

ALBINA NEČAK LÜK

LANGUAGE COMPONENT OF THE INTERETHNIC RELATIONS ISSUES IN THE ETHNICALLY MIXED REGIONS ALONG THE SLOVENE - HUNGARIAN BORDER

Ethnicity is there, for all of mankind some of the time and for some of mankind all of the time.

(Fishman 1989)

1. Introduction

In the framework of the research project "Interethnic relations in the Slovenian ethnic area" the ethnic identity features in two mixed, Slovene Hungarian regions have been investigated. The project has been designed as an interdisciplinary empirical research, diagnostic by type and of a comparative dimension. The basic idea is to create, proceeding from a chosen theoretical issues, a common methodological framework for investigation of the ethnic identity features and the interethnic relations dynamics in the nationally mixed territories on both sides of the Slovenian border where the Slovenian population lives in contact with populations of a different ethnic origin (i.e. Hungarian, German, Italian, and, owing to the recently emerged state border, Croatian population). The aim of the research is to provide a quantitative and qualitative description of the actual situation, and, as far as possible, provide explanation of the determinant factors that influence or have influenced the actual state of the investigated phenomenon and that dictate the trends of change.

2. Theoretical framework and empirical outline

The formulating of the theoretical framework has been tackled from the point of view of Tajfel's theory of intergroup relations (Tajfel 1978) and the Giles' model of structural variables affecting ethnolinguistic vitality (Giles et al. 1977). Both proceed from the hypothesis that ethnicity/ethnic adherence is a dynamic phenomenon dependant on a series of individual and social factors. Owing to Tajfel the essence of the intergroup relations encompasses the following series of individual and group autodeinitions: - social categorization as definition of one's self and the world around him, a basis for people's attitudes and behaviour towards others,

- social identity, i.e. a positive and/or negative connotation of group membership,
- social comparison, i.e. comparison with other ethnic groups, a process which brings about ethnic identity evaluation, and which launches the processes of either ethnic loyalty or alienation
- psychological distinctiveness, i.e. a mutual interaction of the above enumerated processes (Tajfel 1978), which gives rise to a positive evaluation of one's own group and to a sentiment of contentment on account of one's adherence to this specific group.

Positive evaluation of one's own group and the feeling of satisfaction in sharing its membership are strongly dependent on a set of structural factors, presented in Giles' taxonomy of the structural variables affecting ethnolinguistic vitality (status related factors, demographic factors, institutional support factors). It means that the ethnic identity orientation is also strongly dependent upon one's perception of a national minority's objective reality on the one hand, as well as on the perception and attitudes of the majority group's members towards the national minority and its' objective needs, on the other hand.

In operationalization phase a framework of an instrument has been prepared by a group of experts from several nationally mixed regions on both sides of the Slovenian border. Adaptations of the instrument to the specific features of individual regions have been foreseen so that it can be applied in all of them, respondents being sampled from both groups, the minority and the majority. Relevant questions/scales from the existing questionnaires on interethnic relations and ethnic identity are integrated into the questionnaire where it seems appropriate (Bogardus scale, Gubert, Sussi, etc), complementary interviews and a data base questionnaire on local selfgovernment features are in course of preparation.

Several blocks of questions aiming at comprehension of the explicit and implicit ethnic identity indicators have been constructed, including the following:

- participation (social, cultural, political, etc.) of the minority and majority groups' members in the nationally mixed region and on the wider territory of the state
- local selfgovernment features and participation of the minority and the majority members
- contacts and activities across the border: communication with the national minority's mother nation, exchange and mutual activities of populations on both sides of the state border (in the field of culture, sport and professional activities, such as exchange of teachers, priests, mutual publishing and research projects, etc.)
- evaluation of the bilingual education models and mass media functioning
- communication (communicative competence and communicative activity, patterns of language choice in communication, etc.),

- perceptions and attitudes (towards one's own and the other ethnic group, towards the coexisting languages, towards the minority's objective reality, towards the nation of origin/ the national minority's mother nation, etc).

In the first phase a comparative analyses of the ethnic contact situations in two regions along the Slovenian border where Slovenes - either as the so called majority nation or as a national minority - live in contact with Hungarians has been planned:

- the situation in Prekmurje, the North Eastern region of Slovenia that has an official status of a nationally mixed region owing to the presence (settlement) of an autochthonous Hungarian national minority,
- the situation in Porabje, the region of Hungary in the triangel between the Austrian and Slovene border where an autochthonous Slovene national minority is settled.

By now, data have been gathered in two urban centers on both sides of the border, in Lendava / Lendva and in Szentgotthard / Monošter. The instrument has been applied on a sample of 700 inhabitants in each town. Some analyses have been presented at expert conferences and published in scientific reviews.

This year, application of the instrument is forseen in some chosen urban centers along the Slovene Italian border, in the regions where the Slovene and the Italian minorities are settled.

3. Sociolinguistic issues in the slovene hngarian mixed regions

In this article some trends shall be exposed concerning the language status, language use and language attitudes in the contact, Slovene Hungarian areas. It was hypothesized that the language maintenance and the language shift related issues are governed by the context in which the dynamics of each intergroup situation operates.

When both languages are observed from the point of view of the structural variables affecting ethnolinguistic vitality of a group (Giles 1977), the Slovene as a minority language compared to the Hungarian as a minority language is definitely at a less advantageous position on all three sets of the structural variables, i.e.:

- status related: economic, social, sociohistorical and language status,
- ethnodemographic: distribution of ethnic groups, national territory, concentration, proportion, absolute number, birth rate, mixed marriages, immigration, emigration,
- institutional support: formal and informal- government, administration, education, culture, religion, mass media, work sphere.

Therefore substantial differences in both areas were expected concerning the minority language competence, use and attitudes.

From the historical point of view the sociolinguistic development of both languages differs to a substantial degree, the language status issues being in the forefront: While Hungarian cultural and linguistic influence was present for

centuries in the discussed region, the Slovene language in the Hungarian part of the Monarchy developed separately, with but few connections with the mainstream Slovene language corpus planning, that proceeded in the Austrian part of the AO Monarchy. Therefore the Slovene language in Prekmurje and Porabje had retained archaic dialectal features. In past centuries even a kind of the standardization process occurred, the result of which was a considerable literary production in the dialect, intended especially for religious purposes. This situation became a convenient argument in several periods marked by the outbursts of the Hungarian nationalism, when assimilation pressure was advocated by explanation that the Slovenes in Prekmurje and Porabje as well as their language did not belong to the same ethnic body as did the Slovenes on the right bank of the river Mura. On the semiotic level, name *Vend* should have denoted this linguistic variation.

The Slovenes in Porabje have retained their minority position throughout their history and have never become a constituent part of the Slovene nation (State). Thus, the local speech was cut away from the mainstream Slovene language development, its functions were limited, and its symbolic features faded away. On account of the geopolitical circumstances the Porabje villages formed a kind of enclave - the area could be visited only with special permits - where the Slovenian dialect sufficed for the ingroup communication of the predominantly rural population. The Hungarian was reserved for communication in formal domains, mostly outside of the Slovene settling area.

With the disintegration of the AO monarchy Hungarians living in Slovenia became a national minority. Although predominantly rural, the social structure of the Hungarian minority compared to the Slovene minority in Porabje was (and still is) more elaborated, with a rather strong layer of nobility and bourgeoisie. Although the Hungarian language had lost previous legal status it still retained a relatively high social status, the majority, Slovene population being also to a high degree bilingual.

The main difference between both areas concerns the institutional support granted to the minority language, which is reflected through functions accorded to the minority language in the channels of public communication. In the mixed area of Slovenia the Hungarian language has the status of the official language together with Slovene. On the other hand, in Porabje free use of the Slovene language is declared for individuals, while up to until recently it functioned to a limited extent only in few formal domains, in education church and sporadically in mass media.

4. Method

Individual structured interviews were conducted with 678 persons in Lendava (to their own declaration: 54,7% Slovenes, 31,8% Hungarians, 13,5% others) and 602 persons (a random sample 428 persons - 91,5% Hungarians, 7,5% Slovenes and a total population of inhabitants of full age that according to cer-

tain data belonged to the Slovene ethnicity, 174 persons, 43% Hungarians, 55,2% Slovenes).

A questionnaire was prepared in both languages. The choice of the language of the interview by the respondents in both areas indicated interesting trends concerning language use. While in Slovenia both the Slovene and the Hungarian language sheets were used, in Hungary only one respondent demanded to be interviewed in Slovene.

5. Discussion

Differences between both environments concerning language competence are quite evident. In Prekmurje the investigation into the competence of the minority language indicated a much more favourable trend than in Porabje: Owing to the selfestimation of the language competence of the minority population (Hungarians) in Prekmurje the mother tongue competence is equal or exceeds the competence in the majority language (Slovene). In Porabje, however, the trend is reverse: our respondents that declared themselves as Slovenes claimed to know Hungarian better than Slovene (cca 80% of the Slovenes estimate their knowledge of Hungarian as much better on all four skills - understanding, speaking, reading and writing, and cca 17% as equal to the Slovene). Differences at the expece of the Slovene language proficiency become even more evident when the literacy skills are envolved. The deficiency of the Slovene communicative competence is additionally illustrated by the fact that the Slovene respondents in Porabje are to a high percentage proficient only in the local dialect (cca 40% declared that they have no productive skills of the Slovene standard variety and cca 35% have a poor knowledge of it). This statement was further confirmed by data on understanding Slovene written and oral texts. While 100% of Slovenes in Porabje would perfectly understand a text in Hungarian, only cca 13% are able to understand it completely when written or spoken in the Slovene standard variety, and cca 35% are able to grasp the content although they do not understand every word.

Owing to historical development and to sociopolitical factors very few communication networks were established with the Slovene language hinterland. Functions of the Slovene standard variety are limited to only few communication channels. Hence the linguistic distance between the dialect and the Slovene standard persevered for centuries resulting in a very poor knowledge of the Slovene prestigious variety.

The phenomenon evokes an assumption that the communicative as well as of the symbolic functions of the Slovene mother tongue prestigious variety can be realized only to a limited degree. An hypothesis seems to be appropriate stating that social reality of the Slovenes in Porabje is perceived mostly through the Hungarian language and hence much of the Slovene cultural legacy is beyond their reach.

Both environments differ even to a higher degree when the communicative competence of the majority population is investigated. In Prekmurje, cca 40% of Slovenes (majority population) estimate their proficiency of Hungarian as reasonably good and cca 10% as equivalent to their proficiency in Slovene. The understanding of written or oral texts in Hungarian reaches up to 60%. One could conclude that the Slovene official linguistic policy aiming at the two-way bilingualism has been realized to a substantial degree. Through the system of bilingual education the majority population in the ethnically mixed regions has an opportunity to acquire at least a receptive competence of the minority group's language. Thus one of the prerequisites for effective functioning of both, the majority and the minority, languages on the level of public institutions is assured.

The Hungarians in Porabje (the majority population) on the other hand estimate their knowledge of Hungarian as much better than that of the Slovene language. Reasonably good knowledge of the Slovene dialect (cca 6%) and of the Slovene standard variety (cca 3%) has been registered only sporadically with Hungarian respondents. The same percentage of the Hungarians understands the content of the Slovene written or oral texts. Closer inspection into the descent of our Hungarian respondents reveals that the those who claim to have a certain level of proficiency in Slovene, derive mostly from mixed families.

Related to the language competence issues are the standpoints of our respondents with regard to the most relevant reason that entitles a person to declare him/herself as a Hungarian or a Slovene, respectively. Respondents were asked to choose the most relevant reason out of ten enumerated items.

In Slovenia the feelings of a person are considered the most important: A person is justified to declare him/herself to be a Slovene or a Hungarian if he/she feels so. Cca 45% of respondents consider personal feelings as the most important reason for declaration on ethnic affiliation. A person's mother tongue figures in the second place as the most important reason. Cca 31% of the respondents consider mother tongue and ethnic affiliation to be closely interrelated. Among other enumerated reasons, only the ethnic affiliation of a person's mother is worth mentioning: cca 13% of the respondents consider it to be the most relevant issue.

In Hungary the findings show a reverse trend: the mother tongue figures as the first most important reason (chosen by cca 48% of respondents) and personal feelings as the second (cca 30% of respondents has selected this reason in the first place). The importance of other items, the ethnic affiliation of a person's mother included, is not prominent, ranging between 0,5% and 4%.

It is interesting to mention, however, that in Prekmurje as well as in Porabje the proficiency in the mother tongue seems to play a marginal role among features considered to be relevant for ethnic identity declaration.

In both areas, no significant differences were registered between the majority and the minority members with most of the classified reasons, with the exception of the ethnic affiliation of a person's mother. Namely, in Porabje this reason is evidently more important to the minority members (cca 13% of our

Slovene respondents regard it as the most relevant reason for ethnic identity declaration) than to the majority members (cca 4% of Hungarians claim this reason to be the most important). The attitude of Slovenes in Porabje as to the importance of the mother's ethnic affiliation, hence, seems to be closer to that of the population in the mixed region of Prekmurje. Further investigation shall be needed to explain this phenomenon.

Patterns of language use are investigated in an informal domain /home/ and in a formal domain /in publics/. As with items described above, the analysis of variance indicated strong influence of the variable "ethnic affiliation", alone and in interaction with the language competence variables. As expected, the minority members use minority language or both languages much more frequently than the majority members. However, differences between both environments are significant not only with regard to the majority members patterns of language choice but also when the minority members are concerned.

In Prekmurje, The Hungarians claim that at home they use either Hungarian (60%) or both Hungarian and Slovene (cca 30%), Slovene only being used by cca 10% of the Hungarian minority members. In Porabje cca 12% of Slovenes claim to use only Slovene and cca 14% both Slovene and Hungarian in this domain. The trends of language use with individual family members gives additional information on the language maintenance prospects. Our data from both environments point to a tendency that the minority language (alone or in combination with the majority language) is used more frequently with peers (partner, sisters, brothers) and older family members (parents, partner's parents) while the use of the majority language is more frequent in communication with children. The propensity is quite marked in Porabje, where only 2,3% of respondents report to communicate with their children in Slovene and 6,9% use both languages. In Prekmurje the trend is less steep: 45% of our Hungarian respondents claim to use only Hungarian and 27% use both languages in communication with their children.

Again, only the age variable influences this trend, pointing to the generational transfer accross languages.

Language use in publics exposes to a certain degree the dynamics of intergroup relations in multilingual environment. Apart from description of social relations in terms of diglossia-bilingualism, patterns of language use in publics point to the interpersonal accomodation when the choice of the language of communication indicates the nature of intergroup relations. While in a disjunctive athmosphere divergence is expected on the part of the majority, the conjunctive processes between both groups are supposed to be marked by a mutual convergence, the process that would allow the minority members to use their language in publics for ingroup as well as for outgroup communication (Giles 1977).

As our data on the language competence issues in both environments forecast, the convergence tendency could more likely be registered in the Prekmurje region than in Porabje. In fact, 30-40% of the Slovenes in Prekmurje claim to

use both languages in public places. In Porabje the use of the minority language by the majority respondents in public places has not been reported.

On the other hand in Prekmurje, the use of the Hungarian language along with Slovene in public places is quite common phenomenon, reported by over 70% of Hungarian respondents. In Porabje the use of both languages in this domain is reported by cca 15% of the Slovene respondents. However, since the data show no trend of convergence on the part of the Hungarian respondents, an assumption seems to be justified that in Porabje the Slovene language is used for ingroup communication, alone.

6. Conclusions

The differences between both environments are evident with other items, too. As assumed, significant differences were registered concerning language skills, use and attitudes, when both, the minority and the majority populations, from both regions were compared. The analysis of variance with the ethnic affiliation of the respondents indicated that this variable was the most influential concerning the trends of the language competence, use and attitudes. The analysis of variance with some other variables (i.e. age of the informant, attained level of education, language of education, position on the job, etc.) indicated that the propensity to use the minority language and the nature of the language attitudes is not influenced by the majority of variables included. Besides the ethnic affiliation the age of the respondent seems to be one of the crucial variables influencing language competence, language use and attitudes in both investigated environments. Together with other items that have pointed to the age as an intervening variable (mixed marriages, language competence, etc.) this correlation could also be interpreted as a confirmation of the Weinreich's hypotheses on the generational dimension of language shift.

Data from both environments concerning the language competence and use show a distinctively different picture of the minorities' ethnolinguistic vitality features. The constellation of structural variables taken into account, especially the status and the institutional support related variables, the outcome of our research does not come as a surprise. Correlation between the ethnolinguistic vitality and the social factors is quite evident.

However, our data were gathered shortly after the huge political changes in both countries. Meanwhile a bilateral agreement on protection of both minorities has been signed by both states. Hungary has passed an act on the rights of minorities. Certain improvement in Porabje can be noticed with regard to the Slovene language in public channels of communication: a weekly in Slovene has been published for two years now, TV program in Slovene has started recently, several border crossings have been opened along the Slovene-Hungarian border. Hence, there has been some improvement with regard to the set of the institutional support variables in Porabje. On the other hand, in Prekmurje, as

suggested by our respondents, a more strict implementation of individual regulations and some qualitative improvements are wished for.

Since our research is longitudinal, in few years time we shall be able to verify whether and in which direction the above enumerated changes have influenced the language situation in both environments. Global trends of the language status relationships that force small nations to reconsider their language planning policies have not been tackled here. Nevertheless they do affect also the existence of the minority languages. The economic profit orientation brought about into the ethnically mixed regions by multinational companies has not been waged against the language maintenance issues, yet. But this is another topic, calling for susceptible language policy also when small nations are concerned.

Selected literature

- Baker, C. (1992), *Attitudes and Language*. Multilingual Matters. Clevedon.
- Ethnokulturelle Prozesse in Gross-Stadten Mitteleuropas (1992). Bratislava.
- Fishman, J.A., (1989). *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective*. Multilingual Matters, Clevedon.
- Fishman, J.A. (1977). *Language and Ethnicity*. V: Giles, J. (ed.), *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations*. London: Academic Press, 15-57.
- Giles, J., Bourhis, R.Y., Taylor, D.M. (1977). *Towards a Theory of Language in Ethnic Group Relations*. V: Giles, J. (ed.), *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations*. London: Academic Press, 307-348.
- Gumperz, John J., (1992) *Language and social identity*. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Sydney.
- Medetnični odnosi in narodna identiteta v mestu Lendava/Lendva (1992). Raziskovalni projekt: Medetnični odnosi v slovenskem etničnem prostoru, nosilka Albina Nečak Lük. Sumarni pregled rezultatov. Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, Ljubljana, 95 str.
- Medetnični odnosi in narodna identiteta v mestu Monošter/Szent gotthard (1993). Raziskovalni projekt: Medetnični odnosi v slovenskem etničnem prostoru, nosilka Albina Nečak Lük. Sumarni pregled rezultatov. Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, Ljubljana, 105 str.
- Klinar, P. (1991), *Od etničnega pluralizma k interkulturalizmu*. Migracijske teme, Zagreb, 7, št. 1, str. 29-45.
- Madžari in Slovenci - Sodelovanje in sožitje ob jugoslovansko slovensko madžarski meji. Ljubljana 1987.
- Tajfel, H. (1978), *Studies in Intergroup Behaviour*. London: Academic Press.
- Weinreich, U. (1974). *Languages in Contact*. Mouton, The Hague - Paris.

Povzetek

Jezikovna sestava medetničnih odnosov na narodnostno mešanih območjih vzdolž slovensko madžarske meje

Jezik je eden najvidnejših in po laičnem prepričanju, opazovanju najlažje dostopnih kazalcev etnične identitete. Med jezikovnimi spremenljivkami smo izpostavili predvsem tiste, ki se navezujejo na sporazumevalno zmožnost v maternem in drugem jeziku, na jezikovno dejavnost v zaprtih in odprtih govornih položajih ter na stališča do lastnega in drugega jezika. Primerjava jezikovnega položaja v Lendavi in Monoštru je pokazala zlasti naslednje:

- Med obema manjšinama (madžarsko v Lendavi in slovensko v Monoštru) so bile ugotovljene pomembne razlike v obvladovanju maternega jezika, na receptivni in produktivni ravni. Primankljaj pri Slovencih v Monoštru gre zlasti na račun poznavanja slovenskega knjižnega jezika, medtem ko je narečje ohranjeno v večji meri. Ob takšnem stanju jezikovne zmožnosti je stik z dogajanjem v narodnem osredju za znaten del slovenskega prebivalstva okrnjen na več ravneh, na simbolni, čustveni in udeleženski ravni. Ob dobrem znanju madžarskega jezika, ki ga je večina slovenskih respondentov označila kot svoj močnejši jezik, je participacija teh ljudi usmerjena zlasti v svet madžarskega jezika in kulture. Pripadniki madžarske manjšine v Lendavi so kot svoj močnejši jezik označili pretežno madžarski jezik ali oba jezika. Pomembno je, da njihovi oceni o znanju narečja in knjižne madžarščine nista daleč vsaksebi.

- V obeh okoljih so bile ugotovljene pomembne razlike v sporazumevalni zmožnosti v slovenskem in madžarskem jeziku pri pripadnikih večinskega naroda. Kakor smo pričakovali, so Slovenci v Lendavi izpričali visoko stopnjo dvojezičnosti - evidentna je zlasti njihova receptivna zmožnost v madžarskem jeziku - medtem ko je pri Madžarih v Monoštru komaj mogoče opaziti kakšno sled razumevanja slovenskega jezika.

Opisana sporazumevalna zmožnost odločilno vpliva tudi na jezikovno dejavnost v obeh okoljih: v Monoštru je slovenski jezik zamejen v domače slovensko okolje, medtem ko sta v Lendavi oba jezika prisotna v sporazumevanju v javnih in zasebnih govornih položajih, uporabljajo ju pripadniki manjšine, pa tudi večine.

Ugotavljanje povezav med jezikovnimi in morebitnimi intervenirajočimi spremenljivkami (poleg etnične pripadnosti smo sem uvrstili še izobrazbo in starost) je opozorilo na pomembne povezave med starostjo respondentov, njihovo sporazumevalno zmožnostjo v lastnem jeziku in jezikovno dejavnostjo v tem jeziku. Z vidika jezikovnega načrtovanja se zdi zlasti pomemben trend upadanja rabe materinščine v družini v povezavi s starostjo družinskih članov. Generacijski premik k rabi večinskega jezika je očitnejši v Porabju, zaznaven pa je tudi pri madžarski manjšini v Prekmurju.

Ugotovljeni trendi opozarjajo na učinkovanje strukturnih dejavnikov, predvsem tistih, ki zadevajo institucionalno podporo manjšini za ohranjanje njenih etničnih, v našem primeru jezikovnih značilnosti v obeh okoljih. Jezikovno načrtovanje v obeh okoljih bi nedvomno moralo iti v smeri odpravljanja nevraltičnih točk, ki vzpodbujajo opuščanje lastnega jezika pri pripadnikih manjšine. Po naši presoji bi bili v lendavskem okolju potrebni zlasti kvalitativni ukrepi, medtem ko bo treba v Porabju šele vzpostaviti celovit sistem institucionalne podpore slovenskemu jeziku, če naj se deklarirana politična načela, ki slovenski manjšini zagotavljajo (tudi jezikovni) obstoj, udejanijo.