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**The effects of language use of different newspapers concerning minorities  
on the development of prejudice**

Dissertation  
theses

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## **1. Introduction**

I chose the analysis of the language use concerning minority groups in different newspapers as the topic of my dissertation in close connection with the (possible) effects of this language use on the development of prejudice.

In my dissertation I aim to analyse the issues of three dailies (Népszava, Magyar Nemzet, Magyar Hírlap) and three weekly papers (HVG, Magyar Narancs, Magyar Demokrata) came out between 1st January 2008 and 31st March 2008, focusing on the language use concerning minority groups.

The main criteria of the selection of minority groups were the intensity and extent of prejudice in society, therefore I analyse the language and nature of the articles published in the above mentioned papers in the specified period about the Gypsy, Jew and homosexual minority groups.

Although it was not a criterion when I decided to focus on the three minority groups, but it seems that as a result of selecting these groups, politically-, economically- and religiously motivated prejudice may also be analysed. As highlighted by LÁSZLÓ TÓTH, Jews are regarded as a risk to society as power holders and market players, Gypsies' culture and lifestyle may be highlighted as well as the „disruption of social operation”, while unsettling the traditional form of family is mentioned in connection with homosexuals (TÓTH 2008: 58).

In my opinion, the three dailies and three weekly papers constituting the scope of the analysis are suitable for being analysed and also for drawing firm conclusions upon regarding the issues of media language and effects on prejudice, as they have a high circulation and are distributed nationally; what is more, they represent certain world views.

## **2. Research questions**

The following of my observations provoked me to carry out this research and write this dissertation. On the one hand, I strongly believe that the media has a responsibility in what way a topic is reported as it has an influence on the opinion of the people. Quite frequently the same event is reported with factual and objective differences in different newspapers. This increases the responsibility having regard to the fact that in today's fast-

paced world people generally acquire their knowledge from a single information channel. As a consequence, the reader will have different thoughts in certain cases if they read the „truth” and „reality” of one paper or those of another.

My opinion is that the minority rhetoric of the left-wing and right-wing press is often different but unique, and sometimes it can be detected in the features of language use and in the reported topics as well.

I find the left-wing newspapers not only more liberal, but more tolerant, more sensitive and politically more correct towards minorities. I also think that - because of the specific use of language, depiction and rhetoric among others - the left-wing press is less harmful to minorities, they do not catalyse the emotions that already exist in society so much; thereby they reinforce any prejudices their readers may have in connection with minorities less.

For this reason, I assume that out of the papers analysed, Népszava, HVG and Magyar Narancs represent a minority discourse which is more tolerant than that of Magyar Nemzet, Magyar Hírlap and Magyar Demokrata.

In my analysis 1184 articles are involved, 606 in connection with Gypsies, 473 concerning Jews and 105 regarding homosexuals.

### **3. The research and its methods**

When analysing the news, I focus on the following aspects in respect of all three minorities: titles; length of writing (number of words); names used to write about the minorities (Roma or Gypsy, Jew or Israelite, homosexual or gay); word forms and word combinations created with the names used to write about the minorities (number and variability) and their context; the topic of the article; if the minority is the main or a marginal topic of the article; if the minority is an active or a passive character.

I analyse the active or passive instances of the certain minorities contentwise the same way as VERA MESSING (MESSING 2003). The appearance is rated as active if either the members or the representative of the minority is asked (or their statements are referred to), while the article is rated as passive if the minority is being talked about only, without being asked.

I defined different categories according to the topic of the article for all the three minorities so that they best match the distribution of the topics of the articles published in the first quarter of 2008 in connection with the particular minority.

In connection with Gypsies I defined the following categories (6): crimes committed by Gypsies; crimes committed against Gypsies; culture; politics; minority government; Magyar Gárda (Hungarian Guard); other.

In connection with Jews I defined the following categories (6): Israeli-Palestinian relations; Holocaust; commemoration; Auschwitz; culture; religion; Israel; other.

In connection with homosexuals I defined the following categories (6): same-sex marriage; registered partnership; gay parade; health care (illnesses); Gábor Szetey; legislation (equality); other.

In connection with Gypsies I have a thorough look at the press coverage of the following key events (5): Jászladány case; Kerepes case; Canadian case; the performance of Magyar Gárda (Hungarian Guard); János Veres's vote buying case.

In connection with Jews I selected the key topics concerning Hungary (5): the Jewish Quarter case; KDNP's Israelite workshop; the presence of Holocaust; the compensation case; cemetery vandalism.

In the case of Jews and Gypsies respectively, I selected 5 priority topics for analysis to which 606 and 473 articles are classified. On the contrary, due to the lower number of articles (105) and because of the predominantly peripheral minority role in articles, I defined fewer key topics in the case of homosexuals (3): same-sex marriage, articles on registered partnership; health-related articles; Gábor Szetey's case.

#### **4. The main findings of the research**

My studies show that the news published in left-wing papers in connection with Gypsies - considering the whole corpus - more prone to report crimes committed against Gypsies (18.43%). In contrast, in the right-wing press reports about crimes committed by Gypsies dominate (32.41% of the total corpus). On the basis of that, it seems to be obvious that those papers that emphatically portray the members of the Gypsy community as criminals are likely to influence their readers in a way that they do not have a favourable impression of the members of the Gypsy community.

As far as Gypsies are concerned, left-wing papers more often covered cultural topics (54.1% of the total corpus), due to HVG primarily. Cultural topics can be considered favourable from Gypsies' point of view as due to the value creating nature of culture it may induce sympathy in the reader.

The right-wing papers more often reported minority government and political issues in connection with Gypsies (97.36% of the total corpus) than those belonging to the left-wing. This may be partly explained by the assumption that minority government disputes, disagreements and signature collection campaigns may interest the journalists and readers of right-wing papers more. Since this is not a proven fact, further studies would be necessary on this topic.

Contrarily, the left-wing papers are more concerned with the Magyar Gárda (Hungarian Guard) (62.38% of the total corpus). This may be explained by the assumption that journalists at left-wing papers are worried about the actions of the Magyar Gárda (Hungarian Guard). Again, it is not known whether this explanation is correct, therefore further analysis is needed to prove or disprove it.

My analyses proved that articles about the Israeli-Palestinian affairs and other Israeli issues are published on a larger scale in the right-wing papers and they publish more articles about Holocaust, Auschwitz and commemorations, too. Religious topics also had a quite significant presence in right-wing papers

My analyses regarding wording and context show that the language use of the left-wing papers is mostly tactful, their tone is calm, as I did not find any objectionable content in the case of Népszava, in HVG I highlighted only a single word-formation as negative, and it was only one topic where the violation of objectivity could be taken into account as for Magyar Narancs.

In contrast, I found articles showing minorities in a negative light in all of the analysed right-wing papers: in the case of Magyar Nemzet and Magyar Demokrata all three minorities were concerned, while it was Gypsies and homosexuals in Magyar Hírlap.

As for the terms used for referring to the Gypsy minority, it was confirmed that in the right-wing papers it is primarily the 'gypsy' form which is used, while in the left-wing papers it is mainly the 'roma' form which is used. This suggests that the left-wing papers aim to use the name that is considered to be politically more correct.

Regarding the names used for referring to the homosexual minority I found that in all the papers – except for Magyar Demokrata – the word 'gay' was used more frequently. I suppose that it is not only because of the almost monopoly of the prefixes of word combinations, but also because of the political correctness and tactful use of language already discussed in connection with Gypsies.

The proportion of articles the main topic of which is any of the minorities at issue is higher than 60% in Népszava (being a left-wing daily). It leads me to the conclusion that the readers of Népszava encounter these minorities several times.

Although the passive portrayal of Jews and homosexuals is over 90%, and the rate of active articles about Gypsies is also relatively low, approximately one third, these rates are very favourable compared to the rest of the papers examined. If we accept that making minorities appear in the media actively contributes to comprehensive information, Népszava performs well for this aspect as well compared to the other papers examined.

The fact that this was the paper out of the six involved in the analysis that reported about the most crimes committed against Gypsies, testifies a positive, protective attitude towards minorities.

As it was Népszava that published the most articles about same-sex marriage and in connection with registered partnership, we may declare that the paper gives priority to the topic, presumably with the aim to bring the current situation to a standstill. It is reaffirmed by my opinion according to which the language use, tone and context of the articles were not of concern in the analyzed texts.

On the basis of the above, we can state that Népszava performed well when it came to the communication of minority-related topics and the paper is not likely to contribute to the deepening of prejudices.

Magyar Nemzet (a right-wing daily) published the highest number of articles concerning all three minorities with the result that the readers of this paper encounter minorities in several articles. However, the positive quantitative data is not enough for labelling the paper as correct since there are a great number of qualitative characteristics, in connection with which Magyar Nemzet could not record good results.

In connection with Gypsies, I find the fact particularly harmful that crimes committed by Gypsies were a dominant topic. In Magyar Nemzet, it is the second most common topic, however, compared to the other papers, it is the highest proportion of such articles at the same time. The criminalization of the minority is not only denoted by this, but also by the high number of articles on the 'Mortimer'-case and 'Maugli', in which – despite banning guidelines – special emphasis is put on Gypsy origins.

On top of the above, in Magyar Nemzet one may encounter objectionable wording and tone, harmful argumentation and misleading logic which do not suggest that the paper seek to present minorities in a non-harmful way, in a non-negative light.

It can be noted that the rate of articles with religious topic was relatively high which, I think, is related to the conservative values represented by the paper.

The fact that the proportion of the articles Magyar Nemzet published about gay parades and Gábor Szetey is higher compared to the other papers examined indicates that they give priority to these events.

Based on the above, my opinion by and large is that the dominant topics, the style and tone are harmful to minorities in several cases, the result of which is that the readers of the paper encounter minorities in articles where they are depicted in a bad or not necessarily good light. On the whole, this depiction may contribute to the strengthening of any existing prejudices.

Magyar Hírlap (a right-wing daily) published a considerably lower number of articles compared to the other two dailies, which of course means that – compared to the readers of Népszava and/or Magyar Nemzet – the readers of this paper encounter the cases of minorities less often.

Despite this fact, the results of my study placed Magyar Hírlap as the first considering multiple parameters: this is the paper in which the proportion of articles with main topics concerning Gypsies and Jews is the highest out of the six papers; this paper is the most concerned with minority government and political issues among the examined papers; we can read the most about the Israeli-Palestinian affairs and about Judaism as a religious topic; and finally, this is the paper out of the six in which the topic of the holocaust or Auschwitz is the most common and in which different commemorations are reported. Another positive feature is that the second most pieces of news concerning Gypsies were culture related in the paper.

The dominance of the topics above alone is imposing but the qualitative features slightly diminish this initial positive impression. On the one hand, in the articles of Magyar Hírlap there are objectionable word forms, and, on the other hand, one may not say that perfect objectivity is realized in the paper. Namely, Magyar Hírlap did not report about crimes committed against Gypsies at all, while it did so about crimes committed by Gypsies. This is negative portrayal from the minority's point of view. This is somewhat offset by the fact that the topic of crime does not belong to the most dominant topics covered by Magyar Hírlap.

On the whole, one may argue that Magyar Hírlap is more correct and its use of language is less harmful concerning minorities than that of Magyar Nemzet, however, its morale of publishing information about minorities is below that of Népszava.

The number of articles published in HVG (left-wing weekly paper) – both in total and as far as minorities concerned respectively – is far higher than in the other weekly papers analysed.

The proportion of articles about both Gypsies and Jews as a main topic is around 40% or higher, and while it is approximately half of them concerning homosexuals, all of these proportions are the best among weekly papers. This means that HVG is the weekly paper that provides readers with the most information about each of the minorities.

HVG stands out from among the other five papers in the active representation of articles about homosexuals, and this is the only weekly paper that represents Jews in an active way to a certain percentage. Although daily papers have very similar results concerning the rate of articles with the main topic of Gypsies, HVG is slightly better than Magyar Narancs and Magyar Demokrata in this regard.

One of the virtues of HVG is that it is the only newspaper in which the Kerepes case was presented from a minority's point of view (concerned parents were interviewed) and another one is that it was the only weekly paper that covered crimes committed against Gypsies. In addition, it was HVG that published the most active content out of the six papers about homosexuals, and the different aspects of legislation were featured mostly in this paper. It is also HVG - except for those papers that published only 2-4 articles about the minority - which was the most active in mentioning the context of illnesses.

It is also beneficial for the positive judgement of HVG that it seeks to use words in quotation marks in several contexts which denotes aloofness and distancing from the contents described.

Although there was a word in the paper (*Romaphobia*) which was included in the article in the spirit of the pursuit of political correctness, and I still criticized it, all in all, I find the minority-related rhetoric of HVG completely correct.

Magyar Narancs (left-wing weekly paper) published roughly quarter of the content that HVG did in connection with minorities as far as the number of articles is concerned. The representation of the different minorities is mixed: we can find Gypsies as a main topic in 41.2% of the cases, Jews in 18.2% of the cases, while there are no articles where the main topic is homosexuals. Although the representation of the minority is passive in all of the articles concerning Jews, in the case of Gypsies, the proportion of articles with active representation is the highest among all of the examined papers.

It should be underlined in connection with Magyar Narancs that in the case of both Gypsies and Jews, culture-related topics were predominant and 41.18% of the articles in

Magyar Narancs have a topic concerning culture. This phenomenon is one of the factors that increase tolerance.

At the same time, it has to be noted that in the case of Magyar Narancs the requirement of objectivity was not completely fulfilled as this was the only left-wing paper that did not publish articles about crimes committed against Gypsies (while reporting crimes committed by Gypsies).

Based on the above, I would argue that the minority-related articles in Magyar Narancs are basically proper and the language use in the paper does not increase any existing prejudices.

Magyar Demokrata (right-wing weekly paper) published nearly the same number of articles that Magyar Narancs did, however, this is the lowest number amongst weekly papers. As far as the distribution of the articles concerned according to their main topics and active representation, almost the same can be stated about Magyar Demokrata as about Magyar Narancs, however an essential parameter differs: the rate of active representation of Gypsies is only 10% which is the lowest taking all the analysed papers into account.

In Magyar Demokrata there are various cases when articles include facts that are different from those in other papers, and also when the context is different or such data are mentioned that have not been mentioned before. These may distract the stream of thought and are capable of arousing false or distorted associations.

It has to be underlined in connection with this paper that this was the one out of the examined newspapers in which the proportion of the articles about the events in Israel – not connected to the Israeli-Palestinian affairs - was the highest, and it has to be added that religious topics and contexts were also very typical.

The tone and wording of Magyar Demokrata is never unobjectionable concerning any of the minorities, and certain contexts, connotations and word frequencies show minorities in an especially negative light the importance of which is increased on the level of senses due to the relatively low number of articles.

Because of the above, I do not regard Magyar Demokrata as harmless as far as minorities are concerned and I also think that the paper may be capable of inciting prejudices.

The differences between articles written about the same topic and published in different papers enhance the ignorance and misinformedness of readers. My analysis demonstrated a number of differences with certain groups of topics. In the case of Gypsies, some details differed in connection with the Canadian trip, the Kerepes case and János Veres's vote buying case. As for Jews, there was a contradiction regarding the aim of the

Israelite workshop of KDNP and the published information were quite diverse about the compensation case. I found an example of this phenomenon in connection with the third minority, namely homosexuals, too: the articles about Gábor Szetey contained slight inaccuracies.

## 5. References

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