

“The law shall prevent our national language from devastation”: Language ideologies in the Czech Parliament

Many countries have adopted language laws for various reasons. In the Czech Republic, there were a few attempts to establish Czech as the state language, too. It never got through but the parliamentary debates were highly interesting from the ideological, especially nationalist point of view.

The aim of the study is to find out how is language conceptualized when being discussed by the politicians. In other words, it intends to uncover the ideologies employed when there is argument whether a language law should be introduced. In particular, it focuses on the metaphorical concepts used in the political speeches such as language as a *treasure*, *beautiful entity*, *living organism* etc. Special attention is paid to the national aspect of argumentation, both covert and overt.

The corpus collected for this purpose consists of ca. 30,000 words and contains the debates on language law proposals held in the Czech Chamber of Deputies from 1995 until 2004.

The paper combines the approach of corpus linguistics allowing to deal with larger sets of data and employ highly controlled procedures (inspired by the Lancaster approach (e.g. Baker 2006)) with a rather classical CDA approach benefiting from detailed and interpretative analyses of texts, taking the context into account (using mainly the tools of the discourse historical approach (e.g. Reisigl – Wodak 2009)).

The analysis shows a strong accent on the national aspect of Czech, though there are of course many other nations/nationalities in the Czech Republic. This finding and the metaphors that are connected to it are of course not new, neither in the Czech context, nor in general (Bermel 2007) but what is of particular interest is how stable and widely spread they are. The analysis shows that it almost does not matter to what political orientation particular MP adheres to, be it left or right, liberal or conservative – while it is likely that he or she may hold the simplest purist and nationalist stance towards language, the civic principle embodied in the constitution is almost not heard.

References:

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