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SEGÉDKÖNYVEK
A NYELVÉSZET TANULMÁNYOZÁSÁHOZ 113.

UTAZÁS
A MAGYAR NYELV KÖRÜL

ÍRÁSOK KONTRA MIKLÓS TISZTELETÉRE

Szerkesztették:

Csernicskó István
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TINTA KÖNYVKIADÓ
BUDAPEST, 2010

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ON KONTRA ON HUNGARIAN LANGUAGE POLICY

For almost a decade now Miklós Kontra has generously sent me numerous writings on Hungarian language policy. For some time, I have had the intention to prepare a contribution for this field myself. However, until lately I have been busy with analyzing micro-level empirical issues through the lenses of Conversation Analysis combined with Language Ideologies. In order to get a general understanding of the theoretical and practical issues of language policy I have just compiled a description of Finnish language policy (Laihonen, 2009). Therefore, it is time to study Hungarian language policy as a response to Miklós Kontra's gifts.

In this writing I wish to explore Hungarian language policy through the writings of Kontra. The colleagues of Kontra in neighboring countries and like-minded sociolinguists in Hungary and abroad, have provided valuable contributions to the theme as well. Further, Kontra's writings often celebrate, advertise and synthesize studies carried out by others. However, Miklós has been the most productive, consistent and principled in the issues of Hungarian language policy. My basic assumption is that following his work will enable me to build a coherent account on the topic, which will serve as a springboard for later investigations.

According to Spolsky (2004: 5), in order to investigate the language policy of a community we should consider three basic levels: 1) the linguistic practice, 2) the ideas and discourses concerning the linguistic practice and 3) the attempts to intervene or change the linguistic practice. Kontra follows a more limited definition of language policy (see 2006a: 182), however he has written on all the mentioned levels. He has covered also all aspects of language policy. That is, the issues of linguistic corpus, language status and language acquisition (see Cooper, 1989).

Kontra's views stem from two basic sources: language rights approach (following Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson) and Labovian sociolinguistics. In general, Kontra promotes multilingualism and linguistic variability in many forms. He considers the multilingual state, additive bilingual education and positive image of dialects as ideal. According to Kontra (e.g. 1999), political, social and cultural problems related to language stem often from the denial of the right to use a language, or from the unavailability of education in the minority language as well as from intolerance towards substandard forms in mother tongue education. Even though these ideas are universal, Kontra is clearly seeking for proposals for a *Hungarian* language strategy. According to him (2006a: 183), a lack of an explicit Hungarian language policy will have negative consequences for the status of Hungarian in the global rank of languages, for minorities in Hungary as well as for the communication between Hungarians or the learning of languages among the Hungarians. For the Hungarian minorities, monolingualism hinders mobility. However, the mother tongue is essentially connected to identity, language shift is most often forced and destructive for minority speakers. As a solution, Kontra (e.g. 2005a) offers additive bilingualism for the Hungarian

minorities. That is, maintanence of mother tongue, with the addition of mastering the state language and learning foreign languages.

Kontra has provided us some general accounts of the sociolinguistic situation of the Hungarian language (i. e. 2006b). However, he seems to focus on problems and disputes rather than aim at a comprehensive description of the field. To begin with, Kontra in a meticulous study (2003) has shown how the codification of Hungarian is at times based on language cultivators or guardians ideas of how they would like to see the standard Hungarian language, not on majority's use or judgment. In his book he shows how current variation in Hungarian combines with social status, education, age etc. This study should have serious consequences for corpus planning and mother tongue education, since it shows that the current standardization is discriminative among others because certain forms are learnt only by second generation intellectuals. In general, Budapest is shown as the prime location where the Hungarian standard is mastered. In another writing (2006c: 103) Kontra offers two solutions: 1) The standard should be taught additively, not in contrast to the language varieties spoken at home by the pupils, and in context 2) The Hungarian codified standard should be reformed to include forms used widely by different social groups, not just by the educated metropolitan elite.

Dealing with Hungarian language policy, it is fundamental not to forget that Hungarian is spoken widely in the neighboring countries to Hungary as well. As Kontra (e.g. 2005b: 29–30) in his English language reports stresses, the Hungarians constitute a unified cultural nation, residing in eight states. This has several consequences for Hungarian language policy, most of which have been investigated in the Sociolinguistics of Hungarian Outside Hungary project lead by Kontra (see 2005b). First, from the view of language corpus politics, the project has inventoried several differences between the Hungarian spoken in Hungary and in the neighboring countries. The Hungarian minorities have lived in a political and partially linguistic isolation from Hungary since its partition in 1920. The state languages have influenced the vocabulary and grammar of Hungarian varieties spoken in the neighboring countries to some extent. Language change has also taken somewhat different paths in the "motherland" and among minority regions. Before the project no information on the state of Hungarian in neighboring countries was available and the attitude of Hungarian linguists towards those language varieties was that which Susan Gal (2006: 13) described as:

> I have found that the linguistic practices of the populations I have studied – Hungarian speakers in Austria, German speakers in Hungary – were hardly considered "language" by the speakers themselves, by their neighbors, and their governments. Until recently, even many linguists believed those practices did not merit the term language because they were supposedly mixed, chaotic, impure, hybrid forms.

The Sociolinguistics of Hungarian Outside Hungary project has resulted in the corpus political insight that certain lexical and grammatical forms used outside Hungary should be included in the codified standard in order to make it more flexible for use in the entire area where Hungarian is spoken. Furthermore, education in Hungarian and residence in a region where Hungarians form the majority has been shown as the major antidose against language shift from a structural point of view (e. g. Kontra, 2006b).

Kontra has encouraged researchers to combine questions of language variation and change with the status of Hungarian in the minority regions. That is, the language rights situation among the Hungarians in neighboring states has been used as a general explana-

tory framework for language variation and change. Here Kontra et al. have achieved in integrating Labovian sociolinguistics and (grammatical) contact linguistics (Thomason and Kaufman) with the Language Rights approach (e.g. Kontra, 2005b: 32).

Kontra has stressed that Hungarian minorities live bilingual lives, where they should strive for additive bilingualism (e. g. 2005a: 20). It seems inevitable, that minority Hungarians should learn the state language. However, it should not happen on the cost of weakening the knowledge and skills in mother tongue. That is, a Hungarian sponsored education neglecting the state language all together just promotes migration to Hungary. Mastering the state language and learning foreign languages, in addition to Hungarian, are a key to economic mobility. In line with this principle, Kontra (2005a) stresses the importance of including education in the state language and in foreign languages also in the colleges and universities which use Hungarian as the medium of instruction in Hungary's neighboring countries.

For state language education Kontra stresses the importance of teaching the state language as *a second language*, with modern methodology suiting the minorities' needs. At present, Hungarian minorities' right to learn the state language is restricted through the widespread political obsession to teach the state language and literature in the same way for first language and second language speakers alike. In general the ideology of monolingualism is to blame for the misconceptions of educational language policy both by the majority and the minority.

All the Hungarian speakers in the neighboring countries to Hungary are defined as minority language speakers by the countries of residence. The constitutions of Romania, Slovakia etc. name one state/national/official language. This one language is granted the status of a default language in the given state. Minority languages are given some rights to be used in state sponsored education or official situations, usually as an optional exception, and alongside the state language, which is compulsory in all official situations. Kontra has stressed the importance of striving for universal language rights instead of minority rights (e. g. Kontra et al. 2010: 362–363). This model has been proposed by Sándor Szilágyi N., who has adjusted and expanded the Finnish model of a bilingual state to a plan for a multilingual Rumania.

Even though Kontra's writings aim clearly at the well being of the speakers of Hungarian, the involvement in minority issues has resulted in a critical view of Hungary's minority language policy, too (e. g. 2006b: 1813-1814). Among others, Kontra has been the one to notice that Gypsies, who are not first language speaker's of Hungarian are still educated largely only in Hungarian. According to the statistics, this group, which contains 48 000 persons, has the most dramatic under-education and unemployment rate. Finally, Kontra (e. g. 2009a) has drawn attention to violations of minority language rights of Rumanians and Slovaks in Hungary.

Discussion

As Kontra has stressed, at present no clear Hungarian language strategy or policy exists. Too many unsolved disputes have hampered the field. In fact, it is too likely that Kontra's above views are in minority even among Hungarian scholars. The decision makers in Hungary are in turn far more likely to consult language guardians in language related issues than sociolinguists. The law on the use of Hungarian for advertisements in Hungary is a good example of this (see Kontra, 2006c: 182).

The first step of establishing an explicit national language policy is to produce the information on the linguistic situation in the given area. This should be based on solid modern research. Should a serious plan for Hungarian language policy be drawn, it should be based largely on the facts Kontra has been involved in gathering. That is, it should take into account for instance the facts provided by the Hungarian National Sociolinguistic Survey (Kontra, 2003). The Sociolinguistics of Hungarian Outside Hungary project (Kontra, 2005) should be the basis of understanding the linguistic practice among the Hungarian minorities. However, Kontra has noticed that these facts are often consciously ignored (2009b: 88). That is, a basic problem of language related political decisions and actions in Hungary and beyond is that they often go against the insights of sociolinguistic research.

The first step towards a language policy, or recognizing and acknowledging a problem, is to study it. From this perspective, the first step towards a systematic and rational Hungarian language policy has been taken. The conceptions and ideas Kontra has offered for a basis of a language policy, the adjustment of the Hungarian standard, additive bilingualism, universal language rights etc., are still not always generally supported among the Hungarian linguists. However, monolingualism or standard language ideology can hardly provide the springboard for a sociolinguistically informed opinion. Still today, it might be impossible to produce a generally accepted and supported account of the issues and the current discourses on Hungarian language policy, such as *Suomen kielen tulevaisuus* ('The Future of the Finnish Language' Hakulinen A. et al. 2009) by the Finnish linguist community. However, perhaps time is ripe for a sociolinguistic wholesale model of a Hungarian language policy?

The current mainstream efforts to change the linguistic practice among the Hungarians are often criticized by Kontra. Nevertheless, there are some positive examples, too. Such are the acknowledgment of the language rights for the Deaf in Hungary, the support for spreading practical information on bilingualism among the Hungarian minorities and new, modern textbooks on Hungarian breaching the language guardian heritage (see Kontra, 2010: 60,164–165). For the sake of the Hungarian language community and its speakers well-being, we can only hope that such experiments and political decisions will be more numerous in the future.

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