

Report on the conference entitled *Spisovná čeština a jazyková kultura 1993* held August 23-27, 1993 in Olomouc, submitted by Laura A. Janda of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

This August Charles University in Prague, Palacký University in Olomouc, the Masaryk University in Brno, and the Czech Language Institute co-sponsored a conference dedicated to literary Czech. The occasion was the seventy-fifth anniversary of the journal *Naše řeč*, and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first such conference, which was held in Prague and Brno in 1968. This was a high-profile event with the official blessing of President Václav Havel and with opening addresses from the mayor of Olomouc and the rector of Palacký University. The conference was attended by over two hundred people, including many famous Czech linguists (Komárek, Hausenblas, Daneš, and Grepl, just to name a few), and most of it was videotaped for future reference. This was a true marathon for both participants and attendees -- over eighty talks, plus five discussion sessions, were heard in the Hall of the College of Law at Palacký University in the course of three and a half days, with almost no breaks except for meals. On the second day of the conference no fewer than twenty-one papers were delivered before lunch. The foreign contingent comprised fourteen participants, three each from Germany and the USA, two each from Russia and Egypt, and one each from Great Britain, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland. The American participants were Charles Townsend, Věra Henzlová, and myself.

Of course no discussion of literary Czech would be complete without a discussion of spoken Czech and this was, predictably, the topic of many of the talks and the source of most of the controversy at the conference. As Charles Townsend rightly pointed out in his talk, however, battle lines were unfairly drawn on this issue. Participants came mainly from the traditional purist camps of the sponsoring institutions, whereas the opposition leaders, namely Petr Sgall and his cohort at the College of Mathematics and Physics of Charles University, frequently cited for relevant publication (cf. *Variation in Language: Code-Switching in Czech as a Challenge for Sociolinguistics*, by Sgall et al. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1992) were not invited to defend themselves. Indeed, the contents of the talks delivered by traditionalists proved that the velvet revolution has had little impact on Czech linguistics: the status of spoken Czech is more likely to provoke emotionally and politically charged ruminations than scientific inquiry. There is, however, dissent even among the ranks of the *filozofická fakulta* and the *ústav pro jazyk český*. František Čermák, for example, suggested that an objective study of the language be undertaken with the help of computerized data-bases. Before he did so, though, he apologized for the fact that many of those present might be offended by this suggestion. Several of the younger linguists of both institutions joined the fray to support his suggestion, including František Štícha and Zdeněk Starý.

Although the debate over spoken and literary Czech dominated the conference, it did not eclipse discussion of other issues. Several papers were devoted to issues of sociolinguistics. Memorable among them was one delivered by S. Pastyřík, who started out with a string of pejorative vocatives ("*Blbečku, blbouně, hlupáku...*") and then proceeded to discuss the distressing frequency of their occurrence in the speech of parents and teachers when addressing children. Papers on dialectology of the Czech Republic discussed local features of Silesia, Opava, České Budějovice, South Bohemian dialects, East Moravian dialects, and a dialect of Czech spoken in southern Ukraine. Over two

dozen papers addressed the use of Czech in various specialized professions (specifically: politics, computer science, legal prose, journalistic prose, TV reporting, advertising) and literary and popular genres. Among the papers on literary uses of Czech were a lively discussion of the stylistic modernization of children's fairy tales by I. Martinec and an analysis of the widely-read cheap foreign novels that now appear in Czech translation, termed *čtivo* by the participant, A. Macurová. The last morning of the conference was primarily devoted to the teaching of Czech in school. A talented teacher named Světlá Čmejrková described the way in which she coaches students in choosing and developing themes in her creative writing class, and distributed a handout with impressive samples of her students' work. Papers delivered by the foreign contingent tended to focus on the tension between spoken and literary Czech or on more specific issues of linguistic interest. Jan Peter Locher of Switzerland, himself of Czech heritage, lives in the German-speaking part of Switzerland and described the way the Swiss handle their diglossia, which is very different from the Czech attitude to this problem. Charles Townsend was slated to give his lecture near the end of the conference, and used this opportunity to sum up the debate and suggest appropriate directions to be taken in future research and language policy. M. Nilsson of Sweden presented a paper on animacy in Czech, David Short of Great Britain analyzed current trends in the development of past tense morphology, and G. Lilič of Russia discussed the fate of Russian borrowings in Czech (many of which are headed toward oblivion, along with culturo-semantic calques like *soudruh*).

Two publications were announced at the conference. One was a forthcoming volume containing the proceedings of the conference, and the other was a new journal, entitled *Čeština doma a ve světě*, the first issue of which was on sale outside the meeting room. Both projects are being edited by Oldřich Uličný, and interested readers are encouraged to contact him at: Katedra českého jazyka FF UK, nám. Jana Palacha 2, 116 38 Praha 1. The premiere issue of *Čeština doma a ve světě* contains about thirty short pieces (averaging two pages each) on a wide range of topics, for example: "Jsou Romové Cikáni?" by M. Hübschmannová, a discussion of the meaning of the borrowed word *ombudsman* by D. Šlosar, and a discussion of what popular name should be chosen for the new republic, *Čechy*, *Česko*, or *Čechie*, by Oldřich Uličný.

The conference closed with a promise that we will not have to wait another twenty-five years for the next such event, although no specific interval was stated. This participant, for one, hopes that the Czechs will be able to hold such conferences frequently and regularly, and that in the future they will serve as open forums that might eventually heal the rifts between the various groups of linguists in the country. Once the validity of differences of approach and opinion has been established, it might be possible to focus on substantive issues of true linguistic value.