

# *Written Journalism and Language Culture*

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The number of functional styles is not firmly established in present-day stylistics, their scope depending on the identification of principal underlying communicative functions which are perceived as crucial for each of these styles. Obviously, the number of these functions and, consequently, the number of the separate functional styles keep growing. This situation in functional stylistics was reflected by Jan Chloupek (1994). He notes that the classification of the styles rests primarily on the identification of the main factor typical of a given communication/text, but that some means of language, usually those without a strong stylistic preference, may be used in a variety of styles. He points out that the relations within the existing functional styles are dynamic and that it is necessary to distinguish language means used in primarily written and primarily spoken texts respectively. At the same time, such differentiation can never apply absolutely, and it is therefore crucial to assess each particular text on an individual basis. What commonly occurs, according to Chloupek (1994: 66), is “mixing language means of different kinds, their transposition, loans, using language means in unusual contexts”. In spite of this, it is possible to classify separate texts as representing a particular functional style, since their stylistic value remains unaffected.

The present paper aims to point out some instances of language innovation appearing in written journalism and to comment on their contribution to the culture of present-day language. The data were obtained from the following Czech dailies published between 2000 and 2005: *Mladá fronta DNES*, *Právo*, and *Lidové noviny*.

Journalistic texts, whose main function is persuasive, are meant to inform readers about topical public issues, to provide a commentary on them and to persuade

the general public that the interpretation offered is adequate. They also aim to influence the addressees' opinions and to make them subscribe to the views presented, as well as to provide them with basic orientation concerning issues outside the scope of their professional interest.

The data accumulated through long-term study of written newspaper texts suggest that journalism is a variable and dynamic style, reflecting social change more readily than other styles. While assuming that the basic register of written journalism is standard language, it has to be admitted that journalistic texts are open to language means typical of other functional styles, particularly professional and artistic, but to an increasing extent they also employ language means from the style of everyday communication. It is common to find expressive and colloquial elements as well as jargon, both used in order to bring the texts up-to-date. Admittedly, these means are not always to the benefit of the language culture of such texts, with some "innovations" being truly detrimental.

The rise of clichés and foregrounding are processes undergoing constant change. Journalistic texts respond to a particular social and political situation, and this is manifested in the choice of language means. The clichéd elements used in journalism are inconspicuous, their use being motivated by the need to respond promptly to events, and this is why J.V. Bečka (1992) identifies them with language stereotypes. While lacking in originality and impact on the reader, these means represent a complex phenomenon which is functionally justifiable in some types of communication. These means often constitute fixed patterns into which particular information can be quickly encoded, making the writer's task easier and less time-consuming. The process of becoming clichés/stereotypes is fastest in naming units which consequently acquire official status.

On the other hand, the foregrounded means include newly coined elements, as well as existing means used in new contexts. While they may arise on any level of the language system, they are most frequent on the lexical level. An important subgroup of these is represented by figurative expressions, which, unlike in artistic texts, are used in journalism for the purpose of foregrounding rather than for their aesthetic effect on the reader. Consequently, they have to be unambiguously interpretable. An important role in this process is played by subjective variables, e.g. the language experience of the readers, but also their age, gender, education, hobbies and interests, personality characteristics, etc. The stylistic value of a given element is perceived differently by an experienced journalist and by an average reader. An experienced addressee considers only a fraction of the stylistically active language

means as foregrounded, whereas a casual reader may interpret in this way even a common phrase.

The effort by journalists to write in an original manner along with the need to address new phenomena give rise to Czech neologisms which consequently become established in the language, e.g. *bezdomovec* (a homeless person)<sup>1</sup>, *bavič* (entertainer), *posilovna* (muscle-conditioning gym), *vozičkář* (wheelchair user), *čtečka* (microform reader), etc. When neologisms fill in a gap in the vocabulary, they quickly become widespread. Especially outstanding among neologisms are expressive ones, which are meant for a particular context and do not become part of the general vocabulary. Most of these have an amusing flavour and their meaning can be guessed from the context. Compound words consisting of two elements of Czech origin occur frequently, often expressing evaluation, e.g. *jeden kožohlavec byl obviněn* (a skin-head was accused); *penězovod do kapes kamarádu* (money-pipeline leading into friends' pockets); *slonbidlovství* (verbatim elephant-poleship, i.e. clumsiness), etc. Such naming units are coined for a particular context and are not initially used outside it. They arise in the process of creating the text and differ from the normal use of language means within such a text, and are therefore considered textual neologisms. To count as such they have to be unusual and conspicuous, and must be perceived as marked in relation to neutral naming units. Most of them cease to exist when they are no more needed, some of them are used just once and never become part of the regular vocabulary. For this reason they are sometimes referred to as author's neologisms.

Contextual neologisms include compounds with new meanings different from the original meaning of their semantically dominant component, e.g. *kokainová metropole* (cocaine metropolis), *modré přilby* (blue helmets), *transformační nicnedělání* (transformational idleness), *modří bossové* (blue bosses), etc. Neologisms occasionally fulfil the function of puns and are usually used to bring to the foreground the formal or expressive aspects of a text, e.g. *američtí kremnologové* (American Cremlinologists), *zkušení záhadologové* (experienced mysteriologists), *trojlístek nesamozřejměmcu* (a trio of not-matter-of-coursers), etc.

Journalistic texts contain a high proportion of lexical means conveying evaluation and attitude, the majority of them negative. This stems from the fact that journalists usually employ negative criticism, attempting to make the readers adopt a negative attitude towards negative phenomena. The types of expressions convey-

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1 The brackets include the approximate English equivalents, and, in some cases, also verbatim translations into English.

ing attitude have to be unambiguously interpretable in a given context, preventing the possibility of misinterpretation, which would thwart the writer's effort. This evaluation frequently concerns closed groups of people or prominent personalities and is often bitterly critical, e.g. *národ neandrtálců* (a nation of Neanderthal men), *prezident na baterky* (a battery-operated president, i.e. unreliable, weak), *bezcharakterní darebák* (a characterless rascal), *kvarulant* (grumbler), *černý hmiž* (black muck) or *čmoudi* (smokies, i.e. Romanies), *podržtaška* (hold-the-briefcase, i.e. subservient character), *pakáž* (riff-raff), etc. Some of these expressions count as vulgarisms or border on vulgarisms, and therefore evoke negative feelings not only in those criticised, but in some readers, too.

Words of foreign origin are on the increase in contemporary journalism, particularly those adopted from English. It is questionable whether this tendency has a positive effect on the informativeness of the journalistic text, as overloading the articles with foreign lexis may render the text less comprehensible to the average reader. Especially numerous is a set of lexical neologisms borrowed from English into a variety of other languages, which denote phenomena related to globalisation, such as *boom*, *boss*, *disent* (dissent), *happening*, *hardware*, *know-how*, *summit*, etc.

Another important factor is the way these loans adapt themselves in Czech texts. Some retain their foreign form, even resisting spelling changes, do not adopt Czech inflections and remain quotation loans. The reason for this is that some English nouns end in phonemes or phoneme clusters which cannot be readily assigned to any of the Czech declension paradigms. They are usually treated as neuters. However, some oscillate between two genders, e.g. *rooming-in*, *know-how*, *show*, *play off*, etc. Some anglicisms were adopted in their original plural *-s* forms, e.g. *cornflakes*, *chips*, *jeans*, *promotions*, *public relations*, etc. A number of nouns which have retained their original spelling and end in a consonant in pronunciation have been assigned to a particular paradigm of Czech declension and may even serve as a basis for further word-formation yielding adjectives, adverbs and verbs, e.g. *od posledního babyboomu uplynulo třicet let* (thirty years have passed since the last baby-boom); *díky lepšímu backgroundu* (owing to a better background); *politických greenhornů* (of political greenhorns), etc. The most numerous group is constituted by nouns which have undergone spelling and morphological adaptation to suit the system of Czech. They often occur in two spelling variants, the original one and the modified, both of which are standard and quite common in journalistic texts, e.g. *rozpočtová šou* (budget show); *vybraným levicovým lídrům* (to selected left-wing leaders), etc. Some loan words acquire a modified form in spoken communication, e.g. *pankáči* (punks), and become lexical items of non-standard Czech

or a particular slang. As means of conversational language they may consequently occur in journalism.

The process of borrowing foreign words, some of which have become *europeisms* by their nature, is a manifestation of political, economic, social and cultural influence. These words also result from the situation in science and technology, the practice of acquiring information from international scientific databases, as well as from the wealth of scientific literature in English.

One important aspect of written journalism is the competition of implicit and explicit means. Their proportion results from the communicative behaviour of the writer and relates to the informational content, language and context. The implicitness/explicitness is assessed by the reader's individual perception of the completeness of the information. In journalism it is particularly important that the writer should be able to determine "the maximum level of implicitness of the means allowing to accomplish the communicative goal, or, in other words, the minimum level of explicitness the writer can afford" (Jelínek, 1999: 12). The level of explicitness is related to the individual stylistic prowess of the writer. A number of linguistic means are used in a completely mechanical manner by writers facing time pressure, without thinking in detail about their function in the particular text. Consequently, while day-to-day journalism stresses the importance of objective information, the choice by the writer remains subjective.

Milan Jelínek (1995) distinguishes between factual and linguistic implicitness (explicitness). Factual implicitness relates to content, i.e. essentially the choice of information the writer wants to, or is able to, convey, withholding the rest. In journalism, some information may be left out for a variety of reasons: it is considered unimportant, it may be unknown or inappropriate for a different reason.

Factual explicitness is commonly employed, since journalism does not only strive to convey information, but also to convey it in a manner which attracts the attention of readers and makes them feel satisfied. Any item of information may be made more interesting by including unimportant data. Focussing on unimportant information is the principle of tabloid journalism. Excessive level of detail, often only marginally related to the topic, may arouse interest in some readers, and is therefore sometimes found in headlines, inspiring the reader not only to go through the whole article, but above all to actually buy the newspaper.

Linguistic implicitness (explicitness) relates to language means. The writer may choose from different sets of lexical and lexico-syntactic means, some of which are better suited for conveying accuracy, while others are suitable for a rough indication of a problem, in the solution of which the reader is invited to participate. So

while the priority of journalism is accuracy and appropriateness, sometimes journalists employ vague, approximate or general naming units, either because they do not have detailed information and do not know concrete data, or deliberately do not want to disclose them. Jan Chloupek (1991) identifies this process as making a proposition less definite; when this happens repeatedly, the proposition becomes a stereotype, a cliché.

Common means of implicit language include various kinds of figurative language, such as metaphor and metonymy. In addition, newspaper language abounds in hyperonyms, words of more general meaning. Their implicitness results from their metonymical character, e.g. *Evropa* (Europe), *Západ* (the West). Implicit in character are also one-word naming units, commonly used in informal spoken Czech. They are expressive and count as foregrounded language means, e.g. *obvodáci* (general practitioners), *berňáky* (tax authorities), *našinec* (fellow countryman, one of us), *nezletilec* (juvenile person), etc.

Journalistic texts commonly include items of other levels and registers of the national language. These include colloquial, literary, slang, informal or other marked expressions, which are interpreted by the reader as unusual and therefore stylistically foregrounded. Some of these means vary in the extent to which they deviate from standard language; other groups are comprised of quotation words and quotation compounds, literary and terminological expressions. Their choice is primarily affected by the topic. In relation to neutral language means, they may represent their synonyms, as well as competing language means.

The term competing means denotes linguistic (as well as non-linguistic) means used within the usual scope of operation of other language means. For the writer to be able to choose from these, the language system must contain competing sets of means - a term used by Milan Jelínek (1995). These, in addition to synonyms, refer to "groupings of language means which can be used to accomplish the essential communicative goal of the speaker/writer, and are therefore interchangeable" (Jelínek, 1995: 730).

The role of competitors in journalistic texts may be fulfilled not only by language means, but also by ideographic ones, used in order to complement the information conveyed by the text, to make it clearer and more authentic, and to motivate the potential reader to start reading. Ideographic means are represented by photographs, diagrams, sketches of maps, charts and tables containing overviews of data, etc. Newspapers also include cartoons, with or without text, where the ideographic component is primary and the verbal becomes secondary.

In addition to their documentary function, photographs in newspapers may convey the writer's attitude and provide evaluation. It is not an uncommon practice in present written journalism that photographs are deliberately selected in which people (largely politicians) are portrayed behaving inadequately with respect to the situation, often in circumstances which are guaranteed to bring about a decrease in their popularity, e.g. politicians sleeping in Parliament, a politician holding a glass of alcoholic drink or a cigarette, etc. The evaluative force may be further intensified by the caption, in which the writer may negatively (yet in an unchallengeable manner) influence the opinions of many readers. Ideographic means alone therefore represent a convenient source of authentic information which may not be explicitly present in the text. However, more commonly, there is an overlap of the information provided by the language and the photographs.

Conclusion: As written journalistic texts rank among official types of communication, the logical expectation would be for them to employ strictly standard language, with moderately literary ways of expression. However, in practice this is very different. Contemporary journalism is open to language means (mostly lexical) from different stylistic levels. Many of these never establish themselves as permanent components of language. This is especially fortunate in the case of inadequately used, strongly pejorative expressions, which can hardly be considered a positive contribution to language culture.

Exploring the language of current journalism is, owing to its dynamic character, an uneasy task. The popularity of many particular language neologisms is limited in time, and while some of them might be brought to the foreground by social and political changes, others fall into oblivion. Yet the language of current journalism deserves systematic attention, primarily because it may provide valuable information, not only about the present state of language, but, owing to its dynamic nature, also about its development trends.

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**Key words:** *journalism, culture, language, style, innovations.*