

## **Language is not only an Instrument of Communication**

Casting of Doubt on Slovak – Causes and Consequences

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Language policy has played, still plays and will continue to play a very important role in our region. It is necessary to say that even at the time of the entry of the Slovaks into European history, the problem of language formed a key and vital question of state sovereignty and independence. Always, when the question of language appeared as a political question in our history, it was, above all, about the ontological essence of the Slovak nation, not about language as such. Prince Rastislav did not send his ambassadors to Rome and later to Constantinople primarily so that they could help to Christianize the Slovak people. In his time, that was no longer the main problem. The population of Great Moravia was most probably baptized – according to the latest archaeological finds at Bojnál – at least one, if not two generations before Rastislav's accession to the throne. The summoning of a mission from the Byzantine Empire was mainly intended to secure separation from the Bavarian hierarchy, and in this way to strengthen the sovereignty of the state. Therefore, the introduction of Old Slavonic to the liturgy was not primarily a matter of religious teaching. The Bavarian and Aquilean missionaries must have also explained the basics of the religion to the people in their own language. Latin was used only in the liturgy and those who experienced the pre-Vatican II liturgy know that Latin was not a problem for us. The introduction of Old Slavonic to the liturgy had the aim of strengthening the sovereignty of Great Moravia by detaching it from the legal authority of the Bavarian episcopate and founding a separate Church province. This was successfully achieved by the establishment of a Church province of Moravia-Pannonia. Svätopluk I's later loss of interest in the Old Slavonic liturgy can also be understood in this context. After the establishment of a separate Church province, the direct influence of the Bavarian episcopate was eliminated and the language question no longer had such an important role, but caused problems for Svätopluk in connection with his policy of expansion to the west. It is interesting that language again appeared as a political issue at the time of the establishment of the Hungarian state. The famous statement of St. Stephen to his son *Regnum unius linguae et moris imbecile et fragile est* – A kingdom with only one language and custom is weak and fragile) is often quoted, but, at least in the literature accessible to me, I have not found its geopolitical explanation. Why did St. Stephen actually feel the need to leave such a message? I am convinced that it was because he was aware of the reality of the given period. This reality was the fact that in the Early Middle Ages only a country with clearly defined natural frontiers could survive for the long-term. The early Magyars, who lived only in the lowland plains of Hungary, would sooner or later succumb to pressure from the marginal territories of the Carpathian Basin inhabited by non-Magyar groups. St. Stephen solved this geopolitical question by working from the beginning, not to build a Magyar national state, as was usual in that period in the rest of Europe, but a multi-national state. This was the basic idea on which his state was built, Latin was used as its common language,<sup>2</sup> and this situation continued until the 18th century, even in a situation when the ethnic Magyar territory was separated from the state by Ottoman occupation. Violation of these principles by those, who most loudly proclaimed and still proclaim the heritage of St. Stephen, and the effort to build a „*regnum unius linguae et moris*” from the end of the 18th century by means of Magyarization, can be regarded as the main cause of the break up of the Kingdom of Hungary in 1918. Magyarization in relation to the Slovaks had many forms – from humiliation of members of the nation (Tót nem ember „a Slovak is not a human being”), through obstructing the unification tendencies associated with use of a standard written language, to deliberate splitting of the national community on the basis of dialects. The aim of my paper is to point to these methods, which did not entirely end with the break up of the Kingdom of Hungary. They were continued under the First Republic, after the Second World War and surprisingly

even today. In my view, they are appearing again in various veiled forms. We should not underestimate them, because, for example, by under-estimating efforts to achieve linguistic disintegration on the basis of dialect, we lost territories in northern Orava and Spiš. My paper will certainly not give a complete account of the problems it outlines, but I want to point out that the protection of language is an important political task for the state and cannot be neglected. I will devote attention in my paper to the given question in the period, when the linguistic unification was culminating, but I realize that this problem was „not born” in the given period. When the modern Slovak standardized language was established in the 1840s and national integration of the Slovaks on its basis made rapid progress, the first attempts appeared to stop this process by struggle against Štúr’s reform. The attacks on Štúr’s Slovak from the old conservatives led by Ján Kollár are well known. They feared that the introduction of a new written language for the Slovaks would divide the forces of Slavdom in the struggle against the Germans and Magyars. It is less well-known that, as Ján Marták pointed out, the attempts to defend „Biblical” Czech as the written language of the Slovaks did not develop only from fears about splitting the forces of Slavdom. The opponents of Štúr’s Slovak and supporters of continued use of „Biblical” Czech also included supporters of Magyarization (Launer and Lanštiak), who realized the great strength of the new standard language in the national integration process of the Slovaks and in their defence against Magyarization.<sup>3</sup> However, they were not able to significantly influence the penetration of Štúr’s Slovak and its application as the written language of the Slovaks. In the course of the 1860s, standard written Slovak became an indisputable fact, and so played an important part in uniting the nation. By means of Matica Slovenská, the Slovak grammar schools and Slovak press, it gained a significant role and was applied in all spheres of cultural, scientific and political life. The new intensification of Magyarization after the Austro-Hungarian Ausgleich of 1867 did not avoid the standard written language of the Slovaks. After the closure of Matica Slovenská and the Slovak grammar schools, there was also an attack on the national integration function of standard written Slovak. The Magyar ruling circles used a tradition of using eastern Slovak dialect as well as the standard form of Slovak in eastern Slovakia. In the 1870s, they published textbooks for people’s schools of this region in the Šariš-Zemplín dialect.<sup>4</sup> The aim of this measure was clear: to hinder the integration process of the Slovak nation and accelerate the Magyarization of eastern Slovakia by restricting the use of standard written Slovak. These efforts were not directed towards disintegration of the Slovaks, but towards assisting the implementation of Magyarization.

A new situation came at the end of the 19th century, when the process of national integration was essentially complete, and when the Slovak politicians emerged from passivity, they achieved their first successes in the struggle with Magyarization. In this period, the Magyar ruling circles made direct attempts to misuse dialect differences in Slovak to achieve the national disintegration of the Slovaks into dialect areas. The most extensive of these attempts was to present the population of the eastern Slovak dialect area as an independent national unit, as the so-called Slovjaks. However, it is possible to say that activity in northern Slovakia had no less far-reaching consequences. In this regions, Galician Poles began to be active among the Goral population of northern areas of the counties of Trenčín, Orava and Spiš, in support of „renewal” of the alleged Polish identity of these people. The first attempt to use the dialect differences in the territory of

3 See MARTÁK, J.: Útok na spisovnú slovenčinu roku 1847/1848 a jeho cieľ (The attack on standard

written Slovak in 1847-1848 and its aim). Martin: Matica slovenská 1938.

4 See: TAJTÁK, L.: K otázke vydávania učebníc vo východoslovenskom nárečí (On the question of

the publication of textbooks in the eastern Slovak dialect). In: *Nové obzory* 6/1964, p. 43-57.  
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Slovakia to achieve the disintegration of the Slovak nation was the agitation of certain circles from Galicia, beginning in 1904 in northern Orava, under the leadership of the Krakow advocate F. Wojciechowski and J. J. Teisere. Especially J. Wismierski continued this work in the northern areas of Spiš. It acquired an organized form only under the leadership of the district doctor of medicine from Nowy Targ J. Bednarski and the writer F. Gwiżdż, whose activities included publication of the magazine *Gazeta Podhalanska* from 1913. It promoted the Polishness of the Slovak Gorals.<sup>5</sup> Without more extensive research in the Hungarian archives, it is impossible to ascertain to what degree the Magyar ruling circles stood behind this action with the aim of using it to break up the national unity of the Slovaks and so create favourable conditions for Magyarization. However, from the point of view of the old principle of Roman law „who does it favour,” it is possible to suppose that it at least suited the Magyars, even if they did not organize it. The local Magyar and Magyarone figures in northern Orava and Spiš, directly supported pro-Polish activity as a means of weakening the ethnic and national consciousness of the local people, so that they could be Magyarized more quickly.<sup>6</sup> The agreement in time of the Polish action in northern Orava and Spiš with the similar Magyar actions in the rest of Slovakia, testify at least to the intermeshing of the agitation of the Galician Poles with the Magyarization plans in Hungary. It is necessary to say that without the break up of the Kingdom of Hungary, the action of the above mentioned Galicians could not bring the desired results for the Poles. The Gorals rejected it at that time and so it had no meaning. There was no way of predicting that the Kingdom of Hungary would break up in 1918 under the influence of national and democratic revolutions. After 1918, when 25 communities from northern Orava and Spiš were attached to Poland, and when the ruling circles in landowner dominated Poland demanded further areas of Slovakia, this question became a serious obstacle to Polish-Czecho-Slovak relations. It had further consequences at the time of Munich in 1938 and later.

The attempts of Budapest to stop the spread of national consciousness and national integration in eastern Slovakia by limiting the use of standard written Slovak, appeared, as I already said, in the 1870s in connection with the publication of textbooks for people's schools in the eastern Slovak dialect. However, it turned out that overcoming of backwardness in this region was also expressed in the growth of national consciousness among the eastern Slovak people. Slovak emigrants to the USA played an important part in spreading national consciousness in eastern Slovakia. They were nationally awakened by the situation in  
5 One of the organizers of the whole movement, F. Machay also admitted this inadequacy.  
See

MACHAY, F.: *Moja droga do Polski* (My route to Poland). Krakow 1938, p. 89-102.

6 BIELOVODSKÝ (A. Miškovič): *Severná hranica Slovenska* (The northern frontier of Slovakia).

Bratislava 1947, p. 61-62.

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the USA, and if they returned home, they influenced their surroundings.<sup>7</sup> The flourishing of national-political life in Spiš, Zemplín and Šariš surprised the Magyar ruling elite and stimulated a reaction from them. In this case, it could

not be only a matter of holding back the development of national consciousness and national integration, because this had proved to be ineffective and had not brought results. Instead they attempted to break up the national unity of the Slovaks on the basis of the eastern Slovak dialects. Some renegade members of the intelligentsia from eastern Slovakia were employed to implement these plans of the Magyar ruling circles. Under the leadership of the landowner Z. Dešöfi, the magazine *Naša zastava* began to be published at Prešov in the Šaris dialect from 27 October 1907.<sup>8</sup> In our literature and in general knowledge, this action is associated with the activity of the county archivist in Prešov V. Dvorčák. However, its origin was associated with various people, including the above-mentioned landowner Dešöfi and clergy from various confessions, such as G. Žebracký, L. Liptai and J. Repák.<sup>9</sup> The aim of the „Zastavists” was substantial. Using financial resources from the Hungarian government, they wanted to instil in the people of eastern Slovakia the idea that they had nothing in common with the Slovaks in the rest of Slovakia, but that they formed a separate group independent of the other Slovaks. The final result was intended to be the estrangement of the eastern Slovaks from the rest of the Slovak nation, which would facilitate the penetration of Magyarization.<sup>10</sup> Struggle against standard written Slovak played an important role here. Publication in the standard written language was limited and dialect with variable usage was applied, so that the language was inappropriate for communication in higher intellectual spheres. Competition from the nationally conscious press, written in standard written Slovak, was prevented by the county authorities, which used terror to prevent its distribution in eastern Slovakia.<sup>11</sup> The „philanthropy” of the spreaders of *Naša zastava* is shown not only by the clearly reactionary program of the whole movement, but also by the fact that it was backed by the greatest enemies of the Slovak national movement and representatives of Magyarization in the region.<sup>12</sup>

During the First World War, the organizers of the movement around *Naša zastava* progressed from propagation of hidden separatism in form of attacks on standard written Slovak, propagation of the Šariš dialect and absolutization of the

7 MIŠKOVIČ, A.: *Maďarské úmysly so Slovákmi* (Magyars plans for the Slovaks). Bratislava 1944, p. 8.

8 TAJTÁK, L.: *Naša zastava – nástroj politiky maďarských vládnych tried* (Our flag – an instrument

of the policy of the Magyar ruling classes). In *Nové obzory* 8/1966, p. 82-84.

9 Ibidem.

10 TAJTÁK, L.: *K niektorým otázkam koncepcie dejín východného Slovenska obdobia uhorského*

kapitalizmu (On some questions of the conception of the history of eastern Slovakia in the period of

Hungarian capitalism). In: *Historica Carpatica* 7/1976, p. 276.

11 L. Tajták, *Naša zastava*, p. 101.

12 Ibidem, p. 102.

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ethnographic differences, to open separatism. In 1916, certainly also under the influence of the first successes of the Czecho-Slovak struggle abroad, V. Dvorčák published a pamphlet in which he openly propagated the national distinctness of the so-called Slovjaks.<sup>13</sup> In this period, Budapest already adopted measures, of which the full meaning was shown in 1918 and 1938. Their meaning was to

geopolitically mutilate the territory of Slovakia so much that the right of the Slovaks to self-determination would become entirely illusory. This was precisely the aim of the action of Dvorčák and his supporters, and the organization of eastern Slovak „separatism” by the Magyar ruling elite. The creation of the so-called Eastern Slovak National Council headed by V. Dvorčák in November 1918 essentially served this aim. When it was proved that the so-called Eastern Slovak National Council with its program of breaking up the Slovak ethnic unit, could not succeed, the initiators of Eastern Slovak „separatism” changed their tactics. The Budapest government wanted to keep the whole of the territory of Slovakia within its state, not only part of it. Therefore, on 11 December 1918 they attempted to create the so-called Slovak People’s Republic in opposition to the establishment of the Czecho-Slovak Republic in the territory of Slovakia.<sup>14</sup> The pro-Magyar groups around Naša zastava even found a relationship to standard written Slovak. This fact also shows the degree of sincerity of their „Slovjak” identity, its real purpose and for whom they were working. However, in the given power-political situation, they could no longer thwart the right of the Slovak nation to self-determination, and in the course of the first months of 1919 the whole territory of Slovakia came under the sovereignty of the Czecho-Slovak state. However, little is written about the fact that the so-called Slovak Soviet Republic, declared in Prešov with the assistance of the Magyar Red Army, drew its personnel especially from the activists of Eastern Slovak „separatism,” apart from Czech A. Janoušek, and it published its documents in Šariš dialect.<sup>15</sup> It might appear that after the origin of the Czecho-Slovak Republic, when the indivisibility and unity of the Slovak nation was very clearly proved in all the dialect areas of Slovakia, in bourgeois-democratic conditions, the attempts to break up the unity of the Slovaks on the basis of dialect differences within Slovak, should have ended, but this did not happen. The Magyar ruling circles outwardly abandoned these practices, because their irredentist and revisionist policy was not aiming at partial, but at complete revision, that is at return to the pre-war frontiers of the Kingdom of Hungary. The leading representative of Eastern Slo-

13 A. Miškovič, Maďarské úmysly, p. 11-12.  
14 TAJTÁK, L.: Úsilie maďarských vládnucích tried o udržanie Slovenska v rámci Maďarska roku

1918 (The effort of the Magyar ruling classes to keep Slovakia within the framework of Hungary in

1918). In: Historický časopis, 4/1966, p. 577-580.

15 GREGUŠ, P.: Slovjací – výtvor maďarónskej propagandy (The Slovaks – a creation of pro-Magyar

propaganda). In: Slovo, no. 30/2001.

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vak „separatism” V. Dvorčák, in the service of Horthy’s Hungarian government, had to temporarily give up his original dream of a „Slovjak nation” and join F. Jehlička in forming the so-called Slovak Council at Geneva in 1933. This was supposed to represent the „wish” of the Slovaks to reunite with Hungary.<sup>16</sup> Since the aims of the Magyar ruling classes concerning the question of the territories of the former Kingdom of Hungary and the nationalities living in them, remained constant in this period, they could not entirely abandon the „Slovjak question.” In the 1930s, the dialect differences in Slovakia again received attention from some groups in the ruling classes of land-owner dominated Poland. Their

plans were basically a matter of „scientifically” proving the Polishness of some parts of Slovakia. It was not only a matter of the traditional untrue claim that the Slovak Gorals are actually Poles without national consciousness, and so extensive territories in Orava, Spiš and the Čadca district must be added to Poland. The circle of Krakow „Slovakophils” around Prof. W. Semkowicz, included experts such as senior lecturer Zd. Stieber, who „scientifically” proved in 1935 that the eastern Slovak dialects are of Polish origin and the inhabitants of eastern Slovakia are Poles.<sup>17</sup> It is obvious that the aims of these Polish circles were not nation building. This „proof” was intended to serve the blind imperialist policy of claiming the whole of Eastern Slovakia and its wealth of raw materials. They had even worked out a plan to create a Polish strategic triangle, which would be based on the natural resources of Eastern Slovakia up to Košice.<sup>18</sup> It is surprising that a whole wing of Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party headed by K. Sidor, did not notice the aims of these „friends” of Slovakia around W. Semkowicz. In spite of an adequate number of warning signals,<sup>19</sup> they considered it useful to cooperate with the Poles in their anti-centralist and autonomist policies. The aim of these circles was to get the Slovak political elite into such a position that they could, as Semkowicz himself stated: „openly pose to the Slovaks the question of the above-mentioned changes, and gain recognition of our truth on a friendly platform.”<sup>20</sup> This meant forcing acceptance of the Polish territorial claims in Slovakia. The Poles wanted to actively bring about such a situation with the support of Hitler’s anti-Czecho-Slovak plans. However, the Poles did not find Slovak understanding for their claims to Slovak territory, and so Beck’s Poland had to obtain its insignificant territorial gains by

16 TILKOVŠKY, L.: Južné Slovensko v rokoch 1938-1945 (Southern Slovakia in the period 1938-

1945). Bratislava, Veda 1972, p. 80.

17 Slovenský národný archív (Slovak National Archive) (SNA), fond Krajinský úrad (Regional Office

Collection), šk. 263, č. 20777, Správa čl. konzula z Krakova z 18. 3. 1935 (Report from the Czechoslovak consul in Krakow from 18 March 1935).

18 Ibidem.

19 Archív FMZV, pol. sekcia III, šk. 1278, dok. 26785, Správa čl. veľvyslanca z Varšavy z 24. 2.

1936 (Report of the Czechoslovak ambassador in Warsaw from 24 Feb 1936).

20 Archiw Akt Nowych, Warsaw MSZ 10412, P III, Report on a session of the committee on the issue

of Orava, Spiš and Čadca from 15 Dec 1937.

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force. After less than a year the results of this policy were clearly revealed in the fates of both nations and especially that of the Poles.

Munich opened the way to the opening of the so-called Slovjak question.

A supplement to the Munich agreement, which also demanded solution of the territorial disputes between Czecho-Slovakia and Hungary, again enabled the Magyar ruling circles to attempt such a mutilation of Slovak territory, that any possibility of independent life for Slovakia would be geopolitically liquidated, and this would automatically lead to Slovakia’s attachment to „St. Stephen’s state.” This was also the main aim of the far-reaching demands for territorial concessions, including Bratislava, Nitra and Košice, which the Magyar government submitted at Komárno,<sup>21</sup> and Eastern Slovak „separatism” was also revived

with the same aim. The justification of the partition of Slovakia into four parts by the referendum foreseen and demanded by the Horthy regime after the removal of the territory inhabited by the Magyar minority, was based on the claim that „the Slovaks living in the counties of Užhorod and Zemplín with the inhabitants of Spiš and Šariš are linguistically and ethnically different from the Western and Central Slovaks,” and one of their „ethnic” peculiarities was supposed to be that they wanted „unreservedly to belong to Hungary.”<sup>22</sup> In spite of the fact that it harshly violated the right to self-determination by awarding to Hungary extensive territories in southern Slovakia, the Vienna Arbitration of 2 November 1938 did not satisfy the revisionist appetite of the ruling circles of Horthy’s Hungary, which were very surprised by the opposition of the Slovak people to the renewal of their rule in Slovakia. However, they failed to mutilate Slovakia as much as they had wished. A new arbiter had appeared in Central Europe in the form of Nazi Germany, whose decision had to be accepted. The Nazis had their own plans for Slovakia, which were not compatible with the idea of „Greater Hungary.” However, in case things changed or a different situation arose and with the intention of weakening the national unity of the Slovaks in the occupied territories, Budapest again revived Eastern Slovak „separatism.”<sup>23</sup> Naša zastava reappeared and was smuggled into Eastern Slovakia in large numbers.<sup>24</sup> Apart from this, especially the priest Siladi was very active on the ground, making a great effort to prove the separate identity of the „Slovjak nation,” and get

21 Országos Levéltár, Miniszteri elnökség. Flachbart’s memorandum from the end of 1938.  
22 SNA, fond MZV, šk. 112, 11334/39. Správa slovenského vyslanca v Budapešti (Report from the Slovak ambassador in Budapest).

23 The reaction of the Slovak government to the revival of „Eastern Slovak separatism” is interesting also from the present-day point of view. It testifies to the permanent sensitivity of the Slovaks to stimuli in the field of language. At a session on 29 August 1939, the government passed a resolution banning state employees from using dialect in business or private communication. SNR, MV, šk. 7, 15934/39. Obežník Ministerstva vnútra (Circular of the Ministry of the Interior) from 11 Sept 1939.

24 DEÁK, L.: Autonómia Slovenska v plánoch horthyovského Maďarska v roku 1938 (The autonomy of Slovakia in the plans of Horthy’s Hungary in 1938). In: Historický časopis 3/1988, p. 409.  
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Eastern Slovak dialect introduced into the schools.<sup>25</sup> For the purpose of confirming the separateness of the Slovaks, the activists of the movement held a meeting in Košice in September 1939. They invited the professor of Slavonic studies J. Melich, who was expected to provide scientific proof of the existence of the Slovaks. However, to the great disappointment of the participants, he explained to them that the Eastern Slovak dialect is an integral part of the Slovak language, and its division from the Slovak language was scientific nonsense.<sup>26</sup>

However, the organizers of the whole movement forgot that the 1940s was no longer the pre-revolutionary period, when the Magyar ruling circles in the old Kingdom of Hungary had almost unlimited power over the nationalities. They

could establish a small organizational base of egoistic, pro-Magyar and careerist elements, in the form of Naša gazdovská strana (Our Farmers' Party),<sup>27</sup> and introduce the Šariš dialect as the language of worship in some churches, but they could not succeed in pushing standard written Slovak out of the public and cultural life of the people of Eastern Slovakia, or even out of the schools in the occupied territories. The local population was strongly opposed to this,<sup>28</sup> and they were not alone and defenceless in their struggle. The tragedy of the Magyar political elite as a whole was that it could not detach itself from the artificial constructions in the nationality policy they had created. They clung to it at a time, when the whole fascist bloc, to which the Horthy regime belonged, was collapsing before the advance of the anti-fascist forces. No force was found in its ranks, which could find a way to join the democratic anti-fascist forces from other Central European nations in their struggle, and so they had to drink the bitterness of military defeat to the bottom. With the fall of the Horthy regime in Hungary, the attempts to divide the Slovak nation on the basis of dialects came to a definitive end. The role of the society and magazine Svojina (Our Own), which appeared in the period 1946-1950, in this question is not entirely clear. It showed elements of Eastern Slovak separatism and was allegedly founded by supporters of Beneš's Czechoslovakism with similar aims to those of Naša zastava. This problem has still not been researched, although it deserves to be. I will not devote further attention to it here.

From the 1860s, standard written Slovak was an essential factor, which penetrated into all social spheres, as the national written language. It was applied not only in literature, but also in science and other social spheres, where

25 L. Tilkovszky, op. cit., p. 132.

26 SNA, fond MZV, šk. 112; Správa slovenského vyslanca v Budapešti (Report from the Slovak

ambassador in Budapest). Considering the recent unanimous agreement with criticism of the Slovak

Language Act from the circles of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in comparison with the position

of Prof. Melich in entirely different circumstances, it is necessary to consider where we have reached in building democracy.

27 FABIAN, J.: Svätošťefanské tiene (St. Stephen's Shadows). Bratislava 1966, p. 120.

28 Ibidem.

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standard written language is used. The attempts of Budapest described above, already could not stop its development. However, the change in the constitutional position of Slovakia brought a new phenomenon into the development of the Slovak language: that of *ethnic Czechoslovakism*. Ideological and partially also power political means were again used to limit the use of the Slovak language or to cast doubt on its ability to fulfill all the functions of a standard written language. On the ideological level, especially M. Hodža opposed Slovak in his work Československý rozkol (The Czechoslovak Split), as did A. Pražák in a whole series of articles and studies. A whole series of ideologically influenced linguists and theorizing politicians naturally joined in.

The basic concept of the people casting doubt on the Slovak written language was to ignore the real linguistic development of Slovak and claim that Slovak was not an independent Slavonic language, but only a dialect of Czech. The origin of Slovak was denounced as linguistic separatism, even as



Hungarianism.<sup>29</sup> The constitutional act no.122 from 1920 declared that the official language was „Czechoslovak” with two variants – Czech and Slovak – and § 4 enacted that official business in Slovakia would be done in the Slovak language, but this situation was considered only temporary. Various surveys<sup>30</sup> tried to persuade the Slovaks that clinging to Slovak was nonsense, that it was necessary to abandon it and that Slovaks should go to Prague and accept Czech, just as Scots went to London. Allegedly this was the only way to reach the higher aims of civilization.<sup>31</sup> Others, for example, A. Pražák, did not deny the importance of Slovak as a language of fine literature, but they strove to exclude it from the field of science, where Czech had to dominate.<sup>32</sup> The Učená společnost Šafaříkova (Šafařík Learned Society), which was active at Comenius University in Bratislava, put this theory into practice.

However, all these attempts failed. The attempt of Professor V. Vážný to forcibly bring the Slovak language closer to Czech by means of Czechizing the rules of Slovak grammar and the vocabulary of the Slovak language was also condemned to fail. It can be said that the Matica revolution of 1932 struck a strong, perhaps fatal blow against these tendencies.<sup>33</sup> Paradoxically, it was actually the

29 HODŽA, M.: Československý rozkol (The Czechoslovak Split); most recently published in the framework

of the publication: Polemika o československom rozkole. Bratislava: Matica slovenská 2009.

30 Ibidem.

31 Ibidem.

32 PRAŽÁK, A.: Češi a Slováci. Literárně dějepisné poznámky k československému poměru (The Czechs and Slovaks. Literary historical comments on Czechoslovak relations). Prague: Státní nakladatelství

1929.

33 For more details see e. g. WINKLER, T. – ELIÁŠ, M. et al.: Matica slovenská. Dejiny a prítomnosť (The Matica slovenská cultural organization. History and present state). Bratislava 2003, p. 135-138.

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Slovak pupils of the Czech professors H. Bartek,<sup>34</sup> E. Novák<sup>35</sup> and others, who scientifically proved the unsustainability of the conception of a Czechoslovak language and confirmed the independence of the Slovak language. This reality was also later confirmed by the publication of the Rules of Slovak Orthography (Pravidlá slovenského pravopisu) in 1940, and especially in 1953.

Whatever view we take of the period 1948-1989 from the political point of view, it was extraordinarily positive from the point of view of the development of standard written Slovak. It brought the culmination of projects such as the Dictionary of the Slovak language,<sup>36</sup> and other dictionaries, unfortunately still not including an etymological dictionary, guides to grammar and speech, considerations of theory and scientific proof of the early Slavonic origin of the Slovak language.<sup>37</sup> The standard written language was systematically cultivated and language correctors in offices and institutions using the standard language cared for its purity. It was unthinkable that a person, who had not comprehensively mastered the standard written language, could become an editor for Slovak radio

or television. Although we did not have a language act, a system of control of editors was worked out in these media. Every violation of the norms was traced and evaluated. Naturally in the end there were penalties, especially of a financial nature. For the authorities of the time, it was unthinkable that a weaver in a factory should be penalized for poor quality work, but not editors and reporters.

The road to the independence of the Slovak Republic after 1989 also included struggle to give the Slovak language an appropriate, legally sanctioned position in Slovak society. Although this was more complex than could have been expected, it has finally been achieved after almost twenty years with the passing of an act corresponding to modern trends and the needs of society, but only in one area – the use of the Slovak standard written language as a universal means of communication in Slovakia. However, hardly anything has been done for the internal protection of the Slovak standard written language and against its exclusion from spheres not directly connected with state and public administration.

In spite of the vociferous arguments of some representatives of Slovak linguistics<sup>38</sup> on the best position for the Slovak language, I must state that not everything is rosy with the position of the Slovak language in our society. In 34 For example in the work: *Príspevok k dejinám slovenčiny* (A contribution to the history of Slovak).

Trnava 1936.

35 *Jazykovedné glosy k československej otázke* (Linguistic comments on the Czechoslovak question).

Martin 1935, can be regarded as his most important in this field.

36 *Slovník slovenského jazyka*. Bratislava 1959-1968.

37 For example PAULINY, E.: *Dejiny spisovnej slovenčiny od začiatku po súčasnosť* (A history of

standard written Slovak from the beginning to the present day). Bratislava 1983.

38 See for example, the interview with S. Ondrejovič, director of the Ľudovít Štúr Institute of Linguistics

of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in the magazine *Týždeň* no. 21, 2009.

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Language is not only an Instrument of Communication

the 1920s and 1930s, some people argued that Slovak should not be used in scientific works. People realize that financial questions also play a role here, and publishers will offer what people want to buy, but I think that the state should also regulate this sphere.

Especially the word stock has been seriously affected, and not only by Czech, but also by English. We do not even take English words directly from English, but through Czech, which means that we are further adapting the phonetics of the Slovak language to those of our brother nation. I sometimes get the impression that somebody has an interest in the greatest variability in the norms and semantics of Slovak words to reduce the clarity of their meaning.

It is also necessary to point to the revival of some tendencies, which endeavour to show that the Slovaks speaking Goral dialects are really Poles.<sup>39</sup> In connection with the activities of Polish priests and members of religious orders in these regions, we must again ask whether we underestimate some things.

Let us mention only the unsuccessful supplementary educational materials for schools, which arose from cooperation between Slovak and Polish authors, and in which the Poles came out with explicitly revisionist views.<sup>40</sup> Their Slovak version did not get into Slovak schools, but the Polish version is fulfilling its

„mission.” In this context, it is necessary to welcome the universality of the Language Act, which will remove the abnormal situation in some northern Slovak communities, where, for purely commercial reasons, Polish language signs have appeared like mushrooms after rain, so that the malevolent observer might regard them as an expression of the Polishness of this region.

In conclusion, I must state that the linguistic situation in the territory of Slovakia requires the active protection of the Slovak language as the state language of the Slovak Republic. Therefore, I welcome the passing of the Language Act, which, compared to the 1995 version, again introduces sanctions for violations of the act. We have seen that the Language Act was not observed, and in a very ostentatious way. At the same time, it is not only a matter of some backward mayors of villages mainly populated by ethnic minorities, who refuse, and I hope not for very long, to make accessible information about their activities in the state language, for those who are not members of the Magyar national minority. But let us move on. The authorities of the capital city of Slovakia and representatives of many other Slovak towns very openly refuse to follow the rules of Slovak

39 For more details see e. g. MAJERIKOVÁ, M: *Vojna o Spiš. Spiš v medzivojnovom období v kontexte*

česko-slovensko-poľských vzťahov (The war for Spiš. Spiš in the inter-war period in the context of Czecho-Slovak-Polish relations). Krakow 2007, and more popular style works by M. Andráš,

J. Ciągwa and others.

40 ANDRÁŠ, M.: *Ako možno vy(zne)užívať program PHARE (How to (mis)use the PHARE program)*

<http://www.kultura-fb.sk/new/old/stare/andras-12.htm>

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grammar, when they do not respect the rule that the names of personalities from our national history have to be written in Slovak orthography.

However, the passing of the Language Act does not solve all questions connected with active protection of the Slovak standard written language. It is also necessary to adopt measures to protect it against degradation and degeneration.

It is necessary to make sure that directors of both public-service and commercial mass media will not select their editors and presenters according to their blue eyes or similar criteria, but according to their mastery of the standard written language. I am not against development of the Slovak language, its enrichment with new words and phrases, but this cannot happen at the expense of equally valid Slovak elements, inherited from preceding generations. Therefore, I do not understand claims of the type: The frequency of the word *prasačí* (*pig, swine – adjective*) is three times greater than that of the word *prasací*, so it is necessary to consider, which is correct.<sup>41</sup> They already taught us in our education that science is a system. Statistics is good for knowledge of the real state, but cultivation should lead above all to systematization. I also do not understand the conception of publishing a Dictionary of the Contemporary Slovak Language, rather than a Dictionary of the Slovak Language. Are we supposed to understand that archaisms are not part of the contemporary Slovak language and do not need to be preserved for future generations? The Slovak language has struggled for its place in the Sun throughout history. We cannot comfort ourselves with the idea that this struggle has ended. Linguistic confrontation is still continuing. The pressure of globalization will create conditions for the more predatory, stronger

languages, at the expense of the weaker and less agile. Slovak will be resilient in this environment only if it will be an effective and independent instrument. To achieve this, it must be constantly cultivated and enriched, but also defended. Legislation is obviously required as part of this protection, but it is not enough. 41 S. Ondrejovič in the cited interview.

1 PIETA, K. et al.: Bojná, hospodárske a politické centrum Nitrianskeho kniežatstva (Bojná, the economic and political centre of the Principality of Nitra). Institute of Archaeology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and Ponitrianske múzeum 2006.

2 A similar linguistic situation exists today in India. The government has to use English as the state language to hold the country together. Attempts to introduce Hindi as the state language after independence failed because of opposition from the other language groups.