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The competition of lexical means in Czech written journalism

Аутор у овом раду анализира писано новинарство које употребљава неутралну и стилистички немаркирану варијанту стандардног језика. Језичка средства из колоквијалног, књишког, разговорног стила или сленга чешког језика сматрају се стилистички активним. С намером да оствари комуникативну функцију језички систем нуди алтернативне могућности експресије.

Кључне речи:
journalistic style, persuasion, language foregrounding, lexical means, competing linguistic expressions, expressiveness.

1. IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT COMPETITORS

Implicit and explicit competitors result from the communicative behaviour of the writer and relate to the information conveyed, the linguistic form and the context. They are invariably interpreted subjectively by the reader and their selection by the writer is also subjective. Milan Jelínek (1995) distinguishes two kinds of implicitness (explicitness): factual and naming.

Factual implicitness (explicitness) relates to the content and consists in a particular choice of information the writer wishes (or is able to) communicate. This choice plays an important role since it affects the resulting opinion of the reader.

Naming implicitness (explicitness) concerns linguistic means. Although written journalism primarily aims at exact and succinct expression, the author may sometimes deliberately choose vague or general naming units. In this respect, Jan Chloupek (1991) sometimes uses the term "proposition relativisation". Among the common means of implicit expression are various kinds of figures of speech, such as metaphor and metonymy. For these figures of speech to be informative, the writer has to assess whether the reader has enough background information, as illustrated by the following:
…Klausovo natřásání při spanilých jízdách kraji českými, moravskými a slezskými…, – Když si zelení, sociální, křesťanští a liberální demokraté

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budou hýčkat pouze vlastní koně, cílovou čáru překročí dlouho za borcem v dresu ODS.

Journalism often employs hyperonymical expressions, with a less focussed meaning, increasing the overall implicitness, e.g. *Kdyby Lidový dům nominoval čistě stranického kandidáta, byl by odsouzen k neúspěchu. – Rudá Čína chce zelenat, zbrojit a hýčkat chudé. – ODS se nelíbí, že … – Zaplatí alimenty za dlužníky stát?*, etc.

A similar effect may be achieved by the use of single-word alternatives for concepts normally conveyed by more words, or (less commonly) by using multi-word units. The former are primarily used in common conversational Czech, e.g. *berňák* instead of *berní úřad, obvoďáci* instead of *obvodní lékaři, stodvacítka*, etc.

Written journalism, particularly written commentary, sometimes creates the impression of offering as precise information as possible by giving either the names of persons the reader is unlikely to know or invented names. While this does not contribute to the understanding of the situation, it gives the writing an air of trustworthiness. Essentially, however, it is a game the writer plays with the reader, e.g. *Jarmila Fialová prodává brambory u budějovického letiště.*

The competition of implicit and explicit means occurs at other levels of the language system, particularly at the syntactic level, with loose syntactic structures at one end and sentence condensation at the other.

2. COMPETITION OF MEANS DISPLAYING VARYING DEGREES OF COHERENCE

The dichotomy of explicitness/implicitness is closely related to text coherence and cohesion, which is primarily signalled by a particular choice of connectors. Contemporary written journalism abounds in complex prepositions and other prepositional structures, such as is *u příležitosti, v rámci, v zájmu, v duchu, na úseku, kvůli, vůči*, etc. Most of these carry a meaning of their own rather than being merely a component of the syntagmatic structure.

Contemporary written journalism contains connecting devices which were until recently considered bookish or archaic, such as the concessive conjunction *jakkoli¸* which made its way into Czech dailies in the early 1990s. It has recently become so frequent in journalistic texts that it may be considered as experiencing inflation. As it loses its formal character in the process, it brings about a mismatch between the use and the normative description of the language system, e.g. *Koaliční vláda, jakkoli dočasná, by se neměla opírat o opoziční voliče, ale především o voliče koaliční.*

The preposition *vůči* conveys the meaning of favour and disfavour, agreement or resistance, i.e. in essence a relationship or attitude to someone as well as an assessment of someone or something. It has become very frequent in the press, e.g. *K tomu je nutné posilovat občanské sebevědomí vůči všem zvoleným politikům a stranickým aparátům.*

A disrespect for something, or a disproportion between what is common and actual reality is conveyed by the preposition *navzdory*, e.g. *Ministr vnitra Martin Bursík se navzdory tomu chystá …– …navzdory odmítavému stanovisku úřadů; …starostové si spolupráci navzdory oficiálnímu zákazu přece jen prosadí.*

Another frequent preposition is *díky/dík*, e.g. *díky babičkám; … zvláštní okolnosti, díky kterým přišel k části chalupy v Jeseníkách …;* however it is sometimes used in negative contexts, i.e. in breach of its usual positive connotation, e.g. *díky chybě v zákonech; díky celé té vysokoenergetické vřavě.* The preposition *díky/dík* often indicates the writer's ironic or outright negative attitude, but it is not always certain whether this is intentional. It

seems more likely that the writer sometimes uses the some of lexical items in a mechanical fashion, not thinking about their exact meanings.

Czech dailies very frequently contain a prepositional phrases bordering on an idiomatic expression, namely *tváří v tvář*, e.g. *… tváří v tvář hospodářským problémům …* It is so common with some writers that it can be considered an element of their individual styles.

Another group of popular connecting devices are foreign prepositions followed by a noun in the nominative case such as *versus, kontra, a la.* As they are rare in casual everyday communication, they are invariably perceived as bookish. On the other hand, they are widely used in journalism, sometimes along with colloquial expressions suggesting informal style, or along with terminology. By combining such incongruous lexical units, the writer builds strong tension, as in *Topolánek versus Špidla …– Přeměny důchodového systému a la Švédsko*, etc.

Other cohesive devices operate on the syntactic and syntagmatic level, and include non-finite clauses, clefts, fronting or other kinds of highlighting of a particular clause element or a clause, as well as using a non-clausal constituent for a clause, etc.

3. GENERIC AND SPECIFIC LANGUAGE MEANS

The use of generic items suggests the indefiniteness of the proposition, seemingly creating a tension between the perceived vagueness and the readers' expectation that they will be informed as accurately as possible. There are communicative situations when the writer does not want to or cannot use definite expressions because the information is either incompletely known or considered unimportant, and employs indefinite expressions of broad meaning instead.

These include e.g. *masy, odpovědní činitelé, struktury, široká veřejnost, mezinárodní fórum, davy, vojenské subjekty, všichni zúčastnění, zástupci, my všichni, lidé, představitelé politické a ekonomické moci, prominenti, všichni občané, útvary moci, orgány bezpečnosti, profesionálové, zainteresované kruhy, temné síly*, as well as many others.

The use of these expressions in the text may sometimes be motivated by a lack of the time needed to get more detailed information, or by their suitability to convey anonymous statements because they leave the agent or initiator unexpressed. While J. V. Bečka (1992) thinks of the differences between these items as factual rather than stylistic, Milan Jelínek (1996) points out that the competition between generic and specific items occurs on the lexical level as competition between hyperonyms and hyponyms.

The use of generic means is counterbalanced by the simultaneous use of terminology, which represents the specific linguistic items employed in relation to a particular topic. Generic naming units may occasionally be used because the specific ones would not be familiar to the reader, requiring further explanation by the writer. A number of the generic naming units have become set phrases within the register of journalism.

While the choice of generic units is usually made spontaneously by the writer, sometimes the decision results from a process of careful reasoning. In the following example, the word *země* (country) is used for the compound *Česká republika* (the Czech Republic). Although the latter specific expression is not used in the text at all, the writer's intention is unambiguously interpreted owing to the context, e.g. *… naše země stále ještě nemá dobrý bankrotový zákon, …* Generic expressions may sometimes convey a degree of negative connotation such as contempt or disparagement, and many of them have af-

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fective meaning, e.g. *Slušný volič levice a slušný volič pravice…; novinářský šťoura; … pisálci v novinách, …*etc.

In contemporary dailies, the role of generic expressions is often played by indefinite adjectives, adverbs or verbs. The communicative content is typically weakened while the phatic role gains in prominence, e.g. *Není to sice nic moc, ale mnohem lepší než nic; Méně účastníků by mohlo znamenat více …* As stated earlier, the generic items are usually used accidentally, and do not signal a particular communicative intention of the writer.

An interesting category is represented by terminological loan-words from different fields of human activity, most commonly from social and political life, economics, banking, finance, sociology, psychology, history, administration, etc. These expressions sometimes retain their original meanings, in other cases their meaning is shifted or replaced by a new one, e.g. *ústavní krize, sociální dopad, levicová orientace, politická reprezentace, zahraniční kruhy, stávková pohotovost, demokratický blok, finanční praktiky, finanční kolaps, daňové dluhy*, etc. Whether these expressions are to be treated as generic or specific depends on the context and, to some extent, on their frequency in the text.

4. ABSTRACT AND CONCRETE COMPETITORS

Written journalism typically deals with abstract issues, however for these to be properly understood a concrete manner of presentation is often suitable. This is why many writers employ analogy, figurative language and examples stimulating the reader's imagination. The need to express abstract concepts in a concrete manner results in a kind of tension. The competing linguistic means vary in the degree of abstractness they display, e.g. verbal vs. verbonominal predicates, where the former are perceived as more concrete

than the latter: *sbírat – provádět sběr; uklidnit se – vystupovat klidně; obětovat se – podstoupit oběť; hladovět – mít hlad; důvěřovat – vyslovit důvěru.* The verbonominal equivalents are secondary, having been derived from their verbal counterparts, however their high frequency in journalism makes them neutral and inconspicuous. They bring about a loosening of the sentence structure and their use highlights the meaning and the importance of the message.

5. AUTOMATED AND ACTIVATED COMPETITORS

According to Bečka (1992), the automated (standard, predictable) linguistic means feature prominently in professional writing and in journalism. In the former they guarantee accuracy and unambiguity (scientific terminology), in the latter they are motivated by the need to respond promptly to events. On the other hand, automated language lacks originality and impressiveness, however these qualities may not be crucial to these registers. Automated language is inconspicuous, predictable, and often creates set patterns into which particular information can be promptly encoded, saving the writer's time and effort.

The process of automation is very fast, particularly in expressions relating to the time of their origin and in those which assume the status of official words. The early 1990s saw the rise of naming units which were then perceived as new, unusual, activated, and since they have remained in use, they have acquired the status of automatic ones, e.g. *restituce, referendum, představenstvo, valná hromada, akciová společnost*, etc. Some of them have become terms, e.g. *občanské fórum, koordinační centrum, kupónová privatizace, lustrační zákon*, etc.

On the other hand, activated language includes new linguistic items, or at least

existing ones used in different contexts. They are unpredictable, conspicuous, and sometimes even shocking, and their use emphasises the writer's individuality. They have no limits and operate on all levels of the language system, yet are most typically associated with the lexical level. Figurative naming units play an important part among them, but in journalism, unlike in fiction, their main function is not aesthetic, but largely that of making the text unusual and up-to-date. While in fiction they may be interpreted in a number of different ways, their interpretation in journalism is unambiguous.

It is extremely difficult to follow the linguistic means of current journalism with respect to their automating or activating functions, since they have always to be judged within the particular context of their use. Assessing them out of context may easily result in wrong conclusions. Additionally, the expressions have to be judged with respect to the time of their use. Subjective parameters feature prominently in the process, such as the linguistic experience, age and education of the reader. An experienced reader considers a small proportion of the items as stylistically marked (activated), while an inexperienced one may interpret as such even a common phrase.

6. NEUTRAL AND AFFECTIVE COMPETITORS

The competition between neutral and affective linguistic means relates to a large extent to the distinction between activated and automated items. Affective expressions rank almost exclusively in the former category, and they are used to convey the writer's assessment of the situation. Most readers perceive as affective non-standard words, particularly those with non-standard word-formation, one-word equivalents of multi-word concepts, as well as some set phrases and idioms. These are used in a modified form, which increases their affective impact.

Words primarily used in colloquial spoken communication are affective in character. Some of them attract attention by unusual word-formation. This applies to all word classes, but predictably, mostly to nouns and verbs, e.g. *… jejich předseda plká o Leninovi…; – … čunkiáda je jen zlomkem integrální vládní pokleslosti…; Český řidič může klidně přes uzavřenou obec svištět stodvacítkou, i nějakou štamprli v sobě může mít, …*

A special effect is created when normally neutral words are combined in unusual ways, e.g. *čtenáři nepamětníci; euroskeptická vláda; diplomatické nedbalky; atomový poker; názorový kotrmelec; mediální přestřelka*, etc. Some of these ad hoc formations catch on, but most of them, having been coined for a unique situation and context, occur only once.

Journalists writing for contemporary Czech dailies employ other kinds of affective expressions primarily found in spoken language. This strategy creates the impression of a "lowbrow" text, enabling the writer to get closer to the common reader and, at the same time, to express their feelings, real or stylized.

Newspapers contain a number of examples in which the role of affective means is played by set phrases from religion, e.g. *Bůh nás ochraňuj…; Bůh nás netrestej…; … čerta záleží, co my si myslíme…*, etc. In addition to lexical items, these include structures which were originally clausal but have lost their clausal character, as indicated by their occasional solid spelling. As in spoken communication, they perform the role of affective particles or interjections, e.g. *Pámbu s námi a zlý pryč…; nedejbože* apod.

Negative emotions, indignation, disagreement or anger – in periodicals more stylized

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than real – are conveyed by swearing. Swear words are by no means common in Czech papers and when they do occur, they are part of the writer's individual style. Some expressions are always perceived as very strongly affective (not only in journalism but also in casual communication), such as the particles *sakra, hergot, kruci*, etc. These expressions have limited communicative content, essentially informing the reader about the negative attitudes and emotions of the writer. Czech dailies occasionally contain very strong pejorative expressions, some of them displaying unusual word-formation (*tlučhuba*), others unusual phonological structure (*hňup*), e.g. *Proč stejnou možnost nenabídnout vykukům, …* Owing to their strong affective impact, they are usually considered inappropriate.

Particularly conspicuous in journalistic texts are unique expressions coined by the writer for a particular communicative situation. Their affective impact results from the structure as a whole, and also from the premodifying adjective, whereas the separate components standing on their own are devoid of affective meaning, e.g. *Trapnosti typu Grossův igelitový strýc …; …Kavana, tuto těžkou váhu s hroší kůží…;*

A similar effect is achieved by other neologisms, usually nouns, some of which impart an additional comical twist, e.g. *zemanošpidla, trajektologie, kavanismus, Temelínorendum*, etc.

Affective meaning is always conveyed by substandard words, typically those from common spoken Czech. The writer never uses the whole range of substandard means from this particular register, but selects those which epitomise the substandard manner of expression, such as the phonological diph-

thongisation of *í* to *ej* in the following examples: *Už jsem definitivně starej. … Pochybuju, že si to s nimi broukal i jejich trenér – starej Hlinka. … Taky mu řekli … kdy co zdražej.* Exceptionally, newspapers contain elements of regional dialects.

The affective function is, rather infrequently, performed by words which either are or are becoming archaic. These are known to the reader and sometimes even used by the reader in colloquial communication, but their origin is now largely obscure, and instead of being used on their own, they have been preserved only as components of idioms, e.g. *… téma prohloubené smlouvy už média přežvýkala do mrtě.* The affective meaning of the noun *mrť* is highlighted by its combination with the strongly affective verb *přežvýkat* (to munch).

Last but not least, the perception of an item as affective may be motivated by irony, i.e. words or phrases used in contrast with the context, sometimes creating the impression of a language game, e.g. *Kdyby měl pan senátor filipa, velebil by Filipa aspoň v tomto případě.* However, irony is often used in the context of information so absurd that its presence becomes evident, largely from the context, even in the absence of formal indicators, e.g. *Milouš Jakeš by měl dostat Řád bílého lva. Bylo by to jistě rozumnější, než diskutovat o stejném ocenění pro čínského velvyslance v Praze. – …čeští náckové své Nicnežnárod vykřikují beztrestně, pokud se zdrží hajlování.*

In conclusion, it has to be pointed out that competing linguistic means do not have the same distribution in all journalistic texts, but rather reflect a particular communicative purpose and a particular writer's style.

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Σ *резюме*
Конкуренция лексических средств в печатной чешской публицистике

Статья посвящена некоторым возможностям использования конкурирующих
языковых средств в печатной чешской публицистике. Речь идёт об обширной
проблематике, поэтому мы остановились лишь на лексическом уровне языка.
Выбором подходящих средств из конкурирующего множества публицист
реализует свой коммуникативный замысел по отношению к персвазивной
функции публицистики. Это касается конкурентов эксплицитных и имплицитных,
конкуренции между средствами на разных уровнях когерентности, выражения
генерализирующего и специфицирующего, конкурентов абстрактных и
конкретизирующих, автоматизированных и актуализированных, нейтрально
окрашенных и экспрессивных. Языковой материал мы черпали из ежедневных
чешских газет «Млада фронта днэс», «Право», «Лидовэ новины».

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