

Dialect contact in the Czech Republic: do Moravians in Prague really speak Common Czech?

This paper reports on the linguistic behaviour of a group of Moravian migrants (from the east of the Czech Republic) living in Prague, Bohemia (the western half of the Czech Republic). The results are based on a sociolinguistic analysis of 37 university students from different parts of Moravia living at a hall of residence in Prague.

Although no systematic empirical research has been carried out on dialect contact in the Czech Republic, it is assumed by some linguists that speakers of Moravian dialects living in Bohemia quickly start to drop or avoid marked features of their native dialects and accommodate to the local variety, Common Czech (CC). This assumption, formulated by linguists who believe CC is assuming the role of a national vernacular, forms part of what I term the 'contact hypothesis'. According to this hypothesis, Moravians moving to Bohemia quickly assimilate CC, while migration in the opposite direction supposedly facilitates the diffusion of CC forms beyond Bohemia (Sgall and Hronek 1992).

The contact hypothesis is based on the subjective evaluation of the varieties of Czech, their role and function. First – according to linguists who formulated the 'contact hypothesis' – Standard Czech (SC) is an artificially imposed and primarily non-spoken variety that has no native speakers and is rarely used in informal communication. Second, Moravian dialects are highly localized and stigmatized in Bohemia as markers of provincialism. Finally, CC, although non-standard, is a semi-prestigious koine that is socially unmarked throughout Bohemia and parts of western Moravia and it is spoken as a mother-tongue variety with minimal variation by approximately 65 percent of the Czech population. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly widespread in (semi-)formal communicative situations where it is supplanting SC. Thus, in view of the above, it is predicted that Moravians living in Bohemia usually attempt – with varying degrees of success – to speak CC.

The present study is the first attempt to systematically describe the results of dialect contact between speakers of CC and Moravian dialects and to test the 'contact hypothesis'; to my knowledge, it is the first systematic variationist account of language variation in the Czech Republic. The study combines a quantitative analysis of six linguistic variables with both qualitative and ethnographic research and it identifies to what extent speakers of Moravian dialects living in Prague assimilate CC forms, what route their accommodation takes, and which variants of the host variety are most likely to be acquired or rejected. The primary aim of this presentation is to assess and describe the impact of a set of independent social variables on informants' assimilation of CC forms. Special attention is accorded to speakers' sex, region of origin, length of residence in the host community and network integration.

References

Sgall, P. and J. Hronek. 1992. *Čeština bez příkras* (Prague: H&H).