

# *The style of Czech-American Periodicals and its Transformation in the Multicul- tural American Environment of the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*

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Although culture constitutes the basis of ethnic or national identity, there is no single, universally accepted definition, and the perspective changes depending on the approach of a given field of study. Generally, the term culture is used to refer to “a manner of cultivation or a level of knowledge in a given field, such as language culture, culture of the body, graphic culture, political *culture*, or the culture of law”<sup>1</sup>. When speaking about culture in an attempt to define a nation, it is the stable and well-balanced characteristics that come to the foreground, such as language, religion, customs, ceremonies, norms of behaviour, folklore, folk art, etc.<sup>2</sup>

The culture of the Czech enclave in the USA in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was significantly influenced by the relatively common social roots of the immigrants. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was a primarily rural population (craftsmen, cottagers and labourers), followed in the second stage, roughly between the 1880s and 1920s, by urban workers and, to a lesser extent, by Czech intelligentsia. The immigrant community was therefore culturally consistent and balanced, which is manifested in its traditional culture and in its social life (clubs, schools, and the press).

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1 Všeobecná encyklopedie v osmi svazích (The General Encyclopaedia in Eight Volumes, 1999, p. 254).

2 For more detail, cf J. V. Bromlej, 1980.

The preservation of Czech ethnic culture in the Anglo-American environment was made possible, among other things, by the fact that whole families were leaving Czech lands (unlike immigrants from Slovakia, who left their families behind), seeking new homes for themselves and their children. Naturally, they brought into the ethnically different environment some of the forms and customs of their original culture, such as farming methods, housing, food, clothing, folk customs, and patterns of social life. In rural areas, Czech immigrants initially lived on isolated farms, while in towns they constituted concentrated urban communities. This lifestyle contributed to the preservation of their integrity and slowed down the process of their acculturation<sup>3</sup>.

Czech immigrants in the USA started to publish their periodical press in the early 1860s. These periodicals in Czech were meant for those who could not speak English and who were therefore isolated socially and communicatively in the English-speaking environment, depending heavily on the press in their vernacular. This explains why Czech-American journalism has always fulfilled a variety of functions: it was a tool of information and education, a tool of cultural and language influence, as well as a means of providing general orientation in the ethnically different environment. In addition to recording immigrant life in the new circumstances, the Czech-American press supported their ethnic identification and integration into the multi-national society.

When following the development of the style of Czech-American periodicals in American multi-cultural environment, attention will be given to the changes in its constitutive elements. The most important of these, both in relation to style and culture, is language itself. The style of a finished text is defined as a particular organisation of language means, creating unity out the separate components, with a view to the communicative purpose of the author.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, language preserves, transmits and protects cultural information, representing the universal nature of culture in its entirety. As a result of this, language functions within any given ethnic community on the one hand as the main factor of the cultural integration of its ethnicity, and on the other hand as the principal means of inter-generational cultural continuity.<sup>5</sup>

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3 Acculturation is understood in this context primarily as the adoption of a new lifestyle and habits in the new environment.

4 For more detail, cf. M. Čechová et al., 2003, p. 17.

5 For more detail, cf. J. V. Bromlej, 1980.

The language of a text is dialectically related to its content, i.e. also to its topic as one of the objective factors of style. Let us start by exploring this aspect.

At the onset of the Czech-American press in the 1860s and 1870s, content was determined largely by the concept of Panslavism and the need to preserve the ethnic identity of Czechs in the USA. Correspondingly, the central topics included "Czechness", national issues and patriotism, i.e. the central values resulting from the period of Czech National Revival at home in the Czech lands, where a nationally determined society was perceived as representing the ultimate social and moral qualities. The cultural atmosphere at home was the source of yet another attribute of the National Revival movement – the mother tongue, which is even now considered the principal ethnic marker and a kind of "cultural capital" of an ethnic group<sup>6</sup>.

The Czech language became not only a means of communication but also its topic, with many articles taking a defensive standpoint. However, the motivation of such texts was in many respects different from the situation at home. The inability to speak English was causing existential insecurity in the English-speaking environment, and often perceived as a loss of personal identity. And it was exactly the mother tongue that was, along with other "props" related to the original homeland, expected to recover the feeling of identity.

In the course of the 1880s texts explicitly exploring the Czech national identity were becoming less frequent, and in the 1890s the issue was treated only implicitly. The Czech origin of the immigrants was only alluded to in the headlines, e.g.: *Nová česká osada* (A new Czech settlement); *Nový český podnik* (A new Czech business); *České knihy* (Czech books); *Zprávy spolkové* (Club news); *Česky na život pojišťující spolek v Americe* (Czech life-insurance company in America); *Adresář českých spolků* (Czech club addresses); *Zprávy osobní* (Personal news, i.e. a section containing short personal messages by Czech immigrants), etc.

Even the treatment of the topic of the Czech homeland and Czechs shows changes in the immigrant press, indicating development in the ethnic self-awareness of the immigrants. In the 1860s and 1870s the immigrant periodicals (*Slowan Amerikánský*, *Národní Noviny*, *Slávie*, *Pozor*, *Pokrok*, *Slowan Amerikánský (II)*, *Pokrok Západu*, *Svornost*, *Dennice Novověku* and others) include regular and extensive information about the situation in the Czech lands and in Austria. Political news predominates, with the attention focussing on domestic political life. The editors of immigrant periodicals, probably in an attempt to maximise identification with the

6 For more detail, see L. Šatava, 2001.

homeland, often reprint information published in original Czech newspapers. Throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, reporting that concerns the politics of the monarchy is dominated by subjective, critical and even ironical contributions. A similarly critical attitude is employed in church news, both relating to Czech lands and to Austria.

The topic of Czech life and institutions features prominently in Czech-American periodicals throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although with varying frequency and regularity, and not covering the most important and topical issues. While in the 1860s, at the beginning of the Czech immigrant press (coinciding with the beginning of mass immigration from Czech lands), all events in the original homeland are seen in the perspective of the Czech nation, its interest and further development, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the frequency of news items relating to home is substantially lower, with editors beginning to adopt a detached point of view. Although interest in the situation back at home continues, a number of news items are based on the confrontation of the different reality experienced by Czechs living in the USA and those in the original homeland.

The picture of the Czech lands presented in immigrant periodicals in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially critical towards the social and political situation, could not have served Czechs living in America as a positive model for identification. On the other hand, in addition to up-to-date political reporting Czech-American periodicals included articles devoted to prominent Czech personalities and important historical landmarks. Such texts must have been very important to the immigrants, reminding them of their original identity and preventing their loss of identity in the new environment. Original Czech culture was also presented in the form of literary texts by Czech writers, usually serialised. However even these were gradually replaced by non-Czech literature at the end of the century.

Neither the Czech language, nor texts about Czech history and culture had much appeal for the second-generation immigrants<sup>7</sup>. Immigrant press always primarily serves the generation moving into a foreign country<sup>8</sup>, and Czech immigration to the USA did not stop until the 1920s<sup>9</sup>. However, the content of Czech-American perio-

7 The second generation of Czech immigrants already spoke English: a bill requiring education in English in state-run schools in the USA was passed as early as the 1880s. For the second generation of immigrants, as well as all successive generations, Czech became a language of the past (Eckertová, 2004).

8 Cf T. Čapek, 1911; R. Rosická, 1928; K. Kučera, 1990 and V. Papoušek, 2001.

9 New immigration laws introduced by the American government in the 1920 almost brought the steady influx of Czech immigrants to an end.

dicals started to change as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the continuing and irreversible assimilation of Czech immigrants.

The analysis of texts published in Czech-American periodicals in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century shows a highly differentiated picture of America, as well as development in the immigrants' relationship to their new home.

From the very beginning of the immigrant press, America was as an important topic in the texts, featuring on the front pages of newspapers and magazines. The majority of the articles were news reports covering current events in the USA. The number and the extent of such articles were growing from as early as the 1860s, primarily as a result of the Civil War, which was closely monitored by the immigrant press.

However, in the 1860s the immigrants still thought of themselves primarily as Czechs, and in spite of trying to identify with the new country on a rational basis, they did not yet accept it as their home emotionally. This becomes apparent from the content of a number of poetic texts published on the front pages of periodicals; most of these showed homesickness and a longing for the lost homeland.

From their arrival in the USA, Czechs, who had until then lived under Austrian rule, valued American democracy and freedom, despite the fact that they considered some of the features of American society negative and were ready to criticise them in public. These included various forms of election campaigns which were alien to them, as well as certain practices of political life, from which they initially abstained. However, by the end of the century Czechs were becoming integrated into American society and the level of identification with the new country was growing. This is manifested by headlines and column headings such as *Ze života Čechů amerických* (*From the life of American Czechs*), the subheading *Dějiny uplynulého týdne* (*History of the past week*); *Domáci zprávy* (*Domestic news* – a column in the periodical *Slávie* offering news from the USA); *Nové Zprávy Domáci* (*New domestic News* – a column of the same kind published in *Pokrok Zapadu*) or *Hlidka domáci* (*Domestic watch* – a column in *Dennice Novověku*, also bringing news from the new country).

From the 1890s on, the majority of articles in the immigrant press are devoted to American life. The news reflects all current events, including politics, economics, home news (criminality, disasters, strikes, demonstrations, development of separate areas) and local reports. Czechs immigrants identified with social life in America, being linked to it by common territory, government, as well as by their present life, and most of all, their future.

In terms of the verbal code employed, i.e. the language, Czech clearly predominated throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (although increasingly influenced by English), which can be explained by the steady influx of new Czech immigrants. This trend lasted until the 1920s. The question is: What kind of Czech did the immigrants use in the vastly different multi-ethnic and multi-lingual environment? Apparently, Czech was only spoken in Czech immigrant communities and only in general, usually spoken, day-to-day communication. Its written form, as well as a kind of official standard of American Czech, is represented namely by the language of the periodicals. However, this newspaper Czech used in America was different from the language used back at home as early as the 1860s. The immigrants brought along with them colloquial Czech of the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was rather conservative. The Czech language started to develop rapidly in the Czech lands around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, rendering the language of the immigrant periodicals obsolete within a relatively short time. This gap then widened quickly because the immigrants considered their language a cultural symbol of their "Czechness" and, following the tradition of the National Revival, deliberately sought to keep a link with the past<sup>10</sup>. The language therefore manifested an archaic character, apparent on all levels of the language system, most of all in syntax, partly also in morphology and in vocabulary.

The concept of a language standard, unstable at the time even in the original homeland, was not strong enough in the new foreign-language environment where it could not even rely on spoken language. This resulted in uncertainty and variation facilitating the adoption of elements of colloquial spoken Czech into the language of Czech-American periodicals, a trend manifested in the texts by an increased frequency of irregularities, variation and errors.

Owing to the changed territorial, social and economic circumstances of the immigrants' lives, their Czech began to be gradually influenced by American English. According to H. L. Mencken<sup>11</sup>, the first Americanisms were introduced into Czech by journalists. However, it is obvious that the main reason for the Americanisation of Czech in the English-speaking environment was the need to address the new reality, particularly by means of new naming units. This is why initially the influence did not so much affect structural aspects of Czech, but resulted in the occurrence of lexical Americanisms in the language of journalism. Editors resorted to English expressions where there was no Czech equivalent or where they did not

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10 K. Kučera, 1990.

11 L. H. Mencken, 1949, p. 655.

know of its existence. In addition, frequent English expressions might have been better suited for some communicative situations, having a well-defined scope of meanings. The influence of an ethnically different community and different living conditions was initially apparent in the early periodicals only in the substitution of English expressions for some Czech words, used in an effort to capture as closely as possible the new American reality. Most lexical Americanisms occurred in the language of classified advertisement and commercial advertising in general<sup>12</sup>.

Towards the end of the 19th century Czech-American periodicals became considerably varied in terms of language, with separate papers showing differences in the extent to which they observed the relatively stable language standard common in several earlier decades. In this respect, some of the periodicals may be considered conservative, while others, on the other hand, more liberal and progressive. As the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Czech-American periodicals owed both their content and the form to their editors, the differences reflect their particular language skills, and their familiarity with the rapidly developing language standard, which were in turn influenced by the time of their arrival in America.

The process of Americanisation<sup>13</sup>, still slow owing to the continuing influx of new immigrants, remained linguistically inconspicuous at the turn of the century. Nevertheless, it is possible to trace certain changes in the language of Czech immigrant periodicals<sup>14</sup>, as well as in their overall style. While the earlier tradition of journalism was characterised by rhetorical style, pathos, and a number of language and style shortcomings, in the 1890s the immigrant press became more factual, to-the-point and sober, news reporting was extended, news items became shorter, the periodicals were given a structured organisation of regular sections and the separate papers developed stable patterns of topics.

Czechs immigrating to the USA found themselves in a contact situation where the language of the majority exerts a one-way influence on that of the minority. The transfer of elements from the dominating language affects all levels of the rece-

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12 Classified and commercial advertisements, referred to as *ohlásky* or *oznamky*, constituted a prominent section of the immigrant press and were second only to news reporting in terms of extent. Typically, they occupied at least one whole page, usually the last. The periodical *Slavie* printed them on two pages, number seven and eight. In addition to subscriptions, advertisements represented an important source of income for all newspapers of the time.

13 The term *Americanisation* is used in this paper to refer to language changes.

14 The most prominent periodicals of the time included *Denice Novověku*, *Pokrok Zapadu*, *Slavie*, *Slovan Amerikánský (II)*, *Svornost*, *Duch Času*, *Hlas*, *Delnické Listy*, *Narod*, *Hospodář*, *Američan*, *Denní Hlasatel* and *Zenské Listy*.

iving/minority language, i.e. phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexical semantics. Language change brought about by the contact of the two languages is a sociolinguistic phenomenon and is therefore determined by a large number of social and psychological parameters. Consequently, it is almost impossible to capture the changes as they gradually occur through the contact of two languages. They are only registered when they become widespread, having been accepted by a substantial number of communicators<sup>15</sup>.

The changes brought about by the contact of Czech and English on US territory are also varied in nature because the analysis is not based on a single form of the Czech language, but encompasses a range of variants of the Czech vernacular, depending on the time of arrival of the immigrants into the USA. However, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the influence of English on Czech was invariably most prominent and most readily apparent on the lexical level.

Lexical Americanisms occurring in journalistic texts in the 1890 are usually used as quotations, i.e. without translation into Czech (as the Czech equivalent is lacking). They vary in form: the original unadapted English forms appear less frequently, more common are those which were modified, most frequently on the morphological level, by adding affixes, in order to suit the morphological system of Czech. The suffixes assign to nouns the category of gender and a particular paradigm of declension, and a corresponding conjugation paradigm to verbs:

“Obilí se začne sít v březnu, **korný** se sazí ke konci dubna a v máji; obilí se sklízí v červenci, **korný** od října až do jara”<sup>16</sup> (Am. E. corn, i.e. Br. E. maize or Czech kukurice).

Verbs adopted from English were always modified in Czech, most frequently by the addition of the affix **-ova(t)** signalling the paradigm represented by *kupovat*:

“V Grauerově pivovaru **skébuji** dělníci J. Wenzl, Karel Muller, L. Scheff a Winterman. Poslední je ničema prvního řádu, neboť má svůj vlastní dům v ceně \$7000 a dosti peněz, vzdor tomu ale šel ihned **skébovat**”<sup>17</sup>.

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15 For more detail see S. G. Thomason, 2001.

16 *Slávie* 32, 1893, Issue 1639 (22 February), p. 6. Nouns were inflected in accordance with the corresponding Czech declension paradigms into which they would fit if transcribed phonetically in Czech. Loaned nouns were given gender corresponding to that of their Czech equivalents: *corn* ‘kukurice’ feminine – *korna*, also feminine. Additionally, the example quoted is used in the Czech plural form.

17 *Tydni List Hlas Lidu* 5, 1894, No. 27 (28 April), p. 1.



The English word *scab* may function as a verb (*refuse to join a strike or take a striker's place for lower wages*), or a noun (*a workman who does so, a blackleg*). The noun served as the basis for further derivation by the Czech suffix *-ský* creating an adjective<sup>18</sup>, which is then further inflected:

"Naproti tomu značný počet hostinských odrekl hned **skébské** pivo, mnohem více jich slíbilo též, že během týdne spojení své s pivovary **skébskými** přeruší"<sup>19</sup>.

The examples above indicate that most lexical Americanisms have retained their original meaning, but have undergone formal modification of various kinds. In addition to changes in word-formation and morphology the loans were also modified phonologically. Phonological change is indicated by the written form, which in turn reflects English pronunciation. This suggests that the loans were adopted into the Czech used in America only through direct contact between the communicators.

Using two or more languages in a single discourse/text is referred to as *code-switching*. The occurrence of code-switching in journalism indicates that not only the writer/editor but even the reader/immigrant community member has command of both languages and is becoming, or has already become, bilingual<sup>20</sup>. The term code-switching is sometimes applied to instances where a single word is used in a sentence which is otherwise in a different language. However, Thomason<sup>21</sup> points out that it is more appropriate to consider such instances a subtype of code-switching, referred to as *code-mixing* or *intrasentential switching*; this also requires knowledge of both languages. The receiving language adopts words for which it lacks equivalents (*cf* above), often euphemisms or expressions used to identify the speaker/writer with the subject/object of the source language. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century some immigrant periodicals, e.g. *Slávie*, *Hlas*, *Pravda* or *Slovan Amerikánský* printed not only separate English expressions or sentences, but also complete texts in English, most often advertisements.

This description of the topics and language of Czech-American periodicals suggests that their style underwent striking transformation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup>

18 Adjectives adopted from English are infrequent in the Czech-American press. Our database includes a single expression - *all right* (i.e. *dobry, spravně* in Czech), which remains uninflected in Czech.

19 Tydňní List Hlas Lidu 5, 1894, No. 27 (28 April), p. 1.

20 On the issue of bilingualism in the USA see V. Vildomec, 1971.

21 See Note 12.

century. The change reflects the continuing process of assimilation of Czech immigrants and marks the beginning of Czech-American bilingualism.

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### *The style of Czech-American Periodicals and its Transformation in the Multicultural American Environment of the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*

The paper outlines the meaning of two terms: culture, both in a general perspective and with a view to the concept of nation - ethnic community, and language style. It then analyses the Czech-American periodical press of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, exploring the development of the constitutive means of style, in particular topic and language. The changes discovered are attributed to the continuing assimilation of Czech immigrants in the USA and perceived as the beginning of their Czech-American bilingualism.

**Key words:** *culture, interculturality, Czech immigrant press in the USA, style, language.*