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Dynamics of Linguistic Prescriptivism and Purism in Slovakia in the Context of Political and Scientific Development

Abstract. The article presents the phenomenon of prescriptivism as the belief that some language items can be assessed as correct or incorrect according to defined rules. This belief, usually connected with purism, arises as a result of extralinguistic circumstances. The pendulum course of its development in the Slovak linguistic situation in the 20th century has some specific features: it is determined by the long-term Czech-Slovak language relations and the politically motivated alternation of convergent and divergent efforts, as well as the socially motivated alternation of top-down and bottom-up perspectives of the rise of prescriptivism and purism. Despite the decline of prescriptivist ideology in contemporary linguistics, it survives in protective language policy and in various forms of folk prescriptivist activities. The aim is to explain the historical motivations behind the maintenance of the popularity of prescriptivism and purism among non-linguists in the context of the more liberal approach to language regulation currently favored by linguists.

Keywords: Slovak language; language policy; purism; linguistic prescriptivism; language critique; folk linguistics.

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1. Introduction: Prescriptivism and Purism

Linguistic prescriptivism is based on the belief that there are correct and incorrect words or forms, resp. that language contains items – albeit naturally functioning ones – that can be considered “incorrect” for some reason. In contrast to descriptivism, prescriptivist linguists construct language as they would like it to be, or as they think it should be, rather than as it really is – “the descriptivist aims to record language, while the prescriptivist aims to shape language” (Nelson, 2006, p. 459). Therefore, prescriptive linguistics creates its own rules or criteria by which decisions on the incorrectness of certain items are argued. At the same time, it tries to enforce these rules in linguistic practice and to remove inappropriate forms from the language, which practically means to persuade or even (e.g., by law or sanctions) force the language community to remove these units from its linguistic repertoire. This requires that rules and criteria of linguistic correctness be prescribed as mandatory (or at least recommended), so that members of the language community can be required to accept, learn and respect them in official communication. However, the acquisition of such rules encounters a contradiction when the prescription is based on a conception of language as a regular system of structural elements, which is in fact a product of linguistic constructioning and therefore not naturally realised by common users. The “incorrectness” of the elements lies then only in the inconsistency with the desired regularity of language norm, and the user is expected to behave not according to his experience with the language of his vicinity and his own perception, but on the contrary, according to paradigmatically constructed patterns.

The following example from the Slovak prescriptive context shows that the “incorrect” use of a word-form is a consequence of the “immaturity” of the users to understand the structural rules of the language:

In this respect, our common and non-common people have accustomed to *zemiakové hranolky*,¹ because they have not yet reached the level of a user of

¹ Expression “*zemiakové hranolky*” [potato chips] is broadly used in fem. gender *hranolka*, but according to prescription it should have masc. gender *hranolček*, in pl. *hranolčeky*, because it is morphologically a regularly formed diminutive.

the standard language at which they would think more strictly grammatically² (Kočíš, 1995, p. 212).

Therefore, another goal of prescriptive linguistics is to educate the language user or to motivate him to take consciously the responsibility for the correct use of the language (Horecký, 1997, p. 64).

In concrete conditions of social and political circumstances, prescriptive linguistics can acquire an important position within language policy and linguistic scientific “infrastructure”, but also within society itself. This motivates it to develop its own conception of standard language and language planning,³ and also to believe that it fulfils an important role for the language cultivation, its scientific investigation, and also for society as a whole.

And it is the members of the language community (and paradoxically not others, e.g., descriptive linguists or sociolinguists) who decide on the relevance and prestige of the prescriptive approach. If they adopt the belief that language can be corrected, that the rules are consciously planned and prescribed, there logically arises the social notion that the actors of correction and rule-making are linguists, who are not only competent but also entitled, or even obliged, to prescribe language, and that these linguistic authorities or elites are to be respected by the community. However, it is clear that common language users – despite the general acceptance of the role of linguists and the need to follow the prescriptive rules – are not able to fully acquire all the rules derived from the system of language and apply them “correctly” in their speech behaviour. As a consequence, they do not perceive the prescribed rules as a problem, but on the contrary, they get convinced that the problem is on their side, that they do not know how to use their mother lan-

² *V tomto zmysle si naša pospolitosť i nepospolitosť privykla aj na zemiakové hranolky, lebo ešte nedospela na úroveň takého používateľa spisovného jazyka, na ktorej by uvažovala dôslednejšie gramaticky.*

³ As Malory points out, prescriptivism cannot be identified with language planning, since, according to him, “prescriptivism is considered to be the attempted enforcement or imposition of language rules, as distinct from the outlining of how something could be done, which language planning entails” (Malory, 2023, p. 265). In our article, we conceive of language planning as a broader concept, namely as any effort to regulate the structure of language, its parts or individual items. It includes the process of standardization, the creation of orthography, as well as creation of grammatical and lexicographical descriptions of the standard language and their application in language acquisition and education.

guage “correctly” and “purely”, and they make mistakes in it.⁴ As Buzássyová pointed out, by promoting prescriptive rules without regard to the natural differentiation of language communication and the dynamics of language, “a large part of the Slovak population (including prestigious users of Slovak, who work with the whole richness of the language) is in fact denied that they can speak Slovak” (1995, p. 95). Such an impression leads to a conviction of the imperfection of one’s own language competence and, consequently, to lowered language self-consciousness of the users (Dolník, 2010a, pp. 197–208; 2010b, p. 69) and to the belief that language “how it is used” is bad and incorrect. Moreover, it creates (unfortunately, also with the contribution of some prescriptive linguists) a myth of its permanent decay.⁵

Prescriptivism is sometimes associated with **purism** because, in addition to seeking regularity in language, it can also be associated with the idea of national identity and the purity of language, or its threat due to contact with another language. However, the terms purism and prescriptivism are not perceived as identical. Prescriptivism is a broader term and refers to a larger range of phenomena (e.g., orthography, codification, stylistic and pragmatic conventions, etc.). Only some of these prescriptive regulations are directed at units perceived as foreign.⁶ Nevertheless, prescriptivism and purism often accompany and mutually condition each other, which means that they

⁴ It is symptomatic that the most frequent question asked by journalists in interviews with linguists is “What are the most frequent mistakes made by Slovaks in the language?”. This question is often conditioned by older strategies of prescriptive linguistics, in which – in order to remove “incorrect” units from language usage – there were papers summarizing the most frequent mistakes in some type of public sphere of communication, e.g. media, political speeches etc. (for many we can mention at least Považaj, 1993, 1994; Mislovičová, 1995; Hegerová, 1995, 1997).

⁵ Language development and change – if we are aware of them and experience them – is often perceived as the mistake and decline of language (for many works pointing out this contradiction, let us mention the very inspiring work of Aitchison, 2001). Statements about the “bad”, “unsatisfactory” or “catastrophic” state of language culture, about the “decline of the language” or even its “threat”, as well as criticisms of these statements, are a part of the Slovak linguistic discourse focusing on the state and use of the standard language for a long time. Such discourse has already become stereotyped, creating “a spiritual climate in which it is required to speak negatively about standard language and to deduce from observing it that language culture is in decay” (Dolník, 2010b, p. 69).

⁶ The closeness or remoteness of the two concepts also depends on the understanding of purism. If it is not narrowed to the deliberate protection of the language against foreign words but defined more broadly as any effort to remote undesirable elements (loanwords, slang, dialect, archaisms, neologisms, etc.) from the language (Thomas, 1991, pp. 10–12), then they could be considered as closer.

undergo their emergence, rise or retreat together in the social and political context. Like language, also prescriptivism undergoes its own “linguistic” development and changes. In the history of some languages, the prescriptivist approach was widespread in the 17th to 19th centuries, or even in the first half of the 20th century (e.g., Nelson, 2006; Straaijer, 2016, p. 235ff; Malory, 2023; Crystal, 2007, p. 451ff; and others), but later it gradually disappeared or became the object of criticism, condemnation or even ridicule as an unscientific approach to language.⁷

However, it is not the case of Slovak linguistics and also other linguistics, in which language regulation and prescription – often accompanied with purism and linguistic criticism – still have a strong position and a relatively high prestige. In the next chapters, we will explain the social and political background of the emergence and further development of purism and prescriptivism in Slovakia during the 20th century, the reasons why the terms purism and prescriptivism are negatively perceived but still present, and the parallels between historical periods and the current situation.

2. Dynamics of Linguistic Prescriptivism and Purism in Slovakia

2.1. Origin and Character of the Slovak Linguistic Prescriptivism and Purism

The beginnings of linguistic prescriptivism in Slovakia are associated with the emergence of purism, which can be characterized (applying the typology of Thomas, 1991, pp. 62–83) as protective and nationalistic (corresponding with the ethnolinguistic aspect of language; this type is based on perceiving language as a sign of national identity); specifically, it is targeted at loanwords and contact phenomena mainly from the Czech language; therefore, it is sometimes called anti-Czech purism (cf. Múcsková, 2017a, p. 45ff). It is predominantly focused on lexicon, partially also on morphology, with efforts to prevent the penetration of these contact phenomena and remove “undesirable” language variation.

Both purism and prescriptivism are motivated extralinguistically, and they are under-conditioned and kept going by affairs in the social and po-

⁷ Straaijer points out discussions about the role of prescriptive and descriptive approaches and also attitudes towards prescriptivism as unscientific and unimportant for linguistics (2016, p. 235ff). The exclusion of prescriptivism from the interest of scientific linguistics is also critically viewed by Cameron (1995, p. x).

litical context. Therefore, their viability swings between intense purism and prescriptivism and a more tolerant attitude, or even anti-purism. This trimming (i.e., arising or intensifying in periods when community feels to be endangered) and oscillatory (repeatedly swinging) purism – or in fact trimming and oscillatory protective attitudes towards Czech and its impact to the standardization process – corresponds to the metaphor of pendulum (Thomas, 1991, pp. 158–160; see also Jarošová, 2012). Accordingly, the metaphor of pendulum can be also applied on attitudes to the concept or ideology of purism and prescriptivism, which throughout history oscillated between the pole of high prestige and social appreciation and the pole of its rejection or even political persecution. However, we approach the interpretation of purism and prescriptivism as historical and cultural phenomena without evaluating them negatively or positively. The aim is to explain their specific nature and viability determined by the extralinguistic factors.

2.2. Golden Age of Slovak Purism – 30s and 40s of the 20th Century

The historical context in which Slovak became a real standard and official language was the period of the first Czechoslovak Republic established after the First World War in 1918. It brought a radical change for Slovaks in their political status – they became a state-forming nation, and Slovak became an official language together with Czech in the common state. For Slovak, however, this meant that it had to function in the fields of public communication, administration, law, business, science, culture and education, i.e., areas in which it had never functioned to such an extent before,⁸ and, therefore, was not sufficiently developed for these tasks. In the new conditions, it was developing under the influence of Slovak-Czech bilingualism, in which Czech dominated, and many Czech elements penetrated into Slovak texts.⁹ Language norm gradually diverged from the older standard,¹⁰ which was perceived negatively among scholars and the intelligentsia. The increased dynamics of the language norm

⁸ Older codifications (e.g., of A. Bernolák from the end of the 18th c. or of L. Štúr from the middle of the 19th c.) never became the teaching and official languages and were not accepted by the whole society (on the development of the Slovak standard language, cf. Pauliny, 1983; Krajčovič & Žigo, 2002; and others).

⁹ Slovak-Czech linguistic contacts are the subject of interest for a long time, among many works we can mention at least Buzássyová, 1994, 1995; Dolník, 2010a, pp. 71–84; Nábělková, 2014, 2017; Lipowski, 2005; Newerkla, 2009, 2011.

¹⁰ The older standard, perceived as correct and “pure”, was codified in Czambel’s handbook (1902) and based on the variety of the northern central Slovakia.

was also caused by the lack of knowledge of the Slovak standard language, because people in productive age attended Hungarian schools in the pre-war period and used local dialects in private communication. With insufficient knowledge of the codification, they were more open to the unconscious adoption of Czech forms. Increased demands on communicative functions, language contact and intensive enrichment with Czech lexical items led naturally and spontaneously to the convergence of Slovak with Czech.

This tendency was intensified by the presence of Czechs in Slovakia in various areas of economy, education and culture (Rychlík, 1998), as well as by the official ideology of one “Czechoslovak” language and the convergence language policy aimed at the gradual assimilation. A concrete step of this policy was the approval of the *Pravidlá slovenského pravopisu* [Rules of Slovak Orthography] (1931) prepared in Matica slovenská, which legitimized and supported the penetration of bohemisms with the authority of a codification work. The bohemizing Rules met with harsh criticism and were finally rejected (Krajčovič & Žigo, 2002, p. 216ff). This act meant the onset of Slovak anti-Czech protective purism, and to support it, the journal *Slovenská reč* [Slovak Language] was founded in 1932 to contribute to the development of scientific research of Slovak. In its first years it devoted a large space to contributions pointing out “incorrect” items used in language practice, thus trying to prevent the undesirable penetration of bohemisms or archaisms into Slovak (Krajčovič & Žigo, 2002, p. 220). These efforts resulted in a conscious and often extreme purification of vocabulary from foreign loanwords, which often lacked scientific argumentation. Contributions in sections such as *Miscellanea*, *Is it good in Slovak?*, *Wrong words and phrases that should be avoided*, etc. had the form of orders and proscriptions and their explanation was, on the one hand, the scientifically vague but pragmatically very effective concept of “pure Slovak”, and on the other hand, expressive negative assessments of the state of language, which – if they came from the expert – had a considerable persuasive effect:

Such wildness prevails in our everyday spoken language. Let us strive to eliminate it as soon as possible. Let’s all people of good will in Slovakia join together, roll up our sleeves and get to work with the slogan: for our pure Slovak¹¹ (Mihál, 1938–1939, p. 218).

¹¹ *Taká zdivočenosť panuje v našom hovorovom spisovnom jazyku. Usilujme sa čím skôr ju odstrániť. Spriahnime sa všetci ľudia dobrej slovenskej vôle, vysúkajme rukávy a do roboty s heslom: za tú našu čistú slovenčinu.*

In its beginnings, the journal had a strongly prescriptive character and most of its contributions were focused on linguistic correctness. In various articles, it provided lists of prescriptive regulations or criticisms of “incorrect” language use in the form of pairs of words, one of which was identified as incorrect. For these linguistic practices, the journal’s founder H. Bartek used the term “practical linguistics”, and this term included prescriptive linguistics, linguistic criticism and language consulting (cf. Kralčák, 2022, p. 446).¹² The aim was “not to have useless pairs of words, from which, if we want to write well in Slovak, we must choose one and use it consciously” (Jánošík, 1932, p. 217). The structure of such contributions was very simple. The title contained variants occurred in real usage, from which one was regarded as bad. It was followed by example of a bad use (from literature, journal, etc.) and its frequency (e.g., “3 times”, “very often”, etc.). This was followed by comment like “archaism”, “useless loanword”, “Slovak doesn’t know the word...” or even “Not like this!”, “Never!”, and finally the author gives the correct form, which should be used instead.

Prescriptivism and purism had high authority at the time, so that similar prescriptions did not even need scientific argumentation or explanation. It was enough that a linguist wrote it in this journal, or that the expression was labelled as a bohemism. The situation in real usage was irrelevant. If, for example, an “incorrect” word had a high frequency, it meant that more prescriptive work is needed to be done to remove it (instead of adopting it into the codification). In one interview, the chief editor of the journal, H. Bartek, said about the authority of the journal: “If I had written in *Slovenská reč* that this is not a cigarette, but that it is called in Slovak *výfučka*, everybody would be calling it *výfučka* from tomorrow” (according to Pauliny, 1979, p. 47). In the situation, where the codifier has boundless authority, the argumentation “is only an ‘ornament’ of codification decisions, so that the scientific discussion about argumentation and codification acts are autonomous phenomena” (Dolník, 2000, p. 220).

¹² In addition to the journal, *Matica slovenská* started to provide a language-counseling service, and later short programmes for Czechoslovak Radio *Hovoríte správne?* [Can you speak correctly?] (cf. Encyclopaedia Beliana, <https://beliana.sav.sk/heslo/jazykovedny-odbor-matice-slovenskej>).

ukradnúť-ukrást: ukrásť z neho ten najkrajší a najdrahší kus I, 44. Tvar ukrásť (v Pravidlách ukrast) je archaizmus, preto lepšie by bolo neupotrebiť ho. Veď hovoríme napospol len *kradne*, *ukradne*, teda neurčitok musí byť *kradnúť*, *ukradnúť*.

pýtať sa-tázať sa: vraj „táže sa“ I, 31, 35, 46, 81, 83, 95 a veľmi často. No v spisovnej reči máme: *pýtať sa*, *opytovať sa*, *dovedať sa* a pod. Sloveso tázať sa pokladáme za zbytočné a nezvyčajné.

divý-divoký: divoké blesky I, 53; divoko skáču I, 124. Vari nie tak. Veď v spisovnej reči môžeš čítať len *divý*, *divo*, slovo divoký nepoznajú ani Pravidlá.

smäd-žižeň: aby ukojil svoju žižeň I, 68. Slovo žižeň dostalo sa k nám z biblickej češtiny. No ťažko pochopiť, prečo autor ho má radšej ako pôvodné slovenské *smäd*. Básnik môže napísať žižeň, no prozaik má sa pridržať pôvodných slovenských slov.

hľadiet-zierať: Bartolomej Zima ziera na slúžku... I, 70; Zieral na bránu I, 101. Ba ešte čo! Či takto niekto hovorí? V slovenčine poznáme slovesá pozeráť, nazeráť ap., ale nie jednoduché zierať, a ani v Pravidlách ho niet. — Načo robiť násilnosti slovenskému slovníku, načo vymýšľať tvar *zierať*?!

vemeno-vämeno: Tvar vämeno (tri razy na str. 76) nijako neobstojí, veď *ä* nie je tu za praslovanskú nosovú hlásku. Keď nepíšeme *väža*, ale *veža*, tak nesmieme písať ani vämeno, ale *vemeno*.

bojazlivý-bázlivý: vraj „bázlivo milý“ I, 32. Nikdy! Spišovne je len bojazlivý, teda aj bojazlivo.

Picture 1: A critique of literary language by Bartek (1933–1934, p. 188)

The high prestige of the purists and the respect for prescriptive “regulations” in this period also resulted from the fact that they were a reaction to the government’s policy of convergence of the two languages, so that they had the flavor of a defiance of official political power and a struggle for national self-identity (Pauliny, 1947, p. 2). The positive perception of purist activities – often associated in the discourse with the lexemes of struggle (“to fight for the purity of Slovak”, “defenders of Slovak”, “struggle for Slovak”, etc.) – was also supported by rising nationalism and a general resistance to Czech centralism. In 1940, when the *Slovenská reč* was endangered, Jánsky highly evaluated the results of the purists, and in his statistical analysis he indicated which authors and to what extent criticized “barbarisms” (Jánsky, 1940), and this was also an argument for the preservation of the journal.

Interestingly, Jánsky in the introduction stresses that he uses the term purism “without any pejorative attribute”, but in the next lines he says: “However, one should have in mind a linguistic purism that is healthy, uncolored by any side, unscientific tendencies, i.e., a purism that is only helpful to the standard language” (Jánsky, 1940, p. 5). This indicates that criticism of

purism already existed in this period. The emerging ambivalence was, however, only a transitory state in the movement of the pendulum to the opposite – anti-purist – side.

2.3. Prescriptivism and Purism as a Forbidden Ideology (1st Half of the 1960s)

A sharp reverse occurred after the Second World War, when everything associated with the interwar Republic was politically condemned, and interwar purism was associated with the fascist and separatist movement of the Slovak State (1938–1945). Purism was perceived as negative and harmful, and in the political context of the 1950s, it was labelled as a manifestation of bourgeois nationalism and chauvinism (Peciar, 1949–1950; Horecký, 1990, p. 259; Múcsková, 2017b), which was also politically sanctioned. Thus, purism ceased to be part of a linguistics and became part of a political ideology. The politically determined critique influenced perceptions of purism to such an extent that even later protectionist language regulation deliberately avoided the term. This symptomatic understanding of purism can also be seen in the definition of purism in the Slovak *Encyclopaedia of Linguistics* (Mistrík et al., 1993):

Purism – a movement for the purification of the stand. language from elements of foreign origin; it mainly affects vocabulary and phraseology. In the development of languages, purism appears especially in socio-political conditions when a nation feels threatened in its self-existence [...]. Such a situation arose during the first Czechoslovak Republic. The struggle for the purity and preservation of the peculiarity of Slovak was escalated in the discussions on the first *Rules of Slovak Orthography*, which, in the spirit of the false concept of a unified Czechoslovak nation and language, promoted elements and variants identical to Czech. Slovak linguistic purism was mainly targeted against the Czech borrowings [...]. Some traces of purism could be observed to a small extent even later.¹³

¹³ **purizmus** — hnutie za očistu spisovného jazyka od prvkov cudzieho pôvodu; zasahuje hl. slovník a frazeológiu. Vo vývine jazykov sa p. prejavuje najmä v takých spoločensko-politických pomeroch, v kt. sa niektorý národ cíti ohrozený vo svojej samobytnosti [...]. Takáto situácia vznikla aj v podmienkach prvej ČSR. Boje za čistotu a zachovanie svojráznosti spis. slovenčiny sa vyostřili v diskusiách o prvých Pravidlách slovenského pravopisu (1931), v kt. sa v duchu falošnej koncepcie jednotného čs. národa i jazyka podporovali prvky a varianty zhodné s češtinou. Slovenský jazykový p. bol namierený hl. proti preberaniu slov z češtiny [...]. Pravdaže, isté stopy po p. bolo možné sledovať v malej miere aj neskôr.

The rejection of purism brought a new period of conscious and politically controlled convergence of Slovak with Czech and, consequently, a prescription supporting the convergence under the conditions of a common state and social bilingualism, which “rejected the rejection” of bohemisms. As in the interwar period, the convergence of Slovak and Czech was declared to be necessary, especially in the field of new vocabulary and terminology, but also beneficial for smooth communication in a common state (Bělič, 1962, p. 388). These “efforts” developed to political pressure after the adoption of the Constitution in 1960 (cf. Múcsková, 2013). In the cultivation of the standard language “for years it was not allowed to say that a certain expression was not Slovak but Czech” (Buzássyová, 1994, p. 328), any delimiting statement could be considered a “remnant” of interwar purism, which could result in the accusation of bourgeois nationalism. As V. Mihálik wrote: “the fear of purism tied the hands of linguists and linguistics gave up its normative role” (1964, p. 9).

The social situation was in many aspects similar to the interwar years – the presence of Czechs in Slovakia, social bilingualism, but also the prestigious position of the Czech language and generally also of Bohemia in the political and economic sphere. Along with the demand for equal status of Czechs and Slovaks in the federation, negative anti-Czech attitudes and nationalistic views began to emerge (Lipták, 2003, p. 311). The tendency of Slovak and Czech convergence began to be perceived negatively among the intelligentsia. The work that was marked by the contemporary ideology of convergence was this time the *Slovník slovenského jazyka* [Dictionary of Slovak Language], which includes Czech innovations to the dictionary entries, but mostly with some pragmalinguistic qualifier (like *literary* or *archaic*) (Jarošová, 2012, p. 258; 2015, pp. 69–73).

2.4. Revitalization of Purism from the Bottom – Discussion about Language and Linguistics in 1964

In the context of social liberalization and release, as well as pro-reform and decentralization efforts of the 2nd half of the 1960s, open criticism of the language usage in the media and administration appeared in the weekly popular journal *Kultúrny život* in 1964.

A well-known translator and editor J. Ferencík published an article “Na obranu starých materií” [“In defence of grandmothers”] (1964) – where he

criticized a “bad language culture”¹⁴ in official and public communication, bad standard language competence of the intelligentsia, and excessive borrowing of Czech expressions and phrases. Critique was also addressed to the authors of the *Slovník slovenského jazyka* and also to linguists for passively accepting these bohemizing innovations. For today’s reader, the article might seem to be not very much different from other articles focused on language criticism, but historically, it was the first manifestation of these opinions that appeared after “years of silence”. This was probably one of the reasons why the article motivated a wide public discussion about language cultivation and prescription as well as about the role of linguistics in language regulation.¹⁵

An interesting feature of the discussion was that critics were not linguists, but intellectuals from the literary circles, editors, translators, teachers and also ordinary people. A majority of linguists vindicated the high variability and plenty of bohemisms and slang expressions in public texts. They explained it by natural and spontaneous consequences of the dynamic development of the society in the new conditions and the convergence policy. They defined their role just to register, describe the development of language, but not to intervene in it – under the slogan “unhindered development of the language” (Peciar, 1964). On the other hand, these were non-linguists who criticized the state of standard Slovak in the public sphere, which they evaluated as bad and endangering the identity of the Slovak language. They also criticized linguists for accepting this state and ceasing to regulate the language and protect its “purity”. The linguists were accused of “fear of purism”. Non-linguists stressed the necessity of linguistics regulation and purification of the language and demanded a new theory of language cultivation and prescriptive linguistics, or even “new – moderate – purism” (e.g., Mihálik, 1964). Moreover, the majority of proponents of purism claimed (also with regard to the political context of the 1960s) that the protection of lan-

¹⁴ The term “language culture” has several meanings in Slovak linguistics; it competes or is identified with the term “culture of language”, which usually refers to the result of language cultivation. In the context of prescriptive linguistics, the term “language culture” refers to the state or level of language use, usually in terms of conformity with the codified form of the language (for the terminology, cf. Král, 1988).

¹⁵ During the discussion – in May–October 1964 – there were more than 30 published articles and according to the editor more than 40 stayed unpublished. The whole discussion has been republished in a separate book entitled „*Pri zelenom stole: Naša reč*” [“At a green table: Our language”] (Múcsková & Vrábľová, 2014).

guage and language prescription is not purism. That is why we characterize the demand of new prescriptivism as “hidden” or “moderate” purism (see Múcsková, 2015).

2.5. Golden Age of Slovak Prescriptivism – 70s and 80s of the 20th Century

In the 2nd half of the 1960s, a new theory of standard language was built and presented in the so called *Tézy o slovenčine* [Theses about Slovak] (Ružička, 1967a), which stressed the independence of the Slovak language and its development, and stated “criteria of standard correctness” (Ružička, 1967a; 1967b) as objective rules for assessing language items as “correct” or “incorrect” from the official codification point of view. Its author, Ružička, also prepared and published the first proposal of *Language law* (1968) focused on protection of Slovak as an independent language. This turn in language policy reinforced the authority of prescriptive linguistics and revived the purist, mainly anti-Czech, approaches to the language regulation. In the 1970s and 1980s, prescriptive linguistics was a significant and prestigious field in linguistics. Since 1967, a journal *Kultúra slova* [Culture of Word] – a journal for language culture and terminology – started to be published, bringing prescriptive articles (or descriptive but aimed at prescriptive recommendation). It had and still has sections like *Miscellanea*, *Language Counselling*, *You were asking*, *New expressions*, etc. In 1971, in the Ludovít Štúr Institute of Linguistics, the department of Language Culture and Terminology was established, which provided a language consultation service for the public, regular educational radio programmes and articles in newspapers and journals called *Jazykové okienko* [language window = ‘note about language’].¹⁶ Very popular were publications that presented lists of incorrect and correct words, with a symptomatic titles: *A thousand advices from the standard Slovak*, *Dictionary of incorrect and correct words*, *Language consultation centre answers*, and others. The media – television, radio, newspapers – had language correctors and also instructors providing regular courses on the correct use of language and correct pronunciation.

Overall, there was a predominance of structural descriptive linguistics. This became not only a basis for knowing the real state and the language structure, but its role was also seen in serving as a base for prescriptive deci-

¹⁶ It is still quite a popular genre in which authors point to a particular example of “frequent mistakes” made by people when using Slovak.

sions and codification. Variants or new items were assessed according to their correspondence with the described structure. The criterion of frequency or productivity was only secondary. If an expression considered “incorrect” was used frequently, there were equally frequent instructions about its incorrectness. Rather than reconsidering its negative evaluation, linguistic prescriptivism introduced the term *návratné chyby* [recurrent mistakes].

These prescriptive activities were accepted and highly valued by the public; moreover, even the linguistic community considered this field prestigious. In contrast to foreign definitions of prescriptivism, the definition in the Slovak *Encyclopedia of Linguistics* (1993) defines prescriptive linguistics as a branch of linguistics; control of compliance with prescriptive rules, including linguistic criticism, is not only part of, but also the task of linguists:

prescriptive linguistics – branch of linguistics that seeks to develop guidelines, regulations for the use of language in social communication, to produce normative and codification manuals. The basis of p. l. is the theory of standard language, which is grounded on such basic concepts as system, norm and usage, as well as on the sociological knowledge of language use. [...] Prescriptive manuals and guides are prepared and published by certain teams, usually within a scientific institution of a national character, which controls their compliance. [...] ¹⁷ (Mistrík, 1993).

2.6. The Decline of Prestige in the New Conditions at the Turn of the Centuries

A characteristic feature of purism and prescriptivism is that they persist for a longer time even after the specific circumstances that conditioned their emergence and blossoming into a “golden age” have passed. They remain – as historical tradition – part of the culture of a society and its linguistic ideologies. For this reason, the remnants of anti-Czech purism and language regulation in Slovakia are also encountered in contemporary approaches to language and in the reflection of language dynamics both in linguistics and in society (Múcsková, 2017a, p. 44).

¹⁷ **preskriptívna lingvistika** – odvetvie jazykovedy usilujúce sa vypracúvať smernice, predpisy na používanie jazyka v spoločenskej komunikácii, spracúvať normatívne a kodifikačné príručky. Základom p. j. je teória spisovného jazyka opretá o také základné pojmy, ako je systém, norma a úzus, ako aj o sociologické poznatky o používaní jazyka. [...] Preskriptívne nástroje, pomôcky vypracúvajú a vydávajú, resp. aj kontrolujú ich dodržiavanie isté kolektívy, obyč. v rámci vedeckej inštitúcie národného charakteru. [...].

However, a more significant decline in the prestige of prescriptivism can be observed in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Under the influence of the developing sociolinguistics and pragmalinguistics, the perception of language variation and dynamics is changing: they are no longer viewed as disruptive phenomena that need to be regulated or eliminated. On the contrary, they are accepted as a natural part of language modernization, and a functional and frequency perspective is preferred in their assessment. A significant factor in the preference of the criteria of functioning and frequency was the emergence of corpora and corpus databases, which became a source for research of real, natural language use.

The change of paradigm in linguistics and the focus on communication and parole was again accompanied by discussions and polemics about the adequacy of traditional linguistic prescription and the need for a new more liberal codification (or even about its total “needlessness”). As Ondrejovič wrote, “the differences of opinions on language and its research are evidenced in every volume on standard language and language cultivation that has been published in this country so far” (2008, p. 213).¹⁸ In Slovak linguistics, there have gradually profiled groups of linguists with a “sociolinguistic” or “normativistic” approach to language cultivation (Ondrejovič, 2008, p. 214), and alongside the ever-present prescriptive regulatory efforts and the authority of official codification, there appears more and more intensively the “critique of linguistic criticism” (Dolník, 1997).

Due to changes in linguistic attitudes, but also to the emergence of interdisciplinary researches, linguistic prescription has lost its prestigious status. However, this did not mean the end of prescriptivism, but only its liberalization – i.e., the change of the discourse of language regulation from strict commands and prohibitions to recommendations, advices and explanations. However, there is still a Department of Language Culture and Language Counselling Centre, which is contacted daily by language users with

¹⁸ The most well-known and recent are the conference collections *Spisovná slovenčina a jazyková kultúra* [Standard Slovak and language culture] (ed. Považaj, 1995), *Slovenčina na konci 20. storočia, jej normy a perspektívy* [Slovak at the end of the 20th century, its norms and perspectives] (ed. Ondrejovič, 1997) or *Jazyková kultúra na začiatku 3. tisícročia* [Language culture at the beginning of the 3rd millennium] (ed. Považaj, 2009). However, these represent only a part of the discussion also taking place in the journal papers and monographs; overall, it can be said that – also due to certain political circumstances and specificities – discussions or polemics have accompanied the development of standard Slovak since its beginnings.

questions about the language correctness. This is documented by the statistics in the table below:

Number of telephone calls and letters answered (some of them rounded) and the total number of contributions to web language counselling

Language counselling	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Phone	6,000	5,000	5,000	4,000	2,500	1,400	23,900
Email	650	453	638	663	1,050	1,500	4,954
Web	5,500	5,957	6,237	6,453	6,514	6,832	

Picture 2: Summary of the main activities of a research institute (Ludovít Štúr Institute of Linguistics) of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Period: January 1, 2016–December 31, 2021 (https://www.juls.savba.sk/attachments/akreditacne_dotazniky/dotaznik_2016-2021.pdf)

The above statistics show that in society there is still a myth about the necessity of regulating the language and regulatory activities are required by the public or state institutions. Very popular are the regular (daily) radio and TV programs *Slovenčina na slovíčko* [*Let's talk about Slovak*], the popular book *Slovenčina na každý deň* [*Slovak for every day*] published in 2020 became one of the best-sellers on the book market. The prescriptive approach persists in editorial practice, but also in schools. The viability of prescriptivism is also supported by the widespread myth that language is declining, in a bad state, decaying, or losing its purity.

2.7. Maintaining Linguistic Prescriptivism Outside Linguistics

As mentioned above, despite the changes in the linguistic approach to language regulation, the belief that there are correct and incorrect language items that need to be eliminated if we want to speak correct standard Slovak still persists in editorial practice and in school education. In these areas, its persistence is supported by the official language policy, which is undertaken within the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic and its Department of the State Language. Its scope also includes the *Act on the State Language* (Act No 270/1995 Coll., adopted in 1995),¹⁹ which has a strongly protective character, strictly requires compliance with the codification and does not allow elements that distort the prescribed norm:

¹⁹ English version is available at: https://www.culture.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/zakon_o_sj_v_anj.pdf

2 State Language and Its Protection

(1) The State:

- a) shall create appropriate conditions in the educational, scientific and information systems to enable every citizen of the Slovak Republic to master and use the state language in oral and written communications;
 - b) shall create appropriate conditions for scientific research of the state language, research of its historical development, research of its local and social dialects, shall take care of the codification of the state language, and enhancement of the language culture;
- (2) The codified form of the state language shall be approved and published on the basis of proposal of specialised slovakistic linguistic institutes and specialists in the area of the state language by the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter “Ministry of Culture”) on its website.
- (3) Any interference with the codified form of the state language that is contrary to the regularities shall be inadmissible.

Picture 3: Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on the State Language of the Slovak Republic (https://www.culture.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/zakon_o_sj_v_anj.pdf)

The *Act* has been criticized by linguists precisely because of its prescriptive nature and inconsistency with the linguistic approach to language and with the “normal cultivation of the standard language” (Dolník, 2009, p. 8). In section 3 of paragraph 2, the authority of codification is strengthened on the level of the law, i.e., that “a political instrument (the law) directly intervenes into the cultivation of the standard language” (Dolník, 2009.; cf. also Dolník, 2004).

As part of its care for the state language, the Ministry controls the observance of the language law, prepares a *Report on the state of use of the state language* every second year,²⁰ publishes its own regulatory manuals – e.g., a guide *Ako nehréšiť proti slovenčine* [*How not to sin against Slovak*] (Števčková, 1995) containing about 2500 incorrect expressions (mostly long-rejected bohemisms),²¹ or *Slovenčina v našom živote* [*Slovak in our life*]

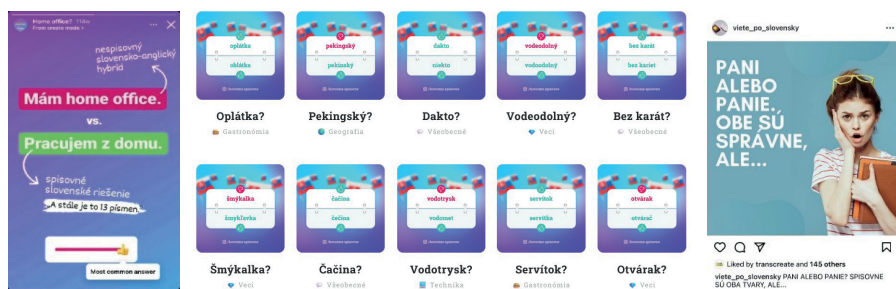
²⁰ <https://www.culture.gov.sk/posobnost-ministerstva/statny-jazyk-narodnostne-mensiny-a-zahranicni-slovaci/statny-jazyk/spravy-o-stave-pouzivania-statneho-jazyka-na-uzemi-sr/>

²¹ The publication was an anachronism at the time of its publication, even in the context of the language prescription of the time. In content and form (it is a list of incorrect expressions and their correct, “pure” variants) reminded the strategies of the purists from

(2020) – and creates its own highly prescriptive database of instructions on standard Slovak.

The second domain in which the ideology of standardism and purism is maintained is the environment of social networks, where discussions about language on various topics are carried out – language correctness, dynamic language phenomena, borrowing from other languages, or bilingual education of children. Thus, an alternative and rather complex “folk linguistics” is being developed, based on the assumption that “[...] it is conceivable that a folk linguistic lens can be applied to any linguistic topic the folk might talk about” (Niedzielski & Preston, 2009, p. 149; according to Albury, 2014, p. 94; about the folk language planning in Slovak context see Múcsková, 2022).

On social networks, there are discussion blogs that focus on language issues or lay language counselling (Cimermanová, 2023; Rusinková, 2020), which resemble those short articles from the interwar period – they do not need argumentation and contains only lists of incorrect expressions mechanically taken from older or more recent linguistic works. Their prescriptive character is also indicated by their titles: *Jazyková poradňa ASAP* [Language counselling ASAP], *Hovorme spisovne* [Let speak correctly], *Máme radi slovenčinu* [We love Slovak], *Viete po slovensky?* [Do you know Slovak?], *Puristický slovník slovenčiny* [Purist dictionary of the Slovak language], etc.



Picture 4: Online prescriptive portals *Hovorme spisovne* <https://www.instagram.com/p/CcaD-TkKG0l/>, and *Viete po slovensky?* <https://www.instagram.com/p/CjV9BQZroUs/>. (according to Cimermanová, 2023, pp. 69–70).

the interwar period. However, due to its distinctly anti-Czech purist character, it has also attracted attention in foreign linguistics – in his contributions, Newerkla points to the unreality of adherence to the prescribed regulations and to the aforementioned persistence of purist approaches to productive units rejected as incorrect by prescriptive linguistics; this contradiction is, from his point of view, also reflected in the teaching of Slovak as a foreign language (2009, 2011).

Folk linguists often replicate the ideologies of standardism and protective purism that have been formed in scientific linguistics before and survive today thanks to widespread myths about the language decline its endangered status. As Ondrejovič states, among the laymen today we meet with a much more pronounced degree of purism than in scientific linguistics: “Purism has lost its position in linguistics in many respects [...], but this does not mean that it has lost this position among the language users” (Ondrejovič, 2020, p. 246). Even Nils Langer and Winifried Davies see it as one of the most significant examples of so-called folk linguistics (2005, p. 1; cit. after Ondrejovič, 2020).

The public acceptance and apprehension of prescriptivism and language regulation – as we have seen it in historical periods of the development of standard Slovak – survives up to the present day. As we have stated above, the prescriptivism undergoes its own “linguistic” development and changes, but this in fact refers only to changes in the linguistic approach to language. However, its current character and approach have not yet penetrated the wider public and cultural consciousness.

3. Conclusion

The development of a language is accompanied by a large complex of factors based on the development of the language community – its political background, culture, thoughts and values. These are often the reasons why the natural dynamics of language is not accepted as an empirical fact but is the subject of evaluation and conscious regulation reflecting the interests and attitudes of language policy and political power. Language ideologies, then, are the tools by which interventions in language are explained as necessary and correct, and which seem to rationalise the promoted principles of language correctness and incorrectness, regardless of whether they are rationally asserted or merely they reflect some desirable fiction.

From the perspective of scientific knowledge of the processuality and complexity of language change, it is clear that “pure” or “natural” language is a construct, as well as the division into “correct” or “incorrect” utterances, words, or forms. The importance of studying the phenomenon of prescriptivism, purism, and anti-purism is therefore not in revealing their (il)legitimacy, usefulness, or harmfulness. They should be accepted as part of the development of language, which accommodates itself not only to communi-

cative needs but also to contradictory cultural and political circumstances, and in its later form carries traces of earlier conflicts and interventions that are subsequently identified as motivations of language changes.

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