UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED FACULTY OF ARTS

PhD PROGRAMME ON LINGUISTICS

DEPARTMENT OF HUNGARIAN LINGUISTICS

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Metalinguistic Knowledge, Language Attitudes and Prejudices
A case study of responses among lower-primary school teacher students

Abstract PhD Dissertation

Szeged

2018

Introduction

Using empirical data, the thesis sets out to investigate the (meta)linguistic knowledge and attitudes of a group of laypeople, as well as to assess their value judgements relating to different languages and dialects, and throughout them, their speakers. The research in this thesis is based on the theoretic framework of previous work conducted with regards to folk linguistics, and also relies on the methodology used in past Hungarian research in the field. The present research shows novelty in two areas: on the one hand, no similar investigation has been carried out among students enrolled in lower-primary school teacher training yet, while on the other hand, the results laid out in this thesis are based on a complex investigation made up of three distinct phases.

The theoretic framework of this thesis is comprised of folk linguistics research and its subfield, perceptual dialectology. Thus in the theoretical background section I introduce these fields of research (Preston 1999, Niedzielski – Preston 2000, Anders 2010). I continue with one of the key elements of this enquiry, by presenting the concept of attitude. I briefly define the concept and present its components from a sociopsychological standpoint (Csepeli 2002, Smith – Mackie 2004, Oppenheim 1982), and explore the concept of language attitude and its functions (Smith – Mackie 2004, Bohner 2007, Grin 2013, Garrett 2010, Garrett et al. 2003, Baker 1992), highlighting the connection between language and social identity (Edwards 2009, Sándor 1995). Then, in a separate subchapter, I discuss the methods of examining language attitudes, summarizing classical methods (Garrett 2007, Garrett et al 2003, Bradac et al 2001, Bradac – Giles 2005) and procedures used in perceptual dialectology (Preston 1999, Long – Preston 2002, Anders et al. 2010). I continue the theoretical section by defining language ideology (Kroskrity 2010, Woolard – Schieffelin 1994, Silverstein 1979, Heath 1977, Irvine 1989, Lanstyák 2014 and 2014a) and by reviewing the ideology of the standard language (Milroy – Milroy 2012, Milroy 2001, Lippi-Green 1994, Laihonen 2009), including the phenomenon of linguicism and the possible ways of its elimination (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, Kontra 2006, Sándor 2001a). I follow that up by presenting the important Hungarian research conducted in the past in connection with this thesis.

Presentation of the research

The aim of the research

I've set two goals for my research. On the one hand, I aims to expand the scientific knowledge concerning folk linguistics (Niedzielski – Preston 2000), while on the other hand, I intend to map the non-specialist views about dialects and language use in a group of people who, being future lower-primary school teachers, will play a major role in the transmission of language ideologies (Milroy-Milroy 2012: 30, Rubdy 2008: 215, Tollefson 2008: 5-6).

Hypotheses

Speakers socialized in Hungarian culture know that it is important to use the standard language variety because using that they could elicit a more favourable impression in their conversational partner (Milroy 2001: 552, Sándor 2003: 381). It is widely known that people using non-standard varieties face linguistic discrimination (Lippi-Green 2012), which phenomenon is also present in the Hungarian language community (Kontra 2001 and 2006, Sándor 2001a). The unfavourable opinion of Hungarian language users towards the speakers of non-standard dialects (Kiss 2001: 218-230) has also been strengthened by the language cultivation phenomenon (Sándor 2001b). Based on this information, I assume the following:

1. The strong normativistic inclinations of Hungarian speakers will be reflected in the answers of the sample.
2. The respondents will rank the standard variation highest based on social utility.
3. The people participating in the study will rate non-standard dialects and their users more negatively.

Standard language ideology plays a major role in Hungarian linguistic culture (Kontra 2006, Laihonen 2009b, Sándor 2003). In addition to the overt prestige of the standard variety, the covert prestige effects associated with non-standard dialects influence the occurrence of linguistic variables (pl. Trudgill 1995, Cameron 2012: 15). Thus I assume the following:

4. Participants will use non-standard forms, even though they will have unfavourable judgements towards them.
5. The respondents employ double-standards, and though for separate reasons, they'll identify themselves with both standard and non-standard language user communities.

Research questions

Based on my hypotheses, I venture to answer the following questions during the study:

1. How familiar are the participants of the study with the attributes of the language variety they speak, i.e. what degree of linguistic awareness characterises them?
2. According to the participants, who speaks Hungarian in the most beautiful and the ugliest manner, and where do they live?
3. According to the respondents, who speaks Hungarian in the most correct and the most incorrect manner, and where do they live?
4. What qualities are attributed to the different languages and dialects by the non-linguist participants?
5. Can characteristic differences be observed between the language attitudes towards standard and non-standard varieties?

Methodology

Research done in Hungary regarding language attitudes towards different Hungarian dialects has traditionally employed surveys for data collection (Terestyéni 1987, Fodor and Huszár 1998, Kiss 2000, Kontra 2003, Sándor 2004). Following this example, I have also conducted surveys in the first phase of my research, using mainly open-ended questions. I have categorised the data I gathered based on the shared properties of the answers. The data collected served as a starting point for the third phase of my research.

I have examined the following areas with the help of the survey:

1.   opinion about the properties of the Hungarian language and other languages the respondent is familiar with;
2.   knowledge about dialects;
3.   attitudes towards different linguistic variables;
4.   categories of beautiful/ugly in the opinions of respondents (in the case of regional and non-regional language varieties);
5.   what makes language use beautiful or ugly;
6.   categories of correct/incorrect in the opinions of respondents (in the case of regional and non-regional language varieties);
7.   definition and importance of language cultivation, activities involved, knowledge about the materials concerning language cultivation and grammar rules;
8.   correction: the respondent as corrector and correctee;
9.   language use in accordance with prescriptive values in different domains and situations of language use.

The second phase of the study relies on the matched-guise test, which is a popular method in sociolinguistics (Lambert et al. 1960 and 1967, Garrett et al. 2003: 55–65, Garrett 2010: 53-69). The respondents heard six recordings spoken by four people. The recordings included the Palóc dialect (a strongly stigmatized variety), the standard (the overtly prestigious variety) and the variety spoken on the southern part of the Great Plains of Hungary. I've selected the non-standard dialects based on the data collected in the Hungarian National Sociolinguistic Survey (HNSS) (Kontra 2003: 255). The sample also contained two recordings acting as fillers.

The texts used in the study had the same character. The recordings embodying the non-standard dialects employed the most prevalent phonetic features of the regional varieties, like the independent use of [ə] instead of [ë], illabial [á] and labial [ā]. This was necessitated by the non-linguist participants, partially based on past research (Fodor 2001: 325) and partially on the results of the survey.

I used a questionnaire during the matched-guise test, in which I asked the participants to characterize the external characteristics and place of birth of the speakers heard and also the applicability and acceptability of the varieties used by them (Garrett 2010: 88-104). In addition to this, I also asked the respondents to rate different attributes (likeability, resoluteness, politeness, friendliness, diligence, gravity; speech rate, tone, style, correctness).

They provided their ratings on a five-level Likert scale. I've employed these attributes to survey the attitudes towards the groups related to competence (diligence, resoluteness) and social interactions (politeness, friendliness, gravity), as classified by Lambert (cf. Sándor – Pléh – Langman 1998: 33).

In the third phase of the study I've arranged focus group interviews. This research method complemented the survey used in the first phase because it enabled participants to expand on their thoughts and justify their opinions regarding dialects. I've constructed the interviews around multiple modules. In the first module, I've employed blank maps to collect data about the most beautiful and the ugliest language use based on regions (Preston 1999, Garrett et al. 2003). The second module concerned aesthetic judgements towards the dialects, while the third concentrated on grammatical correctness and the practice of corrections. In this latter module, I investigated the grammatical evaluation of 12 sentences. Nine of them contained variables which are commonly attributed to incorrect language use: use of the illative case ending of nouns *-ba/-be* (where to?) instead of the inessive case ending *-ban/-ben* (in which place?); use of interrogative *-e*; double affixation, use of *-nák* suffix (employing vowel harmonization with words containing back vowels, instead of using the first person singular conditional suffix *-nék*); use of the postpositive *végett* instead of *miatt* (both mean "because of"); use of *deviszont* (both *de* and *viszont* mean "but"); use of the definite article before personal names; use of the suffix *-suk/-sük* (using the imperative suffix to form the indicative mood of verbs ending in *-t*). Two sentences were agrammatical, while the last sentence contained an archaic form. I've selected these forms based both on the HNSS findings (Kontra 2003: 65-84, Pléh 2003: 266) and the answers I received in the survey conducted in the first phase.

Participants of the study

I've conducted the survey among the first-year students of the Juhász Gyula Teacher Training Faculty at the University of Szeged. Data collection took place during the academic terms of 2014/2015 and 2017/2018, encompassing 206 subjects (186 women and 20 men) in total. The matched-guise test and the recording of focus group interviews took place after processing the survey data, with two groups of first-year students from the 2017/2018 academic term and all in all 17 participants. One of the groups was comprised of the speakers of the southern dialect, among them people originating both in and outside of Szeged. This was necessary to account for smaller language user communities, as they are held to be more self-conscious (cf. Sándor 2004: 48). The other group contained the speakers of non-southern dialects, on the one hand to account for the speakers from Budapest, who have the strongest associations with the standard dialect (cf. Sándor 2004: 48), while on the other hand to include people hailing from the Tisza-Körös region, since they form the second biggest group of people enrolled in lower-primary school teacher training.

Results

Attributes of languages

I asked the participants of the survey to characterise the Hungarian language and foreign languages. The following ten languages were part of the survey: English, German, Italian, Spanish, French, Romanian, Latin, Serbian, Russian and Japanese. Based on the results, it can be assessed that the subjects characterised Hungarian and the other languages they speak using similar expressions. However, there was a marked difference between the frequency of these expressions. Answers focusing on grammatical aspects were more common in the case of foreign languages, while answers relating to lexical features were mainly used in relation to Hungarian. The frequency of the answers in connection with pronunciation, sound and ease of learning didn't show a marked difference, unlike their content. The participants believe Hungarian to possess a far greater lexical diversity, compared to foreign languages. Answers addressing the ease of learning regard Hungarian and foreign languages from the standpoint of second language learning. These responses can be attributed to the difference between first and foreign languages. Apart from the common categories, some responses only occurred in relation to Hungarian (concerning poetry and language change), while others only occurred in relation to foreign languages (regarding penetration, comparison with other languages, utility and honorifics). Myths concerning the sound, tempo and logical nature of languages, their learnability, function and (correct form of) writing surfaced in the answers characterising foreign languages (cf. Bauer – Trudgill 1998).

Attitudes towards linguistic phenomena

The respondents mainly voiced their opinions with regards to regional variables, phonetical and phonological features, grammatical correctness and lexical variety. When asked which linguistic phenomena they liked, they mainly mentioned elements in connection with regional varieties and lexical diversity. When asked which phenomena they didn't like, they mostly commented on grammatical correctness, slang and phenomena belonging to the topics of grammatical correctness and wording.

The most beautiful and the ugliest cases of Hungarian language use

The lower-primary school teacher trainee respondents believe that the dialect spoken in the southern parts of the Great Plains region is the most beautiful, while they rated the Palóc dialect as the ugliest. The speech of the people living in the country's capital was rated the second ugliest, which differs from the findings of the HNSS (Kontra 2003: 255). The subjects think that the people living outside of the capital speak the language in a more beautiful fashion than those in the capital (cf. Terestyéni 1987). The results of sub-samples based on regional variants are consistent with those of the HNSS (Kontra 2003: 250), except the outliers that indicated the dialect of the Tisza–Körös region as the most beautiful. The judgements relating to the most beautiful and the ugliest regional variants were mostly based on features of phonetics and phonology. The answers reflect that conformity to the normative

variant, upholding traditions and proper conveyance of the message make language use beautiful, while obscenity and the lack of honorifics make language use ugly.

Based on the answers to the question "Who speak Hungarian in the most beautiful and the ugliest way?" the participants think that beautiful language use is in direct correlation with educational attainment, and older people speak in a more beautiful manner than younger ones. The importance of conforming to the standard variety rated similarly to the findings of The Budapest Sociolinguistic Interview (Váradi 2003: 356-357). The answers to the questions "what makes a language variety beautiful?" and "what makes it ugly?" upheld these results.

The most correct and most incorrect use of Hungarian

Unrelated to regions, the respondents categorised the speakers of Hungarian based on the correctness of language use by their occupation, educational attainment, erudition, the knowledge about and the application of grammar rules. They correlate higher educational attainment, professional positions requiring such level of attainment and compliance with grammar rules with those who speak the most correctly, while correlating lower educational attainment and divergence from the standard variety with those who speak the most incorrectly. When characterising the language use of those who speak the most correctly and most incorrectly, the subjects connected correctness with phonetic features, use of the standard dialect, lexical variety and wording.

The respondents believe their own regional variety (or that of close proximity) and the variety spoken in the capital to be the most correct, while regarding the language use of the speakers of the Palóc dialect and those living in the North-Eastern part of the country as the most incorrect. The assessment of the language use in Budapest is twofold. It ranked second for correctness and third in the ranking based on incorrectness. The results show that the subjects correlate the correctness of language use not with regard to regions but with the adherence to the standard variety. This is further supported by the results that surfaced during the characterisation of the most correct and most incorrect language use.

Knowledge about and application of grammar rules

The data collected on the knowledge of language rules and their application by the respondents shows that they characterise themselves as people who are familiar with and apply the rules of the standard variety, notice and correct any divergence from it in other people's speech, and correct grammatical errors in other people's writing. Because the subjects believe themselves to be speakers of the standard variety, in situations when correct language use is required, they have to pay attention to phonetical and phonological features, as well as applying the proper wording.

Naming and features of language varieties

Based on the question investigating the naming and characterisation of the respondent's own dialect, it can be concluded that they feel safe from a linguistic standpoint. Answers relating to the naming of the varieties was mostly based on regional distribution, and reflected the wording common in folk perceptions. Naming based on social groups of language users also

appeared in the sample. These reflected the naming conventions taught in schools. When characterising the variety the respondents themselves speak, the highlighting of phonemes is the most widespread. The answers related to the recognition of regional varieties were mostly comprised of comments relating to phonetical and phonological attributes and answers that reflect a general understanding on the part of the subjects on how people speak in a given region, especially regarding the register. Descriptions usually emphasised phonetic and phonological features.

Language use at the university and at home: differing dialects

While referring to the two separate domains of language use (the university and the home), style was selected as the feature showing the greatest difference. The participants stated that while at home their language use can be characterised by directness and friendliness, they strive to emphasise their competence and gravity at the university. The differences can be attributed to differing roles (in the respective groups). The answers also confirmed that the subjects believe the school to be a domain where the use of the (close to) standard variant is necessary, which doesn't reflect an implicit response, but explicit knowledge.

Language cultivation in Hungary

Since language cultivation has an important role in the strong normativisim of the standardized Hungarian linguistic culture, I have also assessed the participants' beliefs and knowledge regarding the phenomenon. Their answers reflect that they mainly identify language cultivation with the transformation and renewal of language, and these are the fields in which they see its importance as well. Although it seems that the subjects are hardly familiar with any proponents or forums of language cultivation, they primarily associate it with linguistics. The responses of the participants hark back to the human-centered period of language cultivation, popularized by Lajos Lőrincze in the 1980's (cf. Sándor 2001b).

Results of the matched-guise test

I drew up three hypotheses before conducting the matched-guise test. I assumed that in case of most of the questions, both groups will evaluate the speakers of the standard variety more positively than the speakers of non-standard dialects. This hypothesis was only partially confirmed, because in the case of the standard1–southern pairing the non-standard, while in case of the standard2–Palóc pairing the speaker of the standard variety was evaluated as better on most of the attributes by both groups.

My second assumption was that both groups will favour the southern dialect over the Palóc variety. This assumption proved to be correct, because the most negative scores and answers were all attributed to the Palóc dialect. This is consistent with the results of both the survey (chapter 5.1) and the countrywide results of the HNSS (Kontra 2003).

My final assumption was that those speakers of the southern dialect, who originate outside of Szeged will regard the southern dialect more positively than their peers coming from Szeged. The results didn't confirm my hypothesis, because the respondents hailing from

Szeged rated the southern variety the most favourably in all questions concerning internal attributes except gravity.

Based on the groups' responses, it can be concluded that the respondents correlate the standard variety with higher educational attainment and a more formal style, and believe it to be mainly spoken in urban environments. Non-standard varieties are correlated with lower educational attainment and an informal style. They identify the use of non-standard dialects with people living in rural environments or smaller communities. The subjects believe that the speakers of the standard are suitable to work in higher prestige positions, while the users of non-standard varieties are suitable for low-prestige professions.

Results of the focus group interviews

Some of the respondents showed consistency in their answers, because they highlighted the same territories for the ugliest language use during both the survey and the interview. However, the remainder of the subjects had different answers for the same question, which makes me assume that they think there are multiple territories in which Hungarian is spoken in the ugliest manner. Apart from the phonetic features, non-linguistic attributes also appeared, like educational attainment or ordinariness, just as in the first phase of the study. During the interview, the participants characterised the beauty or ugliness of language use based mostly on phonetical, phonological features and non-standard variables.

The respondents connect correctness to the capital, their living environments and economically developed regions. They thought that the most correct language use stems from using the standard variety and the erudition and learnedness of the speakers, and they identified grammatical correctness with the standardised, codified norm. They presented themselves as people who know and use the standard variety. The interviews confirmed that proper language use can be learnt at school. The subject themselves believed that, as future teachers, they will improve the speech of the children they teach. The grammatical judgement they passed and the explanations they provided made them appear as speakers of the standard dialect.

Evaluation of the study hypotheses

My first (strong normativisim of Hungarian speakers, which is reflected in the examined sample) and second hypothesis (my respondents believe that the standard variety is more useful than other dialects) was confirmed, because the standard variety plays some part in all characterisations provided. The inclination towards normativity was also prevalent in the way the subjects presented themselves as speakers of the standard dialect. The participants think the standard variant has the greatest social utility, as shown by both the results of the survey (characterisation of language use at the university) and the matched-guise test.

In my third hypothesis I assumed that the non-standard variants and their speakers will be evaluated negatively by the subjects. My assumption only proved to be partially true, because the participants reacted positively to the southern regional dialect.

I also assumed that the respondents will have double standards, and though for separate reasons, they'll identify themselves with both standard and non-standard speakers.

My hypothesis was confirmed in the case of the speakers of the southern dialect. This is also reflected in the answers provided during the matched-guise test.

I assumed that the subjects use non-standard forms, even though they judge them in a negative fashion. This hypothesis was partially confirmed, because the participants try to avoid stigmatized forms, but they still employ non-standard forms (e.g. speaking at home).

The results show that the lower-primary school teacher trainees who partook in the study show a high level of linguistic consciousness. Among linguistic phenomena, they identify phonetic, phonological and lexical characteristics the most frequently, and these are the ones they comment on from a metalinguistic perspective. The results of the survey and the focus group interviews show the participant's high inclination towards linguistic normativism. Because they identify themselves as being familiar with the standard, they correct non-standard forms in other people's speech. The method of correction exhibited during the focus groups interviews (repeating the form that is held to be correct) increases the linguistic uncertainty of the correctees.

The complex (employing different data collection and analytical methods) and qualitative nature of the study enabled comparison of answers provided in different states of awareness. The participants' answers show great consistency. The results of the matched-guise test are consistent with the results of the survey, regarding the high prestige attributed to the standard variant by the respondents. Furthermore, the attitudes towards non-standard (regional) varieties show that they are not clearly condemned by the participants. The answers show that the dialect spoken by people living on the southern part of the Great Plains of Hungary (characterised by the independent use of [ə] instead of [ë]) is evaluated more favourably than the standard variant, that the subjects relate themselves to the speakers of their own (or adjacent) regional dialects, and that they relate negatively to the members of socially stereotyped communities.

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