

## **‘Words of the year’ in Slavic countries: a record of key words, or of neologisms?**

‘Words of the year’, i.e. words assessed as being the most important in the public discourse in a given year, have been regularly chosen in many countries (in Germany since 1971, in the USA since 1977). The criteria by which they are chosen and the voting teams differ from country to country. The words may be chosen by newspaper readers (*Lidové Noviny* in the Czech Republic), by ordinary Internet users or by linguists assembled in special juries (as in Poland, Russia, Germany or the USA); sometimes they are chosen based on frequency distributions. However, a ‘word of the year’ does not need to be a very common word or a new word; rather, it is a word or concept thought to merit being treated as of top importance. In this paper, the words of the last three years chosen and nominated in Poland, the Czech Republic and Russia will be compared and analysed according to their structure, frequency, cultural keyness and social saliency. The winning words of the last three years were: 2013 – Pol. *gender*, Cz. *viroza*, Rus. *gosdura*, 2014 – Pol. *kilometrówka*, Cz. *pussy*, Rus. *Krymnaš*, 2015 – Pol. *uchodźca*, Cz.: *uprchlík*, Rus. *beženec*.

The main question posed in this paper is whether ‘word of the year’ polls can shed light on the permanently valid key words of a national culture (as they are defined by Anna Wierzbicka) or instead reflect one-off occurrences in the short-term story of current social events. The factors which can help to demonstrate the long-term keyness of words are: their degree of adaptation to the system, their word-formative transparency, their frequency in dailies, other media and spoken language, their relation to other languages and cultures (whether they refer to a reality only restricted to one single country).

Interestingly, for the first time ever, the ‘words of the year’ selected in many countries for 2015 (including in Poland, the Czech Republic and Russia) share the same meaning, ‘refugee’. What is more, among the other words nominated, another shared meaning of ‘do-gooder’ also appears in more than one country (*sluníčkář* nominated in the Czech poll, *Gutmensch* nominated in the German poll), used to refer specifically to people continuing to advocate the traditional sort of liberal European refugee policies. This confluence of social discourse across countries gives rise to the question of whether the right time might now have come to start nominating a ‘world word of the year’.