

21st Hungarian Sociolinguistics Conference

THE BORDER AS A CONVERGING AND DIVERGING FACTOR IN LANGUAGE

Miklós Kontra (1998: 13) wrote in the foreword to the first volume of the series *Hungarian language in the Carpathian Basin at the end of the 20th century*: “One who studies the language of Hungarians living abroad in the last decade of the 20th century is breaking taboos and reaches into a beehive (...), because Hungarian linguistics has hardly studied the language use of minority Hungarians in the seven decades following Trianon, with scientific objectivity”. Since then, much has changed in the course of time in the Carpathian Basin, and we are now much more aware of the linguistic consequences of Trianon, partly through the volumes of that series. We now accept the fact that separate language development has taken place and that some of the elements of the Hungarian language varieties used outside of Hungary have been included in some Hungarian dictionaries, starting with the second edition of the Hungarian Concise Dictionary (see Benő and Péntek eds. 2011). We also know, however, that this dynamics did not last long, nor has it been fully codified, and no research has begun to assess standard elements of the Hungarian language varieties used in neighbouring countries at all levels. However, after the fall of communism, there has been a lively debate in Hungarian linguistics about the relationship between different varieties of the Hungarian-speaking areas of the early 20th century (see Kontra and Saly eds. 1998), hundred years after Trianon several questions have not been answered about the polycentricity of the Hungarian language, the appearance of spoken and written varieties of the Hungarian language in the mother tongue education outside Hungarian borders, the interrelationship between various factors of assimilation and maintenance, the issues of human rights of minorities and languages, etc. What Sándor N. Szilágyi pointed out in his lecture at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2002 remained true until recent days: “In the Carpathian Basin, Hungarian is not changing in one country, but due to the present state of history, it is changing in eight at the same time, and it is influenced by different factors in every country” (Szilágyi 2008: 106). There is no large Hungarian dialect region whose territory does not extend beyond the borders of Hungary, but there are three (Mezőség, Székely and Moldavian) that do not cross Hungary (Kiss ed. 2001), and its linguistic consequences are not limited to dialects (see eg. P. Lakatos ed. 2002, 2012) or the language use of secondary school students (Lanstyák and Szabó Mihály 1997), but they appeared at all levels of the language.

Since Trianon, the border has played a decisive role in the discourses about Hungarian national identity, the concept of the nation, and the nation in general. Once drawn, political boundaries will inevitably begin to influence the language spoken and written within and across the border. As these administrative boundaries determine the social networks of language speakers, it is natural that contacts inside the borders become more intense, and cross-border contacts are sometimes hampered and therefore weakened. Thus, state borders are dual in nature: they evoke convergence and divergence at the same time. Varieties within the border gradually begin to converge and evolve toward equalization, while varieties trapped on the other side of the border intensify separate development (Palander, Riionheimo, and Koivisto 2018: 7). In spite of the fact that the period that began with Trianon in 1920 is now considered by many to be a new era in history of Hungarian language (see Szilágyi 2008: 105–106, Kiss 2003, Kiss and Pusztai eds. 2003: 16–17, Lanstyák 2008: 119, É. Kiss, Gerstner, and Hegedűs 2013: 11–12 etc.; but see eg. Kugler and Tolcsvai Nagy 2015: 502), we still do not have a systematic, synthesized knowledge of the linguistic consequences of this century. We have not even faced the fact that since the beginning of the 1990s the borders that have become more permeable, the masses of Hungarians across the border studying and working in Hungary, the tens of thousands of Hungarians moving from

neighbouring countries to Hungary, the spread of Internet communication among the masses, dual citizenship, the accession of Hungary and several neighbouring states to the European Union, the thousands of Hungarians working in Western European states, had an impact on the use of Hungarian language, or did the reduction of barriers imposed by political borders lead to further linguistic equalization and if it slowed down or reversed separate language development (see eg. Tolcsvai Nagy 2018: 154, Péntek 2018: 186).

Even less has been said in recent decades about Trianon's influence on the language use of Hungarian nationalities. Despite the fact that Hungarian linguistics can produce significant results in this field (see, for example, Bartha 2007, Bartha ed. 2007, Borbély 2001, 2014, Knipf 2018, etc.), we are far from having more information about language processes of Slovak, Romanian, Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Ukrainian, Rusyn, Roma, etc. people who are now a part of much more ethnically and linguistically homogeneous countries than the multinational Kingdom of Hungary.

Launched in 1988, the series of Hungarian Sociolinguistics Conferences has repeatedly addressed the linguistic implications of Trianon. One hundred years after the Trianon decision, perhaps it is time to recap a fresh, 21st-century vision of what is worth knowing about this issue, with new perspectives. Not from the point of view of grievances and complaints, but based on the research-methodological principles of (socio)linguistics and its related fields of science.

In addition to all these topics, any lecture is accepted that touches on the central topic of the conference in some way (such as segregation of language and dialect, dialect and language boundaries, etc.), which is no other than *the border as a convergent and divergent factor*.

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