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by Ondřej Šefčík

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Foreword

Aleš Bičan

The 20th century was marked up by a great boom in human communication and exchange of thoughts. Radio was soon replaced by television and people could not only hear voices from the far side of the world, they could also see faces behind the voices. The world became smaller and people grew tighter together. However, neither radio nor television, despite their continuous improvement, could equal the revolutionary step (indeed a leap) forward in the exchange of ideas, thoughts, opinions and discoveries. Although in the second half of the 20th century we made use of nuclear power and made a first step toward conquering the space, probably no other invention or achievement has pushed and will push our development so markedly forward. It was the invention of the internet that was the profound and ultimate *tour de force* of the 20th century.

The internet is still at its beginning. Although it has existed for over a decade, it is still a bud which, when in full blossom, will be a truly unsurpassable medium for communication. It becomes more and more common that we can listen to radio via the internet and it will no doubt come a time when we can watch television via it as well. These two media will become obsolete or will be integrated into the internet. We can write and talk with people from any part of the world in real time. These are undeniable advantages of the internet. Yet there is another aspect of it, perhaps more crucial from the long-term point of view: the internet is becoming world wide storage of information. It offers so many ideas and materials that soon even the greatest public library will be incomparably poorer than the internet. Even now we can find many electronic libraries and databases on the internet¹. If until recently printed books and journals were the sole media for global spreading of thoughts in science, it is no longer true. The internet has become another—and more powerful—publishing medium.

Probably every linguist (and this is in fact not limited to linguists only) must have faced a situation when he had a flash of idea about how to deal with a certain language phenomenon in simpler or more adequate or more consistent way. To be a serious scientist, he had to track down earlier views on the problem, to do a throughout research and to review competing solutions of the problem. At this stage a simple research may,

¹ Like the Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org/>) offering currently 16 000 books in an electronic format for free!

however, turn out to hunting down minor but apparently highly relevant articles. Not only may it happen that the article would be written in a language not familiar to the linguist, he may encounter a more serious problem: the desired article (it is less common in case of books, fortunately) would be very hard to get, because local libraries do not simply have the periodical. Such a situation may become rather cumbersome for the linguist: the research will happen to take more time and effort than writing down the final paper on the problem. Luckily, it is a kind of situation that can usually be finally dealt with.

A more grievous situation may arise when a linguist, though perfectly willing to take in account everything that was written about the matter, would not happen to know about the relevant paper on the subject. Such situations may come to place due to the current political circumstances (like World War II or the Cold War) but it is probably more common that the paper was published in a not-very-known periodical or a periodical of rather a local character. Linguists obviously cannot know all these periodicals but the situation can be helped by making the periodical more known and more easily accessible.

Linguistica ONLINE was conceived to make a step toward this goal. From a simple enthusiastic project aiming to place linguistic papers on the internet (papers of today were probably all written on a computer after all), it gradually changed to be the electronic journal of the Department of Linguistics at the Masaryk University, Czech Republic. As such it is hoped to be a medium for publishing and sharing ideas of the members of the Department. However, its main purpose is to re-publish older papers on various linguistic problems and by doing this to make them available in an electronic form for free on the web pages of the Masaryk University. We believe this not only will make thoughts of many gifted linguists more pronounced but above all we believe it will help the linguistic scholarship as a whole.

A new issue Linguistica ONLINE is meant to appear every three months, starting with January 2006 (except for this *Introductory Issue* which is a special issue). It will bring reprints of old printed papers, usually from periodicals published by the Masaryk University, though this will not be a rule. Also, it is not meant to be a rule that we will re-publish old articles only. Like every other periodical we encourage and will welcome papers that have not been published yet.

* * *

I am proud to begin Linguistica ONLINE with a collection of papers by Ondřej Šefčík. He is not only, as the Head of the Department of Linguistics, one of the persons behind the whole project, he has also been one of my teachers. But *mentor* is a better word. It cannot be changed by the fact that my views have gradually become different to his in certain respects (I have become more influenced by Functionalism of André Martinet), his role as a guide cannot be disputed.

It was his introduction to *phonology*, *glossematics* and *Sanskrit* that changed and formed my linguistic views and outlooks. Ever since phonology has been the main focus of my interest and the field I have done most of my research. The sound structure of languages and fact that all languages are made of practically the same sounds but yet they sound different, these have ever since been topics that fascinated and interested me.

During studying the sound structure one necessarily has to come across all those different views how to deal with the sound structure. Glossematics is an example of a linguistic view that aimed to establish a rigorous and consistent theory of language and as such (despite its hard-to-digest terminology) it soon appealed to my thinking which was, before developing interest in linguistics, always engaged in mathematics and logics.

It may then be clear why I have become attracted to the Sanskrit language. The Old Indic loremasters were the first linguists; they were well aware that their language was of a unique structure, indeed of a very organized structure, and they knew how to describe the structure. Sanskrit is a language that may be said to be a treasure for a linguist. Not only it is indispensable for historical and comparative linguistics, it also hides many challenges for a synchronically oriented linguist, which—when challenged—may be fruitful for linguistics as a whole (*sandhi* being one of the examples).

All of the three linguistic influences or items can be found in papers reprinted in this journal. As Ondřej Šefčík is most of all interested in phonology, all papers deals with phonological problems. His thinking is apparently influenced by glossematics (as can be witnessed in e.g. *Vrchol slabiky a jeho poměr k vokálům*) and most often illustrated on Sanskrit. As mentioned above, Sanskrit is full of problems that can pertain to other Indo-European languages but not only in the sphere of diachronic linguistics. In fact, had it not been for the fact that Sanskrit is a “dead” language, it is would be an ideal material for a synchronic phonological description. Its distribution of sounds and their behavior across morphological boundaries (i.e. *sandhi*) is governed by certain principles and it is interesting to discover them. It is Šefčík’s desire to publish a description of the phonological system of Sanskrit.

Šefčík’s approach to phonology may be dubbed as *morphological* or *alternational*. I have tried to give a brief review of it in a paper of mine (*Phoneme and alternations: different views*, forthcoming). This view is of course not new, in fact Chomskyan systemic phonology is close to it, but Šefčík did not abandon the very useful and fruitful concept of *phoneme* as generativists did. He focuses on alternations between phonemes and holds a view that these alternations shape the phonological system of a language. He tested his method on Czech and published two papers on it (*Popis alternací jako prostředek modelace vokálního subsystému češtiny*, dealing with Czech vowels, and *Alternace konsonantů v češtině – fonotaktické a morfonologické modelování systému*,

focusing on Czech consonants). Although some serious questions were put forward² as regards those languages which do not exhibit any phoneme alternations (do they have any phonological system at all?) and although it needs more solid theoretical background, the method itself is good and interesting.

It is interesting and good even despite the fact that some linguists (myself included) think that morphologically conditioned alternations should be treated in a morphological description of a language, not in a phonological one. So even if I maintain that the alternation of, say, /k/ ~ /c/ as in *ruka* “hand” vs. *ruce* “hand (loc. sg.)” has nothing to do with the sound structure of Czech, because it does not condition the alternation, I must, on the other hand, concur that the alternation creates a bond between the phoneme /k/ and /c/ in Czech. The alternation is much more phonologically suspicious if it is discovered to exist between /t/ and /tʰ/ as in *chata* “cottage” vs. *chatě* “cottage (loc. sg.)”, /d/ and /dʰ/ as in *hrad* “castle” vs. *hradě* “castle (loc. sg.)” and /n/ and /ɲ/ as in *brána* “gate” vs. *bráně* “gate (loc. sg.)” where there is an obvious alternation between “hard” (alveolar) and “soft” (palatal) consonants. If one further discovers the same alternation between /p/ and /pj/, /b/ and /bj/, /f/ and /fj/, /v/ and /vj/, and /m/ and /mʲ/ (for examples see Šefčík’s paper *Alternace konsonantů v češtině – fonotaktické a morfonologické modelování systému*) where the latter term of the alternation is generally regarded as a biphonemic combination, one is naturally tempted to review the traditionally presented structure of the phonological system of Czech.

Of course, it is true that the mentioned alternation has its roots in the so-called palatatizations that took place in the history of Czech. Also, it is true that although I am still convinced that a pure phonological description of a language should be devoid of anything that is not caused by the phonic substance, I must admit that the alternation really establishes a bond between its terms. It is very common that linguists describe phonological segments such as /b/ by phonetic terms as “voiced oral labial closure” or “+consonantal –compact –continuous +grave +voiced –nasal” and others by features derived from mutual relationships entered by the segment in a given language (as “voiced bilabial non-nasal”, myself included), one cannot avoid the feeling that these characterizations are but abstract, intelligible to linguists only, and may perhaps not describe the reality in its essence. If I define /b/ as ‘voiced’, it is because it is opposed to /p/ ‘voiceless’, but it is only my knowledge of phonetics that enables that this opposition is described in these terms. An ordinary speaker of Czech probably does not even know which one of them is voiced; he usually does not even know what it means to be voiced. For him /p/ and /b/ are just two units that can distinguish between meanings of words (he may or may not be aware of another type of bond between the units caused by neutralization between them taking place word-finally). On the other hand, he might

² By Katarína Petriščáková in an unpublished minor thesis *Modelovanie slovenského fonologického systému na základe alternácií a jeho porovnanie s fonologickým systémom češtiny*. Petriščáková used Šefčík’s method on Slovakian.

realize a connection between, say, /k/ and /c/, or better: it is a part of his linguistic behavior as a Czech, because he uses this strategy every day and extends it even over borrowed foreign words (just as he sieves the words through his pronunciation habits).

From this point of view Ondřej Šefčík has taken the right step in a linguistic description. He focuses on alternations between phonemes which form the core of the system. Phonemes not entering into alternations are then on its periphery. Alternations or better relations between the phonemes are what should interest the linguist, because only via these relations he can establish the phonological system of the language. And this is ultimately one of views of Louis Hjelmslev's, the most important developer of glossematics. Now the reader who has read this Foreword from the beginning will not be surprised that the method that Ondřej Šefčík used for his description of the Czech phonological system gradually developed during his study of Sanskrit. The collection of papers presented here gives an outline of development of his method and thoughts.

As mentioned above, Ondřej Šefčík is a person who has introduced me to fields of linguistics that have attracted me and have ever since occupied my mind. Moreover, during the course of time he became a close friend of mine, a friend who, though he can sometimes be caught absent-minded by being occupied by many problems he wants to deal with, is always ready to help, advise and assist. I am very grateful both for his guidance and friendship.

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