Submission for SlaviCorp 2020

MDA of Czech parliamentary discourse as a way to understand populism

Populism has become a prominent trait of current political action in a great number of countries in Europe and beyond. A great part of the electoral success of populist politicians and parties is often attributed to a simple and effective communication with the electorate. The populist phenomenon seems to be "pathological of democracy" (Taggart, 2002) and that poses a potential threat to the pluralistic democracy (Müller 2016, Mudde and Kaltwasser 2014, 2017). Thus, the study of parliamentary discourse is crucial in order to understand this phenomenon.

Many of the existing studies discuss populist language in terms of features that are empirically hard to grasp (Zienkowski and Breeze 2019, Moffitt 2016). On that account, we propose a linguistic analysis that applies the Multi-Dimensional Analysis (MDA) of Czech registers. This method determines the invariant and the repertoire and the scope of the alternating linguistic means, where linguistic variation is perceived as a materialization of the linguistic choices made by the speakers (Cvrček et al. 2018, 293). The analysed text corpus includes parliamentary speeches within the last three mandate periods (2010-2013, 2013-2017, 2017-2019), as such it accounts for a spectrum of populist and non-populist discourses.

In this study, we pursue two research objectives: first, we examine the position of the parliamentary register within the spectrum the established Czech registers (Cvrček et al. 2018a,2018b, 2020) Second, we place the linguistic profiles of the individual parliamentary politicians within the parliamentary register. We determine the invariant and the scope of linguistic variation of parliamentary language under the assumption that the variation reflects the populist – non-populist continuum. Moreover, we examine the impact of extra-linguistic factors (e.g. party affiliation) or sociolinguistic variables (sex, education, age) on the variation of parliamentary register.

Keywords: MDA, Czech, parliamentary discourse, populism

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