On the relationship between small and large Slavic languages*

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Abstract

This article draws on the analysis of (standard) Slavic languages comprising the following pairs: Slovenian – Serbo-Croatian, Lower Sorbian – Upper Sorbian, Slovak – Czech, Rusyn – Slovak, Belarusian – Russian, and Ukrainian – Russian. In these pairs, the first language may be classified as small, the second one as large. This may be done on the basis of the following criteria: number of speakers, spread of the language, its economic strength, status of speakers, how the language is elaborated, and its prestige. These factors operate in particular periods of history, thus a language may vary regarding its "smallness" or "largeness." The notion of a small or large language is relative: with respect to a particular language, a language may be small and with respect to a different language, the same language may be large. Given that the areas where these languages are spoken border on each other and "semicommunication" (Haugen 1966) between their speakers is possible, the large languages influence the small ones. A large language penetrates the communicative domains of a small language or even its structure, especially in terms of vocabulary. The legal equality of small and large languages cannot stop these processes, as it works to the benefit of large languages simply due to their "largeness." Actual equality may be guaranteed by compensatory measures to the detriment of large languages.

This article also further develops Language Management Theory, particularly its power dimension. Another characteristic of this approach is its focus on the reflexivity of linguists' work — the descriptions of language situations produced by linguists are viewed as an essential part of the language situations themselves.

1. Pairs of Slavic languages

Many languages of the world can be arranged in pairs that fall into the categories subsumed under my title: small and large languages. The data

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upon which this article mainly draws are taken from (standard) Slavic languages forming the following "small–large" pairs: Slovenian – Serbo-Croatian, Lower Sorbian – Upper Sorbian, Slovak – Czech, Rusyn – Slovak, Belarusian – Russian, and Ukrainian – Russian. In the Slavic world, other pairs of languages, however, could also be considered to have a similar relation, Kashubian – Polish being one of these. Moreover, "small–large" pairs similar to those identified within the area of Slavic languages can certainly be found in other language families, for example, Romance or Germanic (see Deumert and Vandenbussche 2003). On the other hand, the "small–large" language pairs analyzed here differ in a number of regards from linguistically unrelated pairs such as Slovak – Japanese or even Slovak – Spanish, and such relations will not be discussed here. Also, in contrast to Fishman (1984), this article leaves aside the "national language (small) – international language (large)" distinction, for example, Slovak – English.

Here, I seek common features in the given constellations of Slavic languages. This, however, is possible only on a high level of abstraction. In other words, the language situations in which the given pairs of languages occur are interesting to compare, yet are, to a large extent, unique (see, e.g., Stabej 2003; Zaprudski 2003; Marti 2003). This fact has prompted me to emphasize the theoretical aspects of my interpretation. This article is to be understood also as a contribution to the verification and further development of language management theory. I pay particular attention to the way the factor of power is manifested in the relationship between a small and a large language.

2. Language management

When analyzing the relation between the given pairs of languages, I will employ language management theory, originally developed by J. V. Neustupný and B. H. Jernudd, as a more complex alternative to the language planning theory of the 1960s and 1970s (Neustupný 2002a, 2004; Nekvapil 2006). The starting point of language management theory is the identification of language problems by everyday speakers in the course of communication, not the identification of language problems by experts employed in important social institutions (e.g. ministries or academies). This theory thereby includes an assumption which makes it possible to describe not only the "top-down" management processes, which had been the focus of attention of the language planning classics (see Kaplan and Baldauf 1997), but also the "bottom-up" ones. Institutional or organized management of language should take into account the way a particular individual manages his/her language behavior.

Language management (henceforth LM) has the following stages: 1) noting, 2) evaluation, 3) planning an adjustment, 4) implementation. The speaker, for example, notes a certain language feature in his/her own or someone else's speech, namely on the background of the expected language feature (he/she notes a deviation from the norm); the speaker evaluates the feature used as negative, chooses a different one, and implements it (from the opposite point of view, the speaker chooses a certain language feature because he/she evaluates it positively). LM can be suspended at any of the above stages. The speaker may, for example, merely note a certain language feature; or note it, evaluate it, but not plan an adjustment, etc. The individual stages of LM may concern not only particular items (e.g. a Russian word in a Ukrainian utterance) but also fundamental linguistic problems, such as communicative incompetence in a foreign or native language. Institutional or organized LM may also be viewed as a process, and the above four stages may be recognized within it. Although it is an analogous process, it is of course far more complex both in terms of the number of participants and the way they communicate and assert their will. Apart from language planning (language policy), there exist other types of organized LM, such as language cultivation, speech therapy, and language teaching.

In language management theory, the link between language and social problems is emphasized. Neustupný (1993) draws on the fact that the implementation of institutional solutions to language problems is successful only if the "problem-solvers" consider the socioeconomic in addition to the linguistic and communicative levels. The language competence of a particular ethnic group cannot, for instance, be enhanced merely by offering its members the appropriate language education, but rather, by providing them with the relevant communication opportunities, which can, in turn, only be achieved by providing appropriate socioeconomic opportunities. This may be exemplified by a point from a paper published by Spieß (2000: 208): in order to preserve Sorbian, Upper and ultimately even Lower Sorbian, the economic situation in Lusatia, the region of Germany in which the Sorbs live, should improve to such an extent that young speakers would not be forced to leave Lusatia and seek employment in non-Sorbian-speaking regions, which, of course, removes them from Sorbian communication networks and accelerates their sociocultural loss. The attention devoted to the socioeconomic level logically introduces the notion of power into the theory (see Neustupný 2002b).

3. Semicommunication and adjacency

Let us now pose the question of what is characteristic of the above-mentioned pairs of languages. The first important feature they share is that their speakers can, in principle, communicate with one another while speaking their own languages and understand one another relatively well if they are willing to. This phenomenon is referred to as "semicommunication" (Haugen 1966). The term semicommunication itself indicates a certain degree of information loss in this type of communication; however, what is important is that the interlocutors in the communicative event feel that they can really understand each other (otherwise they would not communicate). Semicommunication, that is, communication with acceptable information loss, is made possible by the fact that the languages used in the communicative event are genetically closely related and are of the same structural type.

Given Haugen's analysis of communication among Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians, we can consider semicommunication positive. Semicommunication formed the basis for the successful language policy of the last two decades of communist Czechoslovakia, where communication between the Slovaks and the Czechs was involved, and it is sure to find its place in the European Union language policy as well. However, the possibility of relatively uncomplicated communication with the users of other languages may under certain circumstances *problematize* the very identity of the languages involved. A question may arise: Are the speakers really using two languages? Couldn't these be considered merely two varieties of the same language?

The second important common feature of the above pairs of languages is the fact that their users live in adjacent territories, or in linguistically mixed territories which were or are a part of a single state. Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian coexisted in Yugoslavia; Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Russian in the Soviet Union; Slovak and Czech within Czechoslovakia; Lower and Upper Sorbian coexisted and still coexist within Germany; and Slovak and the Rusyn language within Slovakia.

Semicommunication and adjacency strongly influence the migration of the population, resulting in the mutual permeability or substitutability of the languages in question, as well as efforts to regulate these processes. This is what I am going to deal with below.

4. Problematization of language identity and language management

In language management theory, it is assumed that it is not only the ministries or the state that are active in managing the language, but also, for example, the schools, business organizations, families, and last but not least, individual speakers. It is useful to differentiate between simple management, that is, one taking place within a communicative event, and an organized one, that is, management taking place within the framework of a more complex social event, usually institutionally based (for details, see Neustupný and Nekvapil 2003).

Simple management can be observed in the following exchange, in which a Czech speaker (C) and a Slovak one (S) communicate (the example is taken from T. Ivaňová's M.A. thesis):

(1) C: *jsem dostala dneska takovej email že se nemůžou dovolat a věčně se dovolaj k těm Moravákům*
'Today I got an e-mail saying that they can't get through and they keep getting those Moravians.'
S: *pretože si im dala <u>zlou zlú</u> linku*
'Because you've given them the wrong [Cz.] wrong [Sl.] extension.'

The first sentence uttered by C is in Czech, but S, a Slovak speaker, replies in Slovak. Clearly, this exchange is an instance of semicommunication in Haugen's sense. Moreover, what is relevant here is that S used the Czech morph "-ou" (cf. the expression *<u>zlou</u>*), but immediately corrected it in favor of the appropriate Slovak morph "-ú" (cf. *<u>zlú</u>*). The management process therefore operated as follows: speaker S noted a deviation from the Slovak norm in her utterance, she evaluated the deviation as negative (her negative evaluation of such deviations may be permanent), and made an adjustment.

Organized language management can be illustrated by the decision of a part of the Belarusian élite to ignore the fifty-year development of standard Belarusian within the framework of the Soviet Union's language policy of Russification (in evaluating the norm called "*narkomaŭka*" negatively), and to return to the standard Belarusian norm from the 1920s (i.e. a positive evaluation of the norm called "*taraškevica*"), thereby contributing systematically to the deepening of the distinction between Belarusian and Russian. Such management should be understood as organized as it is performed by a number of participants, it encompasses theoretical thoughts motivated by diverse ideologies, and becomes an issue of societal discourse.

I have given these examples in order to clarify that what I propose to call the "problematization of the identity of languages" will be different in simple and in organized management.

As far as simple management is concerned, the speakers will, for example, note that they have used a feature of the other language, yet unlike the Slovak speaker S, they will not evaluate this as negative, and they will not adjust their utterances. They may also realize that they are using a more or less unpredictable combination of features of both languages, evaluating this as negative, but are nevertheless unable to perform an adjustment — this is the way the functioning of the language varieties "*trasjanka*" (a mixture of Belarusian and Russian) or "*suržyk*" (a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian) is sometimes described in Belarusian or Ukrainian linguistics (see, e.g., Taranenko 2000). What is even more consequential concerning the questioning of the language's identity are those cases when the speakers fail to note their use of a feature of "the other" language — no management process takes place in these cases, utterances are merely generated. Particularly, the cases in which speakers regard a certain variety of "the other" language as a variety of their own language are worth mentioning. Gustavsson (1997: 1922) suggests that the Belarusians, who migrated in large numbers from the country to the cities, may have regarded Russian as their standard language rather than as another language. A similar case took place in Central Europe. Prior to the foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 and perhaps even later, a number of Slovaks perceived standard Czech as their own language. It should be emphasized, however, that "problematization of the identity of a language" becomes a category for specialists in such cases because the speakers themselves do not realize the existence of any language problem.

The conscious and unconscious problematization of the identity of languages has been reflected by organized LM since the times of the European national (ethnic) movements. This could not be otherwise if a constitutive feature of a nation is to be language and if the nation aspires to a statehood of its own. The delimitation of a nation, or possibly even a state, is therefore accompanied by language delimitation. This process has been a relevant issue up to the present. Stabej (2003) points out a remarkable argument for retaining Serbo-Croatian in the curricula of the Slovenian primary schools in independent Slovenia — it is claimed to be worthwhile for Slovenian speakers to clearly recognize the difference between Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian in order not to mix the languages up unwittingly.

Organized management, however, not only responds to the problematization of the identity of languages in individual communicative events, but stimulates such problematization as well. This usually happens under the banner of constructing another, broader identity that bridges the identities of two or even more languages. The similarity of Upper and Lower Sorbian, or their convergence, was supposed to contribute to the strengthening of the Sorbian identity as such; the "Czechoslovak language," though a mere legal construct, was to symbolize the state unity of interwar

Czechoslovakia; Slovenian was to dissolve in the unified Serbo-Croato-Slovenian language after World War I (Zamjatina and Plotnikova 1994: 217).

The unification processes, however, did not take place at an even pace. The languages in the given pairs were not symmetrical in a number of parameters, in other words, "small" and "large" languages stood in opposition to one another (Marti 1998). And this, in addition to semicommunication and adjacency, constitutes the third feature that the abovementioned pairs of Slavic languages share.

5. Delimitation of small and large languages

What makes the relationship between large and small languages interesting? In the situation of adjacency and semicommunication, either as a possibility or as a reality, large languages affect the small ones by the very fact of their size. This basically happens in two interrelated ways, consciously or unconsciously, on the level of simple as well as organized LM: 1) the large language expands into the communicative domains of the small language, and 2) it penetrates the structure of the small language, or at least its vocabulary. The situation of Slovak in Slovakia after the establishment of Czechoslovakia (in 1918) can serve as an example. At the newly founded university in Bratislava, the present-day capital of Slovakia, the lectures were given mostly in Czech, and as late as in the 1930s discussions were held on whether Slovak should be developed for the purposes of scientific discourse at all. Furthermore, the codification of standard Slovak at the beginning of the 1930s drew Slovak closer to Czech, particularly in the area of vocabulary.

What are the criteria on the basis of which a language may be classified as large or small? Daneš and Čmejrková (1994) define a small language (namely Czech) merely on the basis of its being used by a small nation, thereby limiting themselves to a quantitative criterion. The number of speakers seems to be very important indeed, appearing as a defining feature in the works of other authors as well (Egger 1997; Marti 1998). The number of speakers is often linked to the size of the territory where the language is used, that is, to the extent to which the language is spread geographically. The quantitative criterion also forms the basis of a factor that may be referred to as the economic strength of the language. A corollary of this factor is that the production of cultural artifacts in an economically stronger language is likely to be more extensive than that in an economically weaker language, which means that in the situation of adjacency and mass semicommunication, the culture of the economically stronger language is likely to enter the market of "the other" language. However, other factors, which are linked more loosely, if at all, to the quantitative criterion, may also contribute to the largeness or smallness of a language, viz. the social status of its speakers, its degree of elaboration, or its functional range, and finally its prestige deriving from some or even all of the above factors.

The largeness or smallness of a language depends of course on what the language is compared with. The same language may be a large language in relation to one language and a small one in relation to another. Thus Slovak, while having various features of a small language in relation to Czech in certain periods of its history, acts as a large language in relation to Rusyn (see Magocsi 1996). Similarly, Czech, a large language as opposed to Slovak, is again a small language with regard to German. And as suggested by Marti (2003), Upper Sorbian is a small language in relation to German, but a large one with respect to Lower Sorbian.

Needless to say, the number of speakers, geographical distribution, economic strength, speakers' status, elaboration, and prestige of a language are historically bound and therefore variable. The Slovenian language after 1991, that is, after Slovenia became independent, differs from the earlier forms of the language in a number of the above-mentioned features. Belarusian was different in terms of a number of these factors before 1990, that is, before the independence of Belarus, and has become even more different after 1995, that is, after the Belarusian authoritative president A. Lukašenka consolidated his power.

These examples illustrate the fact that the coexistence of small and large languages is related to factors of power. Power, however, is not exercised only by states and statesmen. The relation between language, or communication, and power will be discussed in the next section.

6. Power and élites

Power has become an important sociolinguistic topic and its analysis has even given rise to a separate branch of sociolinguistics, viz. critical sociolinguistics (see Mesthrie et al. 2000: Ch. 10). Within language management theory, power is dealt with not only on the level of the state, which is usually the case, but also on all other less complex levels of society — any participant of LM either has or does not have power: a political party, an enterprise, a family, and last (but not least) an individual of various social status. Power presupposes a certain community of social actors, at least two (e.g. a married couple), as it has to be exercised relative to someone (e.g. a husband imposing communication in Ukrainian instead of Russian in the family). Thus power is the capability to enforce one's interest, reach one's goals, even against the will of the other social actors. Exercising power is of a processual character and can be managed (cf. Neustupný 2002b). The director of a Slovene bank may, for example, note that his/her employees' knowledge of languages is in decline, evaluate this as negative, and suggest that a course of English be organized, making it compulsory for all employees.

Society, however, is not made up of only mutually independent individuals, families, small social groups, firms, and organizations performing their own local language management. At least since the times of social modernization, language management has also been carried out intensively by the state, programmatically influencing what I have called local LM. According to Fishman (1972), language planning performed by the state should ensure the functionality of the state (Fishman's "nationism") and promote the feeling of sociocultural unity among its citizens (Fishman's "nationalism"). In a multilingual state in the situation of semicommunication, either as a possibility or as a reality, the most important question is that of sociocultural unity. As attested by the history of the European national (ethnic) movements as well as by the situation in the Slavic world after 1989, there is not necessarily a single concept of sociocultural unity within a particular state. The question of who is the bearer of the alternative ideas is crucial for the further development of the state. If it is basically a whole parallel society, with its own organized LM at its disposal, it will avail of some historic opportunity, establish its own state, and raise its language to the status of the official or state language. This is the way Slovenian has been functioning since the 1990s.

The concepts of sociocultural unity, however, may also be borne by smaller groups of people that can be referred to as the élites with respect to their cultural and symbolic assets. In order to impose their interests in the sphere of language, the élites need adequate power. This means at least to convince as many people as possible of their goals. This was already the case during the national movements (cf. Hroch 1996), and this factor has gained in importance today as democratic features pervade political life to a larger or smaller extent. Thus the point of departure is the existence of a discrepancy between what is evaluated as positive or negative in the area of language by the everyday speaker and what is evaluated as such by the élite, the élite aiming at the everyday speaker's identification with its values (see Kronsteiner 2000).

Nevertheless, the élite does not usually dare present all its ideas to the people. It is characteristic for a number of specialists to use two types of arguments to explain why the use of a small language should not be abandoned. One set of arguments is aimed at the élite, the other at the everyday speaker. For instance, when dealing with Sorbian, Jodlbauer et al. (2001) offer both "scientific" justifications for revitalization and those aimed at the "everyday citizen." This of course is well justified, as there is real concern that the "scientific" arguments may not convince everyday speakers. What are the potentially futile or less effective arguments? The authors above adopt them from David Crystal, who answers the question of why endangered languages should be maintained as follows: "Because we need diversity. Because languages express identity. Because languages are repositories of history. Because languages contribute to the sum of human knowledge. Because languages are interesting in themselves" (after Jodlbauer et al. 2001: 212). A similar view is expressed by the Czech ethnologist L. Šatava, a specialist in the questions of Lusatia: "Efforts at survival and further development of small ethnic and language communities should be viewed in the context of the general form of human 'wellness', of ecological activities, of the struggle for an individual element in today's globalizing world" (Šatava 2000: 14). And what are the potentially effective arguments that might hopefully be presented to the "everyday citizen," that is, a Lower Sorb directed toward the exclusive use of German? According to Jodlbauer et al. (2001) there are three of these: a) early preschool bilingualism facilitates the learning of other languages, b) Lower Sorbian opens the way towards other Slavic languages, c) it is possible to learn three foreign languages during schooling, namely, English, the second compulsory language (e.g. French), and the somehow unwittingly acquired Lower Sorbian. It is interesting to note that while the "scientific" arguments are transferable to other languages, the "everyman's" arguments would have to be modified, for example, for Belarusian. In any case, both types of arguments point to the fact that the élites, unlike the everyday speaker, prove to be enlightened and aware of what is good for them. Despite the postmodern topics, here we can observe the "top-down" approach typical of the organized LM of the social modernization period.

7. Élites and everyday speakers

Everyday speakers, however, do not accept the élites' values passively, often resisting their power. Even the everyday speakers have power at their disposal, exercising it openly. They decide, for example, whether to enroll their children in a Russian or a Belarusian school (cf. Gutschmidt 2000: 82). They may also notice that the Russian/Belarusian school does not provide a sufficient amount of teaching in "the other" language, evaluate this as negative, choose another school, and transfer the child there.

The extent of interest in a school in one or another language is an important indicator of the status of a language in the society. In Prague, inhabited by about 20,000 Slovaks in the 1990s, there has never been a Slovak primary school, although legally this would be possible. In the second half of the 1990s, the Ministry of Education approved a project for a Slovak high school (*gymnázium*) in Prague, prepared by the Association of Slovaks in the Czech Republic, whose program focuses on "eliminating the phenomena leading to the assimilation of Slovaks in Czech surroundings." Despite an extensive information campaign, only eight students applied for admission to the proposed high school, and therefore the project failed (see Nekvapil [2000a] for more details). Everyday speakers show their genuine interest in a school, in the particular ethnic language, having considered various circumstances, and their choice may of course conflict with the ideas and interests of the élites promoting a small language. According to Zaprudski (2002), given free choice of their children's language of tuition, the parents in Belarus would probably opt for the language they consider socially more useful, namely, for Russian, Belarusian thus becoming "a victim of the developing democracy in Belarus."

In exceptional cases, the everyday speaker is asked to state his/her attitude towards language in a referendum. Language management theory, stressing the bottom-up approach, cannot but welcome such a social event. On the other hand, it should be kept in mind that the theory was developed in a postmodern climate and it presupposes a certain mode of societal functioning, to which all the societies organizing referenda may not conform. Whether the referendum will or will not be held is often decided by the ruling élites (*this* is not decided in a referendum!). They can time the referendum to their advantage, they can launch an effective campaign directed at a particular result, and they formulate the questions. The results of a referendum should nevertheless be taken seriously. This applies also to the referendum in Belarus (in 1995) in which the question "do you agree to give the Russian and Belarusian languages equal status?" was answered positively by 53.9% of all the potential voters (for details, see Zaprudski 2002, 2003). The results of the referendum were of course taken seriously by the ruling élites, promoting broader use of Russian. However, it is also the élites supporting the propagation of Belarusian, while pointing out the illegality and bias of the referendum, who must accept it as an important indicator of the status of Russian, or Belarusian, in Belarus, and they seem to do so. Statements such as "the results of the 1995 referendum *shocked* those supporting broader use of the Belarusian language" (Zaprudski 2002; my italics) attest to this indirectly.

Critical sociolinguistics, inspired by neo-Marxism and post-structuralism, however, does not point only to the overt exercise of power in human activities linked to language, but also to the fact that power is exercised tacitly (possibly also due to language, or communication, itself) so that people sometimes do not realize that they are being controlled. This type of power is sometimes referred to as hegemony (Mesthrie et al. 2000: 319). Although the non-transparent exercise of power cannot be denied, the fundamental importance of everyday speakers' management is to be adhered to methodologically — if only because uncovering hegemony tends to be at the hands of the (alternative) élites only.

8. Everyday speakers and the standardization of small languages

Although often manifested in everyday utterances and conversations, where verbal performance becomes the subject of simple LM (cf. Neustupný 2002b), power receives particular attention in linguistics in connection with the standardization of languages as the utmost product of organized LM. As far as our topic is concerned, it should be realized that in the early period of modernization as well as in the later period, the standardization of languages was not governed by the interest of everyday speakers but by the interest of the élites (see Mesthrie et al. 2000: 346 ff.). It was propelled by socioeconomic unification and symbolization of state unity. This is why uniformity became the basic feature of language standards ("standard languages"), and it was promoted primarily through the public school system. The everyday speaker's task was to master such a system (like other systems) flawlessly, and therefore "in a uniform way." At present, characterized by the sense of multiplicity, diversity, or dissimilarity, the position of the everyday speaker and the approach of those creating the standard (i.e. the élite) are — or could be — different.

In particular, it should be noted that everyday speakers' resistance to the standards presented to them by the élites is not isolated. The standard form of Lower Sorbian drawing closer to that of Upper Sorbian after World War II resulted in the Lower Sorbs' feeling that the standard language presented to them was not really their standard language but the language of the Upper Sorbs. In the context of revitalization efforts, a tendency to bring standard Lower Sorbian closer to everyday speech and to re-dialectize it to a certain extent has asserted itself logically since the 1990s. Incidentally, an interesting feature of the process has been the introduction, or reintroduction, of German elements into the standard language — something hard to imagine during the period of modernization (cf. Spieß 2000: 206; Pohontsch and Schulze 2000: 925). The results of the Belarusian referendum de facto restoring Russian to its dominant position in Belarus can be partly interpreted as a reaction of the everyday language users to the behavior of the Belarusian élite promoting the broader use of Belarusian. The élite has been split into the "traditionalists" and the "reformers," and accordingly presented two forms of standard Belarusian to the everyday speakers in the 1990s (Bieder 2000), thereby destabilizing their language awareness and discouraging them from using Belarusian.

When studying the standardization processes in Lusatia and Belarus, the question arises as to whether or not today's creators of standards should take another course of action. In a postmodern spirit, Hübschmannová and Neustupný (1996) point to the fact that the attempts at uniform, mandatory and fully elaborated standards, that is, the efforts typical of the standardization of large languages, belong to history. The future may lie in the variant, pluricentric, and selectively elaborated standards. The construction or mere innovation of standards in the old way does not seem to make much sense — an alternative could consist of promoting tolerance towards the existing variability. This applies even more to the situation of semicommunication, either as a possibility or as a reality, in which the adjacent Slavic languages occur.

9. Élites versus élites

Social scientists tend to be particularly interested in such situations in which language problems become the subject of an open battle among the élites. This seems to be due to the fact that such situations are transparent even for everyday speakers, and therefore undoubtedly socially relevant. In such cases, what matters is not usually the language itself, but political power. As noted by Mečkovskaja (2002), the communicative function of Belarusian has been in decline, while its primary function has become symbolic — the use of Belarusian is often interpreted as an expression of opposition against the pro-Russian government in Belarus. The interests of the élites contradict one another, making it difficult, if not impossible, to formulate a generally acceptable language policy in such a situation.

But why can't the results of the Belarusian referendum from 1995 be considered an outcome that could satisfy both the élites supporting broader use of Russian, and those promoting broader use of Belarusian? Did the referendum not, after all, result in merely acknowledging that Belarusian had the same legal status as Russian? It has been demonstrated in other language situations as well that the legal equality of small and large languages actually affects the small languages negatively. This is due to the lower number of speakers, smaller geographical distribution, lesser economic strength, lower status of their speakers, lower degree of elaboration, and finally, their lower prestige, that is, due to all or at least many factors which we used above to distinguish between large and small languages. Today's official status of Belarusian could be compared to the then situation of Slovenian in socialist Yugoslavia. Slovenian was equal to Serbo-Croatian by law, yet in fact Serbo-Croatian penetrated a number of communicative domains even within Slovenia itself (cf. Toporišič 1992). It seems that a small language can be guaranteed effective equality only by positive discrimination, in other words: by compensatory measures to the detriment of the large language.

An extreme solution is the change of state borders, with each of the élites remaining on a different side of the border (cf. the splitting-up of socialist Yugoslavia, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, or the heated discussions on the possible division of the Ukraine that were held during the election campaigns towards the end of 2004). It is worth mentioning that linguistically and politically relevant decentralization can also take place within a state, in connection with general political decentralization and the administrative reorganization linked to it. Something similar happened in Lusatia in the 1990s. As Norberg (1996: 21) notes, in that period characterized by the democratization of East German society, Lower Sorbs freed themselves from Upper Sorbian hegemony, making it easier for the Lusatian movement to adjust to the local conditions. This was also reflected in the organized LM — the former single language board for Sorbian (though it included a separate subcommittee for Lower Sorbian) split into two boards, broad sociolinguistic research on Lower Sorbian was carried out, and the revitalization project WITAJ introducing Sorbian into kindergartens began in Lower Lusatia (see also Marti 2003).

10. Language ecology

We have thus far focused on the relationship between small and large Slavic languages without mentioning that in doing so, we actually generalize to a large extent — unaccounted for is the fact that for language situations in which the pairs of languages studied occur, often more than two languages are likely to operate; the individual constituents of the particular pair therefore necessarily enter into further interlanguage relations. The nonbinary character of these relations is evident in Marti's (2003) characterization of Lower Sorbian as "a minority language, which is a minority language twice over" (i.e. not only in relation to Upper Sorbian, but also to German). Our focus on the relations of Slavic languages was primarily motivated by our interest in Slavic studies rather than by the social relevance of the problems as experienced by the participants of LM themselves, which, however, could not have been neglected. The next step would therefore require us to employ the perspective of "language ecology" (see, e.g., Kaplan and Baldauf 1997), and deal with all the languages and their various aspects operating within a given territory (see also Nekvapil 2003). It would be more evident from such a perspective to what extent the relation of a small and a large language is actually relevant in the particular language situation. To illustrate this, let us deal with the 1990s briefly.

After the establishment of independent Slovenia and the constitutional declaration of Slovenian as an official language (in 1991), the relation of Slovenian to Serbo-Croatian (or Croatian and Serbian) has not been the main focus of attention. What is more relevant is the relation of Slovenian to English, German, and French, the principal question being how to balance economic prosperity, linked with the invasion of non-Slavic languages, with ethnolinguistic identity (Nećak-Lük 1997: 254; cf. also Tollefson 1997; Stabej 2001). This is the central issue of the language law, having been prepared for a long time, whose various proposals included, for example, the regulation of internal communication in the companies on Slovene territory (Nećak-Lük 2003). The attempts to make the use of Slovenian obligatory in such communication domains may indicate that Slovenian did not cease to be perceived as a small language, though Serbo-Croatian has been replaced in its function of the large language by other languages today. Similarly, the Slovak language legislation of the 1990s does not concentrate primarily on the relation of small Slovak to large Czech, but focuses mainly on the effort to regulate the use of Slovak and Hungarian. Revitalization projects in Lusatia are indicative of the primacy of the relation to German over that between (standard) Lower and Upper Sorbian.

The situation in Belarus is different, though languages other than Belarusian and Russian do enter into the picture here as well. In the western and northwestern parts of Belarus, pro-Polish attitudes are on the increase in connection with the spread of Polish, and in the southwestern part (Polissia), separatist attempts at establishing a Western Polissian literary language could be observed (Lukašanec et al. 1998: 99–102). The language situation in Belarus, however, is determined by the problem of the relationship between Belarusian and Russian. Its relevance is partly based upon the fact that the largeness of Russian exceeds the parameters of other large languages we have dealt with, namely, Serbo-Croatian, Czech, Upper Sorbian, and Slovak. In Belarus, Russian is perceived largely as a language of international or interethnic communication (which is actually the case elsewhere as well), thus ranking among such large languages as those which, for example, Slovenian must cope with today. Needless to say, Belarusian élites aiming at the broader use of Belarusian, that is, the de facto limitation of Russian, face an extremely difficult task.

11. The description of a language situation as a genre of linguistics, and reflexivity

Let me conclude with two general remarks. The first refers to both what I have just said about the language situation in Slovenia, Belarus, and elsewhere and *how* I have done so. I suppose that the formulations used when describing the language situation in these countries could be used in a large number of thematically related texts (some of the formulations could actually be found in them!). This is due to the fact that the description of a language situation is a specific linguistics genre determining the way the language situation is spoken about. Limited usually to the size of an article or a conference paper, the genre forces specialists to use a particular mode of expression. This genre typically lacks the everyday speaker's perspective, focusing on macrosocial factors, the constructive performance of the analyst being of crucial importance. This is opposed by the focus of language management theory on the way language situations are experienced or jointly formed by various social actors, in particular by everyday speakers. I believe that the genre of linguistics "description of a language situation" can be restructured along similar lines (see Nekvapil 2000b).

The second and final remark deals with the question which can, following Austin (1962), be formulated as follows: what do we *do* by speaking about specific language situations or about the relationship between small and large Slavic languages? As I have already noted elsewhere (Nekvapil 2000b), the descriptions of language situations produced by linguists are an essential part of precisely those language situations under description. This reflexivity, emphasized by ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967), has led linguists — and language management theory alike — to resign from aiming at impartial objectivity, and to start realizing the social impact and risks of their work.

This can be illustrated by the way the relation between Upper and Lower Sorbian has been discussed. There exist two standpoints which are impossible to arbitrate on a purely linguistic basis (see Faska 1998: 13–18, 273 f.):

1. Lower Sorbian and Upper Sorbian are two separate languages (each with its own standard literary form);

2. Lower Sorbian and Upper Sorbian are different varieties of a single language (even though each has its own standard literary form).

The essential point as regards our argument is that for everyday speakers, professional acknowledgement of Lower Sorbian as a separate language can become a factor promoting its maintenance and revitalization (cf. Spieß 2000: 197).

12. Conclusions

The notion of a small or large language is relative; with respect to a particular language B, a language A may therefore be large, and with respect to a different language C, the same language A may be small.

When analyzing the relations of small and large Slavic languages, not only macrosocial factors (social "structures," such as the state, classes/strata, political parties, economic potential) but also the perspective of the everyday speaker should be considered, that is, the factors operating in everyday communication.

The everyday speaker's perspective is to be integrated into the decisions concerning language policy made by the élites, that is, primarily the state and other social institutions (the "bottom-up approach"). As all language users do not share the same interests, however, universal obligatory language policy is bound to be self-contradictory.

Language policy should therefore be decentralized, or it should not in principle hamper language variability within the given territory. In other words, it should allow alternative solutions.

In the twenty-first century, standardization processes should resign from the great degree of unification typical for the standardization processes during the period of establishment of national states in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. The twenty-first century standards will show more variability than the former ones.

Linguistic and political equality of small and large languages objectively benefits the large languages. Real equality will only be guaranteed by compensatory measures to the detriment of the large language (positive discrimination).

The analysis of the relations between small and large Slavic languages should not be limited to the Slavic perspective. It is necessary to employ the perspective of language ecology, emphasizing the relations of all languages, Slavic as well as non-Slavic, used on the given territory.

The description of a language situation is a genre of linguistics which determines the way the language situation is discussed. The description of a language situation, however, is not a mere "innocent product of objective analysts," that is, linguists. It is, on the one hand, a part of the language situation, and on the other hand, has a direct impact on it.

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Notes

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1. The most extensive presentation of language management theory can be found in Neustupný and Nekvapil (2003) and Nekvapil (2006).

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