Parallel historical corpora – a new method in standardization research?

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The Saxon and Magdeburg Law as a cultural link between the legal orders in the Eastern and Middle Europe
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Ivš međušeznje v omrežju: preliminarni raziskavi

The number of parallel historical texts is very restricted and therefore sets the limits for comparative studies in historical linguistics. The renaissance of the Saxons (the Saxons themselves and Magdeburg Law) (called together ivš međušeznje) is at an advantageous position. Being an important law source, ivš međušeznje were adopted in many Middle and Eastern Slovakianists (1995). It was translated into the languages used there and therefore influenced their legal systems and languages (Lazar et al. 1995).

In many cultures, the legal register is typologically one of the first in which the writing is established and elaborated (Reutter 1982). Having a wide public reach, it crucially impacts the development of the whole language by its nature and therefore deserves the most attention. The key notion of this development seems to be the standardization. The Slavic translations of ivš međušeznje are used to explore this process against the background of the language contact.

Zlina Law Book (Zlíněa právní kniha, 1581-1585, ed. by Kuchar 2003 and Pirinčej 1975) is one of the most important sources of ivš međušeznje in the Western Slovak area. It contains a copy of Mirror of the Saxons in Middle High German (Hunder 2011) and further MHG as well as its translation into “Stabilized Czech” (Cz) and provides comparative material for the study of standardization. Because the empirical evidence for the Czechoslovak linguistic continuum is still not satisfactory (Reutter 1982), Práve sázky (1469-1527) from the Northern Bohemia is used to compare the vernacular variation in these two sources of ivš međušeznje.

Standardization

Standardization is a matter of interdisciplinary interest in the history of law and linguistics.

From the linguist’s point of view two notions of standardization have to be distinguished (cf. Kujawski 2014; my own emphasis – AS).

1. a stage in the development of a specific language designated through “pure”, formal stability and functional versatility (language standardization)

2. a quality of a language used in legal discourse, which ensures its comprehensibility for the participants in this specialized discourse.

For the law historians standardization is a quality of a language used in legal discourse, which ensures its comprehensibility for the participants in this specialized discourse.

The comprehensibility is achieved through usage of the conventionalized expressions in certain genres and situations (Kujawski 2014). Obviously, the linguistic standardization is the cutting point between the history of law and linguistics and the study of the conventionalized multi-word units is relevant for both disciplines. The following description of standardization in the languages of the legal language text will focus on them.

The fact that ivš međušeznje is a translated elucidated text adds the further layer to the analysis design. The law is expressed in a particular language, which makes up its cultural identity and as a result processing of its traces within the network of this particular legal text (Kujawski 2014). Thus the reception of a new law is inevitably an impetus for language contact and two language systems have to be taken into consideration. This challenge is met by creating parallel corpora.

The parallel historical corpus

The parallel historical corpus is applied as a method for linguistic standardization research. It provides a suitable environment for identification and comparison of the formal legal text in the central (paradigm) context in both languages.

The corpus based on Zlina Law Book unifies the approaches to parallel and historical corpora. The workflow encompasses now steps as shown in the following diagram and varies across the languages involved according to the input.

Selected references


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