

From a sort of long-distance  
learning to close cooperation

Prague Linguistic Circle  
and the present European project  
“au seuil du 21<sup>o</sup> siècle”

# History of science and theoretical research

A couple of claims to begin with:

- theoretical research in the humanities requires the free and therefore critical adoption of a paradigm, a tradition, its methods & goals;
- In Italian we say “la povertà aguzza l’ingegno”, i.e. to be a bit far away from the main traditions in linguistics can be a good opportunity to seek for a good one to work in

# A more local premise

- *A fil rouge* through the history of philosophy and of linguistics: Anton Marty (1848-1914) and Vilém Mathesius (1882-1945):
  - one town = Prague
  - two Universities = the German and the Czech one
  - two disciplines = philosophy of language and general linguistics
  - one hidden continuity

# Inferential competence vs referential competence

- bookish learning vs learning by experience
- long-distance learning vs *in praesentia* learning
- remote events & contemporary witnesses
- knowledge by description and/or knowledge by acquaintance

# Two books + the Velvet Revolution

- In 1982 I published *Anton Marty filosofo del linguaggio. Uno strutturalismo presaussuriano*, Roma
- In 1990 I published *Il Circolo Linguistico di Praga (1926-39) Radici storiche e apporti teorici*, Milano
- In 1989-90 it happened to me to feel astonished reading on the newspapers so often about Prague and the Velvet Revolution...I got the impression that what was on top of my mind was also on top of everybody's thoughts...
- What a nice opportunity to come to Prague in April 1990 to meet Josef Vachek, the last living witness of the golden age of the Prague Linguistic Circle and one of its most important mentors abroad!

# An exchange of letters...

- with Josef Vachek: 1990-1995
- with Oldřich Leška: 1991
- with Radim Palouš: 1991
- with Eva Hajičová: 2004-
- with Tomáš Hoskovec: 2006-
- with Jan Radimsky: 2008-

# three international conferences,

- at the Lausanne University in 1993, about Prague Linguistic School, organised by Patrick Seriot, with František Daneš, Jan Šabršula, Milena Srpova, Jindřich Toman
- at Piano di Sorrento in 2005, at the annual Meeting of the Italian Society for the Philosophy of Language, about Translation, with Eva Hajičová as invited speaker
- at Prague University in 2006, being invited as one of the speakers at the seminar on *The Role of PLK in the development and in the perspectives of Czech linguistics*

# one European project

## Théories et concepts du Cercle linguistique de Prague au seuil du XXIe siècle

- **Programme de la série**
- **1. Synchronie dynamique du système linguistique**
  - **Date** Novembre 2006
  - **Texte de référence** Mathesius, Vilém (1982a, 1911), O potenciálnosti jevů jazykových [Sur la potentialité des phénomènes linguistiques]. In: Mathesius Vilém, *Jazyk, kultura a slovesnost*. Praha, Odeon, p. 9-28; *première édition du texte* : Mathesius, Vilém (1911), O potenciálnosti jevů jazykových [Sur la potentialité des phénomènes linguistiques]. *Věstník Královské české společnosti nauk*, 1911-12, třída filozofickohistoricko- jazykozpytná, č. 2, únor 1911, p. 1-24; *version anglaise du texte* : Mathesius, Vilém (1964), On the Potentiality of the Phenomena of Language. In : Josef Vachek compiled by (1964), *A Prague School Reader in Linguistics*, Bloomington, Indiana university Press, p. 1-32.
  - **Actes du colloque** Echo des études romanes, Vol. III, No. 1-2
- **2. Centre et périphérie dans le système linguistique**

**Date** 8 – 11 mars 2009



# PLK: the secret of a long life

- Cooperative work
- Long-lasting tasks
- Theory & practice
- Multilingualism
- Young generations involvement
- Dissemination: from Prague (and beyond) to České Budějovice to Metz, Milan ...

# Les linguistes et les mots

- «Je viens enfin au mot merveilleux de liberté. Voilà quarante ans que, dans mon pays, je lis ce mot sur chaque toit, dans chaque vitrine. Quarante ans qui ont suffi à me rendre allergique, comme tous mes concitoyens, à ce mot magnifique, parce que je sais qu'il recouvre depuis quarante ans: des armées de plus en plus gigantesque, prétendant de servir de rempart à la paix....»

...

Malgré ce long processus par lequel ce mot de paix a été systématiquement vidé de son contenu et même carrément chargé d'un sens diamétralement opposé à celui que lui donne le dictionnaire, malgré tout cela, quelques Don Quichotte de la Charte 77 et quelques-uns de leurs jeunes collègues du Mouvement indépendant pour la paix ont réussi à réhabiliter ce mot et à lui rendre son sens originel....»

Václav Havel, Frankfurt 15.10.1989

Grazie!

Děkuji !



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LETADLEM  
PAR AVION



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CS 130 00 Praha 3, May 19, 1990

/nám. Jiřího z Poděbrad 18/

Dr Savina R a y n a u d

M i l a n o

Dear Dr Raynaud,

Thank you very much for your letter of May 10 which has just reached me. As regards the ~~X~~dating of Weil's book I will consult my friend Firbas whom I shall see here on Monday /he is a specialist in Prague School syntactical problems, while I am not so very much versed in them/. I will also try to get for you the xeroxes of Mathesius's papers you need - only I am afraid this will take some time, since our services are not very quick and prompt as yours. But I'll see to put the things through as quickly as possible.

I also very fondly recall our meeting here and hope it will not be the last in my lifetime.

Yours sincerely,

*Josef Vachek*  
Prof. J. Vachek

Dear Professor Raymond,  
Thanks for your magnificent book  
on the PLC. Inclosed you will find  
my short review of it to be pu-  
blished shortly in Carpis pro  
moderni filozii.

The Circle started regular discussing  
evenings in very modest conditions.  
As an independent institution we  
are not subsidized and will have  
to find some real sympathetic  
souls to support us financially.  
If you happen to have a copy  
please send it to me -