

INDIVIDUAL VARIETIES OF LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE: THE EXAMPLE OF TRANSCARPATHIAN HUNGARIANS

Thesis Booklet



Written by Réka Máté

Supervised by
Prof. Ulrike Jessner-Schmid

Faculty of Modern Philology and Social Sciences
Multilingualism Doctoral School
University of Pannonia
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Introduction

Ever since its independence, Ukraine has been a *de jure* monolingual state, with Ukrainian as the state language. However, *de facto*, Ukraine is a highly multilingual state. One of its most linguistically and ethnically colorful regions is Transcarpathia, located in the westernmost part of the country (see Csernicskó, 1998).

The monolingual norm refers to the societal expectation or assumption that individuals should be proficient in only one language, often the dominant language of a particular region or country and typically devalues the importance of multilingualism and favors the idea of a single, dominant language for communication and cultural integration.

For dominant groups, their own rights have often been invisible: they take them for granted (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2012). In many societies, particularly those with a dominant language, monolingualism is often considered the norm, while other languages spoken within the community, especially minority languages or immigrant languages, are often marginalized or stigmatized. This can lead to different inequalities, and as a consequence, individuals may face discrimination, limited opportunities, or barriers to full participation in society. Various studies have been written on the constant narrowing of the language rights of minorities in Ukraine (e.g. Csernicskó et al., 2020).

However, it is important to recognize the value and benefits of multilingualism. As many studies have proved in the last decades, multilingualism is the norm, not the exception. Despite this view getting more and more recognition, there still are some parts of the world, where the direction is heading to the monolingual norm, due to different historical, political, and economic events. Since we tend to regard as natural what is common, and unusual, which is rarely the case, many believe multilingualism is the normal language situation and monolingualism is the abnormal one (Ellis, 2007).

Efforts are being made in various contexts to challenge the monolingual norm and promote multilingualism as a valuable asset. Recognizing the importance of linguistic diversity and providing support for the maintenance and revitalization of endangered languages can help create a more inclusive and equitable society that appreciates and celebrates multilingualism. Moreover, non-linguistic aspects of language sometimes can be more important in a society than linguistic ones (Eriksen, 1990).

Fishman (1972) argued that language behaviors are not just linguistic acts but also carry social and cultural significance. He emphasized the importance of considering the wider context of language use and the social behaviors associated with it.

According to Fishman, meaningful behavioral patterns encompass a range of language-related activities beyond simple communication. These patterns include language choices, language attitudes, language policies, language shift, language maintenance, and language revitalization efforts. Fishman's concept of meaningful behavioral patterns emphasizes that language is embedded in social and cultural contexts and cannot be separated from the behaviors, attitudes, and ideologies associated with it.

Millions of people are surrounded by an environment where multiple languages are spoken on a daily basis. Today's Transcarpathia is no exception, as several languages are used in the region, making it one of the most ethnically, linguistically, and culturally colorful areas in the country.

Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 1 is the general introduction of the dissertation, presenting the rationale and the significance and research questions of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature. It also contains an overview of the broader context, in which the study was carried out: an introduction to the Transcarpathian Hungarian community.

Chapter 3 introduces the context of the study, through a brief description of the community where the study was conducted. The chapter also contains an analysis of the Linguistic Landscape of the settlement.

Chapter 4 clarifies the design, methods, instruments, and participants of the study. In this Chapter, the rationale behind the choice of methodology and the research design is described in detail.

Chapter 5 contains the results of the study. The in-depth analysis of the life stories of the chosen participants is described in two parts. Firstly, the historical, political, and social factors of LM are described. Secondly, the individual aspects of the development and maintenance of language systems are presented. In the third part of the Chapter, as an addition to the results of the expert interviews, a language map of the settlement was designed as a tool to visualize the bilingualism of the village for the reader.

Chapter 6 contains the discussion and the final conclusions of the study

Research Aims and Questions

The aim of this thesis is to present, how the bilingual state of a small Transcarpathian community has been maintained over the years, through the real-life examples taken from some of its residents. The village of Zhnyatino (Izsnyéte) is situated at the Hungarian-Ukrainian language border, and its population mainly consists of ethnic Hungarians and Ukrainians. There have been studies that examined the coexistence between the ethnicities in different settlements of Transcarpathia with mixed populations. However, the in-depth analysis of the complex phenomena that lead to either language maintenance or shift in a community can be most successfully examined through the thorough observation of the dynamics of the community. In her study, Gal (1979) used participant observation, which is one of the classic methods of anthropology. As a researcher, I have been in a privileged position, as the community I examined has been my home for a little over seven years. As I was born and raised in a predominantly monolingual settlement, I was fascinated by the nature of this community, and how different languages, cultures, and ethnicities can coexist.

My main research questions are the following:

Q1: How do the different historical, political, social, and economic changes on the macro level reflect on the language use of a small community?

Q2: Despite all the odds, how were different members of this community able to preserve their bilingual state?

Q3: Looking at different life stories, what does individual multilingualism look like in a bilingual community?

The Context

Transcarpathia (Ukrainian: Закарпатська область) is located in the western part of Ukraine, bordering the Ukrainian counties of Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk, from which it is separated by the Northeast Carpathian mountain ranges as a natural border. Transcarpathia is the second smallest county in Ukraine (only Chernivtsi county is smaller than it), its area is 12,800 km², which makes up 2.1% of Ukraine's area. Despite its small area, it also borders four countries, where Ukraine is in contact with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania (Ferenc & Kovály eds. 2020). Most of the Hungarians living outside the borders of Hungary live in a state of lower or higher degree of bilingualism. There are those who understand the state language but do not speak it, there are those who speak the state language at a beginner, advanced, or intermediate

level, and there are those who speak both their mother tongue and the state language equally well. Transcarpathia, as a geographical-administrative unit, was established in 1919 as a result of the peace treaties that ended World War I in the (first) Czechoslovak Republic under the name of Podkarpatska Rus: the Hungarian national minority in Transcarpathia was formed. In the following decades, after centuries of belonging to the Kingdom of Hungary as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the region belonged to several states. The Hungarian national minority, which has been part of the several states mentioned below, has successfully preserved its language, identity, and culture in the last century (Csernicskó et al., 2023). In the first decades of the independent Ukraine, the Hungarian minority in Ukraine was represented in the Ukrainian parliament, and there are Hungarian-language medium schools and cultural institutions in the region. However, there are still some issues and tensions related to language rights and policies, particularly in areas where Hungarians form a majority of the population, and the situation of the minorities in the country is rapidly changing in the light of the recent armed conflicts (Csernicskó, 2016).

Zhnyatino (*Izsnyéte* in Hungarian and *Жнятино* in Ukrainian) is a settlement with a mixed population, with 63.4% Hungarian speakers and 36.16% Ukrainian speakers at the time of the 2001 census. Moving toward the village of Horonda, the number of native Hungarian speakers decreases to a minimum, and Zhnyatino also forms a language border (Tóth & Csernicskó, 2014: 134–135).

A quasi-border divides the settlement into two parts: the part of the village, mostly inhabited by Hungarians, going from the direction of the village of Hat to the center of the village is called the “Magyarvég” (“Hungarian end”), while the neighboring streets towards Horonda are called the “Oroszvég” (“Russian end”) by residents (this part of the village is mostly inhabited by Ukrainians). The name “Russian end” most likely was inherited from the Soviet era, where the term “Russian” was used as an umbrella term by other minorities, for the speakers of Slavic languages of the settlement.

The Study

Ethnographic methodology is rooted in anthropology. Ethnographic research, or ethnography, is both a study of interactive strategies in human life and analytical descriptions of social scenes, individuals, and groups that recreate their shared feelings, beliefs, practices, artifacts, folk knowledge, and actions. In other words, it is both a process and product of describing and interpreting cultural behaviors.

In anthropology and other social sciences, an “emic perspective” refers to an approach that emphasizes the understanding of a particular cultural group or phenomenon from the perspective of the people who are part of that group or who participate in that phenomenon. In short: an insider’s perspective – what anthropologists call “the emic view” (Duranti, 1997).

Qualitative research is often oriented toward the inductive approach. We have to note that theoretically, qualitative research does not allow us to use statistical tools to find correlations that point toward patterns in need of explanation. Although there is a wide range of programs available that help us analyze qualitative data. On the other hand, the qualitative (inductive) analyst needs to have a deep understanding, insight and ability for reflection to notice important patterns in a ‘pile’ of data (Babbie, 2020).

In their landmark book, sociologists Glaser & Strauss (1967/1999) laid the foundations of grounded theory, which is a qualitative research methodology that heavily relies on inductive reasoning. It is widely used in various disciplines, including sociology, psychology and management to generate theories or concepts grounded in data. Grounded theory emphasizes the importance of constant comparison, theoretical sensitivity, and theoretical sampling to ensure that the emerging theory remains firmly connected to the data. It provides a systematic and rigorous approach to theory generation that can capture the complexity and nuances of social phenomena.

Life stories refer to personal narratives that individuals tell about their experiences, beliefs, and values over the course of their lives. Anthropologists use life stories to gain insights into the cultural and social contexts that shape individuals' lives, as well as to better understand how people make sense of and respond to social change. Life stories can also reveal the ways in which individuals negotiate and navigate different issues in their lives.

In this survey, the main goal of the sampling was to create categories of the people living in the community, that embody ‘archetypes’ of people by having lived in a certain political era or having had certain types of life experiences that a person in this settlement would usually have.

Experts got a specific set of questions, in a more close-ended, classic interview format, the former were more like life stories.

Todeva and Cenoz (2009) used personal narratives in the form of linguistic autobiographies to describe the journeys of speakers of multiple languages. Anthropologists often use ethnographic research methods, such as participant observation and in-depth interviews, to collect life stories.

Taking the initial steps of the research analysis, a grounded theory approach was applied. The

thematic analysis began after the first interview was transcribed into text format, and continued in parallel with the preparation and transcription of further interviews. The enormity of the analytic task was made easier and more transparent with a data analysis software. Recurring phenomena were first manually coded by the author, and after selective coding, these phenomena were categorized and organized using the ATLAS.ti²³ qualitative data analysis software, which was found to be a useful tool for supporting the process through coding, memos, links, and networks. The program is often used in grounded approach studies.

During the interviews, 653 minutes of audio footage were recorded. After setting up the coding system, manual coding took place. The transcription of the interviews was done in an 'intelligent verbatim' style, to keep the focus on the content for the analysis and to make the translation of the quotes easier (as the language of the interviews was Hungarian).

During the manual and selective coding, the examined text units were first extracted into an Excel document. During the first read of the transcribed documents, I looked for an overall theme, the gist of the life story. That was included in my field notes as well. During the reading, I also looked for recurring phenomena and themes in the texts, which are based on the interview questions (deductively), or appeared independently of them (inductively) in the interviews. During the second read, I focused more on the language narratives of the life stories. This gave the opportunity to add more codes to the existing ones. The third reading included the actual coding process. 1289 quotes were provided with a code (occasionally multiple codes were applied to a single quote). The next step was co-occurrence analysis (hyperlinking) and sentiment analysis, using the the network tool of the program. When analyzing the occurrence or co-occurrence of different phenomena, the network tool also proved to be useful for visualization. Besides the co-occurring codes and their connections, groundedness (how many quotations are linked to a certain code) and density (number of intercode connections) were also featured in the charts.

Discussion and Conclusions

The role of the individual in a community of speakers is indisputable. Different factors, such as top-down decisions in language policy, historical events and changes, and economic challenges constantly affect the individual's choices when it comes to language use. Whether a community is able to preserve its language and identity largely depends on the decisions of its individuals. In Zhnyatino, we are able to witness the result of a long-term coexistence and support of

multiple languages on a societal level. Hungarians of the community, despite being a relative majority in the settlement, are an ethnic minority in the country. Due to the political crises of the last eight years and the ongoing Russian aggression, minorities in Ukraine have been facing serious challenges recently. Researchers and advocacy organizations have argued several times, that multilingualism is a value despite being a challenge when it comes to language planning or policies (see Csernicskó & Máté, 2017).

For the presentation and the analysis of the relevant data, Herdina and Jessner's (2002) Dynamic Model of Multilingualism was used as the main theoretical framework. The rationale behind the choice of this model as the theoretical framework for the analysis of individual aspects of multilingualism and language maintenance is that it lets us explore the internal and external variables as part of the system. When studying the development and maintenance of multiple language systems, several different linguistic, cognitive, environmental, social, and historical factors should be acknowledged and kept in mind. As one of the core concepts of the DMM is language maintenance and it has systematically united and included individual and societal multilingualism, DMM was the logical choice to rely on for the analysis.

Borbély during her longitudinal study of language shift amongst the Hungarians and Romanians of Kétegyháza (Hungary) employed a "sustainable bilingualism model" that refers to the long-term maintenance of the bilingual situation of a community of speakers. While developing the model, the author had previously studied several bilingual communities throughout Hungary. Borbély's SBM applies only to *linguistic aspects*, social and community aspects are not included. The linguistic aspects of the model are the following:

1. The frequency of the use of languages and their local varieties is sustainable among generations and in different situations of language use and language choice.
2. The proficiency of languages is correlated with the sustainable and frequent use of languages (and their varieties).
3. The attitudes are positive towards these languages.
4. Ideologies protect the use, fluency, and attitudes of bilingualism.

As my study has mainly focused on the social, community, and individual aspects of multilingualism, with a special emphasis on their impact on the multilingual speaker, taking this previously applied model as an example, those specific aspects have to be applied. To conclude the several examples of the elements that promoted or considered to promote language maintenance for the speakers I have interviewed, that have been aligned in the previous chapters, I reorganized and merged them into larger topics.

These are the main themes that emerged from the life stories of the participants.

Linguistic and ethnic diversity

When a community recognizes and values the diversity of languages, both minority and majority, within a community or region, they acknowledge that languages are an integral part of a community's cultural heritage and identity. In addition, positive interethnic relationships and understanding each other's culture, habits, and last but not least, language, enables the speakers to gain a knowledge that goes deeper than what could be ever thought in the classroom. Taking examples from the life stories of the participants, a pattern that seemed to emerge is that the diversity of this community lies in a co-existence of languages and ethnicities without mixing or blending in with each other. Hybridity, which is natural in e. g. some urban contact settings cannot be necessarily applied to this small, rural setting.

Engaging with one's community, maintaining relationships inside and outside the family, and being in constant contact with speakers of different languages may facilitate the sustainability of multilingualism.

Education

Education plays a crucial role in sustaining multilingualism. It should involve providing quality education in multiple languages, ensuring that individuals have access to education in their mother tongue while acquiring proficiency in the dominant or official language(s). We were able to witness different strategies that the participants used to correct the flaws of the minority education system. Implementing minority language medium education can present challenges. Adequate resources, including qualified teachers, appropriate curriculum materials, and supportive policies, are essential for its successful implementation. Language planning and community involvement are crucial to ensure sustainable support and commitment from all stakeholders. Additionally, balancing the need for minority language education with proficiency in the dominant language(s) is important to facilitate communication and opportunities beyond the immediate community. The deficiencies in the education of the state language present many parents with a difficult decision: Should they choose a Hungarian-language school, where the child can study in their mother tongue, or should they choose an institution teaching in the majority language in the hope of more effectively learning the state language?

Language Policies

In a state that is navigating towards the monolingual norm, implementing inclusive language policies that promote linguistic diversity is an essential component of sustainable multilingualism. Political decision-making can directly affect the speakers of minority languages, as their language rights (or as Skutnabb-Kangas (2012) calls them *linguistic human rights*) highly depend on them.

The maintenance of minority languages can be defined by four factors that are closely related to each other, but are also determined by the relations between the majority-minority society (see Csernicskó ed., 2010):

- Speakers who maintain the language (demographic factor).
- Situations, and scenes, where language is not only symbolic but it can also be used for practical purposes, to satisfy real communication needs (utility factor).
- The intention of the speakers: if they want to keep using the language and pass it on to the next generations (symbolic value).
- Rights that ensure the possibility of using the language (language policy).

If speakers are deprived of their rights to use their language on different platforms, bilingualism will not be sustainable in the long run.

Economic Development

Multilingualism can have positive impacts on economic development. It can enhance cultural tourism, facilitate international trade and communication, and contribute to global collaborations. In the case of Zhnyatino, we were able to witness how local entrepreneurs aim to attract customers all over the settlement by applying bilingualism in their advertisements. Economic factors can also impact multilingualism. Recent crises led to a wave of migration that has never been seen before in the community, and it has left its mark on the demographic composition of the settlement, which affects the future of the community. The worsening economic situation creates a contradictory situation for the speakers of the community. On the one hand, working abroad gives the individual the opportunity to learn and master foreign languages. On the other hand, that knowledge cannot be utilized in the community, if the speakers are forced to stay abroad or relocate permanently, due to the financial disadvantages their return may presume.

Technology and Digital Resources

Advances in technology have made it easier to support multilingualism. Digital resources, such as language learning apps, online translation tools, and language platforms, can facilitate language maintenance, learning, and communication across different linguistic communities.

Community Engagement

Sustaining a multilingual state requires active engagement and participation from all members of a community. Organizing religious and cultural events, and fostering intercultural dialogue can create an environment that celebrates and values linguistic diversity.

By promoting sustainable multilingualism, the community can foster social cohesion, cultural understanding, and inclusive development while preserving the richness and diversity of its languages. Its importance has an increased value for minority speakers, whose language is in a vulnerable, endangered state to begin with. The sustainability of multilingualism in Zhnyatino heavily relies upon the speakers' willingness to learn each other's languages to a greater or lesser extent.

Zhnyatino as a settlement carries a paradox within itself. After spending several years there, doing months of fieldwork and data collection from a researcher's perspective, and having spoken to hundreds of its people as a resident of the village, the impression one gets is that despite having a border that divides the settlement (may it be a language border or a so-called barrier between the two ethnicities) they belong to one community after all. Hungarians of the village often report that for them going into "Oroszvég" feels like visiting a foreign land. However, this dividedness immediately decreases, when both Ukrainians and Hungarians go to the same store, same post office, clinic or hairdresser, or sometimes, the same church.

All in all: Zhnyatino has a border that not only separates but unites people.

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