

## LANGUAGES, ACTORS AND AUDIENCE.

### *C. A. K. POLNI MARŠALEK VERSUS DER FALSCHER FELDMARSCHALL*

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Multiple-language versions of films produced at the beginning of the sound film era represent an extreme example of the tension between a tendency towards correspondence and a necessary dissimilitude, a tension that is present in virtually all cases when a film is transposed from one language into another. This is demonstrated also by dubbing or subtitles, the two translation techniques most widely used following the transition-to-sound era. Multiple-language versions show an evident identity on the level of the narrated story, in their overall use of sets and costumes, in framing as well as in the principles of editing: this is why they are called versions and not (separate) films. On the other hand, multiple productions with different actors result in a significant differentiation in the concrete speech realisation and in the actors' physical expression.

Linguistic differences between the individual versions (not only additions, omissions and semantic distinctions within the discourses, but also differences due to intonation or the relationship between speech, facial expression and gestures) can generally be viewed as a result of factors of three types:

(a) intralinguistic factors – expressive and semantic features specific to the individual languages;

(b) “realisation” factors – inherent in the acting abilities of the performers cast in a given role in the different versions;

(c) communication factors – connected with the fact that each version is addressed to a different audience, modelling a different addressee with a distinct linguistic as well as national and cultural background. What becomes crucial here are such factors as national mentality (or rather the stereotypical ideas about it), collective historical and cultural experiences, opinions, attitudes and prejudices predominant in a particular community (we should again note a contradiction between the real situation and the filmmakers' ideas of it).

Obviously, it is not possible to ascribe all differences to the factors stated above. The motivation for some differences is very difficult to assess, and they may in some cases be caused by a mere accident.

#### Two Versions of a Film Comedy

A particularly suitable example for supporting our claims is a film comedy about a

false military commander. The Czech version, *C. a k. polní maršálek* (Eng. Tr.: The Imperial and Royal Field Marshall) was made in 1930 by the director Karel Lamač<sup>1</sup> (who based his film on the eponymous play by the Czech playwright Emil Artur Longen). This was the second fully synchronised Czechoslovak film (after the unsuccessful melodrama *Když struny lkají* [F. Fehér, 1930]). The story of a retired Austrian officer who seizes an opportunity to pretend to be a Field Marshal, i.e. a commander-in-chief, capitalised on the popularity of satirical representations of the Austro-Hungarian army, a body which had ceased to exist with the fall of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. After its first run in October 1930 *C. a k. polní maršálek* became an enormous success, providing an important stimulus for the development of the Czechoslovak sound film production. *C. a k. polní maršálek* was also significant for the theatre comedian Vlasta Burian and his success as a (speaking and singing) star of Czech cinema: in the 1920s Burian performed in four silent films which had been much less popular, because his inimitable humour, developed on the stage, was based on thorough interpenetration of sound realisation, facial expression, gesticulation and physical action

At the same time Karel Lamač also directed a German version, *Der Falsche Feldmarschall* (Eng. Tr.: The Fake Field Marshall), with a title that already revealed the main conceit of the plot, though it was also shown under the title of *K. und K. Feldmarschall*, equivalent to the Czech title. The leading part in the German version was again performed by Vlasta Burian, now speaking German; the other roles were cast with German actors. The extras are more or less identical in both versions, including several figures delivering short speeches; in some cases, a given speaker among the present figures differs in the two versions.

It is worth noting that among the authors of the German version's dialogues was the popular Austro-German humorist Alexander Roda Roda, who had been an officer in his youth and had written many satirical texts about the monarchy, and its army in particular. Moreover, Roda Roda plays the real Field Marshal in the German version – who, however, is only a minor character, appearing at the very end of the film.

In 1931 Lamač directed a French version called *Monsieur le Maréchal*, with an all-French cast and situated in the French environment; unfortunately, the copy of this version is not available in the Czech National Film Archive, and it was not possible to consult it.

The following notes are based mainly on a systematic comparison of the linguistic component in the opening parts of the Czech and German versions of *C. a k. polní maršálek*. The later parts are discussed selectively, with attention only on the most characteristic examples. The opening sequence, approximately fifteen minutes long, functions as an exposition where the chief emphasis is placed upon the introduction of the main characters and their relations. It is entirely dominated by Vlasta Burian playing the role of a retired officer who yearns to be an active officer again. The officer's characterization is achieved on one hand by revelations of his subconscious (the film opens with the protagonist dreaming about his enormous success on the battlefield), and on the other through encounters with other characters (maidservant, waitress, members of his "veterans' club" gathered in the pub). The hero's account of the achievements of his lieutenant nephew introduces a set of other characters connected with the garrison in the little Galician town (the nephew, the garrison commander, his daughter, etc.).

## Nationalities and Languages

The first important differentiation between the two versions is a function of the characters' nationalities, and the use of the national languages connected with it. The German version is placed in a homogenous German-speaking environment, without any references to the Czech community. The hero played by Burian is called Alois Buschek (the name indicates a Czech origin, however, the graphic form – visible in a letter written by the protagonist – identifies the person to be a German-speaking Austrian), the garrison is led by colonel Gewitsch, etc. On the other hand, the situation in the Czech version is much more complex. This version constantly emphasises the Czech element, which is strengthened by the very choice of the characters' names. The Austrian army is full of Czech officers in this version: Burian plays a captain called František Procházka (a typical Czech name), the garrison commander in Galicia is colonel Alois Přecechtěl (again a typical Czech name), one of the local officers is called Hřebík ("Nail"), etc. (here the German version uses the corresponding "Nagel"). It is not without interest that this tendency towards the "Bohemicization" of the Austrian army does not affect those characters within the story that are clearly negative. The comical figure of a prying and timorous military servant is called Sep(p)l in both versions (the German version uses an appropriate gemination of the consonant *p*), in the same way the disclosed spy is a nobleman evidently of Hungarian origin, called Géza von Medák (Medak in the German version, without the Hungarian – and Czech – diacritics).

However, all the characters performing in the Czech version speak fluent Czech. It is evident in many cases that what is brought to the fore is the convention according to which "our" language, the language of the community that represents the intended addressee, captures the whole fictional world; for instance, at the end of the film it is natural for the Field Marshal to also speak Czech.

At the same time, the position of German as the official language of the Austrian army is here repeatedly brought to the fore; the same applies to German as the language of the dominant nation of the monarchy in general. There are German signs in the barracks, and people connected with, and influenced by the army often use German commands and typical phrases (*abgeblasen!*, *marsch!*, *gehorsamst*, *auf mein Kommando*); at times they may also use expressions that commonly evoke the military and administrative sphere (*Kriegsminister*). In addition, the characters' speeches contain many distorted words of German origin, words symptomatic of the speech of the Czech members of the Austrian army (*feldflaška*, *raport*, *lajtnant*, *obršt*, *vachcimra*, *maník*, etc.), sometimes also other words showing the German influence upon the Czech language (*sauvirtšaft*, *šnicl*).<sup>2</sup> The Austrian army, and virtually the whole monarchy, is in this version viewed as both "ours" and "foreign."

## Differences in Language Usage

The effect of the Czech version is based entirely upon Vlasta Burian's performance, in which he links casual everyday expression with stylized comic diction. Captain Procházka, played by Burian, speaks a brilliantly conceived non-standard Czech (what is known as "obecná čeština," "common Czech"); furthermore his utterances show a regular use of marked linguistic devices, expressive words (*sekanice*<sup>3</sup> "a pile-up of chops",

i.e. “a fierce battle”) and expressive word modifications (e. g. emphatic vowel lengthening: *majór* instead of the unmarked pronunciation *major*), conspicuous archaic forms (*generál* instead of *generál* “general”), etc. Principally, Burian uses language as a source of play with forms and meanings, his speech is full of “accidental” slips suggesting relations between semantically opposed expressions (*magor* “butthead” – *major* “major”; *pověšení* “hanging” – *povyšení* “promotion”), puns, associative connections between words, allusions to their hidden semantic possibilities, etc. Burian views the Czech language primarily as a source for his constant spontaneous improvisations.

In a minor way, this kind of treatment of language can be observed in the speech of several other characters as well; however, the extent of its playfulness is limited by the fact that they necessarily need to be overshadowed by the protagonist, not to mention the rather awkward and amateurish performances of many of them. We may notice, for instance, a playful use of the name *Medák* (this name of the unwanted suitor wooing the colonel’s daughter is the same as the popular designation for a bumble-bee, activating a connotation of “a ridiculous, unproductive person”), or the accumulation of unimportant, absurd details (i.e. the description of the booty in the opening dream sequence of the film).

The German version reveals Burian’s excellent command of the German language. His way of speaking can be labelled as correct in terms of his formulations; perhaps only the absence of labialisation in the pronunciation of some vowels ([gehe:rt] instead of *gehört*) shows that he is not a native speaker. Nevertheless, the loss of linguistic confidence is obvious. His utterances concern mainly the subject matter, the number of marked expressions being considerably lower (e.g. the German equivalent of the expressive Czech word *sekanice* is *schwere Schlacht*, “a heavy battle”). Essential weakening can also be observed in the creative approach to language. A symptomatic procedure in the German version is for instance the replacement of a dialogue with a waitress based on linguistic play (present in the Czech version) by a comical scene with a menu where words are unnecessary. Most instances of wordplay in the Czech version lack equivalents in the German version, and it is only occasionally that we find some attempts for creative compensation based on the German language.

If we focus on the correspondences in other scenes, we will come to the same conclusion. The name *Medak* occurs in the German version as well, but it is not semanticised; the description of the booty is considerably shorter.

## Differentiated Audiences

Some other differences that emerge out of a comparison between the two versions may be ascribed to the fact of two distinct audiences, complementing further the primary differentiation caused by the used languages and the characters’ nationalities.

The explicit references linking the characters’ speech to the historical, geographical and cultural context (on one hand Czech, on the other hand Austrian, or German) can only be carried so far. It is only the Czech version that contains the garrison commander’s suggestion to sing a well-known Czech children’s song called *Já husárek malý* (approximately: “What a little hussar I am”), producing a comical effect by being utterly inappropriate to the situation as well as to the social position of the persons present; the scene is omitted in the German version even though it would not be probably too

difficult to find an equivalent song. Similarly, when evaluating an officer's work, the false Field Marshal uses a comparison whose punchline depends on the name of a castle in central Bohemia familiar to the Czech audience (“Musím vám říct, že jste si počínal tak jako divokýskaut na Křivoklátě” – “I’ve got to tell you that you behaved yourself like an out-of-control Scout at the Křivoklát Castle”); the geographically concrete element is missing in the German version (“Sie haben sich benommen nicht wie ein Offizier, sondern wie ein Pfadfinder auf einem Sonntagsausflug” – “You behaved not as an Officer but like a Scout on a Sunday trip”).

On the other hand, the German version contains “additional” statements, such as one ascribed to Emperor Francis Joseph I (“Mir bleibt doch nichts erspart” – “I am not spared anything”<sup>4</sup>), uttered by the fake Field Marshal, or a cabaret singer’s mentioning that he was born in Vienna, which initiates one of the few puns occurring in this version, i.e. a Lower Austrian (*Niederösterreicher*) being “elevated” to an Upper Austrian (*Oberösterreicher*).

At the same time it should be underscored that the Czech version relies on the Czech recipients’ relatively extensive familiarity with the Austrian and German historical and cultural contexts: Both versions show Burian excelling at yodelling; later the audience is expected to know not only about the case of the captain of Köpenick, but also the name and appearance of Andreas Hofer, a Tyrolean anti-Napoleonic fighter.

But more significant yet, even though more difficult to capture, are those differences that reflect the presupposed different attitudes of the intended audiences towards the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and its army.

The producers of the Czech version could rely on most recipients having rather negative or distanced attitudes towards the monarchy, yet simultaneously viewing it as a closed matter, not affecting the present. Therefore, it was appropriate to use comical and satirical ways of representation, perhaps with a certain indulgent distance. This is reflected in a core paradoxical incongruity: the retired captain Procházka’s behaviour as an officer has features of a vulgar caricature, and his love of the uniform bears on the symbol of an organisation whose shining facade can no longer hide its decay. Nonetheless, it is evident that Procházka is stylised as a figure intended to generate sympathy, and his reinstatement effort results in a triumphant success.

The version intended for the German-speaking audience starts from a different premise, for a substantial part of this audience might have been assumed to view this recent period in a different light. It then follows that the German version attempts to contain, at least partly, the humorous-satirical view of the monarchy, the army and the “military spirit.” However, even this effort did not prevent the nationalist press in Austria from objecting the film.<sup>5</sup>

Other things apart, the comparison shows that the German version displays a significant tendency to “tune down” the ironic undermining of the old monarchic values and military virtues. This tendency can be observed in the very appearance and behaviour of some characters. Unlike the Czech version, in the German version the protagonist’s nephew Rudi really is – as is said with admiration over his photograph – “ein fescher Offizier” (“a handsome officer”). And here the members of the “veterans’ club” are considerably more disciplined and brisker compared to their Czech counterparts.

Viewed from this perspective, the long scene showing the “veterans’ club” meeting deserves a closer examination. We can see various subtle differences between the two versions, e.g. the fact that the German version links the name of Prince Evžen with a tra-

ditional attribute, “der edle Ritter” (“a noble knight”); above all, the difference concerns the fatal song leading to the dismissal of the protagonist. The announcement that the song has been banned is staged as a serious warning in the German version, whereas in the Czech version the statement is presented by a “Mr. Apothecary” with an intonation and gesticulation so overacted that his distance towards the Austrian official regulations is entirely evident. If we compare the two versions of the lyrics about the Field Marshal, it’s clear that they present the song’s subject in two considerably different ways. The “Czech” Field Marshal avoids fighting and prefers other activities, such as playing cards; he is generally indifferent to all warfare (“na války kašle na všechny” – “he spits on all the wars”). Moreover, the lyrics also present (in a rather unflattering way) Emperor Francis Joseph I as someone who likes to get smashed with the marshal (in the Czech version a slang structure “maže deku” is used). The German version of the song focuses on the Field Marshal’s appearance (bold head, big belly, red nose) and uses it as a source of humorous effects; yet he still keeps his military attributes (his courage, an unsheathed sword), and carries himself as a forceful commander; the climax of the song conveys an affectionate relation between the marshal and his subordinates.

*C. a k. polní maršálek* was no more than a comedy aiming for commercial success; nonetheless, the two versions present us with a great deal of information concerning contemporary film practice as well as with contemporary strategies for attracting differentiated audiences.

- 1 A brief survey of the film career of Karel Lamač (1897, Prague-1952, Hamburg) in Czechoslovakia, Germany, Austria, France and Great Britain is included in Hans-Michael Bock (ed.), *Lexikon Regisseure und Kameraleute* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1999), pp. 272-273.
- 2 The respective German words sound as follows: *Feldflasche*, *Rapport*, *Leutnant*, *Oberst*, *Wachzimmer*, *Mann*, *Sauwirtschaft*, and *Schnitzel*.
- 3 The noun *sekanice* is derived from the verb *sekat* “to chop”.
- 4 This is a resigned sigh provoked by a series of tragic events in Emperor’s family. Cf. the ironic song performed by the sleeping (!) Francis Joseph I in Karl Kraus’ play *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*: “Der Sohn, die Frau, der Otto – / bis in die Gegenwart / bleibt meines Lebens Motto: / Mir bleibt doch nichts erspart.” Karl Kraus, *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1978), p. 427.
- 5 See LubošBartošek, *Nášfilm. Kapitoly z dějin (1896-1945)* (Praha: Mladá fronta, 1985), pp. 176-177.