

Authentic Song Lyrics in the Aspect of Czech as a Foreign Language: The Work of Jan Pokorný

Der Beitrag ist dem Studium der tschechischen Sprache und Kultur durch moderne Lieder gewidmet. Er beschreibt kulturelle und sprachliche Merkmale der modernen Tschechischen Republik anhand von Texten des populären Songwriters Jan Pokorný. Die beabsichtigten Leser*innen sind Lehrer*innen des Tschechischen als Fremdsprache und Selbstlernende.

The paper is dedicated to the study of the Czech language and culture through modern songs. It describes cultural and language features of the modern Czech Republic in the texts by popular songwriter Jan Pokorný. The intended readers are the teachers of Czech as a foreign language and self-learners.

Authentic texts are the valuable source of linguistic and country-specific knowledge. Created by native speakers and not specifically designed for educational purposes, they bring an element of novelty and variety to the traditional learning process, ensure the acculturation of foreigners and increase their motivation to learn (cf. Azimov / Shchukin 2009: 105). Song texts can also be used as instructional texts, which is facilitated by their small volume, the relevance of the topics and the musical accompaniment that makes them more appealing (cf. Verykina / Kuz'menkova 2015: 47).

The use of authentic materials always involves considerable prior preparation, consisting in their selection and description, and in this paper, I propose to turn attention to the work of a songwriter popular in the contemporary music scene in the Czech Republic.

Jan Pokorný, known under the pseudonym Pokáč, presents Czech naive pop-folk (cf. Nevzorov 2019). Therefore, in his work there are also observed features that have been noted by researchers of naive art. Among them are simplicity, clarity and immediacy, optimism, versatility and diversity, the use of stamps and clichés (cf. Bychkova 2003: 311–312; Musyankova 2020: 7), as well as the desire to preserve the memory of events and impressions of them (cf. Bogemskaya 2001: 112; Bobrikhin 2018: 187–188).

As a modern and popular performer, Pokorný tries to meet the expectations of the audience, primarily for entertainment. His work is quite diverse, and this is evident both at the level of the themes and issues of his songs, as well as at the level of their series.

Firstly, his songs are dedicated to serious problems, including health and ecology disasters. In them, humor helps to relieve tension in difficult situations and maintain optimism. For example, many of the songs in the series *Pokáčova rychlovka* deal with the COVID-19 pandemic; the topic of health and appearance is addressed in the songs *I když jsme plešatý* (feat. Anna Slováčková) and *Já se nestydím za to že nevidím* (feat. Matěj Žaloudek). Environmental problems are raised in the songs *Antarktida*, *Na pláži*, *Ekosong*. Supporting local producers is the song *Farmář Tonda*.

These songs, on the one hand, highlight global problems, allowing them to be discussed, and, on the other hand, present them as casually and humorously as possible, provoking and enabling a discussion on them, relieving tension and therefore increasing learners' activity. In addition, this approach makes it possible to regulate emotions in difficult situations and maintain a positive attitude, adapting to the changes in the world.

Secondly, Pokorný's texts are full of ironic musings on all kinds of everyday topics. The author focuses on everyday problems and anecdotal situations from life, for example in the following songs: *Rád chodím na poštu*, *Mám doma kočku*, *Kouření je hnusný zvyk*, *Úplně levej*, *Aromatické léto*, *Probuzení*, *Mám rýmu*, *Nešáhej na mě*, *Když je hokej lední*; *Sám doma*; *Proč na všech fotkách vypadám jak idiot?* (feat. Tereza Balonová), etc. The texts also deal with stereotypes and clichéd thinking, for example in the songs *Stereotypy*, *Hrdinský čin* (feat. Jakub Ondra), *Holky to objektivně lehčí maj*, *Netuším*, etc. Pokorný writes songs about self-development and self-improvement, which are often accompanied by procrastination: *Co z tebe bude*, *Nedělám nic, ale dělám to dobře*, *Zeitra je taky den*, etc. Some songs represent the themes of modern life, the development of technology, the Internet, social networks and their impact on people: *Blbej den*, *Holky*, *V lese*, *Cowboy*, *Děti*, *To si na Googlu vyhledejte*; *Nejde Net*,

Virtuální prostitut, *Koupil jsem si Bitcoin*, etc. There are songs in Pokorný's work about generational and age characteristics (26, 30, *Vymlácený entry*, *Co bejvalo už není*), as well as gender and generational attitudes (*Tak tě tu vítám*, *Dej mi pusku*, *Lovesongy* (feat. Kateřina Marie Tichá), *Dokonalý muž*, etc.). The commercialization of modern life is not left aside: *Nikde žádnéj sníh*, *Anděl*, *Už za pár dní*.

Pokorný does not avoid political topics, which is more characteristic of the series *Pokáčova rychlovka*. The texts may be crude, but they reflect what is being heard at a particular moment, what is being actively discussed and in what way it is being presented, and therefore such texts are also revealing in terms of knowledge of the country.

Pokorný's work is represented by several series:

1. Songs from the four official albums (*Vlasy* (2017), *Úplně levej* (2019), *Antarktida* (2021), *Rodinné album* (2023)); many of the songs have music videos, which make the lyrics much easier to understand.
2. Mini-songs from social media (*Ukulele minisongs*, *Pokáčovo demo*), some of which were included in the albums.
3. A series *Pokáčova rychlovka* written for the radio *Frekvence 1*. As part of the program, current topics are commented every two weeks in musical form (cf. Zhguleva 2021: 86, 89).
4. A series of songs for a variety of projects, including reactions to them. It includes songs for the children's animated series *Kosmix* (*Robůtek Kit*, *Robůtek Kit a pan Baterka*), for Google (*Co Češi vyhledávali na Googlu v roce 2021*), for the project *13 minut* (*Nejezdi jako prase* (feat. Marta Jandová)), for T-Mobile in response to the company's Christmas advertisement (*Vánoční katastrofy*), for the Prague Zoo (*Zoo song*), for the film *Gump: jsme dvojka* (*Život je pes*), for the chocolate brand *Studentská pečeť* (*Zůstaň svůj*), for the consulting bank *Partners Banka* (*Banka pro celou rodinu*, *Na podezřelý odkazy neklikej*, *Kapesný*). In addition, album *Antarktida* includes the song *I když jsme plešatý* (feat. Anna Slováčková) written in support of children with cancer for the fund-project *Můj nový život*.

Thus, the songs of Pokorný are part of the culture of the modern Czech Republic, and at the same time they represent its different realities. Pokorný's texts can be devoted to purely Czech phenomena. For example, the song *Chudák Alzák* is dedicated to the hero of a Czech advertisement for an electronics store. The series *Pokáčova rychlovka* comments on current events that either take place in the Czech Republic directly, or how Czechs perceive what is happening in the world.

In general, texts with Czech inclusions predominate in Pokorný's work: mention of places and other facts of Czech life (the D1 motorway, the news portal *Blesk*, MHD (=Městská hromadná doprava), supermarkets *Billa* and *Tesco*, OSVČ (=Osoba samostatně výdělečně činná), Czech professional ice hockey right winger Jaromír Jágr, Czech painter Josef Lada, single *Klára* by Chinaski, the popular slogan of Czech sports fans *Kdo neskáče, není Čech*, Czech proverb *Jak na nový rok, tak po celý rok*, etc.). In the refrain of the song *Veselé Covidonoce*, we meet the line of the famous traditional Czech songs *Hody, hody, doprovody* (probably, *Zajíčková koleda* was taken as the basis), and the Easter custom of whipping girls and women with *pomlázka* is described in the verses (cf. Zhguleva 2021: 87).

Thus, the key features of his work were identified, including the presence of the country-oriented values, on the one hand, and the actualization of significant problems of our time and the discussion of common everyday topics, on the other hand. In addition, the texts of Pokorný are full of ironic judgments, and to serious problems he always approaches with humor.

The means of creating comic most often are the grotesque and the violation of prediction (deceptive expectation) associated with the unexpectedness and unpredictability of the final part of the song, as well as the discrepancy between the ideal and the real situation (cf. Osipova 2020: 78, 81). A consequence of these features is the presence in the texts of language games and features of Common Czech. All these features together can significantly enrich foreign learners' knowledge of the Czech language and culture.

The use of contamination in song lyrics is also common. The Easter issue of the *Pokáčova rychlovka* observes a 2020-specific designation of Easter related to its celebration during the COVID-19 pandemic: Velikonoce – Covidonoce (cf. Zhguleva 2021: 87).

In three songs we observe the antanaclasis. In the song *Jsem pozitivní* the word *pozitivní* forms the actual meaning ›able to note the positive aspects of events, focused on the good‹ and ›having covid-positive status‹ (cf. Zhguleva 2021: 89); in the song *Antarktida* the word *utopenci* forms the actual meaning ›drowned‹ and ›pickled speckles‹; in the song *Padá hvězda* the word *hvězda* forms the actual meaning ›heavenly body‹ and ›celebrity‹.

Features of Common Czech are observed in the texts at the level of phonetics, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. The following peculiarities are highlighted based on the typology of A. I. Izotov, V.F. Vasil'yeva and A.G. Shirokova (cf. Izotov 2013: 54–56; Vasil'yeva / Shirokova 2003: 48–55):

1. Phonetic features: the use of [i] in accordance with the literary [ē] (*každý ráno, mlíko, na svém albu, v tom mastném triku mým, na celým širým světě, malý vajíčko, mý zuby*, etc.); the use of the diphthong [ei] in accordance with the literary [ī] (*každej, samej, rejpe, prej, bejt, svejch, bejvák, tejden, zejtra*, etc.); simplification of consonant groups, results of assimilative and dissimilative processes (*dyť, dem, nepudu, dycky, pod', pudeme*, etc.); the use of the prothetic [v] before the initial [o] (*vomotal, vona, vod, vodstřelil, vočí*, etc.).
2. Morphological features: the unified ending -aj (-ej) in the presentent-futural forms of the 3rd person plural of indicative verbs (*maj, musej, dělaj, mizej, vozej, stojej, čekaj, ptaj, vypadaj, vykaj*, etc.); convergence of verb classes (*laškuju, piju, vymaluju, naleju, píšu, zbožňuju, zatahuju, skupujou*, etc.); the omission of the final -l in the position after the consonant in the l-forms (*řek, moh, zvlád, neposlech, švih, vznik, zvyk, vrh, výběh, vlek, rozmáz*, etc.); truncated ending of the presentent-futural form of the 1st person plural indicative of verbs (*vezem, píšem, můžem, budem, lžem, použijem, polezem, půjdem, milujem, dojdem, sejdem, vyplujem*, etc.); the tendency to unify the ending -i in the Nom. plural nouns (*lidi, skřítci*, etc.); the use of *bysme* forms in accordance with the literary *bychom*; the use of the form *seš (jseš)* in accordance with the literary form *jsi*; the unified ending -ma (-ema, -ama) in the Instr. plural of nouns and pronouns (*nad nima, nohama, nad hlavama, mezi náma, pod oknama, s brejlema, s váma, lidma, s nůžkama*, etc.); the unified ending -ý in the Nom. plural adjectives, in accordance with the three differentiated endings in literary language (*některý z nich, žádný paparazzi, trochu jiný jsou fronty, hezký holky*, etc.); unified ending -y in the index pronoun (*ty dva chlapi, všechny ty zkratky, názvy, všechny ty jména*, etc.).
3. Syntactic features: the formation of the 1st person past tense indicative by the model *já + l-form* in accordance with the literary model *l-form + jsem* (*já se zeptal, já jí pomoci šel*, etc.); the use of personal pronouns is much more active than in literary language.
4. Lexical features: univerbation (*přes kopíráky, Nuselák, obchodák, obývánk, václavák, z hlaváku, měšťák, toaleták, osobák, pošťák, z sídláku*, etc.); frequent use of emotional means of expression (interjections and particles) (*no, teda, víš, na mou duši, hele, prej*, etc.).

This peculiarity of Pokorný's texts makes them especially attractive for introducing foreigners to the real language situation and the situation of diglossia, which is characteristic of the modern Czech Republic (cf. Izotov 2008: 64–69; Izotov 2013: 52–53; Vasil'eva / Shirokova 2003: 46–49).

Thus, the description presented in the main part of the paper allows us to talk about the didactic potential of Jan Pokorný's work, and therefore about the possibilities of using his song lyrics for educational purposes.

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