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## Message from the Co-President

The New Year began this year with a “changing of the guard”: after 6 years of dedicated service, Neil Bermel stepped down as the president of our organization in order to make time to serve as the chair of his department at Sheffield University. As his article in this newsletter shows, though, he remains a strong presence in our organization, and we are very glad to have his expertise to tap as we begin our term as co-presidents.

With this newsletter, we’d like to take the opportunity to ask the members of IATC what your views are on the organization, and how it can best serve your needs and interests. Are there any special projects that you would like to see the organization pursue in the next few years? Our original mission, as stated in 1994, was “to promote study of the Czech language,” with the following goals:

1. to facilitate contacts among teachers of Czech in North America by organizing meetings, conferences, seminars, and workshops
2. to facilitate contacts among teachers of Czech in North America by organizing meetings, conferences, seminars, and workshops to encourage research in language learning pedagogy, as well as development and updating of Czech teaching materials;
3. to publish a newsletter to serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas and information among teachers and students of Czech and the interested public;
4. to coordinate teaching programs of the Czech language among North American institutions;
5. to seek contacts and affiliations with Czech academic institutions;
6. to raise funds for scholarships, teaching programs and other activities mentioned above.

Under Neil Bermel’s presidency, the emphasis on North American institutions was broadened to a more international scope, which we fully support and would like to extend further. We encourage all members to take a more active role in the organization, with a special invitation to those from the Czech Republic and from countries previously not represented in IATC’s activities. The newsletter is an excellent way to become involved, through book reviews, articles on any topic relating to the study of Czech, or announcements of relevant conferences, meetings and programs. We are working to strengthen our ties with the Czech-based Asociace učitelů češtiny jako cizího jazyka (AUČCJ) and with other Czech institutions, such as the Ústav pro jazyk český, and encourage presenters at AUČCJ meetings and other conferences to publish abridged versions of their presentations in our newsletter, as a way of promoting contact between IATC members and disseminating information about the field of *Bohemistika*. The article in this newsletter on the difficulties that native speakers of English face when learning Czech was first presented at an AUČCJ meeting, and reflects a collaborative-style effort that may be fruitful for future projects: the topic was first suggested by the board of AUČCJ, and the paper resulted from a poll of about a dozen colleagues and students of Czech. As a further collaborative project, we would like to encourage members to contact us if you are interested in working on a survey of Czech heritage students, who grow up speaking some Czech but have limited literacy, with a long-term goal of assessing their needs and addressing the general issue of heritage learning on an international level. If you have other ideas on directions that you’d like to see the organization pursue in the next few years, we encourage you to contact us.

We’ll look forward to hearing from you in the coming months.

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## The Challenges of Czech: From the Perspective of English-Speaking Students

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This article, an abridged and adapted version of a paper presented at the December 2006 meeting of AUČCJ, addresses the features of Czech that native speakers of English find the most challenging. It is based on a poll of twelve language instructors (non-native speakers of Czech), and six students from past Czech courses at University of California, Los Angeles. In the following I will focus on the difficulties that students face in Czech grammar and pragmatics, leaving the topics of pronunciation and the lexicon aside for a different occasion.

### CASE

To students, case stands out as the most troubling feature of Czech. Every one of the students mentioned it, and one student wrote:

The most challenging thing I found in learning the Czech language initially was the concept of a case in general. It took me a few months to wrap my mind around the idea of a case, because I had never heard of one before. It was actually really upsetting for a month or so. Some of the declension patterns seemed difficult for people used to hearing Spanish and other Romance languages, such as the Accusative declension for animate males. It ends in an “a?” I remember one of my guy friends in Cz getting mad because he said he wasn't female. I felt it was very counter intuitive too. Also, declining nouns, particularly names. A proper noun seems absolutely unchangeable, especially my name; it gets very confusing.

The need for case often does not make sense to our students when they first begin studying Czech, because it is not a prominent feature of English. Of course, it does exist in the English personal pronouns: “I see him” vs. “He sees me.” However, most speakers of English are not consciously aware that they adjust pronominal forms for non-subject

use, and even basic terms like “direct/indirect object” are completely foreign to many of our students.

As one teacher noted, students’ lack of understanding of the conceptual basis of case often leads them to overgeneralize the new rules that they are currently learning. Common mistakes include the overuse of the case that they are currently studying. For example, when focusing on the accusative case, students produce sentences like:

– Tomáše vidí Karla. vs. Tomáš vidí Karla.

Similarly, when studying the locative they may produce sentences like:

-- V Praze je v Česku vs. Praha je v Česku

-- na hodině češtině, na hodině na češtině vs. na hodině češtiny

As they concentrate on mastering the endings of nouns, they may also extend these endings to adjectives:

-- v Jindříšce ulici (// "v Americe")

Another difficulty in mastering the case system stems from the need to memorize so many forms. A second-year student wrote:

I think the hardest thing for me in Czech language **specifically** was not the cases per se, which I think I could have learned in a “bare bones” way—but all the “frills” and “bells and whistles” around them—i.e., that all the pronouns (he, she, his, hers) in all their forms changed ALL THE TIME depending on case—and that words like “everyone” and “this” and “that” also changed all the time around the cases. This just felt endlessly daunting... and, to be honest, kind of annoying.

Until our students begin to internalize the conceptual bases of case, the seemingly infinite set of endings that they have to memorize can appear to be just a matter of “frills and bells and whistles.” They do not understand why Czech needs so many endings that make learning the language so very difficult for them. And as this quote shows, having to memorize so many endings causes them no small measure of emotional anguish.

In addition, Czech manipulates case in ways that challenge a native speaker of English to think in completely new ways. For example, students are always intrigued by the opening line of *Švejk*: “Tak nám zabili Ferdinanda.” The classic translation by Cecil Parrott transposes the dative pronoun with a possessive modifier: “And so they’ve killed our Ferdinand...” A more recent translation emphasizes an experiential meaning: “So, they’ve done it to us, they’ve killed our Ferdinand.”<sup>1</sup> Czech often presents an English possessive relation as a dative-case experience: ukradli nám auto (they’ve stolen our car), nešlap mi na nohu (don’t step on my foot), neudělej si flek na blůze (don’t get a stain on your blouse). In my experience, the emphasis on experience over possession is very appealing to students intellectually. The idea that in their essence death, theft, getting a stain, and so on involve an experience is very real to them, and it makes sense to them. Likewise, they can understand and appreciate the conceptualization of basic weather conditions, age, feelings, and so on as experiences: je mi zima, je mi dvacet, je mi smutno. However, comprehension and production are two very different tasks. When their attention is focused on dative constructions, students are able to produce correct sentences, but in free conversation the dative case construction is usually not the first means of expression that comes to mind, since English requires such markedly different conceptual encoding. A student is much more likely to say „Někdo ukradl můj počítač“ than „Někdo mi ukradl počítač“ (and until the highest levels of study an impersonalized construction like „Ukradli mi počítač“ is almost never heard in the spontaneous speech of native speakers of English).

Constructions with reflexive dative *si* are especially problematic. As opposed to languages like French or Spanish, English does not have morphologically independent reflexive particles of this type, so this is something else that is new for our students. As one teacher noted, it is hard for students to hear the difference between *se* and *si*, and hard to remember when to use each of them. Students have a great deal of difficulty mastering distinctions like *Umyju se* versus *Umyju si ruce* even in written form, since the underlying conceptual differentiation of accusative vs. dative is new to them. An advanced student noted:

I frequently omitted the particles [se and si] which completely changed the meanings of my sentences.

<sup>1</sup> See the discussion of this sentence and other issues involved in translating *Švejk* at <http://www.svejkcentral.com/The%20Report.html>

He was aware that his omission of *se* and *si* caused communicative difficulties, but unable to overcome this obstacle, even at his high level of Czech (two years of study in the United States plus one year in the Czech Republic).

#### ASPECT

Moving from nominal to verbal categories, students and teachers alike commented on the challenge of mastering Czech aspect. Interestingly, this comment recurred more in the responses of teachers and advanced learners than among beginning and intermediate students. In my own classes, several introductory students have told me that they find the chapter on aspect a relief, in fact, because it is so much more conceptual, and they are more able to meet a conceptual challenge than the rote task of memorizing. At the most basic level, Czech aspect is not particularly difficult; it is easy to perceive the differences between simple sentences like the following:

Celý den jsme hráli fotbal. vs. Vyhráli jsme 4-3.

Jedli jsme koláče. vs. Snědli jsme všechny koláče.

The basic idea of process vs. summing up a result as the core of Slavic aspect is a relatively easy concept to master. However, as students’ knowledge of Czech increases, they begin to realize that the Czech verbal system is not nearly as simple as it may first seem. An advanced student wrote:

The simple fact that conjugating a verb in present form can have a future meaning (sometimes!) was difficult. And while written explanations and translations in English help a student understand the concept, it was only until I lived in the country when I more clearly understood how the aspect of a verb can have many meanings and connotations which cannot be translated directly.

A seemingly simple question like “Kolik knedlíků sníš?” can carry many different meanings: how many *will* you eat, how many *can* you eat, how many do you *want* to eat? Two main factors complicate comprehension for a native speaker of English: first, the implicit encoding of modality, which must be expressed explicitly in English (*will/can/want*); and second, the lack of a direct correspondence between aspect and tense. In an example like this, the perfective non-past can apply to a specific situation, with future meaning, or it can have more general scope, with a non-actual, omnitemporal meaning.

Another student wrote,

When to use perfective vs. imperfective verbs is a little tricky, and from what I can gathered over the summer [i.e., during a stay in the Czech Republic], in large part up to the whims of the speaker.

#### WORD ORDER

Another feature that recurred consistently in the responses of both students and teachers was word order. Mastering Czech word order is extremely difficult for a native speaker of English. A number of people commented on the difficulty of placing clitic pronouns correctly, particularly in speech. One teacher wrote,

The hardest thing for me was to place the enclitic pronouns properly without thinking about it. The rules were clear, but I needed to think about them each time I spoke, which slowed me down and, I imagine, made my conversation partners climb the walls. I stuck to it, though, and in time it did become automatic. The relief was enormous. One I had gotten over that hurdle I felt I could speak more or less normally. I would therefore advise all teachers of Czech who teach all varieties of foreigners to drill, drill, drill on the enclitics.

Native speakers of English tend to have difficulty mastering the basic concept of *aktuální členění* as the main factor determining word order in Czech. One of the teachers wrote:

My students often have a hard time figuring out who is doing what to whom/what due to their reliance on normal English word order. They often assume the first noun in a sentence has to be the subject.

This assumption creates problems both in comprehension and in production. Czech principles of word order force a native speaker of English to think in a new way. One of the intermediate-level students wrote that...

...it becomes necessary to really think out and know exactly what you want to express before you say it. I think this makes it easier to write Czech than it is to speak it in a conversation, especially a spontaneous conversation. The entire word order concept is so different from English that I find it really daunting to learn how to emphasize certain words, and putting the most important word... at the end.

For example, the word order of an everyday sentence like "Platbu kartou hlaste předem" seems perfectly natural to a native speaker of Czech: *platbu kartou* serves as the *východisko*, while *předem* is placed at the end as the main part of the *jádro*. A native speaker of English, however, is used to a fixed word order of subject-verb-direct object, so to him or her it may seem that *platbu kartou* should be the subject and *předem* the direct object.

Similarly, compare native Czech and English formulations of the following:

Czech: Pivo si dám možná později.

English: Možná si dám pivo později.

When offered beer, a Czech assumes the beer to be the *východisko*, and therefore positions it sentence-initially. A native speaker of English, however, places *pivo* after the verb, as the dominant factor is its grammatical role as the direct object. In addition, the modal particle *možná* is placed at the beginning, as a frame to the whole statement.

An introductory student chose not to face the challenge of *aktuální členění*, opting instead for a simplified coping strategy:

I would stick to the word order of English, and try to use inflection for emphasis, rather than word position, which is obviously incorrect.

Difficulties with Czech word order apply to learners of Czech at all levels. One teacher noted that:

Even advanced students will sometimes misinterpret the meaning of a sentence by ignoring the endings in favor of word order.

Another teacher voiced a concern that many us continue to face even after many years of studying and teaching the language:

While I know the rules governing clitics and have a basic grasp of *jádro/východisko*, I still can't always identify or predict what feels like "old info" or "new/emphasized info" for a Czech.

To a non-native speaker, even with years of experience with Czech, distinctions between SV and VS order, such as the following, can remain an unsolvable mystery.

-- To je skvělé!

-- Je to skvělé! (example from a student's response)

### PRAGMATIC FACTORS

While pragmatic factors tend not to be emphasized in language courses and textbooks, a basic level of sociocultural competence is essential for our students to be able to function in Czech society. One teacher who has taught students at all levels noted:

One of the biggest problems I find hard to crack is *tykání* and *vykání*, *ahoj* and *Dobrý den*. There is little sense even for advanced students to feel the difference. Related to this issue is speech register, and behavior-related issues (how to be friendly with professors, can you be friendly with professors, how?...)

Teachers of Czech may consider these false steps as signs of arrogance rather than culturally-related mistakes. But textbooks rarely illustrate how to behave in the culture, e.g. how to behave as a good guest, how to entertain guests, how to listen to people.

American students in particular are used to more informal relationships with their professors, and especially with their Czech instructors, since our classes tend to be very small and personalized. Saying "hi" to a professor is completely acceptable within an American student's home-country environment, and its use is perceived as a sign of friendliness. The idea that saying "ahoj" to a professor could seem insulting is foreign to our students and has to be explained explicitly. Similarly, overuse of *tykání* often stems not from a lack of respect, but from a wish to seem friendly. For many of our students (especially in California), using formal means of address represents a shift from their basic cultural norms; they have to constantly remind themselves to avoid using overly familiarizing language forms. Given the grammatical difficulties that students of Czech must concentrate on just to get meaning across, it is not surprising that these pragmatic concerns are often overlooked. At the same time, though, pragmatic aspects of the language must be emphasized in our language classes, because, as the colleague cited above noted, pragmatic mistakes are often interpreted not as insufficient knowledge of the language code, but instead on a personal level, as a behavioral or even character flaw of the speaker.

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**Private Correspondence in Corpora and  
Research: Korpus soukromé korespondence  
and Čeština v současné soukromé  
korespondenci**

Neil Bermel  
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Those of us who are interested in using corpora for learning more about the structure and usage of Czech are by now used to the rich offerings that come regularly out of the Czech Republic's various linguistic institutes. Corpora have become somewhat of a Czech specialty, both in the variety of text types offered and the sophistication of their tagging and annotation.

After the groundbreaking Prague Dependency Corpus from the Applied Linguistics Institute of the Mathematics and Physics Faculty of Charles University came the multiple offerings of the Czech National Corpus Institute, which included the first large-scale tagged corpus of contemporary Czech, called SYN2000. Both the corpus itself and the programs that are used to tag it and interface with it have become models for use in other countries.

Since then, we have had SYN2005, the Prague and Brno Spoken Corpora (PMK and BMK respectively), the diachronic corpus DIAKORP, and now the Corpus of Private Correspondence (*Korpus soukromé korespondence* or KSK), the last of which has been designed and produced in the Czech Language Institute of Masaryk University, Brno in cooperation with other departments at that university. The research group has also produced a manual and descriptive booklet, *Čeština v současné soukromé korespondenci*, which describes the corpus and indicates potential research directions for using it.

A corpus, for those who have not yet encountered one, is a structured, annotated database of texts that, when paired with a query processor, can be searched in various ways. When we interact with a search engine like Google, we are searching for strings of text in an unstructured database (the Internet). The query processor looks for these strings in various ways, according to the instructions we give it. If surrounded by quotation marks, it looks only for examples in exactly the format we've given; if we use certain recognized signs, such as the plus or minus, it will mark terms as "necessary" or "excluded."

When the query processor returns the results, it also follows protocols set up by its designers, which aim, for example, to display results in terms of their

highest relevance or the perceived importance of the site. Some search engines, like the Czech Jyxo or Morfeo, can take this one step further and "know" how to decline and conjugate, correctly retrieving, for example, forms like *přijal, přijat, přijetí* when we search for *přijmout*.

Czech corpora have, in common with most corpora produced world wide, focused on several varieties of language. The hundred-million-form corpora SYN2000 and SYN2005 are both corpora predominantly of printed texts (although they do contain small amounts of unedited texts). The much smaller spoken corpora PMK and BMK are based on transcripts of spontaneous, unplanned conversations.

Each corpus is balanced to ensure a spread of different text types. In the case of SYN2000 and SYN2005, this meant taking a sample of different genres of publications by a variety of authors and publishers from varying time depths. In the case of the spoken corpora, this entailed getting a distribution of speakers of different genders, ages and educational backgrounds and varying the topic of their discussions.

This balancing is always disputable and controversial (someone will always find lacunae or argue with the percentages of text types or speakers represented), but its goal is to show the full variety of usage across the language, and to avoid as much as possible the distortion that would occur if one text type or speaker type were over-represented.

The particular composition of these corpora has focused our attention so far on certain kinds of language. Virtually all printed texts have undergone some sort of editorial intervention: editing for content, for style, for consistency, spelling, and grammar.

Unplanned spoken discourse, on the other hand, represents the opposite end of the scale: it takes place in real time, cannot be edited, displays syntax at marked odds with that of standard written Czech and is subject to transactional pressures that are not felt in monologic texts.

Both printed language and unscripted spoken language have been at the center of philological concern for much of linguistic history, and corpora like the KSK now offer the possibility of filling a gap in our research into language by offering insight into hitherto hard-to-research text types. The KSK is concerned with private correspondence; that is, it is composed of unedited written texts not intended for public consumption. As such, it has the potential to shed light not only on the way we write, but on the way we write when there is no editor or mass audience looking over our shoulder.

The KSK has three component parts, each oriented around a particular text type: letters, e-mails, and text messages. There are approximately 3000 private letters in the subcorpus KSK-DOPIŠY, a further 1500 e-mails in the second subcorpus KSK-EMAILY, and approximately 2000 text messages in text files SSK-SMS1 and SSK-SMS2. Although the manual does not give the size of the corpus any more precisely than this, the Czech National Corpus Institute estimates the size of the letter corpus KSK-DOPIŠY at 800,000 words.

The corpus is currently available as a set on two CDs from the Czech Language Institute of Masaryk University, Brno. For those who have access to the Czech National Corpus, the corpus KSK-DOPIŠY is available, although the version there is neither lemmatized nor tagged, meaning that you can only search for specific forms; finding, for example, all forms of a word requires a certain amount of creativity.

*Čeština v současné soukromé korespondenci* gives a picture of the state of the corpus. The letters constituting the KSK-DOPIŠY subcorpus represent a variety of correspondents, and each document is tagged for a variety of different sorts of information, including the author's gender, age, dialect, education and. "Dialogic" elements are also captured, including the relationship between writer and addressee, the date of writing, and the addressee's age, gender, and education. The letters and e-mails come from the period 1990–2005.

There is some attempt at capturing a spread of different correspondents, although the corpus is not precisely balanced as to the entire population of the country. Female correspondents outnumber male by over 4:1, and Moravia is disproportionately represented in the correspondents' dialects, with only 24% of the texts from Bohemian dialects. The letters tend to have been written by those in the age group 15-30 and with elementary or high school education only; both figures are just over 70%. They are also predominantly written to friends (65%), rather than family or partners.

The SMS texts, on the other hand, are not presented as a corpus; the authors report that due to their atypical appearance, various methods of shortening words, typos, etc., it would have been difficult to make a usable corpus out of them. Instead, they are presented as two text files; SMS-1 contains all the text messages sent to 54 recipients in the course of one week (a different week in the case of each recipient), while SMS-2 contains all the text messages received by one person in the course of a year.

The research team that compiled the KSK has already conducted a number of analyses using the

corpus, which are detailed in *Čeština v současné soukromé korespondenci*. These give some idea of the features this corpus displays more prominently than, say, corpora of published materials. For instance, it is possible to ascertain whether certain features are more characteristic of male or female correspondents' language, and, with some hard graft, we can follow the use of Common Czech features in the speech of correspondents from various regions.

The body of *Čeština v současné soukromé korespondenci* consists of four "themes," which draw on these previously conducted analyses and suggest ways in which the corpus can be used to enrich our understanding of personal correspondence.

Theme 1 is "Correspondence as a source of understanding the territorial, social and functional differentiation of contemporary Czech." In this section, several phonological and morphological features of e.g. Common Czech vs. Standard Czech have been fully logged to determine their frequency in the correspondence corpora.

Theme 2 is "Correspondence texts as a material source of lexicological research and lexicographic work," which focuses on the extent of univerbation in the corpora.

Theme 3 is "Correspondence texts as a source of understanding current orthographic trends." This section outlines some of the major issues in the implementation of orthography in private correspondence.

Theme 4 is "Letters from contemporary young people," including work on formulas and formats, humor and creativity, foreign-language elements, and gender differences. This is the longest and most fully elaborated section, drawing on a variety of articles already in press and to appear.

Theme 5 is "Electronic correspondence: E-mails and text messages." This section is primarily devoted to outlining the differences between electronic correspondence and printed correspondence; while it does not bring to bear any numerical analyses of data, it suggests a number of lines of possible enquiry for future research.

Emboldened by the suggestions in the manual, I decided to test the differences between the content of the KSK and written corpora. I ran two sets of searches, one on a lexical phenomenon and one on a grammatical phenomenon.

My lexical test involved the competition between the words *kniha* and *knížka*. Although there is a semantic difference here (*book* vs. *little book*), the latter often replaces the former in speech. The following searches returned all forms of the word except the dative/locative sg.:

"kni[h][^ok].\*" – 75 tokens in the KSK vs. 21,155 in SYN2000

"kníže?k.\*" – 171 tokens in the KSK vs. 5,840 in

The proportions in SYN2000 show *kniha* predominating, with 78.4% of all tokens. In the much smaller KSK-DOPIŠY, however, it constitutes only 30.5% of all tokens, indicating that the diminutive seems here to be the more frequent form.

For grammatical phenomena, I looked at the instrumental plural in *-ama*. Here KSK returned 677 examples (searching on ".\*ama" with a negative filter on the forms "[Ss]ama"). There are a few irrelevant forms among the most common words (*Adama, rukama, nohama, tama, reklama, drama*), giving a final total of 621 tokens. The frequency distribution shows this ending is most common with words from everyday spoken Czech: *holkama* (88), *klukama* (72), *děčkama* (37), *kámoškama* (11), *kamarádkama* (10), *chlapama* (9).

I then ran the same search in SYN2000 (searching on ".\*ama" with negative filters on "[Ss]ama", "[Rr]ukama", "[Nn]ohama" and a positive filter on "tag=NN..7.\*" to leave only forms tagged as instrumental). SYN2000 had correspondingly more irrelevant forms swept up in my original search, but the ability to search it by tag cleared most of them out, leaving a more manageable 3701 tokens. Here again the top scorers were *klukama* (161), *holkama* (138), but then followed *zubama* (60), *hlavama* (45), *očkama* (44), *botama* (39), *horama* (37) and so forth.

KSK clearly contains examples of these non-standard forms far out of proportion to its size. If we scaled up KSK to the same size as SYN2000, we would expect it to have over 77,000 such tokens – roughly 21 times what is in SYN2000. KSK would thus seem to be a particularly rich environment for written examples of these non-standard forms.

A few searches were thus enough to convince me of the objective value of this resource to researchers. Anyone interested in closer work with the KSK is recommended to contact the Corpus's lead author, Dr. Zdeňka Hladká, [zdena@phil.muni.cz](mailto:zdena@phil.muni.cz). Further information can also be found in the following publications:

Hladká, Zdeňka a kol. 2005. *Čeština v současné soukromé korespondenci (dopisy, e-mail, SMS)*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita.

Český národní korpus. <http://ucnk.ff.cuni.cz>.

#### Conference announcement

The Institute for the Czech Language (Ústav pro jazyk český) is organizing a conference on "**Gramatika a korpus**", to be held September 25-27, 2007 in Liblice. For more information, please see the conference site, available at: <http://www.ujc.cas.cz/akce/>.

#### CZECHOSLOVAK SOCIETY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

##### SVU STUDENT AWARDS FOR THE YEAR 2007 Dr. JOSEPH HASEK AWARD

The Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences (SVU) is announcing a competition for the 2007 Dr. Joseph Hasek student awards. The names of the winners will be announced in the Society's newsletters.

The main purpose of the Society's awards is to generate and encourage scholarly interest in Czech and Slovak affairs among university students living outside the Czech and Slovak republics. There will be one prize for the best undergraduate and one for the best graduate study dealing with some aspect of Czech and/or Slovak history, politics, or culture. The winners will receive the \$250 Dr. Joseph Hasek award, a year's membership in the Society, which includes a year's subscription to the Society's newsletter, and a Certificate of Merit.

The following rules apply:

- 1) The paper must be submitted **by the professor** in whose class it was presented and should be accompanied by his recommendation.
- 2) The study must have been written for an undergraduate or graduate course during the academic year 2006-2007. Chapters of theses or dissertations are not admissible.
- 3) The deadline for submission is **MAY 15, 2007**.
- 4) The study essay should be submitted in triplicate to professor Vera Borkovec, 12013 Kemp Mill Road, Silver Spring, MD 20902. It must be typewritten, double-spaced and submitted in Czech, Slovak, or any of the major Western languages (English, French or German).
- 5) The Student Awards Committee which will judge the quality of the submitted essays consists of:  
Prof. Ivo Feierabend (San Diego State University), Prof. Milan Hauner (University of Wisconsin), and Chair, Prof. Vera Borkovec (American University)
- 6) Submitted papers are not returned.

**Department of Czech and Comparative Literature,  
Faculty of Arts, Charles University,  
Prague,  
and Austrian Cultural Forum in Prague**

are calling for papers for an international conference

**The Landscape without Qualities.  
Literature and Central Europe**

held October 23 – 25, 2007 in Prague,  
Czech Republic,  
at the Austrian Cultural Forum in Prague  
(Jungmannovo nám. 18, Praha 1)  
and Faculty of Arts, Charles University,  
Prague (nám. Jana Palacha 2, Praha 1).

**The conference is held under the  
auspices Karel Schwarzenberg,  
the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Czech  
Republic.**

Please, submit your applications with the specification of your topic (title, 300 words abstract) via e-mail to: [Petr.Bilek@ff.cuni.cz](mailto:Petr.Bilek@ff.cuni.cz) or [t\\_dimter@post.cz](mailto:t_dimter@post.cz), or in writing addressed to:  
Ústav české literatury a literární vědy FF UK  
nám. Jana Palacha 2,  
116 38 Praha 1  
Czech Republic  
marking „The Landscape without Qualities“ on the envelope.

The book is not a masterpiece of literature. It is simple descriptive prose that follows the life peripeties of a Czech woman from her early childhood till her late years. The language is simple, almost impoverished. The timeline is chronological, narrated in the first person. There are no big dramas and emotional depths in the descriptions of people's deaths, women's mistreatment, child abuse, and the horror of living under the threat of death during the Nazi occupation and Communist domination. All of it is there in the form of a simple exposition that could be called a list of happenings. Yet, once you finish this book, you get a picture of a time that was about a search for ways to survive, not a search for happiness. It stays with you even after you close the book not because of some eloquent descriptions of the countryside or complex book plan. There is none of that. It haunts you because of the tragic dimension of this simple life, in which not even survival matters. The only moment of total freedom is when one decides to take one's own life. When life becomes too hard, there is always this exit available.

There is a wealth of information contained in this autobiography and it should be read by everyone, who wants to learn about the motivations for the Czech immigration to the New World in the twentieth century.

Antonína Drbohlavová was born in 1905 in the Czech village of Rovensko, in Bohemia, which was at that time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. While she never traveled abroad, she lived in four countries, under five different political regimes and two occupations. She survived all her siblings and cousins, whose deaths were caused by the neglect of overworked mothers, poverty, diseases, and suicides. She outlived one husband who died because of consumption, one child, who committed suicide, and several live-in boyfriends, whom she could not marry lest she would lose her widow's pension that kept her children fed. Her education ended at the age of fourteen, when she had to take care of her invalid mother and the garden that fed her siblings. Then, it did not seem out of the ordinary; that was what was expected from a girl. She was diagnosed with clinical depression toward the end of her life. There remains, however, a nagging question. Is it a real depression or is it a lucid assessment of her life? Could anybody in her circumstances escape depression?

The region where she was born is called the Czech Paradise (Český ráj). It contains beautiful forests, rivers, and rock formations that had been admired by writers such as Goethe, Rilke, Mácha, as well as the royalty of Europe. It has been a popular tourist attraction for the past two centuries. It has

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## **Book Reviews**

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**Welner Sylvia and Kevin Welner. *Small Doses of Arsenic. A Bohemian Woman's Story of Survival.* Hamilton Books, Lanham, Maryland. 2005 145 pages. \$25.00**

The strength of the *Small Doses of Arsenic* is in its simplicity. This book is based on letters written by an old woman to her son who immigrated to the USA in 1968. In it the old woman retraces her family and the fate of countless members of her extended clan. She includes in it not only her in-laws but also her neighbors. In short she talks of her family as it formed itself through the chance of marriages, deaths, inheritance and proximity of dwellings.

not been, however, a paradise for farmers who have lived on this limestone filled land. In the first half of the twentieth century the infant mortality was staggering, the percentage of population suffering from consumption was sky high, violence towards children and women endemic. There was no doctor to be had. And when there was one available, it meant that the family had to sell a cow to afford his visit. It was more economical to pay for a funeral than for a doctor. And many times there were popular and customary cures such as arsenic ingestion. If the person died afterwards, it was God's will.

The details about peasant life in the Czech Lands that come from this short book have simple immediacy that is naturalistic and bridges cultures and time.

I recommend this book to anybody who would like to learn more about the lives of people born in this region; people who lived through the horrible last century that brought forward two world wars and three oppressive political systems: the Empire, Nazism and Communism. The life of Antonína Drbohlavová shows the unintended consequences of lofty but misguided politics, such as material misery, fear of death, and ethnic hatred with numerous ethnic cleansings. There is no energy left for enjoyment when every bit of one's strength is exhausted in the acquisition of a single meal.

Mila Saskova-Pierce  
University of Nebraska

The book can be ordered from Rowman & Littlefield,  
15200 NBN Way  
Blue Ridge Summit  
PA 17214  
Ph 1-800-462-6420  
or [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

**Eckert, Eva. *Stones o the Prairie: Acculturation in America*. Slavica, 2007 431 pages. \$29.95.**

Eva Eckert's new work, *Stones on the Prairie: Acculturation in Texas*, investigates the saga of the Czechs and Moravians fleeing starvation, *robota*, religious repression, and seeking a land where they may be free to live as they please. The story of this wave of peasant immigration, primarily from Moravia, is a difficult one to trace. From the 1840s through the 1910s, they trickled and poured through the port at Galveston, Texas, to seek their fortunes in the abundant Texas soil. It is in this land that their story is written. Through arduous field-work, using eye-witness accounts, oral history, newspapers, and especially analyses of tombstone inscriptions, the

transformation of this community, from isolationist to acculturated, is documented by Eckert in the most complete fashion to date.

The author's argument centers on the use of gravestone inscriptions in order to analyze the extent to which the Moravian and Czech community in Texas had acculturated itself to the American world over time. In this, the author draws a distinct marker: linguistic proficiency and use as a marker of identity. The most literate immigrant group to ever come to the United States and until World War II having a much larger press than their English or German neighbors, the Czech-speaking immigrants to Texas would gradually lose their mother tongue, despite their best efforts. Their cultural awareness forged in the National Revival, however, would remain constant down through the generations.

Not merely a linguistic analysis, but also an accounting of the history of the community, the work traces the stories of immigrants and their families in this new land. Eckert follows the history of the community extremely precisely. Through a combination of documents archived in Prague and in Texas, such as diaries, newspapers, church records, and oral history, she constructs a concise retelling of the story of a people. They came to Texas for many reasons, the Moravian Brethren among them for religious freedom, most for the abundant, inexpensive, fertile land, but all came to give their children something better. The author juxtaposes the political obligation and over-bearing Austrian monarchical state of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the open-range and American do-as-you-please attitude towards life to paint a landscape of peasants seeking their own rule, escaping domination by Germanic overlords. The truth of immigration, as told through the diaries and accounts of several individuals, a Brethren minister, a merchantwoman, and others, is the hard life that awaited them in this new land. As the author recalls from her own experiences in Texas, the stifling heat and open plains contrast sharply with the compact, temperate, neat existence of Moravia and Bohemia. From black, fertile soil that they wrested from the praries, raising churches and settlements, such as Hostýn, Nový Tábor, and Praha, they congregated and settled together in this new land. Eckert's account follows the gradual acculturation of the population, largely agrarian and isolationist, as they turned from focus inside their community and old homeland, to the affairs and culture of their new home. They set themselves apart from their Anglo, German, Polish, African-American and Hispanic neighbors as harder-working and more pious, and in their isolation, created suspicion amongst the Americans. Until the First World War, a constant stream of immigration

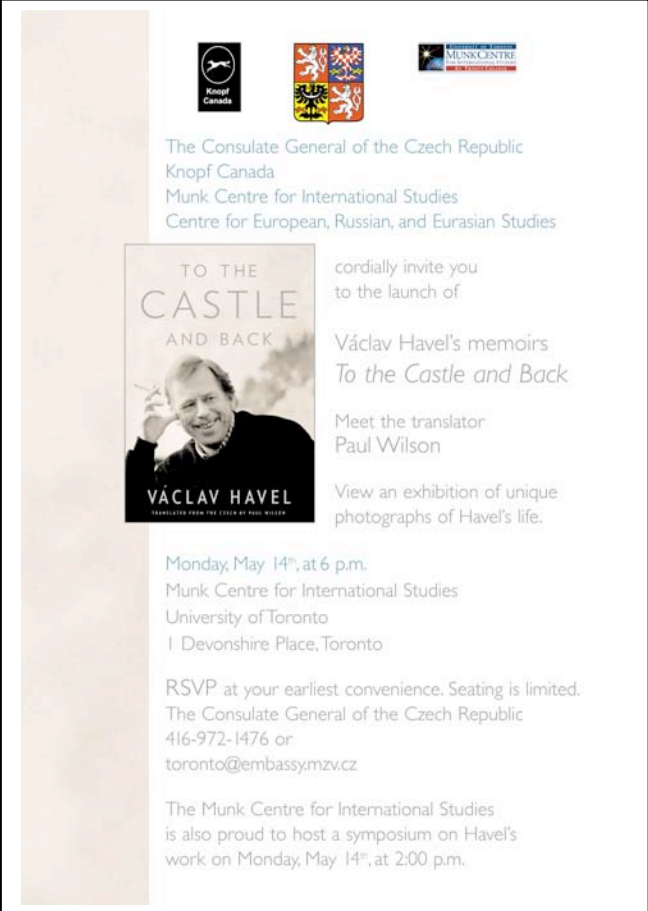
kept the community vitalized, but with the coming of the Czechoslovak state, then the Facists, and finally the Communists, the Texas population found itself alone in a strange land. From 1919 to present, the community had gradually turned outward, the settlements largely left empty, with only their churches and graveyards, the very core of their identity, left standing.

As Eckert clearly describes, the Czech language could not have been more precious to these people. Not far removed from the National Revival, the fear of language loss played so prominently in the collective minds of the people that it was preached over and sanctified as the basis of their identity. Eckert's work focuses intensely on this concept, the issue of language as an identity marker, contrasting the Czech people with their neighbors, and ultimately, their loss of their language. The shift towards English, as it occurred, caused divisions and mourning among the older members of the community. As the decades and generations from Europe would pass, the American world would assume center-stage in the minds of these Czech and Moravian people, now quickly taking up the title "Texas-Czech." Use of English would also creep into tombstone inscriptions. The familiar, European column-esque markers, replete with life-stories etched into their faces give way to commercial marble markers with a very few details written in ever-degrading Czech, until finally English took full control. Indeed, over the years, English words worked their way into Czech language, just as German had in the Old World. It is Eckert's assertion that with the loss of Czech on grave markers, one may declare the once-vibrant Czech communities dead, as their mother tongue is no longer an every-day vital language. Culture, however, has lived on despite linguistic shift, and even those who are or were mostly fluent in Czech only exchange a very few formulaic phrases now.

Overall, Eckert's work presents a bountiful, accurate, and unbiased assessment of the change of the longest-lived Czech diasporic community, which largely retained its own settlements and language for over 100 years. When this reviewer spoke to the author, she stated that she would like to add thanks to the enrichment that Texas Czech culture has provided to her life over the past ten years. As a native of the community on which she is writing, this reviewer can attest to the veracity of her assertions and the tenacity of the research undertaken. While the language has certainly passed away in most places, one may have the treat of hearing it when old friends gather, many now in their eighties and nineties, or in the annual Czech

masses said in the mother tongue in honor of Saints Cyril and Methodius.

John Tomeček  
University of Texas at Austin



The poster features logos for Knopf Canada, the Czech Republic coat of arms, and the Munk Centre. The text reads: "The Consulate General of the Czech Republic, Knopf Canada, Munk Centre for International Studies, Centre for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies. cordially invite you to the launch of Václav Havel's memoirs *To the Castle and Back*. Meet the translator Paul Wilson. View an exhibition of unique photographs of Havel's life. Monday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, at 6 p.m. Munk Centre for International Studies, University of Toronto, 1 Devonshire Place, Toronto. RSVP at your earliest convenience. Seating is limited. The Consulate General of the Czech Republic, 416-972-1476 or toronto@embassy.mzv.cz. The Munk Centre for International Studies is also proud to host a symposium on Havel's work on Monday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, at 2:00 p.m."

## Cimrman Corner

### Japanese Inspiration

Ladislav Smoljak and Zdeněk Svěrák

translated by Craig Cravens

In the play *The Plum Tree: A Dramatic Amnesiacon*, which Cimrman's traveling theater troupe first performed on Easter 1912, Cimrman employed a scenic innovation, the actor's mask. This was undoubtedly the result of his trip to Japan. Cimrman visited the Land of the Rising Sun as a dealer for the firm Rust-Not Detroit, which manufactured eating utensils. His task was to convince the Japanese of the advantages of ingesting food with a fork and knife.

To this end, he devised a witty routine, which he performed in Tokyo restaurants. He would have a waiter bring him two bowls of rice, a typewriter, and a chess timer. He would then press the timer and then demonstrate how disproportionately long it took to eat a bowl of rice with chopsticks. Then he would press the other timer, and in a few seconds bolt down the other bowl with a knife and fork. In the time saved, he would sit down at the typewriter and compose a poem, which he would then read to the astonished guests in the restaurant. Even though these poems were not of high artistic value—after all, they were often composed in a single minute—and even though they were in Czech, they garnered considerable applause among the Japanese diners. Allow me to introduce one of the poems simply as a matter of interest.

Kawasaki, Kawasaki  
Using chopsticks can be tacky.  
Fujiyama, Hiro-Hito  
Rust-Not forks are really neato.  
Okinawa, Detroit, Kuriles  
Tora, Tora, Tora.

During his stay in Tokyo, Cimrman also visited the traditional Japanese No theater, where male actors performed women's roles with the aid of masks. Upon returning to his homeland, this inspiration came in very handy. Ota Plk, the lead actor in Cimrman's theater troupe, who for years played women's roles, became practically unusable over the years because no make-up could cover up his flaccid, deeply wrinkled face covered with protruding and suppurating warts. Cimrman therefore decided to solve the problem with a mask.

It turned out that the mask possessed manifold advantages. During a single performance, one male actor could play several female roles with a quick alternation of masks. Thus, for example, Ota Plk played the six wives of Henry VIII and all the merry wives of Windsor.

Cimrman gradually created an large collection of female masks to cover the entire spectrum of female types. Each mask had its own name, for example, Innocent Maiden, Dumb Bunny, Lass with Dimples, Lass with Dimples from Smallpox, Old Maid, Young Maid, Cruel Marta, Joan of the Gamekeeper's Lodge, Joan of Arc, Jilted Lover, Lady of the Camellias, Lady of the Migraine, Anemic Sonya, Cantankerous Anežka, Cross-Eyed Olina, Pavlína the Elf, and Butch Irma.

These masks, however, made a name for themselves elsewhere, and they unfortunately acquired a negative reputation. Shortly before the first World War, Cimrman's costume storage was

pilfered by the infamous gang Zeno Fifky, who used the costumes and masks for their criminal activities. Thus in news reports from this period we come across such disheartening headlines as: "Innocent Maiden Violates Minor" or "Cross-Eyed Irma Accidentally Shoots Accomplice" or "Joan of Arc Assails Austin Postal Carrier" or "Dumb Bunny Successfully Tunnels Into the Vault of the Agrarian Bank."

### Kohn Doctoral Scholarships at Masaryk University

Kohn Doctoral Scholarships are open to citizens of the United States and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Applicants must be currently enrolled in doctoral degree programs. The scholarships are intended to allow their recipients to carry out their studies or do research at Masaryk University and to contribute to the activities of the departments where they are received. They cover all fields of teaching and research at the university.

The scholarships have a value of 10,000 Kc per month, and are awarded for periods of from 3 to 10 months, depending on the nature of the research or studies that the applicant wishes to pursue. Scholarship holders are exempt from tuition fees. Accommodation, to be paid for by the scholarship recipients, is available in double rooms at the university halls of residence. Travel costs and health insurance are also the responsibility of the scholarship winners.

Applications and information can be found at <http://ois.muni.cz/>.

### *Asociace učitelů češtiny jako cizího jazyka (AUČCJ) Program for the year 2007*

- April 14: Sociokulturní aspekty při výuce německy mluvících studentů II
- June 9: Autorská práva, citace, Valná hromada (volba nového výboru AUČCJ)
- October 6: Obecná čeština ve výuce češtiny jako cizího jazyka
- December 1: Využití filmu, internetu a autentických materiálů při výuce češtiny jako cizího jazyka  
Kognitivní; lingvistika, metafora v cizím jazyce

For more information, please see the AUČCJ website, available at <http://www.auccj.cz/menu.htm>.

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