

Mother Tongue Identity and Language Attitudes of Udmurt and Slovakian Hungarian Youth

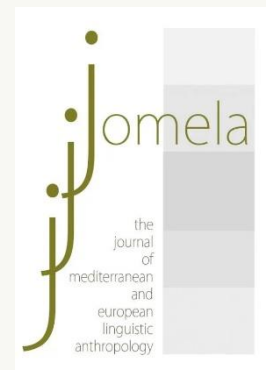
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Abstract

In our paper, we will shortly define the notion of minority, identify the basic issues of a sense of identity, and clarify the role of language in the maintenance of minorities and their identities. The group identity of minorities can be defined along three main factors which occur as historical, linguistic and cultural identity within a certain spatial and time frame. There are various group identities, and groups usually give special attention to some characteristic features, as language, race or religion (Cseresnyési 2004). We will discuss the role of one of these in identity, namely, that of language. We will demonstrate the relationships of language and identity through language attitudes of nationalities Hungarians in Slovakia and Udmurts in Russia, which are similar in quota but different in their historical past and social situation today) (Shirobokova 2008; Kozmács 2008). We will ask what the role of language in different state formations is and whether identity maintenance plays a role in the maintenance of minority languages and linguistic diversity. The aspects of the research: who considers what a mother tongue; what is the relation between the mother tongue and the sense of origin; which are the main features of national affiliation, the importance of the mother tongue in national affiliation. The data are provided as results of a questionnaire survey. The Target groups of the research

were university students as future intellectuals consequently opinion-shapers of the given ethnicity. Four groups were formed: Hungarian university students in Slovakia, Russian university students in Udmurtia, Udmurt university students in Udmurtia and Hungarian university students in Hungary.

Key words: *Identity, Hungarians in Slovakia, Udmurt language, minorities*

Introduction

The notions of nation and nationality are closely intertwined. At the time of the French Revolution, the definition of the ‘modern’ nation was such that every person living in France, on the territory of the French state, regardless of ethnicity or mother tongue, was theoretically considered an equal member of the republic, as French. Such a notion of the nation included both peasants and the middle class, and ethnic or linguistic differences did not play a role in defining membership. In Western Europe, this grounded the liberal notion of the civic nation, which is defined on the basis of the people living in the same country (state), and still prevails to this day. Thus, we note that “the civic nation is a political aggregate based on the unity of administration, the legal system, the armed forces, and infrastructure” (Cseresnyési 2004, p. 137; c.f. Oakes 2001).

In international documents, terms such as people, nation, ethnicity, and minority appear as synonyms, yet as always, without clear definitions. However, as a common denominator, these definitions all evidence the fact that minority groups exhibit a sense of community (organized around a well definable group identity), a common intention to preserve that group cohesion and usually, but not always, a territorial concentration. For example, an ethnic group within a larger society may not identify with the majority nation but (a) may identify, instead, with another nation – which either has a state of its own or aims to form one, or (b) may constitute a group forming a minority which cannot be defined through the notion of the modern nation but whose members share a cultural identity which is significantly different from that of the majority.

In this paper, we examine the possible role of language in the sustaining of minorities and the maintenance of their identity. We investigate these issues via an investigation into the Udmurts and Slovakia Hungarians, two minority groups of approximately the same size. Here, we aim to identify differences and similarities between the two groups, with regard to their languages and national identities, stemming from the fact that the former group has existed as a minority for several centuries, whereas the latter became a minority only after being separated from its nation state. Specifically, our investigation seeks to answer the following question: What are the interrelationships between identity and language attitudes toward mother tongue among young

Udmurt people and Slovakia Hungarians devoted to their first language? These communities study in various programs using their minority language as a language of instruction, and appropriate this language while training for various vocational aspirations.

Literature Review

Nationality and Identity

The group identity of ethnic minorities can be defined along three main factors; the historical, the linguistic, and the cultural, all three of which are structured through certain spatial and temporal frames. As national and minority identity are not essential and natural, these identities emerge throughout a socioculturally formative process, and thus, they develop during processes of socialization and enculturation. In this sense, the identity of nations, the identity of national minorities, and the identity of ethnic groups becomes a product and end result (Csepeli 2000: 48), yet one which is constantly transitive and in transition, with the help of which the members of the nation or national minority can distinguish themselves from other nations or national minorities. The nation or national minority can be regarded as a linguistic community, a community based on shared customs, or a community which has a shared origin and is the product of shared cultural practices. At the group level, identity can be understood as an existing heritage in which the cultural values are shared and are predicated on or grounded in a shared language and history. For the members of the community, an explicit knowledge and meta awareness of the shared values and roots is essential, and this knowledge and meta awareness both form an integral part of the personal value system of the community members, held together through social, cultural, and political cohesion.

For the individual, the identity acquired during such a socialization process defines the experience of becoming a member of the community or group, as it does the emotional experience that determines the emotional relationship and attachment to the land of birth, to the mother tongue, and hence to culture and cultural heritage. Factors such as religion and religiousness, the media, socialization, history and knowledge of history, globalization, symbols and identification patterns, all play a vital role in the formation of national and minority ethnic identities.

In a minority space (Bindorffer 1997, p. 134), identity is understood as the individual's subjective feeling of sameness with and loyalty towards the minority group into which the individual is born, and the space at which they acquired, during their primary or consequent socialization, the body of cultural knowledge necessary for their differentiation from and comparison with others, an identity which is similarly characteristic of the group. The set of elements of national or ethnic minority (or otherwise) thus acquired and negotiated constitute

the basis of ethnic identity, as is the case in Europe's ethnic communities. I now discuss two of these ethnic minority communities

Slovakia Hungarians

Slovakia is a multiethnic state of approximately 5.4 million inhabitants, where officially 80.7% of the population have declared and continue to declare themselves as Slovak, 10.1% of the population declare an ethnicity other than Slovak, and 7% of the population do not specify their ethnicities. According to the most recent official data from the 2021 Slovak census, there are 13 national minorities within the Slovak Republic, with two groups representing 10% or more of the population. The largest of these two is the Hungarian minority (422,065 people, or 7.75% of Slovakia's population). The Hungarian population is distributed compactly along an almost continuous 555-kilometre-long strip along Slovakia's southern border, in ethnically mixed regions, yet together with other minorities and Slovaks.

Nationality	2011		2021	
	Number	%	Number	%
Slovak	4.352.775	80,7	4.567.547	83,82
Hungarian	458.467	8,5	422.065	7,75
Roma	105.738	2,0	67.179	1,23
Czech	30.367	0,6	28.996	0,53
Ruthen	33.482	0,6	23.746	0,44
Ukrainian	7.430	0,1	9.451	0,17
TOTAL	5.397.136	100	5.449.270	100

Table 1

Most of Slovakia's Hungarians reside in this predominantly rural region, where they represent a local majority in 435 out of the 551 municipalities. This proportion of Hungarians has steadily declined over the years (from 12.4% in 1961 to 7.75% in 2021), and most significantly, by 145,231 people since 2001. The 2021 census also presents a total of 306,175 people as a second nationality, of which 34,089 (11.13%) indicated Hungarian (Slovak 18.13%, Roma 29.06%, Ruthenian 13%, Czech 5.46%, Ukrainian 0.52%, German 1.72%).

In 2011, the number of people who professed to have Hungarian as their mother tongue total 462,175, as 40,110 more than those declaring to be of Hungarian nationality. The 2011 census in Slovakia was the first to enquire¹ as to the "use of language in public" and "use of language in

domestic settings.” The census results present the fact that fewer people use Hungarian in public than those who admit to being of Hungarian nationality by 66,890, and than those who declare Hungarian as their mother tongue by 117,317. The number of people using Hungarian at home exceeded that of those of Hungarian nationality by 13,745, but was less than the total number of Hungarians by 36,502.

The Udmurt

Udmurtia, also known as the Udmurt Republic, is situated in Eastern Europe, in the western part of the Ural mountains, between the Kama and Vyatka Rivers. With its territory of 42,060 square kilometers, it is the 11th largest federal territory of Russia. The Udmurt communities are indigenous to this region. At the time of the 2002 census of the Russian Federation, these communities totaled 636,906 people. According to the latest2 census (2010), the number of people declaring Udmurt nationality has decreased significantly in the 21st century, totaling 552,299 (becoming a decrease of 13.9% since the previous census). The number of people living in the Volga Federal District, in the Udmurt Republic and outside of these areas, and declaring themselves of Udmurt nationality, is summarized in Table 2 below. Of those declaring Udmurt nationality in Russia, 342,963 people (or 63.32%) admitted to speaking the Udmurt variety as their mother tongue, 207,936 (or 37.64%) admitted to speaking Russian as their mother tongue, and 656 (0.12%) admitted to speaking Tatar as their mother tongue. While a total of 179 people admitted to speaking one of 29 other languages as their mother tongue, 538 provided no response to this question, while 10 marked ‘other.’

Originally established in the early part of the 20th century as an Autonomous Oblast, Udmurtia became an associated part of the Soviet Socialist Republic a little over a decade later. Since then, the nationalist Demen Society of Udmurt Culture has repeatedly attempted to establish for the country, status of Udmurt as the official language. Yet most of the country continues to speak Russian.

Territory	2002	2010	Change %
Udmurt Republic	460 584	410 584	10.9
Volga Federal District	100 180	86 630	13,5
Outside the Volga Federal District	76 136	54 085	28,9
Total in Russia	636 900	552 299	13.9

Table 2

Based on the data of the 2010 census, of the total population of Udmurtia, 410,584 people, 266,907 (or 65.17%) admitted to having Udmurt as their mother tongue, and 143,180 (or 35.74%) admitted to having Russian as their mother tongue. Regarding their language proficiency, 229,203 (or 55.82%) of the Udmurt people living in the Republic stated that they spoke Udmurt, and 406,443 (or 98.99%) stated that they spoke Russian. These statistics suggest that more people admit to having Udmurt as their mother tongue than those who actually speak the language variety. Already at the time of the 2002 census, “practically all the people who professed to be Udmurt spoke Russian, but only 72.8% of them spoke Udmurt” (Salánki 2007, p. 26), and the latter proportion significantly decreased by 2010, when, according to that census, only 54.06% of those who admitted to being of Udmurt ethnicity spoke the language.

Based on their questionnaire-based research into Udmurt linguistic vitality, Bulatova and Protasova (2010, p. 88) conclude that the Udmurt people are bilingual, where Udmurt has considerable vitality, as far as can be judged on the basis of people’s language attitudes. Other researchers (e.g. Salánki 2007, 2015), however, claim that, especially due to the younger speakers, the Udmurt speech community is undergoing a language shift. Salánki (2007) states that there are considerable differences in language proficiency between the different generations:

People over 60 rated their Udmurt proficiency as very good, and their Russian proficiency as not very good, only few of them saying that their Russian was very good. The middle-aged generation’s spoken Russian is almost as good as their spoken Udmurt, while they can read and write in Russian better than in Udmurt. The youngest generation, in contrast, clearly speak, understand, read and write in Russian better than in Udmurt.

(Salánki 2007, p. 204)

Methodological Framework

We conducted a questionnaire-based survey among 50 Udmurt and 114 Slovakia Hungarian university students, who represented a total of approximately 3,000 Udmurt and 5,422 Slovakia Hungarian students respectively currently participating in tertiary education. As far as is possible to determine, approximately 45% of the approached students responded by completing the questionnaire. The students completed the questionnaire online; the responses were recorded anonymously, and all participation was voluntary.

The questionnaire contained 35 questions, all of which provided 108 possible responses, and was written in Udmurt/Hungarian. In addition to sociometric identifiers (which we will not be

including), the questionnaire enquired as to the respondent's nationality and whether they also had family members of other nationalities. In connection with language use, we enquire as to whether the respondents considered themselves to be bilingual, how they rated their language proficiency in general, and in writing and in speaking in their mother tongue and in Russian and in Slovak. The questionnaire also enquired as to a range of factors, and how significant the respondent considered these factors to be in terms of cultural identification. Respondents were also asked to take a stand on statements regarding their linguistic, cultural, and local set of identities. Some questions focused on domains of language use, some focused on language use through the use of electronic media (internet and mobile phones), and some focused on the requirements of identifying as Udmurt or Slovakia Hungarian.

Analysis

It is our belief that, in the case of the Udmurt respondents' commitments to their mother tongue and culture, the direct opinions and expectations do not correlate with the provided responses to the indirect questions concerning their practices, whereas they do in the case of the Slovakia Hungarians. yet, throughout, the respondents regarded themselves to be of the following nationalities: Udmurtia –Udmurt 43, Russian 1, Tatar 2, Udmurt/Russian 1, Jewish 1, other 1, and no answer 1; Slovakia – Hungarian 111, Slovak 2, European 1, and no response 1.

Among the respondents in Udmurtia, 90% regarded Udmurt to be their mother tongue, 8% regarded Russian as their mother tongue, and 2% regarded other languages as their mother tongue. Of the Slovakian Hungarians, 99% professed Hungarian to be their mother tongue, and 1% saw Slovak as their mother tongue. In rating their own proficiency in Udmurt and Hungarian, the Udmurtia respondents and the Slovakia Hungarians provided significantly different responses,³ as in the case of their proficiency in the majority languages, Russian and Slovak, respectively. Here, the Slovakian Hungarian respondents rated themselves as having a stronger competence in Hungarian than in Slovak, while the Udmurt respondents rated themselves as having a stronger competence in Russian than in Udmurt.

The Udmurt respondents rated their competence in Russian at the same level as their competence in Udmurt, and hence as very good. Only two respondents rated their Russian competence as medium good. A total of ten respondents (i.e. 21%) rated their Udmurt competence as medium good, and 4% rated this competence as poor. The Slovakian Hungarian respondents rated their Slovak competence as significantly poorer than their Hungarian competence: only 10% regarded their competence as perfect, 41% rated the competence as good, 42% rated this competence as medium good, 8% rated this competence as poor, and 1% rated this competence in the Slovak language as very poor.

As much as 94% of the Slovakia Hungarians and 88% of the Udmurt respondents defined their nationality on the cultural nation definition (through attachment to the mother tongue and culture). Here, the results do not significantly differ from each other. However, as is clear from the ranking of the various responses, making their own decision with regards to their national identity is more significant for Slovakian Hungarians than for the Udmurt communities, whereas 25% of the latter did not agree that this had any significance in any way. This difference between the responses of each group was shown to be, or at the very least, we believe to be, significant.

Even though the Udmurt respondents define themselves primarily through their mother tongue, this defining seems to be mostly emotional attachment and more so than actual language use. This fact is also supported by other responses regarding language competence.

In response to the question regarding what factors the respondents considered significant in defining somebody as a member of their ethnic group, respondents in both groups stated the role of language, 91% of these respondents in both groups believing that an Udmurt and Hungarian communities were required to know both the Udmurt and the Hungarian languages.

A total of 89% of the Udmurt respondents and a total of 68% of the Slovakia Hungarian respondents agreed with the statement *Ha elvesztem magyar/udmurt nyelvem, elvesztem magyar/udmurt identitásomat*: "I lose my Udmurt/Hungarian identity if I lose my proficiency in Hungarian/Udmurt." This difference is significant, in that for the Udmurt respondents, the possession of the minority language constitutes one of the main requirements of belonging to the minority group.

Analyzing the questions regarding the relationship of language and identity together, we can expose a significant difference in the ways in which this relationship is regarded to be important: A significantly greater number of the Udmurt respondents than the number of the Hungarians rejected the statement *Ha csak oroszul/szlovákul tudok, akkor is kifejezhetem udmurt/magyar identitásomat* 'I can still express my Udmurt/Hungarian identity even if I only speak Russian/Slovak'. The responses are especially interesting in light of the fact that the 2011 Slovak census evidenced the fact that if a person in Slovakia does not speak Hungarian, they will not declare themselves to be of Hungarian nationality – that is, the Slovakian Hungarians who do not speak the minority language also do not retain their minority nationality. In the case of the Udmurt respondents, the reverse is true; many of those who consider themselves to be Udmurt do not speak the language.

However, the statement *Vannak olyan dolgok, amiket nem lehet magyarul/udmurtul kifejezni* 'There are things which cannot be expressed in Udmurt/Hungarian,' was regarded as true by 59% of the Udmurt, as false by 8% of the Udmurt, and undecided by 33% of the Udmurt. The corresponding statement was regarded as true by only 22% of the Slovakian Hungarians, as false

by 58% of the Slovakian Hungarians, and as undecided by 19% of the Slovakian Hungarians. The differences between the two groups are significant here as well. These results also suggest that the Udmurt speakers consider their language to be poor, while Hungarians do not, also signaling Udmurt respondents' stronger competence in their majority language.

If we examine the interrelationship of cultural self-identification and mother tongue use, again, we find a significant difference in rating the latter as important. The Udmurt respondents considered the interrelationship of cultural self-identification and mother tongue use less significant than their Hungarian counterparts, 6% of the Udmurt respondents did not regard Udmurt language use as important for cultural self-identification. The Hungarian respondents regarded language as by far the most significant factor in the same respect.

The Udmurt respondents considered factors such as preparing national dishes, knowledge of folk songs, retaining and wearing folk clothing, and listening to folk music as significantly more important as far as cultural self-identification was concerned than did the Hungarian respondents. Furthermore, both groups considered knowledge of national history and of national legends as equally important for cultural self-identification. Participation in Udmurt/Hungarian holidays was less important for Udmurt students; their responses are significantly different from those of the Hungarians.' When we rank the factors of cultural self-identification, we obtain the following order:

Important %	Rank	Fairly important %	Important / fairly important %	Important / fairly important rank	Udmurts
69	1st	24	93	4th	<i>Use of Udmurt language</i>
67	2nd	33	100	1st	Knowledge of national history
57	3rd	39	96	3rd	Retaining and wearing folk clothing
55	4th	43	98	2nd	Knowledge of folk songs
49	5th	51	100	1st	Preparing national dishes
45	6th	53	98	2nd	Knowledge of national legends
39	7th	55	93	4th	Listening to folk music
35	8th	35	70	5th	Participating in Udmurt holidays

Table 3a: The interrelationship of cultural self-identification and mother tongue – Udmurts

The Hungarian respondents consider it significantly more important to have primary school education, television, and radio in their mother tongue than do Udmurt respondents. The former also read newspapers and internet content in the mother tongue and consider it important to have theater in the mother tongue in significantly greater numbers. There are no significant differences in how important respondents in the two groups consider secondary education in their mother tongue. Udmurt respondents consider it significantly more important to have tertiary education in their mother tongue than do the Hungarian respondents – while the Udmurt respondents speak more Russian and use it more often than do Slovakian Hungarians speak and use Slovak.

Important %	Rank	Fairly important %	Important / fairly important %	Important / fairly important rank	Slovakia Hungarians
92	1st	8	100	1st	Use of Hungarian language
70	2nd	28	98	2nd	Knowledge of national history
15	7th	50	65	7th	Retaining and wearing folk clothing
28	5th	50	78	5th	Knowledge of folk songs
18	6th	55	73	6th	Preparing national dishes
46	3rd	50	96	3rd	Knowledge of national legends
13	8th	36	49	8th	Listening to folk music
34	4th	56	90	4th	Participating in Hungarian holidays

Table 3b: Interrelationship of cultural self-identification and mother tongue - Slovakian Hungarians

The written use of language in the digital media clearly indicates that the definition of cultural and linguistic self-identification is considerably different in terms of expectations and ideals from everyday practice, as we deduced through our work on the census data regarding the mother tongue. In the case of the responses to all the questions regarding this issue, there is a significant difference between the responses of the two groups. More than twice as many Udmurt respondents write text messages in Russian than in Udmurt, while 99% of the Slovakian Hungarians do not write more text messages in Slovak than in Hungarian. Only 18% of the Udmurt respondents and as many as 84% of the Slovakian Hungarian respondents write most of their text messages in Udmurt and Hungarian, respectively. Slightly more than half, that is, 53%, of the Udmurt respondents regularly write comments in Russian on the internet, and only 41% of the Udmurt respondents do so in Udmurt. Only 14% of the Hungarian respondents comment

regularly in Slovak on the internet, whereas 56% of the Hungarian respondents do so in Hungarian.

Both groups of respondents largely agree (Udmurt 96%, Hungarians 95%) to the fact that it is important to maintain the ethnic identity of the minority group. They also both largely agree to the significance of their future children knowing the majority language at a highly competent level. There is a significant difference in how important the investigated groups consider that their own future children become Udmurt/Hungarian: 96% of the Slovakian Hungarians and 87% of the Udmurt consider this very important. The evaluations of the statement *Fontos számomra, hogy (leendő) gyermekeim is anyanyelvükként használják a magyart/udmurtot* 'It is important for me that my (future) children use Udmurt/Hungarian as their mother tongue' show significant differences: 90% of the Slovakian Hungarians agree with this statement, and no respondent disagrees with it, whereas 85% of the Udmurt respondents agree with the statement and 4% disagree with it.

Conclusion

Our data demonstrates that the groups investigated exhibit different patterns of opinion regarding language, nationality, and identity. The opinions of the respondents are important as they play an opinion forming role as future professionals and as official representatives of their ethnic group in shaping language use and identity.

As far as the Slovakia Hungarians are concerned, the Hungarian language is a considerable factor in the identity of future teachers. They are strongly attached to the region in which they were respectively born and enculturated, yet they also increasingly take up a dual attachment to Slovakia as a country. The maintenance of their mother tongue is important for them – although whether this suggests Standard Hungarian or the regional variety of Hungarian spoken in Slovakia has not yet been thoroughly investigated. This latter question requires further investigation. In their case, there is harmony between the desired image and everyday linguistic practice, despite the fact that Hungarian is not an official language in Slovakia.

In the case of the Udmurt, the situation is different. In their case, it is also facile to construe the fact that their ethnic identity and mother tongue are important for them, yet there exists a considerable discrepancy between the desired, idealistic situation and everyday practice. While the importance of the mother tongue is unquestionable for each respondent, when direct questions are asked, the responses regarding language use and domains of language use demonstrate that the Udmurt language is receding while Russian dominates. Other, outer manifestations of the national culture are important for these respondents, who see the possibility of maintaining their ethnic identity through occasionally practicing their cultural

traditions. Their responses indicate an ambivalent relationship with their mother tongue and cultural heritage.

Some of our data assists us to make similar conclusions to the one made by Bulatova and Protasova, as quoted above, namely, that a generation growing up in a cultural community is prepared to maintain its bilingualism long term and to raise its children as bilinguals, while language shift does not happen (Bulatova and Protasova 2010, p. 88). Our data, however, assists us to conclude that this type of response belongs to an imagined reality, as, in everyday life, language shift occurs; this observation is supported by statistical data, as evident in the case of the future Udmurt professionals. Despite the fact that Udmurt is an official language in Udmurtia, the responses we have analyzed clearly spell out the narrowing of the domains of language use and the idealistic nature of opinions with regards to language. The desires of speakers regarding their language use in the mother tongue are not sufficient for maintaining linguistic diversity in Russia. Without central support, professional language planning, and a widening of the domains of language use, the future of the Udmurt language is not guaranteed (see for example Zamyatin 2019).

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Endnotes

¹ This question was not asked in the 2021 census.

² The last census in Russia was in 2021, but the census data will not be published until after September 2022.

³ We used Chi-square tests, and significance was at the $p > 0.05$ level.