

ABOUT MAGICAL POWER OF THE WORD – CURSE, DAMNATION, MALEDICTION AND SWEARWORDS IN COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

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The language magic, the magic of the words, magical speech and the power of the word, and the magical function of the language, namely of the text, these are the demonstrations embedded in tradition. However, neither their characteristics nor their borders are clearly defined, as they are significantly diffusion. My definitions in the *Encyclopedia of the Folk Culture in Slovakia I., II.*, (Bratislava : Veda, 1995) appear to be the first and the only attempt in Slovakia. Recently, I have been working on the monograph of these magical statements and formulae where pieces of information will be enriched and elaborated subsequently. The sphere of issues to which these speech demonstrations are linked can be divided into 4 groups:

- 1, language facts characteristic of traditional communities such as language taboos, damnations, curses, exorcisms and other word rituals
- 2, language traces of all those facts consciously and sub-consciously connected with the speech that are exaggerated-hyperbolised, such as the use of euphemisms, thanking formulas, wishes, congratulations or strong vulgarisms
- 3, the vividly being developed current 'new magic of the word', the so called post folklore, applied in persuasion techniques of political propaganda and advertisement, such as sign folklore on billboards, and in titles and slogans etc.
- 4, the magic of poetic language applied in beautiful literature, poetry and words in the transferred meaning of words.

The old dispute around *phýsei* (the dispute that the link between a word and a thing is given via its character, stems from the nature of the thing) and *théseis* (it is ascribed to the convention of Plato Kralytos where one can find traces of 'being destructed by something, i.e. uncertainty whether the pronounced word be identified with the thing, or the action it is labelling. This is in fact psychological can tendency of people of comparison, namely identification of expressions-designations, i.e. words with things. These are the language demonstrations regarded as magical such as taboo, curses, damnations, maledictions or even swearwords, and other words that have negative function-the black magic, however, there are also words of the so call white magic connected with the wish of a positive effect

for example: congratulations, greetings, condolences or wishes etc. The belief in the power of the word, curse, malediction or invective stems from one's inner life and imaginations regarding their reflection on the world around. This gives rise to one's fear of death when one is talking about 'that grim reaper', 'the ugly one', 'the skeleton with the scythe' or about 'the devil' or 'old Nick' etc.. In order to avoid attracting dark forces, people are either afraid to pronounce the right name, or on the other hand deliberately pronounce it to call a negative effect upon a person using for example: 'the devil take it', i.e. calling for the higher mightiness. This enhances one's belief that words are personified or objectified. R. Jakobson interpreted the magical function of the text in the understanding of Bühler's model of the language communication. The traditional language model was connected with three functions-emotional, conative and cognitive into the triadic model: to the first person-sender, the second person-receiver and to 'the third' person close to someone or something that one is talking about. The following are additional language functions derived from this fundamental triad: the magical function that is in fact a stable kind of transformation of an absent or non existing third person to whom a communicant is appealing, in acceptance of the conative communicant. As the result of one's own transmission 'the one that is being discussed' (the world into which the communicant is being sent) and as the consequence of conative communicant's direction it is sent to the receiver of the text. Since the communicant is conative and impressive, the sender expects that this method will change the receiver (via or through 'the third person') the way that he responds to the communicant in line with their intention: he fulfils the order, wish, congratulation, recommendation or a negative or aggressive oral signal e.g. malediction, damnation, swearword or invective. In other words, he does what the sender wishes to happen. For example, the sender expects that through the curse such as 'the devil take it', 'God damn', 'hell with you', or the swearword 'you filthy swine', 'you son of the bitch', 'you shit' etc. some force (a receiver of an appellative form 'Let!' and 'Be!' etc.) will carry his out on the referred person, or in the case of a swearword that a recipient will identify himself with the said words thus decreasing their self value. The language in the society with a mythical cognition is the way of an action, effect-activity, and not the tool of thinking. In primitive societies, the language had a positive as well as negative power. Eventually, this holds true also nowadays even though we do not tend to realize the magical power of the word on our consciousness, emotional state or self consciousness. There belong the mentioned statements with expected positive effects as well as negative ones aiming to damage or liquidate someone or something. However, there were also neutral formulas-securing, ordering the so called sub magical. According to Malinowsky, the words are part of an action and also its equivalent! The act is the aim of speaking. 'Pragmatism' alias 'action power' (the power or force of an act and pursuance) can be infiltrated into the meaning of the word. Pronouncing evokes the change in the world, which agnostics regard the magical and fantasy world, but which believers regard as the real world. In the magic language it means the evocation of undoubted phenomena via the

use of mystical means. The act of speech concurrently symbolizes that to which it is linked semantically, at the same time remaining in that in which it is object, metonymical. It has a casual effect on it or it is its physical part. To pronounce a word or collocation does not only mean to bring into the consciousness a relevant object or phenomena, but also the impact onto this object or phenomena. It is often its literal invitation. Magical speech concerning reality belongs to it too, and it is also a kind of existence in reality or intervention into it. In traditional culture, one of the ways to interpret the magical speech-the happening, are through cultural word rituals. Their characteristic context lays in the mythical world view: the dualistic picture of cosmic order strongly Christianised although not identically with the canonical version of Christianity. A person pronouncing words gains and sets the power in motion. Pronounced words become real: they have the power of giving a vivid picture, evoke that to which they are linked, as if there was a physical bond between the designation and the designate. This is a metaphoric word transfer. The sound and meaning are for usual language users of every existing language community reflected not as *théseí* but as *phýsei* i.e. undivided and interconnected. The power performed of the word appears in the set and stable conditions, on certain occasions, with a peculiar regard. The communication context changes in relation to modalities that are currently 'in play'. Communication is mostly influenced by: a) the time, when and how many times it is realized: how much time we have for communication, b) space and its organisation in which it is realized, c) what importance each participant of communication attaches to it (here mental variables apply), d) presence of emotions (emotional variables), e) relationship variables-dominance, submission, rivalry, supplement either talking to someone whom I do not know, or communication in a long term relationship), f) the potential relationship frame e.g. the current presence or absence of the one who we are talking about, and g) existence of community that has no chance to be renewed etc. Concrete modalities are fundamental elements of the context and the situation of communication exchange. Many contextual modalities can be modified according to our suitability or with regard to a recipient. Obvious aggression, disrespect or enviousness of one participant, the suitable or unsuitable time for the dialogue and the place of conversation etc. can significantly modify the context of communication exchange. One can also recognize the communication in various situational roles. The communication situation is always different. The prearranged or suddenly changed situation is substantial part of the entire context. There belong for example: a) intimate, mutual and dyadic communication in private, b) one way directed communication e.g. charming, c) communication in a small primary group such as family, d) one's communication in public where he is exposed to the sights of people (e.g. invectives in political speeches or dialogues), e) communication via mass media (e.g. television or radio where one can hear mostly political slogans, invectives or swear-words toward political enemies), f) prearranged communication (a role in films and theatres where for example vulgarisms, curses and damnations are not an exception) etc. (Vybírál, 2000: 29).

Generally spoken, this is the internal and external context of communication. The internal context input data is represented by all the impulses that have an origin in the past or presence, and which serve for us as a mediator of all the information about the world. Our communication partner generates and stores many pieces of information about the world as well as about us. Some of these 'data' if activated by the evoked association of which causes we are mostly unaware, to some extent misrepresent their communication with us (the intake of information e.g. acceptance of a swearword, malediction or damnation, its perception, selection, storage into our mind, evaluation of this information from 'an aggressor'-sender, evaluation of the context-why, and last but not least in the case of dyadic communication also the reply and reaction). Our internal context is constantly replenished and succumbs to changes based on previous experiences, spontaneous associations, emotions, ongoing and previous relations to a communication partner, but also through personal features, world view, or the rate of tolerance etc. The following is the current scheme of the communication context: $K1 \rightarrow S-O + K2-R \leftarrow K3 \leftarrow K4$, where K1 means the context-co-situation in which an impulse was launched, K2 means the current context including the psychical state in which the recipient occurs, K3 represents the context – impulse that has an impact on its reaction, and K4 is the global cultural, language, and social context in which we communicate. The context is the current frame, the whole of all variables in which our communication is taking place and in which the following is important: with whom, when, where, about what, why (with what aim) and with what effect we are communicating. This will all be applied to and interpreted on the cited genres which I will also define. I will mention the intention, communication manoeuvres, suggestion but also the analysis of the communication act and other facts. (Vybíral, 2000: 31)

In order to concretize the ritual formulae of the speech communication with a magical function, I will mention at least some of the fundamental ones. A curse is a fixed statement of an interactive specification. A formula with its exclamatory character has an aim to evoke a negative action onto another, conditionally one's own person. Its original functions were magical and ritual. Here, a man through the principle of the word 'magic' calls for evil and tragedy. A curse was usually used to refer to an individual. However, it could encompass an entire generation and progeny (reaching for instance even the seventh generation). Likewise, an oath, a curse in the custom and also later in the legitimate law functioned as the means, encouraging the truthfulness of one's own statement. Curse and damnation were kinds of punishment. A person over whom a generation, a municipality, a monarch, a judicious institution or the Church articulated a curse was partially or completely, permanently or temporarily excluded from the public and religious life and their property would be taken away. Moreover, they would be deprived of any legal protection, excluded from the local community and excommunicated from the Church. This form disappeared in 18th century and is no longer used. Curses can be seen in folklore genres, mainly in fairy tales and legends. They were due to the tradition formally stabilized and universalized, and have gained a strongly expressive character and an anti-aesthetic effect as a result of a deliberate use of language conventions, etiquette and politeness. Curses are rich in a metaphor,

personification, hyperbole, epitheton and catachresis ('May a fried goose kick you'). Curses, as well as the transformed maledictions mostly begin with particles such as 'may' and 'let' thus expressing a wish. Frequent are magical words (seven Gods and seven thunders) and numerals (hundreds and thousands of thunders). The thematically oldest layers are those: a) referring to the highest instance i.e. Gods ('God damn you!'), 'Hang you all!', 'God damn!'), on an Anti Christ, including also derived maledictions ('Damn you!'), b) curses and maledictions referring to cooperation with demonic creatures, c) referring to physical liquidation or elimination of illnesses; here, one can find the statements expressing a physical change of a man into an animal ('May he change into a dog!', 'May his hands twist into ram's horns!'), d) semi prankish and prankish curses i.e. damnations that are regarded as milder forms of the intention of evil and negative powers that are based on absurdity. This group often has a spoof character; its roots can be searched for in familiarization of the street speech in the medieval carnival culture. The hyperbolising words 'praise-shame' are organically connected and form a significant level in the development of figurative language. In everyday speech, a curse, damnation and malediction used to be generally spread. Nowadays, however, the repertoire in the frame of a theme and poetics is contracting. Such words are used in stressful and emotionally strained situations, mostly in an auto relaxing function. A swearword is a fixed insulting statement or a formula represented either by a word or a fixed phrase. Swearwords are connected with a threat, curse, swearing or imploring. Their origin has a base also in the magic of the word and their original function was magical and ritual. As it was stated earlier, in the past a connection between a designation and a thing was not only a free association but a real existing combination connecting both of them. Therefore, magic could have had the same strong influence on a man through saying their name or a designation, and also through the breach of an oral taboo- articulating one's name, or a designation (e.g. of God or an illness). Swearwords and degrading oral demonstrations had different functions in the medieval age when the majority of them lost their magical character and became universal expressions of the street. These as forms breaking the standards of official etiquette were in terms of their meaning, theme and function, gradually differentiated. Ethnically common swearwords include: a) swearwords-names of animals, b) swearwords-a designation of illegitimate children, c) swearwords with a scatological character (referring to faeces and their excretion), d) coital swearwords, e, swearwords-names of genitalia, f) swearwords-names of sexually perverse people, g) swearwords-names of the sexually promiscuous men, h) swearwords according to characteristic mental features, symptoms or acts e.g. a thickhead, a toper, a layabout, i) swearwords according to characteristic physical signs e.g. a midget, a smiley, and a humpback, etc. but also many others as a folk invention in this respect has always been open, of which my collection giving some hundreds of statements is its evidence. The function of a swearword is to insult a recipient and aims to evoke in negative feelings within themselves, cause them moral harm and decrease their self-esteem. Although one can get insulted without any use of a swearword, the most common insult is through the use of vulgarisms and fixed phrases which

are often applied to cover the fear and uncertainty of a sender in stressful situations. The youth, often reluctant to realize their real meaning frequently uses such words to fill in conversational gaps. They often demonstrate their social discomfort; disconfirm elite or their identification with a certain social group. Such words can have an appraising or gentle designation function. Children's swearwords or gesticulation swearwords-a phallic symbol, long nose or cacophonous invectives or swearwords form an individual group of swearwords. (ELKS, 1995: 387) My short calculation of the forms i.e. formulae is to show the transformation from the original imaginary function of a word to the present everyday language culture. Forms whose roots are reaching to the magic and mythical image of the universe have been transformed on the level of the etiquette of everydayness.

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RESUME

Jazyková mágia, mágia slov, magická reč a sila slova, magická funkcia jazyka, resp. textu, to sú prejavy zakotvené v tradícii, avšak nie sú jednoznačne definované ich vlastnosti ani hranice, pretože sú výrazne difúzne. Prvý a jediný pokus na Slovensku sú moje definície v Encyklopédii ľudovej kultúry na Slovensku I., II. Bratislava: Veda, 1995. V súčasnosti pripravujem monografiu týchto magických výrokov a formúl, kde budú informácie obohatené a precizované.

Problematiku, resp. okruh problémov ku ktorým sa vzťahujú tieto rečové prejavy možno rozdeliť na 4 skupiny:

1. sú to jazykové fakty charakteristické pre tradičné spoločenstvá, ako napr. jazykové tabu, prekliatia, kliatby, zariekania a iné slovné rituály

2. sú to jazykové stopy všetkých tých faktov, uvedených aj podvedomé spojené s hovorením, ktoré sú zveličované-hyperbolizované. Ako napr. používanie eufemizmov, podakovacie formuly, želania, blahoželanania alebo silné vulgarizmy

3. je to živo sa rozvíjajúca súčasná „nová mágia slova“ tzv. postfolklór, ktorá sa uplatňuje v presvedčovacích technikách politickej propagandy, reklame, ako nápisový folklór na billboardoch, v titulkoch, v sloganoch a pod.

4. je to mágia poetického jazyka, uplatňovaná v krásnej literatúre, v poézii, slová v prenesenom slova zmysle.