

**LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY. THE MONOLINGUAL PARADIGM AND
DISPLACEMENT IN THE “KELETI ÚJSÁG”¹.**

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Abstract: “Keleti Újság” [‘Eastern Newspaper’] was a Hungarian daily newspaper published in Cluj-Napoca between 1918 and 1944, and is considered one of the most important journals of the period between the two World Wars. Covering a large range of topics and genres (from politics to social issues, from literature to advertisements) it was also the most important periodical of the Hungarian community, publishing articles on the state of the community in the new political context, as well as overtly and covertly outlining attitudes towards the mother tongue and the language of the state that determine the way in which the new minority identity of the community was to be shaped.

My paper aims to outline these attitudes towards language in the theoretical framework of the monolingual paradigm and the issues of displacement (from a majority status to a minority status), as well as to identify the strategies with the help of which the newspaper’s editors aimed to form the opinions of their readership regarding the attitudes towards the mother tongue and the language of the state.

Keywords: “Keleti Újság”, language and identity, the monolingual paradigm, displacement, language attitudes.

Introduction

The present paper aims to outline the attitudes towards language in the theoretical framework of the monolingual paradigm as well as the issues of displacement from a majority status to a minority one of the Hungarian community in Romania after 1918, based on the corpus of texts of articles published in the „Keleti Újság” newspaper. “Keleti Újság” [‘Eastern Newspaper’] first appeared on December 24, 1918 in Cluj-Napoca, and is one of the longest-published Hungarian daily newspapers of the period between the two World Wars in Romania, the last issue being printed on October 6, 1944. It became one of the most widespread Transylvanian newspapers playing an important role in informing the readership, in shaping their opinions and attitudes through the types of texts it published. It also provided a forum for the Hungarian writers and poets of the era as it also functioned as a permanent literary press.²

Historical context

The years 1918–1920 brought about great changes in the Transylvanian society, and in particular for the Hungarian community. The new political constructions are important not only from the historical point of view, but also from the economic, cultural, literary and media

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² For more on the history and role of the ‘Keleti Újság’ in Transylvania see Fazakas 2014.

aspects (see Sófalvi 2009: 242–243). In order to fully understand the social implications of the period it is important to stress that in the 1919 international contract Romania guaranteed minority rights, and although the 1923 constitution did not overtly include the language rights of minority communities, it guaranteed the general rights of the citizens. Nevertheless its practical realizations were not obvious, and, except for shorter periods of time, the members of minority groups had to tackle with a number of difficulties both from the political and the social point of view (Sófalvi 2009: 243; Fleisz 2005: 80). Such difficulties included the decline of the Hungarian middle class (mainly because of repatriation), as well as the issue of Hungarian language education, principally ensured by confessional schools (Fleisz 2005: 81).

It is important from the point of view of our research that the percentage of the Transylvanian citizens who were able to read and write was much above the national average, with almost 10%, and this also corroborates the significance of Hungarian minority language press in forming the attitudes and ideologies of the Hungarian community. As several resources show, the period after 1918 saw an increasing hunger for news in the case of the Transylvanian population, which the now Transylvanian media strived to satisfy (Fleisz 2005: 86–87). It is also important to mention that up until 1918 the concept of ‘Transylvanian press’ did not exist, as it was an organic part of Hungarian media; however the political changes of the period resulted in its creation.

Languages of Transylvania

It is not our goal to discuss the demography of Transylvania of the period in question, however it is important to mention the fact that this region had always had a multi-ethnic and multicultural character. The 1920 census data regarding the mother tongue and the ethnicity of the inhabitants of the region indicate the coexistence of the Romanian, Hungarian, German, Jewish and several other ethnic groups, which also means the natural coexistence of their languages (see Vargha 1997).

An interesting addition to our knowledge about multi- and plurilingualism in Transylvania, more exactly in Cluj-Napoca can be found in an article published in the “Keleti Újság” newspaper on January 21, 1919 entitled *Kolozsvár könyv-éhsége* [‘The hunger for books in Cluj-Napoca’]. It is a short account of the situation of the book-shops in the town, as several owners reported having sold thousands of books, many written in foreign languages: English and French books were very popular, German ones especially so, while very many Romanian and French grammars were sold. This also indicates that in this particular period a high percent of the population of Cluj-Napoca reads in foreign languages and is interested in learning them.

The dynamics and power relations between the languages spoken in Transylvania is not the topic of our research either, however it is crucial to understand the most important change that determined the issues of language, mother tongue, identity and displacement among the members of the Hungarian community: “part of an already formed nation, which had been involved in the process of nation building, suddenly became a national minority. (...) the leaders of the Hungarian national minority in Romania organized their political and cultural organizations on an ethno-cultural basis and promoted a policy of self-defence concerning the nationalizing thrust of the enlarged Romanian state” (Kántor 2006: 255). As a result, the mother-tongue became the primary bearer of the national identity of the Hungarian

community, its protection and safeguarding against all dangers (from the inside and the outside) was the main task of the language cultivation movements of the era and also that of the column started in 1936 by Jenő Dsida in *Keleti Újság* (see Fazakas 2014).

In the following we discuss the issue of the mother-tongue within the theoretical concept of the monolingual paradigm. We also analyse several texts published in the “Keleti Újság” from this point of view, outlining the most important attitudes towards the mother tongue as well as the ones towards bi-, multi- and plurilingualism.

The monolingual paradigm

The theoretical framework of our study is the concept of the postmonolingual condition against the monolingual paradigm, as defined by Yildiz:

“For monolingualism is much more than a simple quantitative term designating the presence of just one language. Instead, it constitutes a key structuring principle that organizes the entire range of modern social life (...). According to this paradigm, individuals and social formations are imagined to possess one ‘true’ language only, their ‘mother tongue’, and through this possession to be organically linked to an exclusive, clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture, and nation” (Yildiz 2012: 2).

In Yildiz’s opinion this monolingual paradigm emerged only in the 18th century, displacing “previously unquestioned practices of living and writing in multiple languages” (Yildiz 2012: 6), establishing the idea that having one language is the natural norm, supported by German thinkers such as Johann Gottfried Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt and Friedrich Schleiermacher. This also contributed to the political linkage of language and nation. What is even more important in this perspective is that it not only “drew attention to each language’s specificity, but also to the individual’s relationship to his or her – presumably singular – primary language” (Yildiz 2012: 8), becoming more internal, more innate, more determined by inheritance and nationality. The 18th century is also the period during which the notion of the mother tongue shifts from the original meaning of the Latin term, *lingua materna*, used to refer to lay people’s vernaculars (in contrast to learnt Latin) to a highly emotionalized term, linking it to linguistic socialization (see Yildiz 2012: 10). The author concludes that “mother tongue” is more than a metaphor, “it constitutes a condensed *narrative* about origin and identity” (Yildiz 2012: 12), which is unique, very similar to the uniqueness of a mother.

The monolingual paradigm and the concept of the mother tongue as presented above can be identified in several texts published in the “Keleti Újság”. Our research focuses mainly on the articles included in the column entitled *Anyanyelvünkért* [‘For the protection of our mother tongue’] that Jenő Dsida started in 1936. The name of the column itself indicates the fact that the concept of the mother tongue is deeply rooted in the Hungarian identity of Transylvania; nevertheless in the following we analyse texts that were not published in the column as well³.

Although the main concepts of the monolingual paradigm can be outlined in almost every such article, we aim to stress the fact that there is a shift from it towards the so-called *postmonolingual* condition, a term introduced by Yildiz, in the sense that it highlights the

³ In the case of the articles published in the *Anyanyelvünkért* column we used Zsemlyei’s anthology (Zsemlyei 2008).

struggles against the monolingual paradigm (2012: 4), which can be identified through the attitudes the newspaper formulates overtly or covertly towards the official language of the state and towards foreign languages in general, towards their impact upon the mother tongue, as well as towards multilingualism and plurilingualism.

The mother tongue and identity in the “Keleti Újság”

As Yildiz stresses, “the manufactured proximity between ‘mother’ and ‘language’ stages the fantasy behind the modern notion of the mother tongue – namely, that the mother tongue emanates from the mother’s body” (Yildiz 2012: 12). This is why the mother’s role as the one who passes the language on to her children and as such ensures intergenerational language and identity transmission is crucial, especially in minority contexts.

There are several texts published in the “Keleti Újság” newspaper which contribute to this type of conceptualization of the mother tongue and of the role of the mother. In the following we will analyse a selection of fragments from such articles trying to identify the attitudes towards the mother tongue and other languages (the language of the state and other foreign languages) in the theoretical framework of the monolingual paradigm as well as to outline the need for such a conceptualization of the mother tongue in the new minority context the language community had to tackle with in this period.

One of such articles is entitled *Ami a magyar anyák kötelessége* [‘What the duties of Hungarian mothers are’] published in 1934 (XVII/2.) as a leading article, thus not part of the *Anyanyelvünkért* column, which is significant, because it signals the general standpoint of the newspaper. It is constructed around the linguistic ideologies of decadentism (the belief that the language can decay in the course of its history, however this decay can be halted by language cultivation) and destructivism (the belief that the incorrect, that is the non-standard use of the language can have a destructive effect on itself, and if the speakers use certain linguistic forms considered to be harmful or use harmless expressions incorrectly, this can hurt the language).⁴

The author of this particular article is a woman, presumably a mother, her name is Kovács Dezsóné. She starts from the above defined ideologies, and uses the term ‘mother tongue’ 10 times in her text. While acknowledging that it is the duty of every Romanian citizen to learn the language of the state, she claims that one cannot be reconciled to the loss of the “pure gold of the mother tongue”. Although stressing the importance of the role of institutional education, of schools, and of professionals, she asserts that it is the duty and the “eternal and holy right” of every mother to ensure “eternal life” to the mother tongue, a right that is “hers only, and no one can take that away from her in her family”.⁵ This is in a complete agreement with the concept of the mother tongue of the monolingual paradigm.

The author continues with a historical retrospection, in which she stresses that in the 17th and 18th centuries the Hungarian language was not considered to be “genteel”, and that bourgeois families promoted learning French, German and Latin, and as a result, serf mothers

⁴ For a detailed discussion of linguistic attitudes and ideologies present in the texts published in the *Anyanyelvünkért* column, see Fazakas 2014.

⁵ “Minden anya végezheti, ha meggondolja, hogy nem csupán kötelességteljesítésről van szó, hanem örök és szent jogról, mely egyedül az övé, és családjában senki tőle el nem veheti.”

ensured the continuity of the teaching of Hungarian in their families. This introduces and reinforces the idea of the mother as the cultivator and saviour of the mother tongue.

The article formulates an imperative addressed to the Hungarian women and Hungarian mothers of Transylvania, and states that “fate has put the cause of the mother tongue into your hands”.⁶ The author then outlines the concept of the mother tongue she operates with: she states that children need to understand that “the mother tongue is the first in the world for them”⁷ and only after having experienced the “healing, calming, ensuring breeze of the sweet mother tongue in their homes just like that of fresh, exhilarating, healing air”⁸ can they go on learning foreign languages.

The author continues by identifying the tasks of the mothers in securing the continuity of the mother tongue: it is to make the children see the differences between the various linguistic forms, to correct any mistakes in speech and in writing, to make the children understand the beauties of the mother tongue both in the “language of the people” and in “the perfect creations of literature”. The final paragraph of the article formulates the need and the obligation of the mothers to be permanently alert: “her ears be sensitive as living conscience”⁹, as this will guarantee the good Hungarian (mother tongue) language command of the children. The last sentence of the article is a final affirmation of the role and responsibility of women and mothers in particular: “It is up to the mothers!”¹⁰

The concept of the mother as the highest institution of language cultivation appears in several other articles as well. The one entitled *Nagy nemzetek példája* [‘The example of great nations’] (XX/95.) discusses the experiences of the movements for the safeguarding of the national language organized in England, Germany and Italy as well as the established linguistic institutions and academies. Nevertheless the author concludes, that “There is no such royal institute as the human heart and the lips of the mother”.¹¹

The above analysed texts focus in particular on the role and tasks of the Hungarian mothers and not so much on the biological connection between them and the mother tongue, however this can be considered a general underlying principle of most of the articles. We continue our analysis with the text published in the *Anyanyelvünkért* column in 1936, entitled *Hogyan neveljünk helyes és tiszta magyarságra?* [‘How to educate our children in clean and correct Hungarian mentality’] (XIX/171.), an article putting a much greater emphasis on this aspect. It is mainly a (negative) reaction to multilingualism, more exactly plurilingualism, to the fact that the children living in Transylvania are required to learn several languages (this aspect will be discussed in the following section). The idea of the biological nature and origin of the mother tongue is stressed by the author: “we can speak only one language, not perfectly, but more or less flawlessly, the one which we drank together with our mother’s milk”.¹² This also appears in Dezső Kosztolányi’s text published in the *Anyanyelvünkért*

⁶ “Az anyanyelv ügyét a sors a ti kezetekbe tette le.” (translation by the author, F.N.)

⁷ “anyanyelve neki a világon az első” (translation by the author, F.N.)

⁸ “az otthonban állandóan az édes anyanyelv gyógyító, megnyugtató, biztató áramlatának hatását érzi, mint akár csak a friss, az üdítő, a gyógyító levegőét” (translation by the author, F.N.)

⁹ “A füle érzékeny legyen, mint az élő lelkiismeret!” (translation by the author, F.N.)

¹⁰ “Az anyákon múlik ez!” (translation by the author, F.N.)

¹¹ “Nincs királyibb intézet az emberi szívnél és az édesanya ajkánál” (translation by the author, F.N.)

¹² “nem perfektül, hanem meglehetősen hibátlansággal is csak egy nyelvet beszélhetünk, azt, amelyet anyán tejével szívunk magunkba” (translation by the author, F.N.)

column (XIX/260.): “I look upon the untutored person, who drank my words together with his mother’s milk, with much greater cordiality”.¹³

The monolingual paradigm is also present in the above discussed cases, as the internal, innate relationship between the individual and his or her primary language is emphasized in almost every article. As Yildiz puts it, the mother tongue “stands for a unique, irreplaceable, unchangeable biological origin that situates the individual automatically in a kinship network and by extension in the nation” (Yildiz 2012: 9). As Schleiermacher illustrates, “the ‘mother’ in ‘mother tongue’ stands in for the allegedly organic nature of this structure by supplying it with notions of maternal origin, affective and corporeal intimacy, and natural kinship” (Yildiz 2012: 10), which can be traced in the previously analysed fragments as well.

Another important aspect is that of the uniqueness and organic nature of language: “in this view, a writer can become the origin of creative works only with an origin in a mother tongue, itself imagined to originate in a mother” (Yildiz 2012. 9). The *Anyanyelvünkért* column published one of Dezső Kosztolányi’s articles entitled *Katé az anyanyelvről* [Catechism on the mother tongue] (XIX/260.) in which this aspect is particularly strong: “I can be myself only in my mother tongue. From its deepest depths seethe the insensible screams, the poems. Here I forget that I speak, I write”.¹⁴ Being one of the most prominent poets and prose-writers of his time, Kosztolányi’s views of language and the mother tongue spread quickly as he became the leader of the modern language cultivation movement in Hungary. In this approach the mother tongue is the primary marker of identity, moreover it is identity itself both from the point of view of the individual and that of the (ethnic) group.

The mother tongue and multilingualism

In one of our previous studies we discuss the attitudes towards foreign languages and the language of the state as formulated in the articles published in the *Anyanyelvünkért* column (see Fazakas 2014). We conclude that there is a contradictory attitude towards both: the influence of the Romanian language as the source of many words, expressions and grammatical constructions that enter the Hungarian language, is frowned upon. On the other hand, however, several articles emphasize the importance of learning the language of the state, as something that is a necessity and a duty of the citizens of Romania. Learning and speaking foreign languages is also frequently thematised in these texts, and the attitudes towards it are also conflicting. Several authors confirm that there is need to learn foreign languages especially from the point of view of finding good jobs. One of the articles on the possibilities for employment of young lawyers states that they should not even try to find jobs without foreign language skills: “I have knowledge of several cases in which Hungarian lawyers could not represent foreign firms because they did not speak the German language. It is without a doubt good that they speak French but my experience is that can have more

¹³ “... sokkal melegebben tekintek arra a pallérozatlan emberre, aki az anyatejjel szívta magába szavaimat” (translation by the author, F.N.)

¹⁴ “Csak anyanyelvemen lehetek igazán én. Ennek mélységes mélyéből buzognak föl az öntudatlan sikolyok, a versek. Itt megfeledekzem arról, hogy beszélek, írok” (translation by the author, F.N.)

success with the German language. I repeat: it is an absolute must to know foreign languages”¹⁵ (XVII/4.).

The monolingual paradigm underlies these texts as well, as speaking several languages also involves a certain degree of contact, of mixture, the attitudes towards which are absolutely negative. This is supported by a number of fragments: “We advocate that the citizens of the state speak the language of the state, moreover we advocate that they speak it beautifully (...) Whoever speaks Romanian, should speak clearly and beautifully in Romanian. However who speaks Hungarian, should speak clearly and beautifully in Hungarian” (XIX/200.)¹⁶ Thus language contact between the two is not accepted.

Another article written by Albert Márkos (*Hogyan neveljünk helyes és tiszta magyarságra?* [‘How to educate our children in clean and correct Hungarian mentality’] XIX/171.), reveals a rather peculiar understanding of multi- and plurilingualism. According to the author, learning multiple languages can have a negative effect on the mother tongue skills of the speakers and especially those of children. He does not support teaching foreign languages to young children at all, as – in his opinion – this will harm the child’s mother-tongue competences and will negatively affect its language skills and thinking processes. According to this approach there is only one language a person can somewhat (and not perfectly) acquire, and this is his/her mother-tongue – which, in the light of the fragments analysed above, is not a singular opinion, but a trend, and it corresponds to contemporary views of bilingualism and plurilingualism (on the topic of historical aspects of attitudes towards bilingualism and cognitive functioning see Hoffmann 2014).

This aspect is also significant from the point of view of the monolingual paradigm. In Yildiz’s words “the multiplication of languages is not an issue for this Herderian view as long as each language is conceived as distinct and separate and as belonging to just one equally distinct and separate people. What this position cannot abide is the notion of blurred boundaries, crossed loyalties, and unrooted languages” (Yildiz 2012: 8). Such blurred boundaries and crossed loyalties are unacceptable especially in minority contexts similar to the ones in which the analysed texts and articles were written.

Foreign words as indicators of the postmonolingual condition

The fight against foreign elements of the language has been the driving force of the creation of the *Anyanyelvünkért* column. The influx of such foreign elements is seen as the main threat against the language, which needs to be addressed, and that is why the editors of the column create glossaries of foreign-origin words used in everyday Hungarian, together with their Hungarian equivalents, hoping that with the frequent reading and consulting of these short glossaries the speakers would learn and get used to the Hungarian counterparts and eventually substitute the foreign words with them. A general trend in all of the articles published in the column, and in almost all articles discussing issues of language is purism, the

¹⁵ Sok olyan esetről van tudomásom, amikor külföldi cégeket azért nem képviselhetek magyar ügyvédek, mert nem bírták a német nyelvet. Kétségtelenül helyes, ha franciául is tudnak, de az a tapasztalatom, hogy a némettel többre viszik. Ismétlem, feltétlenül szükséges a nyelvismeret. (translation by the author, F.N.)

¹⁶ “Hívei vagyunk annak, hogy az állam polgárai beszéljék az állam nyelvét, sőt tovább megyünk: hívei vagyunk annak is, hogy *szépen beszéljék*. (...) Aki románul beszél, szóljon tisztán és szépen románul. De viszont aki *magyarul beszél, szóljon tisztán és szépen magyarul*” (translation by the author, F.N.)

need to protect the language from external influences that deteriorate the cleanliness of the language. As Yildiz puts it “foreign-derived words have long been the object of charged attacks by language purists, who have treated them as intruders to be repelled and excised from a ‘mother tongue’ held to be pure” (Yildiz 2012: 27). Articles in the topic can be seen as indicative of the tensions of the postmonolingual condition, in which the boundaries of languages and identities become blurred, and loyalties are not obvious anymore. The monolingual paradigm in this respect can be interpreted as the guardian of identity deeply rooted in and defined by the mother tongue, needed in order to hold on to a collective identity which in some ways is lost, displaced and disappearing.

Conclusions

Upon analysing several texts published in the “Keleti Újság” newspaper we can formulate several conclusions from the point of view of the monolingual paradigm. These texts are clearly determined by everything this paradigm implicates: the overlapping nature of ethnic identity and the mother tongue, the conflicting, mistrustful attitudes towards foreign languages in general, and towards bi- and plurilinguals, the ideologies of linguistic decadentism and destructivism interpreted from the point of view of linguistic purism, the safeguarding and cultivation of the mother tongue and with it, that of (ethnic) identity. Nevertheless the postmonolingual condition is also present as the tensions and difficulties of a multilingual society can be identified in the articles, however – as previously discussed – each language is conceived as distinct and separate and as belonging to just one equally distinct and separate group of people. This is significant both from the point of view that such texts had a deep impact upon the attitudes and ideologies of the readership and consolidated this paradigm in the displaced minority Hungarian communities as well.

Although our analysis focused on articles written and published in the period between the two World Wars, recent studies on linguistic ideologies and attitudes show that most of them are still present and determine the way in which the speakers of Hungarian of any age see and perceive their mother tongue, and the way in which they speak about it both in Hungary and in the minority contexts outside Hungary (see e.g. Lanstyák 2007; 2009).

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