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## Assessment of Modern Loanwords by the Contemporary Czech Youth

### Abstract

The article deals with specific symptoms of formal adaptation of modern loanwords within various spheres of language and their usage and assessment by the contemporary Czech pupils and students. It is based on the results of long-term research and extensive questionnaire search concentrated on the written forms of selected Anglicisms.

*Keywords : language, loanwords, Anglicisms, formal adaptation, communication, slang of the youth*

### Introduction

Like most modern languages, the Czech language has faced many significant changes, particularly enlargement of its vocabulary connected with the development of society and the rise of denomination needs in various spheres. Besides word-formative procedures, the most significant source of lexicon enrichment is represented by borrowing lexical items from foreign languages. The Czech language has adopted foreign words during all of its history; the most numerous borrowings being of Latin, Greek, German and Romance origin (besides words borrowed from the typologically close Slavonic languages). During the last several decades the adoption of Anglicisms, i.e., internationalisms taken over through English (many of them being of Romance or other origin) has prevailed.

## **Current situation of loanwords in the Czech language**

Except for the borrowing of new lexical items itself, adaptation mechanisms are applied in dynamic and often quite uncontrolled ways, i.e. the borrowed words are “Czechicized” in their forms (phonetic, orthographical, grammatical, word-formative) and in the semantic meaning used in Czech. We can also notice a better knowledge and experience in this sphere of language on the users’ side, especially in the case of the frequently used words. An important factor of adaptation of the borrowings is their incorporation in appropriate layers of the contemporary lexicon. Nevertheless, we still miss relevant guiding rules for the evaluation of the newest items in the sense of their literacy, expressivity, stylistic character, etc., as many of them have not been listed in the language reference books yet (not only the codification reference books but also dictionaries of foreign words, neologisms, etc.).

From the traditional point of view, the newly borrowed lexical items are usually regarded to be stylistically marked, i.e. neological, emotively charged, slangy, etc., usually depending on the type of texts and communicative situations they appear in. These lexemes are only beginning to be used, their forms and stylistic character are evolving and getting settled. Their other linguistic qualities are also specified in comparison with the receptor language native words or older loanwords. This process is often extremely variable, which makes the incorporation of these items in the language reference books even more problematic. Such a situation then causes variability and instability and results in the fact that both the formal and semantic aspects of the new loanwords are perceived to be less obligatory than in the case of the native words. Then the users inevitably have to either guess or imitate the language models represented most often by journalists, commentators, celebrities and other popular people, and of course teachers. We must not forget that in the course of interiorization of the loanwords, the process of learning plays a more important role than in the case of mastering the native language words, which is usually ontogenetic.

When dealing with the words of foreign origin, not only in Czech, we can encounter the opinion that we should distinguish among those regarded to be needed, functional, and those we could call “redundant”, i.e. useless in fact. However, we have to realize that the functionality of each loanword consists also in the potentiality of semantic variations and synonymic scales it allows, even if only for special purposes. By these purposes we mean that sometimes language elements are used only with the aim of specific effect on the addressee, or perhaps intensification of formality (or informality) of the communicate, no matter whether we have in mind “exclusive” expressions (*trendy look, fashion week*), evaluative adjectives (*good, best, happy*), or loanwords typical of the language code used by the youth, mostly teenagers.

One of the general opinions is that the young use the foreign words uncritically, too frequently, or redundantly. Particularly the members of the older generations perceive this phenomenon negatively as a certain deformation of communicative competence, which hinders young people from the adequate usage of the loanwords. To be able to take an objective attitude, we should realize which language elements are or are not appropriate and fitting within a certain communicative situation and context, or which of them fulfil their function and purpose – and also what the purpose is. If it is only the above-mentioned ambition of attractiveness, we have to adjust the evaluation criteria to this fact, especially when dealing with those language means which are actually found on the imaginary dividing line between modernity and standard.

We should also admit that sometimes particularly teenagers make use of their knowledge of foreign languages (or even only some foreign words) as an advantage in comparison with the older generation, whose members are usually handicapped in this sense, and the code of young people becomes a secrecy for them to some extent (that is why the slang of the youth is sometimes assigned to argot). Besides mass media (TV, magazines for the youth and mainly the Internet), which influence the development of vocabulary and all the language skills of children and young people to a high extent, their speech manners and choice of language expressions are influenced also by the electronic communication. Chat, Facebook, blogs and various social networks represent a language space to which the newest loanwords of all kinds penetrate en masse, and the young tend to actively use them as they regard them to be modern and attractive. Thanks to a good knowledge of foreign languages (particularly English) they consider the loanwords to be organic and integral parts of their mutual communication. In comparison with the native language elements of the same or similar meaning (supposing that they exist), the foreign words appear to be more attractive, pregnant and “stronger” in meaning. In some cases their usage is only occasional, but usually they are typical of the youth’s language generally within both the spoken and written communication (within chat, blogs, etc., the form is primarily written, but it includes distinctive elements of the spoken language). Perhaps some of the expressions have no longevity, but above all we should realize the fact proved repeatedly by the communication practice: in the case of particular language means young people lose their sense of the stylistic dimensions. When such a situation occurs frequently, the stylistic character of these elements can be modified (most often they change their expressivity, slang signs, etc.).

The complexity of this phenomenon should be perceived in a view of the psychological and sociological aspects, but the most important is the functional

approach to this problem. Besides the above-mentioned attractiveness and modernity, the young consider those lexemes to be symbols of certain social solidarity and expression of generation distinction. Their lexicon could be recognized as a sociolect, usually as the (general) slang of the youth, or perhaps as argot (with either an intentional, or unintentional function of confidentiality and secret meaning of individual lexical elements, which could be either primary, or secondary, depending on the context). Thanks to this social dialect, young people identify themselves as members of certain social groups, and it is evident that the need for unconventional expression, including unusual usage of foreign language elements, is most prominent at the time of adolescence. The youth have a tendency to totemize some words (e.g. various types of intensifying words and expressives), which could gain even poly-semantic character (e.g. adjectives *brutální* (brutal), *totální* (total) etc., all of them oscillating between extremely positive and negative meanings). The aim of the intensification of expressiveness of speech (psychologically conditioned and caused by emotional lability), and at the same time socially induced efforts of impression (when the speaker or writer wants to amuse the other communicants, to attract them by new words, to shock the adults within the assumed generation revolt against conventions) represent two main factors influencing the development of the slang of the youth.

Besides the high frequency of foreign words in the youth's language code, its sociolectal character is intensified also by intentional efforts of uniqueness in the form of unusual manners of usage and levels of formal adaptation of the loanwords, which could be actually distinct from other types of language communicates. Focused on written texts of informal character (especially the Internet communication within various discussion groups) from the point of view of formal adaptation, we find two contradictory tendencies. On the one hand teenagers use not adapted loanwords that have not been used in Czech yet, and then some utterances resemble the phenomenon known as code-mixing (e.g. *musím make call domů; no to byl fakt good joke; hello, friends, jak jde work; musím ráno vstávat do school*) etc. On the other hand, they use various atypical formal adaptations. As examples we could mention derivations formed by curious suffixes, e.g. *fočus* (usually fotbal, Engl. football), *trenál* (trénink, training), *zumbina* (zumba), *bestofka* (best of) etc. Many of these expressions are characterized by distinct expressivity, besides those already mentioned we could name, above all, diminutives of both grades, i.e. comparatives and superlatives, e.g. *kissík* and *kissíček* (kiss)<sup>1</sup>, *flirtík* and *flirtíček* (flirt), then *peoplík* (people in singular, i.e. a person), *džobík* (job), or expressions from the sphere

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<sup>1</sup> In the meaning of emoticon, smiley, adapted as *smajlík* in Czech.

of computers and communication technologies like *mailík/mejlík* (mail, e-mail), *mobilek* (mobile phone), *kompík* (computer), *setík* (set), *sajtka* (site) etc.

The neological word-formation is characterized also by the language playfulness, as well as by tendencies towards language economization, which is explicit, e.g., within the abbreviation-derivation, univerbization and re-suffixation procedures applied in the cases of words like *seroš* (seriál, i.e. TV series), *áloše* (alimenty, alimonies), *intoš* (polysemantic derivation, meaning either “intelektuál”, intellectual, or “Internet”), *inták* (Internet), *repros* (reproduktor, sound reproducer), *fejisko* (Facebook), *textovka* (textová zpráva, text message), *virtuálka* (virtuální situace, virtual situation), *webovka* (webová stránka, web page) and many others.

Derivation of verbs used within various semantic spheres seems to be unlimited in its productivity, too. Depending on communication needs, the verbal derivations are formed with almost no limits from all sorts of word bases of the nominal character (adventure, adapt. *aventura* – *adventurovat*, aerobics, *aerobik* – *aerobikovat*, mobile, *mobil* – *mobilovat*), as well as of verbal character (to focus, adapt. *fokus* – *fokusovat*, to speak – *speakovat*, i.e. *spíkovat*, to walk – *walkovat*, to work – *workovat*). Many of the newly formed verbs are regarded to be stylistically marked, e.g. the neologism *lovovat*, i.e. *lowovat*, in the diminutive form *lovískovat* (to love). Perfective forms are most often formed by the formant – *nou/-nu-*, e.g. to book – *buknout*, to mail – *mailnout*, to reset – *resetnout*, to stop – *stopnout*. The verbs formed in this way are classified as unmarked usually only at the level of informal communicates, some of them have a rather occasional or slangy character, e.g. to check – *čeknout*, to forward – *forvardnout*, to hack – *hacknout/heknout*, etc. The expressive derivations can be found also among adverbs, e.g. *sorky*, *soráč* and *soráček* (sorry), *fajnky* and *fajňáčko* (*fajn*). Among other parts of speech there is a rich scale of possibilities, let us mention, e.g., particles like *plís*, *plííz*, *pls*, *plísky* (please) and *thanx*, *thx*, *fenks*, *fenk jú* (thanks), or greetings *hello*, *helooou* (hallo), *byebye*, *baj baj*, *csauki*, *čágo*, *čágoška*, *čaua*, *čaučík*, *čaudaaa* (ciao) and many others.

Manifestations of the language creativity within the loanwords can be traced in the semantic neologization, where many changes of meaning occur. At first they appear in discourses specific to limited groups of participants, and then they could enter the general usage. Sometimes these semantic modifications are accompanied by intensification of expressivity. Quite often we find them in connection with computers, e.g. *linkovat* (to link, in Czech a homonym with the other meaning “to rule”), *zasejvovat* (to save, with the new semantic modification “to remember”), *resetnout harddisk* (to reset hard disc, new meaning “to have a rest”), from other spheres we can name e.g. *krédo* (originally *credo*, today also in the meaning of mobile phone credit). In fact, most of these examples represent elements of determinologization,

i.e. the original professional terms are used by young people in new (mostly comical) meanings. These untraditional ways of dealing with foreign language elements should be understood in the context of the above-mentioned needs of teenagers, who consider them to be the most appropriate and best fulfilling the requirement of adequacy, success and effectiveness of the language communication. These users usually do not mind breaking or overstepping the existing conventions and norms, regarded to be traditional in fact.

As suggested by some of the above-mentioned examples, specific features of formal adaptation typical of the youth are represented also by intentional “Czechicization” of the graphic form of the words to a larger extent than those corresponding with the contemporary usage, e.g. *haus* (house), *spešl* (special), *ekšn* (action), *pejpr* (paper, in Czech *papír*)<sup>2</sup> etc. From the general point of view, the graphic form<sup>3</sup> of the loanwords plays an important role in their usage and in the process of their integration with the target language. It is because in Czech the orthographical subsystem seems to be the most regulated by the codification in frames of the traditional conception. The codification always respects the orthographical traditions, but on the other hand it must respect the prominent developmental linguistic trends and the contemporary state of the language usage. Usually the orthographical mistakes seem to be the most distinctive, and that is why almost no variability in this sphere is tolerated. This situation corresponds with the generally spread opinion that out of two or three written variants, only one is correct (or at least more correct than the others), and the others are erroneous. And this is exactly the phenomenon used by teenagers, who more or less intentionally realize that in the case of the newly adopted lexemes this process is very progressive – most of the words are borrowed with their original graphic forms at the beginning, then they pass through the phase of doubled forms, and finally they are fully adapted. Today this process is often quicker than it used to be earlier, mainly in slangs, spheres of everyday informal written communication, etc. Assessment of these variants should be individual, e.g. the adapted forms like *mjuzik/mjúzik*, *bandží džampink* or *gejm* are perceived as acceptable only within informal communicates in comparison with the original forms *music*, *bungee jumping* and *game*, but in all other contexts they are strongly marked, unusual (or even incomprehensible)

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<sup>2</sup> The given examples have been obtained by excerption of chat communication within the grant project GAČR 405/04/1035 *Linguistic aspects of one type of communication on the Internet (Czech on chat)* from the server *xchat.cz*.

<sup>3</sup> In our conception we intentionally avoid designation of the individual variants as “orthographic”, because the entire majority of the loanwords and mainly their adapted forms have not been incorporated in the basic orthographical codification manuals yet.

as a result of the highly distinct diversity of their written and pronounced forms. With respect to the fact that among the newly borrowed words in Czech there are hundreds of expressions having actually or potentially two or three graphic forms in the contemporary usage (at random we can name, e.g., *stretching* – *strečing* – *strečink*, *dressing* – *dresing* – *dresink*, *squatter* – *squater* – *skvoter*), it is obvious that the choice is almost only up to the user. The communicants themselves should realize which form of the borrowing is suitable for the appropriate context (i.e. unmarked in the case of neutral usage, or marked for actualization purposes). We do not mean they should distinguish their “correctness” or “incorrectness”; we have in mind their stylistic adequacy and suitability.

## Research

We wanted to get to know the attitude of Czech young people with respect to the usage of the adapted forms of originally English words in the contemporary Czech language (without any explicit differentiation of styles or contexts). That is why we had decided to verify their opinions with the help of extensive questionnaire search, realized in 2010 within the project GAČR 405/09/0113 *Phenomenon of literacy in the contemporary Czech language situation: reception, reality, perspectives and vision*. This search had all the necessary sociolinguistic criteria and involved proportionally the whole territory of the Czech Republic. The respondents were represented by altogether 1419 young people (elementary school pupils and students of various secondary schools, aged 12–18). The whole sets of questionnaires included 17 questions, and one of them was focused on the adapted forms of the Anglicisms *lídr* (i.e. leader), *spíkr* (speaker), *imidž* (image), *mítink* (meeting), *pírsink* (piercing), *mejlovat* (to mail, together with the morphemic-morphological variant *mejlnout*), *zabukovat* (to book) and *šoubyznys* (show business), and on derivations of the original English abbreviations *DVD* and *SMS* in the forms of *dívídičko* and *esemeska*. The respondents were supposed to “mark” them as in school: from 1 (“quite acceptable”) up to 5 (“absolutely a unacceptable”) according to their individual perception of those written forms. For hesitating respondents, a possibility “I don’t know” had been added, but the pupils and students chose this alternative only rarely.

The results we have obtained illustrate that in a situation when young people are confronted with the Czechicized forms and should assess them, they are not by far as benevolent as we could suppose when following their real communicates. The strictest attitude was noticed in the case of the verbal derivation *mejlnout* (the

average assessment was 3.7), which corresponds with the pairs of verbs *printovat* – *printnout* (to print) or *hackovat* – *hacknout* (to hack), i.e. substandard explicit perfective derivation of the originally slang verb *mailovat*, or *e-mailovat*, which is regarded to be standard. If we compared the forms *mejlnout* and *mejlovat*, the second variant was more successful – its average assessment was 2.6, even if some of the respondents could have been influenced by the non-literary words used within the colloquial Czech language, e.g. *mejdlo*, *mejto*, *mejt se* (their standard forms are *mýdlo*, *mýto*, *mýt se*, i.e. soap, toll, to wash) etc., where the original diphthongised – *ej* – combination occurs, too.

The deverbative word *spíkr* had also negative rating (average 3.7), which is surprising because this graphical form is the only one present in the accessible language manuals and textbooks (i.e. they do not include the original English form *speaker*). On the contrary, within the synchronic written corpuses<sup>4</sup> this form can be found many times and the proportion of the occurrence of *spíkr* and *speaker* (including all their derivations) is 1 : 5 (*spíkr* 497 : *speaker* 106). The second deverbative noun *lídr* obtained higher marks (average 2.6). Within the actual representative manuals<sup>5</sup> this word is written in doubled form, i.e. both *leader* and *lídr*, however in the synchronic corpuses *lídr* has multiple frequency (*leader* 1501: *lídr* 60374).

Then we were interested in the pupils' and students' opinions of the Czechicized variant of the Anglicism *image* in the form of *imidž* (which appears to be hybrid from the point of view of its pronunciation in Czech [imič]; but on the other hand, the fully adapted variant *imič* is still too "strange"). The attitude of our respondents was rather depreciative (more strongly in the case of girls), the average mark was 3.3. The assessment of the adapted forms of the original Anglicisms with the suffix – *ing* – *mítink* (meeting) and *pírsink* (piercing) – was not much different, in the case of the former it was 3.0, the latter 3.2, no matter that these words differ as far as the length of their existence in the Czech vocabulary is concerned (*mítink* is much "older"), and also within their semantic spectre (there is a distinct polysemy of the lexeme *mítink* today). Their incorporation in the accessible language reference manuals is different, too (the adapted form *mítink* has been codified in Czech, *pírsink* can be found only in the dictionary of neologisms *Nová slova v češtině 2*).

<sup>4</sup> We mean the synchronic corpus of the written Czech language SYN.

<sup>5</sup> *Pravidla českého pravopisu* (Rules of the Czech orthography, 2005), *Nový akademický slovník cizích slov* (New academic dictionary of foreign words, 2005), *Nová slova v češtině 1* (New words in Czech 1, 1998), *Nová slova v češtině 2* (New words in Czech 2, 2004), *Internetová jazyková příručka* (Internet language manual) [online].



The average rating was a result of the assessment of the Anglicisms *šoubyznys* (2.5), which is a usual, frequent form, and *zabukovat* (with the word *letenku* (air ticket) added so that its meaning was clear, the average was 2.6), which is a lexeme formed analogically to the verbal derivations *zamluvit* (engage) or *zarezervovat* (reserve), formed from the expression *book*, having nothing in common with the Czech word *buk* (beech).

On the other hand, the assessment of two different types of derivations formed from the original English abbreviations was quite different: the graphic form *esemeska* obtained the highest rating of all the expressions (1.9), while *dívídičko* was marked as second-rate (3.1). The reason is obvious – the first word is very frequent, spelling of the abbreviation *SMS* in Czech and in English is similar and the users have no problems with its written form. The derivation formed from the abbreviation *DVD* could be realized either on the basis of the Czech way of spelling [de:ve:de:], i.e. *dévédéčko*, or according to the English spelling [di:vi:di:]. In the second case it is even up to the user to decide whether to choose the variant *dývídíčko* (with explicit “hardness” of the pronunciation), or *dívídičko* (this form is more compact, but not positively evaluated by our respondents).

## Conclusion

In the presented text we have mentioned only some types of the language specifics that represent an integral part of the language code used by the today’s Czech youth, and the opinions of the respondents belonging to the age category of 12–18, when it comes to the problem of graphic adaptation. It is evident that some language elements or communication models have a function of generation and social identification. It would be senseless to suppress or “violently” influence their usage, mainly for psychological reasons. Nevertheless, it is suitable and necessary to amplify the language skills of the youth in the most advantageous ways. Development of the appropriate communication competences of the young could represent the best way not only to avoid any potential misunderstanding in particular communicative situations, but also to advance generation approximation and elimination of barriers in mutual communication.

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