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# Sociolinguistic Typology of Slavic Minority Languages

## Introduction

Several attempts to create sociolinguistic typologies or descriptions of what areas should be included in sociolinguistic research have been made, for example by Haugen (1972), Ferguson (1966), Kloss (1968), Hyltenstam & Stroud (1991), Haarman (1986). Some of these attempts are discussed in Edwards 1992. Up until now these typologies have not been fully exploited as a basis for research. They are, however, important when discussing such notions as language maintenance, language shift and language loss. Despite the title of this paper[1] I cannot discuss here in a comprehensive way the already existing sociolinguistic typologies; nor will I present a new sociolinguistic typology. My aim is more restricted: to discuss one aspect of the typologies that have been thus far suggested and used, an aspect which has some bearing on the language situation of Slavic minorities in former Socialist Europe and neighbouring countries. The aspect I would like to discuss is how the *degree of linguistic distance* (Kloss' term, 1967, p. 16) between the minority language and the language of the dominant majority influences the linguistic situation of the minority.

Slavic-speaking minorities exist in all European countries if one includes postwar refugees and work migrants. Slavic minorities, however, are more "indigenous" to former Socialist Europe and some adjacent countries such as Turkey, Greece, Italy and Austria. The fact that most of the Slavic minority groups are relatively old settlers in the areas where they live means that they are recognized, or have the possibility of being recognized, as minorities according to the criteria usually used in Europe. As is well known, recent immigrant or refugee groups usually are not recognized as minorities according to European praxis. Nevertheless they may have some linguistic rights.

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[1] This paper will be read at the XII International Congress of Slavists in Kraków 1998. The Russian title of my abstract is: "Sociolingvističeskaja tipologija jazykov slavjanskich men'šinstv".

Most of the Slavic minorities in former Socialist Europe live in Slavic-speaking countries, that is, they live among dominant peoples speaking closely related languages. Other groups live in non-Slavic countries. In non-Slavic countries the, distance between the Slavic language of the minority and the language of the dominant population of course varies. The degree of distance between Hungarian and Slavic languages is naturally greater than, for example, between Russian and Latvian.[2]

## Definition of Slavic minority languages

Typologically most of the Slavic minority languages are what Kloss calls *Aussenmundarten* (Kloss 1967 and 1987), that is, they are dialects with a standard language used (spoken and written) as the national language in another state. Most of the Slavic minorities, thus, have what is called a *matica* ("queen bee"; "home"). This is true, for example, for Slovaks in Vojvodina or Poland, Slovenes in Austria, Czechs in Poland, Bulgarians in Serbia etc.

A subgroup of Slavic minority languages is constituted by the so-called micro-languages (12 according to Duličenko, 1981). The micro-languages did not have, did not have contact with, had sparse contact with, or did not recognize any *matica*. The situation for many of the microlanguages is thus that they have been relatively isolated. A micro-language is characterized by the fact that it has some sort of written literature such as, for example, the Prekmurje Slovene, Banat Bulgarian, Burgenland Croatian, Molise Croatian, Vojvodina Rusyn, Kashubian etc. As has been pointed out it is sometimes hard to separate micro-language literature from dialect literature. From a modern point of view the Kajkavian and Čakavian literatures are literature in dialect but as both literatures have a venerable history, they differ from ordinary literature written in dialect.

The linguistic situation for the Sorbian languages is also, to a certain extent, similar to that of the micro-languages. The Sorbs are a minority in Germany, they are bilingual and their languages are more or less threatened.[3] The difference between the Sorbian languages and the so-called micro-languages is the degree of recognition. The Sorbian languages are more widely re-

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[2] I am very well aware of the problems of measuring linguistic distance or similarity, but I think everybody can agree about these two examples.

[3] For Lower Sorbian see Norberg 1996, Fisher 1997. For Upper Sorbian see, among others, Elle 1997, Rzetelska-Feleszko 1997.

cognized both by scientists and politicians. For all intents and purposes I shall make use of a broad and rather truistic definition of minority language, one that includes the micro-languages. A Slavic minority language is thus the language of a Slavic minority living in an area with a dominant majority language.[4] The crucial point in this definition is the scope of the word "minority", which is used here somewhat more broadly than usual. Thus I do not make a real distinction between regional language and minority language. Wirrer (1997, p. 155) defines minority language as a "language which to a minimum degree typologically differs from the respective official 'national' language and whose speakers define themselves as ethnically different from the majority population of the country in question. It does not necessarily cover a particular territory". He defines regional language as a "language with a particular territory which typologically differs from the respective official 'national' language to a minimum degree. Its speakers ethnically define themselves as part of the majority population of the country in question."

However, to differentiate between regional language or minority language is often difficult. When speaking of Kashubian identity some researchers have talked about an "imbedded" identity (see for example Majewicz 1996, p. 41), that is, most Kashubs are aware of their particular identity as Kashubs, but at the same time they feel that that they belong to the larger Polish group. However, some Kashubs do see themselves as a separate nation and their language as a separate Slavic language. And the language situation is about the same for regional languages and minority languages.

## Degree of linguistic distance between the dominant language and the minority language

Haugen (1972, p. 331) argues: "Moreover the many types of diglossia and bilingualism induced by the conquest of one language group by another or the immigration of one group by another are of the same nature. What does differ is the degree of language distance between the dominant and the dominated varieties, what one may call autonomy. In some cases, e.g. in Jamaica there may be a continuous scale, while in others, e.g. in Haiti, there may be a clear break even when the varieties are related. The cleavage [between the langua-

[4] The situation for the Belarusan language in Belarus is also to a certain extent that of a minority language, although the speakers of Belarusan are the majority where numbers are concerned. But functionally the situation of Belarusan was and is once again similar to that of a minority language.

ges/language variants marked + status and those marked + intimate, S.G.] is even greater where the languages are unrelated, as with Breton or Basque against French."

Kloss (1966, p. 16) gives 'degree of distance' as his eighth variable (out of ten) but concludes: "By and large, however, this variable might be of minor importance."

Haarman (1986) too includes linguistic distance between contact languages in his "ethnolinguistic variables" and seems to allot more importance to this variable than does Kloss.

Edwards (1992) does not include 'degree of distance' among his questions.

In my opinion, however, this variable is of real importance when discussing Slavic minority languages. The degree of distance might influence both language maintenance and language shift/loss. The degree of distance might also influence both the degree of interference and the amount of borrowing. That dominant languages influence the dominated ones is a rather truistic statement. The opposite is also true, especially when minority speakers learn the dominant language. Their version of the dominant language is usually flavoured by elements from their mother tongue.

Hypothetically, it should be easier to preserve the language when there is a huge distance between the dominating and dominated language. Michael Clyne (1992), for example, has demonstrated that the Dutch of Australia has changed more than, for example, German. He writes (p. 32): "The more advanced changes in Dutch than in German in Australia are partly attributable to the greater language shift(ing) away from Dutch. One could argue circularly that this, in turn, is due to the greater linguistic similarity between Dutch and English." Clyne, however, does not press this argument. Mac Key also finds evidence of this type in Canada: He writes that there "seems to be an inverse ratio between interlingual distance and language, that is, the more different the language the lower the shift. It is as if similar languages attract each other and dissimilar ones repel" (p. 36). It is hard to find examples of the effects of a great degree of distance on the preservation of Slavic minority languages because, as far as I know, no research has been done. Other factors are also involved that make the picture fuzzy. The minority policy of the country is important. Examples are abundant: Prussia, and later Germany, especially in the Nazi period, Hungary after 1867, the Soviet Union especially after WWII, Greece all carried through restrictive and/or repressive minority policies which usually led to large-scale language shift or loss in the minorities. The

attitudes of the majority population are also important. And (negative) majority attitudes are to a certain extent dependant on the fact that the majority does not understand the minority language.

Hypothetically again, it could also be argued that when the dominant language and the dominated language are (closely) related, the risk for language shift or loss and the interference possibilities should be greater. As for grammatical interference Meillet was of the view that "grammatical loans are only possible between very similar systems" and many other linguists have adhered to this view. Jakobson contends in a less absolute way that "a language accepts foreign structural elements only when they correspond to its own tendencies of development" (see Thomason & Kaufman 1991, p. 14). Thomason & Kaufman, however, do not adhere to this way of thinking (1991, p. 35): "The starting point for our theory of linguistic interference is this: it is the sociolinguistic history of the speakers and not the structure of their language, that is the primary determinant of the linguistic outcome of language contact. Purely linguistic considerations are relevant but strictly secondary overall. [...] Both the direction of interference and the extent of interference are socially determined; so, to a considerable extent, are the kind of features transferred from one language to another." The examples they give tend to support their view but, on the other hand, the interference possibilities are immense when closely related languages are concerned and are very often hard to discern when the languages are so similar in structure and vocabulary as the Slavic languages.[5]

When speaking about degree of distance it is very important to distinguish between spoken language and written language. Written Russian and written Belarusan are, for example, distinctly different due to the fact that Russian spelling is etymological, whereas Belarusan spelling is phonetical. The differences in spoken language are less pronounced due to the fact that spoken Russian has *akanye*. It is also a fact that there is no distinct borderline between Russian and Belarusan dialects, that is, there does not exist any thick "Bündel" of isoglosses that delimits Russian from Belarusan. This is probably one of the factors that has furthered the spread of Russian in Belarus. It is also probably true that many speakers of Belarusan do not really see Russian as a "foreign"

[5]In this discussion it could also be of interest to point out what Poplack and Sankoff (1988, p.1180) write about code-switching: "Once it is known that the social role of language mixing is propitious to the smooth integration of both codes, typological considerations are predictive of the types of mixture. Similar typologies are conducive to equivalence-based code-switching and conflicting typologies are more likely to result in nonce borrowings and/or constituent insertion".

language; rather they look upon it as the high variety of their own language (see Gustavsson 1995, p. 53). The closeness of Belarusan to Russian has also resulted in a creolized or mixed variant, the so-called *trasyanka* ("mixed cattle-fodder"). This variant is highly individualized. The "mix" of Russian and Belarusan varies from person to person and from situation to situation. But the mixing does not seem to be totally without rules. The same type of mixed language is to be found in Ukraine, the so-called *surzhyk.*

The choice of alphabets may have the same function of differentiation as spelling. Belarusans have used the Latin script especially in Western territories which made it at least somewhat more understandable for Poles and less close to Russian. The Rusyns in Presov sometimes use the Latin script, which makes the written language closer to Slovak and more different from Ukrainian (Duličenko 1996, pp. 13-14). The founder of the West Polesian language, Mykola Šyljahovič, also wanted to differentiate from Russian and Ukrainian by using a Latin alphabet (Duličenko 1995, p. 129).

## The typical Slavic minority language situation

Many Slavic minority language situations are tetraglossic: the speaker of the Slavic dialect has to take into account the neighbouring dialect of the dominant language, the standard of the dominant language, and the standard of his own language (see for example Priestly 1997, pp. 127-128, where he discusses "the order of esteem" between Dialect Slovene, Standard Slovene, Dialect German, and Standard German in Carinthia). This *tetraglossia*[6] (my term) is according to Priestly typical for most *Aussenmundarten.* And I would add for most Slavic minority language situations, although the components may vary. In Socialist Ukraine the Slavic minorities had a choice between two "foreign" standard languages: Russian or Ukrainian. The possibility to study their own standards, as is well known, was non-existant, or very circumscribed. Only Soviet Lithuania offered some possibilities for the Poles. The choice of standard was dependant on the linguistic surroundings. The Poles living in Western and Central Ukraine, that is in predomantly Ukrainian surroundings, seem to have chosen Ukrainian, whereas the Bulgarians living in the East chose Russian (Gustavsson 1992, p. 182).

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[6]In an earlier paper (Gustavsson 1990a) I used the term triglossia for this type of language situation but I think now that tetraglossia is a more adequate way of describing this situation.

In some cases the language situation seems to be triglossic. One example is the situation in Opole Province, Poland which Vann (1997, p. 329) characterizes as "social trilingualism". The three languages included in this triangular drama are Standard German, Standard Polish and the local Silesian (Slavic) dialect. A similar situation seems to have existed in the village of Benjakoni in the Hrodna (Harodna) i.e Grodno Province of Belarus. Although most of the inhabitants were Poles, Polish was confined to the Catholic Church and to some elderly speakers. The main language in family life was the so-called *prosta mova/mowa prosta* ("simple speech"), i.e. the local Belarusan dialect. Russian was dominant in official and cultural life while Standard Belarusan was used to a very small extent. (See Michnevič /ed./ 1985). The same situation seeems to exist/have existed among some of the Poles in Lithuania - the "simple speech" being the everyday family language, Polish being used in the church and for contacts with Poland, and Russian or Lithuanian being the more official languages (see Grek-Pabisowa & Maryniakowa 1995, p. 146). A more or less triglossic situation seems to be the case also in the area of Serbia where Bulgarians live (see Gustavsson 1990b, pp. 30-31). The local dialects of the Serbs and Bulgarians are rather similar, the Serbian ones belonging to the so-called Torlak area which has many of the (Balkan) characteristics of South-East South Slavic (i.e. Bulgarian and Macedonian). The two other languages involved in this triglossia are of course Standard Serbian and Standard Bulgarian.

In border areas and areas with mixed population such as, for example, the Carpathian area or Vojvodina one might also find pentaglossic, hexaglossic, or even heptaglossic language situations. The situation for the Rusyns of Czechoslovakia in the period between the wars with the Russophile, Ukrainophile and Rusynophile orientations among the Rusyns was such a situation. Here could also be mentioned the Lower Sorbs in the period after WWII. Here Dialect German, Standard German, Dialect Lower Sorbian, Standard Lower Sorbian and to some extent Standard Upper Sorbian were involved (see Norberg 1996).

The tetraglossic situation, however, is the most common one. In this situation the degree of linguistic distance between the four language variants involved is important. In the case that the four variants are closely related, we should expect many interference phenomena. As examples can be mentioned the influence of Serbian and Croatian on the Rusyn language and on the Czech language in former Yugoslavia (Medješi 1985 and Gustavsson 1984). In spoken Rusyn the influence is evident to a great extent on both the lexical and grammatical levels whereas in written Rusyn the influence can be felt mostly

on the lexical and semantic levels. In the Czech newspaper in Daruvar, Croatia, "Jednota" which was supposed to be written in Standard Czech one could nevertheless find interferences on all levels from the surrounding Croatian. If my hypothesis holds true, close linguistic relatedness could further language shift or loss. There is some evidence for this. The ready acceptance by Belarusans of Russian seems to support such a fact. That so many Rusyns in East Slovakia sent their children to Slovak schools after the Ukrainization efforts in the beginning of the 1950s and later also tended to abandon their Rusyn identity for a Slovak one is also such a fact (Magocsi, 1979, p. 27). East Slovak dialects and Rusyn dialects have many similar traits, the area being transitional from East Slavic to West Slavic. The Rusyn of former Yugoslavia is also in its most essential characteristics an East Slovak dialect, that is, it is West Slavic, whereas the other three Rusyn language variants, which I call the Lemko Rusyn, the Prešov Rusyn and the Užhorod Rusyn, are distinctly East Slavic.

## The written language of the minority and linguistic distance

In tetraglossic language situations the written language of the minority poses special problems. Usually most minorities with a mother country (*matica*) learn and use the standard language of that country. This was a deliberate policy during the Socialist era.The exceptions were the creation of the Moldavian language for Moldavia and the promotion of Rusyn in Yugoslavia. The standard language of the mother country, however, is often rather distant from the dialect/spoken language of the minority. The latter is often peripheral to the dialects that are the basis for the standard of the mother country and has often been isolated from the mainstream of development in these dialects. This means that for a long time they have been open to influence from the majority language and culture. This is true for the Rusyn of Yugoslavia, which, if it is to be counted as Ukrainian, is very peripheral. As a Slovak dialect it is also peripheral, the Slovak Standard being based primarily on Central Slovak. To this distance in spoken language added other factors which made it hard for the Rusyns to identify with the Slovaks and Ukrainians in the Vojvodina environment. The Slovaks in the area were mostly Protestants while the Rusyns were Uniates. The differentiation between Rusyns and Ukrainians is due to the fact that the Rusyns in Yugoslavia came from the area which is now East Slovakia and partly Karpathian Ukraine as early as the 18th century, while the

Ukrainians came from Galicia in the 19th century. The latter then already had some kind of Ukrainian identity. These factors were rather influential when the Rusyns of Yugoslavia created their own language on the basis of the dialect of the biggest village, Ruski Kerestur. This Rusyn language, which has been labelled a micro-language by Duličenko, is now in most respects a full-fledged literary or standard language.

Distance is also true for the East Slavic Rusyn dialects (i.e. Lemko, Hutzul etc) of Poland, Carpathian Ukraine, East Slovakia and Hungary which existed for a long time outside the main bulk of East Slavic and were influenced by adjacent and surrounding Slavic and non-Slavic dialects and dominated by non-Slavic and Slavic majorities. This and other factors have triggered the need to create a written language of their own. For some years we have witnessed this process of the creation of three new written variants of Rusyn (see above). The few Rusyns of Hungary seem to be content with using the Prešov "standard".

Another example are the Kashubian dialects and the attempts to create a Kashubian standard, if - and many do not - we consider the Kashubian dialects a special dialect group of Polish. If they are a dialect group of Polish, then they are really peripheral to, and very distant from the Polish standard language. This peripheral position, this great degree of distance from Standard Polish is, of course, one of the reasons for the creation of literature in Kashubian.[7]

A third example of the importance of linguistic distance is the attempt in the late eighties to create a West Polesian (Yatvingian) language in Belarus. The Polesian dialects are distinctly different from the Belarusan dialects that are the basis for the literary language (for example they lack the *akanye/yakanye* so characteristic of both written and spoken Belarusan) and could be called transitional to Ukrainian. As a matter of fact they have even been considered Ukrainian (see Duličenko 1995, p.121). This distance must have been an important cause for the attempts to create this language.

When the minority language area is as dialectally varied/diverse as in the case of the Kashubian dialects the creation of a common standard language encounters rather severe problems. One dialect cannot be used as the basis for the norm as it will be "foreign" to the speakers of other dialects. On the other hand a supra-dialectal norm might be felt to be too abstract to get recognition

[7]For an account of the present situation in the Kashubian area see among others Zeniukowa 1997, Popowska-Taborska 1997, and Breza 1997.

from the speakers. This is the dilemma that the Kashubian writers and linguists have faced and are still facing.

In the case of West Polesian, the creator of the language, Mykola Šyljahovič, has been criticized for narrowness in the choice of dialectal basis for his language (Gustavsson 1995, p. 67).

The difference in dialect basis is also felt where the Rusyn language variants are concerned. To this difference is also added the fact that these dialects are spoken in six countries: Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia, Rumania, Hungary and former Yugoslavia with six dominant languages which naturally influence the Rusyn dialects in different directions. Thus, the Rusyns from five countries (Poland, Yugoslavia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Hungary) that met at the first working seminar on the Rusyn language in Bardejovské Kúpele, Slovakia in 1992 decided to develop four standards based on the dialects in Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia and Yugoslavia. This decision was based on the difference in the dialects, the fact that one standard already existed in Yugoslavia and that the standardization attempts in the other countries differed from each other. The ultimate goal, however, is to create a common standard at least for the Rusyns in Slovakia, Ukraine and Poland.

## Conclusions

It has often been said that every language situation is unique. This is true, but nevertheless we must try to make generalizations about language situations, in this case Slavic minority language situations. The typical Slavic minority language situation is a tetraglossic one, that is, four players are present: (a) the dialect of the minority, (b) the dialect of the dominant majority, (c) the standard language of the minority which often is a national language of a country outside of the country where the minority lives, and (d) the standard language of the dominant majority. When (b) and (d) are not related to, or distant relatives of, (a) and (c), (a) and (c) should, hypothetically, be better preserved, which is another formulation of the following: When the degree of linguistic distance between (b) and (d) on the one hand and (a) and (c) on the other is great, (a) and (c) should be better preserved.There is some evidence for this from sources outside the Slavic area, while other factors such as restrictive and/or repressive minority policy, negative attitudes from the majority etc. tend to cloud the picture in the areas where the Slavic minorities live. In the case of (close) relatedness between (a), (b), (c), and (d), i.e. when the linguistic distance is not as great, which is the case when Slavic minorities live in countries

with a Slavic dominant language, the risk for language loss and/or shift seems to be greater and interference phenomena on all levels are more common. The fact that many *Aussenmundarten* are influenced from the dominant Slavic language and also are often peripheral to the dialects that constitute the basis for the standard of the *matica,* has often created a need to create separate literary languages. Inside the Slavic countries, this is not uncommon for areas with dialects that differ greatly from the dialects which are the basis for the standard. What is perceived of by the speakers of a certain language variety as linguistic distance, however, probably does not depend on the actual distance.

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