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Language shift and seasonal migration in a multilingual community in Hungary
Linguistic practices, ideologies and commodification in the nexus of social processes

Theses of doctoral dissertation

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1. Purpose, structure and importance of the dissertation

The main objective of the present dissertation is to provide an overview of the linguistic processes going on in Geresdlak, a multilingual settlement with a population of 750 between Pécsvízáró and Mohács, Baranya County. The ethnic and linguistic composition of the settlement is a result of complex historical, political and economic processes (cf. Erdődy n. d.). Most of the population is of German descent. The first German settlers came to Püspöklak and Geresdlak (two independent villages at the time) in the first half of the 18th century. The number of Hungarian inhabitants increased after the Second World War, due to settlement and mixed marriages. Most Gypsies, who live in the village now, moved there after the change of regime. Later on, as services developed and Hungary joined the EU, a new form of mobility, i.e. seasonal migration appeared, bringing about further changes in the linguistic-ethnic makeup of the village’s population. It was first Germans (most of them born in the village, and also some who previously had no roots here) who bought property in the village, and then, from the beginning of the 2000s, Finnish people began to arrive and buy houses. A minority of the newcomers settled permanently, while the majority stay there on a seasonal basis.

The present dissertation is based on research I have been conducting in this village since 2009. Its main objective is to find answers to the following question: How does seasonal migration impact on the linguistic practices and linguistic ideologies of the village’s population, as well as on interethnic relations, with special regard to the ethnic German community, which is undergoing a process of language shift? The research question implies the preliminary hypothesis that in the nexus of the two linguistic-social processes included in the title of the dissertation, language shift and seasonal migration, new linguistic practices will develop.

The present work is made up of five major chapters. The first chapter provides the theoretical framework, based on research in sociolinguistics, anthropological linguistics and linguistic ethnography. It also presents and clarifies the terms used. The research reported in the dissertation examines the linguistic practices of the Geresdlak community using an approach in which the categories of language and ethnicity are not treated as natural facts, but constructs that have social origin. Chapter 2 introduces the methodology of the dissertation. To study the complex linguistic practices developing in the nexus of local actors and circumstances and wider social processes I used an interdisciplinary methodological approach called nexus analysis. Chapter 3 presents the fieldwork and the data and it also gives a more detailed description of the locality of Geresdlak: this is followed by a comprehensive subchapter presenting the discourses, actors and the interactional orders of the village. Chapter 4 is devoted to a more detailed analysis of three issues raised in the previous subchapter: multilingual communication, linguistic ideologies and linguistic commodification. The final chapter (Chapter 5) interprets the results in the context of wide-ranging social processes and indicates further lines of research.

The significance of the dissertation may be summarized as follows. Firstly, to the best of my knowledge, no similar research – research directed at the linguistic impact of foreign settlers in small Hungarian villages – has been conducted so far in Hungary. The literature contains only sporadic references to this phenomenon (Kiss 2007). Secondly, by presenting language as social practice, the dissertation makes a contribution to the study of the social roles that linguistic resources have, to the study of how these social roles come into being, and to the study of what impacts they have. In this way we may also explore how linguistic practices influence economic and cultural life in the community under study.
2. Theoretical background

In the ‘60s and ‘70s Hymes and Gumperz (e.g. Gumperz–Hymes 1972, Hymes 1968, 1974, Gumperz 1982a, 1982b) laid down the principles of ethnographic research within sociolinguistics and called attention to the fact that creation of meaning depends on social relations and happens as a result of interactions determined by how the actors interpret the context. This line of research expanded in the ‘80s and ‘90s and began to show increased interest in understanding the interrelations between linguistic practices and wider social issues, such as the problems of social inequalities and the relations between language and power. Pioneering work in this area belongs to Gal (1979, 1989), Heller (1994, 1995) and Woolard (1989, 1998) (Martin-Jones et al. 2012: 5, Martin-Jones–Martin 2017: 3). The issues raised in this area of research highlighted the fact that some of the concepts that linguistics had developed during its evolution to help explain linguistic differences were actually embedded in nation-state ideologies (cf. Irvine–Gal 2000: 74, 79). Then, in the age of globalization, new social and economic developments, e.g. migration and the introduction of digital technologies, made it necessary to devote more research attention to certain linguistic practices that showed up the inadequacies of the traditional approaches. During the past ten years new terminological suggestions were made in the literature (e.g., Blommaert 2010, Blommaert–Rampton 2011, Jørgensen et al. 2011) and recently heated debates also took place (Pavlenko 2017). The first theoretical subchapter of the dissertation surveys this line of development and by providing critical evaluation it establishes the terminology used in the dissertation.

The second theoretical subchapter introduces concepts that help us to understand the relationship between meaning-making and social relations. One such concept is *indexicality* based on Silverstein (2003) and Eckert (2008). According to these authors the meaning of linguistic elements is changeable and new meanings are always subject to processes of re-interpretations. Following Agha (2005, 2007), the dissertation also uses the concept of *enregisterment*. This concept refers to a process whereby a linguistic element is given social attention and becomes an attribute of a group of speakers.

A key concept used in the dissertation belongs to Judith T. Irvine and Susan Gal (2000), who claim that the process of meaning change is also influenced by ideologies, i.e. conceptual schemata. They present three basic ways in which ideologies play a role in connecting linguistic varieties with typical persons or acts. From among these the empirical chapters of the dissertation utilize the concept of *erasure*, which means simplification and ignoring complexity.

The dissertation also utilizes Blommaert’s (2007) concept, who emphasizes that social events take place on a layered continuum on a vertical *scale* and different normative expectations prevail at the different levels. Whether a speaker can move along these scales depends on their access to discursive resources.

The theories surveyed in this chapter share the feature that they regard the meaning attached to linguistic elements as changeable, and hold that changes will take place depending on social relations. These approaches also highlight the fact that meanings have an evaluative aspect and the meanings attached to linguistic elements raise issues of normativity and power. If speakers can mobilize the resources available to them in contexts where their meanings become valuable they may achieve advantages.

The social and economic changes in Geresdlak are leading, to an increasing extent, to contexts where linguistic knowledge can be commodified. The topic of linguistic commodification is discussed in the third theoretical subchapter of the dissertation. Following a survey of the most important earlier literature on the topic (Bourdieu 1977, Irvine
the chapter focuses primarily on situations in which linguistic resources expressing authenticity fulfil economic roles. In late capitalism it is typically in tourism where minority languages figure in the role. However, the new roles of linguistic resources are not self-evident even in this field, they are created through discursive work by the actors. The nature and manner of commodification of linguistic resources in a given community depend on the local and wider social power relations (cf. Heller 2010a, 2010b, 2014, Heller et al. 2014, Dlaske 2015).

3. Methodology

**Nexus analysis** used as the methodological strategy of the dissertation investigates social practices as parts of a complex system, taking into consideration wider social processes and local factors. For this purpose it offers an interdisciplinary approach: it builds on ethnography, critical discourse analysis and interactional sociolinguistics (Scollon–Scollon 2004). This method is not very widely used in Hungarian research (see for an exception Bodó–Zabolai 2016).

Nexus analysis consists of three closely interconnected steps. In the first stage, i.e. in *engaging the nexus of practice*, the main factors affecting the social practices studied are identified, which are then submitted to further analysis. According to this methodology social actions occur in the nexus of three main dimensions: (1) *the discourses in place*, (2) the *interaction order*, and (3) the *historical body* (Scollon–Scollon 2004: 19–20). The dissertation regards Gerészdlak as a nexus of social, economic and political processes, that is the whole community itself constitutes the main nexus analysed in the dissertation. The first empirical chapter (3. chapter of the dissertation) describes the field work and the processes of engagement with the community, then discusses the discourses, the interaction order and the participants and thereby provides a survey map of the settlement. In this the dissertation relies mainly on sociolinguistic and discourse analysis concepts and it also builds on the typological apparatus of language shift research. By surveying discourses, that is concepts circulating about previous and present social processes, it presents the historical, social, economic and demographical context. In presenting the participants the work focuses on linguistic characteristics, describing the diversity of the linguistic repertoire of these speakers. In discussing interaction order the dissertation describes the domains and situations where inhabitants creating communities of practice enter into interaction.

The task of the second stage of nexus analysis (*navigating the nexus of practice*) is to provide a detailed analysis of those phenomena that were identified by the researcher in the first stage of the research as determining social practice. Using Hult’s (2010) metaphor here the dissertation focuses on three nexuses of the survey map described above. In this second empirical chapter (4. chapter) it is mainly the instruments of discourse analysis and conversation analysis that are used in the dissertation. The trends suggested by the data are interpreted in the context of wider social processes (Pietikäinen–Mäntynen 2009: 157), taking into consideration at the same time that the creation of meaning is also influenced by interactional structures (Laihonen 2008, 2009). The dissertation groups the factors that have the most influence on linguistic practices around three topics (1) the practices of mobilizing linguistic repertoires, (2) the ideologies influencing linguistic practices (3) the use of linguistic and cultural resources in new contexts within the context of commodification. As shown in Figure 1, in discussing the three topics the dissertation proceeds from directly observable
linguistic phenomena towards wider relationships, bearing in mind that the phenomena determining linguistic practices mutually impact each other.

The final, third unit in nexus analysis is the stage of changing the nexus of practice. This is where the results are evaluated and used for the benefit of the community studied. The dissertation evaluates the results in this stage (5. chapter) in the context of wider social processes and it makes recommendations that may help the community to further exploit its linguistic and cultural resources, and the possibilities of further research are also indicated.

### 4. Results

The theoretical background and the methodology made it possible to reveal the following system of relationships:

*The linguistic repertoire of members of the community varies depending on social processes. They mobilize the elements of the repertoire depending on context and influenced by ideologies. Through their discursive work speakers shape the values attached to linguistic resources and their social relations. All this in turn impacts on linguistic practices and in the long term on social processes.*

In the following, after presenting my field data, I will summarize the main results of the dissertation taking into consideration these relationships.

*The process of engaging with the community*

During fieldwork I used sociolinguistic and ethnographic methods. Data collection was based on interviews involving a total of 152 participants. The questions were grouped around the topics of linguistic practices, subjective linguistic beliefs and interethnici relations. Besides the interviews I also kept a fieldwork diary, made photos, voice and video recordings and collected internet conversations and documents connected with the village (brochures, picture postcards, newsletters, newspaper clippings).

**Data collection from several angles** was made possible by the fact that I also acted as interpreter and language teacher in the village. The metalinguistic discourses that arose during
the interviews, the Finnish language lessons that I gave in the village and the interpretations made me and local participants more aware of linguistic issues. The use of these various methods made it possible to avoid one-sidedness in the data collection process and to conduct a number of dialogues with the participants about the research itself (cf. Jones et al. 2000: 349). In this way, fieldwork developed from data collection into a mutual learning process. At the same time, despite my endeavours, I was an outsider in the life of the community. This resulted in some difficulty in the fieldwork, the most significant of which was underrepresentation of the Gypsy participants.

I made a selection from the data collected based on my own discretion, aiming at objectivity, but the analysis must have been influenced by my own ideologies. That is, the dissertation reflects, necessarily, the researcher’s perspective.

Social processes determining linguistic practices
From among the historical events in the village, similarly to other settlements with a German ethnic community (cf. Erb 2010, 2012, Knipf-Komlósi 2003), it was the events following the Second World War that determined linguistic practices, leading to decreased use of the German language. In the interviews this period was reflected especially in the linguistic issues of school education and negative experiences connected with the public use of German.

Seasonal migration (Williams–Hall 2000) in Geresdlak is one of the most significant social processes influencing linguistic practices. The villagers related to this phenomenon neutrally or – because of the positive impact on the villagescape – rather positively. It widely varies how individual members of the community are affected by the settlement of foreigners. From among the community discourses related to seasonal migration the dissertation discusses the motivations of settlement, the different ways of fitting in typical of the Finnish and German settlers, and the strategies used in managing the tensions deriving from the different economic conditions of locals and newcomers.

The social processes affecting the settlement lead to diversified practices in constructing community identity (see also Pachné Heltai 2016a). The analyses in the dissertation point out that the Finnish inhabitants have created a new discourse construction for Geresdlak, the centerpiece of which is the “treasure trove” metaphor that is continuously focusing on natural and cultural resources. This image is conveyed to the members of the community in various forms. It is in harmony with the discourse of cooperation and unity built up by the locals through creative practices in the domains of cultural life and community identity construction, at the same time it is markedly different from the image of a peripheral village that many locals have, due to depopulation and aging caused by lack of employment.

Diversified linguistic repertoires
The dissertation shows that in Geresdlak even speakers who have not learnt any other language but Hungarian during their primary or secondary socialization (e.g. those who have married into the community or come from other settlements), during their everyday life in Geresdlak come into contact with other languages, through the linguistic landscape if not in other ways. In Geresdlak we meet diversified forms of multilingualism. The linguistic repertoire of speakers is rather heterogeneous and there is great variability within communities and generations.

In keeping with previous research (e.g. Erb 2010) it may be said that today all the generations of ethnic Germans living in the village use Hungarian as their primarily means of communication and the local variety of German is less and less used. At the same time different
varieties of German, depending on an individual’s situations in life are present in their everyday activities. The dissertation presents the main factors that determine the frequency and manner of mobilization of resources by the speakers. These include age, the linguistic repertoire of the spouse, the way of maintaining contact with relatives, if any, in Germany, possible employment in German speaking countries, media consumption habits, tourism habits and interethnic relations within the settlement. The dissertation finds that the same is true for Gypsy informants, i.e. in their childhood – besides Hungarian – they acquired Gypsy language varieties, but they use these varieties in increasingly fewer contexts, primarily within the narrow family circle. The dissertation shows that the Finnish people settling in the village come with a multilingual repertoire. Many of them speak languages that have high prestige on a global scale (cf. Blommaert 2007), but have no market value in the village (such as English or Swedish). For this reason several of them start to learn languages, and their decisions are influenced by their beliefs about the different languages and the indexical meaning related to them. The Germans living in the village further increase the diversity of German language varieties. Since they do not take part in the life of the village as actively as the Finns, Hungarian linguistic elements become part of their repertoire to a lesser degree.

Expansion of linguistic repertoires
The dissertation demonstrates that the linguistic repertoires of speakers are not fixed sets, but are undergoing continual change (cf. Gal 1987, Bartha 1998, Blommaert 2010). In Geresdlak, besides general factors that can be found in other settlements, such as taking employment abroad, touristic mobility or media consumption, seasonal migration also adds to the formal and informal opportunities to learn languages. The effects of Finnish language courses held in the village and the effects of everyday linguistic contacts or new linguistic elements present in the linguistic landscape on the linguistic repertoires of the locals are also discussed (see also Heltai 2012, 2014, Pachné Heltai 2015).

People from other countries settling in the village may enter upon formal language learning depending on their beliefs about the different languages present in the village: their assessment of the market value of a given language in both a narrowly and a more broadly defined context, and its relative „difficulty”. When Finnish people start to learn Hungarian, it will be more conspicuous for the locals than when they start to brush up their German. When they speak in Hungarian, the(ir) Hungarian linguistic resources will take on a new indexical value (cf. Eckert 2008, 2012): use of the local language will be perceived as a marker of interest by other members of the community and an indicator of their wish to fit in. In addition, it calls the attention of locals to the fact that language learning does not necessarily have to take place in a formal, institutional setting. When they decide to learn and communicate in German, assuming that it is „easier” and can be used in a wider circle, they add, to a slight extent, to the domains of German-language communication and create a new context for linguistic practices involving German linguistic resources.

Characteristics of the mobilization of linguistic repertoires
The processes of mobilization and modification of linguistic repertoires are influenced by the linguistic ideologies of individual members of the community. An important result of the dissertation consists in showing that the multilingualism of everyday communication and the variability of linguistic repertoires are not consciously reflected, that is, the participants in the
survey did not attach importance to the variability of linguistic resources surrounding them. A distinctive feature of speakers of German was that from the functional point of view they regarded knowledge acquired during primary socialization more highly than knowledge acquired in a school setting. However, in evaluating their repertoires whose changes followed changes in the social context, they did not appreciate the context and tended to underrate the value of their linguistic knowledge. When they depreciate certain elements in their repertoires, they cease to regard them as resources and tend to use them less in various communication situations.

An important finding of the dissertation is that the Finnish settlers are aware of the heterogeneity of the German varieties spoken in Geresdlak. With the appearance of the latter a new social domain emerged (cf. Agha 2005, 2007), i.e., a new community that have certain beliefs about these varieties and are influenced by their value judgements in their linguistic practices. Local German ways of speaking that evolve in the wake of different linguistic socialization, knowledge of language and experience of the different generations, creatively mobilizing elements from different varieties were often perceived by the Finnish speakers as signs of an easy-going, rule-disregarding linguistic attitude. In this way, a tolerant linguistic environment emerged, in which they can also make use of their truncated linguistic knowledge (Blommaert 2010).

Meaning-making and interpersonal relationships
The analyses show that the linguistic resources that speakers possess, besides fulfilling fundamental communication functions, develop new meanings in the course of multilingual conversations. These meanings have an impact on the values attached to individual linguistic resources and have a formative influence on interpersonal relationships. Thus, for example, they may become indicators of authenticity and exoticism, used by speakers to demonstrate their reliability, adherence to the community or their openness in relation to other members of the community (see also Pachné Heltai 2016b).

The composition of a speaker’s linguistic repertoire and the values attached to the different elements by themselves and the community have an impact on the participation of the given speaker in the community’s life and in a wider social context, too. Those who have access to and are committed to the linguistic and cultural resources valued in the various domains of the community’s life take a more active part in the various events of the community’s life. If someone can use German for communication and evaluates this ability positively, he or she will have an increased chance to make contact with foreign people arriving in the village. The fact that the Gypsies’ languages do not play a role in the community’s life and their linguistic resources are not regarded as commodifiable capital reduces their chances of participation in the community’s life and stabilizes the Gypsy community’s peripheral position.

Meaning-making and the community’s long-term perspectives
The analyses in the dissertation demonstrate that, through the discursive actions of the community, the linguistic and the closely related cultural resources acquire new meanings in the process of commodification. Analysis of property advertisements show how linguistic resources become, mainly in the global context, symbols of homeliness and acceptance. Analysis of the linguistic practices at the annual Steam Dumpling Festival (Gőzgombóc
Fesztivál) shows that linguistic resources other than Hungarian have a functional role primarily in communication with guests from abroad or symbolic significance in creating an atmosphere of authenticity or exoticness.

**Media reports** on the village, also analysed in the dissertation, construct Geresdlak as a fairy tale locality, something out of the ordinary, a community symbolizing positive human relationships. The presentation of diversified linguistic resources, multilingual speech modes and language learning initiatives have a central role in creating this image. Media coverage may have a number of positive effects, since outside interest and continuous focusing on positive values will strengthen local identity and lend a sense of pride to local people whose culture and everyday practices are presented in media reports. However, if local Geresdlak people cannot identify with this image, it will negatively impact on interethnic relations and their everyday sense of well-being.

Analysis of the processes of commodification calls attention to the fact that commodification of the values attached to German ethnicity is taking place, to some extent, *along the lines determined by the nation state.* This carries the risk that the field of meaning of products related to a minority culture will be transformed and become a symbol of the nation state. On the other hand, the forms of funding cultural life are determined by the institutional systems of the majority.

5. **Outlook: evaluation of the research and its results**

The social changes taking place, the processes involved in various forms of social mobility, seasonal migration and an upswing in community life in Geresdlak have created **new domains** for multilingual linguistic practices. For some members of the community, maintaining contact with the Finnish people, opportunities for communication at community events and employment opportunities abroad are leading to an increase in **German** linguistic practices. The results suggest that varieties of German acquired in institutional education and in German-speaking countries and the varieties evolving from them in actual situations will continue to form part of the community’s repertoire, and not only in the domains of education and work, but also in community life and meetings between relatives.

The use of **Gypsy** language varieties is negatively influenced by the fact that, in contrast to German, these varieties **do not appear in any new role or context.** The erasure ideology of the community (Irvine–Gal 2000) speeds up the process of language shift. In addition, Gypsy children do not meet in the school the linguistic and cultural resources they bring from home (cf. Bartha 2015).

Future development of the linguistic practices of the community will depend on **seasonal migration to the village** in the next decade. If the time spent in the village by the Finnish settlers declines, similarly to the Germans, and if they begin to sell their houses, the community’s self-image will suffer a drastic negative change, limiting the efforts to stimulate the local economy. The composition of the population in the village and its linguistic practices will also be determined by the greatest challenge of the future, the **lack of employment opportunities.**

This research has pointed out that the Geresdlak community are actively seeking answers to the social and economic challenges that they are faced with, and an important part
of the answer lies in the village’s multilingualism. At the same time, only certain groups of the villagers take part in the creation of strategies, and even they have different motivations. It is an open question whether the strategies adopted so far will only improve everyday life in the village for the current generation, or will result, in the long term, in real economic potential for a wider circle of the villagers. Hopefully, my research interest in the village has made members of the community more conscious of the linguistic and cultural values of the village. In conclusion, the dissertation outlines some recommendations that may help the community to better exploit its resources in the fields of education, community building and self-government strategies.

The theoretical framework of the dissertation enabled me to examine the linguistic practices of the village not only in terms of minority and majority practices, but – by focusing on the processes of meaning-making – on the new roles of linguistic resources. The methodology adopted, i.e. nexus analysis, made it possible to apply an interdisciplinary approach in the analyses. In respect of terminology, the dissertation tried to avoid relying on concepts and terms that postulate a rigid separation between languages. However, since these concepts are not present in everyday discourses about language, they do not appear in the metalanguage of the interviews made during the research. Thus, an important conclusion of this research is that future research on multilingualism must find methodological solutions whereby the participants can create the metalanguage used during the research. This would increase the chances of feedback and create a channel of communication between scientific and everyday discourse.
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