

## IDENTITY, LANGUAGE AND DEVELOPMENT

### RESEARCH ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHNICITY AND LANGUAGE ON THE EXAMPLE OF CROATIAN NATIONAL MINORITY IN HUNGARY

#### SUMMARY

Today almost all states of the international community have minority problems.

Technological transformation has established selective developmental integration as the dominant form of international relations and world development. Selective integration is founded on the belief that inequality, disharmony and disparity are the basic incentives of development. Communities that cannot selectively integrate into global developmental processes - like minority communities throughout the world - remain marginalized and are in practice excluded from the development process. They are confined to the dynamics of internal development, which is so out of harmony with dominant global dynamics that they are condemned to stagnation or deterioration.

The prospects of ethnic or national minorities depend most of all on overall communication processes in the society they belong to (educational system, central cultural institutions, the mass media). These processes help or hinder the selective integration of a minority into the prevailing social system.

The last decades of the twentieth century have witnessed a strong revival of ethnic movements worldwide. This phenomenon has a social (collective) and individual level, both of which are conditioned by so-called global factors either in a wider or a more limited context (regional, European, world). There are many reasons for ethnic revival, and the special features of every community decide which of a chain of factors are more or less important.

In former socialist countries of East Europe ethnicity was regarded as unimportant. It was considered that as classes disappear so, too, will ethnic differences, and a socialist nation will emerge cleansed of both the local and the individual. In western countries it was considered that the rise of the modern nation state would eliminate the need for ethnic identity and grouping on an ethnic basis.

What happened, however, was that in socialist countries nationalism and ethnic conflict appeared as a reaction and opposition to totalitarianism, and in the function of solving internal tensions. Socialism has no mechanisms for peacefully resolving internal tension but uses pressure instead. As the institutions of central power weakened, nationalism flared.

Similarly, the strengthening of the state and the spread of capitalism generates and deepens ethnic conflict. Ethnic, political and economic relations are interconnected and every specific

instance of ethnic revival directly results from a specific form of economic and political development.

In modern societies processes of nationalism run parallel with those of democracy. In Europe both separatism and integration are present, and whereas the basic political entity, the state, attempts to create and preserve large and strong forms, various social communities within the state work to create conditions that will allow them to recognize and prove themselves as ethnic, religious and/or cultural minorities. This imposes the crucial questions of whether processes of separatism and integration are compatible and what are their final reaches? And: can a minority community be protected without destabilizing the state the minority lives in? In the search for answers to these questions emerging ethnic revival must be understood (among other things) as a form of resistance to integration processes. In other words, the development of new forms of ethnicity, which are more situational, more strategic and more formally organized, is an answer to the key features of the new type of society being built in the last decade of the twentieth century.

Interest in and concern with ethnic problems in modern social sciences indicate that communities interrelate through a hierarchy of power and that they must define the foundations of their common life and the boundaries between them.

Ethnic identity is one of the factors of organized-communal life in a community. It includes many elements but basically rests on a feeling of belonging and loyalty to a certain community (subjective dimension). At the same time it implies a variety of cultural elements representing the individual expression of cultural patterns by community members (objective dimension).

Language is one of the elements of culture and one of the factors of ethnic identity. Since (all) these categories vary, changes in them may be reflected in the sphere of language and speech behaviour. When (at least) two peoples with different cultures and languages live in the same geographic area, the phenomenon of bilingualism appears. In our specific case bilingualism is asymmetrical resulting from the interaction of two unequal partners, the minority (Croatian) and majority (Hungarian) community. Asymmetrical bilingualism implies aggressiveness on the majority side and intolerance and undemocracy in mutual relations.

Our research confirmed the hypothesis that language and ethnic identity are linked, expressed as follows: the mother tongue, as one of the factors of ethnic identity, is essential for the identity of a person, but that ethnic identity need not necessarily change if the person in question adopts some other language, usually the language of the dominant majority in the country.

If a person adopts the majority language and loses his own (or loses it to the extent that we talk about an asymmetrically bilingual person), his mother tongue remains part of his ethnic identity through his attitude towards it, including the status the mother tongue has in every individual's own value structure.

Our research established that the respondents - Croats in Hungary - have a high level of ethnic identity.



We also established the presence of manifold identity (so called: nested identity): state-Hungarian, national-Croatian and national-regional, where the relationship between national Croatian and national regional is complementary. A sense of togetherness with the mother country Croatia is also felt.

We drew the following conclusions from the results of empirical research among Croats in Hungary:

a) the questionnaire (random sample) showed:

- correlation between language and ethnic (self)identification,
- early and asymmetrical bilingualism in favour of Hungarian and to the disadvantage of Croatian, and in connection with this the predominance of Hungarian,
- Croatian is still used in the family (sphere of private communication) and in informal social interaction (sphere of public communication),
- unstable bilingualism (threatened domain in which Croatian is used - the family),
- predominance of manifestative over communicative functions of the Croatian language,
- positive attitudes towards the mother tongue,
- desire for the emancipation of local dialects (with the purpose of preserving language and ethnic identity) combined with the demand for a complementary, not conflicting, relationship between dialect and standard language.

A comparison of respondent age with answers about facts and attitudes to language indicates generational patterns in language use. Older generations speak the mother tongue more frequently and know it better, whereas younger people know less Croatian and use it less frequently.

When education was compared with attitudes and facts about the mother tongue, correlation was observed in knowledge of both languages. More educated respondents know both languages better, and they learned the mother tongue at an earlier age than less educated persons. Also, respondents with a higher education prefer greater language tolerance and the development of the culture of bilingualism.

Attitudes of respondents from ethnically homogeneous marriages differ from those from ethnically mixed families. In ethnically homogeneous families both languages are insisted on more, and both languages are learned earlier and better. Those respondents favour complete cultural bilingualism.

There was correlation between the degree of ethnic identity and attitudes and facts concerning the mother tongue. Respondents with strong feelings of ethnic identity learned the mother tongue earlier, usually in their parental homes, knew it better and used it more often than respondents with weaker feelings of ethnic identity.

All respondents have a positive attitude towards the mother tongue.

b) an analysis of selected titles from the minority press showed that educated Croats in Hungary have a positive attitude towards the Croatian language (journalists, teachers, educators, writers, poets

and the like). They consider the mother tongue one of the most important factors of ethnic identity, and its use and development through use an essential precondition for preserving that identity and developing it further.

Conscious of negative trends in the use of the Croatian language (and their consequences, like for example the predominance of the manifestative over the communicative function of the language, stagnation in its development and so on), they encourage raising its quality in its remaining spheres of use, and at the same time encouraging its use in all spheres of social interaction to achieve absolute cultural bilingualism.

They all resolutely agree that loss of language leads to loss of ethnic identity (this does not correspond with our results).

Considering the existing language situation among respondents, and the relationship between feelings of ethnic identity and language situation, we conclude that the correlating factors are dimensions of ethnic identity (language domination and language identification on two levels of social interaction: formal and informal). We can talk about symbolic language-ethnic identity because, as we saw, some factors correlate with ethnic identity and make up its dimensions, but primarily on the symbolic level and in the manifestative function.

A variety of factors (demographic, political, institutional, economic, social) influenced the degree to which ethnic identity has been preserved and the form it takes among the respondents -

- members of the Croatian ethnic minority in Hungary. Identity is formed from the continual interaction of these factors.

This research, carried out on the theoretical and empirical level, shows that in spite of numerous and diverse factors, like:

- many centuries of physical separation from the mother nation;
- continuous life alongside a dominant majority (which implies, among other things, drastic actions of the ruling majority to achieve total political and economic power and predominance through, for example, planned assimilation; Hungary was a typical example of this in the past);
- the process of losing their own culture, its replacement by foreign elements and adopting such elements (e.g. process of replacing the mother tongue by a non-mother tongue);

Croats in Hungary have objectively and subjectively retained their ethnic identity - as Croatian identity - since the time when they moved into the region they today inhabit.

From the time of their arrival until the present members of the Croatian minority in Hungary passed through a process of development that made them part of the system of social, political and economic values imposed by the dominant majority. In that process many features of their original culture were reshaped (some disappeared) so that their identity continued to be profiled by the remaining Croatian cultural elements and by external influence.

Although the so-called objective culture content changed as ethnic and cultural attributes were lost one by one, dress among the first, language among the last, inner dynamics gave rise to a new body of ethnic-cultural characteristics selected by the members of the group and considered their own. What remained as a constant was a feeling



of belonging and an awareness of that feeling, which stemmed most directly from interaction with members of their own and other groups.

The feeling of belonging and the awareness about a common fate gained momentous importance because they concern the past, the present and the future. If that feeling and awareness about that feeling are important for identity (and we say that they are what is important), then ethnicity is not external but internal, inside a person, and is always reproduced anew.

This is the answer to Nikola Tordinac and his contemporaries and supporters who feared that Croats and Croatian feeling would disappear outside the mother country, but also an answer to our own contemporaries (the Austrian-Hungarian-Croatian intellectual elite) who are expressing the same fear. Our research results argument the permanence of ethnic identity among Croats in Hungary.

Theoretical and empirical research also confirmed the interrelation of social development, ethnicity and bilingualism among Croats in Hungary.

The language situation can be divided into several phases each of them accompanied by a negative social and political climate for the Croats, beginning in feudal times and surviving even socialism:

1. the period of immigration, marked by asymmetrical bilingualism in favour of the mother tongue;
2. the period up to about the First World War, marked by relatively balanced symmetrical bilingualism with a strict division of spheres for each of the two languages (most generally: private communication - mother tongue, public communication - non-mother tongue). In this period the mother tongue and ethnic identity were preserved thanks to a series of external circumstances, like the isolation, homogeneity and relative economic self-sufficiency of the small Croatian settlements, and the fact that language was mostly learned through verbal communication and tradition - the written word had a role in language preservation, but a marginal one;
3. the period on the eve of and after the First World War, when industrialization, deagrarization and urbanization intensified exchange between two unequal partners, the majority and the minority. The majority language penetrated the sphere of private communication with the same speed and the process of change from symmetrical to asymmetrical bilingualism began to the detriment of the mother tongue;
4. the period after the Second World War until 1986, during which the process of asymmetrical bilingualism continued, helped by great pressure from the mass media;
5. the period from 1986-1989 and after, which we mark as the beginning of democratization in social relations in Hungary when new trends appeared. In this period the Croatian cultural public made greater efforts to raise the quality of the Croatian language in spheres in which it is still in use, thus ensuring its continuity and also its development through use.

This research therefore established the links/permeation of ethnic identity and mother tongue, and the character of those links, thus confirming our hypotheses.

The mother tongue is a factor in the ethnic identity of the respondents, Croats in Hungary, but it plays a relative role in the shaping, permanence and expression of that identity, because:

- the degree to which the Croatian language as a mother tongue is known, its use and attitudes towards it correlate with ethnic identity primarily on the symbolic and manifestational level;
- the communicative function of the Croatian mother tongue shows a trend towards constant decline, which means that although the mother tongue is essential for the ethnic identity of a person, ethnic identity will not necessarily be lost if a person begins to adopt another language and substitute it for the mother tongue.

Since the process of language substitution among Croats in Hungary is not definite (bilingualism exists, although asymmetrical in favour of Hungarian), this research cannot confirm one of the hypotheses, i.e. that total language substitution need not necessarily change ethnic identity.

There are, however, indications to substantiate this conclusion, although additional research or research on some other example is still necessary for confirmation (research on a selected sample, e.g. among Croats who no longer speak their mother tongue, or research among small Croatian enclaves like the Moravian Croats and the like, although there could in this case be aspects open to discussion, e.g. the question of language relics etc.).

(Translated by Nikolina Jovanović)