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Interethnic Spaces of Serbian and Hungarian Language Use in Vojvodina

A Language Attitude Study[1]

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Abstract. This study elaborates on the attitudes of the informants towards Hungarian and Serbian languages in situations that seem useful. It does not refer to how the languages are used, but it only shows the informants' opinions about it. Both in the case of Hungarian and Serbian the informants talk about the same interethnic spaces, however, concerning frequency, there are great differences. In our opinion the frequency of the guidelines in the study is in direct proportion to the language use. The study discusses interethnic spaces because the ratios do not approach 100% in any case. This means that the rate does not emphasise the exclusive use of one or the other language or their importance, and does not exclude the interethnic nature of the language scene. None of the guidelines in Hungarian stand out as the ratio does in the cases of public matters and the offices in the aspect of Serbian. Informants consider Hungarian the most useful inside the family, but Serbian in managing public matters. These settings are the most common interethnic spaces.

Keywords: interethnic spaces, language attitude, survey, Hungarian, Serbian

1. Introduction

This study, based on the questionnaires collected, presents the interethnic fields of 16 Hungarian settlements where the Hungarian and Serbian language use seems equally important. The research has been conducted in the course of the

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language attitude study. It gives an insight not into the real language use, but – as it is common in attitude studies in sociolinguistics – it talks about the beauty of the languages or their variations, assesing the usefulness of the language and its position (Kovács Rácz 2011).

The language attitude study that was done among the Hungarians in Vojvodina is a product of a well-planned, organised research. The idea came as a continuation of the Hungarian (Kontra 2003, 2006), Transylvanian (Péntek 1998), Transcarpathian (Csernicskó 1998), Upper Hungarian (Lanstyák 2000; Sándor 2000, 2001) and Vojvodinian (Göncz 1999a, 1999b) researches. However, we also studied the language attitude of the minorities living in Hungary like the Romanians (Borbély 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2003a, 2003b), the Germans (Bindorffer 2004), the Slovaks (Gyivicsán 1993) and the Romani (Pálmainé 2007, 2008).

This study is part of the sociolinguistic study about the Hungarian language attitude research of the Carpathian Basin. Its aim is to show the viewpoint of the Hungarian informants in attitude researches in Vojvodina. Nevertheless, it also reflects on the attitudes of Hungarians towards Serbian and their own language, and through this it describes and classifies the interethnic spaces that emerged according to the utility standpoint. Our open question was: "Give us your opinion about why and in which situations you think the Hungarian language is useful." We asked the same question about the Serbian language.

Both personal life conversations and the language of the public communication are connected to the interethnic spaces in Vojvodina. This is why language usage among the Hungarians in Vojvodina is in tight bond with the Serbian language (Göncz 1999a, Kovács Rácz 2011). In a previous survey, the locations of interethnic spaces were examined from the familial sphere to more public fields (Kovács Rácz 2011). Since we conducted a language attitude survey, it is important to emphasise that these interethnic spaces are not based upon real language usage, but on the opinions and viewpoints of the informants about the usefulness of Hungarian and Serbian. Communicating with a person from the clergy – according to the informants – seems to be an interethnic space in the least among Hungarians in Vojvodina, because 98% of the informants speak only or mostly Hungarian in these situations. Moreover, 89% of the informants speak Hungarian inside the family with their spouse, 92% with their children, 45% in the company of their friends, 42% with their superior, 17% at the bank or at the post office and only 6% use Hungarian exclusively or mostly with an official. Interethnic spaces, regarding the usefulness of Hungarian, are most common at workplace or in the company of friends. The higher (or the lower) the percentage showing the frequency of the language use is, the less we can talk about interethnic spaces because in these cases the language use is shifted towards one or the other language.

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We are going to show interethnic spaces that are – according to the informants – settings of speaking situations of private life, on the one hand, and of public life, on the other. During the survey, 1165 informants made statements about speaking situations where they expressed their opinions on the importance of both Hungarian and Serbian. The conversational situation scenes are interethnic spaces connecting the Hungarian and Serbian nations. They were indicated by the Hungarians who live in the cluster and in the diaspora in Vojvodina. Our aim is to draw a parallel between the opinions of the Hungarians living in the cluster and those living in the diaspora. With this research our aim is to contribute to the cognition of the language attitude of the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin. The described interethnic spaces give us additional information to this. Our further aim is to elaborate on the different opinions of the Hungarians living in cluster and diaspora in Vojvodina. It is a quite important sociolinguistic aspect regarding Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin.

2. Hungarian cluster, Hungarian diaspora and Hungarian isolate in Vojvodina

It is not an easy task to define the words *Hungarian cluster* and *Hungarian diaspora*, because they have already appeared in different approaches in the specialised literature (Barlai–Gábrity 2008). Researchers took into consideration the population number, the administrative units (e.g. the Hungarian local governments have assumed the existence of the Hungarian cluster until recently), as well as the Hungarian secondary schools (Fülöp–Kolozsvári 1995). Our definition is based on Jenő Barlai's and Irén Gábrity Molnár's definition stating that:

> Hungarian clusters exist in North Bačka and North Banat. In these two regions they comprise almost half of the population (approx. 45%) (their total number here is 165,732). 57% of southern Hungarians[2] live here. The other regions' turning into a diaspora is inevitable. (Barlai-Gábrity 2008: 17)

The previously mentioned authors mark Subotica municipality as the largest Hungarian cluster, since 57,000 Hungarians live here in the area.

According to the 2002 national census – because we do not have the results of the 2011 census yet – we conducted the survey in the following Hungarian speaking settlements:

Cluster: Subotica (Szabadka), Čantavir (Csantavér), Mali Iđoš (Kishegyes), Senta (Zenta), Čoka (Csóka);

[2] Hungarians in Vojvodina (editor's note).

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Diaspora: Kula (Kúla), Zrenjanin (Nagybecskerek), Rusko Selo (Kisorosz), Novi Sad (Újvidék), Srbobran (Szenttamás), Temerin, Jermenovci (Ürményháza), Novi Itebej (Magyarittabé), Torda, Hetin (Tamásfalva);

Isolate: Ivanovo (Sándoregyháza).

Ivanovo, Skorenovac (Székelykeve) and Vojlovica (Hertelendifalva) are settlements that belong to the South Banat district. They are surrounded by Serbian population and they form a native and dialectical isolate in the sub-Danubian region.

This grouping considers only the ratio of the population and does not dwell on administrative units (local governments) and educational possibilities.

3. The more useful language

The importance of the guidelines considering languages are also language attitudes, and they belong to the realm of language prestige, like the judgement of language beauty, the degree of difficulty and language knowledge. Language attitude is the opinion about the language or its variation that can be positive or negative (Kovács Rácz 2011: 11).

During the survey, the informants gave their reasons to the situations where they thought their mother tongue was important. Some situations agree with the theories mentioned before in the *Introduction* and they consist of several interethnic spaces that mark the location. The informants' answers are shown in the chart. The locations of the interethnic spaces are classified into thematic units according to the communicational situations previously mentioned.

3.1. Interethnic spaces in connection to the usefulness of the Hungarian in Vojvodina

Table 1. The thematic groups of the interethnic spaces (Source: the author's own calculations)

Interethnic fields	Cluster	Diaspora
Family and friends	130	265
Everyday life and official administration	48	68
Literature, Internet and the media	5	4
Environment and communication	52	54
Every time and everywhere	34	14
Culture, education and healthcare	24	36
Answers	293	441

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According to the answers received, we have formed the following groups according to the usefulness of Hungarian:

1. *Family, friends and entertainment* are settings of personal life therefore they are in the same thematic group.
2. In the *Everyday life and official administration* category we meet the following situations in the informants' answers: shopping in the stores or at the markets, practising religion in the church, professional lectures in public places, being at the office, managing public matters inside the settlement and in public places. Managing public matters inside a settlement is an important and distinguished category in our case because the Hungarian population is able to use its language according to the ratio of the Hungarians in the settlement.
3. *The Media (television and radio) and the Internet* are tightly connected therefore they are in the same group. The media and the Internet inform us about both literary and specialised research matters.
4. The word 'environment' partly indicates an exact geographical area (e.g. in Bačka), partly places close to one's residence (conversation with neighbours and other street conversations), and partly indicates language environment (places where Hungarian can be spoken in Vojvodina). We also experience interethnic fields geographically during our travels. This consideration justified placing Hungarian used during travelling in this thematic group.
5. The *Every time and everywhere* category consists of language usage that is effective in every situation and in every position, and it also appears in informants' answers. However, this category does not include specific interethnic space indication, but universal field indication, so we define it as a general field. We have created it according to the informants' following answers:
    a) Hungarian is important in every situation;
    b) "It should be used in all cases"
6. Culture, education and expertise are tightly connected, healthcare and education are also part of the society therefore they are mentioned in the same thematic group.

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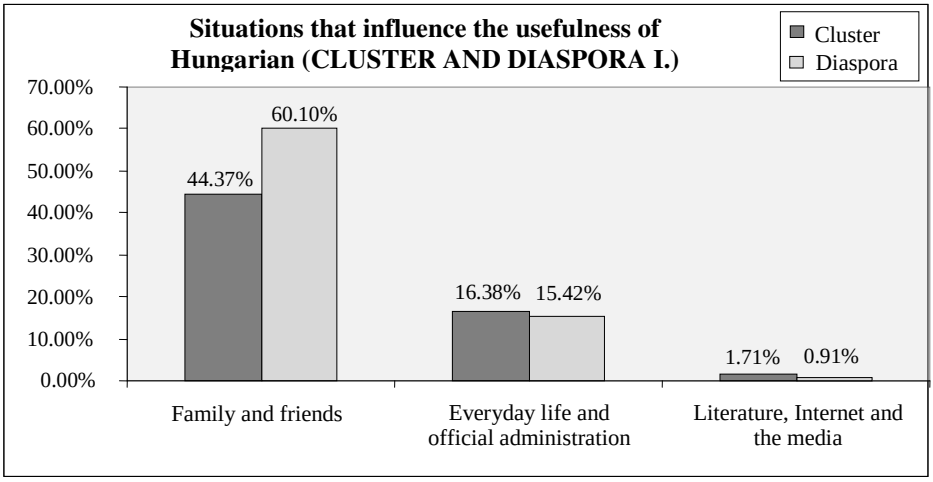
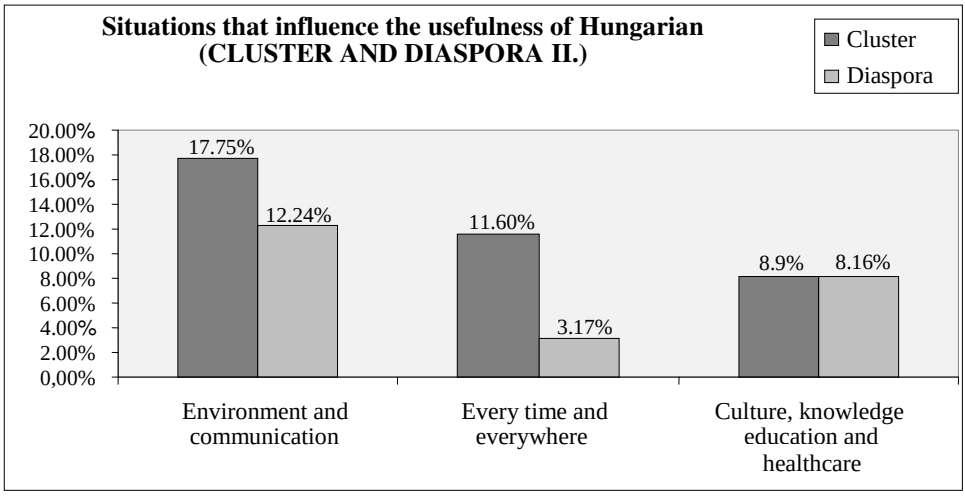
3.2. Differences of the interethnic spaces in the utility motives of the Hungarian cluster and diaspora in Vojvodina

Graph 1. Interethnic spaces in the answers of the Vojvodinian Hungarians living in cluster and diaspora I.



Graph 2. Interethnic spaces in the answers of the Vojvodinian Hungarians living in cluster and diaspora II.



Those who live in the diaspora claim in a 15.63% higher ratio that using Hungarian is useful among the family members and friends, than those who live in

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the cluster. However, at the workplace, during shopping, professional lectures, practising religion, managing public matters and street talk, those who live in the cluster state in a higher ratio the usefulness of the Hungarian language**.** The smallest difference between the cluster's and the diaspora's opinion is found in culture, education, healthcare, literature, the Internet and the media sections. The biggest difference in answers concerning Hungarian, however, is in the *Family and friends* and in the *Every situation* sections. In the diaspora – unlike in the cluster – people think that culture, education and the healthcare are the areas where Hungarian is more useful. They do not think that they should use this language in every situation.

3.3. Interethnic spaces and Serbian

The Hungarians living in Vojvodina also stated the situations where they thought Serbian was useful. 71% of the informants answered this question. The received answers were organised in themathic groups like in the case of the guidelines to the importance of Hungarian. Interestingly, the informants chose the same situations as they had done related to the importance of Hungarian; the only difference was that the frequency ratios were not the same.

1. *Among family members and friends* the informants consider Serbian useful if there are people with them whose mother tongue is this language. Compared to the same group connected to Hungarian – the number of the answers show huge differences as in the case of Hungarian where there were 395 answers. As in the case of Serbian there were only 22 answers. So the majority of the informants think that Hungarian is more useful among family members and friends.

The Family sphere (71.39%) and the Circle of friends (26.83%) shows the use of Hungarian in much larger percentage than in the case of Serbian, where it can be seen that the previously mentioned situation appears only in four cases. Concerning Serbian, the national constitution of the circle of friends is mentioned in 81.82% of the answers. This interethnic space in the situations where Hungarian is useful shows 3.04% rate. There are no data concerning Serbian in the "Personal life and entertainment" sphere.

2. In *Everyday life and official administration* thematic group in the informants' answers "Managing public matters" is the sphere where Serbian is mostly useful**.** If we look at Hungarian inside the same group, using the language in everyday life appears most frequently (44.83%), which is followed by the use of Hungarian inside the settlement (21.55%) and at the workplace (18.10%). Using Hungarian in managing public matters was considered useful only in four cases. The medium inside the settlement is not included among Serbian interethnic spaces, however, its frequent everyday use (5.88%) shows much less ratio than in the case of Hungarian. This can be explained by the fact that the Hungarians in

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Vojvodina communicate in their mother tongue when they are in their settlements but do not deal with public matters. This is partly the result of the fact that in the researched settlements the Hungarians live in the cluster (city/town cluster: Subotica, Senta, Čoka; villagers who live in the cluster: Čantavir, Mali Iđoš, Jermenovci, Novi Itebej, Torda, Hetin, Temerin). The places where Hungarians live in the diaspora inside the settlements (Hungarians in the city diaspora: Kula, Zrenjanin, Novi Sad; Hungarians living in the isolate: Ivanovo), the situations where Serbian or Hungarian are used are connected to concrete situations. The *Every time and everywhere* or *Everyday life* sections, as well as using the language inside the settlement, express generalisation meaning that we mostly communicate in one or the other language in every situation.

Between using the Serbian (12.85%) and the Hungarian at work, we find only 5.25% difference in marking them, which uses Hungarian, so the informants consider it more useful at work in a higher rate.

If we compare the usefulness of the Serbian to the Hungarian language situations, we find the following interethnic spaces: the Church, Practising religion, Further vocational trainings and the Medium inside the settlement. However, regarding Hungarian there are no sections "Outside the family", "Shopping and Travelling" which were connected to Serbian. There were 116 answers connected to Hungarian and 459 answers connected to Serbian in this thematic group. This means that Serbian got more answers.

3. In the *Environment and communication* thematic group the usefulness of Hungarian has 106 replies while Serbian has 79 replies. The term "environment" comes from the informants and means the immediate environment where there is bilingual communication or communication in Serbian. However, they do not include a specific naming. We can conclude that they mark interethnic spaces in Vojvodina and Serbia. In this thematic group we can find the next locations:

According to this grouping, in Hungary the use of the language is considered 48.11% useful while Serbian in Serbia and Vojvodina is considered 43.04% useful. Informants consider Serbian useful – beside the Environment – outside the settlement (30.38%). Hungarian is considered useful abroad and in the EU (13.21%).

4. In the *Every time and everywhere* category the informants consider Serbian useful 12 times, Hungarian 48 times in every situation every time.

5. *Education and healthcare:* this topic includes 51 replies for Serbian and 60 replies for Hungarian. Among the interethnic spaces of Hungarian in the thematic groups, education (80%) represents the highest position, however, in the case of Serbian healthcare (64.71%) is in the highest place. In the *Healthcare* section only four informants think that the use of Hungarian is advantageous. Serbian is considered 11.76% useful as the language of education.

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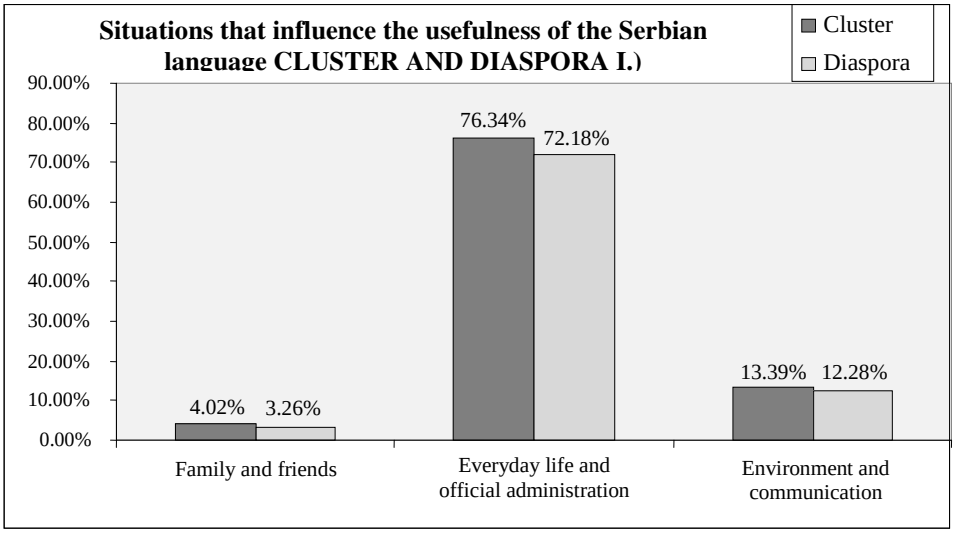
4. Interethnic spaces in the cluster and in the diaspora (utility guidelines in the aspect of Serbian)

There are different answers from the cluster and the diaspora. The ratio is calculated according to this.

Table 2. Interethnic spaces in the cluster and in the diaspora

Response	Cluster	Diaspora
Family and friends	9	13
Everyday life and official administration	171	288
Environment and communication	30	49
Every time and everywhere	3	9
Education and healthcare	11	40
Total	224	399

Graph 3. Interethnic spaces in the cluster and in the diaspora I.



The largest differences in the responses are in the ***Education and healthcare*** and in the *Everyday life and the official administraton* sections. The education and healthcare is 5.11% in higher position in the diaspora, everyday life is 4.16% in

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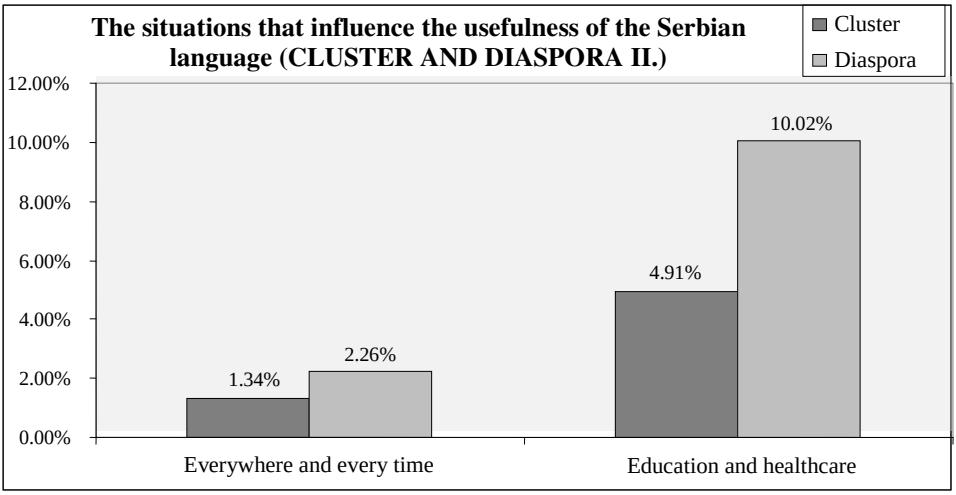
higher position in the cluster. The rest of the categories show only minor differences.

Graph 4. Interethnic spaces in the cluster and in the diaspora II



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