

Phonological synchronic foreignisms in Czech

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Loanword phonology has received much attention in the recent years (e.g. Kang 2011), but the literature mostly focuses on adaptation processes (“repair strategies”) of loanwords. However, even after they are adapted to the native phonology, loanwords may still contain phonological features which mark them off from native words. This may be achieved, for example, by the presence of native phonemes in unusual positions (cf. word-initial /ʒ/ in English words such as *gigue* of French origin) or by unusual phoneme combinations (cf. word-initial /gw/ in English words like *guano* of Quechua origin). This idea, originally introduced by the founder of the Prague Linguistic Circle Vilém Mathesius (Mathesius 1929), has been called (*phonological*) *synchronic foreignisms* (Vachek 1966). It may perhaps be regarded as a type of sound symbolism, although the question has been not considered under this paradigm (cf. e.g. Childs 2015).

It is a goal of the contribution to revive and discuss this concept. Mathesius illustrated his point mostly on Czech, but, being restricted by technical limitations of his time, he did not provide any detailed analysis. A more detailed is Trnka’s analysis of English (Trnka 1966), but the notion still remains tentative. However, thanks to the existence of a phonological lexical corpus of Czech, it is possible to computationally process a much larger word stock in order to test whether there are indeed significant phonological structural differences between the words of foreign and native origin.

The synchronic foreignness may be manifested on a several levels. Take, for example, the Czech word *trénink* (< Eng. *training*). The foreignness is first of all signaled by the final cluster /nk/, which is found in the native vocabulary only in expressive words (*břink* “twang”). However, the situation is more complex. The syllable /trē/, though found in the normal Czech vocabulary, also signals the foreignness by being the first syllable, while its occurrence in the native vocabulary is restricted to final positions (cf. *chytré* “clever (fem. sg.)”). Also, the overall structure of *trénink* is usual because the pattern CCV̄CVCC is mostly confined to the words of foreign origin (C = consonant, V = vowel, V̄ = long vowel).

This example suggests three types of question the contribution wants to consider. In particular, we will (1) compare frequencies of phonemes and phoneme combinations (e.g. consonant clusters) in foreign and native words, (2) discuss differences in the syllable structure, and (3) examine the overall phonotactic structure of words. Our goal will be to find out to what extent the presence of some phonemes and a particular syllable and word pattern may be a cue to foreignness in Czech. The analysis will be based on a database of aprox. 24,000 foreign words and a database of aprox. 22,000 native words. Thus, we will not only consider qualitative differences, but also quantitative differences between these two types of vocabulary.

References

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