

USE OF DIALECTS AND STANDARD LANGUAGE IN THE CENTRAL TERRITORY OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Introduction

The focal point of our contribution is the use of dialects and standard language in the Slovak Republic. The empirical part is based on the use of a standardized questionnaire (www.tarmes.lt; Kačiušienė, 2012, p. 130–131; Leskauskaitė, 2012, p.145–146; Aliūkaitė, Kačiušienė ir kt., 2013, p.64–69) which belongs to one of the possible means of sociological **research methods**.

The aim of the article is to provide the reader with information on the use of dialects and standard Slovak language in the central territory of the Slovak republic and to make an overview into the linguistic situation. The main aim was to deal with dialects and literary Slovak elements used in both written and oral communication.

The **research objectives** are based on the assumption that the majority of respondents use standard language in daily communication as well as during communication in schools or in public. We suppose that the use of dialects will be significantly higher in specifically designated areas or used at home during informal communication.

Therefore, it became one of the **research objectives** to discover whether the given statements could be confirmed or not. The second objective was to find out similarities and differences between the two age groups involved in the research regarding the use of dialects and standard language. Before we started analyzing representative sample made of the two age groups, it was necessary to deal in a more detailed way with the basic theoretical concepts used when talking about language and its varieties.

Different theories on language stratification

First of all, it must be explained that there are different theories on language stratification regarding literary language, standard language, substandard language and dialects. According to Bánik (1999, p. 113) *“the spoken form of language consists of two parts which are mutually related. We refer to two elements within national language specifically and these are literary language and local dialects.”* These are two contrasting elements located in the area of national language. This interpretation is derived from Horecký's studies.

On the other side, there are also those who view the language division in another way. For instance A. Jedlička views the previous dichotomic division of language as archaic (literary language-dialects) and that is why he stresses a *“trichotomic division as more modern including three elements: literary language and dialects and between them there is daily spoken language (Umgangssprache, razgovornyj jazyk)”* (Jedlička, 1979, in: Odaloš, 2012, p. 34).

In our point of view, the study of dialects and literary language is of crucial importance especially nowadays because of several changes which have had influence on language formation in the 21st century. Following Svobodová (2012, p. 13) the social situation in present times can be characterized by: *“a) Globalization and breaking of borders between national communities, b) Modernization and rapid development of IT and electronic age, c) The impact of mass media into all spheres of life”* (Svobodová, 2012, p. 13).

Therefore it is extremely important to pay attention to the study of dialects and standard language because they are an integral part of literary language and they can also be regarded as being the vital elements of national culture and national heritage and thus being a part of cultural and national identity of nation-states. It is these linguistic elements which make the language and its variants so dynamic and fluid.

As far as the literary Slovak language is concerned, we have to distinguish between literary Slovak used nationwide (official and written communication), standard Slovak (semi-official, spoken, written), interdialects - regional ones (semi-official spoken up to private spoken communication), and dialects (private and spoken communication; Svobodová, 2012, p. 16). Referring to the mentioned data, the language is a structured system as it is already known and the knowledge of dialects can only help us to understand our own place in society. It is exactly about the native dialect that we acquired in the process of socialization from childhood. Thus, it can also be described in terms of being an element which forms us substantially, and on the emotional level because it helps us integrate into society. According to Bánik (1999, p. 118), *“in order to reach self-identification regarding human personality or entity we need language with all its internally located elements because the language as well as each individual are both structured.”* Furthermore, he stresses that the evaluation of ethnic identity is based on an emotional basis which means that it is closely related to the attitudes of the subjects. As can be seen, self-perception of the individual is also related to language-ethnic attitudes which are tied to emotions. (Lasak-Gaidos, 2009, in: Bánik, 1999, p. 118).

Moreover, language and dialects are considered to be the integral parts of a nation's identity. Following Majtán (1999, p. 15) *“ethnicity and language are dialectically interrelated.”* Therefore, the cultivation of standard language and surviving dialects should be the number one aim of language and cultural policy of each state because it gives the nation added value and raises awareness and

interest of inhabitants in the language cultural heritage of the country which can also generate positive attitudes to the preservation of cultural heritage.

Another interesting opinion was expressed by Kačala (1999, p. 110) in his study stating that *“dialects are part of culture and also part of Self.”* A lot of people nowadays are quite prejudiced against dialects and users of dialects. They do not understand the added cultural value found in them. This is also connected with their lower knowledge of language and lower cultural awareness. Therefore, the information about dialects should play a vital role in primary and secondary schools and in linguistically- as well as culturally-oriented study programs. As for the Slovak language, *“the Slovak dialects are undoubtedly part of history of our national language and also a Slovak nation and thus, they can be regarded as being an explicit part of our national culture”* (Kačala, 1999, p. 111). Although literary language is considered to have more important status in comparison with dialects, they are still both a part of language diversity.

Research results

First group. Age and identity of respondents

The questionnaire was aimed at students from the Department of European Cultural Studies, Faculty of Humanities, at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica as well as at different professional groups in order to find out more about the given topic and analyze the use of standard language and dialects among the mentioned groups. Again, we can underline the fact that most of the students come from the areas with no specifically strong regional dialect. In Slovakia it is mostly the people from Záhorie (Western Slovakia) and Košice (Eastern Slovakia) who are difficult to understand when speaking in their local dialect. The students from Košice mostly tend to migrate to Bratislava, the capital city, in terms of education and work opportunities which makes significantly smaller percentage of Eastern Slovak inhabitants to be employed in the area of Banská Bystrica, preferring larger cities in order to earn more money and build a better career.

The following results have been obtained from the completed survey. The first research group included young people aged 20 and lower. This sample mostly consisted of those who are currently university students. The students who filled in the questionnaires were 100% of Slovak origin. Simply, they declared themselves to be officially Slovak. They did not state any other nationality or other state-appurtenance. However, the fact that only 40% of the respondents stated they felt Slovakian, is quite significant. This number signifies also how strong actually their Slovak identity is. Moreover, only 10% of the respondents stated that their girlfriend or boyfriend was Slovak or felt Slovakian. These reasons can be the results of the multiplicity of identities in the 21st century because individuals have more than one identity to choose from, which is also closely connected with the postmodern era and the era of globalization (mondialisation in France). It means that in comparison with the past, the instrumental base of identity is stronger than its primordial base (Darulová, Košťalová, 2010). It is not only the case of

young people who tend to choose such identities which they benefit from.

Nowadays, the hotly-debated topics are connected with identity and identity creation and multiethnic aspect of nation-states within the European Union. In this respect the support of cultural and national diversity resembling the motto of the EU 'United in Diversity' is promoted. Therefore, identity can also be described in terms of being a hybridized identity based on diversity, not uniformity or conformity. That is why probably so few university students felt Slovak. Only 40% responded they felt Slovak. In the period of financial as well as cultural crisis young people most often only with difficulties find the place which they could belong to (some will never find it) and fit in because of the destruction of traditional orders and the introduction of new values and ideas spreading from the West by media, especially new social media. There are too many values coalesced together in the 21st century and generation Y is the latest generation influenced by all the changes happening around the world.

The old and new values exist alongside each other. In some cases there is also competition evident between different elements stemming from the old and the new world, from the new and the old culture, the traditional and the modern. We live in a new virtual world also called the cyber space or digital age. *“Still more and more young people are spending their time in online environments.”* (Slatinská, 2012, p.4) All these processes together with the Americanization or westernization of culture influence our identity creation on one hand and on the other results in our togetherness or not to one specific nation. Language can be also regarded as being an integral part of cultural national identity.

The way we use the language is like a reflection of who we are or who we want to be. In some cases, certain variants of language can also be described in terms of being classy or not. Therefore, these facts were given special attention in our distributed questionnaire. It was interesting to find out if people prefer speaking mostly Standard Slovak or the local dialect. The situation in which they used either the first or the second was also emphasized and studied.

Use of language in a family

One question was related to the use of language in a family. As we supposed at the beginning, 90% of respondents answered that they used standard Slovak in communication. One of the reasons for such a high percentage can be that the research was undertaken at the Faculty of Humanities in Banská Bystrica whereas most of the students come from the middle or southern Slovakia. The fact that 10% of young people use English in communication was quite significant. We have to explain that the given students come from the Department of European Cultural Studies and most of the students choose British Cultural Studies, fulfilled through the medium of English, as a first compulsory subject because of family relatives or family preferences. Some students come from bilingual family backgrounds or their relatives live abroad in English speaking countries, which means

that they use English as a language of communication not only at school but also in the family environment where it is supported and set as a goal for future career enhancement by parents.

As for day to day use of language, we have to emphasize that 100% of respondents indicated that they thought, counted and communicated with animals in the standard Slovak language.

Knowledge of foreign languages

As far as knowledge of foreign languages is concerned we supposed that the majority of respondents would be able to read, write and speak in Slovak and also in other languages, especially English. Our hypothesis was confirmed by 100% of respondents who considered Slovak as their native tongue and 80% indicated that besides being able to communicate in Slovak, they were also able to communicate in other foreign languages (English, French, German or Russian), whereas more than 60% of respondents could communicate in English. Again, the preference, when talking about foreign languages, was attributed to English because of its international status and the support of English language teaching in Slovakia since pre-school age.

Going back to compulsory subjects taught at the Department of European Cultural Studies, the majority of students selected British Cultural Studies as the first major subject and the state exams are also taken in this language by the majority of students. Moreover, the ratio of students in this subject is the highest in comparison with other studies, namely French, German or Russian Cultural studies, in which the number of students is significantly smaller. It has been noted that since the European Cultural Studies establishment that the majority of students each year enroll in British Cultural Studies at first and then in another selected cultural studies according to the language level and competence in the given knowledge. This statement can be supported by other data acquired from the questionnaire indicating that 100% of students studied English at secondary school and 76% have been studying the language or certain subjects through the medium of the given language at the university. 100% of respondents stated that currently they belonged to the area of education and culture and they also carried out activities connected with education and culture.

Public communication

Regarding public communication, it must be emphasized that 95% of respondents stated that they use standard Slovak but 65% of them use English in their day-to-day communication. Simultaneously, in communication with neighbours, 95% of respondents use standard Slovak and 5% stated that they used English. In this respect, the majority of those using standard Slovak prevails which means that the respondents' neighbours are mostly of Slovak origin.

What can be considered as quite interesting are the results regarding the standard language or other language used when writing, reading or singing. 95% of respondents admitted reading and writing in Standard

Slovak. But only 25% answered that they sang songs in Slovak whereas 75% of respondents responded that they sang songs in the English language. The fact that so many respondents sang songs in English can be exemplified by the frequent occurrence of English songs on radio, on TV or during different cultural festivals. To sum up, young people, especially university students, tend to study such programs which are special for teaching all or certain subjects through the medium of English. The given percentage confirms that English is still the most preferred language in tertiary education.

If a person speaks a dialect he/she is...

The last data obtained by the research were connected with how people view the person speaking a very strong dialect or any regional variant of the language. The answers of respondents underline the fact that the students who participated in the research have the ability to think interculturally and respect diversity which is part of everyday life. This can be supported by the very fact that 75% of respondents were of the opinion that the person who speaks a dialect is influenced by the region he/she grew up in and respects the dialect and accent of the given area. Moreover, respondents agreed that using a dialect is not a sign of any backwardness or insufficient education or age (immaturity).

Respondents and answers of the second group

The research in the second group was carried out among respondents aged 30 to 62. 100% of respondents were of Slovak nationality and 85% of them felt Slovakian. Their partners were also described as being of Slovak nationality (85%) and 75% of them felt Slovakian. In comparison with the first group, a significantly higher percentage of respondents admitted being Slovakian and thus attributing special significance to the Slovak identity in both cases, in the case of respondents and their partners.

On the example of data obtained we assume that the respondents who belonged to the second group represent the generation of people born in 1950s, '60s, '70s and '80s who were brought up in different conditions and a different world than their successors, most of whom can be described as Generation Y. As it is already known, these two groups underwent or were born into different social and political regimes which also influenced, according to our point of view, their opinion on Slovak identity or belonging to the Slovak nation.

The next result is also closely associated with the historical period the second group respondents were brought up in. Here, in this respect we have to think of their childhood background in the given period. 95% indicated they used Slovak when communicating with family or family relatives and 5% stated they used Russian. The fact that few of them could speak Russian indicates that they remember Russian from school where the language was taught during the era of Socialism. In Slovakia the Socialist regime was overthrown in 1989 which is connected with the Velvet Revolution and the emergence of the new era of democracy, the era of new values and changes.

In comparison with the first group, the percentage of respondents speaking foreign language was proportionally higher in day-to-day communication. In the second group sample, 90% of people answered they think in the standard Slovak, 5% in dialect and only 5% in a foreign language. 100% of respondents counted in standard Slovak and 80% of them communicate in standard Slovak with animals. Here, again, the importance of standard Slovak should be emphasized in comparison with the small percentage of people using a dialect.

The abovementioned facts are supported by other answers with a significantly high percentage of those who indicated having the ability to speak other languages. As for the foreign languages, 40% admitted to having the ability to speak and understand Russian because of the Socialist regime and introduction of the Russian language as a compulsory subject during the Communist era. Slovak language played the role of a native tongue for 100% of respondents and the same percentage responded that they also understood Czech because of the close territorial vicinity and common past and culture. Here, we should point out the fact that the respondents from the first group sample did not indicate Czech as another foreign language probably because they do not consider it as a foreign language. But, today the knowledge of Czech by the Slovak people is quite a hotly debated topic as still more and more members of the young generation forget to understand key Czech words or expressions which might be a result of students' disinterest or apathy to reading and books in general. They are still more and more being influenced by the virtual world or cyber space in which the first group respondents spend most of their leisure time in contrast to second group respondents who have their families and other work tasks to do and also different priorities and career goals.

In terms of school graduation, 65% indicated graduating from a university and 35% having secondary education. All of them (100%) were taught Slovak at school, 50% wrote in Russian and few respondents indicated German, French and Spanish. According to this sample and percentages we can assume that it was mostly the Russian language which was predominantly spoken among the second group respondents aged 30 to 62.

In comparison with the first group, consisting of students who belonged to education and culture area, the second group respondents worked in business (35%), administration (25%), technology (25%), education (10%) and health care (5%). We can see that they stem from different employment areas making the research sample more varied and diverse.

As far as day to day communication is concerned, 85% of respondents speak standard Slovak and the rest use a foreign language especially when it comes to communication with foreigners.

When communicating with neighbors, 100% lead communication in standard Slovak and 80% uses standard Slovak during church meetings and gatherings. 95% of respondents write and speak standard Slovak. However, 70% sing songs in the Slovak language.

In comparison with the first group, the second group respondents expressed their opinion on dialect

users in terms of associating the person speaking a dialect with older age (50% of respondents) as well as with the fact that the given person respects the dialect of a given region (50% of respondents). The percentage shows that the people mostly thought of age and local identity as indicators for the use of a regional dialect.

Conclusion

1. To conclude, it is more or less evident that the majority of respondents use the standard language in all forms of communication. There was only a small percentage of those who prefer speaking dialects. However, what we consider as mostly important is the fact that the respondents consider the person using a dialect not as backward but as patriotic expressing his/her local/regional identity. The overall data shows that there truly is tendency to use the standard language in spoken or written communication and this type is preferred to using dialects which means that dialects are used mostly in specific areas delimited territorially. However, some of the dialectic works penetrate into the standard language. To sum up, the language is not stable but a dynamic and flexible system. It can accept new words and limit the archaic or historic ones used in the past. It is still changing and under constant influence of globalization, mass media and IT.
2. As we discovered, besides standard language and dialects, some authors divide language into more than two parts as mentioned above. There are also current studies on the topic of virtual language in the virtual environment because it has distinctively different features from other forms of language. What we also should not forget about is the increased influence of American culture and English language in general on national languages spoken within the EU. English is becoming an international language. This fact generates other questions concerning the possible lingua franca in the future and decline of a significant number of national languages. Here arises the question of cultivation and support of other foreign languages, not only English.
3. When mentioning virtual space and virtual language, both cases go hand in hand with making the language more economic than what can be fully visible on internet networks. The language is becoming more and more concise, the letters are supplanted by emoticons and other elements like the extreme use of punctuation marks are also quite frequent. These and other future questions which may arise concerning the new digital age will have to be studied in an interdisciplinary manner in order to obtain the most objective data.
4. Last but not least, it is one of the aims of the European Union to support language diversity, specifically, minority and regional languages which can be achieved only by understanding the term *diversity*. This umbrella term which can refer to diversity in terms of identities, languages, nations, attitudes, etc., should be taught to pupils from a very early age because it is the pre-school and elementary education which can have a positive or negative impact on later individual development. And secondary schools should also not be omitted. There were

several reforms made in Slovakia in order to include the topics like diversity, intercultural communication and multiculturalism into national curriculums at schools in specific subjects. The Faculty of Humanities opened a study program called European Cultural Studies whose main aim is to teach culture through the medium of language and language through the medium of culture, stressing not only the four main cultures taught as compulsory subjects (British, French, German and Russian Cultural Studies) but also Slovak cultural studies (based on national symbols, development of language, music and visual arts) because it is through our own culture that we can understand other cultures, which is also one of the components of leading a successful intercultural dialogue.

5. Finally, we will use the quote by Bitušíková (2007, p. 19) relating to diversity: “*Diversity increases the arsenal of knowledge, skills and competences of communities and thus it helps enhance the efficiency of work and economic prosperity.*” This is also the case of dialects and standard language. In order to cultivate them, we have to first admit their importance and integrity in our contemporary multicultural and multilingual society.

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Summary

The aim of the article is to provide the reader with information about the use of dialects and standard Slovak language in the central territory of the Slovak republic and to make an overview into the linguistic situation. The main aim was to deal with dialects and literary Slovak elements used in both written and oral communication. The empirical part is based on using a standardized questionnaire which belongs to one of the possible means of sociological research methods. The questionnaire was aimed at students from the Department of European Cultural Studies, Faculty of Humanities, at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica and at a population of older people. The first research group included young people aged 20 years and lower. The research in the second group was carried out among respondents aged 30 to 62. All respondents who filled in the questionnaires were 100% of Slovak origin.

To conclude, it is more or less evident that the majority of respondents use standard language in all forms of communication. There was only a small percentage of those who prefer speaking dialects. However, what we consider as mostly important is the fact that the respondents consider the person using a dialect not as backward but as patriotic expressing his/her local/regional identity. The overall data shows that there truly is a tendency to use standard language in spoken or written communication and this type is preferred to using dialects which means that dialects are used mostly in specific areas delimited territorially.

Keywords: Slovak language, sociological research, dialects, standard language, identity.

TARMIŲ IR BENDRINĖS KALBOS VARTOJIMAS CENTRINĖJE SLOVAKIJOS DALYJE

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Santrauka

Šio straipsnio tikslas – remiantis lietuvių dialektologų sudaryta tarmių ir bendrinės kalbos vartosenos tyrimo anketa iširti kalbinę situaciją Slovakijoje. Tyrimui naudoti anketos klausimai, daugiausia susiję su gimtosios tarmės vartojimu įvairiose gyvenimiškose situacijose, siekiant išsiaiškinti, kokia yra bendravimo kalba šeimoje, viešumoje, su kaimynais, kaip yra tinkama kalbėti, rašyti, dainuoti, su kokiomis savybėmis siejamas tarmiškai kalbantis žmogus, ir pan. Į sociologinės apklausos klausimus atsakė po 60 dviejų kartų atstovų, gyvenančių arba studijuojančių centrinėje Slovakijoje, Banska Bistricos mieste. Jaunesniosios kartos atstovų amžiaus vidurkis – maždaug 20 metų, visi jie buvo Matejaus Belo universiteto Europos kultūrų studijų studentai. Vyresniosios kartos atstovų amžiaus vidurkis – 46 metai. Visi respondentai slovakai.

Remiantis tyrimo rezultatais galima daryti išvadą, kad didžioji dalis abiejų kartų respondentų slovakų dažniausiose gyvenimiškose situacijose vartoja bendrinę slovakų kalbą. Iš vyresniosios kartos respondentų atsakymų matyti, kad maždaug pusė jų tarmiškai kalbantį žmogų sieja su vyresniu amžiumi arba jį traktuoja kaip patriotiškai nusiteikusį asmenį. Atliktas tyrimas parodė, kad bent jau centrinėje Slovakijos dalyje, kurios tarmė ir yra tapusi slovakų bendrinės kalbos pagrindu, krašto atstovų nuomone, ne tarmė, bet bendrinė kalba šiais laikais pasirenkama kaip pagrindinis ir rašytinės, ir šnekamosios kalbos variantas, o tarminiai ypatumai ir jos vartoseną lieka tik labai ribotam dažnesnių gyvenimiškų situacijų skaičiui.

Prasminiai žodžiai: slovakų kalba, sociolingvistinis tyrimas, dialektas, bendrinė kalba, identitetas.

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