A Small Dictionary of Life under Communist Totalitarian Rule (Czechoslovakia 1948-1989)

Věra Schmiedtová
The Institute of the Czech national corpus, Charles University in Prague
vera.schmiedtova@ff.cuni.cz

Abstract

The intention is to preserve the vocabulary of the period for the younger generation; also to remind the older generation of vocabulary that they used to encounter, but are gradually forgetting. The dictionary is specific in that it is made up of two types of vocabulary – the language of communist propaganda and the spoken language emerging from how people reacted to the pressure of propaganda, often including popular humour. The first type of vocabulary has been collated through Corpus of Totalitarianism, for the second type a corpus-based source does not exist (it is the language as spoken, which it was possible to collate through quotes from fiction, journalistic writings and from the author's own observations. This language has been is checked in contemporary written corpuses, on some occasions it is to be found in the Corpus of Totalitarianism or on the internet).

Keywords: dictionary of communist propaganda; czech language

1   Historical context

The Czechoslovak Republic underwent huge political changes in 1989. The period of communist totalitarian rule ended (1948-1989) and the country returned to democracy. This paper attempts to show how language changed with the change of political discourse. We have to bear in mind that totalitarian language changed its character over time. In this sense, three main historical periods can be identified: The fifties: major ideological pressures dominate Czech society. The focus is on building a new (socialist, communist) society and defining the conflict between the system and its real and alleged opponents. The focus is on the future and the prevailing tone is one of enthusiasm. Young people and children are targeted to represent these values. In some speakers, a full identification between their identity and the ideology of the system - and thus its language - can be observed. The sixties: This period is one of sobering up. Language reflects two main themes: (1) the attempt to escape from the restraints of the communist regime (socialism with a human face), (2) the end of all hope for political change after the Prague Spring, starting with the Soviet occupation of the former Czechoslovakia on August 21, 1968. The seventies and the eighties: The time of disillusionment and so-called normalization. Typical for speakers is not to identify themselves with their language.

2   Vocabulary collected

2.1   "Language of the rulers" – language of propaganda

This was gathered on the basis of the Corpus of Totalitarianism

"Totalitarian Corpus"

This is composed from journalistic texts. It includes three samples of Rudé právo (Red Justice), the daily newspaper of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, which reflected the ideological stand-points of the communist government:

The period 1948-1989 can be divided into three periods

2.1.1   The 1950s (1952, a total of 926 texts, from 16.6 to 31.12.1952)

Examples of vocabulary

Building a new order

agitátoři a propagandisté	*agitators* and *propagandists*
v *agitačních střediscích*	at *"agitation centres"*
v *rudých koutcích* pomocí *agitek*	in *red cells* helped by *propaganda songs*
stěngazety a desky cti	*"wall newspapers", "lists of honour"*
agitace tlampači	*agitation through loudspeakers.*
komunisté, nestraníci	*communists, non-party members .*
reakcionáři, vykořisťovatelé, kulaci, fabrikanti	*reactionaries, exploiters, "kulaks", factor owners*
podvracení republiky, velezradu, vlastizradu	*subverting the republic, treason,*
psovi psí smrt	*"a dog's death for a dog"*

Atmosphere of the time

průvody	*marches*
manifestace s transparenty a s *mávátky*	*demonstrations, banners, flags*
alegorické vozy	*floats*
Sovětský svaz, náš vzor	*The Soviet Union, our model*
akademik Lysenko	*The academic Lysenko*
Mičurin, generalissimus Stalin	*Micurin, Generalissimo Stalin*
stachanovci	*Stakhanovites*
Zlobinova metoda	*the Zlobin Method*
etc.	

Agriculture

kolektivizace	*collectivization*

združstevňování vesnice	*"cooperativizing" a village*
scelování pozemků	*rationalizing parcels of land*
rozorávání mezí	*ploughing in the gaps between fields*
etc.	

Industry

havíři/ horníci, úderníci, novátoři a vynálezci	*miners/colliers, "shock-workers", innovators, inventors*
budování socialismu	*building socialism*
pětiletky	*five-year plans*
stavby socialismu	*socialist constructions*
stavby mládeže	*youth constructions*
závazky	*commitments*
zlepšovatelského hnutí	*the "innovation movement"*
etc.	

2.1.2   1960s (1969, a total of 1038 texts, from 1.4 to 31.7.1969) Prague Spring

Examples of vocabulary

reformátoři	*reformers*
socialismus s lidskou tváří	*socialism with a human face*
ekonomická reforma, obrodný proces	*economic reform, process of renewal*
demokratizace, pluralita	*democratization, plurality*
deformace	*deformation*
dogmatik, konzervativec, kolaboranti	*dogmatic, conservative, collaborators*
bratrská pomoc, internacionální pomoc	*fraternal support, international help*
etc.	

2.1.3   1970s and 1980s (1977, a total of 800 texts, from 3.1 to 31.3.1977)
Continuation of the period of "normalization"

Examples of vocabulary

normalizace	*normalization*
konsolidac	*consolidation*
agent, banda, bdělost, diverze	*agent, band, vigilance, diversion*
oportunista, područí, reakcionář	*opportunist, bondage, reactionary*
spiklenecká banda	*conspiratorial gang*
američtí váleční paliči	*American warmongers*
dřít kůži s těl dělníků	*tearing the skin from the workers' backs*
grandiózní stavba socialismu	*a grandiose socialist construction*

krvavý pes Tito	*that bloodstained dog, Tito*
šťastné zítřky	*a happy future*
zahnívající kapitalismus	*decaying capitalism*
kontrarevoluce, krizové období	*counter-revolution, period of crisis*
prověrky	*screening/vetting*
výměna členských legitimací	*renewal of party membership cards*
pomýlený	*misguided*
vyloučení nebo *vyškrtnutí ze strany*	*expelled or deleted from the party*
zdravé jádro	*the healthy core*
exponent pravice	right-winger
souhlasit/ nebo nesouhlasit se vstupem	expressing agreement/disagreement with the intervention by
(spřátelených) vojsk	(friendly) troops
Chartra 77	*officially described as a pamphlet*
signatáři	*signatories*
samozvanci, zaprodanci rozvratníci	*pretenders/usurpers, traitors, disruptive elements*
samizdat	*samizdat*
edice Petlice	*"Petlice" edition*
pokrývač	*"roofer"*
jít do stoupy	*"to be sent to the shredder"*
trezorový film	*"a film to be kept in the safe"*

Together with scans of 91 propaganda publications of varying lengths.

2.2 "Language of the ruled" – material has been gathered from

Extracts from literary sources – novels etc. Personal experience – existing only in spoken form, these are expressions used among people who felt they could trust each other

Language of the "ruled" – unofficial language

2.2.1 1950s

kdy se to (v)obrátí	when will it turn round
kdy to rupne/ praskne	when will it crack/burst
je načichlej	he's "impregnated"
kopečkář, utýct (za kopečky)	runaway, running away "over the hills"
partajník, fabrika, fárplán	party man, factory, plan
1960s, 1970s and 1980s	
pravý džíny	real jeans

2.2.2 1970s and 80s

byl odejít ze strany	*to be made to leave the party*
Husákovo ticho	*Husák's silence*
Vokovická Sorbona	*The Vokovice Sorbonne*
RSDr. (ironicky Rodné cision of the Party"	*(an academic title, referred to ironically as "Doctor by the De- nebo Rozhodnutím strany doktor) strany doktor*
rychlokvaška	*upstart, fast-track expert*

2.2.3 Used throughout the communist period

aparátčík	*apparatchik*
papaláš	*bigwig*
Dederon (dederonský), dederon	*slang for someone from East Germany*

3 Description of A small dictionary of life under communist totalitarian rule (Czechoslovakia 1948-1989)[1]

Includes more than 1,400 entries, drawn from a number of fields.

Includes:

1. Language of propaganda – drawn from the "Totalitarian Corpus"

2. Everyday language, capturing how people respond to propaganda, gathered through extracts from texts, through surveys, on the basis of personal experience and knowledge;

>   a) Language which captures the life of the time, through surveys and on the basis of personal experience and knowledge;
>
>   b) The entries also include very specific uses of language (e.g. the language of the secret police, of dissidents, prisoners.) It only includes words that came into common parlance

3.1 Some types of entries in A small dictionary of life under communist totalitarian rule: encyclopedia-type entries

The entry is made up of an encyclopedia-type explanation, taken from an example of the word used in context and stating the source of the example.

Action Kulak was the code name for a secret police operation between 1951-1954, under which awkward peasant families were forced to move and their property confiscated, they were tried on false

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1   Schmiedtová (2012) Malý slovník reálií komunistické totality, Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, Praha ISBN 978-80-7422-192-7

pretences, imprisoned and discriminated: *Exactly fifty years have gone by since the beginning of Action Kulak, which the communist regime directed against peasants throughout the country in 1952* / internet.

censorship */occurring only in texts from the 60s and 70s/* a central pillar of the regime; its discontinuation was one of the main prerequisites of the Prague Spring; it functioned under the auspices of the Federal Press and Information Department (FÚTI), up to 1968 under the Press Monitoring dept.: *It was far worse previously, when real censorship was exercised in newspapers and periodicals, cleverly managed and concealed as "journalistic solidarity"; following the badly organized, politically ill-prepared and ill-considered cancellation of censorship, the press came under the control and decisive influence of rightwing, opportunistic groups* / Corpus of Totalitarianism

agitation centre these were centres established by the Communist Party in villages, town districts and later in workplaces. Political agitation was carried out here, party education, information was published on noticeboards, instant messages and notices were put together and radio broadcasts were prepared, which were broadcast to people living nearby or to people at the workplace: *Under the principles approved by the secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party agitation centres have been established in various places and socialist organizations* / Corpus of Totalitarianism

3.2   Some examples of words and phrases typical for the dictionary

agent */occurring predominantly in the 50s/* = **diversionist, spy** the high occurrence is the result of a phobia, seeking out people perceived as trying to subvert the new regime; people working for enemy intelligence organizations, trying to damage the communist order: *an agent of the American intelligence service; agents of American imperialism; agents of western imperialists; an agent of the bourgeoisie and an enemy of the Communist Party; CIA agents; with the help of a treacherous gang of agents* / Corpus of Totalitarianism

gang */the word occurs frequently primarily in the 50s/: What was this **gang of conspirators** Slanský and his accomplices aiming at?; Slanský and his **criminal gang**; **a gang of Tito supporters**; smashing the **treacherous and marauding gang** of Clementis and co.*/ Corpus of Totalitarianism

not one grain should go to waste! a popular slogan, primarily during the period of collectivization; the slogan also came to be parodied: *so that there will be enough bread in our republic, so that not a single grain of our rich harvest goes to waste* / Corpus of Totalitarianism

facing the masses a communist slogan: *Each communist is committed to the words of comrade Gottwald "Facing the masses"; during the continuous work to win the masses for the political work of the party – fulfilling the principle "facing the masses"*/ Corpus of Totalitarianism

3.3 Words which reflect the real life of the time

"androš" /*the word does not occur a single time in the Corpus of Totalitarianism*/ **1** independent musical style, underground: *The only real underground Czech music is that of the Plastics and DG 307* / internet **2** an underground musician: *Brabenec's journey from the underground to exile is a clear example of how the regime dealt with those it couldn't control*/ internet **3** a person with the outward appearance and lifestyle of the musical underground (long hair, shapeless sweater, scruffy jeans, avoiding regular work, hanging around in pubs, a kind of Czech "hippy"): *it's true that for many years I haven't given a shit about your average citizen, I'm more interested in non-average citizens – I mean guys with long hair, hippies, underground people [androše] or punks* /SYN [The word derives from the English word "underground"]

bon /*the word does not occur a single time in the Corpus of Totalitarianism*/ a token which could be obtained in exchange for hard western currency, and through which it was possible to buy goods in "Tuzex" shops. These were special shops where primarily western goods were sold. People without access to western currency could only buy these tokens on the black market from illegal currency traders. Officially one token was worth one Czechoslovak crown. On the black market in the 1980s the price for a token was around five crowns: *a whole hierarchy of illegal traders came into being, through whom even "ordinary" citizens could obtain tokens.* /SYN

4 Software used

We use Bonito (created by Pavel Rychlý, 2004) and TchwaneLex TLex Suit, version 7.1.0.726.

5 Conclusion

As we would expect under any political system, the language of totalitarianism in the former Czechoslovakia works within the semantic structure of Czech. However, it uses this structure for propaganda purposes, so words from the usual vocabulary are often abused to propaganda ends. The language is aggressive and monotonous, it frequently repeats certain associations, phrases and slogans. To certain words it adds its own evaluating positive or negative gloss. For example, the word *American* always has a negative semantic connotation, even though it is referring to a geographical concept; the word *Soviet* is always positive. Totalitarianism often abuses, to its ideological ends, words with a positive semantic connotation. It creates new meanings for words by expanding their polysemy, for example *western = capitalist.* It is fond of certain semantic connections, such as *building a better future; the struggle against enemies of the new order; "democratization of culture and education"*, which is a veiled re-

ference to censorship in these fields. With the aim of concealment it often uses euphemisms *(struggle for liberation).* This language is not creative, it draws from automatized components of the language. It often uses set phrases. To this day users often apply these phrases as ironic quotes, referring to the period.

The various tools of propaganda – techniques of persuasion, brainwashing, euphemisms – separate people into those who are with us and those who are against us, into the good and the bad, words take on new meanings, which have a political sense, linguistic stereotypes are used, which are repeated again and again, the propaganda works on the emotions, it is directed at ordinary people, which it perceives as a mass and a collective group, it tries to build its legitimacy on science, it speaks out strongly against the church.

The language of the ruled is spoken language, reacting to the pressure of propaganda. It is highly creative. It often parodies official language, it very often uses humour (e.g. *the "Vokovice Sorbonne", "to be made to leave the party of your own free will"*). It also captures the atmosphere of the time, which was influenced by the way the communist regime functioned (e.g. *real jeans, Tuzex token, Lenon Wall).* ¨

6   References

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