

# **Szalai Andrea:**

## **Language ideologies of Romani in Central Europe**

### ***1. Background***

In the last two decades several books (Joseph and Taylor 1990, Schieffelin et al. 1998, Verschueren 1999, Kroskrity 2000, Gal and Woolard 2001, Mar-Molinero and Stevenson 2006 etc.) and special issues of journals (e.g. *Pragmatics* 1992/3, 1995/2) were dedicated to the language ideologies. Language ideologies are representations of language, “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein 1979: 193). Language ideologies mediate, i.e. create links between linguistic or discursive forms and various social categories (nation, ethnicity, gender, social class, aesthetics, authority etc.) or social actions, thus they are not limited to language itself (Woolard 1998, Kroskrity 2004). That is why the study of language ideologies became an interdisciplinary field of research, attracting the interests of socially oriented fields of linguistics (e.g. sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, critical discourse analysis), social anthropology and cultural studies as well. The analysis of language ideologies can contribute to a better understanding of the processes through which social actors, either as immediate participants of a sociolinguistic field, or as “experts” (linguists, anthropologists etc.) “conceive of links between linguistic forms and social phenomena” (Irvine and Gal 2000: 37).

Relying on the linguistic anthropological theories of language ideologies (e.g. Silverstein 1979, Ochs 1992, Irvine and Gal 2000, Irvine 2001b), my project aims to analyse participants’ (i.e. Romani native speakers’) and experts’ ideologies of Romani language.

The Romani linguistic data come from my field research among Transylvanian Gabor Roma communities. As to the methods of fieldwork, I follow the methodological considerations of linguistic anthropology. I draw the linguistic data from the speech activity embedded in its social context (Duranti 1997: ch. 4). Beside participant observation, I have conducted metapragmatic interviews and audio- or video-recorded spontaneous (not elicited) discourses in different speech events and situations in these communities. I analyse the language ideologies both by examining the speakers’ explicit metapragmatic commentaries and by studying implicit ideologies embedded in linguistic practice, i.e. analysing Romani discourse samples recorded in various speech situations.

### ***2. The scientific relevance of the research project:***

The prospective research findings can contribute to the following fields of linguistics:

- Linguistic anthropology, with special attention to the scholarly work on language ideologies.
- Language and gender research.
- Discourse analysis.
- Romani studies, especially to the research on Romani language in its social and cultural context.
- It may have relevance for language policy and Romani language planning as well.

### **3. Details of the research:**

#### **3.1. The speakers' views and linguistic practices**

##### ***The social context and the previous research***

On the one hand, the project examines the speakers' own ideologies of Romani language and language use. This part of the research project relies on the experience of a 24-month-long

anthropological linguistic fieldwork<sup>1</sup> carried out in Gabor Roma communities of Maros (Mureş) County. It gives an insight into the discourse strategies and linguistic ideologies of a Romani ethnic group whose language has been scarcely examined. In Gabor Roma communities until the late 1990s no linguistic or ethnographic fieldwork based on long term participant observation was done, and the Romani dialect spoken by these communities has not been studied either.<sup>2</sup>

Communities of this Romani ethnic group live in a traditionally multiethnic and multilingual region of Romania, in Transylvania, in the neighbourhood of the Hungarian minority. Therefore the Gabor Roma are usually trilingual. Their first language is a Vlah Romani variety. In intra-ethnic domains, both in private and public situations, Romani is the dominant code of communication in these communities. Beside Romani, most of the adults also know the regional Hungarian dialect, and they also speak Romanian as the language of the state and larger social environment. For economic reasons, many Gabor Roma have come to Hungary and lived here for longer periods.

The project examines the relationship between particular linguistic practices and the language ideologies of those practices, and other ideologies of social differentiation (e.g. ideologies of gender, “rank”, ethnicity, see: Berta 2007, 2009; Szalai 2010) in these communities.

### ***Culturally specific discursive forms, gender and responsibility in linguistic ideologies and practices of Gabor Roma***

In this part of the project I examine the pragmatic and social functions of two discursive forms frequently used in the interactions between the Gabor Roma, the curse (*armaje*) and conditional curse (*truşul*), as well as the linguistic ideology connected with their use.<sup>3</sup> According to the anthropological literature, these discursive forms are in use not only in the Gabor Roma communities known by me, but also in the linguistic practice of other Roma ethnic groups in Europe. Thus the research findings can be useful in the interpretation of the language practices of other Roma groups as well.

By focusing on curse and conditional curse I opted for such discursive forms which do not index gender identities and relations directly, but serve for pragmatic functions: for stance marking and for the modification (e.g. reinforcement) of the illocutionary force of speech acts (Sbisà 2001). However, the pragmatic value of these discursive forms is not gender-neutral: gender plays an important role in the creation and explanation of it. The link between the linguistic form and pragmatic value of these forms is socially constructed, and the speakers produce and explain it through a gendered linguistic ideology. Among others, I seek answers to the following questions:

a) What kind of pragmatic and social functions are performed by these discursive forms in Romani interaction?

b) What is the relation between the linguistic form and the pragmatic or social functions of the particular forms of curse and conditional curse?

c) In what ways do the members of the communities construct and rationalize these

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<sup>2</sup> The documentation of this dialect is actually limited to a phonological study (Gardner and Gardner 2008), some folklore texts and a slow song which can be interpreted as a metalinguistic discourse (Kovalcsik 1999).

<sup>3</sup> For preliminary results see Szalai, Andrea (2009), *Curse, conditional curse and gender in linguistic ideologies and practices of Transylvanian Romani communities*. PhD dissertation, and Szalai 2012, 2013.

relations through language ideologies, and what role does the gender play in this process?

d) How does the use of these discursive forms serving basically pragmatic purposes (i.e. stance indexing, modifying /e.g. reinforcing/ the illocutionary force of speech acts) become a gendered linguistic practice?

e) How can a conditional curse be used as a strategy of linguistic politeness? How can we describe the role of curses in relational work (Locher–Watts 2005)?

On the one hand, I examine these discursive forms in several situations of everyday interaction, e.g. in family conversation, offering, invitation, teasing of children, playing spillikin, or political discourse at family or community events. On the other hand, I study those formal community events where the use of curse formulas is obligatory, without them the speech act and the speech event cannot be performed. Among Gabor Roma the public oath is a social event of great significance. By performing an oath in public one can clarify his/her responsibility for a norm-breaking act attributed to him/her or his/her family, and restore his/her social prestige, by reducing the loss of face. Furthermore, these speech events are used for conflict management and as an attempt for restoring the broken social relationships within the Roma community. Although such social events are mentioned in the anthropological literature on Roma as an instance of “autonomous law-making”, the oath as a speech event has not been documented and analysed yet.

I plan to analyse the oath as a speech event in Gabor Roma communities in case studies. I pay special attention to the participant framework (participant roles and voices) of the oath, the role of audience as a co-author, and the gendered norms of participation. I attempt to give a detailed analysis of the Romani interaction of particular oath cases. I try to show how the participants co-construct responsibility in oral discourse, and how conditional curses as discursive forms can be used as claim or disclaimers of responsibility.

### **3.2. Experts' ideologies of Romani**

In the last few years a great amount of research focused on the fact that not only the participants, but the researchers also have their (implicit or explicit, more or less conscious) language ideologies. These studies investigated how the experts' language ideologies influenced the scholarly descriptions of a language/variety, its status and relations to other languages/varieties. These studies also reveal the social consequences of these linguistic representations. For instance, they describe how the experts' ideologies were utilized in (post)colonial, national (Irvine and Gal 2000, Irvine 2001a, Friedman 1997), and gendered (Ochs 1992, Okamoto 2002, 2004, Mills 2003) discourses and social practices.

#### ***3.2.1. Deficit-theories on Romani (with special attention to Hungary)***

My aim is to analyse a widespread linguistic theory on linguistic impoverishment of Romani as a professional language ideology. In Hungary, this deficit theory dominated the public institutional discourses on Romani in the 1970s' (see Réger 1995). It explained and rationalized the limited scope of using Romani not in terms of the power asymmetry that characterized the situation of Roma minority (e.g. lack of an additive language policy and education during the state socialism, exclusion of the minority languages from inter-ethnic situations, especially from public domains see: Szalai 1999, Bartha–Hámori 2011), but in terms of the putative lexical impoverishment, i.e. a deficit of the Romani language and its speakers (e.g. a narrow lexicon without abstract categories etc).

The purpose of the current research is to reveal the social effects of this ideology and analyse how this deficit-theory influences the public and institutional discourses on Romani

even today, and vice versa: how the recent public discourses contribute to the reproduction of the earlier, sociolinguistically discredited deficit-theory. I plan to examine the ideological contestation as well, and describe how Roma intellectuals tried to resist the linguistic ideologies of „experts”, and developed their own ideology and practices against linguisticism. I analyse the language ideologies implicit in Romani language planning practices, by discussing Romani language exam issues and Romani language materials (dictionaries, language course books). I pay special attention to the standard ideology and linguistic purism. In the analysis I rely on Irvine and Gal's (2000) semiotic theory of language ideology, hoping that in this framework we can understand better how the linguistic ideologies work. The aim is to discover the processes through which in certain contexts researchers' language ideologies contribute to the construction of hierarchical differentiation between and discrimination against linguistically defined ethnic groups.

The critical analysis of deficit theories may contribute to the identification of the individual and institutional linguisticism afflicting the Romani language and its speakers, and can help the social actors of language and educational policy to reduce the linguistic discrimination in institutional practices. Hopefully, the findings can support the Romani language planning efforts in Hungary as well.

### ***3.2.2. Representation of „the Gypsy/Roma minority” and their languages in Hungarian censuses and sociological surveys***

In this part of the project I examine the (non)representations of the linguistic and ethnic diversity of Gypsy minority in Hungary in the recent demographic and sociological surveys. I consider these surveys as special institutional contexts for public discourse on ethnic and linguistic identities. These statistics are technologies of power in the Foucaultian sense (Gal 1993, Urla 1993). They do not simply register pre-existing identities, but through several techniques these surveys do contribute to the construction and representation of these identity categories.

The analysis does not concentrate on the question of statistical accuracy (the discourse of „statistical realism”)<sup>4</sup>. Rather, it is interested in the processes of linguistic and ethnic classification, and the definitions of language-related concepts (e.g. mother tongue, multilingualism, language shift) used by the surveys. I examine how the concept of mother tongue (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000) and the language – ethnicity/"nationality" link is constructed in Hungarian statistical discourse, with special attention to the "Gypsy minority". I analyse the homogenizing techniques of census-taking practice”, showing how the declared mother tongue becomes an icon of ethno-national identity. For instance, I point out how the imagined ethnic homogeneity is projected into the relationship between two distinct languages (the Indo-Aryan Romani and the Romance Boyash), thereby creating an image of a unified, homogeneous „Gypsy language”, neglecting (erasure, see Irvine and Gal 2000) the distinction between the two languages and their speakers, making them symbolically invisible (Kontra 2003, Szalai 2006).

## ***4. References***

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<sup>4</sup> The ideology of statistical realism can be exemplified by the debates among Hungarian sociologists about the correct statistical methods and the "proper" definition of "Gypsiness" in the 1990s.

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