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Participatory sociolinguistics across researchers' and participants' language ideologies

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ABSTRACT

The participatory approach is becoming more widespread in the social sciences and is also starting to take hold in the study of language in society. However, there has been little research done on how critical sociolinguistics can be linked to research that is based on the involvement and engagement of as many participants as possible at a level they find relevant for themselves. We argue that the academic separation between the 'researcher' and the 'researched' is worth reexamining in sociolinguistic research, as all participants do 'ideologizing work' that establishes the perspective from which they view language. We discuss this through a case study from Moldavia, the North-Eastern region of Romania, which aimed to explore the contemporary language practices of former students of a Hungarian-language revitalization program. We point out that being critical of language-related inequalities cannot be separated from being critical of participation in the research process, if we are to work together across a multiplicity of language ideologies.

Introduction

Participatory research is based on the involvement and engagement of as many people concerned as possible, at a level they find relevant for themselves. Despite the rise of participatory linguistic approaches (e.g., Rodríguez Louro & Collard, 2021; Storto, 2022), little research has been done on how, if at all, these approaches can be linked to critical sociolinguistics (but see Jaspers &

Meeuwis, 2013; Li et al., 2020). We identify a place for the participatory approach in critical sociolinguistics, where the people concerned reinterpret their participation in language-related research and critically explore emerging language ideologies, both their own and those of other participants. We discuss this through a case study from our research project, which was centered around understanding the language practices of people involved in a minority language revitalization program, initiated and funded by external actors. We point out that the ideologizing work (Gal & Irvine, 2019) of both university-based researchers and the people involved in sociolinguistic research results in challenging their well-established ideas about language and linguistic practices, including the study of minority languages. Hence, we argue that the academic separation between the 'researcher' and the 'researched' is worth reexamining in sociolinguistics, as all participants do ideologizing work that establishes the perspective from which they view language.

In our understanding, participatory sociolinguistics subverts the hegemonic practice of assigning separate roles to research participants and thus reinterprets their language-related knowledge in a nonhierarchical relationship. This approach is well established in the social sciences, where researchers have started to redefine their own privileged position, inter alia with the promise that breaking down the hierarchy helps democratize the process of knowledge production and address the legitimacy crisis of science in current societies (Albert et al., 2021; Jung et al., 2014). Based on the decolonial approach to the right to research (Appadurai, 2006), it is argued that an inclusive framework requires a reflective communicative space created and maintained by the researchers in order to experience meaningful participation of all people concerned. Our critical sociolinguistic research adds a further aspect to this argument: it revolves around the relationship between the object of linguistic research and language ideologies of everyone involved in the research.

As discussed in Gal and Irvine's (2019) critical approach, language ideology research addresses positioned and partial visions of language in the world, including the power relations they re-construct and maintain. They point out that it is not primarily the description of ideas that is significant in understanding the dynamics of power, but rather the processes of what they call 'ideologizing' or 'ideological work.' The everyday practices of language are imbued with this work, construing and organizing sociolinguistic differentiation. Moreover, Irvine (2021, p. 232) highlights that 'researchers are not exempt from ideologies of language. We all do ideological work.' It has already been widely recognized by language revitalization researchers that their own work is inextricably linked to language ideologies (Kroskrity & Field, 2009; Leonard, 2017; Smagulova, 2019). Much less noticed, however, is the way in which the language ideologies of university-based and other participants are entangled during the collaboration (but see Leonard, 2021). In this paper, we attempt what Kroskrity (2009) called 'ideological clarification' as

a precondition for targeted language-related activities, such as language revitalization. But as ideological work is an ongoing process, and so is participatory research, the task of clarification can arise at any time during the research.

Doing participatory sociolinguistics does not inherently mean ideological clarification, even for university-based researchers. It is therefore crucial to give an account of their positionalities when reporting on a research involving people from a wide range of backgrounds (Bucholtz, 2021; Bucholtz et al., 2023; Leonard, 2021). Most university-based authors of this article share similar researcher positionalities: we have been academically socialized into ideas about the Hungarian language, particularly its standards, being the essence of Hungarian nationhood and of intellectuality. As social scientists and sociolinguists, we have been deconstructing such language ideologies, and our research aimed to achieve the political agenda of developing a common and anti-hegemonic understanding of the language practices of the people concerned. Since our initial research interest focused on the local implications of an externally initiated language revitalization program, and not on the program's objectives, the gradually expanding group of participants did not set the common goal to promote language revitalization (nor to hinder it). Before discussing the positionalities of all participants involved in our case study, it should be anticipated that the multiplicity of ideologies associated with different positionalities posed a significant challenge to the participatory approach.

Our research question is the following: How can language-related research be made participatory through joint ideologizing work, when the participants' language ideologies are heterogeneous? First, we introduce the 'language issue' at the heart of a language revitalization program, then we describe the actors of our participatory research and the method of analysis we used. We then present a case study exploring the ideologizing work of the research project carried out by these actors. Here we discuss in more detail the researcher positionalities of those who have held a role in this project. The paper ends by drawing conclusions on the possible relationship between participatory approaches and critical sociolinguistics and shows that being critical of language-related inequalities cannot be separated from being critical of participation in the research process, if we are to work together across a multiplicity of language ideologies.

The context

In the North-East Romanian region of Moldavia, multilingual language practices are connected to a minority called 'Csángó' in Hungarian and 'Ceangăi' in Romanian. Such language practices are prevalent in the lives of ca. 48000 people, living mainly in Bacău county (see Figure 1). Starting from the 13th and 14th centuries, this originally Hungarian-speaking population migrated
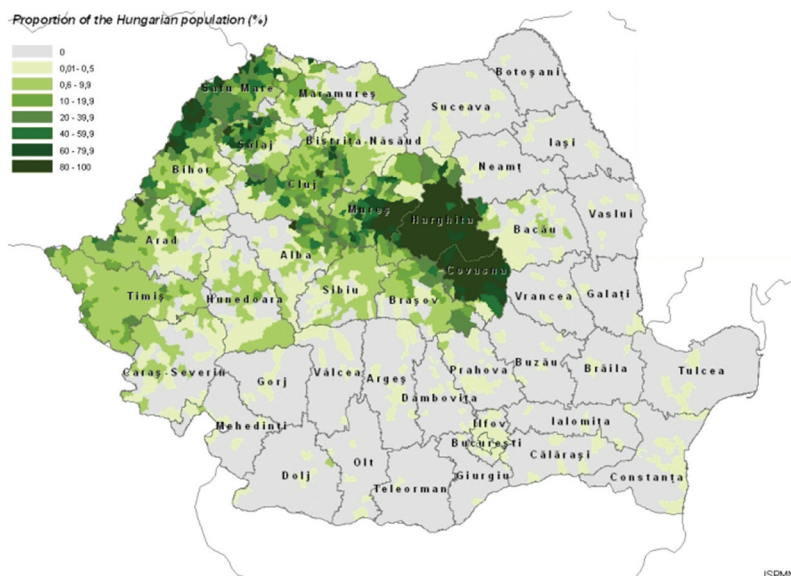
Figure 1. The proportion of the Hungarian minority in Romania, based on census data from 2011 (source: Romanian Institute for research on national Minorities).

from Transylvania, the eastern part of the Hungarian Kingdom until 1918, to the east of the Carpathian Mountains in several waves. For Hungarians, including the ones living in Transylvania (now part of Romania with more than 1 million ethnic Hungarian inhabitants), Moldavia is understood as a peripheral region of the Hungarian speaking world, where most members of the adult and senior generations speak in a way that is seen as archaic. Among younger age groups, however, especially since Romania's post-socialist transition, Romanian monolingualism has become widespread (Tánczos, 2012).

The language of the Csángó communities is highly contested. As often happens in discourses on contested languages (Tamburelli & Tosco, 2021), two nationalizing and thus conflicting interpretations have arisen, articulating the interests of the two neighboring nation states, Hungary (including its 'transborder kin-minorities', cf. Pogonyi, 2015) and Romania. One links local language practices to Hungarian, and the other emphasizes their uniqueness and their differences from standard Hungarian (see Şerban, 2021). The idea of the Csángó 'minority' and its language being part of the Hungarian nation is upheld by Hungarian actors in Hungary and in Transylvania. They often connect the language of the Csángós to the centuries-long 'fight for survival' of minoritized Hungarians. These discourses on the local language are dominated by the notion of Csángó as an 'endangered' linguistic 'relic', enregistered as 'authentic' Hungarian (Bodó & Fazakas, 2018). From the perspective of the Hungarian state, the Csángó are viewed similarly to

Hungarians in Transylvania, who clearly identify themselves as a transborder kin-minority. Standard Hungarian in Transylvania, as in Hungary, is the cornerstone of the Hungarian imagined national community. This approach is reflected on several levels. For instance, research on the Csángó is mostly conducted by Hungarians. Csángó has also been subject to language revitalization efforts: the Moldavian Csángó Hungarian Educational Program was initiated by Transylvanian Hungarians and funded by the Hungarian state. The program is mostly separate from the Romanian educational system, and it is available to the majority of the multilingual Csángó communities (Bodó & Fazakas, 2023). In contrast, Moldavian Csángó speakers' discourses are less focused on the link between language and nation, while they are familiar with these ideologies not only in relation to Hungarian, but also to Romanian (Bodó et al., 2017).

The hegemonic Romanian perspective in Moldavia is mostly represented by politicians and academics, as well as by the Roman Catholic Church, which plays a significant role in the communities concerned (while the vast majority of the Romanian population is Orthodox). According to this perspective, Csángó does not belong either to Hungarian, or to Romanian; Csángó is a mixed language, and its status as an autonomous language is speculative, to say the least (see Tánczos, 2012). The tension between the two approaches manifested itself in the political debate surrounding the official recognition of the language educational program in the early 2000s (Vincze, 2008), but it also had a wider impact on the lives of the multilingual Moldavian people, rooted in the historical developments of the 20th century, when the loyalty of the Csángó to the Romanian state was questioned during both World Wars (Cotoi, 2013; Davies, 2019). In our interpretation, the local metalinguistic practice naming the vernacular the 'Csángó mode of speaking' emerged in order to deal with the tensions between the two types of nationalism (Bodó et al., 2017). As we will discuss in our case study, participatory research that focuses on language cannot overlook the multiplicity of ideologies emerging across local and non-local metalinguistic perspectives and categorizations.

Fieldwork and methods of analysis

Our long-term research has been focused on how language revitalization efforts affect the language practices of a group of those who are connected to the Moldavian Csángó Hungarian Educational Program. Their involvement has not been restricted to providing data on their everyday language practices: the aim was to achieve engagement of all participants in the whole research process, starting from formulating research questions to disseminating research results (cf. Bodó et al., 2022). Together with the institutionally more or less embedded participants of Moldavian language revitalization, we have conducted two short-term research projects, called the CserCseTáre

projects. The name is a play on the Romanian word for research (*cercetare*), which includes the phrase *ce tare*, meaning 'how cool,' as highlighted by our capitalization. The choice to use the Hungarian spelling system reflects the hybridity of the Csángó mode of speaking. The projects were designed based on the principle of critically informed involvement and engagement of all parties through participation in as many stages of the research as possible. We build on the insight revealed by the social sciences (see Albert et al., 2021), that the degree of participation is always dynamic in the lifetime of a project and depends on the aims and the particular context of the research.

In both CserCseTáre projects, one of which is presented here, the participants performed three different but interrelated roles deriving from their positionings within the research process. Considering that there is no ideal solution to eliminate existing hierarchies encoded into the well-established terminology (Eitzel et al., 2017), we labeled the participant roles as follows: accompanying researchers, mediator researchers and invited participants.

- The participants in the role of **accompanying researchers** were the ones who initiated the process. In coining this term, we built on the concept of accompaniment introduced by Bucholtz et al. (2016, p. 17), which is 'an ongoing, negotiated social process of learning to talk and work together, in which all participants contribute different forms of expertise and understanding and from which they benefit in different ways.' In our study, accompanying researchers come from an academic background; although not from the region in question, they are all interested in Moldavian Hungarian language revitalization from a critical sociolinguistic, ethnographic or participatory perspective, having various presuppositions about the Moldavian life-worlds and a wide range of lived or fieldwork experience among the Moldavian Csángós. Their task was to create and maintain a communicative arena that was intended to support involvement and engagement in the discussions that generated the data for this study. They joined the mediator researchers in the recorded online sessions with the invited participants that we call 'core meetings.'
- The two **mediator researchers** were asked to participate in the process by the accompanying researchers. Both of them are Moldavian-born PhD students conducting research on their own Csángó communities. Their role was to invite participants from the villages where they had grown up, to organize the core meetings and to mediate between the invited participants and the accompanying researchers.
- The Moldavian-born **invited participants** had been involved in language revitalization activities in different ways; among them were former students of the Moldavian Csángó Hungarian Educational Program who attended Hungarian lessons during their school years, parents of such

students, participants in Hungarian classes for adults and activists working in the program. The mediator researcher whom we present here asked her childhood friends to take part in a collaboration.

The above labels are not intended to imply any hierarchy between the participants, but to emphasize our various roles in the work carried out together. The labels 'mediator researcher' and 'invited participant' were not used by the participants themselves. The mediator and accompanying researchers decided to use the terms *project* and *product* instead of *research* and *research results*, as suggested by one of the mediator researchers. This aimed to democratize the practice of research by making the terminology of the collaboration more accessible while not imposing academic hierarchies among the participants. At the same time, we did not avoid the term *researcher* altogether as this was the position from which the university-based invited the others into the projects.

The CserCseTáre projects consisted of three steps. First, during the preparatory sessions, the accompanying and mediator researchers discussed a number of language-related issues, potentially important for a participatory research among the Moldavian Csángós. Second, researchers and invited participants took part in the core meetings designed as a series of 3–5 meetings resulting in a tangible product. These were closely followed by 'reflection sessions' between the accompanying and mediating researchers, discussing how to carry out the project in a participatory way and preparing the next core session. Finally, accompanying and mediator researchers wrote reflective diaries during and after their respective project was completed.

Our analysis focuses on the metadiscourses formulated during one of the CserCseTáre projects we discuss here. We have identified reflective moments, where the participants' language ideologizing work interacted with each other, either confronting or reinforcing particular ideologies of language. This method is akin to moment analysis, which Li (2011, p. 1224) describes as 'a paradigm shift, away from frequency and regularity oriented, pattern-seeking approaches to a focus on spontaneous, impromptu, and momentary actions and performances of the individual'. The reflective moments we are analyzing differ from this description in one temporally relevant respect: they do not necessarily occur in the interaction, but can also evolve later, even after leaving the meetings. The reflective moment is not limited to the interactional here-and-now; it also extends to *re*-actions that occur during research phases in which the participants in the 'original' *inter*-action are no longer necessarily present. The inherent reflexivity and the sustainable cyclicity of participatory research thus leads to a methodologically innovative extension of moment analysis that makes specific momentary actions within the research process itself the object of analysis.

The case study: belonging to a minority group with or without speaking the minority language

Our case study discusses one of the CserCseTáre projects: here we present two ways of doing language ideological work to construct belonging to a minority group. One emerges in the conversations between the mediating researcher and the invited participants, and is not centered around language, but reveals an experience of subordination that is based on othering, in which ethnically defined territorial space, religion and urban-rural differentiation play a varying role. The other way is outlined in ex-post reflections on these conversations by several accompanying researchers, highlighting the link between Csángóness and the Hungarian language. The case study shows that the invited participants' intention to reconcile the work of clarifying multiple language ideologies and the participatory approach, by the very nature of the latter, involves unforeseen developments.

At the time of the project, Isa Botezatu, the mediator researcher, was a PhD student in Dance Anthropology. She was also working for the organization running the Moldavian Csángó Hungarian Educational Program, where she was in charge of cultural events. During our initial meetings, Isa often referred to herself as 'a pierced, vegan Csángó with a non-conventional faith', who is 'not like the Csángós depicted in books' (*piercinges, vegán, sajátos istenhittel bíró csángó vagyok; én nem vagyok az a csángó, ami a könyvekben le van írva* – Vera Lajos's fieldnotes, October 2020). In contrast to prevailing representations of Csángós, Isa has been determined to explore and present the complexities of what being a young Csángó means today. Isa grew up multilingual and speaks Romanian, Hungarian and – what she calls – Csángó with confidence, in addition to other languages she learned later.

As mediator researcher, Isa invited 'Romanian-speaking' participants as an act of symbolic resistance against the Hungarian language hegemony of some earlier non-participatory 'Csángó research' and the cultural and linguistic appropriation of the Csángós by powerful external actors such as the Hungarian government. As the invited participants preferred to remain anonymous, their positionalities can be resumed as follows: they were women in their 20s with university degrees, childhood friends who used to attend Hungarian language classes together with Isa, but who are now living in urban areas. As an outcome of the core meetings, Isa and the invited participants dedicated an additional meeting to engage in an open discussion with their mothers, touching upon sensitive topics that had rarely been jointly discussed before.

Although their parents mostly use the Csángó mode of speaking among themselves, the invited participants claimed to have a receptive knowledge of Hungarian. Isa explained her decision to invite Romanian speakers as follows: 'because the [Romanian-speaking Csángós] represent a huge part of our

culture, and it would be a pity if all the valuable information they possess were to be lost simply because they are not fluent in Hungarian' (*óriási szeletét képezik a kultúránknak, és kár lenne, ha esetleg az a sok értékes információ amivel ők rendelkeznek elveszne csupán azért, mert nem beszélnek folyékonyan magyarul* – fieldwork diary, November 2020). In this way, she deconstructed the ideology of the immediate link between Csángóness and the Hungarian language. This also determined the language of the core project meetings, i.e., they were held in Romanian, and only the reflection sessions between the accompanying researchers and the mediator researcher were held in Hungarian.

Isa's choice of language also determined the selection of the accompanying researchers participating in this CserCseTáre project; in addition to Hungarian, they all speak Romanian. Accompanying researchers joined Isa and the invited participants for the recorded core project meetings. Vera Lajos carried out stationary fieldwork in a Moldavian Csángó village and spent two years in a Moldavian town when she was in her 20s. Since then, she has built an academic career in Hungary. Blanka Barabás, the other accompanying researcher, is a PhD student from Transylvania with an academic background in sociolinguistics and gender studies, conducting research on language ideologies linked to the Hungarian language, nation and identity. The project was also closely followed by Noémi Fazakas, one of the Transylvanian members of the research group, and she consulted on several occasions with the participants. Noémi, an ethnic Hungarian, finished her studies in the Hungarian medium schools of a North-Transylvanian city, whose population is mostly monolingual Romanian.

The product of this project was a series of 'Csángó memes' reflecting on Isa's and the invited participants' shared life experiences, connected mostly to their childhood, while also taking a critical stance, as they (re)interpret these early memories in the light of their adult knowledge. Memes constitute a metamodern genre and a form of collective response to social and cultural phenomena (Blommaert & Varis, 2015). As discursive units, memes constitute a form of ideological practice since they imply a certain degree of critique (Wiggins, 2019). The mostly Romanian-language memes created within the project address topics such as the participants' relation to their mothers, to religion, local traditions, alcoholism, sexual education, domestic violence, and feminism. During the discussions, shared experiences of being othered were included, too.

In Excerpt 1, the participants talk about how they were othered by their peers in high school. Isa and the three invited participants went to the same primary school in their native village, where the language of instruction was Romanian. Isa attended a Hungarian-medium high school in Csíkszereda (Miercurea Ciuc in Romanian), a Hungarian-majority Transylvanian town. Her former classmates continued their studies in Romanian at different high

schools in Moldavia, Bacău, the county seat. Immediately before the interaction presented below, one of them talks about how the Hungarian phatic expressions they inserted into Romanian utterances, such as *jaj, Istenem* ('oh my God!'), indexed their otherness for monolingual Romanians.

Excerpt 1: recorded core meeting, November 2020 (IP = invited participant)

Isa	Când zici că erai diferită, la ce te referi, doar la *jaj, Istenem*?	When you say you were different, what do you mean, just *jaj, Istenem*?
IP1	Nu, m-am simțit crezi, nu crezi, ca un țigan. (râde)	No, I felt, believe it or not, like a gypsy. (laughs)
IP2	Nu, dar	No, but
IP1	Echivalentul țiganului. (râde)	Gypsy equivalent. (laughs)
IP2	Da, pentru că ne văd ca o minoritate. Știu că suntem catolici din satele alea, suntem ceangăi, tot timpul s-a zis asta, adică nu neapărat să ne privească într-un mod rău, dar oricum diferit, până te cunoști, până îți dai	Yes, because they see us as a minority. They know we're Catholics from those villages, we're Csángós, they've always said that, I mean not necessarily to look at us in a bad way, but different anyway, until you know yourself, until you
IP1	Și în mod rău.	Also in a bad way.
IP2	Da, dar până la urmă oricum	Yeah, but eventually anyway
IP1	Au impresia că vor să furăm țara. (râde)	They feel like we want to steal the country. (laughs)
Blanka	(râde)	(laughs)
IP1	Și ăstia-s doar de la mine din Moldova mea mică, nu am nicio treabă. Îmi pare rău. (râde)	And these are the ones only from my little Moldavia, I have no business with that. Sorry. (laughs)
Isa	Mi se pare super interesantă. N-am mai vorbit despre astea niciodată. Dar, și eu n-am fost la liceu ca voi la Bacău, dar și eu am avut aceeași experiență într-un alt județ din direcția opusă: că noi suntem românii și am venit aici, că nu știu ce, lalala. Și eu nu știam, chiar nu.	I find it super interesting. We've never talked about these before. But, and I didn't go to high school in Bacău like you guys did, but I had the same experience in another county in the opposite direction: that we are the Romanians and we came here, that I don't know what, lalala. And I didn't know, I really didn't.
IP1	(râde)	(laughs)
Isa	Da, chiar n-am auzit niciodată, niciodată n-am vorbit despre astea și mi se pare super interesant, nu știam că și aici se vorbește despre asta.	Yes, I really did not hear about this, ever, we never talked about this, and I find it super interesting that these things are discussed here as well.
IP2	Da, mai mult la liceu, deja la facultate nu se mai uită lumea, nu te mai întreabă de unde ești, ce ești. La liceu au fost prejudecăți din astea la început, știi, că a, de la [anonimizat], voi toți ceangăi. La mine cel puțin în clasă eram majoritari catolici, adică eram toți catolici, majoritar ceangăi. Și atunci erau foarte puțini din oraș și ziceau că „am nimerit într-o clasă de bozgori," că toți știți sigur	Yes, more in high school, in college people don't look at you anymore, they don't ask you where you're from, what you are. In high school there was prejudice like that in the beginning, you know, that oh, you are from [anonymized names of Csángó villages], all you Csángós. In my case, in my class at least, most of us were Catholics, I mean, we all were Catholics, mostly Csángós. And there were very few people from the town and they said that 'I got into a class of Bozgors', you all know for sure
IP1	(râde)	(laughs)
IP2	Sigur am avut colegi din astea, unii s-au și transferat că nu se simțeau bine între noi ăstia de la țară	I'm sure we had such classmates, some of them even transferred because they didn't like being with us from the villages
IP3	Nu știam.	I didn't know.

Isa's question whether the experience of being different from the other students in Bacău was based on language, is answered with no by her interlocutors, who go on to discuss the significance of the discrimination they faced. This includes questioning their loyalty to the country's region,

to which one of them expresses her relationship by calling it 'my little Moldavia'. In the next turn, Isa points out that their common experience is being subject to othering based on ethnicity, along the same axis of differentiation but from 'opposite' directions. Isa's own experience of exclusion is that Hungarians in Transylvania see her as an outsider, an intruder, i.e., the 'Romanian'. In contrast, the invited participants report that in their high school worlds, the axes along which differences were created were not based on place (Moldavia vs. Transylvania), but religion (Catholic vs. Orthodox) and locality (village vs. town), closely linked to a category that emerged as a way of stigmatizing these Csángó students: 'class of Bozgors'. *Bozgor* is a derogatory term used by Romanian people when referring to minority Hungarians living in Romania. In contrast, shortly after the interaction in Extract 1, IP2 describes the students who called them Bozgors as being 'from the city, all Orthodox and more badass'. What we point out in our analysis here is the fact that although the distinction takes the 'opposite direction' in the two locations, this is not related to the difference in languages: while Transylvanian Hungarians called Isa 'Romanian' in Hungarian, the urban students called the Csángó girls 'Bozgor' in Romanian. In other words, instead of linguistic differentiation, it is ethnicity-based othering that becomes subject to language ideological work in the participants' interaction.

The invited participants' shared experiences of being othered were also different from those of non-Moldavian researchers with a minority background, i.e. Blanka and Noémi. Even if belonging to a Romanian minority or a minoritized group was a common trait among most participants, being a Transylvanian Hungarian is much more a language-related identity than in the above narrated Moldavian cases (see Péntek & Benő, 2020). The stake of participatory research is that the differences between the accompanying researchers and the invited participants may may lead to the recognition of a language-related axis of differentiation, i.e., the one between those who speak Hungarian and those who do not. Thus the research can contribute to a more reflective understanding of what it means to become a minority.

The next two excerpts point out how the retrospective reflection on the above findings of the project is made in relation to the positioning of Noémi as a Transylvanian research group member. Her diary entries represent instances of our interpretation of reflective moment analysis, where reactions to the interactional here-and-now become the subject of research as well. During our collaborative analysis of the project recordings, we decided to write diary entries on our researcher positionalities in dialogue with the outcomes. Noémi describes the hegemonic discourses of her own minority group as follows:

Excerpt 2: Noémi's reflection diary (July 2022, original in Hungarian)

Az erdélyi magyar kisebbségi lét egyik meghatározó ideológiai konstrukciója a megmaradás: az anyanyelv és a magyar identitás megtartásának szent feladata (és minden, ami ezzel jár), a magyar identitásból fakadó büszkeség és többségi társadalommal szembeni felsőbbrendűség érzete (l. a csíkszeredai ételszentelés katonás rendjét, a csíksomlyói búcsú utáni szemétmentes hegyoldalt stb.), a 'keveredés' (legyen az nyelvi vagy etnikai) elutasítása és megbélyegzése: 'aki román házastárs választ, áruló,' 'aki román óvodába/iskolába adja a gyerekét, gyenge ember,' 'aki románul tanul tovább, elveszett a magyar közösség számára' [...]

A hátrányos megkülönböztetéssel szembeni ambivalens érzések is jelentős szerepet játszanak (az én személyes tapasztalatomban) ebben: az erdélyi kisebbségi magyar minden helyzetben hátrányos megkülönböztetést feltételez a hatóságok/intézmények/ mezei állampolgárok/'az elképzelt román' részéről, ugyanakkor ez a (vélt vagy sok esetben valós – lám, én magam is erdélyi magyar kisebbségi vagyok) hátrányos megkülönböztetés katalizálja/energizálja a megmaradásért való küzdelmet, teszi még magasztosabbá a feladatot, még jobb emberré azt, aki ebben részt vesz. Ebből az ideológiai erőtérből nézve a román nyelvet 'választó' moldvaiak megítélése nem bonyolult: elvesztek, beolvadtak, eltűntek.

One of the defining ideological constructs of being part of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania is survival: the sacred task of preserving the mother tongue and the Hungarian identity (and everything that it entails), the sense of pride and superiority over the majority society that comes from the Hungarian identity (see the neatly lined-up families waiting for the consecration of their Easter baskets in Csíkszereda, the garbage-free hillside after the Pentecost Pilgrimage of Csíksomlyó, etc.), the rejection and stigmatization of 'mixing' (whether linguistic or ethnic): 'whoever chooses a Romanian spouse is a traitor,' 'whoever sends their child to a Romanian kindergarten/school is a weak person,' 'whoever continues their studies in Romanian is lost to the Hungarian community.' [...]

Ambivalent feelings about discrimination also play a significant role (in my personal experience) in this: the minority Hungarian from Transylvania assumes discrimination in all situations from the authorities/institutions/foreign citizens/'the imaginary Romanian,' but at the same time this discrimination (perceived or in many cases real – well, I am a minority Hungarian from Transylvania myself) catalyzes/energizes the struggle for survival, makes the task even more noble, makes the person who takes part in it an even better person. From this ideological perspective, the perception of Moldavian Hungarians who 'choose' to speak Romanian is not complicated: they are lost, they are assimilated, they are gone.

According to this account, members of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania cannot distance themselves from the moral imperative of 'survival;' the compulsion to choose between resisting discrimination or abandoning 'the preservation of Hungarian identity' offers a moral evaluation to those who participate in this discourse, according to which the effort to avoid 'struggle' makes one 'weak,' a 'traitor,' less of a 'good person.' Being a member of this group, the researcher herself cannot avoid interpreting social

inequalities in an ethnic and thus discriminatory framework. It is this discursively constructed moral differentiation that is crucial in understanding the social and linguistic situation of Moldavian people who 'choose' the Romanian language. As we see in the continuation of Excerpt 2, this generalization cannot be extended in a self-evident way to the invited participants of the project, who, when faced with the choice of school, continued their education in Romanian as being the most common way of pursuing their studies. The less obvious choice here is to study in Hungarian.

Excerpt 3 (continuing Excerpt 2)

[A] Bákóban román nyelven tanuló fiatalok is (hátrányos) megkülönböztetésről számoltak be a többségiek részéről, legyen az etnikai, vallási, vagy akár nyelvi gyakorlatokon alapuló. Az vált világossá számomra, hogy a beolvadás folyamata sem annyira egyszerű, mint ahogy azt a 'beolvadás' metaforája sejtetné: ha valakit az egyik közösség a maga szempontjából elveszettnek ítél, az még korántsem jelenti azt, hogy őt a másik közösség befogadja, és ne élne meg újra és újra olyan helyzeteket, amelyben a - saját másságára reflektálnak azok, akik közé ő már elvileg beolvadt.

[The] young people studying in Romanian in Bacău also reported (negative) discrimination by the majority based on ethnic, religious or even linguistic practices. What became clear to me is that the process of assimilation is not as simple as the metaphor of 'assimilation' would suggest: being considered lost by one community does not mean that one will be accepted by another community and will not experience situations in which one's own otherness is reflected upon by those one is supposed to be assimilated into.

Noémi's experience of the core project meetings spoke against the moral differentiation between those who 'assimilated' into the Romanian majority and those who did not. She pointed out that 'assimilation' cannot be understood as a choice for the easy way out (if it can be called a choice at all), as differentiation is constantly being (re)created in the new 'community.' Quoting from recordings of project meetings, schoolmates often stigmatized the invited participants as 'bozgor.' Whether the differentiation is based on language or not, is hardly reflected during these meetings, but Noémi describes the processes of integration in a context that is 'the permanent liminal space for experiencing otherness' where 'the girls try to give meaning to their Csángóness' (*a másság megélésének állandósult köztes tere*, [ahol] *próbálnak a lányok jelentést adni a saját csángóságuknak* – Noémi's reflection diary), just as she recontextualizes her own Hungarianness through participation in the project. This example shows that personal, political, and scholarly identities and agendas are often more intertwined than researchers would admit. Thus, participatory sociolinguistics helps us advance scholarly knowledge as well as challenge research hierarchies.

Ideological clarification was quite complex during the project; as participants followed different political agendas, everyone made adjustments to their ideological commitments in order to respect the self-determination of all participants. Throughout the core meetings, the accompanying researchers took on an observer role due to several factors: the already existing strong interpersonal relationships between the invited participants, the more rigid practices of turn-taking in online settings, and lack of confidence in speaking Romanian. According to her reflection diary from August 2022, Vera, one of the accompanying researchers, initially found this frustrating. She felt that as a researcher with previous personal and professional experience of Moldavian life-worlds, she could have contributed to either strengthening or diversifying the invitees' viewpoints. Blanka, the other accompanying researcher also reflected that she would have liked to share her thoughts on the issues raised, such as women's rights, or the role of religion in Romania. At the same time, she also pointed out that her intensive participation might have meant "that the primary question 'What does it mean to be a young Csángó intellectual woman in the 21st century?' would not have remained central, and it is possible that the extra meeting with the girls' mothers would not have been organized at all" (*Az elsődleges 'Mit jelent fiatal csángó értelmiségi nőnek lenni a 21. században?' kérdés nem tudott volna a középpontban maradni, és előfordulhat, hogy nem került volna sor + 1 találkozóra a lányok anyukáival* – Blanka's reflection diary, June 2022). This led Vera and Blanka to the realization that participation was shaped by the invited participants' political agenda, the boundaries of which they did not extend to the accompanying researchers. In line with Tuck and Wayne Yang's (2014, p. 302) claim, that 'there are forms of knowledge better off without the scientific stamp of model citizen knowledge', the accompanying researchers adopted self-limitation on the research process, contributing to a reinterpretation of the hierarchy of participants involved.

In the project, the accompanying researchers, the mediator researcher, and the invited participants all worked together to create a shared communicative space where everyone contributed to setting the research's political agenda without anyone dominating the entire process. In this space, it became possible for the mediator researcher and the invited participants to share their life experiences of being a Romanian-speaking Csángó. In doing so, they referred to their stigmatization when arriving in a Romanian-speaking urban environment of another religion and discussed their understanding and personal political agendas concerning being subjected to minoritization. This experience was different from that of the accompanying researchers, who closely associate being a minority with language. The participatory

approach allowed for the mediating researcher and the invited partici-
pants to define the project goals and the product, while challenging the
hegemonic Hungarian approach to Csángóness as related to the
Hungarian language.

Discussion and conclusions

The case study indicates that significantly different ways of involvement and
engagement can be achieved during a sociolinguistic project, depending on the
extent to which participants cooperate in language ideological work.
Participants' different positionalities toward the language-related axes of dif-
ferentiation between belonging to a minority or minoritized group were not in
the focus of the core project meetings. From a critical perspective, the decisive
aspect of the case study is how the language ideological work is or is not
reflected and how the similarities and differences arising from the positional-
ities of the participants are connected to or in conflict with each other. Our
analysis puts emphasis on ideological clarification. Even if it is often a complex
and multifaceted process that each participant experiences differently, it needs
to be integrated into the entire research process as meaningful participation
requires an effort to clarify the language ideologies of the people involved.

In this article we argued that participation in sociolinguistic research is
realized, when participants seek to accommodate their own ideologies in
critical ways through common acts of reflective participatory practices.
These reflective insights, as we have seen in Noémi's case, may come much
later, but they are linked to deeper and recurring participation in the research.
Participation, however, cannot be an end in itself. The broadest possible
involvement and engagement of the people concerned contributes to the
democratization of research. But it also means that the participants who
initiated the research can no longer maintain control over the ideological
process if the other participants set a new direction for the research.
Language ideologizing work, being explicit or (mostly) implicit, is a constant
challenge in participatory research.

As our case study shows, the emergence of shared insights as a result of
this work is influenced by at least three difficulties. First, the language
ideologies of some participants determine the design and implementation
of the project to such an extent that the heterogeneity of voices can
hardly be addressed. We see this in our case study, where the mediator
researcher created the group of invited participants in order to develop
a more inclusive research project. Despite their different positionings, the
accompanying researchers chose to let the perspectives of the invited
participants unfold. Second, the success of collaboration between research
participants depends largely on common ideological ground based on
previous shared experiences. In our case study, the cooperation of the

participants created an implicitly constructed ideological platform during the core meetings by narrating lived experiences of different understandings of what it means to belong to a minority or being subjected to minorization. On this particular platform, the accompanying researchers did not share their own experiences of multilingualism, these being foregrounded in the reflection sessions and diaries. Finally, university-based researchers' language ideological perspectives are not easily integrated into the political agenda participants are invited to develop. The project pointed out that as a result of the reorganized hierarchy between research participants, the language ideologies of the accompanying researchers did not become prominent during the core meetings. University-based researchers recognized that the political agenda of the other participants, i.e., establishing the public presence of young Csángó women, would be hindered if the accompanying researchers, as initiators of the collaboration, called on all participants to do language ideologizing work. Consequently, the explicit request for ideological clarification could have jeopardized the participatory aspect of the project.

The difficulties of implementing participatory sociolinguistic research are not insurmountable barriers. Participants come from different linguistic and ideological backgrounds, different social positions and different intentions to engage and commit to joint activities and language practices. Language ideologizing work is inevitably part of, and, as we reflected on it in our methodological approach, followed by such activities. It is a constant challenge of participatory sociolinguistic research to find and maintain an equilibrium between the engagement of the participants and the ideological clarification of their different positionalities and political projects. For this to be successful, participants cannot contribute in the same way. The main responsibility for providing a critical perspective rests on the shoulders of those who, as initiators of the research, also attempt to create a communicative arena for collaboration. It is in this space that the voices of participants calling for social change can enter into dialogue with each other. Otherwise, if critical reflection does not become an integral part of the joint activities, there is a risk that participants will not recognize the difference between their own and others' sociolinguistic positions and thus will not seek to do language ideologizing work in understanding and managing these differences. Whatever the outcome of such work might be, it is a condition of participation for anyone who wants to engage in sociolinguistic research for social change. After all, participatory sociolinguistic research makes a difference through the engagement of the people involved by transforming the ways we have access to linguistic knowledge that matters in our life.

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