Presenter: Masako Fidler, Brown University and Václav Cvrček, Charles University in Prague

Title: Ptydepe and Chorukor: Artificial languages and socialist discourse

Abstract:

In *Vyrozumění* (Memorandum) Václav Havel introduces two artificial languages for bureaucratic purposes: Ptydepe and Chorukor. Ptydepe is conceived as a much more “precise” language than natural languages; its grammar is “maximally rational” and its words tend to be long and numerous because they are maximally (redundantly) differentiated from one another. Ptydepe lacks not only homonyms, but also words that are minimally differentiated (avoiding pairs such as *kůl – vůl, posel-osel*) (Havel 1966: 154). Use of Ptydepe led to increasingly long texts even despite simple purposes and became unusable and was replaced by Chorukor, a language built on similarity, which leads to ambiguity.

This presentation will show that Havel’s two artificial languages accentuate two major aspects of socialist political texts. It will compare the principles of Ptydepe and Chorukor and presidential speeches from the socialist period (1948-1989) in Czech (Fidler and Cvrček 2015 and 2017). Some of the striking features of socialist political texts include predominance of adjectives and adnominal genitives for further qualification, just like Ptydepe, which generates long texts. Socialist political texts also blur the contents of events with subtle morphosyntactic modifications, just like Chorukor.

This paper is part of a panel on artificial languages and their properties, and will discuss how artificial languages relate to natural languages and what functions they may have in literary texts.

References

