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**Sociological Aspects of Bilingualism in Education and
in the Labour Market**

PhD Thesis

ABSTRACT

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Contents

Introduction

I. The Bilingualism in Sociological Terms

1. Relationship between language and society – the sociological perspective
2. The process of the minoritisation of language
3. Bilingualism and language choice
4. Language – economics – social structure

II. Bilingualism and the Labour Market

1. Summary of Methodology
2. Language choice – school choice – the choice of profession
3. Linguistic strategies in the labour market
4. Unemployment among the Hungarian graduates
5. The advantages of bilingualism
6. Language deficiencies in mother tongue
7. Language disadvantages
8. Language attitudes
9. Code-switching and code-mixing
10. The where and the when of languages

III. Bilingualism and Identity

1. Mother tongue – language of the state. Paths towards a profound study of the official language
2. Languages and Identity

IV. Conclusions

V. Appendix. The Dynamics of Language use: Noted Orality.

1. Language – Culture – Communication
2. Written in speaking, read in listening

Bibliography

Methodology

Keywords: sociolinguistics, bilingualism, minority, language and economics, labour market, the dynamics of language use, symbolic power, code-switching, code-mixing, diglossia, narrative identity

The central topic of the dissertation is the relationship between the language of instruction and study in education and the language use in the labour market among the Hungarian graduates in Romania. Despite of this precise delimitation, the paper passes beyond these analytical frames and treats other related issues, making reference to other social groups too. These issues, as well as the theoretical and methodological approaches, are based on my empirical researches carried out within the past two decades¹.

Central and Eastern European socio-economic-political transitions after 1989 led to radical changes in the labour market, the centralized system having been replaced by the logic of supply and demand, generating significant consequences in language use. On the one hand, the language-economy relationship can be investigated in terms of economy, analysing the impact of global or national economic developmental trends on language use. On the other hand, the dynamics of language can be studied, interpreting the language choices of the actors of economy, as well as the cultural or symbolic elements of employment, and the social networks being influenced by a market segment (Grin 1999: 14). Both starting points raise interesting questions, especially from the perspective of a minority language. What kind of language behaviour characterizes the world of the work? Is the social prestige of the languages in change, or is it stable? How about the economic benefits of languages? How does language use influence attitudes and behaviour? What are the effects of different languages used in education, in learning? What are the sociological factors which determine the choice of language? What kind of career opportunities, following self-assertion, may the Hungarian speaking minority meet in

¹ Major researche topics:

1. *Sociological survey on school preferences and assimilation* (Sorbán-Dobos 1997, Sorbán 2000a, Sorbán 2009b);
2. *About the labour market in Cluj County* (Sorbán-Nagy 2003a, 2003b);
3. *Hungarian graduates in Romania in the early twenty-first century* (Sorbán-Nagy 2006);
4. *Bilingualism and labour market* (Sorbán 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2011).

the labour market? Considering language, culture and economy as adjoining concepts, what are the significances of bilingualism for the Hungarian minority in Romania?

The thesis is built on three main chapters. In the first chapter – **Bilingualism in Terms of Sociology** – the relationship between language and society is presented in the context of sociology, briefly highlighting some innovative aspects of sociological theory, namely: R. H. Brown's theory about society as text (Brown 1987), Foucault's vision about discourse (Foucault 2000, 2001, 2002), and Bourdieu's conception of language and symbolic power (Bourdieu 1977, 1978, 2001). Besides this theoretical basis, the studies and the philosophical considerations of Welsh sociologist Glyn Williams (Williams 1992, 1999, 2005) served as starting points and provided the main reference sources. His works have a critical perspective of mainstream sociolinguistic theses as well as of the description of the political and economic processes through which a language obtains the status of a minority language (the minoritisation of language / language group). In this section the basic characteristics of the social structure of the Hungarian minority in Romania are also succinctly presented, compared with those of the majority. They are based on the fact that the status of a language and opportunities related to it are largely determined by the social situation (educational levels, employment positions) of the native Hungarian speakers.

The sociological research of the language contains two main guidelines: the first one originates from the use of language as a social practice; therefore we can talk about the sociology of language similarly as about sociology of religion, or sociology of the family. According to the second perspective, however, language is actually present in all human activities – as well as in the interaction between the participant (interviewee) and sociologist. Consequently all sociologists ultimately research language and discourse, while preparing a sociological survey (Achard 1993). This latter view draws particular attention on major problems of social sciences (e.g. what does sociology investigate?) and their methodology, too (e.g. how can we capture these phenomena?)

In the second half of the 20th century, we witness a linguistic turn of social sciences, which means that sociology shows an increasing interest in biographies, stories, narrated identity, and the verbal construction of social reality or language-related aspects of symbolic power. This turn means, however, a re-evaluation of the social fact treated as the basic sociological category, involving the need of inter- and multidisciplinary researches. Sociological discourse analysis

studies the constitution of social significances, such as social connotations, indirect suggestions (Grice 1975), rhetorical structures, methods of influence and verbal manipulation – the objective of these analyses is to reveal the discursive techniques of power, which are hiding social inequalities (Fairclough 1989, van Dijk 1988, 2001). Linguistic market described by Bourdieu is a “battlefield” for positions and for the influence upon the legitimate vision of the social. Therefore, language by words, notions and concepts classifies social actors, social reality, making distinctions that serve for identification and self-identification. The names, titles, however, by their specific operating mechanism, produce and reproduce their adequate attitudes and behaviours. The concept of minority or ethnic group is such a discursive category.

In his book “Sustaining Language Diversity in Europe” (2005), Glyn Williams, relying on Foucault’s concept of discourse and power, describes the socio-economic process, where the structure of a social, language or ethnic group changes unfavourably through discourse, which is finally based on particular relations of power. Actually, ethnic minorities do not have political, ideological and economic institutions that could guarantee the use of their language in all segments of everyday life. Our question is as it follows: how does a language become a minority language? The answer could be found in the power relations characterizing the different discourses of the majority and the minority. The national discourse is related to the official language, to the equality of citizens, while minority discourse is about cultural distinction and right to mother tongue. In a nation-state, the official language has an important role in the organization of the society and, by its symbolic meaning it becomes the language of possibilities, of opportunities, compared to the language of the minority, which has less influence. In sociolinguistics, the concept of diglossia describes this separation of functions between languages, but it ignores the role of power in this process; similarly, it sets aside the factors causing this situation and the entire dimension of psychosocial problems concerning to language choice, the assimilation process, and the extremely subtle relations between language and identity.

The situation of a language in a society and the opportunities related to it cannot be separated from the social situations or positions of its speakers. In this context, the question arises: if it is true that bilingualism is, as often said, an asset, while the majority is mostly monolingual, what would be the cause of social disadvantages of bilingual minority compared to the mostly monolingual majority? Census data from 2002 indicate that the situation of

Hungarians in Romanian employment area is different from that of the Romanians: Hungarians remain underrepresented in management positions and in the sphere of intellectuals, but they are over-represented among skilled and unskilled workers, or in the fields of commerce or services. Among the Hungarians in Romania, the proportion of people with a degree (graduates) is much lower than in the case of Romanians and, similarly, data referring to the entrepreneurs also present a shortfall of the Hungarian population compared to the majority (Farkasné 2000 A. Gergely 2001). Thus, the question arises: regarding professional carriers, is it an obstacle to belong to the Hungarian minority and to be educated in Hungarian? What language of instruction should a child choose in schools for better opportunities?

Between September 2007 and March 2008, we carried out a research based on in-depth interviews, interviewing Hungarian graduates. This empirical research data contains 50 interviews on career history, which reflect the relationship between language of education, language skills and strategies in the labour market. In the second part of the thesis – **Bilingualism and Labour Market** – the results of this research are presented in the larger context of previously mentioned researches.

The “self-assertion” (success and achievement) is one of the well-known terms of the minority social discourses, referring mostly to the choice of language of education, such as: “The child should learn in Romanian for a better self-assertion”. In this context self-assertion of a minority should be in rapport with high proficiency of the official language, without having any connection to other social or psychological factors. Actually, one of the most important tools of self-assertion for minorities, within a nation-state, is a high-level competence of the official language in everyday, as well as in professional communication. This is obvious and requires no further argument. However, it would be erroneous to exaggerate the role of the official language competences regarding the situation of minorities in the labour market. According to the results of our empirical research, this evolution is strongly influenced by the social situation of the Hungarian minority, the economic and political positions occupied by the Hungarians in Romania, and the social networks associated to them. We can also state that the labour market has also got a specific cultural-symbolic component, structuring cultural elements and language skills. Both employers and employees have ethnic and language preferences during the employment processes. We can conclude that graduates of Hungarian nationality, if they have possibilities, look especially for jobs that offer the chances of using their mother tongue.

Nevertheless, Hungarian employers have similar preferences, as being confirmed by other researches (Sorbán-Nagy 2003: 163). Therefore, the proficiency of a language (even a balanced bilingualism) has no exclusive role in self-assertion, the labour market being influenced by a lot of other social factors.

In addition, we should mention another factor: what can be considered self-assertion? If self-assertion is equal with Hungarian graduates easily finding a job, then, besides language competences, we have to take into consideration the specialization of higher education – the demand or the eventual oversupply of the discussed labour market – and the successful, flexible application of knowledge and professional relations. In this case, not the Hungarian language of education is the main problem for fresh graduates, the unemployment will be caused rather by the asymmetric feature of the language of instruction (what kind of specializations can be studied in Hungarian?) If self-assertion means that graduates of Hungarian minority face disadvantages in terms of progress in the social hierarchy (promotions, leadership positions etc.), then the career-story concludes: a Hungarian, however, »is not supposed to desire« to become hospital director, president of Chamber of Commerce, General Inspector etc. Therefore, we, as minority language speakers, have to consider and expect such disadvantages; somehow this is normal because it is related to the minority status itself. Provided self-assertion means that a Hungarian graduate is professionally acknowledged and successful, in career-stories the above-mentioned disadvantages will be interpreted in a different way; there will be episodes highlighting bilingualism and its benefits. Undoubtedly, bilingual, bicultural skills have advantages, which can be extremely well exploited if well managed by the employee.

There are several statements about the multiple advantages of bilingualism in everyday discourse as well as in sociolinguistic literature. They usually list the following aspects: bilingual people are more open-minded, more tolerant and have divergent ideas and a wider cultural horizon than monolingual people, who have access to a single culture. It is also stated that bilingualism stands for an advantage in the labour market, so, those who speak two languages find a job easier. However, the question is: which kind of bilingualism is beneficial, which leads to disadvantages, and what is the society like, characterized by these aspects? Certainly, balanced bilingualism is the ultimate goal to achieve; the ideal society is a largely tolerant one, where both languages are not only used for economic amounts, but also considered as values and therefore appreciated.

However, the advantages of bilingualism cannot be explained exclusively by economic terms, by terms of money, or by the profit gained due to self-assertion on professional or individual level in the social hierarchy. Society is more than economy, and life is more than a job. Among the advantages of bilingualism one can enumerate the cross-cultural friendships and the ability of reading in two languages, accessing any forms of literature. Reading is included among the elements that create our social identity, as common knowledge derives mainly from fiction and not from social studies; therefore, reading has an extremely important pragmatic role in everyday life. This can be presented by short stories, aphorisms or anecdotes describing successes, or failures in life.

Bilingualism is a real chance only if any kind of biases are eliminated, and both languages are used accurately with self-confidence, both in professional sphere and everyday life. The lack of linguistic competence is a common experience in a bilingual milieu. In this milieu, language mixing and code-switching are often needed to meet the requirements of various communicative situations. They may lead to the lack of linguistic competence and loss of different registers in the mother tongue, thus a constraint to use the official language. In this respect, the lack of linguistic competence in mother tongue is a matter of human rights. "Compared to neologisms that enrich linguistic variants of Hungarian minority, the lack of linguistic competence and the loss of registers cannot be described by positive terms. They do not increase but diminish the communicative potential of the speakers, forcing them to use the official language even in cases when they would actually not change the language. Linguistic deficiency may restrain the exercise of human rights in terms of language, the right to use the mother tongue, for instance. Moreover, human rights may be abused in general, such as the freedom to express, because the lack of knowledge in mother tongue sometimes constrains the speaker to crop or suppress, even keep quiet their message." (Lanstyák 2008: 131). In this sense, language deficiency may be defined as one of the disadvantages of minority (subordinate) bilingualism. The clearest and most complete definition of this view is formulated by Sándor N. Szilágyi: "... As I mention language deficiency, I do not mean anything that a linguist or any other critical observer misses; I consider what a speaker misses himself, this lack becomes obvious during communication and often causes frustration, moreover, sometimes embarrassment or shame (Szilágyi, 2008: 114).

A sociological study of conversation supports the statements above with tangible examples. During the interview, the interviewees often experience awkward situations because

they must overcome the lack of mother tongue competencies. They may have problems with finding an adequate expression for specific notions related to their profession; eventually, they use the official language instead. Not being able to talk about their own profession is quite characteristic, shown by lexical hesitations or even by behavioural and attitudinal manifestations, too.

It is well-known that the language deficiency is most frequently encountered among professional languages, mainly in legal, economic, technical and agricultural registers, since the terminology is almost exclusively Romanian and the language used at these workplaces is predominantly Romanian. A person is often considered a good speaker of both languages if he or she knows the special terminology in both languages. Professional language, however, cannot be restricted only to its terminology because even professional languages are structured on different levels (Ablonczyné 2006).

One of the biblical metaphors frequently used in the social sciences is the so-called Matthew effect, which refers to the Gospel text by Matthew: “for unto every one that shall be given, and he shall have abundance, but from him hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.” (Matthew 25:29). This is used to describe the phenomenon when groups in advantageous situations gain new advantages with the help of the institutional systems, while the disadvantages of other groups increase. This metaphor is also expressively describing language and behavioural phenomena associated with mother tongue deficiency.

The language disadvantages designate situations in which minority language speakers encounter detrimental situations because of their shortfalls in the official language. Grosjean in his writings on bilingualism (Grosjean 1982, 2008) points out that ideal bilingualism – equal skills and competences in two languages – is rare. Despite of it, in everyday communication, but especially in the institutional sphere, the language skills of a minority are judged in terms of monolingualism (by both parties), which affects the self-confidence of an individual. Teaching Romanian as the official language in minority schools is focused on competences related to Romanian literature and grammar rather than communicative skills. It unfavourably affects the language learning skills of the minority, resulting in a paradox: after 12 years of study and a final exam in Romanian language and literature, members of the minority are unable to use common words, expressions, phrases fluently and accurately in everyday conversation.

Language disadvantages are mainly related to the tolerance of the majority towards the minorities' less developed official language skills. The interviews also show that, in the recent years, a rising level of tolerance among the majority can be observed concerning the issues of the minority. Nevertheless, it should be noted that language disadvantages are considered a delicate topic during interviews, often provoking silence, restraint or embarrassment. Generally, interviewees become more distant, change the subject, and avoid talking about these issues.

An opportunity for the Hungarian minority to defeat their lack of Romanian language skills is the choice of schools with the official language of instruction for the following generation. This choice, however, has a considerable influence on the language competences in their mother tongue, their language use in their private life, language attitudes and last but not least collective identity.

Attitudes are prerequisites learned throughout life, expressing positive or negative judgments towards the attitude object. Despite the fact that language attitude is a basic sociolinguistic notion, there are only a few studies dealing in-depth with it, especially in various contexts of collective bilingualism (Baker 1991). In sociology, the most common methods to measure attitudes are scales (Likert-scale, semantic-differential scale etc). However, attitudes are elements of self-history (biography), they can be captured through narrative, biographical stories, episodes about the languages and language use.

In their work "Acts of Identity" Le Page and Tabouret-Keller define linguistic phenomena as "activities" in which the individuals express their symbolic universe (Le Page, Tabouret-Keller 1984). Symbolic aspects of language use draw our attention to the dynamism of human behavior, including language behaviour. Individuals using different languages may belong to different groups, language use becoming the marker of their group-identities. Thus life and career stories give us access to language attitudes towards mother tongue, the official language or even code-mixing.

What are the factors influencing or determining language attitudes? According to our research, we can describe a positive attitude towards mother tongue – the family obviously having a strong influence on it, but it is also affected by the language of instruction in schools. We can also capture a different attitude, a defensive one regarding mother tongue, which is closely linked to language deficiency and the frustration caused by the lack of well-developed skills in this language. Attitudes towards the state language are rather influenced by the language

disadvantages, socialization experiences and different ways of learning the official language. In interviews, we can find strong stigmatisation and rejection referring to mixed language, especially outside the sphere of informal language use, the social norm being in both languages the appropriate, accurate and expressive language use.

Code-switching is one of the most dynamic aspects of language use, which is defined as a mixed use of two or more languages (registers) in the same situation. Different reasons lie behind code-switching, which meets various functions in the communication process. In a bilingual context, one encounters different varieties of code-switching and code-mixing. Although Hungarian vocabulary mixed with the Romanian one is much stigmatized it fulfils different roles. Code-switching, or even the option for code-mixing play extremely important social roles in group dynamics: they can serve as a mean of integration into one group or another, or as markers of separate identity, sharply distinguishing the speaker from a cultural/social group by building another symbolic universe.

Diglossia is an important concept in sociolinguistics, which refers to a situation in which two dialects or languages are used by a single language community. However, in linguistics, we can hardly find any reference to the social factors determining diglossia in a society. Studies often ignore the role of power as well as the dynamics of standard language use. The present paper emphasizes the sociological aspects of language use in certain spheres of social interaction, highlighting the role of the language of instruction in education, which is an important influencing factor of language attitudes and behaviour. Consequently, not only power and socio-economic factors influence the alternate use of languages but the speakers themselves by their choice of language which depends mainly on their language of instruction in education.

The third part of the paper deals with the relationship between **identity and bilingualism** in a minority situation. Linguistic studies have paid a special attention to the concept of identity (who we are, what group we belong to) nowadays. It is described by a modern manifold interpretation of identity, which is often in contrast with the definitions of previous ages (Kovács 2004). By defining identity as reflections on the self and social environment, we can conclude that identity is a synthesis of these subjective reflections, and language plays a crucial role in its construction (Tabouret-Keller 1996: 317). The connection between language and identity seems obvious, however, our insight into these reflections are quite limited. By the help of the interviews, life stories we can introduce some topics to reveal these reflections, inner dimensions.

We can identify three areas in this respect: language rights, language disadvantages, and language choices in education. These topics are linked to biographical episodes, memories, feelings, emotions, experiences, inherited opinions, and attitudes for and against the mother tongue or the official language. Identities constructed by these narratives can be classified into three main categories. They are distinguished not only by their subjective content, but by their utterances as well (different vocabulary and grammar is used). We can briefly state that individual and collective identity based on monolingualism or bilingualism needs deep impressions, emotions, and memories related to language practice. Generally, all experiences with mother tongue establish the construction of the identity by the cognitive, affective and emotional dimension of the mother tongue.

The most important results of our empirical research are formulated in the **Conclusions**. Throughout our study, we had a balanced approach towards highlighting the determinant role of socio-economic structure and involving the dynamism of language behaviour.

According to the classical interpretation, sociology is supposed to draw attention to social inequalities by describing social phenomena and rules (or by exposing the discourse of power), as well as it can make efforts to decrease them by respecting human dignity, and can re-evaluate social stigmatisations. Therefore, working on this thesis required a critical point of view, presenting also the viewpoint of the language speakers with all their rights and social responsibilities.

The main idea of the dissertation is defining the relationship between language of education and language practices in the labour market. It reveals a dilemma concerning the choice of language of education among the minority language speakers: which language would be the better choice for a child, leading towards a more successful self-assertion? We can conclude that the well-known argument for using the official language as language of instruction in education disguises the disadvantageous situation (including the educational system) of minorities, and it also hinders the dynamic language behaviour.

Bilingualism is practised in concrete situations. Therefore we cannot ignore any sociological or psychosocial aspects of bilingualism. Languages are used by people, who, as social beings, have different stories, subjective experiences and attitudes concerning languages. Their language behaviour roots in these collective and individual sources of knowledge.

In an economic context, language is often presented as a tool, meant to support self-assertion. According to our research, this can be defined as an oversimplified and one-sided view of the roles and functions of a language in society, because the interpretation is more complex and more differentiated. Also, the exclusive separation of different areas of language use (school, university, workplace, public places, etc.) is quite artificial – these areas of life are in natural interdependence.

The sociological perspective describing the relationship between language and society highlights the role of the language, its power of constructing a social reality. The power of constructing social realities involves not only the language of power. Every language in the world creates social realities if they are chosen and used.

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