

Cultural Implications of Attitudes and Evaluative Reactions Toward Dialect Variation in Croatian Youth

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ABSTRACT

As a consequence of political changes and war, during the last decade the migration processes have been intensified and incomers from other parts of Croatia and neighbouring countries have moved to the town of Zagreb and have changed it considerably. These demographic changes have also had an influence on the language used in the area and on language attitudes towards the Standard Croatian, local vernacular and other dialectal varieties. The aim of this study is to explore the awareness that speakers, Croatian adolescents resident in Zagreb, have of their own language variety and their attitudes toward different other dialect varieties. The data were collected using the speech guise method and a questionnaire in order to assess both conscious and unconscious components of these linguistic evaluations. The results obtained once again confirmed the expected prestige of the Standard variety in terms of its speaker's alleged highest competence, but also its low standing as far as social attractiveness is concerned. Non-standard local varieties showed the exactly opposite trend, although the evaluation of native and immigrant adolescents differed considerably.

Key words: language attitudes, matched-guise test, stereotypes, adolescents

Introduction

In a multidialectal context, the dialect is often considered to be the most important dimension of social identity and may represent an indicator of group categorization (*us* vs. *them*). In this way, the values attributed to language/dialect can be used to promote identity, contrast, affilia-

tion, power or solidarity and provide a means of establishing the relationship between language and cultural identity.

An *attitude* is a favorable or an unfavorable evaluative reaction toward someone or something exhibited in one's beliefs, feelings or intended behavior. One

of the possible reasons for any a priori evaluation lies in *stereotyping*, i.e. beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people based on overgeneralization and therefore often inaccurate and resistant to new information. Although there are positive and accurate stereotypes, it is the negative and inaccurate ones that lead to discrimination and therefore lie in the focus of socio-psychological and sociolinguistic research^{1–3}.

Although stereotypes in Croatia are not formed strictly along dialectal divisions but rather on regional basis, a person's speech often provides a clue to his/her approximate origin at least, which then becomes the trigger for group categorization and the expression of stereotypes. A dialectal map of Croatia is dominated by three main dialects: *Štokavian*, which is the basis of the Croatian Standard language, is predominantly spoken in the eastern parts of the country, *Kajkavian* in the northwestern continental Croatia and *Čakavian* in Istria and along the Dalmatian coast. This study will, however, as far as the sample is concerned be limited to the Zagreb area only.

Zagreb is a town situated in the northwestern and originally Kajkavian part of the country. It has grown into the capital of a new country in the past twelve years and has thus become a political, cultural and educational center of Croatia, the headquarters of the official national media and consequently the »center« for the promotion of the Croatian Standard in a relatively short period of time. Simultaneously, Zagreb has undergone significant demographic changes by becoming the target for migrants from the war-afflicted regions of Croatia and other neighboring countries, primarily Bosnia and Herzegovina. These political and demographic changes have greatly affected the linguistic situation in Zagreb and the attitudes of its inhabitants towards the Standard, the two traditional Zagreb ver-

naculars (Štokavian and Kajkavian) and other language varieties that now have a greater share in the overall linguistic picture of the city than they used to have.

In Croatia, unfortunately, the type of sociolinguistic research which would inquire into the existing stereotypes towards different linguistic varieties was neglected for a long time in favor of normativism and prescriptivism, which on the one hand regarded dialects as a necessary evil poisoning the perfection of the Standard by dialectalisms, and on the other deemed them unauthentic, plagued by standardization and therefore not even suitable for traditional dialectological research. At the same time their actual role in everyday communication on various levels of formality as well as their role as unprecedented identity markers was disregarded. This paradox situation led to confusion and uncertainty on the part of Croatian speakers as to what kind of attitude towards the Standard on the one hand, and their native dialect (even if not historically pure) on the other hand, is desirable and should be assumed^{4,5}. However, in the last fifteen years there were some attempts to discover the actual perception of dialect varieties as opposed to the Standard.^{6,7} In two studies of this kind a neat division between private and public spheres in view of appropriate language use was evident. Jakovčević pointed out that the problem with the results was the fact that they might have reflected what students thought they should think instead of how they themselves actually perceived the dialects⁶. Mildner, however, observed higher appreciation of dialectal variants, but the Standard remained to be perceived as most appropriate for official use.⁷ Because a certain pattern in language perception among Croatian students is discernable in both studies, deeper investigation using larger samples seems inevitable to find out how people actually feel about the Standard

as opposed to their native dialects, imposed artificiality of the Standard, and an unjust treatment of Kajkavian and Čakavian speakers as opposed to Štokavian ones because of their presumed linguistic inferiority. Having this in mind, this paper will discuss the study in which it was attempted to examine some of these problems from a slightly different angle.

Aim of the Study

The primary goal of this study was to find out to what extent language attitudes reflect the perceived boundaries between existing regional and ethnic groups among Zagreb adolescents, or more specifically:

- to examine the general attitude towards speakers of nine language variants and the degree of stereotyping in the evaluation of each speaker along the dimensions of social attractiveness, competence and social power/ status;
- to find out the potential divergence in the perception and assessment of the examined varieties between host and immigrant adolescents in Zagreb;
- to investigate the potential prestige of the two Zagreb vernaculars.

Our interest was also to discover to what extent our results would correspond to the results obtained by Jakovčević (1988) and Mildner (1998)^{6,7}. Although their samples and methodologies differed significantly from the ones employed in this study, their findings were still valuable insofar as their observations along with the results from other similar sociolinguistic studies served as the basis for advancing the hypothesis that the standard variety would score highest in competence, while non-standard local varieties would be perceived as more pleasant and likeable on expressive dimensions of social attractiveness^{8–12}.

Methods and Sample

A version of a matched-guise test adapted to fit the specifics of the Croatian linguistic situation was used in this study. Matched-guise technique, devised by Lambert^{13,14}, although criticized for its alleged artificiality, has eventually proved to be the most reliable test for detecting language attitudes and one of the most useful means for the expression of social stereotypes formed on the bases of one's speech^{2,3}. Its success lies in its ability to elicit the listeners' attitudes towards a group of speakers without them being actually aware of it. It usually consists of listening to a few recordings produced in different language varieties.

For purposes of our study we used two voices (one female and one male) that alternately read the text of a message left to a friend on an answering machine in variants of Štokavian (Standard, Zagreb Štokavian, Bosnian, Serbian, Janjevo dialect), Kajkavian (Zagreb urban and rural Kajkavian) and Čakavian (urban and rural). The contents of the message were kept as neutral as possible considering the fact that the chosen text was to contain various potentially dialectally marked linguistic features. After listening to each recording, students were asked to fill out a questionnaire evaluating the speaker of each variant. The questionnaire consisted of a few questions regarding the basic demographic data of a respondent and a set of 13 different qualities, which by the means of a subsequently conducted factor analysis were grouped into three dimensions, i.e. social attractiveness (just and honest, warm and kind, nice and friendly, witty and cheerful, pleasant and sophisticated), competence (responsible and trustworthy, intelligent and capable, ambitious and hard-working, self-confident and decisive), and status (well-educated, successful, well-off, having a good job) and were thus analyzed.

A sample consisted of 240 high-school students. The ratio of male and female participants was 45% to 55% and the average age of the participants was 16.4 years. The sample was randomly drawn from five high schools markedly different in status (from prestige private and public classical gymnasiums to timber processing school). 85% of the respondents were born in Zagreb, 7% in other parts of Croatia and 8% outside of Croatia, mostly in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As far as the parents' origin is concerned, only one third of the respondents were originally from Zagreb, i.e. had both parents born in Zagreb, whereas two thirds had at least one parent born elsewhere.

Results

Taking into consideration the neat division of the evaluated qualities along the dimensions of social attractiveness, competence and status, as well as the composition of the sample, the results will be

presented as follows: after the initial analysis of the evaluation of the speakers along the three dimensions by all respondents, the evaluation of each dimension will be analyzed in terms of the differences between: 1) students born in Zagreb and the first-generation immigrant students (i.e. by respondents' birthplace); and 2) students whose parents are born in Zagreb and the second-generation immigrant students (i.e. by respondents' parental origin).

The most conspicuous thing in the analysis of the total sample (Figure 1) along the three dimensions is the extreme variance found in the rating of rural Kajkavian. Whereas its speaker was rated far above the average for social attractiveness, he was also perceived as having the lowest status of all the speakers. Kajkavian is a local rural vernacular spoken in the surroundings of Zagreb and closely related to urban Kajkavian, which is why its extremely high score in the social attractiveness domain is not surpris-

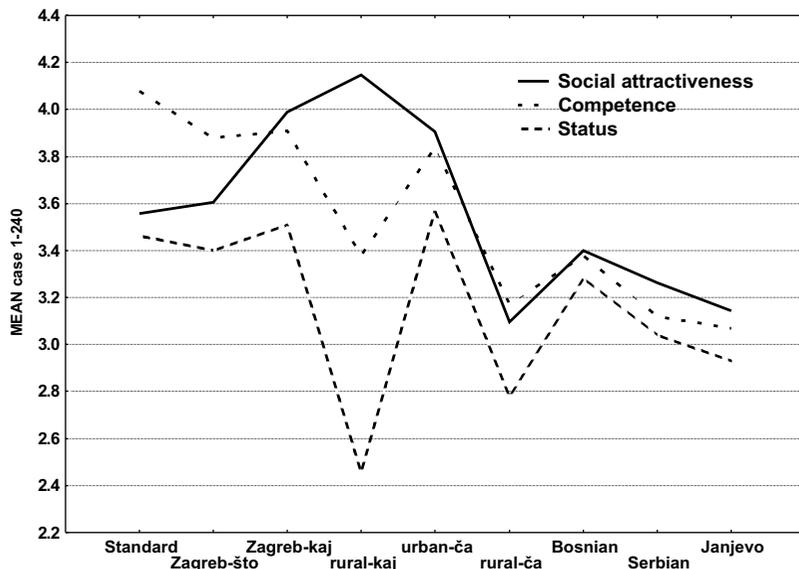


Fig. 1. Attitudes towards speakers along three dimensions by all respondents.

ing and is in accordance with the results from similar studies. The fact that the Standard speaker was rated highest on competence and relatively low on social attractiveness was also expected. The relation between the two Zagreb vernaculars is interesting in that Štokavian speech, which is closer to the Croatian Standard, was evaluated relatively high on competence and significantly lower on social attractiveness, while the traditionally more ingrained Kajkavian speech was rated far better for social attractiveness and even slightly better for status than Zagreb Štokavian. The overall means in the evaluation of the thirteen traits show that the Zagreb Kajkavian has the highest prestige. It is followed by Split Čakavian, Standard and Zagreb Štokavian. The three originally non-Croatian varieties, i.e. Bosnian, Serbian and Janjevo dialect, were rated relatively low following the principle of familiarity so that Bosnian was rated higher than Serbian, and Serbian higher than Janjevo dialect, which

coincides with geographical and social distance demonstrated towards the speakers of these varieties. The problem with Janjevo dialect lies in the fact that, although it is spoken in Zagreb, because of its low prestige its speakers are ashamed of speaking it outside their enclave, which in turn enhances ignorance and stigmatization by the rest of Zagreb population. An extremely low rating of rural Čakavian in all three basic dimensions is most likely due to a slightly artificial rendering of that variety accompanied by the lack of familiarity of Zagreb students with these dialects, which caused a low comprehension and consequently overall low ratings of that speaker.

In the evaluation of *social attractiveness* (Figure 2) the students born in Zagreb showed high preference for Kajkavian dialect, favoring rural Kajkavian over its urban counterpart. They demonstrated relatively high appreciation of urban Čakavian, but rated Zagreb Štokavian only somewhat better than the

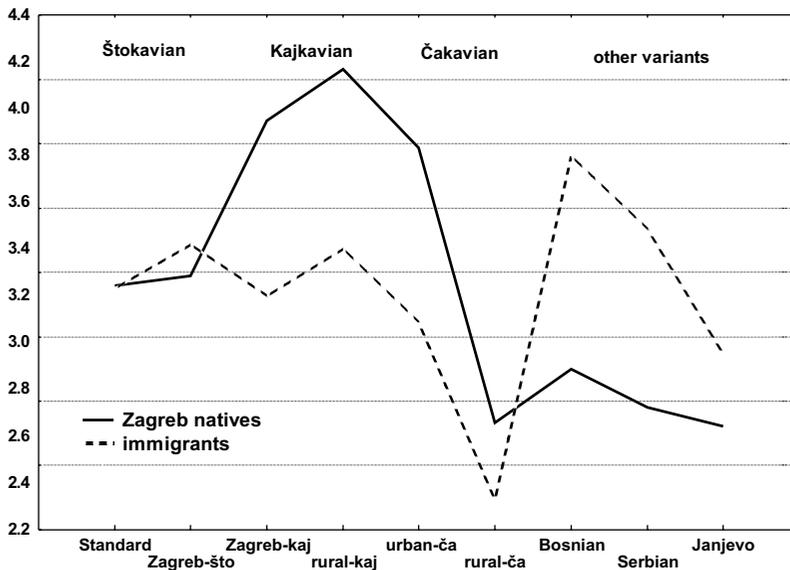


Fig. 2. Evaluation of social attractiveness by respondents' birthplace.

Standard. This group rated Bosnian, Serbian and Janjevo speakers far below the average, although the rural Čakavian speaker was rated worst of all most likely due to the reasons mentioned above. An exactly opposite trend is visible in the evaluation of the speakers by the first generation immigrant students. According to them, Bosnian speaker demonstrated the highest degree of social attractiveness and was followed by the Serbian speaker. The fact that the majority of non-Zagreb students come from Bosnia and Herzegovina can explain their high ratings of Bosnian they are well familiar with, but can less so account for the high ratings they awarded to the Serbian and Janjevo speakers. The explanation for this should probably be looked for in these students' higher degree of linguistic tolerance, as they themselves had had to pass a period of linguistic accommodation once they had moved to Zagreb. The fact that Zagreb Štokavian is rated better by non-Zagreb students is probably due to its vicinity to non-Croatian variants which

are also based on Štokavian and the Standard, which generally enjoys a higher prestige in non-Zagreb population.

A different trend to the one described above can be observed in the rating of students once the sample is divided by parental origin (Figure 3). The evaluation of the students whose parents are born in Zagreb and the second-generation immigrant students differed in that the latter group showed higher tolerance for all Croatian and non-Croatian variants except rural Čakavian one, and compared to the first-generation immigrants they rated even northern Croatian variants significantly better.

Zagreb-born students and the first-generation immigrants seemed to be more balanced in the evaluation of *competence* (Figure 4) and unanimously regarded the Standard speaker as the most competent of all. Zagreb-born students again expressed very high confidence in the competence of Zagreb Kajkavian and Split Čakavian speakers, and would only then trust Zagreb Štokavian speaker, but in

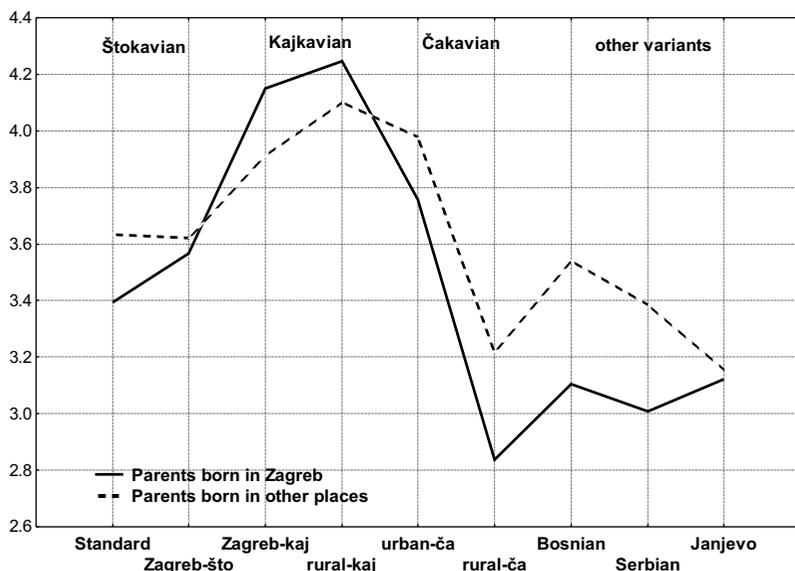


Fig. 3. Evaluation of social attractiveness by respondents' parental origin.

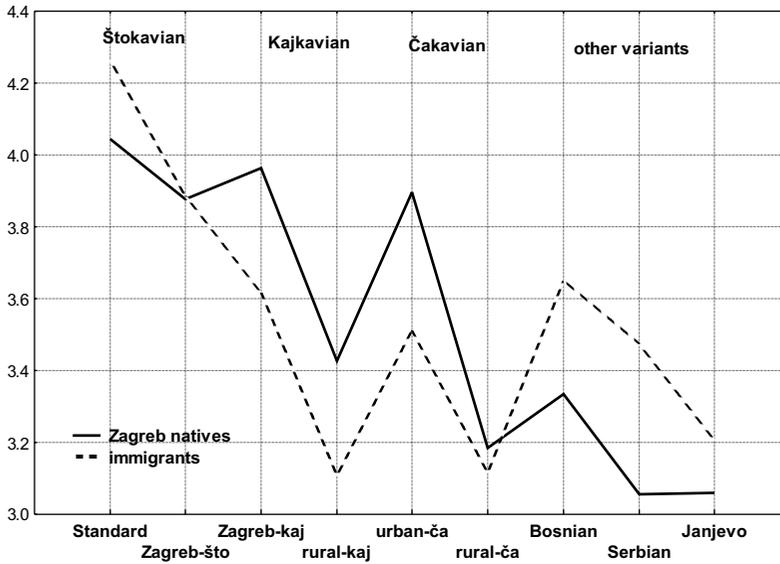


Fig. 4. Evaluation of competence by respondents' birthplace.

this case both groups placed the rural and non-Croatian speakers in the low end of the scale. In the analysis of competence by parental origin, the two groups, i.e.

those whose parents are born in Zagreb and the second-generation immigrant students, did not diverge much (Figure 5) as far as the evaluation trend is con-

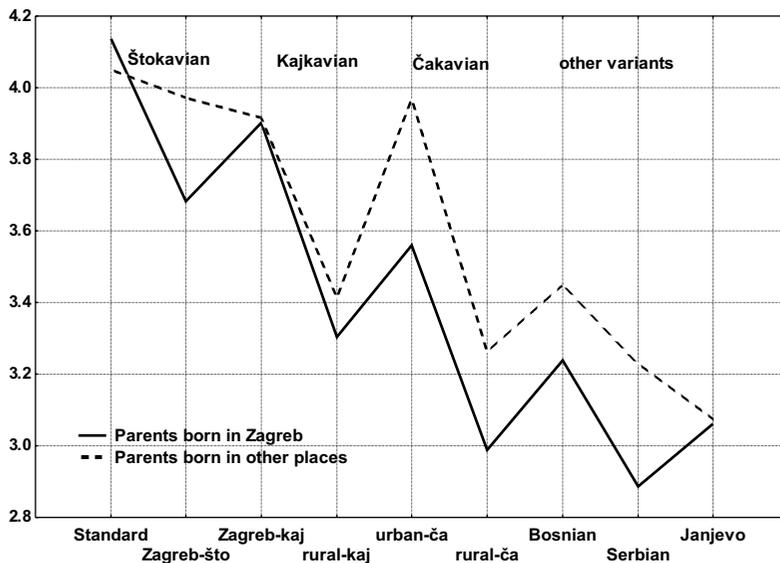


Fig. 5. Evaluation of competence by respondents' parental origin.

cerned, although the difference in the evaluation of single variants is significant. The non-Zagreb respondents were generally more positive in evaluating competence of all speakers except the Standard one, even though the difference is only slight in this case and is far more obvious in their higher appreciation of Zagreb Štokavian speaker's competence compared to the students whose parents are born in Zagreb. An interesting fact deriving from the comparison of Figures 4 and 5 is that, although the first-generation immigrant students still seem to be reluctant in the acceptance of Zagreb regional varieties and other urban vernaculars, the second-generation immigrant students' melting into the social environment is visible from their unexpectedly high rating of Zagreb and Kajkavian variants.

Although the two graphs referring to the evaluation of the speakers' status (Figure 6 and Figure 7) are not identical, the point of some concern is the fact that in

both cases all the rural dialects (Kajkavian, Čakavian and Janjevo) remain in the bottom end of the graph, while the urban dialects, with varying scores, received relatively high rating regardless of the respondents' origin. The position of Serbian is specific in that its speaker was rated below average by Zagreb students (by birthplace and parental origin) and above average by the two groups of non-Zagreb students (by birthplace and origin of parents).

In this sense the results of our research coincide with the results of a broad study conducted by the Institute for Anthropological Research on the acculturation process of immigrant adolescents in Croatia and its psychosocial consequences¹⁵. In that research, social distance was used as the primary means for measuring social tolerance, prejudices and ethnic stereotypes¹⁶. It is defined as a continuum of various levels of intimacy of social relations in general. One end of this continuum is represented with uli-

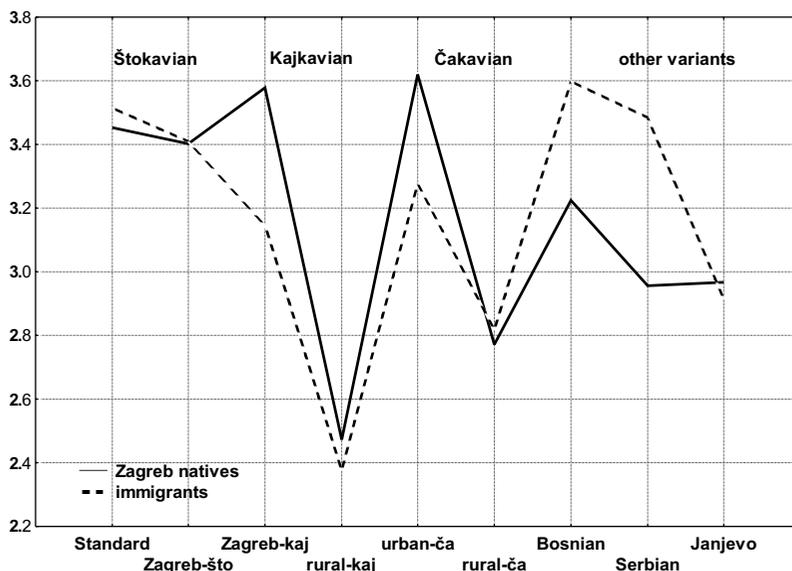


Fig. 6. Evaluation of social status by respondents' birthplace.

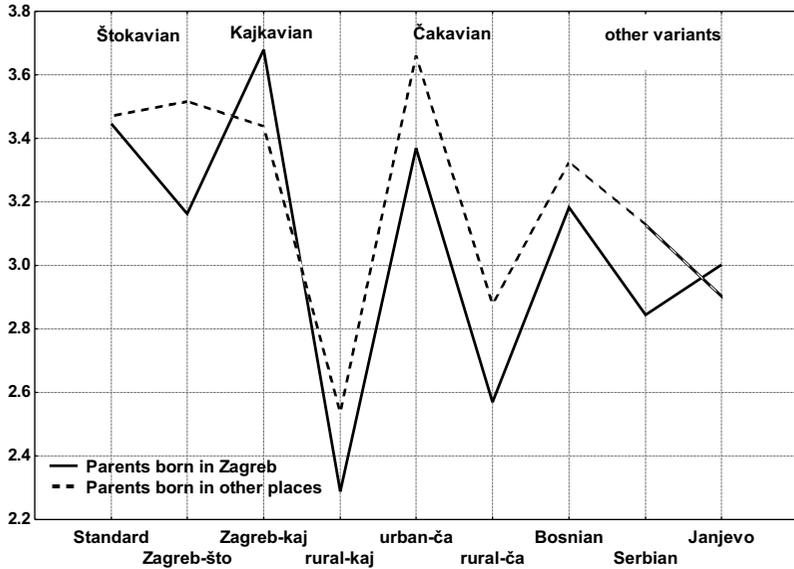


Fig. 7. Evaluation of social status by respondents' parental origin.

mately close and intimate contacts, the middle indicates indifferent feelings, while the other end of the continuum implies active intolerance and rejection. The

results of the measurement of social distance indicate high social distance of Croatian adolescents toward other ethnic groups (Figure 8). The levels of accep-

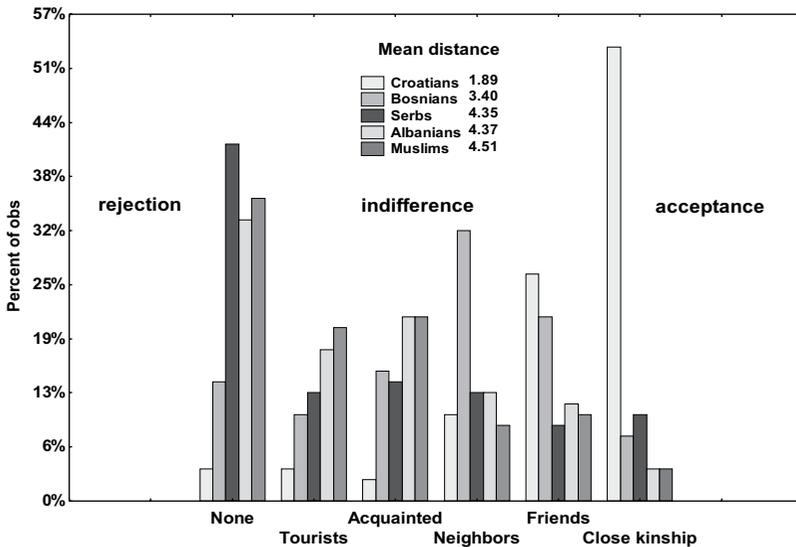


Fig. 8. Social distance of Croatian adolescents toward some ethnic groups.

tance/rejection clearly coincide with the presented attitudes toward linguistic variants spoken by these groups. This comparison further proves that the attitudes toward spoken language are perceptually colored by ethnic stereotypes and simplified and rigid understanding of the characteristics of other ethnic groups.

Conclusion

Various studies have shown that dominated (minority) groups accept the superiority of dominant (majority) groups on competence/ability dimensions, or on status, power and resources, but they view themselves as superior in the expressive or sociability dimensions¹⁷. With regard to the analyzed results, we have concluded that our hypothesis regarding the Standard's absolute superiority in competence and significantly lower standing in social attractiveness was confirmed. Accordingly, local dialects' rating has shown the expected opposite trend, which is particularly visible in the rating of local rural dialects (rural Kajkavian in our case). Local urban dialects (i.e. Zagreb Kajkavian and urban Čakavian) resulted the prestigious language variants. A noticeable difference in the perception of native and non-native students has been observed in that the latter group showed significantly higher appreciation of the Standard. The most striking differences have been found in the evaluation of non-Croatian variants (especially Bosnian and to a lesser extent Serbian), whose speak-

ers seem to be regarded as much more pleasant and likeable by the immigrants than by the host adolescent population. The dividing line between Zagreb and non-Zagreb students is also visible in the perception of the two Zagreb vernaculars whereby natives, although not particularly familiar with Zagreb Kajkavian, intuitively seem to show very high appreciation of that variety over its Štokavian counterpart. Zagreb Štokavian, on the other hand, fairs better among immigrants to Zagreb, which is probably due to its perceived vicinity to Standard Croatian. Additionally, it has been proved once again that measuring language attitudes can be a powerful means of measuring social distance that potentially leads to discrimination of speakers of dominated (minority) groups.

This study was meant to provide only an indication of the present state of affairs in the domain of language attitudes among Zagreb adolescents. A further, more elaborated investigation into the causes of language-based stereotyping is needed in order to discover an effective means that could help to eradicate the negative consequences enhanced by social categorization based on one's speech.

Acknowledgements

The research was funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology of the Republic of Croatia under grant 0196002 for the project »Population structure of Croatia – Sociocultural approach«.

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KULTURNE IMPLIKACIJE STAVOVA MLADIH U HRVATSKOJ PREMA DIJALEKTALNIM VARIJANTAMA I NJIHOVOG VREDNOVANJA

SAŽETAK

Pojačane migracije tijekom posljednjeg desetljeća rezultirale su značajnijim doseljavanjem stanovništva iz drugih dijelova Hrvatske i susjednih zemalja u Zagreb. Te su demografske promjene uvelike utjecale na jezik ovog područja te na stavove prema standardu, lokalnom govoru i drugim dijalektima. Cilj je ovog istraživanja bilo ispitivanje jezične svijesti hrvatskih adolescenata s prebivalištem u Zagrebu o vlastitom govoru te njihovih stavova prema drugim jezičnim varijantama. Podaci su prikupljeni indirektnom metodom radi ispitivanja svjesnih i nesvjesnih komponenti prisutnih u jezičnom vrednovanju. Dobiveni rezultati su potvrdili očekivani prestiž standardne varijante u smislu pripisivanja najviše intelektualne sposobnosti njenom govorniku, ali i njenog niskog vrednovanja u smislu društvene privlačnosti. Pri vrednovanju nestandardnih lokalnih varijanti trend je bio upravo suprotan, iako se vrednovanje pojedinih varijanti domaćih i doseljenih adolescenata značajno razlikovalo.