

Use of Dialects and Standard Language in the region of Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

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Abstract: This article focuses on the use of Slovak literary language and dialect of Banská Bystrica within a group of young, university-educated, over 30 years old people. The aim of our research is to find out the current status and preferences in the use of dialect as an essential part of cultural heritage and standard language. Except literary language and its non-literary forms, we expect significant usage of foreign languages, especially English.

Keywords: Slovak literary language, standard language, dialect, foreign language, communication.

1 Introduction

Language is a system of communication means and has several functions that are not separated but function together (Koltaiová, 2014, p. 60). Ondruš and Sabol (1987, p. 29–41) distinguished these functions:

- Primary:
 - cognitive,
 - communicative.
- Secondary:
 - aesthetic,
 - representative – national and cultural.

In our context, representative function plays an important role, since language is a part of each culture and its users identify themselves through it and at the same time they receive and spread culture by using it. Culture is thus reflected in the language and vice-a-versa. Ripka considers the language not only as a tool of communication and thinking, but according to him, spiritual creations of previous generations are kept and handed over by it (Ripka, 1998, p. 81). Cultural heritage is preserved not only in and through literary language but various specific and unique terms are kept in its dialects.

2 Language Stratification in Slovakia

The society differs and also its needs and language that does not really function in just one form but practically is realized in several forms – varieties that were formed as a result of the territorial, social or communication diversity of the community (Koltaiová, 2014, p. 119). Stratification of the language is a part of socio-linguistic researches and several authors have been examining Slovak language as a social-communicative system. For example: *“Language stratification model represents functioning of the varieties of national language coexisting in particular language (national) community in a specific historical period”* (Bosák, 1995, p. 54). Stratification has been developing gradually, historically and logically. Varieties of national language has been shaped and formed that responded to the needs of their users in specific communication situations (Koltaiová, 2014, p. 120). According to Horecký’s language stratification concept it is necessary to know particular forms of national language and borders between them. He divided national language into: literary language, standard form, substandard, dialects and language of fiction (Horecký, 1979, p. 221–227). These reflect functional, territorial, social stratification of Slovak language in its integrity (Kumorová, 2015, p. 36). The basic stratification of national language can be expressed in dichotomy – literary language and its non-literary forms. The literary language is naturally on the top of the stratification schemes.

3 Literary Language

It is possible to interfere into the development of language, to create appropriate conditions for its existence, function and cultivation. The result of this cultivation is literary language (Koltaiová, 2014, p. 115). J. Dolník (2010, p. 162–163) defines literary language as an institution in socio-linguistic context that means a social establishment which has coordinating function in the society based on generally accepted and individually implemented standards. It also means a semiotic system – a system of signs, so that its elements determine characteristics resulting from relations in the system. Literary language is a national language unit that is used in:

- official public relations,
- public and social binding communication,
- art, science literature and journalism,
- administrative communication and documentation (state, business, legal, juridical etc.),
- and is taught at school.

Literary language has written and oral form. It differs from commonly used language by stylistically modified system of means and tools. This language is often codified. Although literary language is usually formed on the basis of one particular dialect, there are also elements of other dialects and taken elements from different cultural environments. In our case, Slovak literary language has its basis in the middle-Slovak dialect, especially Martin. J. Kačala claims that Slovak literary language is *“a gothic cathedral built on the grounds that were created for centuries in the form of the Slovak dialects”* (Kačala, 1997,

p. 17). We agree with the thought of E. Pauliny that *“language (Slovak language) lives and lasts in its dialects”* (Pauliny, 1962, p. 356).

4 Dialects

Slovak dialects have been the means of communication of the Slovak people in their everyday social and work relations (Štolc, 1994, p. 15). Dialect communication is popular in a particular society (family, friends and acquaintances) in a specific territory. According to Ripka, dialects are *“relatively autonomous variable form of language, having its own internal structure forming a system, its own communication functions in a variety of limited communication spheres”* (Ripka, 1995, p. 16).

Dialects are considered to be one of the forms of national language and belong to non-literary language. Unlike literary language they are not codified and do not have validity in the entire society. Dialectology is a science discipline that examines language in the society and reflection of a social life in it. Its subject is non-literary, non-codified form of national language – dialects (Krajčovič, 2009, p. 186).

Slovak dialects can be divided territorially into:

- Eastern-Slovak,
- Middle-Slovak,
- Western-Slovak.

Except these dialects, there exist also local dialects of towns and villages. Banská Bystrica and its surroundings have specific local vocabulary known for both younger and older generations. In order to keep and spread this valuable heritage, in 2013 one of Banská Bystrica ex-patriot Dušan Klimo published a collection the language traditions, customs and local colour of Banská Bystrica and the surrounding areas from ancient times to the present.

Dialects can be divided geographically but also socially. Ondruš and Sabol (1987) within national language distinguished three basic forms of national language:

- literary language: superstandard (artistic style), standard (literary form) and substandard (colloquial language),
- dialects (horizontal division),
- social dialects (vertical division).

Social dialects (sociolects) have been formed as a result of economic, professional and cultural differentiation of the society. According to Bosák, *“sociolects are the least fixed variety in all languages and particular speakers use them in connection to various communicative situations”* (Bosák, 1995, p. 30).

5 Research

5.1 Aim of Research

Following the research done by Lithuanian prof. Kačiuškienė and two Slovak doctors Slatinská and Pecníková in 2014 we have examined the use of dialect and standard language in the region of Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. The empirical part of our research is based on the same questionnaire used in the previous research. The aim of our research is to find out the current status and preferences in the use of dialect and standard language within a group of young, university-educated people.

5.2 Objectives of Research

The objectives of the research are based on the assumption that majority of our respondents prefer using standard language in daily communication publicly and privately. We suppose that the use of standard language will be significantly higher in comparison to dialect. As we selected the group of the young, university-educated people we believe that except using standard language they prefer foreign languages, especially English. Dialect is probably used more with the group of older people in the surrounded villages of Banská Bystrica. The objective of our research is to confirm given statements.

5.3 Characteristic of Respondents

Historically, the language basis of the spoken language in the town is the dialect of the town and its surroundings. In the course of development, the language of the town in the speech of individuals is shifting from this basis towards the literary language, while the language basis of the town remains more or less stable (Findra, 2007, p. 119). In our research, we have examined the use and preferences of the standard language and dialect in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. The group of respondents were university-educated, over 30 and successful young people. All of them are Slovak and have some connections to Banská Bystrica. Two of them do not feel being Slovak, one did not state the nationality he/she is adherent to and another one considers himself/herself being Western European. 70% of respondents have a Slovak spouse. One stated that he/she has an English spouse.

In connection to education, 73% of them studied at University of Matej Bel. 50% have human education and 33% economic. One of our respondent studied law and also gained doctoral degree. Another one studied political sciences and international relations and passed rigorous exam. Two of our respondents attended technical universities and one went to Armed Forces Academy in Liptovský Mikuláš. 80% of them studied internally, three passed rigorous exams and three gained doctoral degree.

Their careers are mostly connected to their education. Business, trade and administration have the highest representation. In some cases, they are joined so currently 43% work in

business and trade, 60% in administration. Despite the fact that 50% have studied humanities only 27% work in education. 20% of our respondents do not work. As they are over 30 we suppose that the main reason for not working is maternity leave.

The following results reflect who our respondents are. Based on the language research we can find out their identity as the language and its dialects are an integral part of it.

5.4 Research Results

Language of communication in the family

As we have selected the group of intelligent young people. We assumed that they would prefer speaking standard language within their families. And the results confirmed our assumption as nearly 100% marked using standard language with basic family (mother, father and siblings). One stated that he/she uses Czech in conversation to a father and another one uses Polish when talking to a mother.

Probably 60% of our respondents have children, they use standard language and one stated they he/she also uses English in conversation with them.

As 70% of our respondents have a Slovak spouse they confirmed talking to them in standard language. One said that he/she talk to a spouse in a dialect and as we mentioned above one has an English spouse so they communicate in English.

In connection to grandparents, 63% stated talking to mother's parents in standard language. There are simple explanations for such results, they do not remember grandparents or they marked the way they talked to them when they lived or this number represents those who still live. With father's parents, we understand it the same as 67% stated using standard language with grandfather and 73% with grandmother. Again, one person uses Czech with grandparents and one Polish with mother's father. As grandparents are of different generation, we would guess that a dialect can be used when talking to them but according to our research using a dialect represents only insignificant number.

Common usage of language

As for the daily use of language, we can claim that 100% think, count and communicate with animals in standard language. Except this, they also stated using foreign languages for thinking and counting. 23% think in English, one person thinks in Polish and three people think in German. As for counting 17% use English and 10% German.

Knowing languages

As all of our respondents are over 30 years old they were born in the previous, socialist regime. Except Slovak language, their mother tongue, they are all 100% able to understand and read Czech. 77% stated that they can write and 43% can speak Czech. During socialist regime, Russian language was compulsory at schools and as it is similar to Slovak language nearly half of our respondents (47%) understand Russian and 17% stated that they can speak, read and write in Russian. Another similar language is Polish and more than half of our respondents (57%) understand it and 20% can speak and read in Polish. As we supposed, out of all language, English keeps its dominance. All of our respondents

understand and can read in English. In addition to this, 87% can speak and 97% can write in English. Second popular language that has significant representation is German as 60% stated that they understand it, 47% can read and 30% can speak and write in German. Around 10% of our respondents can communicate in French. And finally, one person is able to communicate in Italian, another one in Spanish and one understands Croatian. Knowing foreign languages is a very important skill mainly in our working and as the world is getting globalized it is also necessary in our private lives.

Languages learned at schools

As we have already mentioned, Slovak language is a mother tongue of all our respondents and 100% stated that they learned it at primary and secondary schools. In addition to this, 30% studied Slovak language at university. In connection to our past Russian was a compulsory subject at schools and all of our respondents were born in the socialist era so 30% of them learned it at primary schools. After Velvet Revolution in 1989 English and German substituted Russian language. 73% of our respondents learned English and 37% German at primary school. At secondary school 93% learned English, 40% German, 7% French and one respondent stated that he/she had also Italian language. Except learning languages at schools our respondents attended courses at language schools. Again, English is represented the most (43%). At universities 57% learned English, 27% German and one or two people mentioned French and Italian. As we asked a law-educated person, Latin also appeared as an answer. This group of people took chance and travelled abroad where they also learned language. The reasons for travelling were getting to know other cultures, learn language, earn money, gain experience or internships during university studies. The language they used mostly was English (40%). One of our respondents stated that he/she spoke and learned English during his/her mission in Iraq. As we supposed English has dominant position between all foreign languages.

Language of communication in public

Language is a bridge that safely gets us from one place to another and through it we can also gain information about other people and cultures (Kučmová, 2006, p. 325). Communication in public varies from the private one and we agree with A. Buda who claims that way of communication is frequently connected with the interlocutor's education, his/her age and work position (Buda, 2012, p. 176). Usually, we have tendencies to speak more sophisticated in public and results of our research confirm it because 100% of our respondents reported using standard language in shops, institutions, with acquaintances and during various meetings. However, 17% stated using English during meetings and 7% of our respondents also use German. Despite the fact that our respondents are young people more than half (57%) of them said that they use standard language when talking to a priest. When talking to strangers and acquaintances they also use English (30%) and German (10%) otherwise they prefer standard language (over 90%).

Language of communication with neighbours

When talking to neighbours we would guess less formal language but as our respondents prefer standard language in their families with neighbours it would not be different. Only

17% of them stated using a dialect when talking to older generation, people over 50 years old. With middle generation 97% of them stated using standard language but also some foreign languages for example 23% English, 7% German and Polish and one person uses also Czech. The same use of foreign languages is when they talk to younger generation. In addition to foreign languages, they all reported using standard language.

Language of religion

In Slovakia, even today, most people report to Christianity, but faith does not have such an impact on the lives of believers as it was in the past. 50% of our respondents stated that they say prayers in standard language, 43% reported going to confession and teaching prayers in standard language. One person stated praying, confessing and teaching prayers in a dialect, one in Czech and one prays in Polish.

What is a proper way to speak/write/sing

Our respondents reported that they use standard language at home and thus we can suppose that they prefer using it in all forms of communication. According to our respondents the right way of communication at home is the use of standard language. Only 20% stated the use of a dialect. Higher percentage of respondents uses standard language when talking to family members in public. 97% of them confirmed it. With strangers, they also prefer Slovak literary language and furthermore 17% mentioned using English. One respondent uses German and Russian as well. Every spoken conversation in public should follow the rules of standard language. On TV and radio Slovak literary language is must. 100% of our respondents supported this idea. Again, one respondent prefers also other foreign languages. In written form, all of them agreed to use Slovak literary language.

Singing songs does not have to follow the rules of literary language. Slang, non-literary language, breaking grammatical rules are acceptable. However, our respondents claim that when singing songs standard language should be preferred. 90% confirmed it when singing privately with family members and 93% stated using standard language during festivals and parties. In addition to this, 27% of them use a dialect when singing with family and 30% claim using it during various festivals and parties. As all of them can speak foreign languages, they also expressed using them when singing privately and publicly as well. Moreover 20% of our respondents stated that it depends on the song what language it is sung. And surprisingly, only 17% mentioned using English privately and publicly.

If a person speaks dialect (the local language), he/she is...:

The last question of our research was connected to how respondents view a person speaking dialect. As our respondents come from town, 70% of them consider a person speaking dialect as a rustic one and 80% stated that older people use a dialect in communication. Furthermore, they understand using a dialect regionally and patriotically. This is shown in their answers where 80% expressed that using a dialect means respecting native dialect and more than half of them (57%) think that patriots use a dialect. Despite the fact that our respondents understand dialect-users as old, rustic and partially patriots, they do not consider them uneducated. Only one third of our respondents reported that people who speak dialect are poorly educated.

6 Conclusion

In connection to proper understanding of any language it is necessary to take into account the cultural background that can affect, to a large extent, the process of perception of the importance of the utterance. Language is not only a means of communication which we use to express our thoughts, but through it we also spread the culture (Kučmová, 2006, p. 325). Being a member state of the European Union means to keep a unique identity in this multicultural and multilingual society. The European Union aims to support language diversity and standard language with its dialects is considered to be an integral part of an identity. In order to cultivate language and to keep dialects vivid, firstly we have to admit their importance as dialects are an essential part of the nation's culture, identity and history. In our case "the Slovak dialects are undoubtedly part of history of our national language and also a Slovak nation and thus, they can be regarded as being and explicit part of our national culture" (Kačala, 1999, p. 111). Those who do not respect them or are prejudiced against dialects and their users, they do not understand the added cultural value found in them. This is also connected to their lower knowledge of language and lower cultural awareness (Slatinská, Pecníková, Kačiuškienė, 2014, p. 82).

To sum up our research, it is more or less evident that majority of our respondents use standard language in all form of communication. There was only insignificant percentage of those who use dialect in certain forms of communication. However, this does not mean that they consider dialect users as backwards or poorly educated people but rather partially patriotic ones who respect native dialect acquired since childhood.

The language is not stable but dynamic and flexible system. It can accept new words and limit the archaic or historic ones used in the past. It is still changing and under constant influence of globalization, mass media and IT (Slatinská, Pecníková, Kačiuškienė, 2014, p. 84). Global, but mainly pan-European indicators suggest that English is a strong phenomenon in Europe, that there is a constant debate over whether English will become the only common communication and negotiation European language so called *lingua franca* (Kumorová, 2015, p. 82). The reason is a simple fact that English expressions penetrate to European languages and that is also true for Slovak language. As we live in a new digital era, words taken from English, mainly throughout the means of mass communication, are getting into Slovak language faster than ever before. Our research also confirms dominance of English but our respondents are skilled in other foreign languages as well.

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