



Review Ph.D. dissertation
Markéta Hajská

*Language Borders as Borders of Ethnic Identity:
Language Use and Ethnic Categorisation Among Eastern
Slovak Vlach Roma*

Markéta Hajská's Ph.D. dissertation is an outstanding multidisciplinary study of the Slovak village of "Borovany" (a pseudonym), inhabited by Vlach Roma (Vlašika Rom), Non-Vlach Roma (Rumungri) and Non-Roma (Gáže). It combines socio-anthropological and sociolinguistic methods to explore the actors' perspective on the conceptualisation of group boundaries and the role of the language. The dissertation is based on an extensive fieldwork with a time span of 14 years. The ethical issues pertaining to the data collection are sufficiently described in Section 1.4.

With 284 pages, the thesis is extensive, comprehensive, and well structured. It comprises 7 chapters, of which the first one is an introduction, describing the research topic, ethical issues, key concepts, Romani groups and their history. Chapters 2-3 comprise the socio-anthropological analysis, while chapters 4-5 deal with sociolinguistics. Chapter 6 contains conclusions, and chapter 7 the references.

Chapter 2 deals with symbolic boundaries between ethnic groups in social anthropological perspective, starting from ethnicity and the debate between primordialists and modernists (constructivists, instrumentalists, and situationalists). Section 2.4 contains a definition of the use of the concept of ethnicity for the purposes of Hajská's thesis, emphasising ethnicity as a social category. Section 2.5 analyses the state of the art of the conceptualization of Roma and Olaš Roma and referring to the Czech/ Slovak debate about the nature and possibilities of conceptualizing the Roma issue.

The large chapter 3 (pp. 82-133) examines the ways of social organization in Borovany, pursuing the the ways of social organization and social stratification in Borovany, in particular

in the framework of the local Vlach settlements. This chapter also deals with symbolic boundaries between “us” and “them” and boundary markers. Topics dealt with include e.g. contact between roma and non-Roma, segregation, the relationships between the Vlach Roma and Rumungri, concepts of Romanihood, and segmentation of Roma by location and gender.

Chapter 4 discusses language and ethnicity in the perspective of linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics. This chapter most surveys the state of the art comparing the primodiliastic and constructivist views. Ways of defining linguistic communities and the concept of language situation are briefly discussed.

The large chapter chapter 5 (pp. 146-242) analyses the language situation in the village of Borovany, involving three language communities (the non-Roma, the Vlach Roma and the Rumungri) with different linguistic repertoires. Section 5.3 deals with language socialisation, the acquisition of individual languages (incl. Slovak and Romani, also focusing on mixed families and new arrivers), which consitutes a little studies aspect in Romani Linguistics (cf. however the work carried out Prof. Dr. Hristo Kyuchukov). Section 5.4 discusses language domains, and section 5.5 language prestige hierarchies, central topics in current Romani Linguistics. Sections 5.6-7 examine code switching phenomena, hence contributing to the new trends in Romani Linguistics, the departure from traditional dialectology and work on language structured to sociolinguistic topics (cf. the Migrom project, work planned at Södertörn University).

If there is a critical aspect, it is perhaps in the choice of international literature regarding, for instance, questions of language and identity, code-switching phenomena and language domains, that could have been perhaps more wider and also include recent studies on these topics in Romani (e.g. Adamou & Granqvist 2015; Matras & Robertson 2015; Gaiser & Matras 2016; Leggio & Matras 2017).

Overall, Markéta Hajská’s Ph.D. dissertation on Language Borders as Borders of Ethnic Identity is an excellent descriptive work that demonstrates extraordinary empirical and analytical skills in cultural and social anthropology and sociolinguistics. It is an invaluable contribution to both anthropological and linguistic research on Romani.

The work submitted by far meets the standard customarily required by a doctoral thesis. Thus, the general grading is "pass" and, consequently, the dissertation is fully recommended for public defence.

Best regards



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