

UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED  
FACULTY OF ARTS  
DOCTORAL SCHOOL FOR HISTORICAL SCIENCE

Konstantin Medgyesi

**Democracy discourse(s) in Hungary from and about the period  
between 1945 and 1949**

Theses of a  
Doctoral (PhD) dissertation

Consultant: Bencsik Péter Dr.

Szeged, 2017

## **Thematic concept, applied methods**

“Democracy is an important issue in both modern history and in our present time, since democracy is not just a political system by itself, but a sort of ideal-typical description of a “good” social construct.

Linguistic struggles regarding the concept of democracy are important characteristics of modern politics. The “word debate”, the argument regarding the linguistic phrase is the essence of democracy, even if the public debate is about the very definition of democracy. This fight, the linguistic struggle around the interpretation of democracy – which is essentially a political struggle disguised as a linguistic one – has been going on for over a hundred years in both world and Hungarian politics.

During the course of our research we research a few year interval specifically, that is, we examine the nature and characteristics of democracy discourse pertaining to the Hungarian Coalition Years.

From the aspect of Hungarian democracy related experiences, the Coalition Years are one of the most informative periods of modern Hungarian history. The political on-goings between 1944/45 and 1948 can be considered as references due to the fact that the participants of the revolution of 1956 considered the Coalition Years as examples of public life. The parliamentary democracy of 1989/1990 also began operating based on the public law of the Coalition Years. During the course of researching the democracy discourse in and about the Coalition Years, we created a set of texts after an empirical collection of data; we performed discourse analysis on this set of texts. By unfolding interpretative differences, cause and effect, time contexts, parallelisms, we identified separate manners of speech within the set of texts. During the examination of the texts we differentiated four manners of speech on a hypothetical basis – this is the structure of the dissertation. These four manners of speech are as follows: 1, the speech manner of public struggles; 2. the speech manner of autobiography writers; 3. scientific speech/the speech manner of the reception; 4. the local manner of speech. We examined the texts using the methods and procedures of discourse analysis. We also consider these texts as sources of paramount importance, because we accept the thesis of Pierre Bourdieu, that in the field of public life – where the purpose of deeds is the acquisition of positions of power – politics don’t “generate power, but meanings and interpretations, i.e.: texts.”

According to the fundamentals of Bourdieu the political text realities create, form and sustain situations of power.

Discourse analysis offers a qualitative set of tools for content analysis methodology. In our study, we use the following formulas for text analysis: who is the speaker and what do they say? What are the circumstances, how opinions and manners of argument are formed? How do the various texts form and did form the processes of political communication? With the help of a contextual analysis, we are looking for recurring motifs and thought structures. We aim to uncover the know-how of “speech acts”, i.e.: we are unraveling meaning.

The goal of our research – based on the research methodology outlined above – is the construction of various democracy interpretations from the Coalition Years and the analysis of the “conceptual webs” of democracy discourse. By conceptual web we mean whether the meaning of the used words adapts or new phrases are formed to describe various events, thus renewing, expanding the use of language.

By analyzing published articles, studies, parliamentary speeches, public speeches from the Coalition Years, we uncovered the post 1945 democracy discourse’s set of arguments, the disputes’ communication panels, their manner of speech. We identified the antagonistic differences between democracy interpretations.

In the post 1945 political life, the “divide” in various disputes was the attitude towards the base principles of civil democracy: any who held onto the ethos of civil democracy, found themselves facing against the Communist interpretation of reality, and any who was willing to let go of some of the principles of constitutional democracy would create the possibility for a joint communication platform with the Communists.

### **Structure and main content elements of the dissertation**

In the first chapter of the dissertation we analyzed the speech manner of the era’s public struggles. We reviewed contemporary studies of the Coalition Period and articles published in daily press. During the review of this “manner of speech” we showcased speeches from important individuals concerning democracy after 1945, paying special attention to the unique characteristics the Communist democracy interpretation and the Communist rhetoric towards

formal democracy. The Communist political strategy of democracy interpretation during the Coalition Years can be demonstrated best by expanding the phrase “reactionary”, thus we strived to outline the Communists’ deliberate strategy, the process of constructing their enemy.

The focus of the next chapter of the dissertation is the speech manner of autobiographies and memoirs. We examined how the theme of democracy appears in autobiographies of people of this era. Autobiographies, memoirs and diaries are unique “prints of self”, which are suitable for unfolding past thoughts of an individual, their attitude towards historic facts, processes, events, and the relationship between the autobiographers and important concepts affecting the personalities’ states of being. In our paper we examined the Coalition Year’s participants’ democracy-experiences concerning the era and their concepts of democracy. At the same time, we showcased the situation, where the concept of democracy – even in memoirs – was a kind of a tool for war and a weapon; an identity building narrative element from another point of view.

This was followed by the examination of scientific manners of speech, we reviewed the terminological dilemmas from the historic period of the few years after the Second World War. By doing this, we attempted to uncover the individual researchers’ attitude towards democracy of the era, using the context of historic scientific debates. This chapter is devoted to the review of how the phrases used regarding the perception of the democracy of the Coalition Years, starting from the standpoint of historians from the fifties, then moving towards freshly published professional opinions. We wished to go around sixty years’ worth of historic scientific research regarding what the individual authors think about the democracy of the Coalition Years. The common factor in the texts of professionals with different ideologies is that they all had several dilemmas towards the topic of democracy versus dictatorship. In various Hungarian and English scientific publications we uncovered the differences and similarities between various democracy-concepts regarding the era and the different beliefs regarding the formation of dictatorship as an intellectual structure.

In the dissertation’s appendix we performed a vertical democracy research. With respect to local democracy manifestation, the town of Makó is a suitable location for examining how national debates and democracy interpretation had their effect locally and how they formed local democracy. We identified this approach as a local manner of speech in the dissertation. During the examination of the local manner of speech our goal was to uncover the operational

mechanism of local democracy, the unique characteristics of local democracy interpretation and those local language policy struggles that were waged for the possession of the concept of democracy itself.

### **The thesis-like summary of the research results**

Advocates of the Coalition era left-wing democracy interpretation did not view democracy as a system and a way of life founded upon rights, but as a society-transforming framework, capable of unraveling age long fixations. This system of view is contrasted by the “civic” approach, which warned against the severe attenuation of general rights of freedom for the sake of radical change.

In the smallholder democracy perception the idealism of a social structure based on rights provided the mental basis. What we have uncovered: in addition to freedom, the autonomy of the individual, general equality of rights and the political culture of constitutionalism were also prominent elements of the smallholders’ concept of democracy. Respecting the majority principle, the laws (the rules of the game) and the institutional structures were also central elements of the post 1945 smallholder democracy concept.

After of the texts we came to the following conclusion: the essential concept of the smallholder-civic perception of democracy is that civil liberties belong to “all”. Communists on the other hand did not accept the existence of liberties applying to everyone in the same manner; according to their communication panel, the enemies of democracy were entitled to no rights.

The mood and mentality of discussions regarding democracy in 1945 was heavily influenced by the feeling of hope. The period before the elections, until the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1945, was dominated by a kind of hopeful sense of consensus. It seemed that in the long months between the end of the war and the elections consensus-like agreements began forming regarding the affirmation of democracy and its basic principles, which went beyond real – and as it later turned out, antagonistic – differences.

Due to the results of the 1945 elections their hopes were joined by the Communists as well, which resulted in a shift in the language of democracy interpretations as well. This may also

be related to the fact that the public language used by Communist became rougher now long after the elections.

If – in the context of the democracy discourses of 1945 – we said that this time was a period of the consensus of peace, then 1945 – in the context of democracy disputes as well – was the year of balance. Differences between interpretations of democracy have not yet brought on the communication toolset of denouncement and exclusion.

The fall of 1946 brought about a new era for the democracy disputes of the Coalition Years. From this date onward, the state of balance became more and more upset. In the shadow of the conspiracy case of 1947, the linguistic framework of democratic dialogue was narrowed down severely. During this state of crisis verbal brutality from the Communist Party and the law enforcement's creation of falsified accusations and open violence resulted in such a public-cultural environment, where the conditions for democracy related arguments were met at a lesser and lesser degree. By 1947 the concept of “democracy” used by the Communists became more and more absolute in its meaning and exclusionist in its content, only accommodating such points of view into its language that fit into the communist strategy.

In 1947-1948 we are still able to find and reconstruct public speeches advocating democracy, but the linguistic space, the freedom factor necessary for open dialogue was no longer present. By 1949 the period of hope and the world of the Coalition Years came has come to an end. There was a definite shift the Communist interpretation of democracy. By this time both Mátyás Rákosi and József Révai have declared that the so-called people's democracy is no more than a dictatorship of the proletariat, a type of Communist dictatorship.

With the help of discourse analysis we deal with the democracy interpretations of the manner of speech present in autobiographies regarding the Coalition Years. We can ascertain that the concept of democracy became an identity creating and forming narrative element in memoirs.

Faithful Communists' memoirs about the Coalition Years feature the democracy as a narrative element in order to analyze the period – their shared trait is that by democracy, in accordance with the Communist worldview, they meant a people's democracy, they held the structure of the people's democracy more valuable than the ethos of civil democracy. On the other hand, the democracy-image appearing in the memoirs of public figures who had taken on Communist roles during the Coalition Years but later became disillusioned with the system of

Communist dictatorship, is nuanced; The communist approach to the concept of democracy was not accepted even in the dimension of the years after 1945, the deeds of Communists against constitutional democracy during the Coalition Years was judged critically and the post 1945 democracy experiment was rather viewed as a value in hindsight. Smallholder public figures who held onto the ethos of civic democracy were advocates of constitutional democracy in the Coalition Period. Their memoirs clearly reflected a sort of protective mentality towards civil democracy and declared a set of feelings and cultural attitude against the dictatorship of the proletariat, also known as people's democracy. In their memoirs, these figures argued, they drew up their memoirs in such a way to express that the cause represented by them in the current period had been defeated, but – from a historic viewpoint – they might have assumed that they were on the “good” side – this moral superiority is a clear feature of smallholder figures' self-reflective memoirs.

In the memoirs of smallholders taking on a companion role with Communists on the other hand, the common characteristic is that constitutional democracy does not appear as a value in the sources. Democracy, as a narrative, is not a text forming factor in these memoirs. The following can be ascertained: it was psychologically necessary to make a definite split from the ideal of democracy based on freedoms in order to take on the role of companionship as a public phenomenon, thus democracy as an ideal has not appeared in memoirs either.

With the help of memoirs as sources uncovering the narrative of democracy we followed up on the process, where those smallholder public figures, who held onto the ethos of civil democracy even after 1947-48, were forced into emigration or were distanced from public appearances; while those who let some things go from the idea of democracy, were allowed to remain in the world of politics in the Communist dictatorship as well in a marginal, companionsque role.

The first time a scientific manner of speech has appeared in discussions regarding the years after 1945 and the democracy of the era was in 1950 and then onwards. This time, narratives analyzing the time period and the democracy's use of terms could be identified using another language as a code, the speech manner of reception.

Based on the historic linguistic canon of orthodox Communism, the “requirements” for the dictatorship of the proletariat were already “present” by 1948/49, the proletariat's dictatorship

has also been realized in the structures of state power, by contrast, the prelude to the proletariat's dictatorship can be observed in the four-five year period after 1944 in the form of a conceptual framework of a sort of "democratic dictatorship, based on this linguistic code, the period of the Coalition Years was the period of "democratic dictatorship".

Until the middle of the sixties, scientific speech was majorly influenced by the characteristics of ideological speech. From the middle of the sixties the phrases used started becoming more and more objective, by the eighties scientific speech was still not able to get rid of the bindings of ideological speech completely, but historical scientific discourse became more fact-based.

The manner of speech can obviously be paraphrased based on the Marxist linguistic code, but a certain textological renewal tendency could be perceived. The fundamentals of Kádarian reform ideology – which became established by the second part of the sixties – regarding a realist perspective opened the way for more complex, argumentative linguistic constructs, for historic scientific discussions regarding the Coalition years. The scientific manner of speech of the seventies-eighties interpreting the Coalition Years was clearly leaning towards a more objective use of language. The concept of the Coalition period became an accepted, legitimate notion, and even though examples of the linguistic categories of Marxist historic canon could still be found, the intentions for more objectivity is evident.

The democratic narratives of a scientific manner of speech studying the democracy of the Coalition period was allowed to form in the free linguistic and spiritual medium brought on by the regime-change. In publications published after 1990 we identified the following phrases pertaining to the democracy of the Coalition period: The period of a democratic multi-party system, the period of rebuilding and democratic reforms, the period of democratic reform, the period of democratic interlude, the period of the great coalition, the years of democratic pretense, the time of the coalition's interlude, the period of forced coalitions, the period of democratic evolution, an experiment to form a restricted parliamentarism, the period of restricted civil democracy, the trial and failure of creating a rule of law, the chess match for the sake of democracy, the four years of democracy arguments, an attempt to remodel the system, two-faced power structure, the period of restricted representative democracy, anti-liberal construction of democracy, multi-step revolution, strangled democracy, gradually undertaken Sovietization, formal multi-party system, creeping revolution, the period of a life-and-death struggle between civil and Marxist forces, the period between two totalitarian regimes, the introductory period of communist dictatorship, the period of multi-party



totalitarianism, the lost reform era, the time of demotic democratic transformation, the period of gradual communist takeover of power, the period before the establishment of Stalinism, the moment of transition, the years of transformation, the period of the attempt at democracy, the years of sovietization tendency, the time for an attempt at democratic renewal, the few years period after the Second World War, the initial phase of sovietization, the years of change, the period of failure at democratization, the period of pre-Stalinization, the years of forced regime-change, the period of false coalition, the period of restricted and threatened democracy, the period of democratic compromise, on the way to Communist dictatorship, the period of gleichschaltung the parliamentary democracy, the period of dualist power, the interim years, the antechamber of Rákosism, the attempt at democratic pluralism, the period carrying the promise of democracy, the years of fragile democracy.

By researching the democracy discourses of the years after 1945 we can considered the following phrases as key phrases of the period: fear, hope, total division, distrust, and forced compromise.

The democracy discourses of Hungarian public life after 1945 were mainly determined by the dichotomy of democracy versus dictatorship, or fear versus hope from another point of view: the essence of these arguments was whether democracy or dictatorship shall come to life, that is, the real meaning of discourse was not about whether a civic or a people's democracy is forming, but rather: is there any chance for the thought of a democracy based on freedoms to form in the face of the forming dictatorship. By 1949 this arguments was "decided", the hope for democracy ceased to exist.

In relation to the democracy-aspirations of the post 1945 period the concept of democracy-intention seems like a legitimate concept, since even after the analysis of discursive texts we shall come to the conclusion that democracy-intent can clearly be identified in the Hungarian public life in the years following 1945.

The democracy-intentions of Hungarian society are evidenced by the institutions of direct democracy, the democracy arguments, the operation of parties, the relative freedom of democracy-declarations of party programs and that of the press. The democracy intentions and the multitude of democracy experience between 1945 and 1948/49 managed to become a factor which transformed the period.

## **Scientific publications related to the topic of the dissertation:**

A „demokrácia” mint fegyver a koalíciós évek makói közéleti küzdelmeiben („Democracy” as a weapon in the public struggles of Makó during the Coalition Years). In: Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve (2014-) 3: pp. 165-180. (2016)

A kertész, az orvos és a borkimérő: Kisvárosi rendszerváltozás és a helyi hatalmi elit. (The gardener, the doctor and the wine measurer: small town regime-change and the local power elite) In: Szociológiai Szemle 1. pp. 60-71. (2005)

Egyházi küzdelmek a rendszerváltó kor Makóján. (Ecclesiastical struggles at Makó during the period of the regime-change) In: Magyar Egyháztörténeti Vázlatok 1-2. pp. 173-191. (2005)

Jelenkor-kutatás és kisvárosi rendszerváltozás. (Research of the contemporary and small town regime-change) In: Történeti Muzeológiai Szemle 4. pp. 91-98. (2004)

A makói Pfeiffer-affér: Közéleti botránysorozat a koalíciós évek Makóján. (The Pfeiffer-affair of Makó: A series of public scandals at Makó during the Coalition Years) In: Zombori István (szerk.): Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve: Történeti Tanulmányok. Szeged: Móra Ferenc Múzeum. pp. 257-283. (2004)

Mindszenty bíboros Makón. (Cardinal Mindszenty in Makó) In: A Makói Keresztény Értelmiségi Szövetség Füzetei 36. (2003)

„...jogosultságát megtarthassa”: Bibó István szakvéleménye az állásvesztésre ítélt magántanárok magántanárságának megszüntetéséről. („so that he may keep his entitlement”: the expert opinion of István Bibó regarding the teachers about to lose their job about to lose their status as private teachers) In: Forrás: Irodalom-Művészet-Tudomány, február. pp. 57-59. (2002)

Egy meghiúsult Zadravec-intervjú háttere: Közjáték az alsóvárosi harangünnep idején (1921) (The background of a failed Zadravec-interview: Interlude during the bell celebration at the lower city) In: Erdélyi Péter, Szűcs Judit (szerk.): Múzeumi Kutatások Csongrád Megyében. Szeged: Móra Ferenc Múzeum (2002)

Mindszenty bíboros és a Marosmenti Mária-nap: A Boldogasszony-év történetéhez (Cardinal Mindszenty and the Maria-day at the Maros: To the history of the year of St. Mary)  
In: Zombori István (szerk.): Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve: Történeti Tanulmányok.  
Szeged: Móra Ferenc Múzeum. pp. 289-331. (2000)

**Presentations:**

*To the democracy interpretation of Imre Nagy during the Coalition Years – The communication panels of an unpublished speech at Makó.* Museological Research at Csongrád County 2016. The scientific reading session of Móra Ferenc Museum, November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

*The concept of “democracy” as a weapon in the Coalition period – with particular regard to the public struggles of Csanád County.* Museological Research at Csongrád County 2015. The scientific reading session of Móra Ferenc Museum, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

Autobiographies of Communist cadres of Makó from the period of the Coalition Years. Museological Research at Csongrád County 2012. The scientific reading session of Móra Ferenc Museum, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012.