

Aleksandra Šćukanec: “In Search of Identity: The Burgenland-Croatian Perspective”

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Abstract

Burgenland Croats are members of a Croatian minority who have been living in Austria and neighbouring countries for more than 500 years. In contrast to some Croatian minorities in other countries, in which various assimilatory processes are already visible in the second or third generation, the Burgenland Croats have managed to preserve their language, culture and tradition for several centuries. This paper aims to give an insight into the strategies of identity construction in this Croatian community. The main issues we are dealing with are collective versus individual identity, and how this identity or identities are constructed. Two perspectives were taken into consideration: the perspective of Burgenland Croats and the perspective(s) of outsiders: whether they are Austrians, people from other (neighbouring) countries or Croats from the ‘old homeland’.¹

Key words: Burgenland Croats, minority, identity, language biographies

¹ The paper uses the word *homeland* intentionally because, though they left the territories which are today part of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina more than five centuries ago, Burgenland Croats in Austria even today call Croatia their *old homeland* (Croatian: *stara domovina*).

Introduction

This paper will discuss how Burgenland Croats, the members of a Croatian minority group, deal with their identity. The main objective of the paper is to present this complex aspect in the lives of Burgenland Croats from several perspectives in order to show that, though we may find some common features which are typical for minority groups around Europe and in the rest of the world, the case of Burgenland Croats is, to a certain extent, unique. The paper will primarily focus on Burgenland Croats who live in Austria and analyse their points of view. When expressing their own attitudes and talking about their feelings and experiences, they usually mention how ‘others’ see and perceive them. In order to provide a better insight into the issues discussed, we will also include the observations of Burgenland Croats from the USA and present our own notes and observations to give an outsider’s perspective on the construction of Burgenland-Croatian identity.

Burgenland Croats and the socio-political situation in Burgenland

Burgenland Croats are among the oldest Croatian minority communities² and have lived outside their homeland for more than five centuries. The majority of Burgenland Croats today live in the Austrian province of Burgenland and elsewhere in Austria, but a considerable number of them are also found in Hungary, the Slovak Republic and even in the USA. The migration of Burgenland Croats started at the end of the 15th century and lasted until 1650. Historians mention three migration periods. According to some estimates, in the course of three migration waves between 150,000 and 200,000 Croats left their home and settled in former West Hungary, Lower Austria, southern Moravia and the southern areas of today’s Slovak Republic. The main reason for their migration was the war against the Ottoman Empire. Historiographical works on Burgenland Croats³ document that the Croatian elite clans of Zrinski and Frankopan had estates in the Burgenland and invited Croats to come and revive their land. These Croats obtained a certain level of autonomy and were allowed to use their language in the church. This proved to be extremely important for the preservation of

² Karaševci Croats in Rumania are the oldest Croatian Diaspora.

³ E.g. Tobler (1995): 39 or Valentić (1987): 18.

Croatian language and culture.⁴

At the end of the 16th century, Croats from Lower Austria experienced forceful assimilation, especially under the rule of the Emperor Maximilian II. In the 18th century, assimilation processes were sweeping through the whole area resulting in German as the sole language spoken in schools and officially in the church. In *Westungarn* (Western Hungary), Croats were not under such a strong assimilation pressure. There was even a tendency for the local priests to learn the language, i.e. dialect, of the village they were 'doing their service' in. At the end of the 19th century, there were some attempts to ban Croatian from schools and insist on only using Hungarian. After the First World War and the major political changes in Europe, the everyday life of Burgenland Croats changed significantly. Until 1919 Burgenland Croats lived in the former Habsburg Empire. The Treaty of Saint Germain and Trianon brought the end of Burgenland, and Austria received the parts of Burgenland in *Westungarn*. At the same time, Czechoslovakia was founded and the Burgenland Croats were separated into three states. Today they also have different rights depending on the state they live in - Austria, Hungary or the Slovak Republic.

New borders and the new political map had a major impact on the Burgenland Croats. Overnight they lost their cultural centres and their capital, and had to adapt to new conditions. This situation also greatly influenced their identity, a fact which is still mentioned today by older generations. One should not ignore the great migration wave from Burgenland to the USA. In the period before the First World War, the interwar period and after the Second World War many Burgenland Croats went to the USA in search of a better life. Soritsch states that, due to poor economic conditions, around 1900 some 33,000 Burgenland Croats left for the USA, Canada and South America.⁵ One fifth returned in 1929 because of the US economic crisis known as the Great Depression. Between the First and the Second World War another 25,000 Burgenland Croats went to the USA, followed by 6,000 after the Second World War. Although there are no exact numbers, it is estimated that there are 100,000 Burgenland Croats in the USA. Most of them never returned and now comprise one of the Croatian

⁴ Priests organized people and led them to these new areas. They established the first schools and were the first teachers. Even the Vatican acknowledged Burgenland Croatian as the official language of liturgy.

⁵ Soritsch (1987): 77.

communities in the USA with a significantly different background and history from other Croatian communities.⁶

In order to better grasp the sociocultural landscape in question, one must bear in mind several facts. For more than four centuries Burgenland Croats lived in a region which was isolated and had very limited contacts with the mainstream culture. Although some went to cities, usually to the capital city of Vienna to work and study, the majority stayed in their villages and were immersed in their main occupation, agriculture. Although this could be seen as favourable with regard to the preservation of the language and culture, Burgenland was for a long time the least developed Austrian region. Today the situation is completely different. For the last few decades Burgenland has been evolving. Travel connections are much better and most Burgenland Croats work and study in cities during weekdays and spend their weekends in Burgenland.⁷ Moreover, life in Burgenland is cheaper than in the cities and more Austrians are buying land and houses in this region. There are also more mixed Croatian-Austrian marriages, and yet, all these changes are not seen in a positive light by all the members of this community. Their deepest fear is that their language⁸ will gradually deteriorate and eventually disappear through contact with (Austrian) German.⁹

Methodology, language biographies and informants

The study presented in this paper is only one part of a large-scale study on German-Croatian (socio)linguistic contacts in Burgenland. The first

⁶ A historical overview and more about Burgenland and Burgenland Croats can be found in Ernst (1987): 201-02, 249; Ščukanec (2011): 17-50; Tobler (1995): 38-42; Ujević (1934): 8-9; Valentić (1970); Vranješ-Šoljan (2005), etc.

⁷ They are so called *pendlers*, according to the German verb *pendeln* - to move between two places, especially the place where you live and the place where you work or attend school, usually on a daily basis.

⁸ (Standard) Burgenland Croatian is based on the čakavian dialect(s) of Croatian although there are elements of both kajkavian and stokavian dialects, especially at the lexical level. To a certain extent it could be seen as a ‘petrified’ variety of Croatian dialects which their ancestors brought with them. But the exposure to German and Hungarian has left many traces, primarily at the level of lexicology and syntax but at other levels as well. Burgenland Croatian language is today on the UNESCO’s list of endangered languages.

⁹ As with many languages, not only ‘small(er)’ ones, Burgenland Croatian is also under the influence of English, both through German as language mediator and directly, mostly through films, music and other media.

objective was to learn about the Burgenland community, at first only as observers and then as participant observers, in direct contact with its members. The author spent more than three months living with one family which introduced us to this community. The research corpus comprised mostly written materials which included newspaper articles, literary works, forums and blogs but also transcripts of television and radio programs and (narrative) interviews as well as language biographies. In the course of analysis of the collected materials a variety of methodological tools were used and three aspects were taken into consideration: sociolinguistic, systemic linguistic and language biographical. The major part of the study was completed by 2009 and it provided a thorough insight into the life of the community in question. This paper wants to focus on the part, which is probably the most complex and which constitutes a significant part in almost all language biographies: identity. Since most studies about Burgenland Croats in Austria have been dealing primarily with language, mostly with dialects of specific areas in Burgenland, this aspect remained neglected. More up-to-date materials and newspaper articles have been analysed and conducted additional interviews with some of the informants to discuss particular aspects of their language biographies in more detail.

There were 32 informants who participated in the original study, and 5 of them were Burgenland Croats from the USA. With 7 informants were conducted interviews only and the other 25 either wrote their language biographies or wished to give us some additional information in written form to complete their interviews. The youngest informant was 15 years old and the oldest 84. The majority of informants from Burgenland were between the ages of 20 and 30, whereas those from the US were older.¹⁰ There were 13 male and 19 female informants. In order to obtain more accurate data, the informants were chosen from all parts of Burgenland, although most of them were from the central part which is considered to be the cradle of Croatian language and culture.¹¹

Since Burgenland Croats for the most part understand standard Croatian, the interviews were conducted in Croatian and the informants

¹⁰ At the time the study was conducted they were 30, 42, 43, 53 and 70 years old.

¹¹ In the course of the study the attention was concentrated on this part of Burgenland because there could be found most Burgenland Croats who still speak some variety of the Burgenland Croatian language and who are actively participating in the everyday life of this community.

spoke their variety of Burgenland Croatian. At times, some younger informants could not think of a Burgenland Croatian word or expression and started speaking German.¹² The interviews with Burgenland Croats from the USA were conducted in English. A selection of research questions for the informants from Burgenland¹³ can be found in the appendix, and the examples are used only to illustrate complete corpus of material.¹⁴

In the course of data analysis we applied the methods found in Fix & Barth and Franceschini¹⁵ with slight modifications: present language biographies were obtained both as interviews in the way they did their studies and also in written form, mostly as extensions of the interviews, as already mentioned. Franceschini explains the purpose of a narrative interview or language biography as she understands it: “*an informant tells the researcher his / her life story, and in the centre of it is language [...]*”.¹⁶ Researchers may ask additional questions to get the information they are interested in and to hear a story which is clearer and more meaningful. Although the research was interested in language issues, the main objective was to learn more about this community, its way of life, attitudes and possible problems, and at this point identity emerged as the core of the interviews.

When this study was started, the decision was made to modify the approach according to the informants. It was not always possible to conduct interviews only in the way the above mentioned authors did in their studies. With older informants were experienced no problems since they were eager

¹² This is a typical example of the phenomenon of code-switching, which is widely used by younger generations, especially in spontaneous conversations, and which points to the fact that German is for many their ‘first language’. Some talk about it openly, but the ‘authentic’ Burgenland Croats and elderly in general do not approve of this because they are afraid that this gradual loss of language will eventually result in the loss of identity. They also criticize the practice common with children from mixed marriages: even at home both parents speak German only. But sometimes it can be seen even when both parents are Burgenland Croats because they think that speaking or learning Burgenland Croatian is only a loss of time. This is a current topic in the Burgenland Croatian media and political debates.

¹³ For the informants from the USA the questions were modified, but the main ones were similar.

¹⁴ It is necessary to point out that these were only the questions prepared in advance. Older informants mostly talked freely with only a few ‘interventions’ when the interviewer wanted them to give some more details.

¹⁵ Fix & Barth (2000): 20-64 and Franceschini (2004): 123-25, 131, 137.

¹⁶ Franceschini (2004): 228-29.

to tell the stories of their lives in as much detail as possible. These stories revealed some new points and aspects, which were not apparent at first, but which were also of utmost importance to better understand this community. Many younger informants, however, were shy or not comfortable being recorded. In that case a combination of interview and language biography in written form was made. They were asked to additionally write whatever they wished regarding the topics discussed in the interviews. This approach provided them with more time and enabled them to express what they wanted in as many words as they wanted. This proved to be a helpful approach because some unexpected information was obtained from the younger informants, which could not be found in the language biographies of older informants.

The interviews with informants from the USA were conducted via Skype. In this part of the study the interviewer was interested primarily in the stories, i.e. language biographies. Informants were given several questions in advance by email, so that they could better understand what this research was about and decide if they wanted to participate. The concern that they would limit themselves to these questions proved wrong. The interviews obtained much more information than expected from them about their families and community in the USA as well as stories told to them by parents and grandparents about how and why they left their homes.

Since identity forms a crucial part of everyday life in this community, as it will be illustrated later, it is a common topic of newspaper articles. Moreover, such articles tend to follow the form of language biographies and were also included in present corpus of language biographies, without always coming into direct contact with their authors. In the (discourse) analysis of data was used a comparative method to single out similarities and differences. From the analysis of interviews and language biographies several key categories emerged: mother tongue, family, education, culture and tradition. When discussing these topics informants expressed their experience(s), feelings and attitudes pointing out the importance of identity, both implicitly and explicitly, which illustrates its significance in their lives and (construction of) their self-image and self-concept(s).

(Ethnic/minority) identity – definitions, theories and observations

Haarman claims that there is no unified definition of identity, especially since identity is closely connected to the ideas of culture, language and

ethnicity.¹⁷ Most researchers focus on the relationship of language and identity, but it would be much more precise if language itself was seen as one of the components of identity. Fishman also points out that “*language and ethnicity are highly contextual, but identity is the most contextualised term of all. It depends essentially on circumstances and concepts that play upon it, modify it, and create or recreate it.*”¹⁸ These, and other definitions or attempts to define such a complex notion, suggest what experienced in the course of the study. When it comes to identity, it could be generalized only to a certain extent because there are too many factors, both internal and external, which always come into play. Identity is rather complicated for every individual, let alone for a member of a minority group, be it a newer one or an old one, as in this case.

The analysis of the materials made a clear distinction between the individual and collective identity. However, the stories and features of individual identities/identities based on the stories of individuals, it is possible to draw conclusions on the Burgenland Croatian identity in general/collective identity. It is not always possible to make general remarks, but in many cases similarities or even similar opinions and attitudes, especially among members of the same generation could be singled out.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the more time the author spent with this community, the more obvious it became that in some aspects it could be recognised not only *intergenerational identity* but also *intragenerational identity*. These terms suggest that not only do members of the same generation display common identity traits, but the same ‘building blocks’ of Burgenland Croatian identity are found in all generations.

For the informants in the present sample, and according to the data obtained, the most important factor for identity formation is language, regardless of the informants’ age. However, they also stress the importance of their tradition and culture for its preservation. Although in the course of the study the focus have been kept on Burgenland Croats from Austria, with the exception of the five informants from the USA, in the narratives and language biographies of most of those informants several layers of ethnic identity can be recognized. The dominant identity would be their *local*

¹⁷ Haarman (1996): 219.

¹⁸ Fishman (2010): 28.

¹⁹ See also Treichel (2004): 75-77.

identity. The informants express close connection with their birthplace, i.e. their village. Their local identity comprises their families, the local community, the language, be it their idiolect or local dialect, and cultural and artistic associations. On the second level there is *Burgenland Croatian identity* both in the narrow and in the broad sense. Burgenland Croatian identity in the narrow sense signifies the identity of Burgenland Croats in Austria, whereas in the broad sense it comprises Burgenland Croats from all three states. Although Burgenland Croats do not identify themselves with the Croats from their *old homeland*, the majority of our informants claim to still feel connections to the geographical area of Croatia, which is in the interviews often referred to as the ‘homeland’ where one has his/her ‘roots’, and the identity in the broad sense could even be labelled as *Croatian identity*. The third level would be *Austrian identity*, since our informants do not consider themselves as a minority group, but rather as Austrians, which is primarily the case with younger generations.

Only after all the interviews from this corpus were analysed and recognized concepts and categories regarding identity, the theories and models found in the works of other authors and researchers were consulted in order to compare them with the data, though in the course of the analysis the data had been already brought into connection with some of them. The observations will be illustrated by selected excerpts from the language biographies of the informants.

As an introduction to examples some of remarks and conclusions will be mentioned. What comes to mind first is “*the image of hierarchy of identities*” as discussed by Stets and Burke.²⁰ The concept of individuals having multiple identities is not uncommon, but in the case of younger informants the hierarchy is in a constant flux depending on the context, i.e. situation. When their family is not around, they stress their individuality, and Burgenland Croatian aspects of their identity become secondary. Yet, in the interaction with their family members or more prominent members of their community, their individuality gets blurred and they identify themselves only in the context of the Burgenland Croatian community, since they obviously want to meet the expectations of their families and their community.

In the line of ‘self’ and ‘other’ model(s), we might extend this

²⁰ Stets & Burke (2000): 142.

category and find that the perception of our informants depends on the perspective. Those who are not satisfied with the outside non-Burgenland-Croatian community view or perceived view of them and who are ashamed of their community feel that they are the ‘others’ or want to be the ‘others’ in this community. They are alienated from the community because they do not share common goals.²¹ On the other hand, those members who are proud of their Burgenland Croatian roots underline the characteristics of good members of their community. Those who care about their language and culture are better representatives of their community. The ones that do not agree with them, or are not aware of the importance of Burgenland Croatian (collective) identity as a whole, are not true Burgenland Croats and in their eyes they are the ‘others’.²² Today, language bears a powerful symbolic role of ‘otherness’ be it in relation to the dominant culture or as a means to express the individuality and ‘otherness’ when the members (speakers) are distancing themselves from the Burgenland Croatian community.

Although he was primarily referring to the colonial discourse, Bhabha used two important terms which could be applied to our data when he discussed “*the hybridity of mother tongue and heterogeneity of [its] national space*”.²³ Indeed, in the case of the Burgenland Croatian community we can observe linguistic and cultural hybridity and heterogeneity at more than one level. Since Burgenland Croats originated from various parts of today’s Croatia and spoke different language varieties, this hybridity was present from the very beginning and (socio)political and historical changes made it more visible.

Illustration – excerpts from language biographies

Burgenland Croats in Burgenland on identity

Most of the informants and other members of the Burgenland Croatian community the author came in contact with are very proud of their ‘roots’ which, in their opinion, constitute the pillars of their identity. They say that they are Burgenland Croats as long as they nurture their mother tongue, which is Burgenland Croatian. In the magazine *Novi glas*, Lukas Kornfeind summarizes those opinions heard from many different sides and read about in their language biographies and personal narratives:

²¹ Again, this applies primarily to younger informants.

²² See Chávez & Guido-DiBrito (1999): 41.

²³ Bhabha (1994): 60.

“[...] our identity is most important for the survival of our community... The following factors are crucial for establishing and strengthening our identity: language use in general, language prestige and its economic value, but also relations to the old home and presence in the media. As far as language use is concerned, the number of speakers is dropping, and consequently the language has less positive influence on our identity. But we all have the opportunity to encourage our friends to learn our language or to use it again, although some of them have already lost it.

The prestige of our language directly depends on language use. We have to enhance its prestige both within our community and on the outside. Over the last few decades our language has been gaining in prestige, but we have to show the others, that it is in to speak Burgenland Croatian.

The economic value has been put aside. There are numerous Burgenland Croatian companies, but their owners neglect their roots. How could our people learn the value of our language? All the Burgenland Croatian companies should have Burgenland Croatian signs and choose Burgenland Croats as their workers and partners. As for the representation in media, we all know that there should be much more media.

Our relations with the old homeland are still not the way they should be. We feel stronger bonds with Austria (at least we, Burgenland Croats on the Austrian side). But for the last few years we can observe growing identification with the old homeland which should not be underestimated. Our identity has suffered a great deal due to alienation and detachment both from the old and the current homeland. We were not Croats because we spoke differently, but we were not Austrians because we had a bad command of German. Politicians took advantage of this disparity and assimilated a significant number of Burgenland Croats...²⁴

But some younger Burgenland Croats admit that they feel more comfortable

²⁴ Kornfeind (2001): 4.

when speaking German. Even in their personal stories it seems that they are still uncertain about their mother tongue. The informant who is now 31 in her language biography wrote:

“Burgenland Croatian is definitely my mother tongue. It is for me the language of family and everything connected to the family. But since I’ve obtained my education in German only, I have to say that I feel more confident with German because in German I can express everything I want. I guess I could also express myself equally in Burgenland Croatian ... I think I am bilingual and I could say that German is also my mother tongue to a certain extent.”

This 27-year-old informant is also aware of the close connection of language and identity, and feels the need to say that she is still a Burgenland Croat regardless of the language:

“In my dreams I speak German, when I am thinking about something, I think in German, when I started writing poetry, all my poems were in German. I find Burgenland Croatian to be my mother tongue, but the first language that always crosses my mind is German. This does not mean that I am less Burgenland Croatian than the others. I am a Burgenland Croat with all my heart, maybe even a bigger one than the ones who do not come from a bilingual family.”

When discussing identity issues, most informants dwell upon Burgenland Croatian identity in the Austrian context. Here is a part from the language biography of a 31-year-old informant in which she compares Burgenland Croatian and the ‘Austrian community’:

“In my opinion, Burgenland Croats are not so different from the ‘rest’ of the Austrian community; they only have an additional language. The situation is rather homogenous, but I would say that Burgenland Croats in general are a constituent part of the Austrian society. Maybe I could divide it like this (that is only my thesis): their political identity is Austrian – they participate in the Austrian society, politics, etc., but their cultural identity is Burgenland Croatian, i.e. some kind of mixture of the

Austrian and Burgenland Croatian. I would say the same for the language identity.”

The next informant recognises another Burgenland Croatian community in Austria – the one in Vienna:

“The Burgenland Croatian community in Vienna is pretty interesting: on one side there are Burgenland Croats who have been living in the capital for two or three generations, and on the other side there are the ones who came later, for example to study.

It seems to me that Vienna became the ‘cultural centre’ of Burgenland Croats. This is at the same time rather problematic because Vienna and Burgenland are now “in conflict.”

23-year-old informant mentions the aspects in which he can see that Burgenland Croats are different from Austrians:

“According to some criteria Burgenland Croats are probably different from Austrians. Culture as such is a very wide concept, and I think that there are certain differences in some parts of the ‘culture’ we live in. The customs, mostly the ones connected to the Catholic year, are in some points different from the Austrian. The weddings and similar events have a different tradition. A great difference is national music and dance, folklore, although, like everywhere, we can observe foreign influences – of German, Slovak and Hungarian culture ...”

One of youngest informants who were 19 when she was interviewed, claims that Burgenland Croats resemble Croats in Croatia more than Austrians.

“I think that Burgenland Croats in general are different from others, since every part of Austria has a different mentality. But when we are together, we sing and dance a lot, which is more similar to ‘Croatian ways’.”

The best conclusion of this part of research would be a quote from Michael Hirschler’s text on pessimism among Burgenland Croats found in *Novi glas*:

“We are not allowed to fall into resignation due to our current situation. We have to pick up our strength and

*continue to cherish the value of our language instead of complaints that everything was lost. Because if we keep complaining, everything will be lost and the language, culture and identity of Burgenland Croats would disappear.*²⁵

Once again we see the trefoil of language, culture and identity, which most Burgenland Croats are aware of.

Burgenland Croats in the USA on identity

In this study the author came into contact with five informants whose parents or grandparents left the Hungarian part of Burgenland for the USA. As opposed to Burgenland Croats in Austria, the informants from the USA assimilated into the mainstream culture. Although they are aware of their 'roots', familiar with the personal stories and history of their ancestors and family - they still consider themselves to be Americans.²⁶ Especially in terms of language use, the situation is very similar in all Croatian communities abroad. In some cases the second generation already does not speak Croatian, or speaks it rather poorly. Even though they usually keep at least a part of their Croatian identity, it is something they have inherited. In this context, Burgenland Croats in Austria are a unique group.

The informant S.G. (53) claims:

"I feel like a Hungarian-Croat. My parents and grandparents would feel the same. I don't feel like a member of a minority group in America. I do feel this way though if I visit Burgenland, Austria. I have no negative experiences, and I have never been ashamed of my roots ... if anything ... just the opposite."

Informant J.L. (42) shares a similar view:

"I feel like both. I am American with 50% of my ethnic heritage from the Burgenland/West Hungarian Croatian community. I am very proud of my roots. When I was a child, some children from different ethnic backgrounds

²⁵ Hirschler (2012): 19.

²⁶ The informants said that they are both Americans and Croats, but all the informants are members of a group called the Burgenland bunch and they are rather active members of their communities. At the same time they described the current situation and said that in this melting-pot-society the younger ones forget their roots.

would make fun of the names ending in ‘-its’ but it never bothered me since our community was so strong.”

Informant J.D. (43) also expresses a pride in her background, but remembers that she had some problems with it when she was a child:

“I know that I’m an American but think of myself differently than others because of my background. I have a Hungarian flag that I fly on Hungarian national holidays but know I’m Croatian too. I have great pride in my ancestry and appreciate how much my parents have accomplished. My parents always spoke about ‘the Hungarians’ when talking about growing up, which were people from outside Szentpeterfa.

There were so many people in my town growing up that were Croats from Hungary and I knew of quite a few children of my age whose parents were from Szentpeterfa, so I didn’t have any negative experiences as I grew up. When I was little I used to be a little embarrassed when my mom would yell at me in Croatian and say she was going to use the ‘kuhaca’ (wooden spoon, unsure of spelling) when I was playing with my ‘American’ friends.”

The oldest of the American informants, F.T. (70), gave a very detailed interview. Just a part which deals with identity is quoted.

“We live and feel as Americans with an ethnic background and do not in the least consider ourselves to be a minority. Our nation is truly a ‘melting pot’ of humanity and we accept each other for what we are and question not where we are from. Even if an individual speaks with a noticeable accent would anyone question them as to who they are and where they come from. We consider them to be an American and accept them for whom they are!

I would suspect that was not the case with our parents or grandparents who initially ‘broke ground’ in America. They spoke a different language, lived in groupings of people with similar ethnic backgrounds, and worked their way into being accepted as Americans. They were hard working, God-fearing people who instilled that same culture into so many of us.”

We should also point out that Burgenland Croats from the USA are ‘twice

removed' from their original homeland which resulted in a significant change of perspective. Whereas Burgenland Croats from Burgenland see Croatia as their old homeland, for those in the USA the old homeland is Burgenland.

Outsiders' perspective on Burgenland Croatian identity

When using the term 'outsider' it is referred to people who do not have Burgenland Croatian roots and bear no connection to this community. Since many Burgenland Croats are anxious about the image they send 'to the world', these aspects will also be presented in this section.

The attitude of one informant who wrote her personal story at the age of 24 came as a surprise at first, but in discussions with other Burgenland Croats it is noticed that some others, though in much milder form, shared her opinion. Young people from active and vocal Burgenland Croatian families are under the strong influence of their parents, grandparents and older generation in general. Although most of them are really proud of their Burgenland Croatian identity, whichever form it may take, with some of them, in some instances, it seemed that they were anxious about disclosing all they wanted to share. This may be due to the fact that almost everyone knows everyone in the community and no anonymity could be guaranteed. But at the same time some feel responsibility and obligation towards their family and community and do not want to let anyone down.

“80% of my friends are not Burgenland Croats because many Burgenland Croats are very conservative. They play tamburica or dance in one of the Burgenland Croatian societies, and I have an aversion to it. For me, it does not represent the Burgenland Croatian culture. I am ashamed of it because most people 'outside' have an impression that we are all like that. We are always smiling, we are a bit silly, we are singing and dancing and that is it ... I am convinced that many Croats who come to Burgenland think that we are 'slow' and funny caricatures. I do not blame them – I would share their opinion.”

This passage from a language biography introduces another point of interest: Burgenland Croats dwell upon how people from 'outside' perceive Burgenland Croats, in which we get a perspective within a perspective. In this context the (family) name as a powerful mechanism of identity

construction comes into play.

Many Burgenland Croats with family names in which the Croatian origin is still recognizable write their family names in two versions²⁷ – (Burgenland) Croatian and ‘foreign’, e.g. Sučić and Szucsich. This phenomenon should be examined more thoroughly, but we have not noticed that any of our informants were ashamed of their roots or that any of them were trying to ‘camouflage’ their family names; one of the frequently mentioned reasons for writing family names in the foreign version is simply to make it easier for Austrians to pronounce them.

In the course of the research it is noticed that the (family) name for Burgenland Croats is an important feature of their identity. In all our correspondence they used the Croatian version of their names, especially the older ones, because this made it more intimate. It was a sign that they are all Croats. As for those who today bear Austrian surnames, they usually have Austrian first names too, or at least ‘Austrianized’ or internationalized versions (e.g. Katharina). Younger informants admit that it is much easier when they have Austrian names because German is their first language or second mother tongue and with Austrian names no one notices that they are foreigners.²⁸

Although this is not the case with the informants, cases like the one which will be mentioned below obviously do exist, as it is a character in a relatively new novel written by Petar Tažky. One of the protagonists, Heidi Petrovits, is ashamed of her roots and is hiding behind her name. She says that Heidi was an old German name, and that she ‘adjusted’ her family name to sound more Austrian than Petrović. But at the funeral of her grandmother, when all the emotions come to the surface and when she meets other Burgenland Croats, she claims to not be ashamed anymore.

²⁷ One of the informants, whose language biography is not discussed in this paper, provided a possible explanation for this phenomenon. His parents came to the USA from the Hungarian part of Burgenland. He studies the genealogy of the area that also includes the study of last names. He noticed that the spelling of the last name has been variable over the past 100 years and dependent on the ‘inclination’ of the record keeper who maintained birth, marriage and death records. Typically, this would be the village priest and would vary depending on the ethnic leaning of the priest.

²⁸ See the study conducted by Andreouli (2010): 14.8 and example of the informant who wanted to be recognized as British and change her name and applied for British citizenship so that ‘it would be easier for her’.

“Grandma Reza also wrote her surname Petrovits, but she pronounced it Petrović. But in school I say I am Petrovic. First, I do not want people to think I am a child of some guest worker from Bosnia, and secondly Petrovic sounds more Austrian than Petrović. Besides, Heidi is an old German name. Why should I mix a German name with a Croatian surname? Yes, I admit, I am a bit ashamed of my background. But at the funeral of grandma Reza I did not feel ashamed.”²⁹

Conclusion

In this paper we have discussed various aspects of the Burgenland Croatian community. As can be seen from this research, this is a very complex topic which cannot be covered by only one paper. In the sub-section ‘(Ethnic/minority) identity – definitions, theories and observations’, as an introduction to the examples, were listed a few remarks, which reveal a lot about this community. Some language biographies can be analysed as case studies in themselves, but the aim was to give a general overview and to show which factors come into play when discussing the issues of (minority or ethnic) identity of Burgenland Croats ranging from language and culture through tradition to the (family) name. As seen from those examples, there are some features Burgenland Croats share with other minorities, and there are also some characteristics which enable us to speak about their collective identity, but in every biography there are some parts which make it unique. The overall situation gets even more complicated when we (re)consider all the socio-political and historical aspects which have posed additional problems. Ultimately, it is impossible to neglect a large number of Burgenland Croats who today live in the USA. Even though they are more similar to other Croatian minority groups, their ancestors have Burgenland Croatian roots and hence are part of the community presented in this paper.

²⁹ Tažky (1995): 11.

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Sažetak

Gradišćanski Hrvati potomci su Hrvata koji više od pet stoljeća žive u Austriji, ali i na prostorima današnje Mađarske i Slovačke. Za razliku od nekih drugih 'mlađih' hrvatskih zajednica izvan Hrvatske kod kojih asimilacija katkad zahvaća već drugu i treću generaciju, ponajprije kada govorimo o jeziku, gradišćanski su Hrvati uspjeli očuvati svoj jezik, kulturu i tradiciju više od pet stotina godina.

U ovome je radu dan uvid u strategije konstrukcije identiteta, pokazavši na primjerima kolektivni, odnosno individualni identitet te slojevitost samoga konstrukta. Korpus obuhvaća materijale, bilješke i zapažanja s terena prikupljene i sastavljene tijekom istraživanja njemačko-hrvatskih jezičnih dodira u Gradišću. Glavnina istraživanja provedena je tijekom 2009. i 2010. godine. No, budući da je riječ o longitudinalnom istraživanju, korpus neprestano upotpunjujemo novim primjerima. Primjere na temelju kojih smo sastavili korpus za ovaj članak pronašli smo u književnim djelima, novinama, a najvažniji su izvor bile jezične biografije (narativni intervjui) i osobne priče ispitanica i ispitanika.

U analizi su prikazane dvije perspektive: perspektivu i stajališta gradišćanskih Hrvata i perspektivu osoba 'izvana' (Austrijanaca, osoba iz susjednih zemalja, Hrvata iz Hrvatske, ali i samih istraživača). Mnoge ispitanice i ispitanici govore o vlastitim iskustvima i o tome kako ih doživljavaju osobe koje ne pripadaju gradišćanskohrvatskoj zajednici. U takvim slučajevima možemo govoriti i dodatnoj perspektivi ili perspektivi unutar perspektive.

Budući da je u razdoblju između dva svjetska rata i neposredno nakon Drugog svjetskog rata velik broj gradišćanskih Hrvata napustio Gradišće i otišao u SAD i druge prekomorske zemlje, u članku su analizirani dijelovi intervjua četvero ispitanica i ispitanika koji danas žive u SAD-u i koji pripadaju srednjoj i starijoj generaciji. Iako su gradišćanski Hrvati koji danas žive u SAD-u sličniji Hrvatima koji su u SAD otišli iz Hrvatske nego gradišćanskim Hrvatima u Gradišću, uključili smo ih u ovo istraživanje kako bismo dobili što potpuniju i cjelovitiju sliku o gradišćanskohrvatskoj zajednici. U jezičnim biografijama ispitanica i ispitanika iz Gradišća moguće je prepoznati

neke zajedničke domene: djetinjstvo, školovanje, obitelj, odnos gradišćanskohrvatske zajednice i Austrijanaca. No valja istaknuti kako je svaka od spomenutih domena prožeta problematikom jezika i identiteta. Na temelju analiziranih primjera potvrdilo se i da su jezična i identitarna pitanja usko povezana i isprepletena.

