned, 1925, 20–21; translation by Bermel).

Even purists were cognizant to some extent of the fact that they were fighting a losing battle; the author enjoins those of like mind to choose their linguistic battles carefully and not to waste their effort. Meanwhile, reformers like Vilém Mathesius saw this as an opportunity to use scholarship to rationalize and target intervention selectively at aspects of the standard language:

It would be quite possible to rely solely on the refining influence of authorial practice and on the language commentary of non-linguists gifted with a delicate sensibility for semantic nuance and rhythm and the melody of speech. These forces sufficed to form and refine the majority of standard languages that arose before the nineteenth century, and these are the most refined languages in the world. But the current state of linguistic theory enables us to accelerate the process of refinement a bit through scholarly intervention—and anyway, the current position of standard Czech is rather different from that of the great cultural languages at the time of their refining (Mathesius 1932, 25; translation by Bermel).

As this determinist attitude gathered pace, it came to moderate even purist views of the language, but its most obvious outlet was in the development of “Prague School” functionalism, which began to take shape in the 1920s.

In both the positivist and determinist trends we can see a number of continuities in the development of Czech language culture in the period 1870–1950. There continues to be a special role for the LitC and the H functions it encompasses, and all sides acknowledge the ongoing need for regulation that will ensure that LitC remains “fit for purpose” even if in some accounts it will be more limited in its application.

One bellwether of change is the series of manuals that later came to be known as the *Rules of Czech Orthography* (*Pravidla českého pravopisu*). After the privately published *Orthographical Index* (*Pravopisný ukazatel*) of 1886 came out, a government commission was formed to provide an officially sanctioned manual for use in schools across the Czech-speaking lands of Austria-Hungary. The first edition was published in 1902 under the title *Rules Regarding Czech Orthography and Morphology* (*Pravidla hledící k českému pravopisu a tvarosloví*), and was revised at ever-lengthier intervals. At first, each version contained a grammar, spelling, and

punctuation manual, and a spelling and grammar dictionary. After 1957 the manual was split into two editions, one for the general public, focused on common words and usage, and one for editorial use, focused on the widest possible range of vocabulary; grammatical information was found only in the dictionary section of the general public edition.

The Rules of Czech Orthography and its predecessors can serve as a handy indicator of dismantling activities. Over the years, the handbooks have gradually admitted more and more features into LitC that would previously have been labeled as ComC. This began in 1902 on a purely lexical level when efforts were made to standardize vowel length in many words where written usage had previously been varied and inconstant. In the 1940s and 1950s the focus shifted in part to morphology: we begin to see admission of a few ComC morphological forms that had previously been excluded from LitC. This trend gathered pace starting in the 1960s and continued through the 1980s when more and more ComC morphological forms were admitted (for examples see Bermel 2007, 108–110, 112–115, 121–122, 129–131). A reaction to this was registered beginning in the 1990s, with a return to and preference for some more conservative, pre-communist-era forms, but by and large the pressure to “admit” to the standard forms previously regarded as belonging to varieties “outside” it—most notably ComC—has continued.

In this timeline, it is possible to see orthography as a “garden path” where that which starts as orthographic standardization can turn easily into language engineering. Attempts to introduce consistency lead to decisions that produce simplification. One form is favored over another for the way it contributes to the creation of a more easily understandable overall system, and “quality” loses out to “efficiency” in the striving to limit the number of places where one function corresponds to two forms. This has obvious repercussions for a diglossic grammar.

As we move from spelling to grammar we can see how in the early history of the *Rules* (1902–1921), codification of spelling frequently relates to word derivation and word formation. The word *srdce* (heart) previously had the diminutives *srdéčko* or *srdečko*, but the latter is decreed to be preferable in the earliest rules (1902, 151). From here it is just one short step to rationalizing morphology along the same lines. The 1941 rules give the conjugation of the verb *mazat* (spread) as *maží/mažu* (1941, XLV), listing the traditional H variant first and the newly codified L variant second. By the next major revision, the forms are given in the opposite order, with L before H: *mažul/maží* (1958, 184).

Thus, codification of ComC forms seems to happen in two or three stages. First, the new form is admitted, often subject to limitations. Next, free variation is allowed, possibly with one form privileged over another but not necessarily. Finally, the older H form is quietly dropped without ever being proscribed; it is first labeled archaic or formal and eventually left out altogether. The 1958 *Rules*, for example, comment:

The School edition of the *Rules* conveys this variety for the most part, but it cannot, given its size, encompass all the subtle differences in the usage of individual forms, and thus in some places restricts itself to the forms most common and basic in the literary language; alongside those it is sometimes possible to use, in certain phrases or with a particular

stylistic coloring, forms not listed in the *Rules*, without needing to regard them as incorrect (1958, 7; translation by Bermel).

Dismantling can also be a creative process that gives rise to new hybrid forms not originally found in either variety. For example, the original LitC verbs *míti* (to have), *péci* (to bake) show the use of the infinitive in *-ti* for regular verbs and *-ci*, found with many irregular verbs. These correspond in ComC to the forms *mít*, *píct* (note that LitC/é/: ComC/i/).

By the 1950s an infinitive in *-t* is introduced alongside the existing *-ti*: *mít/míti*, *péci*. By the 1980s, when the old infinitive in *-ti* was regarded as archaic, a new hybrid LitC form was introduced to make the irregular verbs parallel with the regular conjugations: *mít*, *péct*. Note that this newly minted form *péct* is not found in any Czech dialect. The L code in most of the country would dictate *píct*; elsewhere we find forms like *pect*, but neither of these appears. The form codified for use appears to be not a ComC form, but a neologism incorporating elements from both LitC and ComC.

In a similar vein, some examples of dismantling involve the appropriation of hypercorrections, which show overgeneralization of a “good” form at the expense of a “bad” form; an example of this in English is the ubiquitous overuse of subject pronouns in contexts such as *between ‘he’ and ‘I.’* In Czech, the pre-eminent example is the LitC 3 pl. forms of three verb classes whose infinitives end in *-it/-et/-ět*. Where the rest of the conjugation pattern is identical, the 3 pl. of some verbs ending in *-et/-ět* is *-í*, whereas for other verbs it is *-ejí* or *-ějí*:

prosit_{INF} (to ask) > prosí_{3PL} (they ask)
 vidět_{INF} (to see) > vidí_{3PL} (they see)
 BUT sázet_{INF} (to sow) > sázejí_{3PL} (they sow)

The ComC 3 pl. forms, on the other hand, are predictable and regular and always utilize the ending *-ej/-ěj*, cognate to the LitC endings *-ejí/-ějí*:

prosit_{INF} (to ask) > prosej_{3PL} (they ask)
 vidět_{INF} (to see) > viděj_{3PL} (they see)
 sázet_{INF} (to sow) > sázej_{3PL} (they sow)

Other dialect forms are similarly predictable and regular, and so this feature was felt to be a candidate for “intervention.” In the 1990s a new hybrid LitC form was thus coined:

sázet_{INF} (to sow) > sází_{3PL} (they sow).

Modeled on the syncretism seen in the L code, it made use of forms from the H code and drew on features of a relatively minor Czech dialect (southern Bohemia) that also occurred frequently as a hypercorrection.

We might rightly ask why the Czech cultural establishment pursued a dismantling agenda. The answer seems to lie with the dominance of functionalism in language planning circles after 1947. Functionalism attempted to combine the continuity of the H code with a modern, scientific approach to language that focused

on L as primary or natural. This resulted in the doctrine of *pružná stabilita* (flexible stability). Although dismantling activity predated 1947 and the Communist era that immediately followed it, the functionalist agenda dovetailed neatly with the political agenda of 1948–1989, and its adherents were careful to ensure that their interests as linguists coincided with that of the powerful state apparatus and its ideological commitment to building a society based on mass mobilization and thus employing mass literacy. Havránek, the head of the Czech Language Institute and Mathesius's successor as chief spokesman for the functionalist movement, succinctly formulated the balance early in the Communist period as follows:

Our task is to take practical care to ensure that our national language fully meets the requirements placed upon it, both as a tool of thinking and understanding and as a means of social combat, by the construction of socialist society (Havránek 1953, 26; translation by Bermel).

Once a dismantling agenda has begun, a culture of ongoing change is set in motion that is then difficult to arrest. The existence of a commission promulgating reform suggests in and of itself that reform is needed or desirable. In this way, dismantling activity becomes institutionalized and insinuates itself into the fabric of language culture.

Pressures Leading to Dissolution

Alongside the official dismantling activities we also need to consider outside pressures that feed this activity. Among the most important of these are the rise of hybrid situations that combine elements previously viewed as preconditions for the use of H and L. In each situation we can identify three axes distinguishing them: the *mode*, the *setting*, and the *message*; we will consider first spoken situations and then written ones.

Take a situation such as formal public speaking, where the mode is spoken (not written), the setting is public (not private), and the message is non-personal (not intimate). The choice of code for Czech is H, following the *setting* and the *message*. New forms of formal presentation, such as television reporting, may not in fact be done in public but are nonetheless intended for public consumption. By metaphorical extension, they also adopt the H code.

However, we can also find situations in which the spoken mode exists in a public setting and an informal register, such as in a play or by extension a film. Here the choice of code in Czech has, increasingly over the last 100 years, tended towards L or contained significant elements of it, following the *mode* and the *message*. New forms of “intimate publicness,” such as infotainment shows on television, also adopt the L code by extension; although an audience may in fact be present while the show is taped, the message is that this is a conversation between a small, intimate group.

While technology has created many more opportunities for the transmission of spoken language than previously existed, the spread of hybrid written situations is also notable. Ferguson talked about the variety of types of letters that could be written, but this genre has now been substantially extended to include e-mails, texts, and instant messaging. A letter exists in the written mode, is generally in a private setting, and can contain either impersonal or intimate messages and thus appear correspondingly in either H or L; the same is true of e-mails, but some of the other new means of communication, such as texts and instant messaging, are perceived almost universally as person-to-person and thus more intimate in their scope, meaning that in these media, H is actively avoided in Czech where possible. Even when the setting moves to a more public one, on the model perhaps of advertisements, we find new forms such as graffiti and forums where L tends to predominate.

The decisive member of this set of factors thus appears to be the message rather than the mode or the setting. This makes the contemporary situation seem much more like a case of highly elaborated register variation. Given the numerous ways in which Czech diglossia has been eaten away at over recent years, we are within our rights to ask what remains of it.

Contemporary Attitudes

If diglossia in its formal aspect seems to be weakening, it is useful to consider attitudes towards it as well. If we look back at the criteria enumerated in section “[Diglossic Retreat](#)”, we can see that even where the actual examples of diglossia have become attenuated, the criteria that are subjective or attitudinal in nature remain firmly diglossic.

In criterion 2, we stated that H has a prestige lacked by L. Research into the two varieties confirms the high standing of H and—more interestingly—the continued low standing of L. Bayerová-Nerlichová, for example, concludes in her study of the usage of H and L forms:

The Czechs’ positive attitude towards ‘Literary Czech’ need not automatically imply a negative attitude towards ‘Common Czech’ as it does today. This attitude is almost grotesque when measured against reality: We all speak this way, even though we don’t want to (2004, 191; translation by Bermel).

The third criterion concerned the ‘heritage’ of H. To this day, LitC is considered to be the heritage of the Czech people: an H code that embodies the aspirations of a nation, such that the use of ComC in H spheres becomes an attack on Czech nationhood (for examples see Bermel 2007, 205–210).

Criterion 4 stated that H is acquired through formal learning, while L is acquired naturally in the home. In the Czech context, the formal nature of the route to acquiring LitC is presented as a positive feature, and it engenders a discourse of LitC as a rare native cultivar needing protection/care. For an earlier work (Bermel 2007), I collected dozens of examples of this from the press in the form of

metaphors; one such is a quote from Petr Fidelius's article (Fidelius 1993) in the weekly literary newspaper *Literární noviny* from 16 December 1993, in which he writes:

The literary language does not grow like wood in a forest; it is formed as the result of deliberate cultivation and refining. The question, of course, is... who should have the role of chief cultivator.

(One might then ask whether ComC can metaphorically be seen as a weed in the garden, which the discerning gardener will pluck out.)

Criterion 6 was the stability of the diglossic situation. Here we can say that the details of what is admissible in which variety have changed, but attitudes towards the two varieties have evolved very little: LitC is still the protected, codified, prestigious variety, and ComC is still uncoded and unfavorably compared with LitC (but indispensable in certain situations).

Curiously, the high degree of observable mixing between the codes does not alter public attitudes towards this mixing; the general prejudice against the inappropriate use of codes is such that a mention of such a transgression can prompt an exaggerated response.

Čmejrková records one such transgression in her 1996 work on broadcast language. An actress was discussing with the moderator of a television programme her feelings regarding a role she had played recently. She slipped into a more colloquial register and was followed by other actors. The moderator remained in the standard, but after a phone call from an audience member, the mood changed abruptly:

While certain listeners were probably grateful that this person was willing to let them look into her authorial workshop and to share her creative approaches with them, the listener who phoned the broadcast sharply criticized the moderator for the sort of participants he had invited onto the program and the lack of respect they had shown to their mother tongue by speaking so non-literarily (*tak nespisovně*). When the program participants realized that they had let themselves be seduced by an atmosphere of intimacy, by a tone of mutual trust and confession that had not been accepted, they felt taken aback, even deceived. They could not settle back into the original mood; they did not even seem capable of making the effort. The thread of assumed understanding [with the audience –NB] had fallen silent; it had literally snapped (Čmejrková 1996, 192; translation by Bermel).

Conclusions

The Czech case offers an interesting perspective on diglossia in the modern nation-state. Under pressure both from technological innovation and progressive approaches to language regulation, it nonetheless remains a resilient concept that informs and shapes people's attitudes, sometimes long after its features have faded.

The case against diglossia would focus clearly on the way features distinguishing H and L are being reduced in number through regulatory action (dismantling), while the zone of overlap between H and L is widening (dissolution). The fact that LitC and ComC are not uniform constructs but agglomerations of

features more or less acceptable in conveying certain types of messages makes it easy for regulators to focus on first one feature, then the next, distinguishing them from each other and picking apart the notion that these features are connected with a coherent H or L discourse.

The case for diglossia would, on the other hand, focus on the constants. Attitudes are resistant to change, and central to these are images of H as weak, unsupported, in need of protection, but also embodying the national spirit. L, on the other hand, is not simply left unremarked, but becomes an object of avoidance—one that everyone uses, while refusing to admit how central it is to their daily speech.

What is left after the objective parameters of diglossia are removed is not necessarily a non-diglossic system. In the case of Czech, it is an oddly post-diglossic system, where strong elements of prescriptivism and conservatism combine to produce a striving to produce and reproduce a variety that is in reality nowhere near as well-defined as the bulk of the nation believes.

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