

Opponent Review of the Doctoral Dissertation

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Title of the dissertation: *Language, Power, Assimilation, and Minorities in Multilingual Space
(Based on the analysis of Transcarpathian Hungarian novels)*

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1. Choice of topic and theoretical background

Gabriella Mádi's choice of subject is interdisciplinary, and its originality lies precisely in the meeting of linguistic, literary and literary historical approaches. In her work, the candidate has undertaken to examine the linguistic behaviour of people living in minority situations, from a sociolinguistic and linguistic point of view, in their contextualised historicity. While the usual analytical path is empirical data collection (by mapping language use patterns), the starting point of the author's database is based on a specific source, namely literary texts. Thus, the analysis of linguistic attitudes, value judgements, linguistic behaviours and contact phenomena reflected in literary texts is the focus of this work.

In her dissertation, the author states: "The research adopts a multidisciplinary approach, combining literary analysis with sociolinguistic methods. A comprehensive review of Transcarpathian Hungarian novels from different historical periods is conducted, focusing on works from the Czechoslovak era, the Soviet period, and contemporary Ukraine. Key texts include Mihály Tamás's "Két part közt fut a víz," Vilmos Kovács's "Holnap is élünk," János Penckófer's "Hamuther," Marianna Brenzovics's "Kilátás," and Éva Berniczky's "Méhe nélkül a Bába" (4p).

Although literary works are aesthetic works, the linguistic devices used to depict reality, which emphasise the spirit and mood of the times, the characters' features and attitudes, become

extremely decisive. Thus, for instance, the phenomenon of code-switching, word borrowing and other contact phenomena can be analysed both from the point of view of literary linguistics (aesthetics) and as a reflection of linguistic relations in a given period and time, but also as discourse-organising strategies justified by the characteristics of the discursive context.

The candidate will present in depth the criteria for the selection of different literary works, describe the political and socio-cultural background of the period and, in this context, will deepen the presentation of literary works, the multi-level analysis of the linguistic behaviour of the characters and the presentation of the stories. The analysis will reveal the different stages and faces of minority linguistic existence. It would also have been worthwhile reflecting on the literary texts of the majority societies of certain periods, specifically on how the literature of the majority societies of the periods was generally affected by the change of power and the change of dominance of languages. Is there any reference in these texts to the change of dominance of languages and, if so, what is the nature of this reference and how is it specific to minority literature? Of course, their absence is also telling!

The presentation of representative literary work from each period begins with a description of the forms of approach to the new period, followed by a discussion of linguistic phenomena at the level of linguistic contact. Language is a reflection of social change, and literary works interpret these changes in the world of fiction in a 'reality' constructed for aesthetic purposes. In this introduction, the titles of literary works, as paratextual elements, are revealing. I miss the use of the potential of interpreting titles in this highly complex analysis.

2. Research methodology

The starting point of the research methodology is that "literature depicts some aspects of social reality, and the texts of some literary works can be suitable for sociolinguistic analysis" (51p). Thus, the literary text can serve as a corpus for analysis. It is a challenge to select literary works that are representative of different stages of development, since it is difficult to assign the authors' habitat to a single country. Finally, the doctoral student has based her selection on the following criterion: "the most significant novels from both periods, that were influential at their time of publication as well as being considered to be valuable pieces in the Transcarpathian Hungarian literary tradition" (54p). The research is a qualitative study based on linguistic analysis, using critical discourse analysis techniques (close reading of texts). In this way, research methods from

linguistics and literary studies are complemented with those from history, thus presenting a multidisciplinary research strategy. The quantitative indicators of the data are summarised in a single chart on page 122.

3. Structure of the paper

The paper is based on five research questions and four hypotheses (Question 1: What elements of language contact appear on the pages of novels? Question 2: How are the effects of language contact and issues of minority identity reflected in literary works? Question 3: What linguistic resources are used to construct or express multilingual contexts, culture and identity in minority literature? Q4: What are the main similarities and differences in the language interference phenomena in these literary texts? Q5: Can the writers' attitude towards language and multilingualism be seen through the novels?). In order to answer these questions, the author of the dissertation first defines theoretical concepts to be used, followed by the presentation of her research methods. The paper devotes most of its space to analysis and concludes with a thesis statement. The paper has a logically built-up structure.

4. Remarks, observations, conclusions

Through her analysis, the author has shown that:

- The literary works can serve as a corpus for linguistic analysis, revealing the relationship between language use and identity.
- The interdisciplinary approach can open new ways of understanding minority existence.
- The interdisciplinary approach validates the complementary nature of interdisciplinary research techniques by creating a configuration that is fit for the purpose.
- The literature review is clearly connected to the research carried out, and all the means and methods used are fit for the purpose.
- The examination of Transcarpathian Hungarian novels can contribute to broader discussions on multilingualism, minority rights, and the role of literature in preserving cultural heritage.
- The ideas for further research are also convincing, with the remark that similar analyses already exist for Hungarian minorities outside the borders of the motherland (see. Imre József Balázs, 2023, Erika-Mária Tódor, 2022, 2023, Éva Toldi, 2023).

- I see the great merit of the thesis in the fact that it analyses a specific form of regional manifestation of multilingualism, through the images of life captured in literature, so that we can get to know a specific form of multilingualism and its dynamics.

To sum up, Gabriella Mádi's PhD thesis displays a high level of originality. It shows that the author can design and implement an elaborate study by applying appropriate theoretical frameworks and research methods. The findings contribute to a better understanding of current issues in the field and are relevant in the understanding the dynamics of multilingualism in minority context. The dissertation proposed by Gabriella Mádi complies with the requirements of a PhD dissertation.

Therefore, I suggest that the thesis proceed to public thesis defense, and that the author be awarded a PhD degree.

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