

INTRODUCTION

“... for thy speech bewrayeth thee” Matthew 26,73

Most of us are familiar with the famous scene from the Gospel of Matthew wherein Peter thrice denies having anything in common with Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples. The third query is the most critical for him as the discovery of his identity is based on a powerful argument: “Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee”, and Peter has his hands full refuting this charge. We could say that the scene is probably one of the oldest written records documenting the importance of sociolinguistic characteristics.

To use the terms of contemporary sociolinguistics, what gave Peter away was his regional dialect and probably also his social dialect revealing his background. We know that differences in regional dialects and sociolects are most evident at the level of sound and only then at the other planes of language, lexis and grammar. It can't have been difficult to tell that Peter was not a local man and to notice the similarities between his way of speaking and that of his teacher. It is most likely that Peter adopted other things from his teacher as well, a certain kind of thinking and way of viewing things, and with it also a specific way of expressing these views, especially when speaking publicly. This takes us from dialect to a functional language, a register. Whilst a dialect shows who or what we are, a register, stylistic variant, shows what we are doing via language right now. Our speech habits and activities bewray us.

The reason for choosing this particular quotation for the title of a Festschrift presented to Libuše Dušková on the occasion of her 80th birthday is quite simple and obvious to all who know the festschriftee well. There are few people so perceptive about language, its subtleties, nuances and convolutions at all

levels, about everything that can be deduced and concluded from speech, so sensitive about everything that speech can tell us about its users and their communicative intentions, as she is. And there are few people as unconditionally devoted to the investigation of language as Libuše Dušková. When responding to the question in a recent interview of what her lifelong hobbies are, her answer was symptomatic: “I used to have many hobbies in my youth, but they gradually faded away. Today I have but one, and it is the exploration of language phenomena, which appear to have no end.”

This modest volume is meant as a sincere tribute to a linguist who dedicated her whole life, all her energy, to the study of the English language and to the development of English linguistics at the department of English at Charles University at both the theoretical and the personal level. Thanks to her efforts, Prague English linguistics weathered out the gloomy period of Communist normalisation in the eighties of the last century, rallied around her in the stormy 1990’s to become a balanced modern study programme that can compare with departments abroad. Now, at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, we can say that under her spiritual guidance English linguistics at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, has become an efficient and up-to-date department with good prospects for the future, relying on a team of young scholars to whom she has imparted not only theoretical knowledge, but also the principles and ethics of sound scientific work. Those who know Libuše Dušková are well aware that there is no discrepancy between what she says and what she does. They know that “her speech bewrayeth her” but, in contrast to “Simon, who is called Peter”, it reveals her to be consistent both in life and in work.

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