

Anna Fenyvesi (Szeged)

Minority Hungarians in Romania, Slovakia and Serbia: Schoolchildren's attitudes to their languages (minority vs. majority vs. EFL) and the teaching of these languages in their schools

This presentation reports on some of the results of the work done in LINEE (“Languages In a Network of European Excellence”), an extensive sociolinguistic research project on European multilingualism funded under the EU’s FP6 program (project number 28388). More specifically, these results come from LINEE’s Work Packages 9 and 9a, which studied the minority education systems of and students’ attitudes in traditionally bi- and trilingual regions of Europe such as South Tyrol, Italy, Transylvania, Romania, Southern Slovakia, and Vojvodina, Serbia. The presentation will be focusing on the educational situation of Hungarian minorities in three of these: Transylvania, Southern Slovakia, and Vojvodina.

As far as the investigations of the educational systems of these regions were concerned, the main research questions were as follows: (i) how far are the linguistic, cultural, economic and social needs of the investigated groups taken into account in the present-day school system? and (ii) how successful are the methods investigated above as regards the increase of multilingual competence? The answers to these questions were sought in 101 semi-structured interviews (28 in Slovakia, 28 in Vojvodina, and 45 in Transylvania) with teachers and school principals in minority schools (approximately a total of 59 hours), which were analyzed for content.

As a general conclusion we can state on the basis of our research that the linguistic needs of the communities we studied in terms of the mother tongue are taken care of. However, in terms of the state language, the situation is different: whereas *legally* there are clear guarantees for state language teaching, *factually* one can sometimes find less idyllic situations because of local, constantly changing circumstances resulting frequently in insufficient state language knowledge. One common problem identified among the Hungarian minority was that in all three countries involved, the state language is invariably taught to minority students as if it was their mother tongue rather than a second language: their teachers are not trained as second language teachers, and their textbooks are not written for second language learners. The foreign language (English) teaching, at the same time, commonly fails to take advantage of the students’ multicompetence deriving from a proficiency in their mother tongue and the state language, treating the foreign language virtually in isolation.

The research on students’ attitudes explores what attitudes minority Hungarian students have towards and what values do they attach to the various languages they use (i.e. the minority language – their regional variety vs. its standard variety – vs. the state language vs. English as a foreign language).

The investigation adopted the view of attitudes as responses made by people to social situations and to members of ethnic and social groups (i.e. the speakers of certain varieties and languages), showing a pattern of distribution of the social and linguistic evaluations by speakers.

The source of data for this study is an attitude survey along the lines of the matched guise technique, with the use of speech samples played to the subjects which they are asked to rate on semantic differential scales (for a number of characteristics along status vs. solidarity traits). The languages tested for include, in addition to the minority language (Hungarian) and majority language, or state language (Romanian, Serbian, and Slovak,

respectively), the students' foreign language, English as well, including native speaker (British vs. American English) vs. non-native speaker, i.e. Hungarian-accented English.

The study reported on was carried out among 7th-8th grade vs. 11th-12th grade students, with the total number of subjects being 1,150, in minority schools in the following minority Hungarian regions: (1) the Szekler region (n=200), Transylvania, Romania (where Hungarians are the local majority), (2) Maros County (n=200), Central Transylvania, Romania (where Hungarians are the local minority), (3) Vojvodina, Serbia (n=400), and (4) Southern Slovakia (n=350).

The presentation provides insight into the attitudes towards and values attached to minority Hungarian students' languages that they use on a daily basis. In general, English was given by far the most positive ratings, showing the very high value attached to it in Central Europe today. The ratings of state language vs. Hungarian vary country by country, pointing at important differences.