

On the Eastern Slovak Linguistic Separatism

It is generally assumed that Ľ. Štúr codified the standard Slovak on the basis of central Slovak dialects, which is supported also by his own claim. The newer analysis shows, however, that the basis for Štúr's codification was the language of scholars in central Slovak towns (especially of Liptovský Mikuláš).

The choice of the central Slovak concept for the basis of the standard language is considered to be the reason for the success of Štúr's codification and failure of Bernolák's codification, who had attempted such codification even before Štúr, on the basis of Trnava scholars' usage. Štúr laid the basis of standard Slovak via his works *Nauka reči Slovenskej* (1846) and *Nárečja Slovenskuo* (1846), but the important thing is, that he managed to overcome the linguistic-confessional split between the bernolakovian Catholics and evangelicals writing in biblical Czech.

However, not everyone was content with this Štúr's step at the time (but also later). Ján Kollár wanted to remain by (slovakized) Czech, which had been used before by Slovaks as a literary language, later he promoted the so called old Slovak. Other authors, who had supported the bernolakovian tradition, wanted to constitute the standard Slovak on the basis of western Slovak. It is pointed at also today, that western Slovak had been prepared for this role better than central Slovak. It disposed with not only the Bernolák's grammar of Slavic (= Slovak) language, but also with his multivolume dictionary. Štúr had prepared the grammar and also the claim for his Slovak, but he never published a dictionary.

A different concept is presented by the authors, who are convinced that the most suitable basis for constituting standard Slovak at the time was neither central nor western, but eastern Slovak. This view was defended by the historian Ondrej Halaga in the *Svojina* magazine and he later summarized it in *Východoslovenský slovník (Eastern Slovak Dictionary)* (2002). According to this view, eastern Slovak originated "via Czech". However, it can be shown, that at the time, when Czech came to the Slovak territory, Slovak functioned as the language of the Slovak ethnic group in the form of dialects, cultivated local varieties as well as folk literary production, and also supradialectal units. Neither his thesis, that at the time Czech was the language of people (lingua vernacular) in Eastern Slovakia, nor that the eastern Slovak, in which the Calvinist books of the 18th century were written, originated by the "easternslovakization" of Czech (Štefan Švagrovský), can be defended.

The eastern Slovak was perceived by several philologists of the Slovak past (Matej Bel, Ľudovít Štúr, Samo Czambel) with certain contempt. O. Halaga argues, however, that at the time, it was precisely eastern Slovak which functioned as the “noble language” at least in the way, that it was used by “gentlemen” as well, whereas the central Slovak was only a Wallachian language, the language of raftsmen and the language of the lowest layers of society without any literary tradition.

The Šariš standard language was “exported” also abroad at the end of the 18th century. Some newspapers were published in it also in the USA, but this language remained a political issue also after establishing the Czechoslovak Republic. The eastern Slovak separatism survived at home also after 1918 (slovjacké spolky – Slovak associations). The last attempts to resurrect the eastern Slovak as the standard language were possible to observe after the Vienna Award 1938 – 1945, when a part of Slovakia was devolved to Hungary and was misused for political (“separatist”) goals.