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HUNGARIAN OR BRATISLAVAN? IDENTITY IN LANGUAGE BIOGRAPHIES OF MULTILINGUAL FAMILIES IN BRATISLAVA¹

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Introduction

This paper focuses on the perception of identity in three-generation families of multilingual speakers in Bratislava. Identity is understood here as a social construction which can be formed and reformed differently in various contexts. The frame for the construction of a personal national and language identity in the presented material is a narrative interview – a language biography². The aim of this paper is to present some material from the interviews, which show how the language and national identity is expressed.

Bratislava is the capital of Slovakia. The number of inhabitants according to the latest census in 2011 was 411 228. Hungarians form the largest ethnic and linguistic minority in Bratislava. In 2011 14 119 people claimed Hungarian nationality³, 15 307 marked Hungarian as their mother tongue. 3 531 people claimed that Hungarian is the most used language in public for them and 8 765 said Hungarian is the most used language at home⁴.

There are two kindergartens and two primary schools with Hungarian language of instruction in Bratislava. 116 children attend the kindergartens and 274

¹ This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the contract No. APVV-0689-12. I would like to thank the reviewers for their valuable comments and recommendations.

² I use the term *language biography*, as it is common in the Central European tradition (see for example Nekvapil 2000, 2001) even though I am aware of the possibility to use *linguistic biography*, which is common for example in the works of Aneta Pavlenko (2007 and elsewhere).

³ Nationality in the census can be understood also as ethnicity. It is not to be mixed with the citizenship category. A citizen of Slovakia may be of various nationalities. However current Slovak law does not allow multiple citizenship (cf. Law of Slovak national council of 19th January 1993 regarding citizenship of Slovak Republic and its amendment from 2010).

⁴ All references to the census are from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

pupils the primary schools. Bratislava has one Hungarian medium high school. It is attended by 176 students⁵.

In 2011 more than 10 000 people in Bratislava did not answer the question on mother tongue in the census. To state the ethnicity of inhabitants in the mixed environment (which a city clearly represents) is fairly difficult. It is easier to map their language competences which can be determined according to when they use which language (or language variety or repertoire, compare Blommaert–Rampton 2011) and with whom.

2. Method and data

Identity can be approached from many views. The types of identities analysed in this paper are understood as social constructions, which are not given, and which can change throughout the life of an individual. They can appear either in a narrative (in this case an autobiographical narrative) or in contextual situation (in this case a research interview). De Fina (2003: 19) describes the relationship between the narrative and identity on three levels. At one level the form of narration points at specific communities. At another level identity is related to negotiation of social roles. And at yet another level it points to the group membership, and the ability to identify or distinguish oneself from it. All these levels are present also in narratives framed as language biographies.

Language biography may be defined as such biographical narrative in which the main topic for the narrator is language or languages, especially their acquisition and use (Nekvapil 2000: 31). Language biography (LB hereafter) may be approached in two basic ways depending on the aim of the research. In the first case the LB is also the aim. In such research the aim is to capture a typical LB of a certain speech community. This is how LB is approached by Jiří Nekvapil (focusing on Germans in Czech Republic, 2000) and Jozef Tancer (focusing on trilingual people born in inter-war Bratislava, 2010). The second approach sees LB as a method, or means to other research aims. For example it is used for improving the teaching of foreign languages (see Busch–Jardine–Tjoutuku, 2012), helping immigrant integration (Werlen 2002), understanding language acquisition (Franceschini 2002) or language attitudes, communicational functions of languages in multilingual contexts, assimilation processes in multilingual communities (Carl–Stevenson 2009) and so forth.

Aneta Pavlenko, who uses the term *linguistic biography*, warns against too narrow interpretations of content and thematic analysis of narrative data. She offers three basic analytical approaches dependent on the point of view of reality that is

⁵ Source: The Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education. Available online: <http://www.uips.sk/registre/zoznamy-skol-sz-v-exceli> The data in the table are valid from 15th September 2014.

taken into account. This can be the subject reality, life reality and text reality. Applied theoretical approaches are cognitive, textual and discursive (Pavlenko 2007: 171). She reminds that narratives constitute rather than reflect reality and researchers should be constantly aware of this when analysing data (Pavlenko 2007: 180).

In my research I use LB as a method to uncover the language situation of multilingual families, their attitudes to Hungarian and Slovak language, the perception of their own identity and the importance of maintaining the minority language (Hungarian). I have also encouraged the attitudes towards assimilation and mixed marriages or linguistic landscape in the interviews. As core data for this paper, I use only the data connected to the perception of identity⁶. I am aware that my interpretation of presented data forms subject reality, the reality constructed during our interview.

The data set consists of interviews carried out amongst members of 5 three-generation families, 23 respondents⁷. Table 1. presents them according to generation and sex.

Generation	Sex	
	female	male
The oldest (79 – 94 years)	5	2
The middle (50 – 65 years)	5	3
The youngest (18 – 34 years)	5	3
Total	15	8

Table 1. The characterisation of the respondents according to generation and sex

The respondents' age at the time of research was from 18 years (year of birth 1996) to 94 years (year of birth 1920). All respondents currently live in Bratislava, seven of them were not born here, but they started a family and raised their children here. The sample is random and the participating families were appointed by the snow ball method (see Hendl 2005: 152). This has its limits and tends to lead to representing people with similar views. However, for the purpose of this research this was not considered a problem, as I was looking for respondents with positive affiliation to maintaining Hungarian. Widening the sample with people who undergo language shift across generations may be a topic for a different research (cf. Rabec 2012). The criteria for the choice was that the representatives of all generations live

⁶ More extensive results may be found in my dissertation thesis (Satinská 2015).

⁷ All names are anonymized on the basis of a signed agreement on the recordings' use for scientific purposes.

in Bratislava and have attended at least one type of Hungarian medium educational institution (kindergarten, primary school, high school). Each generation in each family had to be represented by at least one person. In order to ensure their anonymity the names are changed⁸.

I interviewed the respondents individually (in some cases a husband and wife were both present, but they were interviewed separately). The average length of an interview was 1 hour and the questions proceeded from personal to general. The language choice was left on the participants. I (the researcher) have always shown my knowledge of Hungarian during the initiation process (organizing the interview session) so the participants were aware of this and had proof of my bilingualism⁹. Some interviews were thus conducted multilingually. Sometimes the respondents stated their preferred language during the phase when we were setting the date of the interview. In case they declared they did not care which language to use at the interview, it was carried out in Slovak but the participants were encouraged to switch to Hungarian whenever they wanted.

When interpreting narrative interviews the role of the researcher has been discussed extensively, especially the way how his or her identity affects the narratives of the respondents (see for example De Fina 2011). Some aspects of individual identity cannot be changed (such as sex, age or race), therefore it is important to realize how this affects the results. Rather than trying to get “objective” data it is better to get most out of the situation the role of the researcher can bring.

My own position in this research enabled me to be on the border between an “insider” and “outsider”. I speak the language of the community (Hungarian) but I do not belong to it, as I have not learnt it in my childhood naturally, but as a foreign language during my university studies via a one year scholarship in Budapest. I have not attended any educational institution with Hungarian medium and I was not aware of meeting the members of the community. My only contact with the language in my childhood had been before Christmas when my parents used it as a secret (code) language. I do not consider myself to be a heritage language learner of Hungarian, rather a new speaker of the language. I have not known the respondent families before the research apart from one member of a family from my generation who belonged to my friend circle. However, the respondents have sometimes known me, due to my public activities aimed at raising awareness about Hungarian in Slo-

⁸ Note on transcription: The quotations of transcription are in italics. There are English translations of transcriptions in the main text and original transcriptions in footnotes. Some other transcription conventions: [commentary] – commentary to explain context or giving additional information; (P) – pause; R – researcher in a dialogue; Capital letter – respondent in a dialogue.

⁹ I usually approached them on the phone or in a written message (e-mail or Facebook) in Hungarian, so they know my ability to speak the language.

vakia or my family history¹⁰. The participants therefore saw me primarily as a young cosmopolitan intellectual woman with a strong interest in Bratislava and its languages.

3. Results

My respondents express multiple identities. On the one hand stands the national (or ethnic) identity, which they claim in census. This one is fixed and does not change throughout their lives, as all of my participants stated, they have not changed their nationality throughout the times. Apart from two respondents from the youngest generation, who come from a mixed family (one parent considers himself Slovak, the other Hungarian), all claim Hungarian nationality. On the other hand stand much more complicated individual identities affected by many factors such as the language use, culture, citizenship or family history. These identities can change due to age and situations. They are more complex and cannot be narrowed into one-word categories such as ethnicity or nationality. This second type of identity construction is more interesting, because it helps to deconstruct the oversimplified picture created by censuses.

The research participants themselves realize this discrepancy between a simple identity represented by nationality and a complex identity expressing their belonging to various social groups. The respondents from family P. have explained to me separately, why it is pointless to think about the identity of this geographical region from the point of view of nationality. According to them, everything is mixed here. **Nóra P.** (born in 1927) says: *“That’s why I say, because this Carpathian Basin, that’s a smelter, which all, here, pure blood can’t be found.”*¹¹ **Júlia P.** (born in 1949): *“We are mixed here, in this Carpathian Basin. Really, nobody can say he or she is pure.”*¹² Also, both had the need to explain to me what the difference between Hungarians from Slovakia and Hungarians from Hungary is. **Nóra P.** hints there is some kind of competition between the Hungarians in the two countries, who is a better Hungarian: *“Well, you know, for example in Hungary, they don’t like us, the locals, who were from Czechoslovakia, they said, those Beneš Hungarians.”*¹³

¹⁰ My father Július Satinský was respected amongst the Hungarian community, as he always mentioned his Hungarian roots as a public figure (he was a famous writer and comedian, born in 1941, died in 2002).

¹¹ *„Azért mondom, mert ez a Karpatská kotlina, a Kárpát-medence, ez egy olvasztókemence, ami az összes, itt nem talál az ember tiszta vért.”*

¹² *„Mi össze vagyunk itt keveredve, ebben a Kárpát-medencében. Igazán senki nem mondhatja magáról, hogy tiszta.”*

¹³ Beneš Hungarians is a term referring to post-war (post-1945) deportations of Hungarians based on the Beneš decrees.

*Because we, well how to put it, we were more democratic than the Hungarians.*¹⁴ She herself identifies as Hungarian in a cultural sense: *“That’s why I didn’t ask for it [the Hungarian citizenship], because my hungarianness does not mean Gyurcsány, Orbán or I don’t know who, but for me, Arany János, Madách Imre mean my hungarianness. So I am Hungarian in cultural terms not political.”*¹⁵ Her daughter **Júlia P.** differs also from Hungarians in Slovakia. It is interesting how she talks about them in the third person, as if she did not belong to them: *“But it’s interesting because Hungarians from Slovakia, they are a special (P) social class. They don’t really identify with Hungarians from Hungary. There is no such thing that politicians say that Hungarians are, I don’t know, irredentists, but, no, no, it is not like that. And especially in Pozsony¹⁶, I think. Actually, the Pozsony Hungarians, those, who, well, look, most Pozsony Hungarians have German names. On the one hand. And Pozsony Hungarians see themselves as Pozsonyers. Pressburgers.”*¹⁷

Pressburger (or Old-Bratislavan, as it is labelled in contemporary use)¹⁸ identity as an individual type is not exclusive for the elderly. Representatives of the youngest generation claim it, too. It needs to be emphasised that those, whose grandparents really belong to the so called Old-Bratislavans. **Marek P.** (born in 1981) expresses

¹⁴ *„Hát ugye, például Magyarországon minket nem szerettek, az ittenieket, akik Csehszlovákiából voltunk, az mondták, hogy ezek a benesi magyarok. Mert mi, hát hogy is mondjam, demokratikusabbak voltunk mint a magyarok.”*

¹⁵ *„Azért nem [kértem a magyar állampolgárságot], mert az én magyarságomat nem a Gyurcsány, az Orbán, a nem tudom kicsoda jelenti, hanem én nekem Arany János, Madách Imre, ez jelenti az én magyarságom. Tehát én kulturális vonalon vagyok magyar nemzetiségű, nem politikai.”*

¹⁶ In the translation of the quotations from the interview I use the geographical name of the city in the form in which it was pronounced in the original. Current Bratislava has a historical Slovak name Prešporok and Hungarian name Pozsony, German Pressburg. Both Hungarian and German version are still used in the respective languages. However, if the official, Slovak version is used, it signals that it is not neutral use.

¹⁷ *„De érdekes, mert a felvidéki magyarok, ez egy külön (P) társadalmi réteg. Annyira a magyarországi magyarokkal nem azonosulnak. Az nincs hogy, a politikusok mondják, hogy a magyarok, nem tudom irredentisták, de nem, nem ez nem úgy van. És főleg Pozsonyban, azt hiszem. Tulajdonképpen a pozsonyi magyarok, azok, akik, hát figyelje meg, hogy a legtöbb pozsonyi magyarnak német neve van. Egyrészt. És a pozsonyi magyarok inkább pozsonyinak tartják magukat. Pressburgernek.”*

¹⁸ There are various terms in Slovak and Hungarian used to refer to inhabitants of Bratislava. They are derived from various names the city had in the past. The most used historical names were Pressburg in German, Pozsony in Hungarian and Prešporok in Slovak. In this paper I use the neutral contemporary term Bratislavan for an inhabitant of Bratislava. Old-Bratislavan refers to a person who was born in Bratislava in the inter-war period or to those who respect the values of that period. It is a direct translation from Slovak phrase starý Bratislavčan, which is widely used. More extensively on the topic of the Old-Bratislavan identity see Tancer (2013) or Satinská (2012).

his identity on the basis of place: “*Basically, I grew up here, and how to put it, even though I said I was Hungarian in the census, I feel like, like a Bratislavan or Old-Pressburger.*”¹⁹ **Dávid K.** (born in 1992) also claims Pressburger identity, laughing: “*Well, I am European. Either European or, if we really want to categorize it, so Bratislavan – Pressburger.*”²⁰ Later he explains how he understands this term: “*Pressburger, probably because we grew up here, we speak Hungarian, German at home, because Bratislava is a good place to live in and what do I know, I feel like a Pressburger. I don’t feel like a Hungarian now.*”²¹ Similar message comes through their peer, **Diana R.** (born in 1995) who officially admits Slovak nationality in censuses: “*But in fact, whether I have some emotional relationship towards the fact that I am Slovak or Hungarian or German, I in fact don’t have. I have a feeling I am, I live and I was born in Europe, in Central Europe, in Bratislava and all the influences and the mixing of all the cultures or nationalities and languages, it forms me. Not the fact whether I am Slovak, or this or that. I really don’t feel I belong to some specially defined group.*”²² Their opinions about their identity show, that Old-Bratislavans may have not died out yet after all. None of them know, though, whether they stay in Bratislava. **Marek** is married to an American, **Dávid** studies in Vienna and **Diana** studies in Bratislava, but she has a part-time job in Austria.

For some respondents the most noticeable fact is how their identity oscillates between Slovak and Hungarian. It can be illustrated by family **F. Zoltán F.** (born in 1961) feels once like Slovak then like Hungarian. It depends on his surroundings and also on himself: “*So Hungarians see me as a traitor, as Slovak and Slovaks see me as Hungarian. I am neither, in fact. (...) I see myself as neither Hungarian nor Slovak, I see myself as me. I think the whole our family is like that, we all see ourselves as ourselves. (...) I think that when you get up in the morning, you don’t think about being Slovak or Hungarian. You’re thinking about whether you slept well, whether you’re hungry or I don’t know what. (...) Sometimes I feel terribly like a Hungarian,*

¹⁹ „Skrátka, tu som vyrastal a akoby som to povedal, aj keď som sa zapísal na sčítaní ako Maďar, ale ja sa tak cítim, ako taký Bratislavčan alebo Staroprešporčan.”

²⁰ „No ja som, Európan. Bud’ Európan, alebo ak to chceme veľmi kategorizovať tak Bratislavčan – Prešporák.”

²¹ „Prešporák, tak asi preto, že sme tu vyrastali, hovoríme po maďarsky, po nemecky doma, lebo v Bratislave je dobre a čo ja viem, cítim sa ako Prešporák. Necítim sa teraz ako Maďar.”

²² „Ale pravdupovediac, či ja mám nejaký citový vzťah k tomu, že som Slovenka, alebo že som Maďarka, alebo že som Nemka ja pravdupovediac nemám. Ja mám taký pocit, že som, žijem alebo narodila som sa v Európe, v strede Európy, v Bratislave a všetky tie vplyvy jednoducho to miešanie všetkých tých kultúr alebo národností a jazykov, to ma tak formuje. Nie to, že či som Slovenka, jedno druhé alebo tretie. Ja naozaj nemám pocit, že by som patrila do nejakej vyčlenenej skupiny.”

sometimes terribly like a Slovak."²³ His wife **Réka F.** (born in 1963) explains how her identity changed throughout her lifetime: *"I don't see myself as (P), I mean, at the moment, or like this, on the basis of the experience that I have, I do not see being Hungarian as the highest value in life. When I was young, maybe under the influence of my mother or grandfather, who was born in Budapest, so that feeling of connection with the language, culture, with my own Hungarian identity was stronger."*²⁴ It is interesting that their daughter, **Lívია F.** (born in 1988), thinks that the "hungarianness" of her parents is stronger than hers. She says about them: *"It is a generation thing, but I think they feel to be more Hungarian than us, their children. For me, the border between being Hungarian or Slovak is not so sharp, or it isn't a question I would deal with so much inside me."*²⁵ However later she explains her identity more clearly: *"I am a Hungarian, born Hungarian and I am a Hungarian living in Slovakia and I would say, despite being so mixed, half of my heart is Hungarian and the other half Slovak. Because Hungarian is my mother tongue, it is the closest language in the world for me. Until the end of my life, it will be. But the environment, into which I was born, where I grew up, it is of course closer to me than the pure Hungarian, because I don't even know it so well."*²⁶

Other representative of the youngest generation **Ilona L.** (born in 1987) talks about her identity slowly and clearly emotionally. She admits arguing with her friends about this topic several times. She is considered patriotic by them.

"I: But when someone asks me now, whether I am Slovak or Hungarian, I say from the depth of my heart that I am Hungarian, but on the other hand, I would rather say it in Hungarian

²³ „Ja sa nepovažujem ani za Maďara, ani za Slováka, ja sa považujem za seba. Asi celá naša rodina je už taká, každý sa už považuje len za seba. (...) Ja si myslím, že keď ráno vstanete, tak nemyslíte na to, či ste Slováčok alebo Maďar. Myslite na to, či ste sa dobre vyspali, či ste hladní alebo neviem čo.(...) Niekedy sa cítim strašne ako Maďar, niekedy strašne ako Slováčok.”

²⁴ „Teraz sa nepovažujem za (P) tak, momentálne, alebo teda, už na základe tých skúseností, to že som Maďarka, nepovyšujem nad ostatné hodnoty v živote. Ale keď som bola mladá, tak možno práve ovplyvnená svojou mamou alebo starým otcom, ktorý sa narodil v Budapešti, tak taký ten pocit previazanosti s tým jazykom, kultúrou, s tou svojou maďarskou identitou bol silnejší.”

²⁵ „Je to generačná vec, ale podľa mňa sa cítia byť viac Maďarmi ako my, ich deti. U mňa tá hranica, že či som Maďarka alebo Slovenka nie je taká zreteľná, alebo nie je to otázka, ktorú by som v sebe tak riešila.”

²⁶ „Ja som Maďarka, rodená Maďarka, a som Maďarka, ktorá žije na Slovensku a by som povedala, že napriek tomu, že som taká že miešaná, tak polka srdca je maďarská a druhá polka je slovenská. Tým, že maďarčina je môj materinský jazyk, tak je pre mňa maďarský jazyk najbližší na svete. A do konca života, až kým nezomriem, bude. Ale to prostredie, kam som sa narodila, kde som vyrastala, tak to je mi samozrejme bližšie ako čisto maďarské, lebo to ani nepoznám až tak.”

R: [in Hungarian] *No problem.*

I: [in Hungarian] *I have no homeland just birthplace.*²⁷

She explains that she does not feel at home either in Slovakia or in Hungary, which she perceived in both countries on various occasions (children's camps etc.): *"I was born here, but I don't belong here. (...) I am really felvidéki²⁸. It's something in-between. It is neither Slovak nor Hungarian."*²⁹ Eventually there are two representatives of the youngest generation, one of them liberally oriented, the other conservatively, but their identity of not belonging neither here nor there is the same. They both also express affiliation to the environment they grew up in. One calls it Slovakia (*"I am Hungarian, who lives in Slovakia"*), the other Felvidék (*"I really am Felvidéki."*).

Thus, several respondents feel their identity is mixed. **Martina R.** (born in 1980) talks about it in the most metaphorical way: *"I imagine myself as a cocktail, where there is a bit of sugar, a bit of mint, a bit like this and I think many people are like this and I think it is the maturity when one realizes it. I feel like a European."*³⁰ **András K.** (born in 1995), who is studying in Abu Dhabi at the moment pushes it a bit further. He sees himself as cosmopolitan and finds the whole concept of nationality useless: *"I don't know, I don't care that much. I would probably say I am Hungarian, but at the same time I see myself as world citizen (P) because (P) I don't know, those nationalities sometimes seem rather counterproductive as they limit people, now you're this so be with these people."*³¹

²⁷ I: *Ja ale v súčasnosti, teda keď sa ma niekto spýta, že či som Slováč alebo či som Maďar, tak ako v duchu svojho srdca hovorím, že som Maďar, ale zas na druhej strane, by som to tak vyjadрила, to bude asi lepšie v maďarčine*

R: *Nyugodtan.*

I: *Nincs hazám, csak szülőföldem"*

²⁸ Felvidék is a historical name of the Upper-Hungary region which is now Slovakia.

²⁹ *„Ja som sa tu síce narodila, ale ja sem nepatrím.(...) Ja naozaj som felvidéki. Je to niečo medzi. Nie je to ani vyslovene Slováč ani Maďar.“*

³⁰ *„Ja samú seba si predstavujem ako taký miešaný drink, kde proste troška cukru, troška mäty, troška takto a myslím si, že veľa ľudí je takto a myslím si, že to je vyspelosť, keď si to človek uvedomí. Ja sa cítim byť takou Európankou.“*

³¹ *„Nem tudom, annyira nem érdekel. Valószínűleg azt mondanám, hogy magyar, de közben inkább ilyen világpolgár látnám magamat (P) mert (P) nem tudom, ezek a nemzetiségek néha annyira inkább kontraproduktívnek tűnnek abban, hogy behatárolják az emberek, most ez vagy és akkor ezekkel az emberekkel legyél.“*

4. Conclusion

The research based on language biographies of multilingual three-generation families in Bratislava shows problems in one-dimensional approach to national and ethnic identity as used in statistical sources, mainly censuses. Several types of parallel identities of multilingual people are presented. Apart from simple minority “pure” identities, such as Hungarian, there are also much more complex ones present, which are not connected to nationality. These identities may be labelled as Bratislavan, Pressburger or European. More people express their identity as something in-between: between Hungarian and Slovak, between European. They speak about it carefully because they are used to “being fitted into the boxes” of official documents where they often have to suppress their “in-between” identity, which may contest the significance of nationality or ethnicity categories as well. On the basis of understanding the diversity of identities of multilingual speakers it is possible to enunciate recommendations how to collect data for statistical sources (censuses etc.) in a better way. It is important that people have wider possibilities to express their identities and not only ticking boxes offered to them in advance.

In this paper, mainly the authentic material was presented, as it was the initial phase of the interpretation. What will follow is a closer analysis of identity construction in the interviews, contextual and discursive analysis of the realities formed by the respondents.

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