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Marek Nekula. System der Partikeln im Deutschen und Tschechischen: Unter besonder Berücksichtigung der Abtönungspartikeln [book review]

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Marek Nekula. *System der Partikeln im Deutschen und Tschechischen: Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Abtönungspartikeln*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1996. *Linguistische Arbeiten*, 355. xiii + 220 pp. ISBN 3-484-30355-7.

Reviewed by Gary H. Toops

In the 1970s the Deutsche Bundespost ran an ad campaign promoting greater use of its telephone service in West Germany, with the slogan *Ruf doch mal an*. A German friend asked me back then if there was any way of adequately rendering in English this German advertising slogan—morphosyntactically nothing more than an imperative sentence—since English did not seem to have anything equivalent to the (so-called “modal”) particles *doch* and *mal*. After some discussion, we agreed upon ‘Why not go ahead and call?’ as the closest English equivalent, with ‘why not’ doing service for *mal* and ‘go ahead and’ representing *doch*.¹

Marek Nekula’s *System der Partikeln im Deutschen und Tschechischen* provides evidence that our earlier conclusion about German *doch* and *mal* and their translation into English was not unjustified. Nekula considers in his book a number of German and Czech particles—prominent among them German *doch*, *ja*, *eben*, *halt*, and *eigentlich*, and, correspondingly, Czech *přece*, *vždyť*, *právě*, *holt*, and *vlastně*; despite the close syntactic and semantic parallels exhibited, respectively, by these German and Czech particles, Nekula occasionally notes a tendency in Czech to resort to paraphrase, combinations of particles, or even morphology in contexts where German relies strictly on the use of individual particles. In the following illustrations (for the most part, passages from German works of literature and their published Czech translations), we indeed note, for example, a one-to-one correspondence between the German and Czech particles in question:

- (1) [Ger] Das ist *doch* Ihr eigenes Geld.
[Cz] Jsou to *přece* Vaše vlastní peníze. (120)
‘That’s your own money, *and you know it*.’

[Plenzdorf 1979: 28]

¹ Lohnes and Strothmann (1980: 227) likewise translate a German imperative into English as an interrogative: *Mach uns doch mal eine Tasse Kaffee!* ‘How about fixing us a cup of coffee?’

- (2) [Ger] Ich habe *doch* keinen Finger krumm gemacht.
 [Cz] Nehnul jsem *přece* ani prstem. (120)
 '[What for?] I didn't even raise a finger.' [Plenzdorf 1979: 28]
- (3) [Ger] ... das ist *doch* außerhalb jeder Vorstellbarkeit.
 [Cz] ... a to si *přece* nelze vůbec představit. ~
 ... a to je *přece* naprosto nepředstavitelné ... (120)
 '... which is simply unimaginable ...'
 [Kafka 1971: 338, 1973: 204]

In fact, Nekula notes (120) that in a 1986 Czech translation of Ulrich Plenzdorf's short novel *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* (*Nová utrpení mladého W.* Petr Karlach, trans. Praha: Mladá fronta), German *doch* is rendered 39 times by Czech *přece* (84.78%), once each by *tak*, *no*, *no tak*, *taky*, *vždyť* (2.17% each), and twice by *nejspíš* (4.34%).

Nevertheless, as Nekula points out, this close correspondence between German *doch* and Czech *přece* is observable for the most part only in declarative sentences. Elsewhere, German *doch* may be rendered by *vždyť* (particularly where *doch* itself is synonymous with *ja*) or a combination of particles (120). With respect to other particles—German *eben* and *halt*—Nekula similarly observes that “the Czech particles *zrovna* or *právě* ... as well as *prostě* and *holt* ... tend to be combined with other particles more often than [German] *eben* or *halt*” (163), cf.:

- (4) [Ger] Komm *halt* nach!
 [Cz] *Tak* (*holt* / *prostě*) přijed' za náma! (154)
 'So [*just*] meet up with us later on.' [Translation mine—GHT]
- (5) [Ger] Nun laßt ihn *halt* in Ruh!
 [Cz] *Tak* už ho nechte na pokoji! (154)
 'Will you *just* leave him alone?!' [Translation mine—GHT]
- (6) [Ger] Dann laß es *eben* / *halt* !
 [Cz] *Tak* toho *prostě* nech(ej)! (154)
 'Then *just* forget [about] it!' [Translation mine—GHT]

Thus, although significantly closer to German than to English, the Czech system of particles would appear, nevertheless, to occupy an intermediate position between German, at one extreme, and English—with its frequent reliance on paraphrase (*go ahead and*), rhetorical question tags (*How about... ?; Why not... ?; Will you... ?*), and simple contextual implication—at the other.

It is worth considering here the classification of these particles and how they place a Slavic language like Czech typologically between two

Germanic languages. Throughout his work, Nekula employs the German term *Abtönungspartikeln*. This term is generally translated into English as 'modal particles', and even German dictionaries cite *Modalpartikeln* as its synonym. Still, *Abtönung* means 'modulation', and *Abtönungspartikeln* are not "modal" particles in the same sense that, say, Russian *by* or *-ka* are, i.e., as particles that encode or mark a specific verbal *mood* (i.e., conditional/subjunctive or imperative, resp.). A popular textbook of German published in the United States introduces German *denn* in this way: "Idiomatic German is characterized by the very frequent use of 'particles' which, in addition to their definable dictionary meaning, have a psychological meaning sometimes hard to define. One of these is **denn**" (Lohnes and Strothmann 1980: 19). Subsequently, however, the same textbook classifies *denn* and *doch* as sentence adverbs, which, unlike most other sentence adverbs, "can appear only in the inner field" (Lohnes and Strothmann 1980: 73–74), i.e., cannot occur in sentence- (or clause-) initial position (in which case they, like Czech *neboť* and *přece*, function as coordinating conjunctions signifying 'for' and 'yet', resp. [114]). It is therefore not surprising that Nekula devotes the first chapter of his book to distinguishing these particles from interjections, adverbs, sentence adverbials, clitics, etc. (13–66), and to reconciling their disparate treatment in both the German and the Czech grammatical traditions (1–13).

If modal particles have little to do with mood *sensu stricto*, i.e., as a grammatical category of the verb, then they have, in contrast, much to do with (sentence) modality (in this respect we could say that "modal particles" have a "modalitative," rather than an actual "modal" function).² According to Panfilov, modality "is a logico-grammatical phenomenon and characterizes either the speaker's evaluation of the sentence content's degree of certainty or the nature of the objective relations reflected in the sentence. Modality may be expressed by the most varied linguistic means (through phonetic, tonemic, synthetic and analytic forms [including modal forms of verbs], through special auxiliary words [including modal particles], and by syntactic means as well)" (1974: 212; translation mine—GHT). In this connection it is instructive to review some of the modalitative functions that Nekula attributes to specific Czech particles. He states, for example, that the Czech enclitic particles *-že* and *-pak* refer back to shared, or previously communicated, information (*A co-pak-s tam koupil/kupoval? 'Was hast du denn da gekauft?' ['So what (all) did you end*

² As indicated in Toops 1996: 270, 286–87, the Bulgarian *preizkazno naklonenie*, traditionally referred to in English as 'renarrated mood', actually constitutes a renarrated ("evidential," "non-confirmative") modality in which various moods (indicative, conditional, future [to the extent that the future tense can be regarded as a modal, rather than a temporal, category—see Aronson 1977: 15]) are expressed much as they are in the non-renarrated ("non-evidential," "confirmative") modality (the so-called *izjavitelno naklonenie*).

up 'buying there?']; *Co-že-s tam koupil/kupoval?* 'Was hast du da *doch* gekauft?' ['Just what (all) did you buy there?']; he goes on to state that, compared to the question with no modal particle, the question *A co-pak-s tam koupil/kupoval?*, like its counterpart phrased with *to* (*A cos to tam koupil/kupoval?* [175]) seeks a more thorough, detailed answer, which can shed new light on a given topic, that "the matter inquired about is therefore not completely unknown and assumes a situation in which the speakers are familiar with the topic [of conversation] or even know the answer, as in the case of rhetorical questions ..." (176–77). Thus, a number of Czech modal particles would appear to have discourse functions similar to those extended deictic and anaphoric functions which Kresin has identified for the Czech demonstrative adjective *ten* (*ta, to*)—viz., that of instructing an addressee "to recall common experience or general knowledge" (Kresin 1993: 12), of serving "as a means of speaker-addressee contact, asserting the likelihood of common knowledge or experience" (Kresin 1993: 199).³

As suggested above, the modal particles of Modern Czech (MCz), according to Nekula, place that language typologically closer to German than to most of the contemporary Slavic languages. In the second of his book's three chapters (67–109), Nekula shows that Old Czech (OCz) had a system of enclitic particles whose modalitative function resembled that of similar particles that we find, for example, in Contemporary Russian (cf. Russian *že, -to, už, etc.*). These include the OCz enclitics: *-s/-si*, which expressed the speaker's uncertainty (*kterýsi, kdys[i], kdosi, etc.*); *-ž(e), -ť/-ti*, and *-pak*, which served as focusing particles for the pronouns and adverbs on which they were cliticized; *-ť*, which, having arisen from the ethical dative use of the second-person singular pronoun, contributed to textual coherence; and *-pak, -ť, -ž*, which could signal the amiable or polite proximity of the interlocutors as well as a speaker's attitude toward the content of his/her message (95):

- (7) [OCz] Nečiňmež nic proti otci i mateři.
 [Ger] Machen wir *doch* nichts gegen Vater und Mutter. (95)
 'Let's [*of course*] not do anything against Father and Mother.'

³ Cf. descriptions of German modal particles provided by Lohnes and Strothmann: "The word *doch* may be stressed or unstressed. The stressed *doch* [...] corresponds to English *after all* and expresses that the fact reported is contrary to expectations. This stressed *doch* is frequently preceded by *also*, which adds the flavor of *so* when used at the beginning of English sentences" (1980: 72). "*Eben* can also be used as a sentence adverb meaning 'it won't take long; I hope you don't mind the interruption.' In this function, it minimizes the significance of the action ..." (1980: 432).

- (8) [OCz] Daj-ž-ť mě vody.
 [Ger] Gib mir *mal* Wasser. (96)
 'How about giving me some water?'

Nekula attributes the MCz system of modal particles to a period in the Czech language, "when southern German elements had decisive prestige in the lands of the Bohemian crown, i.e., at the time of the more or less bilingual society, in particular [that society living] in the cities in the 18th and 19th centuries," a society whose Czech-German bilingualism ultimately spread as well to the non-urban populace as the result of a newly structured educational system (91). This explains, among many other similarities between MCz and German, the almost exact semantic, syntactic, "constitutional," and "relational"⁴ equivalence of MCz *přece* and German *doch* (104–07; see above). Although Nekula takes care to avoid definitively attributing the many similarities exhibited by MCz and German modal particles to a Central European *Sprachbund* (73–94), his tracing the evolution of Czech *přece* as a modal particle (equivalent to German *doch*) back to a period of Czech-German bilingualism is still not fully convincing.

For example, Nekula notes that Czech *přece* derives from *před se* and originally signified 'ahead [of one's self]' (German 'vor sich [hin]'), hence 'further [on]; still; always'. Thus, *Mluv přece!* originally meant 'Keep talking!' (German 'Sprich weiter!'), *Vždyť přece on jest skála má*—'For he is *still* my rock' (German 'Denn er ist *immerhin* mein Felsen'); by the first half of the 19th century, though, these sentences had acquired a different meaning: 'So [go ahead and] speak!' (German 'Sprich *doch!*'), 'For he is [, *after all,*] my rock' (German 'Denn er ist *doch* mein Felsen') (106).⁵ Nevertheless, if a period of Czech-German bilingualism in Bohemia suffices to explain how Czech *přece* came to be a modal particle equivalent to German *doch*, then similar considerations should apply just across the Bohemian border to the Sorbs in Lusatia, who have historically constituted an even more bilingual society than the Czechs. Contemporary Upper Sorbian (USor) exhibits the adverb *přeco*, which, like its OCz cognate, signifies 'always' (German 'immer') and derives from *před so*. Unlike MCz *přece*, however, USor *přeco* has **not** assumed the function (meaning) of the German modal particle *doch*. Interestingly, Jenč et al. (1989: 271) cite USor *přecy* as an *archaic* equivalent of German *doch*, which in USor imperatives

⁴ For Nekula, a Czech and a German modal particle are *constitutionally* equivalent if they are similarly (in)accentuable, (in)declinable, and (in)mobile (clitic); they are *relationally* equivalent if they occur in similar sentence types (declarative sentences, questions requiring one-word answers, questions requiring a yes/no reply, imperatives, etc.) and/or if they fulfill similar alternate grammatical functions in each language.

⁵ I have replaced Nekula's German glosses here with my own—GHT.

today is expressed by *da*, *džě*, *t(o)la*, or *wšak*. Just how archaic the USor modal particle *přecy* is, remains unclear; nevertheless, Pful's USor-German dictionary defines *přecy* (together with *předco*) exclusively as German 'immer' as early as 1866 (Pful 1866: 518). It is thus odd that USor *přecy* should have already become obsolete as a modal particle by approximately the same time that, according to Nekula, Czech *přece* had only recently turned into one.

Somewhat problematic as well is Nekula's explanation for the general absence of any Czech lexical equivalent in imperative sentences where German exhibits the particle *mal*:

- (9) [Ger] Drück *mal* auf dieses Knöpfchen hier.
 [Cz] Zmáčkni tenhleten knoflík. (166)
 'Just press on this button here.' [Plenzdorf 1979: 80]
- (10) [Cz] Jane, poslyš ...
 [Ger] Hör *mal*, Jan ... (166)
 'Listen, Jan, ...' [Translation mine—GHT]

Nekula proposes that the meaning of "one-time" action implied by German *mal* is expressed in Czech grammatically, i.e., it is subsumed by the perfective aspect of Czech verbs occurring in the corresponding imperatives (166–71). However, this explanation ignores the fact that German *mal*—to the extent that it occurs in imperative sentences—occurs only in positive imperatives, not negative ones. Since in Czech, as in most Slavic languages, positive commands are typically formulated with perfective (achievement- and accomplishment-type) verb forms, any correlation between the Czech perfective aspect and the German particle *mal* is indirect at best.⁶

Elsewhere Nekula cites Czech sentences which contain the adverb *jednou* 'once' and whose German translations might well be expected to include *mal* (which is basically short for *einmal* 'once, one time'); ironically, however, Nekula here ignores *jednou* in his German translation(s), by which he seeks, admittedly, to demonstrate the mobility of Czech *přece* in contrast to the putative fixed sentence position of German *doch* (139):

⁶ USor reveals that a Slavic language in contact with German can, in fact, express German *mal* lexically in imperative sentences containing a perfective verb form, cf. colloquial USor *Daj mi mól pječ mark* (literary USor *Daj mi [jónu] pječ hriwnow*) 'Let me have five marks' (from a conversation witnessed in Bautzen, July 1996). Cf. also Michałk (1959: 246): *Dži mól to żyto wobsykać* 'Go [and] reap the grain' [emphasis added].

- (11) [Cz] O tom plánu *jsme už přece* **jednou** mluvili. ~
 O tom plánu *už jsme přece* **jednou** mluvili. ~
 O tom plánu *jsme přece už* **jednou** mluvili. [boldface added]
- (12) [Ger] Wir haben *doch* über diesen Plan gesprochen. (139)
 'We *did* [*in fact*] talk about that plan [**once**] before.'
 [Translation mine —GHT]

In my opinion, a more accurate German translation, and one that would have revealed more similarities than differences between the Czech and German sentences, would have been:

- (13) [Ger] Über diesen Plan *haben wir doch* [*schon*] **mal** gesprochen.

Indeed, this last observation points up the intuitive nature of much of the analysis involved in researching modal particles. In the aggregate, Nekula has done a good job of establishing and adhering to rather rigorous criteria for identifying, classifying, and contrasting modal particles, and with a minimum of theoretical baggage; future research on particles will no doubt follow the example of Nekula's methodology. Once a corpus of modal particles in one language (e.g., German) has been delineated, however, one must rely largely on *Sprachgefühl* to determine whether and, if so, in what ways another language (e.g., Czech) expresses the corresponding modalities. As the few examples cited above suggest, the meaning of a modal particle occurring in German may receive no lexical expression in Czech or English at all; the corresponding modality may be contextually implied, subsumed in the morphology, or be expressed by a variety of lexical means. In the end, it is to Nekula's credit that he has the requisite command of German and the intuition of a native speaker of Czech to produce *System der Partikeln im Deutschen und Tschechischen* and thereby make a fairly significant contribution to Germanic and Slavic contrastive linguistics.

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