

Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Philosophy

PhD Thesis
Summary

Budapest
2008

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Language use in Dunaszerdahely

Hungarian Linguistics PhD

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Budapest
2008

Introduction

Language surveys on the language varieties of Hungarian language in Slovakia cannot ignore questions of bilingualism. Language varieties of Hungarian spoken in Slovakia are affected by the Slovak language – in this way they create a big amount of language contact phenomena. Survey of the language varieties of Hungarian language in Slovakia is changing time-to-time: with the inflow of new tendencies the researches are getting more modern. Until the very beginning of the 1990s researches of the varieties of Hungarian spoken in Slovakia were influenced by dialectology and only after the change of regime were realized by socio- and contact linguistics.

In my thesis I am going to “show” the language situation of Dunaszerdahely (a small town in South-western Slovakia occupied mostly by Hungarians). I point out how the languages effect each other, signalize the situation, which is created by the numerical minority of Slovaks – on the level of this town – and numerical majority/politically minority of Hungarians in Dunaszerdahely and other ethnics (mostly Gypsies and Jews), who are continuously forming the language situation in the shade of politics. Politics has an influence on the language use of multilingual speech communities: especially on usage in the official areas. Language use on a particular domain is affected also by the “time” (the attitude of the political sphere). In the Slovak Republic (declared on 1 January 2003) the language use is controlled by language laws. The main language is the Slovak: it means it can be used in all domains (in contrast to the other languages).

The language repertoire of Dunaszerdahely is formed firstly by its geographical location and by its former agricultural and rural importance. Its rareness in this area is that for centuries it is occupied by several nationalities (Hungarians, Slovaks, Gypsies, Jews) and after the change of regime by a group of East-Asians – unfortunately their precise amount is hidden.

Language use of Jews in Dunaszerdahely

The language repertoire of Jews in Dunaszerdahely contains not only the languages of their surroundings, Hungarian and Slovak, but also Ivrit, Hebrew and Yiddish. The language repertoire of the community differs by generations. The oldest use mostly Hungarian – not only in familiar domains, but also in official situations. In situations, where are only Jews (from Dunaszerdahely and other countries) they use Yiddish. The “mid-generation” can speak world languages (mostly English and German) and also Ivrit. They cannot speak Yiddish, because after the World War II had no possibility to use it. In this period they used mostly Slovak language: it was the way they could show loyalty to the former Slovak Republic. The youngest Jews of Dunaszerdahely were socialized in Slovak language (either in family or in school). They use mostly Slovak language in their everyday life – and if it will continue, maybe the Hungarian language will be only the second language of the community (although it was and nowadays is still Hungarian community).

Epilogue

In the meantime Dunaszerdahely “has” six or seven frequently used languages. The most frequent languages are the Hungarian and the Slovak. They are used as own languages, but they can be used as *lingua franca* (in this position is mostly Hungarian language).

Language use of Hungarian Romas and the Lovara from Malomhely

The survey shows that among the Hungarian Romas only the oldest can speak their language. The youngest are not able to make fluid conversations in their language. Mostly the youngest are socialized in Hungarian language so the Romani words are in their life only markers of their gypsy background. In the past, in Dunaszerdahely the Romani was used in everyday communication, but with the death of oldest generation this will lose from the language repertoire of this community. Their language use is based on Hungarian language, because they can not speak Slovak. They are visiting schools with education on Hungarian language, and mostly they never acquire high abilities in Slovak language.

In my thesis I dealt not only with the language use of Hungarian Romas in Dunaszerdahely, but also with the use of Lovara community near this city (they live separately in a settlement). Their social and geographical position determines their language use: because they live their lives mostly in their community (only the men are mobile) they use almost just Lovara. They use Hungarian only when they step out from the settlement. They never acquire Slovak language (although they learn it in school – they are attending school for mentally retardates: not because they are retardate, but because of the lightened curriculum).

Diglossia of the Gypsies in Hungary and Slovakia: *pro and contra*

The Hungarian and Slovak literature speaks about the diglossia of the Gypsies: they use this term to their bilingualism without specifying their social surroundings and language use. In my thesis I try to refute this habit of the researchers and I am trying to set a model of their language use (which is based on Fasold's and Gumperz's model of diglossia).

During the description of the language use I am focusing on the synchronic status (I made my researches between 2001 and 2007). It is not enough for the demonstration of reasons and other consequences, therefore in some cases I made apparent-time research. I use it especially for the demonstration of the language shift, because of the complication of its demonstration in one period. I had no possibility to make real-time diachronic researches and there were no earlier data on this topic.

Domains of language use

In the introduction of the thesis I survey the specialties (labels) of language use of the speech community of Hungarians in Slovakia. I also deal with the institutes infecting the usage of Hungarian in Dunaszerdahely (the language of oral and written office work and administration). In this chapter I also mention the publications representing the language use of Hungarians in Slovakia (dictionaries, corpuses and other databases).

The conventions of language use and language choice of the discussed minorities (Slovaks, Gypsies and Jews) are viewed on the following domains:

1. "one-man" language use of the respondents (active personal sphere)
2. "one-man" language use of the respondents (passive personal sphere)
3. language use of the respondents in minor communities
4. language use of the respondents in the less centralized public domains
5. language use of the respondents in the more centralized public domains

The 1st and 2nd domains (reading, dreams, counting, swearing, cursing, speaking to pets, praying) require only one speaker. In these domains the presence of other speakers or listener can be disturbing.

The 3rd domains fit mostly to familiar patterns. They are about the communication in families: between parents-children, grandparents-children, grandparents-grandchildren; and neighbors. The main character of this usage is the bilateral communication, which is rather informal than formal. The other characteristic type of these domains is that the attitudes of respondents have no (or less) rules in communication.

The less centralized public domains are part of the everyday life of speech communities, but not the part of privacy – they are all public (cultural associations, shops, restaurants, sport). Language use of these domains is partly centralized – the employees in these places are sometimes forced to speak a particular language. The more important is that the attending on these domains is obligatory.

In the more centralized public domains we can add the domains of public administration (e.g. court, police, public offices) or other centralized domains (doctor, post office, place of work in Dunaszerdahely). The characteristic type of these domains is that usually the respondent has no possibility of language choice (but: in general in Dunaszerdahely the client/respondent has the right of language choice).

Beside these domains I do research on:

1. language knowledge of respondents
2. social and language milieu of respondents, attitudes of respondents
3. other effects: language rights

Methods

In the research I used questionnaires (surveys) and made interviews. The questionnaire was mostly made from open questions so the respondents always had possibility to give their own opinion. The questionnaire can be divided into 3 parts:

1. personal data
2. data on language use
3. attitudes towards own group and other groups

Language use of Slovaks in Dunaszerdahely

The Slovak respondents are using not only the Slovak language, but also the Hungarian in a daily use. Not only those, who were born in Dunaszerdahely, but also those people who lived their life far from this city in Slovak surroundings. Although, they are able to speak Hungarian, they use it only in situations, where they are “forced” to use it: mainly in situations, where the others can not speak Slovakian – mostly in shops. The younger generation uses Hungarian frequently because of their Hungarian friendships – which were made in the city.

They have possibility to learn Slovak from the youngest age (or educated in Slovak language) – from kindergarten to high school. Beside it they can use Slovak in their everyday life, not only in familiar, but also in public domains (in the city).