

THE ECONOMY OF CZECH EXCHANGE IN THE SLOVAK MARKETPLACE OF AUSTRIA AFTER THE FALL OF HUNGARY

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Abstract: Lexical quanta in writing and speech are important indicators of an individual's social class. This paper analyses the lexical features of the utterances produced by writers/speakers from different social classes in terms of word length based on a representative sample of letters from the Kremnica archive. The study found that writers/speakers from different social classes showed different average word length in the 2nd half of the 16th century. According to the analysis of the letters, writers/speakers from the upper classes produced utterances with longer words than those from the lower classes. These differences are explained by factors related to the individual's social class backgrounds and his "right to speech" or "right to be read". The linguistic economy principle, objective of which is to save more time and energy by conveying more information with less effort is thus far from exhaustive and by no means reflects the whole sociolinguistic reality.

Keywords: applied linguistics, economy principle, language management, linguistic marketplace, social class, sociolinguistics, word length

1 THE ECONOMICS OF LINGUISTIC EXCHANGES

Pierre Bourdieu in his paper *L'économie des échanges linguistiques* (1977a) introduces the notion of a linguistic marketplace or linguistic market (*marché linguistique*), which he develops in a significant way in his English article with the same title (1977b). The main idea of the studies is that in the symbolic marketplace, where linguistic exchanges happen, linguistic (or cultural) capital is exchanged, and different varieties in the marketplace have different symbolic market values. The *marché linguistique* in this paper will be, in terms of space, the north-eastern part of the monarchy, what would become Austria, which was called Slovak land (*Windenland* in German), specifically its Czech-speaking population from among the nobility and bourgeoisie in communication primarily with the town of Kremnica. In terms of time, it is the period not long after the defeat of Hungary at Mohács in 1526 and practically the end of its existence as an independent state. The period can be defined as the 2nd half of the 16th century. Language varieties are divided according to social class.

After the fall of Hungary, where Latin was dominantly used in writing, Czech began to dominate the linguistic market in the Slovak land. This was partly a result of political revolution after the defeat, but at the same time it happened gradually as a result of a slow transformation of material and symbolic power relations (like the steady devaluation of French on the world market, relative to English), which was a consequence of an increasingly close relationship of the Slovak land to the Holy Roman Empire including the Czech lands. Those who sought to defend a threatened capital of Latin in the so-called Royal Hungary were forced to conduct a struggle, because they could not save the competence without saving the market, i.e. all the social conditions of the production and reproduction of producers and consumers (cf. Bourdieu 1977b, p. 651). The Latin language began to be clearly dominant again in the territory of the former Hungary only after its liberation. In the period relevant for our research, however, the kingdom was dominated by a population with one mother tongue. This was Slovak, and spoken Slovak, of course, penetrated into the splendid Czech written culture radiating from the Czech lands, since Czech and Slovak have always been mutually intelligible. S. Czambel (1890, p. 29) therefore also calls the Czech of the Royal Hungary of the 2nd half of the 16th century “Czech-Slovak”, and considers its most important texts to be A) 15 letters of the Révays, B) 18 letters of the town of Mošovce, C) 9 letters of the Benickýs, D) 10 letters of the Majthénys, and E) 3 official documents. The texts thus determined provide a good basis for a corpus intended for sociolinguistic comparison of lexical quanta in writing and speech. As Grotjahn and Altmann (1993, p. 143) point out, letters as a specific text type have been considered to be “prototypical” texts, optimally representing language due to the interweaving of oral and written components.

However, the comparison in the article is made on the basis of social classes, and Czambel’s corpus of “Czech-Slovak” texts needs to be modified somewhat for this purpose. The Révays and the Majthénys had castle estates and can be considered middle aristocracy. The Benickýs, since they did not have castle estates, are considered to be landed gentry. Branches of both the Révays and the Majthénys were included among the titled aristocracy relatively early after the fall of Hungary, where only a very limited circle of aristocracy had held titles (41 persons in 1498, cf. Pukanec 2016, p. 52), while the Benickýs never did, which also partly confirms our division. The small but important town of Mošovce was in constant conflicts with the Révays, thus showing its equality with them, so that the mayor and members of the town council can be considered as middle bourgeoisie, which is roughly at the level of the middle aristocracy. However, since the town *de jure* belonged to the Révays, they should have stood socially below them. Each of the three official documents mentioned by Czambel is written by someone else, and they are also few in number overall, which means that they are not representative enough, so we do not include them in the corpus. We will, however, expand the corpus with at least a few archived Czech documents from this period from the upper aristocracy, namely

the prince of Cieszyn (8 letters), the landed gentry, namely George Jesenský (6 letters), and the petty bourgeoisie, namely the Holeš family (6 letters). This gives us a slightly broader sociolinguistic picture. The letters are published in *Slovenský letopis I-VI* (Sasinek 1876, 66ff., 159ff.; 1877, 76ff.; 1879, 73ff., 241ff.; 1880, 165ff., 337ff.; 1881, 66ff.; 1882, 80ff.) and are available at <https://www.hathitrust.org/>, but some manual editing was needed.

All 72 letters analysed are dated from roughly the same period, which is important because the average word length increases and decreases over the centuries (Bochkarev et al. 2012). The writings are found in the archives of Kremnica, a very rich town at the time, and in the vast majority of cases they are also addressed directly to Kremnica, its mayor, high officials and the town council (upper bourgeoisie). This means that the addressee is virtually always the same, which highlights the differences on the production side (the letter writers) and makes the research more precise. As Bourdieu (1977b, p. 648) states: “The structure of the linguistic production relation depends on the symbolic power relation between the two speakers, i.e., on the size of their respective capitals of authority... Language is not only an instrument of communication or even of knowledge, but also an instrument of power. A person speaks not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished. Hence the full definition of competence as the right to speech... An adequate science of discourse must establish the laws which determine who (*de facto* and *de jure*) may speak, to whom, and how” – including *how long*, we might add, since finding out this is the purpose of the paper. The production is governed by the structure of the market, and when one side of the communication is constant, we can accurately measure the differences of the other side.

This is the basis of our hypothesis in the paper that the higher a social class, the greater the “right to speech”, which is quantitatively reflected in the length of words. The hypothesis is also based on the knowledge of a letter addressed to our great-grandfather John Majthény from his subjects in the 16th century, which is in our family library, where the word length is extremely low, and thus the economy of the text is greater. Contemporary assertion that “linguistic economy principle is one of the generally recognized mechanisms, the objective of which is to save more time and energy by conveying more information with less effort” (Zhou 2012, p. 100) is thus far from exhaustive and by no means reflects the whole sociolinguistic reality. As Bourdieu (1977b, p. 646) puts it: “Language is a *praxis*: it is *made for saying*, i.e., for use in strategies which are invested with all possible functions and not only communication functions. It is made *to be spoken appropriately*.” This is the problem of *καιρός* [kairos], of doing the right thing at the right time, which was central to the Sophists. The linguistic economy principle formulated in this way ignores the variations in the structure of the linguistic production relations between a speaker and a receiver, which depend on the interlocutors’ positions in the symbolic power

relations. The specific characteristics of the work of linguistic production depend on the linguistic production relation inasmuch as the latter is the actualisation of the objective power relations (e.g. class relations) between two speakers (or the groups to which they belong) (Bourdieu 1977b, p. 651).

2 WORD LENGTH IN THE TEXTS

Measuring the length of words in older texts is not new. Something similar has been attempted, for example, by researchers F. Lian and Y. Li (2019). Their research is one of the first to have at its disposal a large corpus of texts and provides an analysis of word length distribution in German based on 360 texts originated between the 17th and 19th centuries. Our corpus of Czech letters is therefore comparatively smaller, but it has the advantage of uniformity of time period and addressee. The question is naturally how to measure word length in text corpora with software tools so that the measurement results are relevant. As Grotjahn and Altmann (1993, pp. 142–143) state with regard to word length, there are three basic types of measurement: graphic (e.g. letters), phonetic (sounds, phonemes, syllables, etc.), and semantic (morphemes). And, as a consequence, it is obvious “that the choice of the unit of measurement strongly effects the model of word length to be constructed”. Of course, we must not forget that there are other lexical quanta than word length, such as lexical diversity or lexical density (cf. Strömquist et al. 2002), but these will not be of interest to us in this paper. Of the above-mentioned methods of measuring word length, if one looks for a method in all languages, the general view prevails that “[f]or evaluating word length one cannot use a different measurement unit but the number of syllables” (Popescu et al. 2013, p. 225). It should be noted here, however, that the letters used for the purposes of this study are written more or less monolingually, i.e., in Middle Czech (or in Slovakized Czech), only in some of them the introductory and concluding formulae are in Latin. In this paper, we have therefore chosen to apply grapheme measurement because the “right to speak” in written communication is also interpreted as the “right to be read” and it is the graphemes that are read.

However, in addition to the graphic measurement, we add at least a phonetic one based on phonemes. Slavic languages with their simple orthographies, where the rule of 1 grapheme = 1 phoneme almost always applies – with the exception of the older digraph orthography, which was also often used in the Middle Czech –, do not need to be measured on syllables, especially when one considers that some syllables are much longer than others (cf. Czech *žbluňk* ‘splash’ and *a* ‘and’). In phonetic transcription, we apply the simplification of digraph orthography as follows: *cz* > *c/č*, *dd*, *dt* > *d* (in *Radd[a]* ‘council’, etc.), *dč/dts/dž* > *č*, *dz* > *ž*, *ff* > *f*, *ch* > *X*, *ij* > *i/i*, *ll* > *l*, *pp* > *p*, *rz/rž* > *ř* (with the exception of *skrže*, *[drz[at]/[drz[et]]*), *ff* > *š*, *ss/sz* > *s*, *th/tt* > *t*, *zz* > *z/ž*. This simplification relatively does not change the average word

length, because it is more or less constant in all letters, but the average word length in the texts is increased quite considerably by writing out the Czech abbreviation *V.M. > Vaš[e] Milost[]* ‘Your Grace’. We chose to write it out in order to measure the speech against the writing to a greater extent. This affected the relative word length in the phonetic transcription versus the graphic transcription significantly, especially in the case of the Benickýs, which requires an explanation. Other abbreviations also occur in the letters. For our research, however, only the Czech abbreviation overused by the town of Mošovce is important: *V.Opp. > Vaš[e] Opatrnost[]* ‘Your Prudence’. Moreover, the text is to some extent skewed by proper names, of which there are quite a large number and which are objectively given, but we have decided to count them, because sometimes the boundary between proper and common names is disputable (cf. *Most Sučanský* ‘bridge of Sůča’ (= village in Slovakia)). We take the letters as separate units, not as a sub-corpus for a social class.

2.1 Upper aristocracy

We start our measurements from the highest social class, which in our corpus is represented only by an individual – the prince of Cieszyn. His texts are characterized by the use of the majestic plural (royal *we*), which confirms his inclusion in the upper aristocracy. The prince addressed 7 of his 8 letters directly to the mayor and the town council of Kremnica. The second of the 8 letters (in italics in the Tab. 1) has no direct addressee. It should be noted then that word length is highest here. Except for a few abbreviations, there is no Latin in the letters.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	AVG
graphic	4.77	5.35	5.15	5.09	5.16	5.18	5.03	5.16	5.11
phonetic	4.49	5.13	4.72	4.71	4.93	4.88	4.81	4.92	4.82

Tab. 1. Upper aristocracy

2.2 Middle aristocracy

In the second social class of our survey, and the second in order within our social stratification, we analyse the letters of two families: the Révays and the Majthénys. Unlike the letters of the prince of Cieszyn, there are several writers, so the letters are of a greater informative value in terms of our research. The letters of the Révay family are mostly addressed to the mayor and the council of Kremnica, but not all of them. Among the 15 letters of the family (Tab. 2 and 3), the letters 1–3 were written by two barons who used the majestic plural. However, their proximity to the upper aristocracy is not confirmed by the word length measurements, and the results are average. In the table, to make this more visible, they are in italics. The other letters (4–15) were written by two persons of the Révay family of a lower social rank. Tab. 4 shows the results concerning the Majthény family. In terms of state administration, the Majthény family as a whole was less important than the

Révay family. The Majthény family addressed 9 out of 10 letters of the corpus to the mayor and the council of Kremnica. The authors of the letters were several members of the family, but all but the last one seem to have originated from the office of *vicecomes* Christopher. Latin formulae are much more frequent in the texts of the Révay family, which may distort the results compared to Majthény's lexical quanta (Latin formulae generally have longer words than Czech ones). Indeed, as some models of word length measurement show, the measurements should have their own specificities for each language (cf. Grzybek 2007, p. 66).

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
graphic	4.56	4.83	4.85	4.91	5.16	5.36	4.54	4.40
phonetic	4.34	4.80	4.70	4.55	4.99	5.00	4.44	4.69

Tab. 2. Middle aristocracy – Révay I

	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	AVG
graphic	4.80	4.63	4.63	5.18	4.53	4.78	4.94	4.81
phonetic	4.64	4.54	4.61	5.18	4.85	4.82	4.87	4.73

Tab. 3. Middle aristocracy – Révay II

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	AVG
graphic	4.97	4.51	4.66	4.44	4.34	4.25	4.31	5.19	5.35	5.03	4.71
phonetic	4.59	4.34	4.50	4.33	4.25	4.17	4.17	4.99	4.98	4.78	4.51

Tab. 4. Middle aristocracy – Majthény

2.3 Middle bourgeoisie

The letters of this social class were almost always written by the mayor and the council of the town of Mošovce, or at least by the mayor of the town, the addressee was almost always the mayor and the council of the town of Kremnica, or at least the mayor of the town. Latin formulae occur in relatively small amounts, comparable to those of the Révay family, so at least with respect to them they do not substantially bias the results. The formulae may, however, increase the length of the words compared to the Majthénys. In some letters the Czech abbreviations *V.M.*, and *V.Opp.* are excessively used, which leads to the fact that the phonetic measurement here reaches values slightly above the level of the middle aristocracy, although the graphic measurement does not.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
graphic	4.61	4.81	5.04	4.85	4.95	4.61	4.88	4.71	4.57
phonetic	4.63	4.57	4.72	4.60	4.68	4.43	4.81	4.59	4.52

Tab. 5. Middle bourgeoisie I

	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.	AVG
graphic	4.52	4.60	5.04	4.99	4.97	4.51	4.89	4.35	4.69	4.76
phonetic	4.49	4.73	5.22	5.09	4.79	4.36	4.74	4.40	4.77	4.67

Tab. 6. Middle bourgeoisie II

2.4 Landed gentry

The letters of this social class were written by three members of the Benický family and by the nobleman George Jesenský. The letters of Jesenský were all written by the same person to the mayor and the town council of Kremnica except for the last one that was addressed to a high official of the town. The largest number of the letters of the Benický family was written by *vicecomes* Jan. We can only speculate that, while the speech of the Benický family was at the level of the *vicecomes* Majthény, they did not have sufficient *certitudo sui* (self-certainty) in their written speech and the feeling that they had a “right to be read”. In any case, the fact that they lacked the *certitudo sui* that is typical of dominant class texts (cf. Bourdieu 1977b, p. 659) proves the excessive use of the abbreviation *V.M.* even in completely unjustified cases (“*V.M. take prosym ze byste V.M...*” ‘I also ask Your Grace that Your Grace...’, etc.). There is relatively very little Latin in letters of this class.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	AVG
graphic	3.97	3.95	4.30	4.86	4.50	4.03	4.58	4.74	4.50	4.38
phonetic	4.18	4.33	4.55	5.03	4.37	4.35	4.57	4.66	4.61	4.52

Tab. 7. Landed gentry – Benický

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	AVG
graphic	5.19	4.40	4.32	4.56	4.26	4.45	4.53
phonetic	4.93	4.26	4.23	4.51	4.23	4.36	4.42

Tab. 8. Landed gentry – Jesenský

2.5 Petty bourgeoisie

All the letters attributed to this social class were addressed to the mayor of Kremnica. They show the inferior education of the writers, who are probably father and son of the Holeš family. This is proved by the absence and erroneousness of the Latin: there is only one abbreviation (*m.p.*) and only one phrase (*Post Cripta*, which should have been *Post Scripta*) in Latin. The formulations are cumbersome (frequent beginnings of sentences *Zo se dotize...* ‘As regards...’) and expressive (e.g. the only rhetorical question in our corpus is found in the letters of this social class). The texts show that the writers are members of the lower class (*Yako Vaša milost roskazete.* ‘As Your Grace will command.’). Thematically, too, these letters are considerably

“lower” (*Zo se dotize prasiez...* ‘As regards pigs...’, *Zo se dotize teho hnoga...* ‘As regards the manure...’). The abbreviation *V.M.* is overused in the letters.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	AVG
graphic	4.31	4.38	4.27	4.25	4.11	4.09	4.24
phonetic	4.46	4.33	4.23	4.23	4.06	4.07	4.23

Tab. 9. Petty bourgeoisie

3 CONCLUSIONS

The results of the graphic and phonetic measurements of word length from the highest social class to the lowest are approximately as follows: 5.11 – 4.77 – 4.76 – 4.44 – 4.24, and 4.82 – 4.64 – 4.67 – 4.48 – 4.23, respectively. Since the methods of measurement are not accurate, the corpus of texts is limited, we do not know the symbolic power relations between the speakers and the receiver(s), on which linguistic production substantially depends, nor do we know anything about the personalities of the writers (e.g. their education) apart from their social classes, between which there are not even exact boundaries (the bourgeois used to be nobles, a part of the aristocratic family belonged to the upper, part to the middle or lower aristocracy, etc.), we cannot use these results to their full extent. However, by establishing texts with almost the same addressee in the same period, we have brought a new methodological element to word-length research that makes the measurements more precise. Based on the results of our measurements, we can establish a clear tendency and trend: that is, the less socially significant the class writing and speaking Czech in the Slovak linguistic market in Austria after the fall of Hungary was, the more economical the words in their utterances were. This was due to the fact that they had a *different* (in terms of the above-mentioned linguistic economy principle neither better nor worse) *language management*. However, this study is more quantitative than qualitative in nature and the findings are far from conclusive.

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