UMCS WYDAWNICTWO

Etnolingwistyka. Problemy Języka i Kultury 35 (2023)
ISSN 0860-8032 ◇ e-ISSN 2449-8335
https://journals.umcs.pl/et

I. Rozprawy i analizy

DOI: 10.17951/et.2023.35.241

Marie Pavlásková
Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic
ORCID: 0000-0003-0811-5876
e-mail: pavlaskova.marie@gmail.com

An invisible virtue: *SLUŠNOST* as a key Czech cultural value*

Niewidzialna cnota: *SLUŠNOST* jako kluczowa wartość w kulturze czeskiej

Abstract: This paper aims to examine the concept of SLUŠNOST in the Czech linguistic worldview. It is hypothesised that *slušnost* might be a Czech cultural key word, or, in this case, a key moral value of Czech linguaculture, resulting from a specific historical experience of the community of Czech speakers. This study, based mainly on the data from Czech language corpora, analyses two human-related meanings of *slušnost* and explicates them through the universal and elementary Natural Semantic Metalanguage. This methodological tool, developed mainly by Anna Wierzbicka and Cliff Goddard, makes it possible not only to clarify the complex and culture-specific concept of SLUŠNOST, but also to explicate it in a simple, universal, and non-ethnocentric way.

Key words: Natural Semantic Metalanguage; Czech; linguistic worldview; cultural key word; moral values; *slušný člověk*

Introduction

When asked how they imagined their ideal president in 2004, Czechs had many things to say. Apart from intelligence and appropriate education, being

* This publication was supported by the project "Grant Schemes at CU" (reg. no. CZ.02.2.69/0.0/0.0/19_073/0016935). I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Cliff Goddard, Anna Wierzbicka, and Zhengdao Ye for their invaluable feedback and to thank two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments. All the remaining errors are my own.

slušný (roughly 'decent' or 'upright') was one of the most often mentioned qualities.[1] Throughout the following eighteen years, *slušnost* would return to the Czech political discourse over and over again, featuring as something to be treasured and valued not only in public opinion polls, but also in numerous political slogans, e.g. "Together we will bring *slušnost* back to politics" or "We will carry through the principles of *slušný* governance".[2]

However, the picture is not quite clear-cut. When a rather popular Czech Minister of Health resigned during the covid pandemic, many people were explaining it by the fact that he was *příliš slušný* ('too *slušný*').[3] In 2016, a political movement called *Slušní lidé* ('*slušný* people') was created, considered a right-wing extremist group by many, with their chairman facing a police investigation due to his appeals to physically eliminate certain political figures of the time.[4] At the same time, the phrase *slušný Čech* ('a *slušný* Czech') was so commonly used as a derogatory nickname for people with a similar set of values as the chairman of *Slušní lidé* that it even made its way into newspaper headlines.[5]

In light of these facts, *slušnost* seems to be a rather prominent but also curiously double-edged quality. How is it possible that it can be listed among the greatest moral values and, at the same time, applied to people who openly claim that they would like to see their opponents dead? What does it mean to be *slušný* in Czech, and what does it say about the Czech linguaculture? These are the questions this paper seeks to answer.

Methodology: the Natural Semantic Metalanguage

The primary methodological tool used in this paper is the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), proposed by Anna Wierzbicka (1972) and developed by herself, Cliff Goddard, and, later, other colleagues (e.g. Goddard and Wierzbicka 1994; Goddard and Wierzbicka 2002; Peeters 2006; Wierzbicka 2014; Goddard 2018). NSM is based on the assumption that all natural languages share a common core of elementary concepts (NSM primes) and their similarly elementary syntactic relations. This shared core can, then,

[1] The full report is available online: https://bit.ly/3GFRmCN

[2] See https://bit.ly/3GBPpXS and https://bit.ly/3TWvt5d. All Czech slogans, corpora concordances, and literary excerpts are translated by me in this paper. The Czech words are always cited in their nominative form.

[3] E.g. *Vojtěch has been doing a great job; he only suffered for being too* ***slušný*** *[...]* (online_now, cit. 11. 3. 2022)

[4] See https://bit.ly/3Xu98ia.

[5] E.g. https://bit.ly/3OteeHC or https://bit.ly/3Oy58ZW

serve as a *tertium comparationis*, a simple and intuitively understandable metalanguage, readily cross-translatable and free of any particular culture[6] (e.g. Wierzbicka 2014: 24). It can be used to describe and explicate other concepts in a controlled way, which is, thanks to its universality, free of terminological ethnocentrism.

As such, NSM allows us to treat languages very much in the vein of linguistic relativism, acknowledging that the vast majority of any language is culture-specific, unique, complex, and non-translatable (cf. Sapir 1949; Whorf 1978; Lucy 1992; Wierzbicka 1997). However, the existence of a small set of universals enables us to do so without getting involved in known relativistic problems, such as the incomparability of languages, the impossibility of speaking about one language in another language, or the impossibility of people understanding one another across language boundaries.

In its understanding of language, the NSM approach in many respects resembles other areas of linguistics, such as cognitive linguistics or Polish ethnolinguistics. With cognitive linguistics, it shares the belief that our language is tightly interconnected with the way we think (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson 1981; Lakoff 1987; Dirven and Verspoor 2004; Wen and Taylor 2021), and similarly to Polish ethnolinguistics, it treats languages as distinctive and highly interpretive cultural universes, or linguistic worldviews (cf. Bartmiński 2016; Vaňková et al. 2005; Vaňková 2007). In such a universe, meaning plays the primary role, being a kind of cultural artefact, Sapir's famous "guide to culture" (1949: 70), or, as Goddard writes, "human interpretation", which is "subjective", "anthropocentric", and "infused with human perspective" (2018: 2). One of the hypotheses of this paper is that meanings of *slušnost* are such guides to Czech culture, or Czech cultural key words (Wierzbicka 1997), unique, complex, and culture-specific words which offer insights into the Czech linguistic worldview.

Nonetheless, NSM, cognitive linguistics, and ethnolinguistics also differ. The NSM approach was created with cross-translatability in mind; therefore, explications of meaning formulated in NSM primes can be adapted to NSM in any other language, which makes them universally accessible, non-

[6] The concept of culture has become a hot topic in recent anthropological debate and a problematic notion as a result (cf. e.g. Rapport and Overing 2000: 92–102). However, its practical usefulness for describing some clearly observable differences experienced, for example, by bilinguals or immigrants, is undeniable. This paper, therefore, uses the concept, knowing that it is not without problems. When it does so, it sticks to the conception of Clifford Geertz (1973: 89): "[...] the culture concept to which I adhere [...] denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."

ethnocentric, and easily comparable. Polish ethnolinguistics, on the other hand, does not limit the metalanguage it uses. This makes its conclusions more problematic when the intercultural comparison is concerned. However, it also enables it to capture meaning in a broader way, including connotations, emotional aspects, encyclopaedic cultural knowledge, or the potential for irony and satire (cf. Vaňková 2007: 76). In contrast, NSM linguists usually seek to describe only the constant features of a word's usage (Wierzbicka 2014: 322), which can be paraphrased in simple concepts (Goddard 2018: 43). Although it is not easy to draw a line between the constant and not constant aspects of a word's usage, the NSM approach is based on the assumption that drawing such a line is, in principle, possible, and that meanings are not essentially fuzzy and can be captured in clear, albeit sometimes vague and anthropocentric, definitions (or, more precisely, explications). It needs to be acknowledged that these assumptions are by no means self-evident, and this approach can be criticised from various perspectives (e.g. Blumczynski 2013; Geeraerts 2010; Riemer 2006). However, the criticism of NSM is not the goal of this paper and will not be discussed here.

Table 1 presents the list of NSM primes used in explications below.

Table 1. Semantic primes in NSM (based on the Chart of NSM primes from May 2022, https://nsm-approach.net/resources)

I∼ME, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING∼THING, PEOPLE, BODY	substantives
KINDS, (HAVE) PARTS	relational substantives
THIS, THE SAME, OTHER∼ELSE	determiners
ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH∼MANY, LITTLE∼FEW	quantifiers
GOOD, BAD	evaluators
BIG, SMALL	descriptors
KNOW, THINK, WANT, DON'T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR	mental predicates
SAY, WORDS, TRUE	speech
DO, HAPPEN, MOVE	actions, events, movement
BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)	location, existence, specification
(IS) MINE	possession
LIVE, DIE	life and death
WHEN∼TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, (FOR) SOME TIME, MOMENT	time
WHERE∼PLACE∼SOMEWHERE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, ON (ONE) SIDE, INSIDE, TOUCH	place
NOT∼DON'T, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF	logical concepts
VERY, MORE∼ANYMORE	augmentor, intensifier
LIKE∼AS∼WAY	similarity

Importantly, exponents of semantic primes can be polysemous, i.e. they can have other, additional meanings. They can be words, bound morphemes, or phrasemes; they can also be formally, i.e. morphologically, complex, and can have combinatorial variants or allolexes (indicated with ∼). Each prime has well-specified syntactic (combinatorial) properties.

The invisible majority: normal, ordinary, *slušný*$_1$ people

The adjective *slušný* has several meanings in Czech. Some can be applied to people and their behaviour, others cannot. Weather, cars, test results, wine, or even problems can be said to be *slušný* – and it obviously means something different than when we talk about *slušný* people (which is illustrated, for example, by the fact that in the non-human contexts, the adjective does not form an abstract substantive derivate *slušnost*). Whereas the human-related instances of *slušný* seem to refer to a certain way of living with other people, the non-human usages of *slušný* appear to assess quality, which could be glossed as not great, but all things considered, good enough.[7] Even though it might be interesting to compare and contrast all of these meanings as they are surely interconnected and share some underlying ideas (e.g. what people can do when their options in life are limited by circumstances beyond their control), the non-human meanings of the adjective *slušný* will not be discussed here for the reasons of space.

My initial hypothesis was that there is only one human-related meaning of the adjective *slušný* (and, by extension, of the noun *slušnost*). However, this hypothesis soon proved untenable. As we have briefly seen in the Introduction, *slušný* can be used in such a vast array of contexts that one explication cannot possibly capture them all.[8]

Let us look at some examples from Czech language corpora, which illustrate the extensive scope of usage of the adjective *slušný* and its substantive derivate *slušnost*:

(1) *[...] it's hard to tell if it's just* ***slušnost****, or the truth.* (online_now, cit. 20. 1. 2022)
(2) *She got fired from the circus, too. It certainly wasn't for* ***slušný*** *behaviour.* (syn2020)

[7] E.g.: *He is achieving* ***slušný****, though not extraordinary results* (syn2020) or *"I'm a chemist." "Is it a good job?" "It's* ***slušný****"* (syn2020).

[8] Not to mention the historical development of the meaning of the adjective: in the Czech diachronic corpus diakorp v6, *slušný* is attested as far as the 14th century. Then, it meant, roughly, either 'handsome', a derivate of the verb *slušet* ('to suit', 'to look good') or 'appropriate', which is also confirmed by the Czech etymological dictionary (Rejzek 2015) and which is probably connected to the meaning of *slušný* discussed here.

(3) *In the neighbourhood, he is considered a* ***slušný*** *person who says hello to his neighbours and takes care of his family.* (online_archive, cit. 18. 2. 2022)
(4) *We gave Europe a proud, fearless reformer, Hus. Rather than recant his principles of* ***slušnost*** *and justice, he let the Catholic clergy burn him for the truth.* (syn2020)
(5) *Arnošt Lustig said that the greatest quality of a person is* ***slušnost****.* (syn2020)

As these examples show, *slušnost* ranges from an undesirable opposite of honesty (example 1) to one of the most outstanding moral qualities a human can have (4, 5). In some contexts, it is made obvious that not many people are *slušný* and that it is a rare quality, one to be treasured and admired. In others, the phrase *slušný člověk* ('*slušný* person') collocates with adjectives like *normální* ('normal') or *obyčejný* ('ordinary'), clearly hinting that most people could be labelled as *slušný* and that it is nothing special. As it soon turned out, such differences could not be made sense of in one explication. Therefore, two meanings were hypothesised: the first capturing *slušnost* as applicable to most people (from now on *slušnost*$_1$) and the second as an exceptional and admirable moral quality (*slušnost*$_2$). Let us look at *slušnost*$_1$ first.

Slušnost$_1$ can be roughly described as conventional, a sort of common decency.[9] In this context, we may use an adjective (*slušný*), a noun (*slušnost*) or an adverb (*slušně*), and we can negate them using the negative prefix *ne-* (*neslušný, neslušnost, neslušně*). All six commonly collocate with expressions used to describe human behaviour (such as *způsoby*, 'manners', *vychování* 'upbringing', or *slova* 'words'), the words *person* or *people* ('člověk', 'lidé'), or verbs connected to proper manners (e.g. *pozdravit* 'to say hello', *poděkovat* 'to say thank you'). Compared to *slušnost*$_2$, this is quite a wide range of collocations, which probably explains the statistical prevalence of *slušnost*$_1$ in Czech corpora. The sample of 250 concordances in the synchronic representative corpus syn2020 produced 59 instances of *slušný*$_1$, 25 instances of *slušný*$_2$ and 166 instances of non-human uses of *slušný* (the relative frequency of the adjective in all its meanings is 41,9 in this corpus). When searched specifically for the highly specific lemma *slušný člověk* ('*slušný* person'), the corpus still shows that *slušný*$_1$ is prevalent: 171 instances out of 281. Even though there can be some error due to insufficient context of some of the concordances, which does not allow to definitively assess if the adjective is used as *slušný*$_1$ or *slušný*$_2$, the statistical trend is clear.[10]

[9] The comparison of both *slušnost*$_1$ and *slušnost*$_2$ with the English concept of common decency, which seems quite similar in some respects, offers an intriguing area for further research.

[10] All corpora searches in this study were limited to texts originally produced in Czech.

This kind of *slušnost* is not seen as any special virtue. It is conventional – based on custom and what society deems as the standard of polite behaviour. According to the corpora, the opposite of *slušnost*$_1$ is represented by behaviour that is rude, impolite, vulgar, frivolous, or otherwise inappropriate (e.g. dirty jokes, swearing, wearing inappropriate clothes). Conforming to such norms is not seen as something exceptional but as something basic (*slušnost*$_1$ collocates with words like *obyčejný* 'ordinary', or even *základní* 'elementary'). That, however, does not mean that *slušnost*$_1$ is unimportant. On the contrary, it is indispensable because of its basic nature, as it is seen as something that binds our society together, the most elementary social glue:

(6) *And she's not even capable of some basic* ***slušnost****; she hasn't even asked him what he thinks of all this.* (syn2020)

(7) *[...] I don't know why I couldn't give you a truthful explanation. It's ordinary* ***slušnost****.* (syn2020)

Being *slušný*$_1$, therefore, is a social minimum everybody is expected to have. It gives us rules to navigate most social situations, and, as such, it makes most of our encounters predictable, minimising any potential adverse outcomes. When someone behaves *slušně*$_1$, nobody will notice them because of it; however, if they do not respect the rules, they are sure to arouse negative feelings in others. The feelings of displeasure and sometimes downright outrage (*pohoršení*) are, according to the Czech corpora, a typical result of *neslušné* behaviour, often resulting in a negative judgment about the person in question (examples 8–10). Therefore, motivation to be *slušný*$_1$ is very much external: we wish to avoid being judged by others.

(8) ***Slušnost*** *is not to jump the queue, woman. If you don't know that, stay home in your cow barn [...]* (syn2020)

(9) *Didn't your mother teach you* ***slušný*** *manners? You're always cutting in on someone!* (online_now, cit. 21. 1. 2022)

(10) *People's irresponsibility and* ***neslušnost*** *really piss me off [...]* (online_now, cit. 11. 3. 2022)

The fact that *slušnost*$_1$ is seen as a bare minimum can lead to its negative evaluation in some contexts. If we are dealing with strangers, it is perfectly appropriate to treat them according to the conventional standards of *slušnost*$_1$. In close relationships, however, *slušnost*$_1$ is not seen as sufficient, as we expect such relationships not to be governed by mere convention but by authentic closeness, truthfulness, and affection. If we resort to *slušnost* with friends or family, it usually signals that the relationship is somehow dysfunctional as it cannot be built upon mutual trust. Here, a collocation "mere *slušnost*" or "out of *slušnost*" appears, contrasting

the basic nature of conventional *slušnost*$_1$ with the exclusiveness of close interpersonal relationships:

(11) *[...] it's hard to tell if it's just* ***slušnost,*** *or the truth.* (online_now, cit. 20. 1. 2022)
(12) *I would have accepted her words spoken with no sincerity, only out of* ***slušnost****.* (syn2020)
(13) *Why am I dressing up for such a bitch? Out of* ***slušnost*** *[...]* (syn2020)

So far, the concept of *slušnost*$_1$ does not seem to be particularly culturally unique. Surely, many languages have some etiquette-related words. However, *slušnost*$_1$ can also be used in other contexts, which have nothing to do with etiquette:

(14) *Someone should explain to these bigots that the laws apply equally to everyone [...] How do* ***slušný*** *people who just want to live their normal and peaceful lives come to this?!* (online_now, cit. 17. 2. 2022)
(15) *You'd probably like Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia, where all the 'non-standard' children were taken to institutions outside the city so that '****slušný*** *people' like you wouldn't have to look at them, wouldn't you?* (online_archive, cit. 18. 2. 2022)
(16) *Yes, not being on the internet today is something that will almost exclude you from the company of* ***slušný*** *people.* (syn2020)
(17) *Some woman jumped in front of a train [...] Břéťa stated that this was highly inconsiderate because a* ***slušný*** *person should hang themselves at home and not bother others.* (syn2020)

In these contexts, *slušný*$_1$ people are not simply people that say hi or thank you. Their *slušnost* seems to relate to a much more general attitude towards life. Etiquette does not tell us how we should live, what attitude we should have or, indeed, how we should decide to die. The norm here is much broader: it tells us not only how to properly treat others (as we have seen above) but also how we should live. Even so, it has nothing to do with the moral meaning of *slušnost*$_2$ (see below) as most people are said to be *slušný* in this way, and the measure used here is, once again, purely conventional. A way of living that can be assessed as *slušný*$_1$ is evaluated not according to its inner value, but according to how it appears in public. *Slušnost*$_1$ is not much concerned with what a person does in private (as long as they do not annoy or disturb anyone), but everything that can be seen in public is a matter of potential scrutiny and, as such, of *slušnost*$_1$.

What kind of value or standard are we talking about, then? It appears to be similar to the rules of etiquette in some respects. These allow us to navigate most social situations and avoid social discomfort, which is precisely the criterion of the lifestyle of the broadly conventional *slušný*$_1$ person. Such a person does not shock others by what they do or how they live: if they

lead a quiet life and do not attract much attention, they can be described as *slušný*$_1$. According to the Czech corpora, *slušný*$_1$ people have a job, pay their taxes, remain civil to their neighbours, do not argue with their spouses too often and too loudly, and take care of their children. They do not disturb anyone or break too many rules (certainly not more than anyone else),[11] and they live as they are expected to live, just as they say thank you when they are expected to. Because of that, they do not arouse negative feelings in others. Living outside such norms is not necessarily bad, but it is suspicious, at least. The Czech corpora clearly show that being a "normal, ordinary *slušný*$_1$ person" is a valued quality.

This allows us to understand some seemingly contradictory uses mentioned in the Introduction. A group of right-wing extremists can call themselves *Slušní lidé* because they see themselves as *slušný*$_1$, not as morally *slušný*$_2$. Their *slušnost* is not based on moral values but merely on the fact that they live according to generally accepted norms, which is, in the Czech linguistic worldview, a quality in itself. Only this kind of *slušnost* can be ridiculed and used in a derogatory way (as mentioned in the Introduction as well), casting doubt upon the customary way of living and its actual value and making *slušnost*$_1$ a somewhat contested concept. I believe, however, that it is not the meaning of the word that is contested, but rather the actual content and specificities of the currently prevalent tradition, convention, or norm.[12] The fact that ironic uses of the adjective *slušný*$_1$ in Czech corpora are very often marked with quotation marks signals that something additional is needed to rid *slušnost*$_1$ of its inherent positive evaluation. This evaluation might change in the future as a result of this cultural and political dispute, but at the moment, the meaning of *slušný*$_1$ still demonstrates that being a "normal, ordinary, *slušný* person" like everyone else, a part of the invisible majority, is not something to be avoided, but something desirable.

It might be this broad and positive attitude to convention which makes *slušnost*$_1$ culturally salient and telling, maybe even a cultural key word

[11] Interestingly, it appears that breaking some rules is considered normal in the Czech linguistic worldview. The primary evidence for that is the existence of the substantive derivate *slušňák*, which refers to someone who adheres to rules at all times, which can sometimes be regarded as slightly boring or unimpressive: *At that moment, his double Richard, a high school teacher,* ***slušňák****, pedant, and an honest man gets in his way* (syn2020) or *Forget the rigid* ***slušňák*** *from The Eleventh Commandment, and remember that our ancestors' lives were not at all black and white* (syn2020).

[12] Czech corpora do not seem to show any significant variation of meaning of the word depending on the ideological stance of speakers. It needs to be noted, however, that in concert with the broader attitude of the NSM theory to meaning (see above), irony is treated as a matter of usage, not meaning.

(Wierzbicka 1997). Even though any culture creates some kind of pressure on its members and promotes a certain urge to fit in, it can by no means be taken for granted that it will also produce a whole cluster of words praising the fact that someone appears like everyone else and does not attract unnecessary attention. Why did it happen, then, and why in the Czech linguistic worldview? Although the answer to that question is undoubtedly highly complex and perhaps not possible to ascertain entirely, I would hypothesise that it might be connected to the long history of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes on the Czech territory. What is now known as the Czech Republic was for several centuries a part of the Austrian empire, and then, after a brief period of independence, suffered from Nazi occupation and from 40 years behind the Iron Curtain. Under such unfavourable circumstances, avoidance to attract attention and the constant effort to appear normal, ordinary, or almost invisible seems like a sensible survival strategy. In a situation when any such attention could be a matter of life and death, or at least of significant complications in life, the low-key standards of *slušnost*$_1$ seem imminently practical.

The practicality of appearing inconspicuous also connects naturally with the tradition of the 19th-century Czech national rebirth movement, in which praise of common, ordinary people was a prolific topic (e.g. Rak 1994; Macura 2015). For the most part, they were praised because they were the ones who ensured the survival of the Czech language and, therefore, Czech culture. As the majority of the Czech aristocracy were either executed or forced into exile at the beginning of the 17th century and the Czech language was replaced with German on all levels of administration, the only place where any residue of Czech linguaculture could survive was the proverbial "cottage" (Macura 2015: 440), where the so-called "small Czech people" lived (Holý 1996: 62): "The Czech nation survived three hundred years of oppression not because of its heroes but because of the little Czechs who were the nation". The oppression reached such a level that some historians speak of "something little short of cultural genocide" (Sayer 1998: 50), which, a few centuries later, resulted in Czechs constructing their nation as a "plebeian nation" or a "nation without elites" (e.g. Rak 1994; Holý 1996; Sayer 1998; Macura 2015). In other words: a nation of normal, *slušný* people who treasure their inconspicuous way of living, not seeking the spotlight, not disturbing anyone, not attracting unnecessary attention, and being the invisible majority, which is valued as such. At least that is what the meaning of *slušný*$_1$ seems to reflect.[13]

[13] It should be noted, however, that in the 19th century, neither of today's meanings of *slušný* existed. The diachronic corpus diakorp v6 shows that *slušný* or *slušet (se)* were

In light of these reflections, I propose this NSM explication:

Slušný$_1$ *člověk* ('*slušný* person')

a) People can think about this person like this:
b) This someone is like this:
c) This someone wants to do things like other people do them
d) This someone wants this because they think like this:
e) "People do things of many kinds with other people
f) They do things of many kinds in places where there are other people
g) When they do such things, they often do them in one way because many other people did them in this way before
h) If I do such things in another way, other people can feel something bad because of it
i) Because of this, they can think something bad about me
j) Because of this, I want to do such things as many people do them"
k) It is bad if someone is not like this

In this explication, the conventional nature of *slušnost*$_1$ is explicitly mentioned in component c) and then, in more detail, in following components d) – j), which explain the social character of *slušnost*$_1$, its customary origin, and the power of peer pressure that enforces it. The displeasure inspired by behaviour which is not in concert with *slušnost*$_1$ is described in component h) and the primary source of external motivation in components i) and j). The fact that *slušnost*$_1$ is seen as very basic and not something to be specifically admired is glossed in component k).

Invisible heroes: *slušný*$_2$ people

The second human-related meaning of the adjective *slušný* differs from the first in several ways. Grammatically speaking, it takes only an adjectival or substantive form (*slušný*$_2$ and *slušnost*$_2$); I did not find a single adverbial usage in the Czech corpora. Also, it does not have any morphologically related opposite (like *neslušný* for *slušný*$_1$), and when used as an adjective, it collocates almost exclusively with the words for 'person' and 'people' (*slušný člověk, slušní lidé*), which is probably why its frequency of use is lower than in the case of *slušný*$_1$ (see above).

Slušnost$_2$ is connected to morality and is, therefore, a much more serious matter than the conventional *slušnost*$_1$. In the corpora, it is sometimes listed among the best and most treasured qualities a human being can have. It

used in an etiquette-related sense and, roughly, as an equivalent of "being appropriate". Thus, the convention and its positive evaluation were already there, but the concept still had quite a long way to go.

does not collocate with words like *elementary* or *normal* and cannot be found in phrases such as "mere *slušnost*".

(18) *The highest values for me are truth, honour,* ***slušnost****, patriotism, tolerance, and diligence.* (syn2020)

(19) *They [communist secret service agents] were promising me trips abroad and help in all financial matters. I realised that if I gave in even in the slightest, I would no longer live as a* ***slušný*** *human being, but I would languish as a human wreck.* (syn2020)

(20) *And who was that... Horáková, I peep to divert the conversation. That was a...* ***slušný*** *woman...* (syn2020)

(21) *Tulis predicts that lectures and film screenings about Winton will continue in schools. "There are few educational programs about* ***slušný*** *people, and the response from students and teachers has been very positive."* (syn2020)

Slušnost$_2$ is not a question of merely following convention; it is a moral virtue. In contrast with *slušnost*$_1$, it can be attributed to explicitly heroic figures like Jan Hus, Milada Horáková, or Nicholas Winton, and is often said to be an exceptional quality that only a few people have. The corpora show clearly that behaviour that is not *slušný*$_2$ is of a much worse sort than that which is simply *neslušný*$_1$. We are no longer talking about dirty jokes or swearing. What is not *slušný*$_2$ is immoral, sometimes even criminal, ranging from lying, false testimony, tax evasion, fraud or scamming to denouncing someone to the totalitarian secret police.

What does it mean, then, to be *slušný*$_2$, and is there anything that the two kinds of *slušnost* have in common? On a closer look, it appears that *slušnost*$_2$ is a social virtue; we would probably not describe a person marooned on a remote island as *slušný*$_2$ (let alone *slušný*$_1$). *Slušnost*$_2$ can exist only among other people or, at least, in relation to them. This is similar to the inherently social *slušnost*$_1$. However, *slušnost*$_2$ does not make itself felt in any comparable way. If we are *slušný*$_1$, we behave conventionally. If we are *slušný*$_2$, we have unquestionable moral integrity or moral spine. According to my interpretation of the data from the Czech language corpora, a *slušný*$_2$ person treats others fairly even when it is not the generally preferred course of action; they are aware of how their actions affect those around them and refuse to hit below the belt. *Slušný*$_2$ people are often praised for not taking advantage of others, even in situations when the other side could by no means discover who is responsible. Unlike *slušný*$_1$, the motivation for being *slušný*$_2$ is internal, and a *slušný*$_2$ person does not seek public approval in any way.

As it appears, *slušnost*$_2$ is a kind of morally motivated resilience, often manifested in what a person refuses to do. To be *slušný*$_2$ often means to

refrain from doing something that could be harmful to others, even though we are depriving ourselves of some advantage – be it a bribe, a promotion, or being left alone by the secret police of a totalitarian state. An extreme but quite telling example of this kind of *slušnost* is the Velvet revolution in 1989, also sometimes called "the revolution of *slušný* people" (Krapfl 2013: 84), which was marked by strict nonviolence of protesters face to face with violence of the communist police (the mottos of the time were "We are not like them!" and "We have empty hands!").[14] To remain *slušný*$_2$, a person decides to keep their moral spine although it might significantly complicate their life, and more unscrupulous people would probably describe this as sheer naiveté. Therefore, *slušnost*$_2$ is often conceptualised as something that ties our hands and limits our options:

(22) *If we say that someone has made a career, we imply that they are an ambitious person, able to do things that other,* ***slušný*** *people are simply not capable of doing [...]* (syn2020)

(23) *I am sure that a* ***slušný*** *person, as everyone calls the future Minister of Health, would NEVER go into a government with a former communist secret agent as its head.* (online_now, cit. 17. 2. 2022)

From this point of view, it is understandable that the most prominent contexts of *slušnost*$_2$ in the Czech language corpora appear to be politics (often seen as the proverbial trough) and the collaboration with totalitarian regimes.[15] In both contexts, a person can have numerous tempting options: options to become rich or to make their life easier. A *slušný*$_2$ person rejects all such options as they refuse to gain any advantage unfairly or at the expense of others.

Apart from their social nature, the two kinds of *slušnost* share another essential trait. As we have seen, *slušnost*$_2$ is somewhat passive, resembling more a kind of resilience than an incentive to act. Thanks to this quality, the person that is *slušný*$_2$ can be entirely inconspicuous; in fact, they can be the normal and ordinary *slušný*$_1$ person from the section above. The fact that *slušnost*$_2$ can go (and, according to the corpora, often does go) entirely unnoticed is precisely what makes it so admirable in the Czech linguistic worldview. *Slušnost*$_2$ is not an obvious virtue as the *slušný*$_2$ person is not *slušný*$_2$ in the hope of being praised for it. Interestingly, it is not the only virtue that seems to behave in this way in the Czech linguistic

[14] This is also marked by a sharp increase in the use of the words *slušný* and *slušnost* in 1989, which is documented in the Czech language corpora (application SyD).

[15] Out of 281 corpora concordances of lemma *slušný člověk*, there were 110 instances of *slušný*$_2$ and 46 concordances explicitly mentioning totalitarian regimes or a war (predominantly the second world war). Out of these 46, there were 33 instances of *slušný*$_2$.

worldview: *lidskost* (roughly, 'humanness'), which is sometimes glossed as another typically Czech value and which quite commonly collocates with *slušnost*, seems also as "a normal, ordinary value", more conspicuous when it is lacking than when it is present (Danaher 2018: 133). Being *lidský*, then, is much like being *slušný*$_1$: highly praiseworthy, but virtually invisible. In case of *slušnost*$_1$, it is because most people are *slušný*$_1$, and *slušnost*$_2$ manifests its moral worth in this way. *Slušný*$_2$ people are noble, but inconspicuous and invisible heroes, appearing like everyone else and not seeking recognition. They simply are good – even though all they get in return are complications:

(24) *Here, too, Němcová projected into her* Grandmother *her own life experience that only a crown of thorns belongs on the grave of* ***slušný*** *and brave people.* (Jedlička 2009: 25)

Nevertheless, there are some contexts where even the highly valued *slušnost*$_2$ may appear undesirable. Let us look at some examples:

(25) *He is a predator, following his prey infallibly.* ***Slušnost*** *is a weakness to him; deceiving others is his sport.* (online_now, cit. 20. 1. 2022)
(26) *The People's Party and the Socialists joined the Civic Forum and said: You won't cancel us if we are with you, will you? And Havel, an excessively* ***slušný*** *man, wanted to oblige them, I think.* (syn2020)
(27) *Vojtěch has been doing a great job; he only suffered for being too* ***slušný*** *and young [...]* (online_now, cit. 11. 3. 2022)

Still, not even these contexts contradict the high value of *slušnost*$_2$ in the Czech linguistic worldview. *Slušnost*$_2$ is considered not as something inherently bad here but as a weakness, which makes the *slušný*$_2$ person vulnerable to those who do not share this moral standard. This is why Adam Vojtěch, a rather popular Czech Minister of Health mentioned in the Introduction, was said to have been "too *slušný*" to withstand the pressure of high politics. It does not express any scorn for him but for politics itself. The fact that *slušný*$_2$ people refuse to make certain choices and that others can take advantage of them as a result (by making these choices themselves, for instance) is more a bitter evaluation of the environment that makes such an admirable quality as *slušnost*$_2$ a weakness, rather than a rejection of *slušnost*$_2$ itself. As one of the concordances concludes:

(28) *I don't know about you, but I really don't want to live in a country where* ***slušnost*** *is a disadvantage.* (online_now, cit. 20. 1. 2022)

Similarly to *slušnost*$_1$, the meaning of *slušnost*$_2$ might also be telling a story of the collective experience with oppression and the lack of freedom.

It is a kind of inconspicuous moral virtue, quite suitable to flourish under highly unfavourable circumstances. Even in a totalitarian society, which suffers from ubiquitous distrust, *slušnost*$_2$ (like *lidskost*, for that matter) allows people to preserve an ideal of truthfulness, integrity, uprightness, and undistorted human relationships. Moreover, it does so without the dangers of open heroism – a *slušný*$_2$ person can manage to maintain their moral spine without much unnecessary risk. No-one may ever know that they refused some irresistible offer to make their life better at the expense of others. They are invisible, unsung heroes who may remain such forever.

According to many authors writing about Czech history and culture, heroism does not exactly flourish in the region. Josef Jedlička mentions in one of his essays that the Czech literary tradition does not have a single real hero (2009: 9), and Ladislav Holý comments that Czechs do not really celebrate their victories or heroes but prefer national martyrs (1996: 130). Josef Kroutvor claims that in Central Europe, "[p]eople avoid extremes and have no interest in them" (1990: 49), and he connects this tendency to the 19th-century tradition of Biedermeier, which "has successfully survived all regimes, fashions and styles" (ibid.). It is no accident that Biedermeier, characterised by "avoiding all extremes" of Enlightenment reason or Romanticism emotionality (Sršeň 2006: 164) and celebrating the comforts of the private sphere, originated in the times of political oppression. According to multiple authors, Biedermeier "does not force its adherents into civic heroism or ragged titanism" (Sršeň 2004: 165); it tends to choose "the golden middle way" (Kroutvor 1990: 49), encourages "generally calm, intimate, and anti-melodramatic sentiment and behaviour" (Lenderová 2006: 79), or "conventionality, moderation" (Vinkler 2006: 366).

It is not surprising that a society with a fondness for such a worldview does not exactly cherish heroes. About two years ago, there were advertisements all over Prague, describing Czechs as "invisible heroes".[16] One of the ever-popular genres of Czech literature could be described as a small story on the background of dramatic world history, featuring all kinds of inconspicuous, "small" characters. Karel Čapek, one of the most popular Czech authors, wrote a book called *An Ordinary Life* (*Obyčejný život*), which celebrates and explores the seemingly perfectly ordinary life of the main character and was adapted to a theatre play called (sic!) *Slušný člověk.*[17] And one of the most famous Czech literary works, *The Good Soldier Švejk,* contains a famous antiheroic quote by Lieutenant Lukáš: "Let's be Czechs, but no one need know about it. I'm a Czech too" (Hašek 1973 [1921]: 166).

[16] See https://bit.ly/3icS1lb
[17] See https://bit.ly/3gujrm3

It almost seems that there has been and still is a particular pragmatic distaste for individual heroes in the Czech cultural environment. In a country with such rich experiences of authoritarian political regimes, any hero looks suspicious, especially one praised by official state representatives. Living as invisibly as possible can not only seem like a perfectly logical survival strategy; it also appears to be the only way one can remain truly good. Only an invisible hero can clearly be free from any ulterior motives. At least, that is what the meaning of *slušnost*$_2$ suggests.

Therefore, I propose the following NSM explication:

Slušný$_2$ *člověk* ('*slušný* person')

a) People can think about this person like this:
b) This someone is not like many people
c) Many people often do some things because they know that some good things can happen to them if they do it
d) When they do these things, they know that some bad things can happen to other people because of it
e) This is bad
f) This someone is not like this
g) This someone thinks like this:
h) "I don't want bad things to happen to other people because I do something
i) Because of this, I don't want to do some things, I won't do such things
j) Because of this, I can do some other things
k) I know that something bad can happen to me because of this
l) I don't do these things because I want other people to think something good about me"
m) It is very good if people are like this
n) Not many people are like this

In this explication, the *slušný*$_2$ person is contrasted with the unscrupulous attitude of people who are not *slušný*$_2$ and do not hesitate to take any advantage, not caring about the consequences of their choices (components c) – e)). The altruistic nature of *slušnost*$_2$ is described in components g) – l); components k) and l) emphasise the purely moral motivation for such actions (caring neither about the impact of the actions on one's own life, nor about opinions of others). Component l) in particular contrasts the conventional *slušnost*$_1$ with the moral strength of *slušnost*$_2$, which does not seek public approval. Component m) sums up the highly valued nature of *slušnost*$_2$, and component n) describes the exclusivity of this quality.

Conclusion

Slušnost$_1$ and *slušnost*$_2$ are both valued and positive qualities in the Czech linguistic worldview. The first one appreciates an inconspicuous and conventional way of living, praising the majority of normal, ordinary, *slušný*$_1$ people who live out of the spotlight. The second one esteems the similarly

discreet moral strength of *slušný*$_2$ people who refuse to cause harm or to take advantage of others, not seeking recognition or approval. I believe that it is the invisibility involved in the meaning of both which makes them especially culture-specific and telling. The Czech linguistic worldview seems to reflect the attitude that to appear like everyone else is a good thing – either because it allows us to avoid risk or because only in invisibility lies the true virtue of those who are good simply for the sake of being good. In a society that has seen streets and towns renamed, and monuments and memorials torn down and rebuilt over and over again, such an attitude seems perfectly sensible.

References

Bartmiński, Jerzy. 2016. *Jazyk v kontextu kultury: Dvanáct statí z lublinské kognitivní etnolingvistiky.* Praha: Karolinum.

Blumczynski, Piotr. 2013. Turning the tide: A critique of natural semantic metalanguage from a translation studies perspective. *Translation Studies* 6(3): 261–276. doi: 10.1080/14781700.2013.781484

Dirven, René, and Verspoor, Marjolijn H. (eds.). 2004. *Cognitive Exploration of Language and Linguistics.* 2nd rev. ed. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/clip.1

Danaher, David S. 2018. Revolution with a "human" face: A corpus approach to the semantics of Czech *lidskost.* In Fidler, Masako and Cvrček, Václav (eds.). *Taming the Corpus*: *From Inflection and Lexis to Interpretation.* 119–144. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98017-1

Geeraerts, Dirk. 2010. *Theories of Lexical Semantics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198700302.001.0001

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays.* Basic Books: New York.

Goddard, Cliff. 2018. *Ten Lectures on Natural Semantic Metalanguage: Exploring Language, Thought and Culture Using Simple, Translatable Words.* Leiden: Brill. doi: 10.1163/9789004357723

Goddard, Cliff, and Wierzbicka, Anna (eds.). 1994. *Semantic and Lexical Universals: Theory and Empirical Findings.* Amsterdam/John Philadephia: John Benjamins.

Goddard, Cliff, and Wierzbicka, Anna (eds.) 2002. *Meaning and Universal Grammar: Theory and Empirical Findings.* 2 volumes. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. doi: 10.1075/slcs.60 (vol. 1), 10.1075/slcs.61 (vol. 2)

Hašek, Jaroslav. 1973 [1921]. *The Good Soldier Švejk and His Fortunes in the World War.* Translated by Cecil Parrott. London: Penguin Books.

Holý, Ladislav. 1996. *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity and the Post-Communist Transformation of Society.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jedlička, Josef. 2009. *České typy a jiné eseje.* V Praze: Plus.

Krapfl, James. 2013. *Revolution with a Human Face: Politics, Culture, and Community in Czechoslovakia, 1989-1992.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Kroutvor, Josef. 1990. *Potíže s dějinami: eseje.* Praha: Prostor.

Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1981. *Metaphors We Live By.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, George 1987. *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things. What Categories Reveal about the Mind.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lenderová, Milena. 2006. "... *ušlechtilé sestřinky*" aneb Dívčí a ženské ctnosti v době předbřeznové. In Lorenzová, Helena, and Petrasová, Taťána (eds.). *Biedermeier v českých zemích: sborník příspěvků z 23. ročníku sympozia k problematice 19. století, Plzeň, 6.-8. března 2003.* 79–87. Praha: KLP – Koniasch Latin Press.

Lucy, John. 1992. *Language Diversity and Thought. A Reformulation of the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Macura, Vladimír. 2015. *Znamení zrodu a české sny.* Praha: Academia.

Peeters, Bert (ed.). 2006. *Semantic Primes and Universal Grammar: Empirical Evidence from the Romance Languages.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Rak, Jiří. 1994. *Bývali Čechové: české historické mýty a stereotypy.* Jinočany: H&H.

Rapport, Nigel, and Joanna Overing. 2000. *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts.* Routledge: London. doi: 10.4324/9780203451137

Riemer, Nick. 2006. Reductive paraphrase and meaning: A critique of Wierzbickian semantics. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 29: 347–379. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10988-006-0001-4

Sapir, Edward. 1949. *Culture, Language and Personality.* Ed. David Mandelbaum. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Sayer, Derek, and Alena Sayer. 1998. *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv10vm14j

Sršeň, Ladislav. 2006. Specifika biedermeierského portrétu v Čechách. In Lorenzová, Helena, and Petrasová, Taťána (eds.). *Biedermeier v českých zemích: sborník příspěvků z 23. ročníku sympozia k problematice 19. století, Plzeň, 6.-8. března 2003.* Praha: KLP – Koniasch Latin Press.

Vaňková, Irena, Iva Nebeská, Lucie Saicová Římalová, and Jasňa Pacovská. 2005. *Co na srdci, to na jazyku: kapitoly z kognitivní lingvistiky.* Praha: Karolinum.

Vaňková, Irena. 2007. *Nádoba plná řeči.* Praha: Karolinum.

Vinkler, Jonatan. 2006. Biedermeier ve Slovinsku: poměry a vztahy, ideály a představy. In Lorenzová, Helena, and Petrasová, Taťána (eds.). *Biedermeier v českých zemích: sborník příspěvků z 23. ročníku sympozia k problematice 19. století, Plzeň, 6.-8. března 2003.* Praha: KLP – Koniasch Latin Press.

Wen, Xu, and John R. Taylor. 2021. *The Routledge Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics.* New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351034708

Whorf, Benjamin Lee. 1978. *Language, Thought, and Reality.* Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Wierzbicka, Anna. 1972. *Semantic Primitives.* Frankfurt: Athenäum.

Wierzbicka, Anna. 1997. *Understanding Cultures Through Their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese.* New York: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1075/lplp.22.2.15stc

Wierzbicka, Anna. 2014. *Sémantika: elementární a univerzální sémantické jednotky.* Praha: Karolinum.

Resources

Cvrček, Václav and Pavel Vondřička. 2011. *SyD – korpusový průzkum variant.* Praha: FF UK. <http://syd.korpus.cz>

Cvrček, Václav and Pavel Vondřička. 2011. Výzkum variability v korpusech češtiny. In Čermák, František (ed.) *Korpusová lingvistika Praha 2011. 2. Výzkum a výstavba korpusů.* 184–195. Praha: NLN.

DIAKORP: diachronní korpus, verze 6 z 18.12.2015. Praha: Ústav Českého národního korpusu FF UK, Praha. Cit. 1. 11. 2021. <http://www.korpus.cz>

ONLINE_ARCHIVE: monitorovací korpus internetové češtiny. Ústav Českého národního korpusu FF UK, Praha 2020. <http://www.korpus.cz>

ONLINE_NOW: monitorovací korpus internetové češtiny. Praha: Ústav Českého národního korpusu FF UK. <http://www.korpus.cz>

Rejzek, Jiří. 2015. *Český etymologický slovník.* Vydání 3. Praha: LEDA.

SYN2020: reprezentativní korpus psané češtiny. 2020. Praha: Ústav Českého národního korpusu FF UK. <http://www.korpus.cz>

Streszczenie: W artykule omawia się koncept SLUŠNOST w czeskim językowym obrazie świata. Autorka stawia hipotezę, iż w czeskiej lingwokulturze *slušnost* może mieć status słowa-klucza lub kluczowej wartości moralnej, co wynika z historycznego doświadczenia czeskiego społeczeństwa. W niniejszym badaniu, opartym głównie na danych z korpusów języka czeskiego, analizuje się dwa odnoszące się do ludzi znaczenia słowa *slušnost* i proponuje ich eksplikacje z wykorzystaniem Naturalnego Metajęzyka Semantycznego. Model ten, rozwijany głównie przez Annę Wierzbicką i Cliffa Goddarda, umożliwia nie tylko wyjaśnienie złożonego konceptu SLUŠNOST, lecz także dokonanie tego w sposób prosty, uniwersalny i nie-etnocentryczny.

Słowa kluczowe: Naturalny Metajęzyk Semantyczny; język czeski; językowy obraz świata; kulturowe słowo-klucz; wartości moralne; *slušný člověk*