GRAMMARS OF SLAVIC LANGUAGES FOR FRENCH-SPEAKING PUBLIC

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Abstract

The paper deals with grammars for foreigners from the point of view of linguistically heterogeneous communication situations. It puts the notion of grammar through to those of mediation and intercomprehension. It brings an overview of existing grammars of Slavic languages for French-speaking users in a chronological and enunciative perspectives, focusing especially on the grammars of Slovak language as starting points of the conception of a new grammar of Slovak language for French-speaking public.

Keywords: Linguistics, grammar, communication, intercomprehension, slavic languages

Introduction

The paper takes a look at grammars of foreign languages in the perspective of exolingual (linguistically heterogeneous) communication through the example of grammars of Slavic languages – and Slovak language in particular – oriented towards French-speaking users. For the purpose of this study, the term „grammar" will be used to design a material object describing a linguistic system or some of its parts.

The importance of studying grammars for foreigners is related to the fact that they represent one of the possible materializations of language contact. Contact of languages is closely related to intercomprehension and mediation. Even though contacts between Slovak and French language may not seem very fruitful it is still interesting to study their forms and expressions. Teaching grammar brings along enhancement of linguistic, communicative and cultural skills (cf. Klimová & Kubeková, 2007 for the term of cultural skill).

Grammars for foreigners as mediating entities

Foreign language grammars become interesting subject matter when seen in the perspective of communication studies, especially when considered with regard to the triple distinction made between direct, indirect and mediated communication, adopted – despite more or less important conceptual differences – on a large scale by theoricians of communication studies, mediology and linguistics.

As we stated elsewhere (Chovancová, 2013), mediated communication takes place between subjects that are not able to share the same coordinates of the enunciation situation. More specifically, they do not share the same space and/or time. The emitter's situation (he/she is designed as A) is defined as [T1, L1], T representing time and L representing place. The receiver's situation (B) is defined as [T3, L3]. We see mediation as a procedural task ensured by a third person (X) having a physical or a technical access to both communication situations [T1, L1] and [T3, L3] who transfers contents of the utterance 1 produced by the emitter decoding and re-coding it into the utterance 2 reaching the receiver. The time and place of his/her own utterance are designed as T2 and L2. Depending on the actual communication situation (there is a large variety of them where mediation occurs), the mediator's communication with both emitter and receiver can be two-way, ensuring

necessary feedback. What is more, in some situations, mainly when mediation takes place in an everyday interaction, the emitter and the receiver can be in touch one with the other as it is shown by the dotted line in the following scheme:

A [T1, L1] ↔ **X** [T2, L2] ↔ **B** [T3, L3]
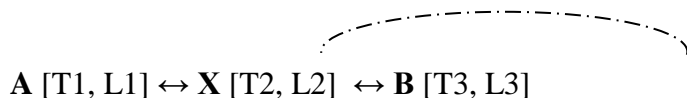
Mediated communication is to be clearly distinguished from indirect communication where information transfer is ensured technically, without the presence of a third speaking subject, through a material support of various kind. A common point between the two (mediated and indirect communication) is the existence of a time and/or space lag and, subsequently, the need to overcome it efficiently.

We affirm that the *mediator* (a person which bears a specific congitive history and builds up specific communication skills) must be strictly distinguished from *support* (a material basis for a mere archiving and transferring of language content) and from the *media* characterized as an interrelated complex of technical and human communication factors.

In the light of grammar analysis this theoretical framework is to be revisited in order to take into account those instances of indirect and/or mediated communication when the emitter A and the receiver B, in addition to non identical space-time structures of their respective situations, do not share the same code. The non identity of codes is a possible menace to a successful information transfer and a problem to be solved by interlocutors. Two basic solutions available include translation and (partial) intercomprehension of an unknown or less known code based on linguistic and textual transparence as well as on the process of inference. Putting aside translation for the moment, we point out at intercomprehension as one of Europe's keywords-to-come, a possible scenario of its linguistic politics (cf. Zázrivcová, 2008) and a necessary melting pot of educational practices at various levels of foreign language teaching/learning (cf. Veverková, 2013). The concept of transparence in itself, opposed to opacity, is not knew to linguistics. In the last decades, it has been studied in association to intercomprehension and linguistic heterogeneity (Castagne, 2002, Puchovská 2009 and 2012). Transparent zones in the text are understood easily (e. g. lexical ressemblances such as anglicisms/internationalisms, cf. Reichwalderova & Sliačanová, 2008, Reichwalderová, 2009, vernacular language units, cf. Lazar, 2012, or borrowings in general, seen as „intersections between languages" cf. Zázrivcová, 2010). The less transparent ones can be comprehended through semantic (e. g. interlingual motivation, cf. Zázrivcová, 2008b), syntactic (e.g. word order or distribution of syntactic roles within the clause, cf. Klimová, 2006 and 2012) and non-verbal keys (cf. Zajacová, 2011, on the notion of intertextuality). Grammars show that codes (languages) themselves have a certain capacity of mediation, in the sense of enlarging subject's linguistic and metalinguistic competence as a basis for acquisition of other (foreign) languages. In other terms, grammars enable the language user to build up or improve his/her intercomprehension skills, giving him/her re-usable input.

Moreover, we affirm that (foreign language) grammars are samples of both mediated and mediating discourse. On one hand, they result from mediation, as they bring personalized readings of linguistic matters. Major grammars of French, written by recognized authors are outstanding examples of such visions (let us take into consideration P. Charaudeau's *Grammaire du sens et de l'expression* (1992), M. Wilmet's *Grammaire critique du français* (1997) and others). On the other hand, they mediate, as they give access to comprehension of unknown linguistic phenomena, and strenghten the (meta)linguistic conscience of users, possibly re-activated in other endolingual and exolingual contexts.

Grammars for foreigners and the process of intercomprehension

In the light of above mentioned, we affirm that a foreign language grammar is to be seen not only as a gate to the target language and the culture it vehicles, but also as a bridge towards other, typologically and/or genetically related languages, i. e. as a means of constructing intercomprehensive competence of its users. They can improve receptive skills in language with a various degree of structural parenthood with the given language, even in distant languages.

To understand intercomprehension, some theoricians retrace the concept of discursive competence (cf. Capucho & Oliveira, 2005), by nature plurilingual and intercultural, pluridimensional (linguistic, textual and situational), dynamic and self-regulating. Thus, intercomprehensive competence is based on conscious and/or subconscious strategies activated by a subject when moving between linguistic areas, in other words, when he/she is in an exolingual environment. When there is an exolingual interaction, subjects tend to pragmatically co-construct the sense, employing their capacities of transfer, making the most of lexical (and other) ressemblances and putting them through to textual and situational data. A pro-active transfer may be enabled by a bridging language, i. e. a foreign language already acquired by the subject and close to the target language.

F. Capucho (2008 : 239-240) defines intercomprehension as follows:
1. Multilingual (oral) reception between neighbour languages;
2. Multilingual interaction between neighbour languages (with the use of interactive technical suports);
3. Multilingual interaction between non neighbour languages.

Improving intercomprehensive skills seems to be a condition *sine qua non* in education of plurilingual language users (cf. Ľupták & Kolečáni-Lenčová, 2013 for an overview of the actual state of the matter in Slovak educational system).

Grammars of Slavic languages published in French

Unlike intercomprehension of Romance languages, intercomprehension of Slavic languages by endolingual and exolingual subjects has not been thoroughly explored yet. The necessity to use the intercomprehension method in teaching Slovak as a foreign language is underlined by M. Sokolová (2007), concentrating on interlinguistic relations between Slavic languages. A recent survey realized by Kurejová (2013) goes in the opposite way, aiming particularly at non-native speakers of French, Spanish and Italian testing their intercomprehension of these Romance languages.

Within the framework of research activities aiming at a conception of a new grammar of Slovak for French-speaking users (cf. Pognan et al., in press), in order to strengthen the intercomprehensive aspect of the Slovak language acquisition, we analyzed the reception of scientific presentations of grammars of Slavic languages in the French-speaking environment in Europe, mainly in France. Out of 19 Slavic languages (extinct ones excluded), only 9 have their grammar systems presented in French (cf. Table 1).
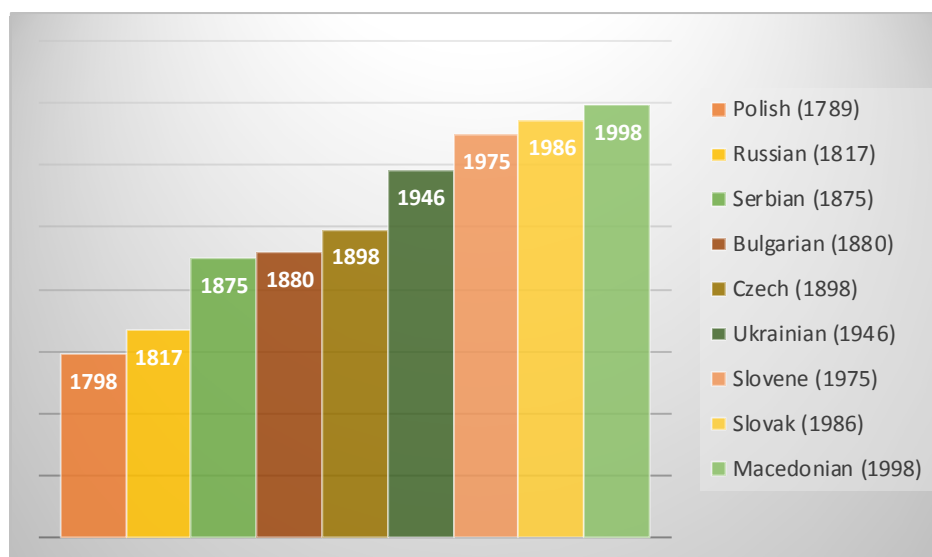
Table 1. *Chronologic view of first grammars of Slavic languages published in French.*

Polish language was the first to have its grammar published in French. The first grammar of Polish written in French came out in 1798. This fact can be considered as a reflection of the historical impact of the Polish culture upon the French one. According to Louis Léger, one of the first Slavist scholars in France, the one who has not lived the Second Empire cannot fully imagine the importance of the Polish influence on the contemporary French public opinion.

Polish was followed by Russian, a Slavic grammar system most frequently presented to the French public (the list of Russian grammars and other works containing grammatical information on Russian in French contains 43 items, compared to 40 on Polish, 16 on Bulgarian, 8 on Slovene and even less on every other Slavic language). Russian and Polish, most available to French learners when it comes to material ressources, might be able to function as entry points into the realm of the Slavic languages.

We must note that publications of grammars of Slavic languages aiming at exolingual publics closely depend on codifications of Slavic languages, i. e. changing their statuses and becoming official languages in Central and Eastern European countries. They depend as well on the publication grammars of these languages for endolingual users (1603 and 1809 for Czech language, 1790, 1846 and 1931 for Slovak, to name but two of them) and other related works of reference. For example, as far as South Slavic languages are concerned, the first grammars concerned exclusively Serbian, later Serbo-croatian, newer works take into account linguistic plurality of the region (Thomas & Osipov, 2012)

Grammars of Slovak language published in French

When it comes to grammars of Slovak, our search was motivated by the intention of putting forward the already mentioned conception of a new grammar of Slovak for French-speaking public. In order to achieve this objective, we mapped various kinds of existing grammars classifying them according to target public, language and author(s). As it is shown in the table below, we have examined in particular: **a)** grammars of French by French-speaking authors for any public, **b)** grammars of Slovak by Slovak-speaking authors for any public, **c)** grammars of Slovak written in French by French-speaking authors of Slovak or French origin, for a French-speaking public and finally **d)** grammars of French written in Slovak by Slovak authors for a Slovak-speaking public. We have paid attention to the position occupied by the Slovak language within the group of Slavic languages to which a French-speaking subject can have access.

Group	Presented language	Language of presentation	Author's origine	Public
A	French	French	French	general
B	Slovak	Slovak	Slovak	general
C	Slovak	French	French/Slovak	French-speaking
D	French	Slovak	Slovak	Slovak-speaking

Table 2. *Enunciative grammar typology.*

In the group a) we lean upon the works by M. Grevisse & A. Goose, P. Charaudeau, P. Le Goffic and M. Wilmet considered as works of major reference and treated as such in our previous research projects focused on comparative verb classification.

In the group b), the major reference is *Morfológia slovenského jazyka* (Ružička, 1966). As far as the syntaxe is concerned, we lean on works by J. Oravec and E. Bajzíková (1986), Kačala (1989) and others, Slovak morphonology has been presented recently by Očenáš (2007). Let us remark that the publication of the only academic grammar of Slovak goes back to the year 1966. The lack of ressources dedicated to foreigners is then certainly not suprising.

In fact, the overview of bibliographic resources available shows that within the group of Slavic languages, the Slovak is not among the most largely presented to the French-speaking user. Since the 1970s, only six works about Slovak language have been published, out of which only one grammar (Bartoš & Gagnaire, 1972), then textbooks and conversation guides (Baláž et al., 1973 ; Serafínová – Baláž, 2000 ; Baranová et al., 2007 ; Jamborová et al., 2009) and a doctoral thesis (Jamborová-Lemay, 2003). The grammar by P. Bartoš and J. Gagnaire was published in 1972, while – as it can be seen in the Table 1 – the first grammar of Czech, the closest Slavic language, destinated to the French-speaking users appeared in 1898 (others followed in 1923 and 1952).

The situation in the opposite sense, i. e. concerning grammars of French written by Slovak authors and presumably oriented towards Slovak-speaking public, does not show substantial differences. The only reference work written in Slovak is *Francúzska gramatika* by J. Taraba (1995). However, there are several works written in Czech, such as *Francouzská mluvnice* (Hendrich – Tláskal – Radina, 1991) or *Vědecká mluvnice francouzštiny* (Šabršula, 1986). La *Grammaire du français contemporain* by a Czech-Slovak team of authors (Ducháček & Bartoš, 1976), theoretical and practical work of structuralist orientation dedicated to Czech and Slovak university scholars and students can be added to the list

Conclusion

Grammars of foreign languages are pieces of discourse that aim at facilitating linguistically heterogeneous (exolingual) communication, mediating linguistic knowledge and improving intercomprehensive skills. Intercomprehension is a phenomenon based on strategies adopted naturally by a language user in exolingual communication contexts, leading him/her to (at least partial) understanding of unknown or less known linguistic codes.

The relation between grammar, mediation and intercomprehension is not yet thoroughly described. We believe it deserves further attention. Newly conceived grammars should not underestimate intercomprehension as a method of language teaching/learning.

Slavic languages represent a linguistic group that is open to conception of intercomprehensive grammars. A French-speaking learner has the best access to these languages by means of Russian and/or Polish. Grammars of other Slavic languages, including

Slovak, are little represented in the French-speaking environment, as it results from the overview of available ressources classed chronologically in an enunciative typology.

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