



Complex Language Analysis as One of the Methods in Teaching Czech as a Foreign Language

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Abstract: *As the number of foreigners in the Czech Republic keeps rising, teachers are faced with the novel task of teaching Czech as a foreign language. Approaching this issue, the authors here discuss the method of 'complex language analysis', which supports the learning process by reconnecting abstract language expressions with the real world. Three functions are particular to this method: motivation, repetition, and practising of the curriculum, deepening the understanding of the new schoolwork.*

Keywords: *complex language analysis, pupil with different mother tongue, migration, Czech as a second language*

One of the objectives of the current European policy is to interconnect the cultures of individual countries. This cannot be achieved without a quality level of language skills. According to the data of the Czech Statistical Office,¹ by 31st December 2020 there are more than 633 thousand foreigners with long-term and permanent residency in the Czech Republic, and the number keeps growing.

When coming to another country, foreigners face difficult changes in their lives and must overcome many obstacles, including the language bar-

rier, differences in the operation of the state system, and cultural differences. If a foreigner wants to acquire Czech citizenship or study in the Czech Republic, he/she must master the Czech language at a level corresponding to B1 or B2, respectively.

We are aware that the right to education is one of those human rights of which the importance is gaining momentum. Education is currently seen as one of the key ways to meet the ever-accelerating demands of the 21st century. However, not only adults of working age come to this country from abroad,

¹ Český statistický úřad (2020). Data – počet cizinců. Available from: <https://www.czso.cz/csu/cizinci/cizinci-pocet-cizincu>



but also their children, who become pupils/students in Czech schools, where the language of instruction is Czech.² Fulfilling the compulsory school attendance requirement leads to the process of integration for foreigners (i.e. not only children, but also their parents), and their relationship with the Czech state begins there.

Following the national laws and the international conventions to which the Czech Republic has acceded, basic education should be accessible to all, without distinction. In the 2019/2020 school year, there were, 26,527 foreigners registered in Czech primary schools, which corresponded to approximately 2.8% of all primary school pupils. The ethnic composition of these pupils was equal to the distribution of foreigners in the entire population – most often Ukrainians, Slovaks, Vietnamese, and Russians.

The aim of this article is to provide information about the principles of the language teaching method known as Complex Language Analysis and how to apply it to language learning.

The task of Czech language teachers is to support the pupils by means of appropriate methods and materials, so that they may acquire the Czech language in the best and fastest way and be able to use it in everyday communication. Learning a foreign language is

demanding, and it is also complicated by the existence of dialects; learning the language system is not enough; it is also necessary to have an understanding of its cultural context. Here we understand language as a systematic yet evolving set of expressions inherent in society. The development of society, therefore, affects the development of the language.

A scholarly interpretation of these evolving processes, and the resulting state, is the subject of Czech linguistic studies (mediated to students via didactics).

Language, once represented as a noble literary standard, exists today in a multi-layered complex of various language units. These are differentiated socially, culturally, and geographically at the level of dialects and inter-dialects (e.g. Common Czech). They differ in their unequal participation in the current developmental changes of the Czech language. This is reflected, for example, in a relaxed attitude to the standard language, for the benefit of certain rapidly developing phenomena in vocabulary and word formation. The linguistic behaviour of society has lost its previous refined sophistication. All this penetrates into education and not only transforms, but also makes it difficult to teach Czech to both native speakers and individuals with different mother tongues, and greatly increases the demands on teachers.

² Foreign pupils are those who have a different citizenship than Czech. However, there is an increasingly more common term used in Czech – “pupils with a different mother tongue” (OMJ). This designation does not depend on the pupils’ citizenship or place of birth, but mainly on the fact that Czech is a second/foreign language for them.



The presence of a foreign pupil in the class may seem to a teacher with normal pedagogical practice to be a difficult challenge, and may require a different teaching approach. A simple solution, leading from learning the Czech language at a high level to engaging in the common educational process, is unrealistic. The standard practice is to involve foreign pupils in the pedagogical process immediately upon arrival, and very often they have to be enrolled one or two years below their age group, precisely because of the language barrier.

The scientific literature states that after about five to seven years most foreign pupils have acquired a level of almost native fluency in the language (Brown, Miller, & Mitchell, 2006). Recent research (Kurowski, Denglerová, & Šíp, 2019) at a Czech school with a high proportion of foreign pupils supports the idea of Cummins' language acquisition theory (Cummins, 1979), that the language used in the school environment could be divided into two important levels: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), which are easier to master and with which children communicate outside the classroom, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which is harder to master, but contributes to school success (it includes the terminology of a particular field, reading texts in textbooks, following classroom instruc-

tions, etc.). Achieving a CALP level, including understanding specific cultural contexts, takes a long time. Even if the child can communicate with his/her classmates without problems, his/her language level may not be sufficiently advanced for him/her to understand the academic topics covered in the classroom. This fact significantly complicates the educational career of foreign children. In this context, not only content, but also the way of teaching the Czech language is important.

One notable method applied in Czech language teaching is Complex Linguistic Analysis. This method develops analytical thinking, which allows pupils to **connect the concepts and phenomena of language** with the structures of the physical world, i.e. to see them in their order and function. Complex Language Analysis performs various functions, among which the **motivational function** is very important; if a text is chosen with regard to the age and individual peculiarities of pupils, it may become an effective means by which to enrich vocabulary, develop communicative competence, and enhance reading comprehension.

Another of its functions is the **repetition and practising of the curriculum**. Using specific questions³ during the repetition of the curriculum contributes to the consolidation of language knowledge (nouns; masculine; subjects;

³ For example: *What kind of word is missing in the underlined sentence? Can you modify it by adding the missing parts of speech? How has the edited text changed? What do the words "frost" and "wind" have in common?*



consist of four letters; consist of three consonants and one vowel, etc.).

A third function is **to deepen the understanding of the new school-work**; the acquired knowledge is extended by topics that are interesting in terms of content and expression and attract attention. An important aspect of Complex Language Analysis is to assign so-called problematic tasks, the solving of which leads to greater independence and involvement of the imagination, contributing to the development of the pupil's/student's personality in many areas.

In addition to the necessary knowledge provided, the form used in Complex Language Analysis is also very important. In lower grades it is appropriate to include work in groups or in pairs, but in higher grades it should rather be individual work. The teacher can then assess and evaluate the level of the pupils' knowledge, abilities, and degree of independent thinking. At the same time, pupils should be able to discuss the results of their work and learn to argue and defend their own views.

Complex Language Analysis is also beneficial in teaching Czech to foreigners, as it contributes not only to improving their language skills, but also to their obtaining at least basic information about Czech language units and their functions in contemporary communication. One of the significant reasons for using this method is achieving the ability to distinguish between the spoken and the written language,

and the standard and non-standard language. It is very difficult for a foreign pupil to distinguish between these two forms. Linguistic analyses help to understand these circumstances and play an important role in the construction of a text and understanding its meaning.

Analysing language at all levels should not be neglected, as doing this provides crucial information about various lexical, syntactic, audio, and graphic aspects and helps to increase orientation as to their suitability and function in communication, both in writing and speaking. For example, understanding and mastering parts of speech helps pupils with correct flexion and spelling (e.g. distinguishing adjectives from adverbs: *hezký* × *hezky* – in English nice × nicely). These are “tricky things” to learn, although a native speaker may not even realise them.

According to Čechová (1996),⁴ the so-called “identification of the communication situation” and “the construction of the text” should also be included in the system of Complex Language Analysis. The term “communication situation” includes social, psychological, and speech factors that influence the speaker when formulating statements (Team of authors, 1995). The foreign pupils meet standard Czech in the classroom, but in daily contact they meet elements of non-standard Czech, which may be confusing. It is not enough for them to master only the standard language used in writing



and formal speech, but also the Common Czech that they meet in their daily life (media, offices, and shops). In addition, there are dialects, which still surround us to a lesser or greater extent, mainly in smaller towns and villages in the eastern half of the Czech Republic, and sociolects, e.g. in the work environment, study teams, etc. For example, the word “girl” has a variety of forms in Czech – *dívka* (Standard Czech) × *holka* (Common Czech) × *děvuča* (Moravian-Silesian Dialect) – and this can cause the foreign pupils to think that these are different words. The com-

munication situation could thereby be misunderstood, which in extreme cases may discourage pupils from learning Czech. However, by identifying this communication situation and distinguishing the Czech language units, the pupil can recognise what level of language it is and when to use it. They can then classify language elements and understand the differences in the use of these phenomena. Complex Language Analysis can help the foreign pupil in familiarising him-/herself with the appropriate use and understanding of the Czech language.

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KLÍMOVÁ, K., KUROWSKI, M., SVOBODOVÁ, H. Komplexní jazykový rozbor jako jedna z metod výuky češtiny jako cizího jazyka

S přibývajícím počtem cizinců v České republice stojí učitelé před novým úkolem – vyučovat češtinu jako cizí jazyk. V rámci zvoleného tématu představují autorky textu metodu „komplexní jazykové analýzy“, která podporuje proces učení tím, že propojuje abstraktní jazykové výrazy s reálným světem. Tato metoda se vyznačuje třemi specifickými funkcemi: motivace k učení, opakování a procvičování učiva, prohlubování porozumění nové školní práci.

Klíčová slova: komplexní jazyková analýza, žák s odlišným mateřským jazykem, migrace, čeština jako druhý jazyk