

Jaroslav Suk

The 5th Conference on Slang and Argot in Pilsen on 7-9 February 1995

The circle was closed: last time I was in Pilsen was when I left its prison 24 years ago. Now I came to this town to take part in a conference on slang and to give two lectures based on experiences I had with slang which I collected mostly in the jail of this town.

The *conferences on slang and argot* have taken place in Pilsen since 1977, in the beginning in an atmosphere of semi-legality, during the regime for which reality existed only as a part of its propaganda and where speaking about argot or slang of the prisoners in modern Czech could be seen as subversive. It was almost a heroic achievement and the importance of these conferences for the development of the linguistic thinking for the Czech region is hard to deny. A great deal of the credit belongs to the nestor of slang research, Lumír Klimeš. Without his activity we can not even imagine the existence of such meetings.

At the 5th conference were present, among others, Milan Jelínek, Přemysl Hauser and Miloslav Churavý from the host country, Cvetana Karastojčeva from Bulgaria, Jiřina van Leeuwen-Turnovcová from Germany, Peter Odaloš from Slovakia and Stanislaw Kania from Poland. And here we met at last, Jaroslav Hubáček, the one who denied the existence of argot and wrote about "extinct slang of prisoners" in Czech, and I who attacked him on the pages of an emigrant journal¹. But times were different now and all the old contentions seemed to be abandoned.

The contributions are assembled in the Proceedings². I would like to mention here two of the most important lectures at slang theory: Leeuwen-Turnovcová's on *Binary Models in Argot and Slang* and Jan Bosák's (not present at the conference) *Slang in the Language and in the Vocabulary: the Dynamics of its Description*. Among the contributions which described the separate types of slang, those by Přemysl Hauser on the slang of miners in Oslavansko, Helena Chýlová on the slang of pharmacists, Luboš Skopec on the slang of chess-players and Jiří Zeman on the language in fun-fairs met with a big interest, the last mentioned contribution also for its being theoretically innovating, treating the aspect of prosody. Many aspects of e.g. sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics,

¹ Svědectví no. 65/1981, p. 32.

² Sborník přednášek z V. konference o slangu a argotu v Plzni 7.-9. února 1995, Pedagogická fakulta Západočeské univerzity v Plzni, 1995, 170 pages.

semantics and onomastics were discussed.

In my reports, I sought to establish a unified system in the group language terminology, and to elucidate structural and social problems in the Czech language regarding slang research. A rather emotional discussion arose after the second speech. Especially the Moravian linguists were negative towards my proposal that Common Czech could be taken as a possible neutral style in the Czech language.

The conference was a great event with attention from town officials and the media. The participants could, of course, visit the famous brewery and listen to Lumír Klimeš who is also an expert in the old vocabulary of brewers. In the dynamic life in the Czech Republic nowadays, the conference was just one part of many cultural and other activities in Pilsen of these days.