

## Reflections of the Word "Socialism" in Three Historical Periods and Three Countries

VID PEČJAK<sup>1</sup>, SLOVENIA

ANDRAS FARKAS, HUNGARY, JANA PLICHTOVA<sup>2</sup>, SLOVAKIA

### POVZETEK

REFLEKSIJA NA BESEDO "SOCIALIZEM" V TREH ZGODOVINSKIH ODOBBIJH  
IN V TREH DEŽELAH

*V obdobju "realnega socializma" naj bi bila v vzhodnih evropskih deželah ideja socializma glavna vrednota takomenovanega "novega človeka". Vprašanje pa je, koliko se je ta ideja v resnici vtisnila v zavest ljudi in koliko se je ohranila tudi po spremembi političnega sistema.*

*Namen prve študije je bil odkriti in analizirati tipične besedne asociacije na besedo socializem pri ljubljanskih študentih v treh zgodovinskih obdobjih: leta 1969, 1991 in 1993. Namen druge študije pa je bil odkriti in analizirati proste besedne asociacije pri slovenskih, madžarskih in slovaških študentih v letu 1992. Beseda socializem je izzvala več afektivno in vrednostno pozitivnih odgovorov leta 1969 kot leta 1991 ter več leta 1993 kot leta 1991, istočasno pa manj negativnih asociacij leta 1969 kot 1991 ter manj leta 1993 kot 1991. Eden od možnih razlogov je razočaranje. Številna pričakovanja se niso uresničila, zato ljudje niso več tako zelo kritični do prejšnjega sistema.*

*Pojavile so se tudi nekatere vsebinske spremembe. Kategorija ljudje je bila leta 1969 pomembnejša kot leta 1991 in 1993. Socializem je postal tudi bolj konkreten pojem, čeprav je njegova ideološka komponenta še vedno dominantna. Negativne asociacije so najbolj značilne za Slovake, nato Madžare in nato za Slovence. Eden od mogočih razlogov leži v razlikah njihovih nekdanih političnih sistemov. V bivši Čehoslovaški je bil režim opresivnejši kot na Madžarskem ali v nekdanji Jugoslaviji.*

1 The author collected data for the first study, which is a part of a broader project.

2 The authors, together with the first author, collected data for the second study, which is a part of a broader project.

Human values, attitudes, interests, opinions and similar subjective structures are constitutive parts of human spiritual culture. Moreover, there is no objective culture which is not transmitted and mediated by them.

During the period of "real socialism" in East European countries the idea of socialism was prevalent. It was considered by official ideologists, politicians and educators as the prime value of the so-called new man. Any deviation from the official conception was criticized and often punished. From this standpoint all social phenomena were interpreted; even language, nations, religion and sexual relations.

Yet the question is, how this official conception was reflected in one's mind, or, in another words, how much it penetrated internal values, attitudes and opinions? And how much is it preserved after the collapse of the regimes?

The first study aims to find out and to compare the typical verbal associations given to the word *socialism* by Slovenian students in three important historical periods: in 1969, when the communist regime was firm and able to control most intellectual activity; in 1991, when the communist regime collapsed and some countries proclaimed their independence; and in 1993, when the new authority consolidated its state. The second study aims to find out and to compare the typical verbal associations given to the word *socialism* by Slovenian, Hungarian and Slovakian students in 1992.

The method of free association was chosen because of some advantages over the method of interview or questionnaires. They investigate only the surface structure of attitudes, values and opinions, whereas the method of free association discloses also their deep structure. When subjects answer the questions, like "do you agree with the idea of socialism: yes, moderately, not at all," they are much more conscious about their response. But when they react with "the first word, which appears in their mind after hearing the word socialism," they do not know or know only vaguely that they are expressing their attitudes, values and other structures which mediate the responses. Therefore the self-controlling mechanism is weaker.

There are also some other advantages of the indirect techniques such as the method of association. The subject is free to answer with any word which appears in his or her mind, whereas in the interview these possibilities are limited.

The method of association discloses not only the evaluative component of the internal structures, but also the denotative one. It detects its semantic content more exhaustively than any other technique.

## Method

**First study:** In the framework of a broader investigation (Szalay and Pečjak, 1979), the data were collected from student groups at the University of Ljubljana and University of Maryland in 1969. In Ljubljana the testing was repeated in 1991 and in 1993. Each group consisted of 50 students, males and females.

**Second study:** In 1992 the association test was performed in four national student groups: Slovenian, Slovak, Hungarian and Spanish. The testing was a part of some broad cross-cultural investigation. The Spanish group was included later for comparison because of some similarities to the three East European groups (Spain too had a totalitarian role and the level of development is similar).

The associative *Group Analysis Technique*, developed by L. Szalay and J. Brent (1967), was used. The subjects were asked to give as many responses as they could in

one minute to the word *socialism* (besides some other words, e.g. capitalism, which are not treated in the paper). The subjects were told to avoid responding to their own previous associations. Most subjects gave 7 to 10 responses. Here is one example:

Stimulus word: SOCIALISM

Individual responses:

Communism

*east*

*Tito*

*Capitalism*

*utopia*

*past*

*Marx*

By excluding from the further analyses all the responses, given by only one member of the group, the AGA technique deals only with more stable, shared responses, giving more reliable information about trends of associations.

Each response is given a score indicating weighted order of its occurrence. The scale of scoring was elaborated by Szalay on the basis of stability of the rank of responses. The weights assigning to responses beginning with the first in the sequence are: 6, 5, 4, 3, 3, 3, 3, 2, 2, 1, 1.

Group scores (frequencies and the sums of weights for particular responses) indicate the salience of responses for the individual groups of subjects. Here is one example:

SOCIALISM  
Some group data for the Slovenes

	f	sw
Yugoslavia	16	82
communism	18	72
Tito	16	52
Stalin	11	50
Utopia	7	23
decline	7	22
red	7	22

The responses are grouped into categories based on their semantic similarities; e.g. the responses "Yugoslavia" and "Russia" are grouped together into the category entitled "countries", and the responses "bad" and "cruel" into the category "negative references".

## Results

The scores of each category and each concept were established and compared across the Slovenian groups in three periods and A cross four national groups. About one third of differences is significant ( $< .05$ ).

**First study: the scores of the Slovenian groups in three historical periods:**

	1993	1991	1969	USA 19693
People, society	103	110	214	
Ideas, Symbols	94	127	95	
Social systems	109	90	129	(83)
Negative references	137	165	47	(19)
Positive references	74	56	126	
Countries	142	75	101	(169)
Names	98	40	81	(88)

**Dominant values (the responses with the highest scores):**

**1993:** Yugoslavia 72, communism 62, Tito 58, poverty 30, past 28

**1991:** Capitalism 55, Yugoslavia 45, utopia 38, decay 33, east 30

**1969:** Yugoslavia 76, capitalism 63, communism 61, Engels 57, Tito 46

**Second study: the scores of the national groups**

	Slovenia	Slovakia	Hungary	Spain
Negative references	134	251	113	63
Political references	204	122	104	116
Countries	198	31	43	0
Names	160	23	121	37
Ideas	76	63	97	18
Positive references	64	38	95	151
Economic references	18	33	34	37
Time	27	19	54	0
Authority, power	14	20	38	0
People	23	32	35	35

**Dominant values:**

**Slovenia:** Yugoslavia 84, communism 72, Tito 52, Stalin 50, east 43,

**Slovakia:** totalitarian 41, restriction 32, communism 28, utopia 24, USSR 20.

**Hungary:** utopia 51, equality 47, Kadar 30, Soviet Union 29, communism, 21 (ideology 21).

**Spain:** equality 101, left 34, democracy 36, freedom 35, Marx 23.

3 The U.S. data are taken only partially into consideration because only some categories are the same and directly comparable with the categories of the Slovenians.

$$\text{Index of Evaluative Dominance. IED} = \frac{\sum f \text{ positive resp.} - \sum f \text{ negative resp.}}{\sum f \text{ all resp.}}$$

Slovenia 1969: + .46

Slovenia 1991: - .49

Slovenia 1993: - .29

Slovenia: - .36

Slovakia: - .74

Hungary: - .09

Spain: + .41

The Index of Evaluative dominance is considered by Szalay as an index of the evaluative component of attitudes and corresponds to the evaluative factor of the Semantic Differential. It varies from -1 to +1.

## Discussion

### Slovenians in 1969, 1991, 1993:

The word *socialism* elicited more positive associations in 1969 than in 1991, and in 1993 more than in 1991, though still less than in 1969. At the same time it elicited less negative associations in 1969 than in 1991, and in 1993 less than in 1991, though not so little as in 1969. One possible reason could be disappointment. People's expectancies have not been fulfilled and many strange things have come to pass (e.g. unemployment and corruption). Therefore they are not so critical of the former socialist system as they were in 1991.

The results do not agree with the findings of M. Ule and Vlado Miheljak (1993), who found a pretty negative attitude towards socialism. They applied the interview method among 17 years old high school pupils. The difference can be due to different characteristics of groups (university students are a selected group) or to different methods of detection. It is possible that on the surface they are conforming to the prevalent social trend, but internally their refusal of socialist *idea* is less pronounced.

In 1969 the category *people* was more salient than in 1991 and in 1993, when the responses like worker and working class almost disappeared. In 1993 *socialism* became a more concrete concept (high scores for countries and names), but the ideological component (ideas, symbols) has remained strong too.

### The national groups:

The negative score of IED is the highest for Slovakia, then Slovenia and then Hungary. One possible reason are the differences of their former socialism. In Czechoslovakia the regime was much more repressive than in Hungary with its "Goulash Socialism" or in Yugoslavia with its "Selfmanaging Socialism". It is harder to explain the difference between Hungarian and Slovenian data. It could reflect the

political situation in these countries. In both of them the change of system was relatively gradual and peaceable, yet in Hungary it happened earlier and it was initiated by some communists who rehabilitated the revolution in 1956.

The Spanish IED is the only one which is positive. Spaniards do not have experiences with "real socialism"; they have more experiences with fascism, which is considered to be on the opposite side of socialism. Besides, they probably connect socialism more with their own socialist party, though the name Marx is frequently mentioned.

For the Slovenian group the word *socialism* has quite concrete denotation, and it is more saturated with political meaning than for the others (especially for Spaniards). Its meaning is also slightly less saturated with economic component. These reactions could reflect the strong influence of politics in today's Slovenia. For all three East European groups, and especially for the Hungarian group, socialism is still a very ideological concept. *Utopia* is a common association. This denotation is probably the result of past indoctrination.

## Literature

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