RESEARCH OF THE CZECH LANGUAGE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF QUEER LINGUISTICS

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The aim of this minireview is to analyse the existing Czech research in the field of Queer Linguistics with the use of the meta-linguistic perspective. After a short introduction of Queer Theory ideas and ideas of Queer Linguistics focusing on the terms *queer* and *heteronormativity*, the author deals with the Czech denomination of this field. Against the backdrop of the state of Czech Gender Linguistics, additional circumstances of the current state of Czech Queer Linguistics are presented. Those include (apart from the unavailability of relevant literature in Czech libraries) a limited number of experts dealing with the topic, offering queer-linguistic lectures and seminars at Czech universities. In the next part of the article, the existing publications dealing with various topics from the field of Czech Queer Linguistics are analysed. In the final part of the article, some topics which may extend the publication basis of the field are outlined as they also may help to reflect the current social topics in the Czech Republic.

Key words: Czech language, meta-linguistic perspective, Queer Linguistics, heteronormativity

1 INTRODUCTION

Queer Linguistics is based on the US post-structuralist Queer Theory from the 1990s. Queer Theory in general has been dealt with extensively (e.g. by Degele, 2005, 2008; Hey et al., 1997; Jagose, 1996 (or, in German translation, 2005); Kraß, 2003, and others). It is rather a young discipline which has, however, rapidly spread from the US not only to Western Europe, but also to several Slavic countries. In the United States, Queer Theory devel-

oped first and Queer Linguistics followed, as its linguistic application. In the Czech context, however, we see the simultaneous rise of publications in the humanities focusing on Queer Theory and Queer Linguistics during the late 1990s.

Queer Theory critically reflects heteronormativity – i.e. "binary sex system which accepts only two sexes while it puts them on par with the gender role, gender identity and sexual orientation" (Degele, 2008, p. 88), however, it emphasizes also the naturalization and institutionalization of this concept, e.g. in legal systems, medicine or elsewhere in daily life. This heteronormativity (and all sexual identities at the same time) is revealed by Queer Studies as discursively constructed and, therefore, they are not essential and natural.[1]

1.1 The heteronormative concept is constituted by three elements (while their concordance is presumed): *sex*, *gender* and *sexual orientation*. *Sex* refers to the biological level constituted by the internal and external sex organs, chromosomes and hormones (male, female, intersex persons, etc.).[2] *Gender* includes the socially constructed differences between individual sexes, or one's own gender identity (man, woman, trans* persons, non-binary persons, etc.). *Sexual orientation* then refers to sex/gender of one's counterpart. Therefore, it is possible to say that *queer* is everything that does not correspond with the heteronormative concept which may be schematically indicated as the following triad: *male sex – masculine gender practice – desire for women; female sex – feminine gender practice – desire for men* (Motschenbacher, 2012, p. 95). However, it is necessary to point out that every queer identity is considered inferior by the dominant discourse while they are sanctioned as well – e.g. the contemporary absence of marriage for gay and lesbian couples in the Czech Republic or surgical adjustments of

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1   The meaning of the English word *heterosexuality* went through a rapid development from its origins in the middle of the 19th century – as evidenced by Katz (1990). The original sense of 'intense and morally abhorrent desire for sexual activities with the opposite sex' gave way to the sense of 'correct and normal sexual orientation, without necessarily involving any sexual acts'. The latter sense has been strongly institutionalized. The term has been used to create a norm and at the same time to identify deviations from this norm. A comparable diachronic study of the Czech context has not yet been published.

2   Nowadays, sex is seen rather as a continuum then as merely two different poles excluding each other.

children's genitalia of ambiguous biological sex (i.e. intersexuals) may be an example of those sanctions.

Therefore, Queer Linguistics (as an application of Queer Theory in linguistics) researches the language (discursive) representation of the sexualities.

1.2 In this article, whose aim is to analyse the contemporary state of the Czech Queer Linguistics, the author deals with the existing publications of queer topics in relation to the Czech language by the means of a metalinguistic perspective. Since the search engine *Union Catalogue of the Czech Republic*[3] does not provide any relevant results for English and Czech entries *queer linguistics, queer lingvistika, queer and language, queer a jazyk, heteronormativity* and *heteronormativita*, the articles which are analysed below were acquired by means of research in both foreign and domestic (Czech) potential monographs, conference proceedings and specialized journals. Therefore, the list of publications presented below does not claim to be complete.[4]

It is necessary to state that the reception of foreign queer linguistic literature (which is often an established component of linguistics elsewhere) as well as its development and application into the Czech environment (except for individual publications) has not come about yet. As evidenced by Kolek & Valdrová (2017) and Valdrová (2015, 2018), the topics of Gender Linguistic are gaining ground within Czech linguistics only slowly and with difficulty, despite its tradition of more than two decades;[5] it is therefore not surprising that more attention has not been paid to the potential queer linguistic topics in the context of Czech linguistics.

One of the consequences of this state of affairs is the lack of a generally accepted name of the discipline itself. There are several variants of the Czech term: a variant of an indeclinable adjective *queer lingvistika,* a compound *queerlingvistika* (used by Valdrová (2018)), a term *queerová lingvistika* (similarly to *genderová lingvistika*), or a general term *lingvistika sexuálních*

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3   www.caslin.cz

4   There are no more publications known even to Jana Valdrová, the only Czech gender linguist who is actively publishing. I hereby thank her for her assistance and comments.

5   The origins of publications worth analysing from the perspective of either Feminist or Gender Linguistics date back to the 1920s (see Kolek & Valdrová, 2017).

identit (which is also used by Valdrová (2018))[6] and *heteronormativně krit-ická lingvistika*. The author of this paper argues for the use of the term *queer lingvistika* which he considers to be the most convenient one. It is easily relatable to the international context due to its correspondence with the English term *queer linguistics*. Furthermore, the critical potential of the term is preserved as well.

The ignorance and insensitivity in relation to the gender and queer theoretical concepts mentioned above is the cause that Czech linguistics does not have enough experts in the field who would develop the field and topic further as well as touch upon the topic at their lectures at Czech universities. The fact that even Czech libraries (with a few exceptions) do not possess any foreign Queer Linguistic publication may serve as an indicator of the situation. Despite this scepticism, there are publications dealing with sexuality and sexual identities in relation to the Czech language. These publications are introduced in the following section of the present paper.

2 EXISTING QUEER-LINGUISTIC PUBLICATIONS

From the perspective of Czech Queer Linguistics, the year 2002 may be considered as the breaking point since two articles with a non-heteronormative topic were published in that year. One of them was authored by Zdeněk Sloboda under the title *Feminizace jazyka v homosexuální komunitě*. Based on his own observations over a period of several months, Sloboda describes here the lexical level of the language within the Prague gay community while he introduces three categories of words of feminine grammatical gender which are used within said community. The words of feminine grammatical gender are used instead of words of masculine grammatical gender (e.g. *holky* instead of *kluci; girls* instead of *boys*), use of feminine proper names instead of masculine proper names (*Petra* instead of *Petr*), or completely new words. Sloboda sees the reasons for the gay community's language feminization in either the degree of speakers' femininity or in the ironizing distance (as a member of gay community). Sloboda also stated the fashionable usage of feminine expressions even among individuals who do not express themselves femininely on

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6   Valdrová (2018) uses the term *lingvistika genderových a sexuálních identit*, while considering it an umbrella term for Feminist, Gender and Queer Linguistics.

a regular basis. In the article, Sloboda does not use the basic terms of queer linguistics, e.g. *heteronormativity* or the term *queer* itself.

The second publication of the year 2002 was a German article by Franz Schindler *On hledá jeho: Kontaktanzeigen tschechischer Homosexueller*, in which he analyses the dating advertisements of Czech gays from 1991 and 1999, while focusing on the descriptions of the advertisers, descriptions of the sought after partners, and the proposed types of relationship. In his content analysis of 160 dating advertisements in total (80 from 1991 and 80 from 1999) from the gay magazine SOHO, he focuses mainly on the exterior (attractivity, hair length and colour, eye colour), personal data and character traits. The desired relationship types can be divided into the following categories: long-term relationship, sexual encounters, and free time. The author compares not only the advertisements from both years but also the two groups with the advertisements by heterosexual persons – therefore, his work gets its heteronormatively critical dimension, mainly in treatises devoted to the topic of stereotypical assumptions of promiscuity or in the thinking about gays primarily as sexually oriented beings. Schindler confirmed the correlation between the gays' improving situation within the society and the language of the dating advertising.

In the article from 2013 „*Positiv denkende, natur- und kulturbegeisterte NR sucht passende SIE" Partizip I und II in Kontaktanzeigen* which analyses 100 German lesbian dating advertisements from EMMA magazine, Valdrová (2013a) foreshadows topics for German-Czech (or Czech) research in this field. Based on the observation, Valdrová formulates the following hypotheses: Czech lesbians use hedging strategies (e.g. humour, smileys, etc.) more frequently in the dating advertisements, they feel lonelier and they tend to believe less in strong relationships.

The next field constitutes the queer perspective in the onomastic research of given names and family names. Within this field, mainly the issue of unisex (neutral) given names and family names which are chosen by transgender persons during their transition phase is addressed. The latest (sixth) issue of *Jak se bude Vaše dítě jmenovat* (by Miroslava Knappová, 2017), which often serves as a basis for the registry entry of the name, includes only a limited list of possible names while the majority of them may give an exotic impression, thus causing unwanted attention or even stigmatization. Transgender

persons have also limited possibilities while choosing their family names since these are subject to grammatical neutrality: they may either take the suffix *-í* (e.g. *Kočí*), *-ů* (e.g. *Petrů*), or Slavic suffixes *-ych, ých, -ech, -ich, -iech*. Knappová does not take the critical perspective of gender or queer into consideration, which results in selected terminology – e.g. „treating trans-sexualism"[7] (Knappová, 2017, p. 93) – which Knappová considers merely a „a temporary period" (Knappová, 2017, p. 91). Other terminological ambi-guities are pointed out by Valdrová in a short summary of the stated issue from 2016, or in a book *Reprezentace ženství z perspektivy lingvistiky gen-derových a sexuálních identit* (2018).

The very first introduction of Queer Linguistics in the Czech language is in an appendix of a book by Valdrová (2018). This short treatise was written by Dennis Scheller-Boltz, who defines Queer Linguistics as a "field of research which deals with language mechanisms in relation to the identity construction in context of sex, gender and sexuality" (Scheller-Boltz in Valdrová 2018, p. 400), while all gender and sexual identities should be problematized; he also briefly mentions the differences between Gender and Queer Linguistics as well as their necessary co-operation and Queer Linguistics' application in many sub-linguistic fields. However, queer-focused notes are present throughout the mentioned work of Valdrová.

A Queer-related question was also sent to the editors of the Czech Language Studies journal *Naše řeč*. The response of the editorial staff was published in the section *Z jazykové poradny* in the 1/2018 issue. The question consisted of several sub-questions: the possibility of using words ženatý and *vdaná* for non-heteronormative persons in a same-sex relationship as well; the connection of the stated words with the opposite sex; suitability of a term *sezdaný* as a neutral alternative; and the existence of a linguistic publication dealing with this topic.

In their response, the editorial staff reproduced and further strengthened the status quo and heteronormative concepts since they mean that "the persons

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7   Knappová understands *transsexualism* in a strictly binary manner as a *change of sex*, in other words as the transition from one sex to the other. Consequently, she does not reflect the variety of gender identities. Transsexualism is seen as a medical diagnosis in the Czech Republic, which leads Knappová to talk about *a treating transsexualism*.

of the same sex may enter into a civil union while this term is already used"; additionally, they also remark that "in addition to the marriage, there will be an (equal) partnership while it is not possible to rule out the possibility that this state will be called with a circumlocution – 'living in a partnership'". The editorial staff does not reflect the fact that it is pointless to have two terms – *manželství* and *(registrované) partnerství* (even though considered equal institutes) – while it further divides, hierarchizes and thus discriminates non-heterosexual persons. Furthermore, the editorial staff does not linguistically reflect the inappropriateness of the term *registrované partnerství* – as it is aptly pointed out by the initiative and campaign for an equal marriage *Jsme fér*, „cars are registered, people are married". In the following part of the response, the editorial staff explain the origin of words *vdaná* (*married*; the term referring to women) and *ženatý* (*married*; the term referring to men), which is *ipso facto* heteronormatively based – "'vdát se' [referring to women] is an inflection form with the verb 'dát' ('to give'), a woman is given, the father gives her to a man, while a man […] received a woman". The fact that these are reflections of a patriarchal and heteronormative society in the language and that it is possible to change this language reflection as well as the situation within the society is not mentioned by the editorial staff. Therefore, they do not reflect on the power relationships based in the language.

The last field of Czech Queer Linguistics is the assessment of the existing proposals of means of gender-fair expressions from the perspective of their capability to mark non-heteronormative persons. This issue is dealt by Kolek (in print) in his article *Options for Labelling Non-heteronormative Persons in German-Czech Comparison*. In accordance with Valdrová (2013b), Kolek claims that both observed languages have to a great extent similar means of gender-fair expression. Some of them may serve to designate queer persons. The author considers the gender-neutral formulations the most suitable means; on the other hand, he considers usage of gender-specific forms to mark the non-heteronormative persons least suitable (e.g. *učitelky*$_{FEM}$ a učitelé$_{MASC;}$ teachers$_{FEM}$ and teachers$_{MASC}$) as they reflect the heteronormative concepts of societal division, while not admitting queer persons without adding an asterisk or an underscore, the application of which in the Czech language is also considered by the author in the article while he is the first

author to do so. In light of the richness of inflection in Czech, there are several ways of using the asterisk or underscore. Between the masculine and feminine ending (e.g. *učitel*ka, učitel* 'teacher' being the masculine and *učitelka* 'teacher' the feminine form), between two full forms (e.g. *učitelky*učitelé* 'teachers') or by using the short form (e.g. *učitelé*ky* 'teachers'). Alternatively, both forms can be used with the dynamic (i.e. moveable) underscore (e.g. *uč_itelé* and *učit_elky* 'teachers').

The number of publications dealing with Czech Queer Linguistics is not sufficient as there is not enough authors dealing with this very issue, and this also means that this subject matter is not dealt with at universities. Therefore, it is not possible to consider Czech Queer Linguistics an established field.

3 FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Despite the present state of Czech Queer Linguistics, it is possible to assume (and it is evinced by the question for the *Naše řeč* journal) that the demand for the queer-oriented publications will rise. A number of both existing and potential topics from abroad is offered by e.g. Motschenbacher (2010, 2011, 2012) or by Motschenbacher & Stegu (2013). Motschenbacher focuses on queer-linguistic topics which also belong into a number of other linguistic fields, i.e. semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, corpus linguistics, contrastive linguistics, but also into fields dealing with the language development of even the foreign language methodology. That is the evidence of a vast potential of Queer Linguistics research for any language.

In the following section, the author outlines a limited number of topics that he considers topical. Additionally, discursive and media analyses of queer topics within the Czech society (e.g. the current debate about marriage for everyone, former media reflection of a debate about civil partnership, or a comparative study of both debates) may be suitable topics for future research as well. Such studies may be realized by the means of various methods focusing on corpus analysis, topoi analysis, argumentation, etc. These queer-linguistic analyses may show how and how much the heteronormative patterns prevent the implementation of the act on marriage of gays and lesbians. A similar topic is the rainbow family – i.e. same-sex couples with children, or the public debate about adoption by same-sex couples.

In 2015, the organization *Trans*parent* was established – it pushes the rights of trans* persons[8], their publicity and emancipation within the society. This organization conducts research within the Czech trans* community, and organises meetings, public lectures and conferences. Some of the lectures were connected to language as well – e.g. ways of marking and the issue of first names and family names. The queer-linguistic analysis focused on the trans* persons may show in which media, how often, in which situations and why trans* persons are (not) shown, how they are (not) approached, what the topics of the talks are (not), etc.

One of the topical problems (mainly for the trans* and non-binary persons, but also for many translators) is the absence of a gender-neutral pronoun in the Czech language. In the publication mentioned above, Kolek mentions a possibility of a combination of pronouns of masculine and feminine grammatical gender (in the manner of Slovenian language, see Popič & Gorjanc, 2018; Vičar & Kern, 2017), while a graphic symbol (* or _) is put between those two representing the non-heteronormative persons.

Queer Linguistics is, however, not focused only on the non-heteronormative identities, therefore, the discursive construction of the heterosexuality and its critical reflection must not be omitted as well – a graphic example may be a development in the understanding of the marriage institute.

4 CONCLUSION

In the article, the author briefly introduced the ideas of Queer Theory and Queer Linguistics while focusing on the fundamental terms of *heteronormativity* and *queer*. Based on the situation of Czech Gender Linguistics, the current state of Czech Queer Linguistics was discussed together with the existing publications dealing with this field. Subsequently, the author showed that only a very small number of works dealing with the queer topic in relation to the Czech language was published despite the fact that it covers various topics within the field of Queer Linguistics: mainly the feminization of gays' language, analysis of gay's dating advertisements, marking of non-heteronormative persons and the issue of trans* persons' names. It would be interesting

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8   The asterisk here refers to the broader spectrum of (transgender) identities.

to monitor the development of those topics and to perform comparative analyses – the gays' language feminization may be compared not only diachronically but also within various gay communities in other larger (and smaller) Czech cities and towns; the gays' dating advertisements may be compared not only diachronically but also with the advertisements by lesbians regarding the development of internet dating services and mobile apps. The space for the future publication development of Czech Queer Linguistics is also provided by the highly socially relevant topics, such as the development of both gender-neutral given names and gender-neutral family names and the connected registry practice, as well as the possibilities of addressing queer persons. This field has a huge potential to reveal discursive constructions of sexual identities within the Czech environment and thus keep the pace with the societal development of the Czech Republic.

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ANALIZA ČEŠKEGA JEZIKA Z VIDIKA QUEER LINGVISTIKE

V kratkem znanstvenem prispevku analiziramo dosedanje raziskave, ki bi jih bilo mogoče uvrstiti na področje češkega kvirovskega jezikoslovja. Pri pojasnjevanju osnovnih idej kvirovske teorije in kvirovskega jezikoslovja se naslanjamo na pojma *heteronormativnost* in *kvir*, s pomočjo katerih pojasnjujemo predmet raziskovanja kvirovskega jezikoslovja. V nadaljevanju ponujamo možna češka poimenovanja za predmetno disciplino in na primeru češkega jezikoslovja družbenega spola iščemo razloge, zakaj se kvirovsko jezikoslovje v češkem jezikoslovju še ni uveljavilo. Kot možen vzrok poleg poimenovanja, ki za konzervativni del bohemistične skupnosti zveni eksotično in celo provokativno, obravnavamo predvsem pomanjkanje strokovne literature ter majhno število raziskovalk in raziskovalcev, ki se s to disciplino ukvarjajo.

Ključne besede: češčina, kvirovsko jezikoslovje, metalingvistična perspektiva, heteronormativnost