University of Szeged
Graduate School in Linguistics
English Applied Linguistics PhD Program

Language policies and language ideologies related to multilingualism: A case study of the Hungarian minority population in Szeklerland

PhD dissertation summary

Zsuzsanna Éva Kiss

Supervisor:
Prof. Miklós Kontra

Szeged
2012

1. Introduction

Although in recent decades studies carried out to explore the characteristics of multilingual education have become more and more widespread, the number of investigations exploring multilingualism in Szeklerland, Romania, in the educational context of the Hungarian minority is still limited.

This case study has a twofold objective: on the one hand, to investigate the educational language policies of minority Hungarian educational settings in Szeklerland, and, on the other hand, to trace aspects of language ideologies connected to these language policies in terms of multilingualism. Thus, it is the goal of the present dissertation to outline what language ideologies and language policy views the interviewees have as far as multilingualism with Hungarian as a first language, Romanian as a second language, and English as a third language is concerned. A further objective is to examine whether the existing state and foreign language policy efforts of the Romanian state respond to the linguistic needs faced by the Hungarian minority in Szeklerland. Accordingly, the possible discrepancies between language policy in theory vs. in practice are also investigated.

This research was conducted in the context of the international LINEE (Languages in a Network of European Excellence 2006-2010, contract number 028388) Project, specifically its sub-project called *(Inter)-regional case studies of multilingual education,* and has set out to survey and analyze educational models in multilingual settings in four regions: South Tyrol (Italy), Vojvodina (Serbia), Transylvania (Romania) and the Hungarian-inhabited region in southern Slovakia (*Felvidék* in Hungarian). The work package that I was a member of during my PhD studies at the University of Szeged, Hungary, tackled these four countries in terms of their educational systems, school results and multilingual school experience.

The choice of topic for this dissertation is supported by the following two reasons. First, for the simple reason of wishing to avoid the reproduction of the ideological and partial view of policy documents which would represent the context under study in a very limited way, I considered it vital to conduct interviews with the members of the Hungarian minority educational system in order to gain a well-contextualized orientation to language practices. By this, I try to reveal participants' own points of view about how the educational language policy facilitates or challenges multilingualism of a minority population. Second, the dissertation does not discuss past problems, only present-day issues that challenge current minority language policy in Romania as far as the

educational needs of the Hungarian minority are concerned and the submission of which to the authorities in charge of minority issues could bring about changes in developing and implementing a more effective minority language policy in Romania.

The data for this study was collected between April 2007 and January 2009. The author finished most of the writing of the present dissertation by November 2010. Significant changes have taken place in the minority language policy of Romania when the modifications of this country's *Law on Education* came into force in January 2011. For this reason, what the interviewees and the author of this dissertation say in connection with the drawbacks of state language policy was adequate before the modifications of the *Law on Education* came into force in Romania in January 2011. As such, by now the interviewees' and the author's critique as far as the disadvantages of the Romanian as a first language policy in teaching *Romanian language and literature* and the medium of instruction and examination of *The Geography of Romania* and *The History of Romania* is no more valid as far as Romania's post-2011 state language policy is concerned.

2. Aims and research questions

In the dissertation, which targets to trace aspects of multilingualism in Szeklerland, the discussion focuses on the language policy and the language ideologies of minority Hungarians in Szeklerland as far as their first (Hungarian), second (Romanian) and foreign languages are concerned (English, most often). The dissertation follows the lines of a new language policy approach proposed by Spolsky (2004, 2007) and Shohamy (2006a, 2006b), who conceive of the aforementioned linguistic fields to be interconnected with each other and as ones without which the deeper understanding of any language policy is less efficient. As part of this framework this dissertation sets out to determine the aspects of multilingualism as conceived of by students, parents, teachers, school presidents and other stakeholders in the educational process (Throop, 2007). Accordingly, the focus is on exploiting how the language ideologies of different actors of the educational system, as language policy mechanisms in connection with their second and foreign language(s), promote or discredit a multilingual language policy and multilingualism. Since it is among the aims of the study to uncover and explain language policy as it functions in everyday life, particular emphasis is paid to examining language ideologies as mechanisms or devices that are used by different educational institutions and their agents to perpetuate or challenge declared language policies.

The main research questions of this dissertation are the following:

1. What language policies are promoted in the current minority educational contexts in Transylvania?
2. What language ideologies can be observed as underlying existing language policies?
3. How do existing language policies and language ideologies contribute to or discredit the development of multilingualism of Szeklerland minority Hungarians?

3. Methodology

Participants

The data for this study was collected over an approximately two year long period between April 2007 and January 2009. Participants were selected in order to enable the comparison between language policy in theory and practice as well as to reveal the hidden relationship between language policy and language ideologies.

Between April 2007 and the first few months of 2008, 21 individual interviews were recorded in the 7 schools (3 in Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda and 4 in Sfântu Gheorghe/Sepsiszentgyörgy) that participated in the research. Seventeen of the interviews were conducted with teachers and 4 interviews with school principals and vice-principals. Six of the teachers and 1 principal were from Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda, 11 teachers and 3 principals were from Sfântu Gheorghe/Sepsiszentgyörgy.

The second part of the research involved the same schools and lasted from November 2008 through January 2009. Twenty-three interviews were conducted in Sfântu Gheorghe/Sepsiszentgyörgy (3 school principals, 11 teachers, 5 parents, and 4 stakeholders in the educational process), and 8 focus group interviews were also recorded. In Miercurea Ciuc/Csíkszereda the number of interviews is 9, of which 1 is a focus group with students, 5 are individual interviews with teachers, 2 with stakeholders in the educational process and 1 with a parent.

All in all, after the nearly two-year data collection period that took place between April 2007 and January 2009, the total number of interviewees is 33 teachers (of whom 23 are language teachers), 7 school (vice-)principals, 6 parents and 6 other institutional representatives. The total number of student subjects with whom focus group interviews were conducted is 41.

Table 1: The number of respondents by location, time, and status

	Time of data collection				
	From April 2007 to the beginning of 2008		From November 2008 to January 2009		Total
Location	Miercurea Ciuc/Csíksze-reda	Sfântu Gheorghe/ Sepsiszentgyörgy	Miercurea Ciuc/Csíksze-reda	Sfântu Gheorghe/ Sepsiszentgyörgy	
Stakeholders in the educational process	0	0	2	4	6
School (vice) principals	1	3	0	3	7
Teachers	6	11	5	11	33
Students	0	0	1 focus group	8 focus groups	9 focus groups (41 students)
Parents	0	0	1	5	6
					93

Research instruments

In the present study data analysis consists of the procedures offered by Fairclough (1995), i.e. the method based on three components: description, interpretation and explanation of the content of the interview excerpts by summative statements.

In this case, the interview transcripts have provided the text that has served as a domain of thematic content analysis. First of all, I listened to the interviews and selected elaborations on relevant themes for the research. Then I transcribed the selected voice sample units of the interviews word by word, without adding any marking of other linguistic conventions (e.g. accent, standardization, hesitation), in order to have an orthographic representation of the oral data. To break down the amount of text I received, I applied a thematic coding system to denote one of two major themes of the study, that is, language policy and language ideologies. Finally, I focused on describing the aspects of existent language policies related to first, second, or foreign language policies and matched them with one or more of the language ideologies my interviewees articulated. This was the last step of the analysis.

To evaluate the language policy of the Szeklerland Hungarian minority schools, I adopted

the "language as a right, as a resource and as a problem" framework presented by Ruiz (1984), also applied by Kontra et al. (1999), and the "three elements" language policy evaluation grid (capacity, opportunity and willingness) described by Grin (2003) in his suggestions referring to the effective planning of the implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

I considered it important to apply both of these language policy evaluation guidelines since, due to this, the language policy analysis presented in the dissertation is both ex ante and ex post facto in its character for the reasons that (a) it describes existent orientations that have already been adopted, (b) it draws attention to the need to focus on the implementation of adopted orientations though specific measures, (c) it examines effects of existing policies, and (d) it assesses beforehand the advantages and drawbacks of policy alternatives if implemented (Grin, 2003).

In this dissertation, data triangulation is achieved by the combination of the investigation of academic literature, official documents and by carrying out semi-structured interviews with the different members of the Szeklerland Hungarian education system. The main strength of the methodology employed in this dissertation is that it avoids the reproduction of the ideological and partial view of policy documents which would represent the context under study in a very limited way. Also, it gives a well-contextualized orientation to language practices and reveals participants' own points of view about how the educational language policy facilitates or challenges multilingualism of a minority population.

4. Overview of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of 7 chapters.

Chapter 1 has the main role of introducing the objectives of the dissertation which can be briefly summarized as follows. On the one hand, the dissertation investigates the educational language policies of minority Hungarian educational settings in Szeklerland, and, on the other hand, it aims to trace aspects of language ideologies connected to these language policies in terms of multilingualism.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the review of the literature on the history and sociolinguistic situation of Hungarians in Szeklerland.

As far as the Romanian language is concerned, section 2.2.1 discusses how the *Constitution* and the *Law on Education* (1995, modified in 1999 and 2011), official regulations that seem to ensure minority rights, hide policies of discrimination and language political acts that block the Hungarian minority from access to education and employment. The most important observations of

this description can be summarized in the form of recommendations for the teaching of the Romanian language in minority schools as follows: (a) all the minorities in Romania should have a separate curriculum for teaching and learning the Romanian language; (b) curricula for teaching the Romanian language in minority schools should focus more on the development of communicative competence; (c) curricula should clearly reflect the fact that learning Romanian language and literature (a school subject) is not the same in schools which have Romanian as the medium of instruction (and where this subject is the study of mother tongue language and literature) and schools which have a minority language of instruction, where the study of this school subject is the study of the language and literature of a non-mother tongue; (d) new textbooks should be written which incorporate the recommendations listed above. All in all, section 2.2.1 suggests that a new state language policy should be developed in Romania which would incorporate, first, a focus on the development of communicative competence, second, the enrichment of communicative competence and of those registers of the vocabulary that enable students to effectively communicate in everyday situations, and, third, would also consider the influence of the linguistic context on informal language learning possibilities.

Section 2.2.2 gives a brief outline of the ways in which the teaching of Hungarian as a subject and teaching through the medium of Hungarian are problematic in Szeklerland. Among these the most important challenges discussed by the interviewees are (a) the textbooks with very poor translations and an inconsistent terminology, (b) the lack of the supervision of translations and of the use of any Hungarian textbooks published in Hungary, (c) the total absence of field specific dictionaries in Hungarian, (d) the lack of qualified teachers and teaching resources for the Hungarian language, (e) the existent textbooks' exquisite focus on high level literature analysis with no attention given to the importance of the mother tongue as a means of everyday communication, to the influence that society bears on language, or to the differences between the vernacular and the standard forms of a language, and (f) the absence of the institutional background of both the Hungarian language and culture.

Section 2.2.3 reports on the challenges related to foreign language teaching, mainly English. The review of the problems related to English language teaching includes the description of the ways in which the low number of the programs taught through the medium of a foreign language, the lack of qualified teaching personnel for all the six foreign languages that are taught at present in Romania, and the absence of the necessary number of foreign language lessons in schools discourage the development of multilingualism in Szeklerland.

Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical framework of the dissertation, which is based on an interdisciplinary approach drawing on the concepts and methods of language policy and language ideologies following Ricento's view (2006), who claims that for those who work in language policy and planning it is impossible to explore social processes and structures without a look at ideologies. The challenge of the effective analysis of language policies is also described as conceived by Spolsky (2004, 2007) and Shohamy (2006a, 2006b), who argue that for a deeper understanding of true policies there is a need to apply an expanded view of language policy that incorporates the analysis of the different policy mechanisms that are used to perpetuate language practices in covert ways.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological background of the dissertation. It describes the data collection (respondents by time, status and location), the method of analysis, and the position of the researcher in the research.

Chapter 5 reports on the results. It outlines, on the basis of interview excerpts, interviewees' language policy views and language ideologies related to multilingualism, including their perceptions related to Romanian, English and Hungarian.

As section 5.1 shows, interviewees consider multilingualism a very relevant competence. One part of the arguments in favor of multilingualism emphasizes the instrumental value that multilingualism has in education, labor force, information flow and communication, while another part of the arguments views multilingualism as a window to other cultures and as a feature that makes one's personality richer. All in all, multilingualism is portrayed as a basic competence that comprises, besides the mother tongue, fluent language competence in the state language and in one additional foreign language, primarily English.

Section 5.2 focuses on describing the results related to the Romanian language. It shows that much of the discourse of the interviewees of this dissertation focuses on challenging the efficiency of Romania's top-down state language policy which does not allow the Romanian as a second language policy and which disregards the linguistic needs of the Hungarian minority in Szeklerland. It explains that, similarly to the view presented in the literature, the interviewees of the present study evaluate the Romanian as a first language policy as a state-imposed language policy that is unsuccessful. Here, the reasons for which interviewees consider that the state language policy malfunctions in Szeklerland Hungarian minority schools is described. The focus is on showing that the most important reason for which the interviewees consider the Romanian as a first language policy ineffective in Hungarian medium schools is that it does not contribute to Szeklerland

Hungarians' development of communicative competence in Romanian.

In subsections 5.2.1, 5.2.2, 5.2.3, 5.2.4 and 5.2.5 of the dissertation a description of the ways in which the ideologies of linguistic territoriality can contribute to a group of people conceiving of themselves as linguistic minority or linguistic majority is given. These subsections also give a review of why interviewees conceive of learning the Romanian language as an obligation and, at the same time, a relevant competence. In addition, these sections describe why interviewees call the Romanian language or the methodology of teaching Romanian *idegen* 'foreign' in Szeklerland minority Hungarian schools, and they explain why Romanians regard this phrase so disturbing.

Subsection 5.3 provides an overall discussion of the views of the interviewees regarding the English language. It shows, first, that interviewees consider the English language as "the prestigious language" that opens doors and facilitates mobility and success and, second, that fields such as education, travelling, tourism, science, technology, computers, films, music and entertainment are thought to be the sources that stimulate English language learning and use. Further in this section, it is also shown that even though interviewees consider that competence in English is of influential importance for internationalization of personal capacities, they also underline that in spite of the benefits of English as a lingua franca they do not agree with the promotion of "the English language as the most important and only language that facilitates success" language policy.

Subsection 5.4 presents language ideologies related to the Hungarian language. It shows that the maintenance of the first language, which, as interviewees underlined throughout the data, is Hungarian as far as the Hungarian population in Szeklerland is concerned, is of exquisite value and importance. Undoubtedly, interviewees consider Hungarian to be closely linked with the Hungarian culture. As a matter of fact, Hungarian is the language in which and through which interviewees describe the maintenance of Hungarians as a homogeneous (minority) community in Szeklerland and within the borders of the Romanian state.

Chapter 6 provides an overall discussion of the results on the basis of the policy evaluation path designed by Grin (2003).

Chapter 7 supplies conclusions of theoretical background, methodology and the findings of the dissertation.

The dissertation ends with the **notes** giving further relevant information on the topic investigated throughout the dissertation, the **list of references** and the **appendices** listing the interview questions and containing tables, maps and a diagram.

5. Findings and discussion

According to the analysis of this dissertation, the ideology of territoriality has considerable influence on interviewees' language policy and language ideologies of multilingualism. The interviewees of the present dissertation consider their L1 to be of primary importance, the state language they perceive as occupying the second place, while English or another foreign language as the third place.

As far as the Romanian language is concerned, the dissertation shows that since both the degree of Romanian language competence and the opportunity to learn the Romanian language are fairly inadequate in Szeklerland, interviewees consider that the state language policy needs to be reconceptualised. This is indicated, among other things, by the use of the term *foreign* as denoting the call for teaching Romanian with a methodology that is different from the one used at present (i.e. before 2011). This chapter also outlines that the ideologies related to the state language indicate that people's attitudes towards the Romanian language are influenced by their views of state language policy, which symbolizes the power and the dominance of Romanians as the majority group and stands for a top-down language policy which interviewees evaluate as wrongly conceptualized.

Regarding the English language, findings suggest that interviewees consider English as a very important tool of communication (internet, travelling), a language that facilitates mobility on the labor market and in education. In addition, it contributes to the development of intercultural tolerance and openness towards foreign cultures. And yet, while English is valued as a helping factor in future career building, it is also represented as a language that contributes to the ideological positioning of multilingualism as the source of inequality of languages with English in the top position. As a matter of fact, the "English language at every step" ideology in foreign language learning in Romania is identified in the interview data as being a source of inequality in the constellation of the languages of the world.

On the whole, Hungarian is not only considered to be the language of everyday communication but the national language that represents an important means for Szeklerland Hungarians to reproduce themselves as a national and cultural minority in Romania. As such, Hungarian plays a major role in shaping group loyalty, preserving the Hungarian cultural heritage, in making distance from others, in distinguishing "us" from "them". Eventually, the first language is viewed as the basis of the ability of human beings to think, talk, feel and understand. What is more, it is considered to be the only language one can truly express oneself in. Interviewees stress

that the importance and primacy of mother tongue need to be kept even if this is not considered to be useful. The loss of the first language is depicted as a very negative phenomenon, that is, one of the most tragic forms of identity loss that interviewees can imagine. Moreover, the interviewees assert that there is a close link between mother tongue maintenance, identity and cultural maintenance. All in all, the language ideologies connected to the first language indicate the sentimental value that the interviewees attribute to the Hungarian language.

To conclude, the language ideologies related to Hungarian, Romanian, English and other foreign languages stand for the L1 (mother tongue) plus L2 (state language) plus L3 and L4 (foreign languages) conceptualization of multilingualism. On the whole, a very positive positioning of Szeklerland Hungarians towards multilingualism is detectable in the data with multilingualism being conceived of as a tool of integration into the European community and global society.

6. Conclusions and implications

The analysis of interview data indicates that language ideologies underlie language policy theory and implementation and are, furthermore, the source and the initiators of language policy reconsideration. In fact, ideology is further elaborated as the guiding principle in language policy making and plays a fundamental role in the construction of discourses surrounding the use of languages in informal contexts at the micro-level of everyday talk. Ideology guides people's attitudes and determines the way they position themselves when they are required to talk about their views on language learning and multilingualism. This finding is in agreement with both Spolsky's (2004, 2007) and Shohamy's (2006a, 2006b) views on language ideologies as mechanisms that emerge at the grassroots and that underlie language policy procedures from the bottom up.

In this study, the focus is also on how top-down and bottom-up language policies and language ideologies shape views of multilingualism of the Hungarian minority in Szeklerland. The study demonstrates how the national interests of the two groups, Hungarians and Romanians, organized along the lines of the demand of institutional autonomy and minority rights (in case of the national minority) and that of the stability of the state (in case of the national majority) are able to divide a society. Second, it illustrates the ways in which the different dimensions of language policy are in tension and, furthermore, that it is not always the case that there is complementarity between them. As such, the results of the present dissertation also demonstrate the power of bottom-up language policy in activities aimed to challenge or undermine top-down language policy goals. Nevertheless, findings also demonstrate openness on the part of the Hungarian minority in

Szeklerland towards multilingualism and multiculturalism as a possibility that could identify the solutions on the often conflicting debates that arise between Hungarians and Romanians as cohabitants of Szeklerland. In addition, it shows that it is important for the effectiveness of any minority language policy designed and imposed from the top-down that it gives space for the voice of those from the bottom-up since it is only in this way that the cultural reproduction of the minority group is organized in such a way that it clashes with neither the rights of the minority nor the (sense of) security of the dominant majority.

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