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## Non-native (academic) writing

Whereas politicians can rely on the aid of interpreters and writers may hope to be translated, scientists are mostly forced to depend on a common scientific language, academic English. Writing academic English is a special form of non-native or second language writing which shows characteristic features of cross-cultural communication.

The theory of non-native or second language writing has much in common with the theory of translation, which may be considered its predecessor. Nevertheless, the starting point of both theories is not quite the same. Whereas the theory of translation is concerned with ready-made texts which are to be transformed into the target language, the theory of second language writing presupposes a somewhat different activity, namely processing a text according to the rules of the target language, and, moreover, to the patterns of the target language's writing culture.

The rules that are to be followed are thus not only linguistic in a narrow sense of the word, but also involve those which are more difficult to pin-point exactly - e.g. the patterns of thematic progression and textual coherence, patterns of logical presentation and argumentation, norms of the writer's and the reader's interaction, etc. This is why the principles of rhetoric and discourse processing in different languages are investigated and it is the cause of the recent development of contrastive rhetoric and the theory of culture-specific discourse.

If the results of Robert Kaplan's (1966, 1972) pioneering investigation into "cultural thought patterns" are to be taken seriously (at least as far as paragraph development is concerned), the distinctions between the English culture-specific pattern of writing on the one hand, characterized by linearity and directness, and different "non-English" patterns on the other (Kaplan identified five types of paragraph development for five language groups; see U. Connor in this volume), characterized by various kinds of broken lines and curves, seem to determine the problem in question: What should the non-native English writer adopt and what should he/she abandon in order to make himself/herself understood, to join the English writing scientific community and meet the expectations?

Contrastive studies of different English and non-English patterns of discourse processing seem to follow two paths that coincide only partially: one of them leads to surpassing barriers to the exchange of the scholarship discourse



more directly, the other one makes detours examining corners with locally specific species, aiming at the maintenance of their diversity.

### Czech vs English situation

The distinctions between the Czech and English situation originate from different approaches to the phenomenon of writing in the development of theoretical linguistics (1), applied linguistics and pedagogical disciplines (2), in the treatment of academic writing against the background of other types of writing or styles in language (3), in historical circumstances of the development of the so called intellectual styles (4), and generally, in cultural aptitudes and inclinations manifested in the writing patterns (5).

1. Linguistic theory of text processing has arisen from different roots and has been shaped through unequal motivations. The Anglo-Saxon linguistics due to its philosophical tradition of pragmatic approach to language naturally aimed at handling the phenomena of text composing in terms of interaction, and even transaction from sender to receptor, building up (a) the theory of writing which has embodied the achievements of the theory of communication and discourse and its (b) pedagogical application. The Czech text linguistic activity appears as an organic continuation and development of "classical" ideas and attempts of the Prague functional-structural school. According to Daneš (1993a), among the Prague research resources, assumptions and attempts, the following two conceptual domains seem to be highly relevant to text studies: Firstly, the functional stylistics (including Mukařovský's poetics and esthetics), and secondly the conceptual cluster of the functional sentence perspective (in Mathesius', Fírbas' and Daneš' treatment) leading to the theory of thematic progressions (cf. Daneš, 1993a). Though the FSP and TP approach to text processing investigates the mechanisms that cement sentences into text and discourse taking the text producer's estimation of the previous knowledge of the receptor as a point of departure for the choice of discourse strategies, the text linguistic studies developed in a theoretico-descriptive framework, showing a variety of potential choices, rather than formulating suggestions for applied linguistics, including language teaching. The results of the theory of composition, text and discourse have been presented rather as a theoretical construct than as an instruction.

2. Acquisition of text and discourse processing in the Czech and English curriculum in the secondary schools thus differs in many respects. Whereas in the Anglo-Saxon tradition writing is considered a skill that can be taught,

acquired, tested and qualified, in the Czech stylistic tradition the creation of texts is viewed rather as a result of an individual gift or talent. It is taken for granted in the Czech school curriculum that if the writer knows the basic grammatical and orthographical rules, he/she will be able to compose higher units, paragraphs and whole texts. Instead of writing the Czech students take lessons in stylistics during which they are taught to be aware of stylistic variation in language. They are mainly trained not to repeat the same words but to vary them, not to use banal words but to employ a rich and colourful vocabulary, in short, to be sensitive towards their mother tongue, to be aware of the semantic potential of a word, its connotations and its expressive power.

The Czech students of stylistics are nearly free in their decisions about the structure of the text they are writing. They process it spontaneously and it is up to them to find their own ways. The Czech school is highly prescriptive regarding grammar and orthography, however, it is purely descriptive in the area of stylistics. The idea of systematic cultivation of writing skills may be found in Mathesius's (1942) approach to language and discourse, obviously due to his anglistic orientation, however, it has not been embodied in a teaching programme.

Paragraph writing, which seems to be essential to English and American writing instructions, has no parallel in Czech stylistics. The phenomenon of paragraph is usually outlined only very briefly, the stylists' attention being attracted more to paragraphs in literature, due to their unpredictability and impressiveness. One of the chapters of Mathesius' (1942) book bears the title *The art of paragraph writing*, however, this study has remained an isolated theoretical attempt to describe the paragraph structure until recent times when Daneš (1993b, elaborating an unpublished analysis 1966) took up the topic and applied the principles of thematic progressions to the analysis of paragraphs in scientific text.

3. Whereas Anglo-Saxon tradition treats writing academic texts against the background of the general theory of writing with its strong emphasis on an interactive nature of any writing process, the Czech structuralist stylistics treats the so called scientific (scholarly or, in another terminology, expository) functional style in its opposition to the other four language styles, ascribing following constituent features to it: Regarding parameters of spokenness vs writtenness it is conceived as primarily written, and as regards the distinction between monologue and dialogue it is attributed the features of monologue. Scientific style is shaped under the pressure of typical features of written manifestation of language, and profiles through typical monological parameters. The author's text strategy oriented towards the reader is approached mainly through metatextual comments accompanying the exposition, whereas



the macrostructure of a scientific exposition is considered to follow from "the internal needs of the theme development", i.e. not from external factors, such as situation or reader etc. Scientific style is defined as belonging to public styles, and opposed to those which have a close or well-known addressee. Public design should not be understood as a comprehensive intelligibility of a scientific text, as scholarly discourse due to its exacting and demanding nature (including conceptualization which is another constituent feature of scientific style) is not intended to address everybody. Being aimed at an unknown and distant addressee, the public design is to be understood as a formal design. This is in short the summary of classical treatments of the expository discourse in Czech textbooks of stylistics, qualifying this style as the most demanding and exacting.

4. The Czech scholarly register has developed in historical contact with German thought, being shaped both by terminology and syntax of German scholarly discourse. Due to numerous historical coincidences the Czech academic register is marked by similar features as are postulated by Clyne (1987) for German texts: syntactic complexity, a large number of nominalizations, overloaded phrases, impersonal constructions, agentless passives, and various modal expressions, which all in all create quite a demanding task for the reader. Syntactic complexity of a Czech sentence follows from a high degree of inflective character of Czech, and especially from the rich valency of a Czech verb. The expository discourse is considered an especially appropriate milieu to explore the potentialities of syntactic elaborateness of Czech.

Moreover, Clyne in his comparison of German and English formulates two completely different conceptions of academic writing which correspond to our assumptions about the different design of Czech and English academic texts. Texts written by Germans, Clyne argues, are less designed to be easy to read. Their emphasis is on providing readers with knowledge, theory, and stimulus to thought. In English speaking countries, most of the onus falls on writers to make their texts readable. English academic texts are said to be closer to non-academic ones. In German-speaking countries, it is the readers who have to make an extra effort so that they can understand the texts. This presupposition that it is the reader's responsibility to understand rather than the writer's responsibility to write it understandably also seems to be deeply rooted in the Czech stylistic tradition. Using Hind's (1987) classification we may conclude that Czech belongs to reader responsible languages, whereas English belongs to those that are writer responsible. However, this feature of Czech academic writing has more than one source.

5. We approach the features which do not mark the Czech academic writing exclusively, but seem to dwell in intellectual and emotional background of Czech cultural considerations.

a) *Reader's responsibility*

This feature has various sociocultural motivations in Czech: Czech readers have been trained to read between the lines and to infer the sense that is text immanent. The distinction between a text's explicit meanings, overtly expressed, and its implicit, covert sense that is to be inferred, is applicable mainly to the analysis of literary texts. Nevertheless, even texts in the social sciences and humanities, such as philosophy, aesthetics, literary theory and the theory of language may be influenced by the idea that the sense of the text is something that should be sought for and not explicitly formulated in a text (cf. Jafáb, 1993).

b) *The delayed purpose*

The Czech convention tolerates not only vagueness, but also delay in the articulation of the main purpose of the text whereas the English convention calls for the main thesis to be presented early and to be articulated explicitly and clearly (cf. Tirkkonen-Condit's statements following from her comparison of Finnish vs English argumentative texts). The strategy of delayed introduction of purpose (Hinds, 1990:98) marks not only academic texts, but other types of Czech texts as well. The American editor of the Prague Post newspaper characterizes Czech journalism in contrast to American habits: "We in first two or three paragraphs answer the questions who, what, where, how and why. The Czech journalist do not write like that. What they give in the last paragraph I would start with. And your journalists are very baroque" (Levy, 1993).

c) *Baroque, associativeness, multiplicity of standpoints*

The Czech writer does not write simply, plainly, precisely, or in a straightforward manner. These qualities do not seem to hold a prominent position in the Czech stylistic tradition. On the other hand, they seem to occupy a very important place in the English tradition of writing and the teaching of writing. A Czech writer has no restrictions placed upon him or her with respect to adding more and more new information, to making digressions or to providing the reader with as much information and as many standpoints as possible. Associativeness, parallelism and thus obtained interplay of meanings seem to be a culture specific characteristics of a Czech discourse. No wonder that an English text written by a Czech and read by the native English often seems to be obscure and complicated. The native English finds the sentence confusing, and complains that it does not keep to the subject, jumping from one thing to another.



d) *Purpose oriented writing vs free writing*

Essay writing which seems to be central to the English curriculum implies a system of parameters, that are to be learned and assessed to master the argumentative type of text, the notion itself emphasizing the role of the addressee and including the main function of such a text, persuasion. An essay in Czech cultural tradition does not necessarily have such a purpose. We refer here to the book on stylistics (Mistrík, 1974:132ff.), which defines an essay among genres of an expository style in following way: An essay is a short reflection on a scientific topic or current social problem. It is witty, vivid, and spirited. It is a contemplation that shows the author's original attitude. The essay does not intend to do anything either in the sphere of science or in the sphere of art. It has childish charm, it is spontaneous, nonsystematic, humorous and free. It is an attempt at a free expression of one's self. Its structure is mosaic-like, fragmentary, incohesive, not compact. The vocabulary of an essay is large, variegated and colourful. It combines expressions belonging to the opposite registers: monosemantic and exact expressions on the one hand and polysemantic and ambiguous or even metaphorical expressions on the other. This genre is full of surprises and unpredictable turns. The emphasis dwells on syntactic and modal expressions which modify the basic meaning, supplying it with genuine, but highly significant connotations. It is obvious that the Czech concepts marking the discipline of writing differ from the English ones in many respects and so do the habits and norms in this field. The Czech writers should be aware then when they endeavour to write in English, they step outside the norms of the Czech academic style and are on the fringe of a gap that they are supposed to bridge. The writer is either forced to 'forget' his or her culture specific choices and to adopt the English rules or he or she decides to take the Czech norms 'with him' into the English world but then he or she is in danger of being accused of writing in "non English" way.

The interactive approach to native as well as non-native writing will undoubtedly bring us closer to an understanding of the nature of cross-cultural communication. The scientific community is governed by the wish to share – to have common knowledge, to contribute to it and to cultivate it. The forms of transmitting knowledge vary across languages and cultures and even within the same culture there always exists a great variety of attitudes to knowledge and its formulation, doubting any reductionist statement. All of the various rhetorical modes are possible in any language, as Robert Kaplan concludes in his "Cultural Thought Patterns Revisited" (1990:10), however, each language has certain clear preferences or, at least, delightful inclinations.

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