

Language Borders as Borders of Ethnic Identity

Language Use and Ethnic Categorisation among Vlach Roma in Eastern Slovakia

The thesis focuses on the topic of the relationship between language use and the process of ethnic categorization in one municipality in Eastern Slovakia. It presents an extensive case study based on eighteen years of field research among the inhabitants of the Vlach Roma settlement in the village called „Borovany “. The author uses a combination of socio-anthropological and sociolinguistic methods and explores the actors' perspective on the conceptualisation of group boundaries dividing the inhabitants of the village into the Vlach Roma (*Vlašika Rom*), Non-Vlach Roma (*Rumungri*) and Non-Roma (*Gáže*) and the role of language in the whole process. In the anthropological part of her research, the author studied the patterns of social organization within the studied village and analysed the symbolic categories that are relevant for the social space of the group of *Vlašika* Roma. She discusses the ways in which symbolic boundaries between "us" and "them" are formed and focuses on identifying the boundary markers that shape these symbolic boundaries. She concludes that it is the language that represents one of the most important pillars of the group identity of the Vlach Roma while simultaneously serving as the most distinctive feature in the process of boundaries construction.

In the sociolinguistic part of her work, the author examines language behaviour and language repertoire of the Vlach Roma in Borovany. She does not approach language as a mere marker of ethnicity, but rather examines it as an active instrument which reflects as well as contributes to the formation of the local social structure and to the processes of the creation of ethnic categories as social constructs. The issues of the correlation between language and ethnicity, and of the conceptualization of the relations between language behaviour and the formation of social identity are not discussed only on the theoretical level but are treated as the main focus points in the interpretation of the field work data.

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