

Farewell with editor-in-chief, professor doctor Jan Kořenský

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Abstract: This article was written in memory of professor Kořenský, a very prominent personality in Czech linguistics, the founder and former editor in chief of the journal *Linguistic Frontiers*. The purpose of this paper is to capture essential moments in the life of Professor Kořenský, his achievements and merits in the field of linguistics, and also to describe his unique personality. This article aims to remember this linguistic genius and share these memories with other readers of *Linguistic Frontiers*.

Keywords: farewell, remembrance, grammar theory, Czech linguistics, Jan Kořenský


Countless times the students of the Department of General Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, Palacký University have constructed grammars from a semantic basis, performed complex analyses of the communication process and text, and designed process grammars. Professor Kořenský has been the soul and genius of the department since its establishment. Students were equally afraid of his exams as they admired his charm, elegance, wit, and the art of lecturing. The professor's voice will never again be heard in lecture halls and classrooms; language games will never be the same. But the silence and emptiness are easily filled with a warm feeling from the memories of seminars, debates, amusing stories that the professor loved to tell, his magical mischievous smile and the eternal sparkle in his eyes. Professor Kořenský was editor-in-chief of the journal *Linguistic Frontiers* in the period 2018–2021. Before that he was editor-in-chief of the journal *Czech and Slovak Linguistic Review*² issued by Palacký University Press for many years (2011–2017). We would like to dedicate a few words in remembrance of his genius for the readers of *Linguistic Frontiers*.

We said farewell to our professor Kořenský on the day of 28th of April 2022 in Prague. It was a very sunny and hot spring day. The professor would be happy because he loved to be exposed to the hot touch of the sun and he enjoyed warm walks on hot summer days

in the streets of Olomouc where he used to teach, or in Prague where he lived with his family. Many people gathered to say goodbye to the beloved colleague, teacher, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. Despite the sad circumstances, it was a very nice gathering of people who love and admire professor Kořenský for his scientific contributions to the linguistic community but also, and more importantly even, for his extraordinary human dimension. Everyone there remembered many similar warm days, with the first hot sun of the year shining on the university yard as they were waiting for one of the professor's lectures, discussing the peculiarities of the professor's theories with classmates. Many of the gathered people met each other on the 28th of April after many years, brought together again thanks to professor Kořenský, with the bittersweet irony of the fact that this was the last time with our professor. He taught many generations of linguists, some of them are professors now, the youngest are current Ph.D. students. Everyone mentions professor Kořenský as "our professor" because everyone has the feeling of admiration and love towards such a big personality and everyone somehow feels a profound personal impact from their relation with the professor, whatever sort of relation it was. He was the teacher of us all. As associate professor Dan Faltýnek said in his funeral speech, "we were so lucky to have the chance to go to school to prof. Kořenský's classes".

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² <http://cslr.upol.cz/>

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Dan's biggest homage to the professor will continue to be the transmission to every new generation of students' the grammar theory of professor Kořenský, to translate the professor's ideas into simple language, so that students can try to understand his complicated ideas, whose expression was typified by long, complex sentences and technical terms. What remains after all the semantic and syntactic complexity of the message professor Kořenský left behind is a purely pragmatic itch never to be scratched: *we all went to school to listen to his lectures*. The pragmatic implications of this statement are countless and diverse for every individual. Every next warm day will remind us of professor Kořenský and of the days we used to wait for his lectures in the Palacký University yard and then sit in the classroom, the professor would enter, tall and charming as he was, stand in front of the whiteboard and tell us always the same and always a different linguistic story.

Professor Jan Kořenský has been one of the most prominent personalities profiling Czech linguistics of the twentieth century. The basic building blocks of today's Czech standard linguistic theories bear his signature (the grammatical and theoretical concepts). His work from recent years, which primarily has a methodological framework, then heralds the development of language study. The current development of language sciences gradually confirms his vision. We can assume that there will be a further increase in situations where we state that Kořenský anticipated the development and trends to come in linguistics. Professor Kořenský's beginnings in linguistics are linked with questions of language structure at the sentence level, especially regarding the morphological features of the word (grammatical categories). When the attention of Czech linguistics turned from the valency model to the description of sentence components, which was also inspired by the generativism projected into the concept of sentence formulas of prof. Daneš, professor Kořenský undertook a comprehensive overview of the Czech grammatical case patterns. As part of the description of sentence formulas (*větné vzorce*), these were also the initial components of the description of the Czech sentence. Later, Kořenský wrote a chapter on the substantive case for "Czech Academic Grammar" (*Akademická mluvnice češtiny*). With his interest in case theory, he consciously followed personalities of structural linguistics such as Roman Jakobson or Louis Hjelmslev.

When the tasks of the description of Czech in terms of two-level valence syntax were divided, which also included Kořenský's concept of the case, he subsequently focused on static predictors and processed this material largely independently. This led to his significant deviation from the view of language compared to other Czech linguists. At the same time, he continued to profile himself in two branches of the development of Czech linguistics. On the one hand, he developed language levels in the *Academic Grammar* project based on two-level valency syntax, but he also developed his own specific way of language description. In 1984, he introduced his

dissertation thesis "Grammar construction from semantic basis" (*Konstrukce gramatiky ze sémantické báze*). Published papers show that the whole approach was set out as early as the end of the 1970s, but the publication of the dissertation took a long time for various reasons. In this book, Professor Kořenský questioned the interpretive potential of the traditional linguistic theory of levels and its descriptive units (morpheme, word, sentence, etc.) in a directive way based on interpolation with conventional components of semiotic sign (syntax, semantics, pragmatics). He showed how the sign components are not carried by grammatical/morphological units separately, but are represented in a sentence to a different extent and without respect to the language level they belong (is the communicated content expressed by a suffix, a word, or a combination of words?). In this way, he classified grammatical categories based on whether they have syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic competence (syntactic—they relate to each other with the relevant paradigmatic form of the word: *Mladý Karel*, not *Mladého Karel*; semantic—they express the content of the sentence: *Karel leží*, not *Karel položil*; pragmatic—they express the relationship of the act of communication to the expressed content: *Karel jede*, not *Karel pojede*). Professor Kořenský's suggested approach questions the linguist's intuition. If we take away all language structures and formal units from any linguist, he will undoubtedly lose ground. However, Kořenský's approach has a unique advantage: he reconciles the essential starting points of semiotics with a linguistic description. Furthermore, he is thus much closer to the natural features of the sign and its role in communication. Professor Kořenský's approach to the text also has a relatively unexpected impact on natural language processing by computational and machine learning methods. These methods of classifying a text or searching for specific information do not have to rely on language signs in individual language levels separately, but may combine all the decisive properties of a text at the level of a complex sign—as professor Kořenský does. When the newly formed digital and automatized approaches to the text begin to search for their theoretical background, they will find it in Kořenský's works.

In the following years, after the publication of "Grammar Construction from Semantic Basis", professor Kořenský became a receptor for Czech linguistics in the field of text theory and pragmatics. At the same time, he gradually developed his insight concept (see his polemic with Beaugrande in the most prestigious Czech linguistics journal *Slovo a slovesnost*, of which Kořenský was the long-time editor-in-chief). The development of Kořenský's interests also had a clear logic. It began at the word level and gradually reached a larger scale through the sentence level. Then he thought about the structure of the text quite universally. He explained the basic concepts of Prague structuralism and defined the relationship of modern scientific trends to linguistics—see his discussion of the involvement of the metaphor, vagueness, or chaos theory in linguistics. In 2005, he took

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part in the debate on language culture, which underpins today's linguistic consensus on language correctness.

Professor Kořenský liked theater, and he also wrote scripts, although he did not publish them. He liked new and original art. He could not help but laugh when someone made a terminologically hypertrophied joke in the formal plenary. He loved cats, and in restaurants, he most often ordered simply breaded steak with potatoes (a stereotype of traditional Czech cuisine). During theoretical conversations, he liked both a bit of beer and a bit of wine. He always de-escalated conflicts. In the words of professor Uličný, professor Kořenský was an extremely conciliatory man. He was never haughty or rude to the students, and if anyone treated him inappropriately, he went through it with a very slight irony. He liked to laugh, and he liked to laugh together with others. His mentor was professor Havránek, and among all Czech linguists, he most often spoke about him. He preferred air travel over the car and train. He always had something sweet after lunch; if you offered him something salty immediately afterward, he would say with a smile and an apology: "I can't; we structuralists never do that". He liked to play

tennis and watch hockey. When the others searched for shade on hot days, he was the only one walking the streets in the sun. He rejoiced in the Indian summer and sat on a bench admiring the autumn falling leaves glistening in the sun. He liked Belmondo, Janáček and Smetana. Now, thousands of his students and colleagues are thinking of him, to whom he said something that changed their lives forever. Professor Kořenský, at the age of 80, was still lecturing on new media, and he was good at it. The apparent paradox only confirms the fact that the professor was much younger in spirit than many of his students and, until his last days, fully committed to linguistics and communication studies. Professor Jan Kořenský left us at the age of 85. His active lifestyle and love of culture, philosophy and language, which he cultivated until old age, testify to the fact that time is not irreversible. The professor will live forever in his books and, again and again, every time students or linguists open one of his publications, he will speak to us in his kind tone. The professor will live forever in our hearts and his moral compass will guide the next generation, not only in linguistics.