

BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY, CLUJ NAPOCA
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**THE ATTITUDES OF HUNGARIANS FROM ROMANIA
TOWARDS THE USE OF THE MOTHER TONGUE
AND LINGUISTIC RIGHTS**

A sociolinguistic analysis

PhD Thesis

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ÉS A NYELVI JOGOKHOZ**

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Keywords: Hungarians from Romania, Hungarian language, language attitude, language choice, language use, linguistic rights,

The aim and hypotheses of the research; the structure of the thesis

I was inspired to carry out the sociolinguistic research described in the present thesis by the realization that although there has been some progress regarding the codification and enforcement of linguistic rights in Romania from the 1990s onwards, especially since the signing and ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, mother tongue usage in everyday situations is not always realized even after the ratification of the Charter, not even in cases when there are no longer any legal obstacles preventing it. Knowing that language is a basic factor in the identity of the Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin (Péntek 2011: 33), preserving identity mainly means maintaining the language (idem 39); at the same time using the Hungarian language is made difficult not only by unfavorable circumstances, but also, consciously or not, in many cases by the Hungarians and their representatives themselves. We are looking for answers regarding the attitudes towards mother tongue use and towards (codified) linguistic rights. We also wish to identify the factors that influence the attitudes of the respondents: what is the relationship between language attitudes and attitudes towards linguistic rights? Is there any difference between the attitudes of the Hungarians living in a diaspora situation from those living in a majority situation? Is there any difference between the attitudes of generations socialized before and after 1989? Are the individual attitudes affected by sex, education or the fact they live in an urban or rural setting?

Based on previous sociological, sociolinguistic and psychologic studies, we defined the points of view of the survey starting from the three work hypotheses below on planning the research:

1. the attitudes towards linguistic rights and the language attitudes form a system of attitudes, recalling the latter activating the attitudes towards linguistic rights and the other way around, as a result of which the individual feels the need to preserve inter-attitudinal congruence. This means the more positive the language attitudes of the individual are, the more positive one's attitudes towards the rights of using the mother tongue will be. At the same time the more positive the attitudes of the individual towards the rights of mother-tongue usage are, the more positive his/her attitudes towards the mother tongue will be.
2. the language attitudes and therefore the attitudes towards linguistic rights of the Hungarians living in Romania differ depending on them living in a majority or diaspora situation; at the same time the language attitudes of those living in settlements or regions where the Hungarian population makes up around half of the population

represent a transition between the attitudes of the ones living in majority and diaspora situations.

3. the attitudes towards linguistic rights of the individual (determining attitudes towards linguistic rights as well) besides the linguistic environment are influenced by sex, age, education as well as the type of settlement the individual lives in.

In order to clearly delineate the socio-psychological process we discuss, it was important that in the second chapter of the thesis, following the theoretical issues on linguistic rights, we not only present the current legislation, but give a thorough description of the history of the codification of laws on linguistic rights. Although the subject of the thesis in itself does not justify such a detailed presentation, we considered taking into account the different stages of legislation by linguistic rights and law important because the dynamics of Romanian legislation and practice that (can) make citizens hesitant in demanding their linguistic rights become more obvious from this aspect. This happens mainly because the attitudes of the people do not change as quickly as legislation, and as they are culturally bequeathed as well, if a change in the law provides a right to something which was not allowed before, we very often can recognize the functioning of old reflexes in attitudes.

The third chapter presents the methods, instruments and locations of the research, as well as the respondents. In order to verify the assumptions described in the first part of the chapter we used both quantitative and qualitative methods during our research. The main instrument of the research, the questionnaire was applied in three different regions: firstly in settlements where the Hungarians are in majority, secondly in regions where they live in a diaspora situation, and thirdly in regions where Hungarians constitute approximately half of the population. The attitudes towards the importance of mother-tongue use and indirectly towards linguistic rights of the Hungarians living in a majority were analyzed in three settlements from Harghita/Hargita county: Odorheiu Secuiesc/Székelyudvarhely, Dârjiu/Székelyderzs, and Rareş/Recsenyéd; the research points in Mureş/Maros county, where the Hungarians constitute nearly half of the population were Târgu-Mureş/Marosvásárhely, Sângeorgiu de Mureş/Marosszentgyörgy and Band/Mezőbánd; in order to analyze the attitudes of Hungarians living in the diaspora we chose Deva/Déva, Cristur/Csernakeresztúr and Peştişu Mare/Alpestes in Hunedoara/Hunyad county.

Based on the questionnaire used in the research we asked 60 respondents in every region (30 living in urban settings and 30 living in rural areas), the responses and their interpretations are presented in chapter four of the thesis. The data presented here refer to the different factors of conditions of mother tongue use, such as the linguistic environment and linguistic practice of the respondents, their previous experiences influencing their attitudes, their knowledge on legal aspects of language use, assessing the importance of mother tongue use in the different situations, the attitudes towards language choice and linguistic rights. Although these data are different to some extent, discussing them in one large chapter is

supported by the fact that we present different aspects of the same issue, because – as included in the chapter discussing the theoretical aspects of the thesis – the linguistic environment, the language attitudes, knowledge of linguistic rights, demand for linguistic rights as well as language choice as the concretization of the attitudes of the individual are closely interrelated, and create a system the understanding of which one needs to take all the above factors into consideration.

This is followed by a short summary note, then bibliography, and an appendix at the end of the thesis, which – besides the questionnaire and information regarding the respondents – includes further data from the results of the survey, which were not presented in the thesis, but were important in drawing the conclusions of the analysis. The appendix also contains excerpts from the conversations with the respondents that shed light on the background of several issues.

The methods of the research

In order to answer our questions and verify our assumptions we applied qualitative and quantitative methods during our research: on designing the questionnaire, the instrument of the research we have taken into consideration the fact that although attitude studies are usually carried out using closed questions because these are easier to process, in some cases it is more subservient to use open questions, as the placing of the attitudes on a scale, defining the scale values, the expressions selected to define these points may make the measurement less optimal. At the same time, in the case of open questions the errors brought about by the researcher do not distort the answer, and as such – as previous research has shown – these are much more reliable (Krosnik–Judd–Wittenbrink 2005: 34).

As during the research I had to take into consideration the fact that social pressure is the strongest when the questionnaire is applied face-to-face, in the form of a conversation, however – due to the nature of the research – it was important to record as many conversations as possible. In order to make the analysis reliable, we needed to apply strategies such as ensuring the respondents that their names would not appear in processing the data, making the circumstances of recording the conversation clear before applying the questionnaire, recommending face-to-face conversation but accepting someone the respondent trusts being there, if this option is rejected, etc.

As we mentioned before, the research included 60 people from every region (30 from urban, 30 from rural settlements), that means a total of 180 respondents. Although we planned to have an (approximately) identical number of respondents from the villages of the three different counties, this goal could not be achieved as in some settlements fewer people decided to take part in the analysis. The research was carried out among individuals belonging to two different age groups in order to shed light on the possible differences in mentality

between generations. Also for the sake of comparability we took into consideration the sex and level of education of the respondents in choosing them.

The results of the research

The results of the research show that due to the differences in the linguistic environments of the respondents living in the different regions, the frequency and possibilities of using the mother tongue differ depending on the communication situation in these regions. While in Harghita/Hargita and Mureş/Maros counties the use of Hungarian is generally more common, in Hunedoara/Hunyad county Romanian as the language of the environment and as the official language is more frequently used, as a result of which there are differences in the language attitudes of the respondents living in the three regions. We have seen that none of the regions is homogeneous in terms of how the people living there consider the importance of using the mother tongue, we can state in general that although Hungarian is used the most frequently in Harghita/Hargita county, the awareness regarding the importance and possibilities of mother tongue use is the highest in Mureş/Maros county and the lowest in Hunedoara/Hunyad county. On this issue, therefore, our initial work hypothesis, according to which Mureş/Maros county would represent a transition from the majority situation to the diaspora situation in every respect, is not entirely confirmed.

The data also show that - although to varying degrees and ways - the attitudes towards the importance of the mother tongue, and through this the attitudes towards linguistic rights also impact language attitudes in the sense that - directly or indirectly - affect the factors with which these interact. We have seen that the more positive the attitude of the individual towards using his/her mother tongue, the more he/she wants to take this opportunity, and get the necessary information. At the same time lacking the necessary legal knowledge the individual tries to find his/her way based on his/her language attitudes and direct or indirect experience regarding the practices of certain offices or institutions. On analyzing the language choice of the respondents, we have found that language choice in the different situations is influenced by language attitudes depending on whether it is a linguistic behaviour that needs consideration or not. In the former situation attitudes affect manifestations through the demand to use the mother tongue, in the latter case however they determine linguistic behaviour in a direct way. That means the more positive one's language attitudes are, the more probable it is that he/she will decide to use the Hungarian language. On the other hand the less functional or accepted the person considers Hungarian in the given situation or environment, the more he/she will tend to use the Romanian language despite being aware of the possibilities ensured by law.

Our third hypothesis, according to which the attitudes of the individuals can depend on their sex, age, education and also on coming from an urban or rural type of settlement, was only partially validated by the results of the research. Based on these we can conclude that

there is no significant difference between men and women in any of the communicational situations or regarding any linguistic right, and that education does not influence attitudes towards linguistic rights.

Differences in the attitudes of the analyzed age groups could be found only regarding a few linguistic rights. Such possibility is the more or less administrative type of communication in the Hungarian or mixed-language schools, towards which mainly the members of the older generation have positive attitudes. Practice, habit as well as better Romanian language skills have made the younger generation more open to the use of the official language of the country. Due to the different foreign language skills the attitudes of the generations are also different regarding getting information in their mother tongue, as the younger are more open to other (not only Romanian) language press, audio-visual media as well as internet resources. The 20–35 year olds in their capacity as consumers are more flexible from the linguistic point of view; as opposed to the older generations, more respondents declared that other factors (such as the price and quality of the products, the distance to the shop, etc.) are more important, than being able to use the mother tongue as customers, either communicating with the seller or getting information regarding the product.

There is no significant discrepancy between the attitudes of the respondents living in urban or rural communities; important differences can be identified only in the case of the linguistic rights of consumers: respondents living in rural communities are more likely to identify with the view that as Hungarians they choose the services and products of companies that make using the mother tongue possible.

Outlook

Although we have managed to answer our most important questions with the help of our research, due to the fact that on planning the questionnaire we tried to expand the analysis to as many linguistic rights as possible, in the case of some we have not been able to get a clear picture regarding the attitudes towards certain linguistic rights in order to formulate answers regarding obvious similarities or differences. Therefore several smaller-scale but more in-depth research could be carried out in the future. There have been several steps in this direction: for example the Institute of Sociology of the Babeş-Bolyai University together with the *Igen, tessék! Da, poftiți!* ('Can I help you?', said in both languages) movement and the Hungarian Student Association of Cluj carried out a research in spring 2014 among the university students learning in Cluj regarding the ethnical aspects of consumer behaviour. However it would be important to carry out more in-depth research in the fields of attitudes towards mother-tongue press and audio-visual media, cultural life, medical care, for nuancing the attitudes towards mother-tongue education and administrative issues.

It would also be interesting to continue the research using the questionnaire applied in this survey in other regions as well in order to see the differences and similarities for example

between the attitudes of Hungarians living in majority in Harghita/Hargita county and in Bihor/Bihar county, and those of Hungarians in the diaspora in Hunedoara/Hunyad county and Maramureş/Máramaros county. It can be assumed that such a comparison would help better understand the language attitudes of the regions included in the research and could reach more general conclusions regarding the analyzed issues.

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