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A FEW NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THE CLASSICAL PRAGUE LINGUISTIC CIRCLE¹

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Basé sur les archives inexplorées du CLP, le présent texte se propose de révéler certains aspects de l'histoire de cette association scientifique importante. Suite à la présentation globale des archives examinées, les auteurs mettent notamment l'accent sur les circonstances de la dissolution forcée du Cercle dans les années 1950 du xx^e siècle, ainsi que sur l'adhésion de certains linguistes éminents et la correspondance des membres du CLP. Le texte complète également de manière fondamentale la liste des conférences prononcées dans le cadre du Cercle en présentant 16 conférences, tenues dans les années 1948-1950 et jusqu'ici inconnues.

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The present volume of *La Linguistique* offers plentiful evidence that the ideas of the Prague Linguistic Circle on language and literature have not ceased arousing interest. This contribution, however, will discuss neither the Circle's intellectual heritage nor its impact on modern linguistic and literary scholarship. Rather, its focus will be on the Circle's history itself, as the newly edited materials of the Prague Linguistic Circle Collection in the Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences have helped us see some aspects of the Circle's history in a new light. In what follows, these documents – along with some materials associated with Bohumil

1. This text was produced as part of the GAČR Grant No. 405/09/0277 (*Pražský lingvistický kroužek 1926-1953: nejstarší dějiny ve světle archivních pramenů*), whose receiver was Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague.

Trnka and found to be part of his pupil Jiří Nosek's estate – will be presented here for two reasons: firstly, they serve to complement and, in some ways, rectify the standard facts of the Circle's history; secondly, it is our strong conviction that the Circle's intellectual heritage can only be interpreted and fostered if such an enterprise rests on reliable knowledge of the Circle's external history. The scope of the present contribution only allows for brevity – for relevant issues, the reader is referred to the detailed treatment of a number of themes in our recent monography on the subject (Čermák, Poeta, Čermák, 2012).

2. THE PRAGUE LINGUISTIC CIRCLE COLLECTION

So far, the historiography of the Prague Linguistic Circle has extensively drawn upon two principal sources – the works of Roman Jakobson and Josef Vachek. Each of them – key figures in the Circle's history – naturally centred their texts around their memories though each did so in his own way.

Jakobson, a protagonist of the Circle's founding generation, had never striven to create a comprehensive picture of the association's history. Instead, he had always concentrated on its specific activities and, even more importantly, on an analysis of events and tendencies in the Circle's evolution, and he had been doing so with customary vigour. Moreover, from 1939 onwards he had not been living in Czechoslovakia, which allowed him – unlike Josef Vachek – to voice his statements concerning the Circle in a free manner and with no restraint whatsoever. In addition, the impact of his words increased thanks to his established post-war position as a philologist in the U.S. For all these reasons, it comes as no surprise that an overwhelming majority of international literature on the Prague Linguistic Circle has used Jakobson as its primary source², most notably when treating specific themes,

2. Osorio Nelson, 1971, *El Círculo de Praga*, Valparaíso, Ediciones Universitarias; Fontaine Jacqueline, 1974, *Le Cercle linguistique de Prague*, Tours, Maison Mame; Raynaud Savina, 1990, *Il Circolo Linguistico di Praga (1926-1939): Radici storiche e apporti teorici*, Milano, Pubblicazioni dell'Università Cattolica.

such as the role of the Russian philologists in the Circle or understanding the Circle as an organized, militant platform that pursued clearly defined common goals.

For Czech historiography of the Circle, the primary referential source has undoubtedly been the writings of Josef Vachek, who was, for that matter, almost the sole systematic historiographer of the Circle until the fall of Communism in 1989 (the Prague Linguistic Circle representing, in the political sense, an undesirable theme). Vachek's writings³ differ from Jakobson's in several respects. Most importantly, he devoted himself to minute historiographic analysis, much appreciated by modern historians. Moreover, his extraordinary loyalty to the Circle had always led him to positive interpretations: in describing external conflicts of the Circle as well as its internal clashes he did not emphasise the antagonistic aspects but preferred seeing the Circle as a meeting platform for intellectually related people to portraying it as a militant, well-organized movement. Needless to say, Vachek, in his loyal and positive approach, never interfered with facts – this is why his texts serve as an absolutely reliable and by far the most significant source for researchers who seek true facts rather than punchy statements and interpretations, including foreign authors of Czech or Slovak origin whose publications combine knowledge of relevant Czech texts, familiarity with the Czechoslovak context and international perspective⁴.

All these texts are primarily based on personal memories of people involved with the Circle and on documents preserved in collections by individuals or institutions (such as libraries and universities). It is precisely these documents that make the bulk of the Prague Linguistic Circle Collection in the Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences (for its

3. Vachek Josef (ed.), 1964, *A Prague School Reader in Linguistics*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press; Vachek Josef, 1966, *The Linguistic School of Prague. An introduction to its Theory and Practice*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press; Vachek Josef (ed.), 1970, *U základů pražské jazykovědné školy*, Prague, Academia; Vachek Josef, 1994, *Vzpomínky Českého anglisty*, Prague, H & H; Vachek Josef, 1999, *Prolegomena k dějinám Pražské školy jazykovědné*, Jinočany, H & H.

4. Matejka Ladislav (ed.), 1978, *Sound, Sign and Meaning. A Quinquagenary of the Prague Linguistic Circle*, Michigan, Ann Arbor; Galan František William, 1988, *Historic Structures: the Prague School Project, 1928-1946*, Austin, University of Texas Press; Toman Jindřich, 1995, *The Magic of a Common Language: Jakobson, Mathesius, Trubetzkoy, and the Prague Linguistic Circle*, Cambridge – London, The MIT Press.

detailed description based on the arrangement and record by the Archives, cf. Barvíková, Janderová, Podaný, 1999). As for the attention paid to the Collection by philologists, some authors have used some of the texts⁵, but its comprehensive description, analysis and contextualization has only been provided now by P. Čermák P. – Poeta – J. Čermák, *Pražský...*

The Collection only took shape and received its name in the Archives upon the deliverance there of the materials in 1977 by Bohumil Trnka⁶. As it transpired recently, the materials were those he had been privately collecting over the years – the Circle itself kept no such collection intentionally and of its own accord.

The present Collection consists of 4 document files and 7 notebooks (referred to as « books » by the Circle members). The stock-taking archivists described it briefly as « a preserved but incomplete collection of meeting minutes, correspondence, documents on international relations, publication and lecture activities, conference materials, editing materials and accounting documents ». The most valuable documents among these include:

– minutes of « lecture » and « organisational » meetings, which very significantly supplement and refine our knowledge of the Circle's daily existence, its scholarly

5. Toman, *The Magic...*; Toman Jindřich, 2011, *Příběh jednoho moderního projektu. Pražský lingvistický kroužek 1926-1948*, Prague, Nakladatelství Karolinum; Ehlers Klaas-Hinrich, 2005, *Strukturalismus in der deutschen Sprachwissenschaft: Die Rezeption der Prager Schule zwischen 1926 und 1945*, Berlin – New York, Walter De Gruyter.

6. Bohumil Trnka's estate contains a letter to the Academy in which Trnka explains why the collection he delivered is incomplete. The primary reason he adduces is that these are the documents that have been in his keeping, in accordance with the Circle's practice: all principal members used to keep documents that pertained to them personally or to activities they were responsible for. Trnka's own, secretarial file was voluminous – and happened to end up in the Academy. Its Collection, therefore, contains documents kept by Trnka until 1970s. This may serve as a partial explanation of why Vachek apparently could not use them when he was working on the historiography of the Circle. Evidently, he had no idea this collection was in existence, and there is no way of knowing why Trnka did not inform him – however strange this may seem, as these two linguists came to be the most loyal guardians of the Circle's heritage. In the same letter, Trnka goes on to say that the collection could possibly be complemented by materials potentially in keeping by some other members of the Circle – Havránek, Vachek, Trnka, Jakobson, Skalička and Nováková. It seems, however, that the Academy never approached them and that the Collection retained its original scope.

- activities both at home as well as abroad and of the birth of its publications;
- attendance sheets, which – along with other documents both of and outside the Collection – have helped us to supplement the existing lists of Circle lectures by another 14 hitherto unknown lectures of 1949-1950; also, they have refined our ideas of the attendance: with most lectures it is now possible to reconstruct the numbers as well as the identity of the listeners (thus providing data of utmost importance for those interested in the history of Czech science and culture, as the lectures were attended by prominent representatives of other academic disciplines as well as poets, writers, etc.);
 - record of correspondence between the Circle and institutions as well as individuals both at home and abroad, as well as the bulk of the correspondence itself; these documents amply demonstrate that at the height of its activity, the Circle was indeed a most effective scholarly institution, tied by links of cooperation to a number of foreign academic institutions;
 - documents associated with some of the Circle's most significant projects (e.g. conferences on phonology; the *Spisovná Čeština a jazyková kultura* series);
 - accounting books and related documents, which demonstrate, among other things, the Circle's remarkable capacity to raise funds for its economically exacting publication and other activities.

As stated above, the creation of the Collection was essentially a random process. It comes, then, as no surprise that the Collection is heterogeneous both in terms of content and chronology. The heterogeneity in content is most of all due to the fact that the Collection primarily contains documents related to the Circle's daily life in which the role of Trnka as secretary was central. On the other hand, there are only a few documents in the Collection that pertain to matters that were responsibility of other members. The chronological heterogeneity is determined by the historical context: whereas some periods in the life of the Circle are amply documented, some come across in

documentary scraps only. In this respect, the following chronology offers itself:

Period from 6th October 1926 to 1st December 1930

This period spans the time between the first lecture in the Circle (by Henrik Becker) and generally assumed to mark its birth, and the Circle's official constitution. The first 18 months of its existence are only sparsely documented in the Archives, as only attendance sheets of the lectures have been preserved. Obviously, by that time it was as yet no one's intention to turn what were freely conceived meetings by researchers related by thought and method into an institutionally organized Circle. In time, however, the Circle's activities expanded and its members started feeling the need to represent their body in the public as an institution whose life is guided by a set of regulations. This trend, apparent in the latter half of this period, is documented by minutes of the meetings and other materials.

Period from 1st December 1930 to 27th February 1939

This is the best-documented period in the Archives and perhaps also in the history of the Circle as such, most notably in the minutes of lecture and organisational meetings. It is particularly detailed from 1st December 1930 to 15th January 1934, when the record was kept by the young Josef Vachek. He entered everything he took note of in a special notebook, which leads us to the safe assumption that all the record of the period had been preserved. The detailed nature of the records reflects both Vachek's thoroughgoing approach, characteristic also for his historiographic writings, and the fact that this was a task taken up with all respect and responsibility by a 21-year old student. Later, when record-making was taken over by Bohumil Trnka, whose position within the Circle was very different, the style of the minutes changed considerably: from then on, the record often was only in numbered statements and sometimes incomplete or not quite clear. Yet, even Trnka's record appears so full that we

may safely conclude that this period as a whole offers by far the best representation of the Circle's life.

Period from 27th February 1939 to 12th May 1952

This time segment covers the war and post-war period. Despite the fact that its closing date is identical with that of the very last lecture delivered in the Circle, the Collection contains documents that are later than 1952. This fact aptly illustrates the gradual decline of the Circle, as its activities were not officially terminated as of a particular date. Both the war and post-war period are documented very poorly (in the above-mentioned letter to the Archives, Trnka points out that a number of documents disappeared during the war when the Faculty of Arts was occupied by the Nazis). The record of the former period contains only dates and titles of lectures on separate and often tattered sheets while the record of the latter contains attendance sheets as well. All told, this time segment of the Circle's history is documented in a most partial, uneven way and its thin and scattered materials must be interpreted and contextualized with utmost care.

3. SOME ASPECTS OF THE CIRCLE'S HISTORY IN THE LIGHT
OF THE COLLECTION DOCUMENTS

The overall nature of the Collection is therefore such that it significantly supplements our hitherto knowledge of the Circle's history. However, the limited scope of the present contribution allows us to mention but a few themes whose understanding can be profitably refined on the basis of the Collection's evidence.

3.1. The Circle's End

While historiography has taken great care to describe the rise and the grand years of the Circle, little is known about its end. Traditional accounts say that the Circle ceased to exist

in the early 1950s, with an implication that it was officially banned some time in the decade.

It is certain that the Circle's activities were not terminated in accordance with its Statutes⁷, but that document was naturally ill-suited to the conditions of Czechoslovak life in the 1950s. The documents of both the Collection and Bohumil Trnka's estate yield but a single specific date: on 12 May 1952, the Circle convened for its very last lecture. Materials of the Collection that relate to the following years only document how the Circle's earlier activities were dying away during the 1950s. Trnka himself refers – in the above-mentioned letter to the Archives of the Academy of 1977 – to « a premature official dissolution in the academic year 1952-1953 ». The nature of this « official dissolution » can only be inferred from the correspondence between Trnka as the Circle's secretary and various power institutions. As early as November 1949 (i.e. about 18 months after the Communist coup d'état), Trnka had to provide a detailed account for the National Committee of the Circle's status, activities and property. In 1951, when the authorities launched a campaign to « simplify the system of scientific societies », Trnka responded to a query regarding the possibilities of the Circle's association with another scientific institution. Trnka's struggle for the Circle's independence was brave but futile – he had, for example, to report which publications by the Circle were ideologically objectionable and should therefore be no longer distributed – the more so that the pressure was part of a general campaign by the authorities against societies. As early as April 1952, Trnka stated in a letter that « the Prague Linguistic Circle will be affiliated – as a selective scientific society – to one of the institutes of the newly created Academy of Sciences ». However, even this idea of a preserved Circle as an independent branch of the Academy proved too optimistic. In January 1954, the director of the Institute of the Czech Language of the Academy of Sciences informed Trnka in a letter that « the presidium of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences had decided that instead of the hitherto Prague

7. Paragraph 16 of the Statutes states that « the association ceases to exist if the committee's motion to this effect has been approved by two thirds of members attending the plenary session specially convened for that purpose. The association's property will pass on to the public and university library in Prague. »

Linguistic Circle and the Society for Slavic Linguistics there would be one selective linguistic scientific society, affiliated to the Institute of the Czech Language... and called Language Circle (“Jazykový kroužek”) ». Paradoxically, the director of the Institute and the writer of the letter inviting Trnka to discuss the terms of the change was Bohuslav Havránek.

However, it is evident that, ultimately, the Circle did not continue to exist in any form. The Collection contains several documents demonstrating that the international linguistic community could not understand these developments at all, and those who tried to answer queries from abroad often had to resort to comical evasions. It was only Bohumil Trnka who went on calling a spade a spade – his letters in the Collection, addressed both to former Circle members and to Czech institutions, contain blunt references to « the liquidated Prague Linguistic Circle ».

It is certain, then, that the Circle had not been dissolved in accordance with its Statutes, and probable that an official act of terminating its activities (as could be documented, for example, by its formal ban) had never taken place.

3.2. Lectures in the Circle

Lectures organized by the Circle – along with its publications (with which the lectures were often closely connected) and the Circle’s presence at congresses – form the most valuable part of the Circle’s heritage as they reflect ideas so very attractive for the world’s linguistic community.

It is a well-known fact that regular lectures made the backbone of the Circle’s life from the beginnings to its very end. Every would-be member was, according to the Statutes, supposed to give a lecture, and lectures were continuously recorded in various publications. These became, in time, the basis of detailed lecture lists (cf. Kochis⁸, Galan, *Historic...*; Vachek, *Prolegomena...*, selective surveys published by the Circle). These lists can now be significantly expanded and supplemented from the sources in the Circle Collection,

8. Kochis Bruce: List of Lectures Given in the Prague Linguistic Circle (1926-1948). In Matejka Ladislav (ed.): *Sound...*, p. 607-622.

which not only supply details of lectures already listed (including attendance sheets) but also add new items to the lists. On comparing the diverse evidence from the Collection to the above-mentioned lecture lists, another 16 lectures, all of them given in 1948-1950 and hitherto unknown, can now be added:

23 February 1948: Ludovít Novák: Mimoslovníkové předpoklady vzniku a různosti jazyků (« Extralinguistic prerequisites for the rise and diversity of language »)

1 December 1948: Jan Mukařovský: Strukturalismus a dialektický materialismus v teorii umění (úvod k debatě) (« Structuralism and dialectic materialism in the theory of art: introducing the debate »)

31 January 1949: Vladimír Skalička: O jazycích melanéských (k problému smíšených jazyků) (« On Melanesian languages: the problem of mixed languages »)

7 March 1949: Ctirad Bosák: Stadiálnost v jazyce (« Stadiality of language »)

16 May 1949: Karel Zemen: Grafémy, fonémy a fonetické varianty v jazyce anglickém (« Graphemes, phonemes and phonetic variants in English »)

23 May 1949: Štefan Peciar: O prosodických prostředcích jazyka (« On prosodic devices in language »)

30 May 1949: Marie Mayenowa: Informacje o Instytucie badania literackich

20 June 1949: Bohuslav Havránek, Vladimír Skalička: Rozhovor o vývoji Pražského lingvistického kroužku (« A dialogue on the evolution of the Prague Linguistic Circle »); Nové cesty Pražského lingvistického kroužku (« New paths of the Prague Linguistic Circle »)

27 June 1949: Stojko Stojkov: Problémy bulharské spisovné výslovnosti (« Pronunciation of Standard Bulgarian and its problems »)

5 December 1949: Pavel Eisner: Nacismus a jazyk (« Nazism and language »)

27 February 1950: Antonín Dostál: O produktivnosti v jazyce (« On productivity in Language »)

27 March 1950: Karel Hausenblas: Metaforický obraz v poesii Jiřího Wolkerova (« Metaphorical imagery in Jiří Wolker's poetry »)

17 April 1950: A. V. Isačenko: Třídní charakter spisovných jazyků (« Class nature of standard languages »)

24 April 1950: Vladimír Skalička: N. J. Marr

31 May 1950: Ctirad Bosák: Sovětská jazykověda po Marrovi (« Soviet linguistics after Marr »)

12 June 1950: Petr Sgall: Diskuse o sovětské linguistice v Pravdě (« The debate on Soviet linguistics in *Pravda* »)

The list is no doubt of considerable interest for a number of reasons. In terms of content and structure, it is apparent that the character of lectures had changed: most lectures now responded to the political reality of the day and there were increasingly fewer that remained free from ideology. New lecturers appeared, too: some later became prominent philologists, some happened to be associated with that time only. No less remarkable are the attendance sheets: some of the lectures apparently were rather like plenary sessions, with more than 80 people present and many supplementing their signature with the name of the institution on whose behalf they attended. In short, the spirit and ambience of the lectures had changed visibly, reflecting their time.

Let us conclude, then, that the materials from the Collection – which Vachek (Vachek, 1999: 112) assumed to be no longer in existence – refine our knowledge of the Circle's final years in a very significant way.

3.3. Membership

As already noted, every would-be member of the Circle was required by the Statutes to give a lecture; the lecture having been delivered, a vote was taken by the members on the lecturer's suitability for membership. However, documents from the Collection reveal several cases in which no lecture appears to have been required (cf., e.g., the membership of Oldřich Hujer) or, by contrast, in which not even a delivered lecture sufficed for membership.

In following up this topic, many other materials from the Collection can be used: more or less complete membership lists (compiled as of a specific date); records of vote-taking; letters of admission to new members; responses by new members

expressing thanks and agreement to the Statutes; minutes of meetings containing references to specific individuals as members. A comprehensive analysis of the membership is now available in P. Čermák – Poeta – J. Čermák, *Pražský...*; in what follows, we offer a brief discussion of the role in the Circle of its foreign members – a theme widely commented upon by international researchers.

Documents from the Collection fully confirm the idea of the Circle as an institution where the language of communication and nationality of members and lecturers mattered very little. It is clear from the materials that while organisational and committee meetings were conducted in Czech, lectures were delivered mostly in Czech but also in German and French. Other languages, such as Russian or English, were used rather exceptionally – by guest lecturers from abroad. It is remarkable that records of lectures contain no reference to the language used: this can only be inferred from the lecture's title (if not given in Czech) or other indirect evidence. This can only mean that, indeed, the language of communication was not of primary importance. What languages would have been shared by most members of the Circle can now only be a matter of speculation: apart from the obvious use of Czech, fairly general command of German can be taken for granted while knowledge of French was less widespread and that of English only exceptional (cf. e.g. the well-known difficulties Trubetzkoy experienced when communicating in English). The knowledge of Russian in other than Russian and Ukrainian members of the Circle can only be inferred from scholarly interests of individual members.

The Circle was a varied body of linguists of diverse nationalities, which no doubt reflected the position of Prague and Czechoslovakia at that time as one of preferred destinations for foreigners, who kept coming, for various reasons, from various countries – the Ukraine (Agenor Artymovič, Ivan Paňkevič), France (Louis Brun) and of course, Russia.

The Russian community was the strongest (naturally, along with that of the Prague Germans) and the Prague Linguistic Circle Collection allows us to assess – though in terms of facts not of ideas – whether the formative influence on the Circle of its Russian members was indeed so fundamental as is claimed

in a number of international studies that are primarily based on Roman Jakobson's recollections. The Collection materials reveal mechanisms of the Circle's daily routine: they show that an overwhelming majority of principal decisions was made at the meetings of the Circle's committee as conclusions to discussions among Vilém Mathesius, Roman Jakobson, Bohuslav Havránek, Bohumil Trnka and Jan Mukařovský. Jakobson's role was no doubt central and many details of the documents demonstrate that his was indeed the primary impulse behind important projects (such as conferences or publications) of the Circle. The documents show Jakobson as a tireless organizer and prime mover of an incredible scope of activities and interests. His proposals, naturally informed by his opinions and professional experience (including that of a philologist in Russia), often found a direct representation in the Circle's collective enterprises. A very different role was that of N. S. Trubetzkoy – this widely acknowledged scholar whose ideas often inspired professional debates in the Circle but who, as a corresponding member, visited Prague only rarely influenced the Circle's daily life but marginally. A much stronger influence on the Circle's daily agenda was exercised by other Russians, particularly by Petr Bogatyrev, Alfréd Bém and Leontij Kopeckij (for as long as they lived in Prague). The Collection throws very little light on the practical role of N. S. Durnovo, highly regarded as a contributor to the intellectual and linguistic programme of the Circle (including *The Theses* of 1929). To summarize this sub-theme: though the Collection documents acknowledge the importance of the Circle's Russian members in practical terms (and the role of Roman Jakobson as a principal one), its general assessment in some non-Czech historiographical studies appears exaggerated⁹.

To conclude this section, a brief note is due on what the Collection reveals concerning relations to the Circle of several foreign linguists and philosophers who tend to be associated with it in the literature.

Several world-famous scientists did deliver a lecture in the Circle but never became its members: talks by Otto Jespersen

9. This does not, of course, relate to the linguistic programme of the Circle and the contribution of its Russian members to its formation.

(1933), Rudolf Carnap (1935) and Edmund Husserl (1935) are listed in all the relevant sources as mere guest lectures.

Then there were foreign researchers who delivered a lecture, became members and went on cooperating with the Circle as corresponding members. Such relationships were current throughout the Circle's existence but especially frequent, as transpires from the documents in the Collection, in two periods: during the first years of the Circle's history and then in the later 1930s. The former period features the beginnings of an important cooperation of the Circle with Lucien Tesnière who became a member on delivering a lecture in 1927 and whose close links to the Circle are reflected in the correspondence and membership lists (where his name appears until 1936). Another lecturer of 1927 was Sergej Karcevskij, whose cooperation with the Circle is amply documented especially in the early 1930s. The very first lecture arranged by the Circle was given in 1926 by Henrik Becker whose life-long affiliation to the Circle is paradoxically witnessed by the fact that he was both the very first lecturer in the Circle's history and the addressee of one of the two very last letters (both contained in the Collection) that Bohumil Trnka dispatched (in November 1951) on behalf of the Circle.

For the latter period, the later 1930s, the Collection documents lectures and membership of Viggo Brøndal (who gave a lecture in 1935 and became one of the Circle's close collaborators in the later years), Louis Hjelmslev (who gave a lecture in 1937 and as a member closely cooperated with the Circle until after the war), Émile Benveniste (1937), A. W. de Groot (1938), Nicolaas van Wijk (1938), Giacomo Devoto (1940) and others.

3.4. Correspondence

A considerable part of the Collection contains the Circle's correspondence of 1928-1956: received letters, copies of sent letters and notebook records of both received and sent mail. Altogether, the body of the correspondence offers a unique testimony to the Circle's everyday existence as well as the twists

and turns of its history. Though highly diverse, it generally represents two basic types of correspondence:

- 1) correspondence with members and collaborators (such as letters of admission to new members and their replies, requests for publications, letters concerning organisation of lectures, etc.); this section is arranged alphabetically in files by individual members and collaborators;
- 2) correspondence with Czech and foreign institutions concerning publications and their distribution, conference and congress participation, and fund-raising¹⁰.

The records of mail are contained in well-kept notebooks, each item entered with the date, the topic of the letter and the addressee's name. The correspondence itself contains letters, cards, mimeographed materials and telegraph forms. Languages used include – apart from the Circle's working languages – also Russian, Ukrainian, Serbo-Croatian, Polish and Bulgarian.

Even though some of the letters have already been published¹¹, it is in its entirety that the correspondence provides a panoramic view of the Circle's life.

Despite the fact that much of the correspondence lacks philological dimensions, it offers valuable insights into mechanisms of the Circle's daily routine, gives fascinating details of both professional and personal relationships within the Circle and helps fill significant gaps in its chronology. Last but not least, part of the correspondence (along with a special file in the Collection containing the Circle's accounts) throws light on the economic aspects of the Circle's multifarious activities: the Collection contains a number of fund-raising letters addressed to ministries and other institutions, correspondence concerning negotiations with publishers, membership dues,

10. Cf. P. Čermák – Poeta – J. Čermák J., *Pražský...*, for a complete list of correspondents, along with a set of 33 hitherto unpublished letters by Vilém Mathesius to Bohumil Trnka, written during the World War II. (The first one is dated 31 October 1941, the last, and incomplete, one 26 February 1945). These letters come outside the Collection: they are part of the estate of Jiří Nosek, a prominent pupil of Bohumil Trnka.

11. Cf., e.g., Toman, *The Magic...*; Toman, *Příběh...*; Ehlers, *Strukturalismus...*; Havránková Marie (ed.), 2008, *Pražský lingvistický kroužek v korespondenci: Bohuslav Havránek, Roman Jakobson, Vilém Mathesius, Jan Mukařovský, Bohumil Trnka, Miloš Weingart: korespondence z let 1923-1970*, Prague, Academia.

etc. The documents reveal an amazing fact: though the economic situation of the Circle had never been good, it only very rarely happened that a specific project had to be dismissed or abandoned for financial reasons.

A specific sub-theme covered by the correspondence is the gradual decline of the Circle in the post-war period, culminating in the 1950s. As partly discussed above, letters documenting changes in the Circle's climate, political pressure by the authorities and Bohumil Trnka's determined stand as the last guardian of the Circle's intellectual heritage present a grim but eloquent picture of the Circle's final years.

Researchers from abroad will appreciate the Circle's correspondence with numerous foreign institutions, preserved throughout its history. The cooperation was beneficial in many ways as it helped sharing information on ongoing projects, facilitated attendance at conferences, organisation of visits by foreign lecturers in Prague (such as those by Danish and Dutch linguists in the late 1930s, mentioned above) and maintained a lively exchange of publications. The limited scope of this contribution allows us to mention but a few of the institutions the Circle was in contact with: English Seminar, Seminar Imperial University Tokio (Shizuka Saito), Seminar of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Strasbourg (Lucien Tesnière), Circle of Young Slavists and N. van Wijk's Seminar, Leiden University (J. M. Bool), *Lingua* (De Groot); Instituttet for sammenhengende kulturforskning (Oslo, Alf Sommerfelt), Deutsches Spracharchiv (Berlin, Ernst Zwirner), *Acta Linguistica*, Kaiser-Wilhelm Institut für Phonetik (Braunschweig, Dieter Gerhardt), Institut movoznavstva (Kiev), Academy of Sciences of the Ukraine, Minerva (Walter de Gruyter, Berlin), Société linguistique de Paris, *Emérita* (Madrid), Basil Blackwell (Oxford), Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Georgetown University (Washington), etc.

However, the correspondence concerns by no means only practical and organisational matters. A number of letters bear witness to a continuing debate over diverse linguistic and philological themes. For example, several letters in the Collection discuss the proposal of a standard phonological terminology (« Projet de terminologie phonologique

standardisée »). One of them, dated 7 December 1930, contains a seven-sheet analysis, full of both general and specific observations, of the proposal by Charles Bally. A detailed commentary on the same project, addressed to Jakobson a mere three days later, comes from Lucien Tesnière. A letter from Edward Sapir, of 18 March 1930, contains extensive notes on Trubetzkoy's article about vocalic systems in *Travaux* 1. Not infrequently, such epistolary linguistic debates are interspersed with words of personal witness to the Circle's significance and renown. Let us quote one such exceptional testimony – which happens to come also from Edward Sapir – to conclude this section: in the letter of 18 March he first gratefully acknowledges receipt of the first two volumes of the *Travaux* (the reading of which is « a real event in my scientific experiences ») and then goes on to add: « Let me say at once I am enormously impressed by the high standard that these volumes set for linguistic work. In fact, I do not know of any other group of linguists anywhere in the world who are doing such valuable and really forward-looking work as the group that you are associated with. Please do not take this as an empty compliment, but as a sincere expression of my conviction. Needless to say, I am very proud to be associated, even at this distance, with your group, and I shall be more than happy to receive further issues of your series. »

4. CONCLUSION

The aim of this contribution has been to draw attention to the Prague Linguistic Circle Collection in the Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences as a fundamental source of information on the Prague Linguistic Circle. In its entirety, the Collection very significantly supplements the existing knowledge of the Circle, fills some gaps and rectifies some of the traditional imprecisions in the historiography of this extraordinary linguistic society. By doing so, it offers a more solid framework for interpreting the Circle's intellectual heritage.

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