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Slovak linguists and Slovak language laws: An analysis of Slovak language policy*

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Abstract

At the end of the 20th century we witness a growing awareness of the role language plays in increasing or decreasing interethnic conflicts. In this paper, after a brief discussion of language and ideology and the social responsibility of linguists, a cursory history of language policies in (Czecho)Slovakia between 1990 and 1998 is provided, with special regard to the situation of the Hungarian minority. The role of Slovak linguists is analyzed in shaping an aborted language bill in 1968, the Law on the Official Language in 1990, and the Law on the State Language in 1995. It is demonstrated that some professional linguists have not only contributed to increasingly repressive language legislation but provide professional or unprofessional linguistic advice which can be used by politicians as the scientific basis of the activities of an organization which has effectively become the 'linguistic police' in Slovakia.

1. On language and ideology

As Woolard and Schieffelin (1994: 55–6) state, 'ideologies of language are significant for social as well as linguistic analysis because they are not only about language'. They have an impact on group and personal identity, social equality or inequality; and social institutions such as the nation-state, schooling, gender and law 'hinge on the ideologization of language use'.

Linguistic ideologies will be defined as 'sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use' (Silverstein 1979, quoted by Woolard and Schieffelin 1994: 57).

The study of linguistic ideologies is important because fundamental linkages are often formed among diverse cultural categories such as language

(spelling, accent, grammar, and choice of words), nation, state, power and tradition. Safran (1992: 397) calls language a tool of state-building. It has become increasingly clear that the equation 'one language = one people = one state' is not only a myth hardly found in the real world but also an ideological red herring (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994: 61) which is oftentimes used to make discrimination on linguistic grounds publicly acceptable (see, e.g., Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1994; and Crawford 1992).

Stances toward the state regulation of language vary from overt prohibition to overt promotion of minority languages (see, e.g., Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 1995). Founded in 1993, the Republic of Slovakia provides an example of both overt and covert prohibition of minority languages (see Kontra 1995/96, and Kaplan and Baldauf 1997: 203–204). Some leading Slovak linguists have played an important role in shaping these repressive language policies, which is in striking contrast to the role many, if not most, linguists play in language planning.

2. On the social responsibility of linguists

In the past decades there has been a growing recognition that the work of linguists is not value-free but takes place in a social context in which linguists have responsibilities. In a seminal study of the Black English trial in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA, William Labov (1982) has shown how the apparent contradiction between the principles of objectivity needed for scientific work and commitment to social action could be resolved. For at least two decades the majority of professional linguists in the United States have opposed language-based discrimination, whether it be directed against US-born citizens or immigrants to the country (see, e.g., Nunberg 1989; Baugh 1996; and LSA Statement on Language Rights). Nevertheless, linguists, like other academics, vary in their awareness of the broader social contexts of their operations. Wide-spread myths related to language (see Skutnabb-Kangas 1996 for a critique of them) are variously believed by some linguists and many educationists. Academics occupy a continuum from those who see themselves as doing 'clean', 'value-free' scholarship to those who see themselves as basing their work on their moral standards as critical intellectuals.

In addition to addressing the thorny issues of bilingual education and the teaching of standard English in the USA, American linguists have developed community-based preservation programs for endangered dialects (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1995) and argued for changing 'the present unequal partnership between researcher and researched' (Rickford 1997), in accordance with 'the principle of the debt incurred' adumbrated by Labov.

In an analysis of the political debates surrounding bilingual education in North America, Cummins distinguished two types of disinformation (deliberate spreading of false information vs. genuine belief in false information which is spread) and emphasized the ethical responsibility of opinion-makers:

Those in positions of power and influence (e.g., media commentators, politicians, academics) have an ethical responsibility both to inform themselves of the relevant research and to attempt to be logical and rational in the way they interpret this research. (Cummins 1991: 189)

Although it is probably safe to assert that many (socio)linguists agree about the need for and the principles underlying the empowerment of the linguistically disadvantaged, not all do. Considerable disagreement can be found concerning the need to preserve languages (e.g., Trudgill 1998 vs. Brookes and Heath 1997: 206), linguistic imperialism (e.g., Phillipson 1992, 1997 vs. Davies 1996, 1997), mother-tongue-medium education as a linguistic human right for minorities (e.g., Skutnabb-Kangas 1998a, 1998b vs. Gupta 1997), the right to mother-tongue education for the Gypsies of Hungary (e.g., Réger 1988 vs. Vekerdy 1988), or the teaching of standard English in Great Britain (e.g., Trudgill 1995, 1996 vs. Stein and Quirk 1995). Because linguists, and especially sociolinguists, often provide expert advice to social policy-makers, they have an important ethical responsibility in the sense suggested by Cummins above. Linguists (as well as other academics) may influence social processes by providing sound scientific advice to politicians or by giving them disinformation.

3. A brief overview of Slovak language policy between 1989 and 1998

Hungarians and Slovaks have lived together in today's southern Slovakia for over a millennium. Following the collapse of Austria-Hungary after WW I, Hungarians became a recognized minority in Czechoslovakia.¹ Their rights were guaranteed by the peace treaties following World War I, and 'were quite limited and should not have been seen as a threat to the state' (Kaplan and Baldauf 1997: 203).

According to the 1991 Czechoslovak census, 567,296 people, or over 10 percent of Slovakia's population declared themselves Hungarian by nationality. Those who claimed Hungarian as their mother tongue numbered 608,221. Between 1921 and 1991 Slovakia's population rose from 3 million to 5.27 million. The number of Slovaks increased from 1,952,000 to 4,519,000 and the number of Hungarians decreased from 650,597 (21.68 percent) to 567,296 (10.76 percent). The Hungarian minority lives in the

southern part of the Slovak Republic; in over 400 villages and towns Hungarians constitute the local majority of the population.

After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, for a short while there were hopes that the interethnic tensions would lessen in Slovakia, but those hopes soon evaporated when Law No. 428 on the Official Language of the Slovak Republic was adopted in October 1990. With regard to this law, the Slovak psychologist Plichtová (1993: 17) has made the false claim that it granted 'the status of official language to a minority language if an ethnic minority in a given region exceeds 20 percent of the population'.² If minority languages had been official languages in the said localities, Section 6, Paragraph 2 of the 1990 law would not have stated that state and local government officials were not required to know and use the minority languages (see Zalabai 1995: 324; and Gyurcsik 1998: 54). What the law did allow was oral use of the minority language in official contacts in the said localities. For years after 1990, fierce language battles took place over bilingual city- and village-limit signs, the right to use Hungarian personal names, language rights in education, etc. (see Kontra 1996).

Rather than create order, the 1990 Official Slovak law resulted in confusion and increased interethnic antagonism. As Obrman (1990: 16–17) put it, 'the law leaves no room for discrimination against Slovaks, as some radicals argue it does. On the contrary, if the law discriminates in any way, it is in curtailing rights previously enjoyed by other ethnic minorities. The new law is, in fact, a step backward and is likely to harm Slovakia's image, even in its present, relatively moderate form'. Brunner (1994: 35) has noted that 'before 1990, there was no direct regulation, but in territories inhabited by Hungarian minorities, Hungarians could often use their language in offices even in the case of lower proportions'.

The Official Slovak law was revoked when a new Law on the State Language of Slovakia³ was adopted in November 1995. This law is much more repressive than its predecessor, prompting Kaplan and Baldauf (1997: 204) to comment on it as follows:

[it] provides a clear case where the state is using its power to suppress the language of its citizens in the name of language standardisation and nation-state building. The law severely disadvantages its Hungarian and other minority citizens and makes it difficult for them to participate in the affairs of the state.

One way to measure the extent to which the State Language Law curtails minority language use in Slovakia is to apply the first principle of the Linguistic Society of America's Statement on Language Rights, whereby people should be 'allowed to express themselves, publicly or privately, in the language of their choice'. Minority citizens of Slovakia do not have this right in a large number of domains of language use, including local government, teachers' meetings in a state school, church bulletins, street signs, elementary

and secondary school-leaving certificates, legal documents relating to employment, verbal contact between health care workers and patients, etc. In other domains minority citizens have an unduly costly choice: for instance, minority-language programs broadcast by local or regional TV stations or radio channels also have to be broadcast in the state language (see Kontra 1995/96). Since 1997 severe fines can be levied by the Ministry of Culture for non-compliance with the law.⁴

The State Language Law has drawn considerable international criticism from the European Union, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Government of Hungary, and scores of linguists and lawyers all over the world.

In a candid assessment of the situation, the Slovak political scientist Miroslav Kusý (1996: 63) wrote that '[a]s of January 1, 1993, they [Hungarians in Slovakia] became sub-tenants in a country in which they have lived from time immemorial, when the Slovaks turned this land into their nation state'. Among other things Kusý maintains that

- it is quite justified and legitimate for Hungarians to demand ethnic self-administration of their own educational system,
- the language law is a concentrated attack against the identity of the minority,
- the principle of civil coexistence has been replaced by the principle of superiority of the state-forming Slovak nation,⁵ and
- ethnic autonomy is unquestionably an alien element in the civil state while it is an absolutely natural consequence of the nation state.⁶

In May 1996 a group of members of the Slovak parliament requested that the Slovak Constitutional Court examine the constitutionality of 26 paragraphs of the State Language Law. In its ruling on 9 September, 1997, the Constitutional Court found all but two paragraphs in accord with the Slovak constitution and other international treaties to which Slovakia is a signatory. The Court found Section 3, Paragraph 5 of the law ('All paperwork submitted by citizens to statutory organs is in the state language.') in violation of the constitution. It has somewhat toned down the severity of the applicability of fines for violations of the law by temporarily suspending the right of the Ministry of Culture to levy fines.⁷ In a detailed analysis Gyurcsik (1998) criticized the Court's ruling for two major reasons: (1) its silence on rescinding established rights (e.g., the right to bilingual documentation in schools), and (2) a narrow interpretation of international obligations.

At the time of writing this paper in June, 1998, the Slovak government is using various methods of coercion, including gerrymandering and firing school principals who have violated the State Language Law by issuing bilingual school reports, a right they had from becoming a minority in 1920 to the adoption of the 1995 law. Time and again Hungarian parents and

politicians mount protests against such government actions. For instance, as a sign of protest against the government's firing of two principals, parents did not send their children to school on 5 June, 1998, leaving 28 schools out of 34 in the Komárom/Komárno district empty. Minister of Public Education Eva Sklavkovská then purportedly threatened to close down those schools (see *Magyar iskolák bezárásával fenyegetőznek*).

4. On the role of Slovak linguists in influencing language policy

Most members of the Linguistic Society of America oppose legislative attempts to make English the official language of the United States (see Nunberg 1989, and the LSA Statement on Language Rights). The LSA Statement addresses some misconceptions upon which public debates are based and urges protection of basic linguistic rights. However, the English Only movement has considerable popular support in America (see, e.g., Nunberg 1997).

Linguists in Hungary tend to occupy a position fairly close to the Americans': for instance, the Hungarian Language Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences stated in May, 1996, that there was no need for a law on the mother tongue (see *Van-e szükség Magyarországon anyanyelvi törvényre?*).⁸ Nevertheless, academics and politicians sometimes attempt to gather support for legislation to protect Hungarian both within Hungary and in her neighboring countries (see, for instance, Rosdy 1996, and Pomogáts 1996).

Among other countries, France is a well-known example where the state regulation of linguistic matters is held in high esteem, both with regard to the purity of French and the promotion of French as the official language. In its philosophy, Slovak language policy and planning is close to French language policy.⁹ It is to the role which some Slovak linguists have been playing in shaping recent Slovak language policy that we now turn. Our sources include a book by a leading Slovak linguist (Kačala 1994) and some personal experience such as international email exchanges and meetings attended in Slovakia. We believe the role played by these linguists merits attention because linguists of the leading Slovak research institute petitioned the Slovak National Council in 1990 to pass legislation on Slovak, and because the 1995 Slovak language law provoked a massive protest from linguists all over the world in 1996.

4.1 Ján Kačala – architect of the 1995 State Language Law?

Between the adoption of the 1990 and the 1995 language laws in Slovakia, in 1994 there appeared a book with the title *Slovenčina – vec politická?* ['The Slovak Language – a Political Matter?']. The author, Ján Kačala, worked as a researcher in the Ľudovít Štúr Linguistics Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, where he was director between 1981 and 1992. Among other fields he was involved in the work of committees on orthography, orthoepy, and the compilation of the 1989 2nd edition of *Krátky slovník slovenského jazyka* ['Slovak Explanatory Dictionary'].

Kačala's book contains five chapters, which deal with such major topics as national identity and national language, language culture and purism, the codification of Slovak, geographical names, and language policy. In the preface (p. 7) the author states that he takes a scientific stand on some problems in the codification of Slovak and pays special attention to the problems of the state language and the battles led by the cultural organization 'Matica slovenská' ['Slovak motherland']¹⁰ for the legal recognition of Slovak as the state language.

Published by 'Matica slovenská', this book is primarily targeted at the general public. To use Cummins' expression, the author is in a 'position of influence' and has an ethical responsibility to inform himself of the relevant research and to be logical and rational in interpreting it.

In sections 4.2 through 4.8 below, we will highlight some key motifs of the book, then in section 5 we will demonstrate how these ideas found their way into the State Language Law and its Justification, and how they have been used as grounds for linguistic discrimination.

4.2 An earlier plan to protect Slovak (1968)

In chapter I/8 (pp. 44–55), the origins of the 1990 law are traced back by Kačala to 1968, when Jozef Ružička, then director of the Štúr Linguistics Institute, published a draft bill on the Slovak language in the daily *Pravda* on 8 May, 1968. The bill aimed to raise the prestige of Slovak¹¹ and strengthen the linguistic consciousness of citizens and state organizations. The Prague Spring was too shortlived for the realization of these aims, but the same ideas surfaced, with renewed force, in 1990 – with one important difference. This time, says Kačala, the driving force behind the language movement were Slovaks who live in ethnically mixed (Slovak–Hungarian) southern Slovakia, where they are subject to forced Hungarian assimilation and where they feel their national identity is endangered (pp. 53–54).

Unfortunately, writes Kačala, the language bill presented by 'Matica slovenská' was voted down in the Slovak parliament in 1990, and the coalition government's bill was adopted, which meant a severe defeat for the national language movement (p. 53).

4.3 Does Slovak need to be protected?

Yes, says the author in chapter III/1 (pp. 89–90): it is the job of linguists to protect the language from those culturally ignorant speakers who display irresponsible attitudes to linguistic and cultural values.

In Kačala's view, linguists conduct scientific studies of Slovak and, being professionals, have the right to regulate language in social communication. Society gives them a mandate to do this, which legitimizes the linguists' right and obligation to interfere with the standard variety and its use in communication.

4.4 Codification: Orthography

Chapter III/4 (pp. 107–112) deals with orthographic codification. One of the most important tasks of the leading research institute for Slovak, the Academy's Ľudovít Štúr Institute, is the codification of standard Slovak. In the late 1980s the Institute produced a new edition of the rules of Slovak orthography, *Pravidlá slovenského pravopisu*, which was published in 1991. This new edition, says Kačala (p. 109), contains some new rules which were made necessary by the 'linguistic practice of society'. Such is the case, for instance, with the spelling of proper names which belong to 'the Hungarian era of Slovak history', e.g., earlier *Pálffy* or *Csáky* are now spelled *Pálfí* and *Čáki*. (*Pálfí* is a possible Hungarian spelling, but *Čáki* is not: there is no Č in the Hungarian alphabet; S.S and M.K.)

4.5 Linguistic sovereignty

Chapter V/3 (162–169) deals with 'linguistic sovereignty', which Kačala describes as a new phenomenon that has hitherto received little theoretical attention. Among other things, we learn that it is closely related to the sovereignty of the state and to national sovereignty. Linguistic sovereignty manifests itself in filtering items borrowed from other languages as well as how names of other countries are formed in Slovak. According to Kačala, national and linguistic sovereignty also imply that a nation can responsibly de-

cide when the solution of problems concerning the situation and use of the national language requires linguistic legislation (p. 168).

4.6 Národný vs. národnostný

Chapter V/4 (pp. 169–172) is devoted to the politics of the use of the Slovak adjectives *národný* 'national' and *národnostný*, which is derived from the noun *národnosť*, 'nationality'. The notion of nation contains a common language, common psychological and cultural elements, a common territory and economy, and a common state. However, Kačala goes on to say that a nationality has neither a common territory nor a relatively self-contained economy. A nationality is an ethnic group which is connected to the economy of the state-forming nation. Specifically in Slovakia, there is one state-forming nation and there are several nationalities or 'nationality minorities' (p. 170). It is our impression that here the author starts out with a widely accepted definition of 'nation', but then uses it to legitimate a hierarchical relationship between majority and minority citizens of Slovakia.

In Kačala's opinion, when in 1993 the Hungarian Coexistence Movement (a political party in Slovakia in 1998; authors' note) published a document whose subtitle in English translation is 'From oppressed minority to coequal nation', its authors misused Slovak. The use of the phrase *partnerský národ* 'coequal nation' must be rejected, says Kačala, because its coiners are not Slovaks, and it is only Slovaks who have the right to decide the Slovak name of things. Slovaks have already decided how *národný* and *národnostný* must be used, and they do not need advice from those whose mother tongue is not Slovak (p. 171).

4.7 Language policy aspects of the notion 'standard language'

In Chapter V/5 (pp. 172–176), the author asserts that, in consonance with the efforts to create the Slovak state especially in the recent past, standard Slovak is viewed by the public as an important factor in the integrity of the state and the territory of Slovakia. Slovak is a unifying force for all citizens of Slovakia and is, in a sense, one of the state's symbols. Kačala emphasizes that it is in the best interest of society to support research on the standard and to make the research results available to the public. Linguists as well as the entire society should work towards strengthening the position of standard Slovak in the life of society. Adequate language legislation makes the standard language socially and politically stronger. In this respect it is laudable that the Constitu-

tion of the Slovak Republic, adopted on 1 September, 1992, codifies Slovak as the state language of the Slovak Republic.

4.8 Efforts to impart an adequate legal standing to Slovak in Slovakia

Chapter V/7 (pp. 178–185) begins by stating that politicians should ensure that the national language has an adequate legal position in the territory where the nation lives. The need for a language law was first advocated by linguists of the Ľudovít Štúr Linguistics Institute in the second half of the 1960s. The thrust of their proposal was that Slovak, along with Czech, should be made a state language of the common state, and that it should be mandatorily used as the official language in public life in Slovakia.¹² However, work for the legal recognition of the national language was hampered by the communist authorities, and the director of the Institute and author of 'Theses on the Slovak language', Jozef Ružička, was politically harassed.

An important event in recent Slovak language policy was the rally organized by 'Matica slovenská' in Surány on 3 March, 1990. Delegates from all the villages and towns in southern Slovakia where ethnic Slovaks live together with ethnic Hungarians attended and demanded their language rights.¹³ Soon after this rally, the Štúr Institute sent a proposal to the president of the Slovak National Council urging the legislature to pass a Slovak language law (p. 180). If the state provides legal protection for its historical towns and districts, it should also provide legal protection for its national language, without which the nation simply would not exist. From March to October, 1990, 'Matica slovenská', supported by linguists, campaigned heavily for making Slovak the sole state and official language, but parliament passed the coalition government's language bill on 25 October, 1990, despite protests in Bratislava.

Kačala claims that Matica's bill would have stopped the discrimination against and assimilation of Slovaks in ethnically mixed southern Slovakia. According to Kačala, not only would it not have harmed anybody, it would have made ethnically non-Slovak citizens socially and linguistically equal, since Slovak citizens who do not know Slovak are naturally (sic!, p. 183) discriminated against. In this, Matica claimed to be following the example of foreign countries, where ethnic minorities respect the natural requirement that they learn the language of the state-forming nation and use it in official contacts. Minorities in Slovakia, says Kačala, are different, because they do not learn the state language well and do not recognize Slovak as the only language for official contacts. Kačala asserts that Matica's bill should have contributed to a harmonious social atmosphere and should have increased national consciousness and Slovak identity, and that it should have socially

marginalized those who cannot use the standard language in official contacts. The goal of Matica's bill, according to Kačala, was to strengthen Slovak state and territorial integrity. The bill, he stresses, was not directed against anybody. He makes an emphatic claim that when the Slovak National Council rejected Matica's language bill in 1990, it hurt the process of national emancipation. Kačala believes there would have been nothing extraordinary about adopting Matica's bill since language laws are also adopted in other developed countries in Europe.

5. The survival of several key motifs

Although linguist Ján Kačala lamented the failure of Matica Slovenská's language bill in 1990, a good deal of Matica's ideas were later written into the State Language Law of 1995. Several ideas that occur in Kačala's book also appear elsewhere in language-related political discourse (see, for instance, Zalabai [1995]). Lack of space prevents us from giving an exhaustive list.)

The claim about the alleged assimilation and discrimination targeting Slovaks in southern Slovakia (4.2 above) occurred almost verbatim during the parliamentary debate of the State Language Law in the speech of a member of parliament for the ruling coalition, Eva Garajová, who said that the law 'would halt the lingual discrimination and national assimilation of Slovaks of Southern Slovakia' (*The Slovak State Language Law and the Minorities*, henceforth SSSL, p. 18). This seems to be a curious if not false claim if one considers the fact – also published by Plichtová (1993: 18) – that the proportion of the Hungarian minority in the total population of Slovakia decreased from 21.7% in 1921 to 10.8% in 1991.

As mentioned in section 4.3 above, Slovak linguists see themselves as having a mandate and obligation to regulate the standard, which needs cultivation and protection. Section 2, Paragraphs (2) and (3) of the law¹⁴ state the following:

(2) The codified form of the state language is decreed by the Culture Ministry of the Slovak Republic on the basis of proposals made by specialist Slovak language institutes.

(3) Any form of interference with the codified form of the state language which is not in line with its rules is inadmissible.

On 1 January, 1996, the Culture Ministry decreed that the norms of the state language are found in (i) the rules of Slovak orthography published in 1991 (see 4.4 above), (ii) the Slovak explanatory dictionary published in 1989 (see 4.1 above), and (iii) *Pravidlá slovenskej výslovnosti* [The Rules of Slovak Pronunciation], 2nd ed., 1988). These sources contain the prescriptive norms of standard Slovak as described by professional linguists. They embody 'the codified form of the state language', which must not be

interfered with, that is, must be observed. If they are not observed, legal consequences might ensue.

The codified rules of orthography (see section 4.4 above) for certain personal names are discriminatory. According to the text on p. 40 of *Pravidlá slovenského pravopisu*, the spelling of personal names originally written in the Latin alphabet is retained in Slovak, but certain Hungarian historical names are respelled, e.g., *Rákóczi* as *Rákoci*. However, no such respelling is required for *William Shakespeare*, which would be *Viliam Šekspír* (see Zalabai 1995: 193).¹⁵ Recall that these rules of orthography have come to be regarded by the Culture Ministry as a reference book for defining 'the codified form of the state language'. Thus the rules created by linguists can become a part of the legal basis for the activities of the linguistic consultants/police.

The notion of linguistic sovereignty (section 4.5 above) features in the preamble of the State Language Law: '... the Slovak language is ... the expression of the sovereignty of the Slovak Republic'. Linguistic sovereignty and linguistic legislation can be closely associated, says Kačala (see section 4.5 above), which is mirrored in the Justification of the law: 'A language law is a natural part of developed legal systems' (SSLL, p. 13).

In Slovakia there is only one state-forming nation, says Kačala (section 4.6 above), and that is what the Justification for the State Language Law asserts (SSLL, p. 13).

Slovak is an important factor in the integrity of the state, a unifying force for all citizens of Slovakia, and a state symbol, in the words of Kačala (section 4.7 above). In the Justification it is 'the unifying language of all citizens' and 'the unified means of communication between citizens'. The Justification criticizes the Official Language Law of 1990, for it considered the Slovak language only an 'official language', and '[c]ontrary to the sovereignty of the Slovak Republic and Slovak nation, it recognizes Czech as a secondary official (auxiliary) language' (SSLL, p. 13).

Kačala claims that knowledge of the state language makes all citizens linguistically equal, and he believes that promotion of the state language is not directed against anybody (section 4.8 above). The preamble of the 1995 law says that Slovak 'guarantees them [citizens] freedom and equality in dignity and rights in the territory of the Slovak Republic'.

Section 1 (4) of the State Language Law of 1995 says, 'The law does not legislate the use of languages of national minorities and ethnic groups. The use of these languages is determined in other laws.' Slovak government politicians cite this paragraph continuously, in their attempts to deflect criticism of the law. However, neither Kačala's position nor Section 1(4) of the State Language Law is compatible with the simple linguistic truth expressed by Kaplan and Baldauf (1997: 271):

... the planning activity *cannot* be limited to one language; it will affect all the languages in the environment. Each language has its own ecology of support and relationships to other languages.

6. Protest and counter-protest

Until now we have concentrated on a leading Slovak linguist's views on language and legislation and have shown that what Kačala published in 1994 has strong and detailed correlations with the letter and spirit of the Law on the State Language of the Slovak Republic adopted in 1995. Of course, we cannot, without further proof, claim any causal relationship. The correlations may be accidental, but they are certainly striking. Albeit sketchily, we have also shown that some Slovak linguists cooperated with and supported Slovak politicians who drafted and passed this highly repressive language law.¹⁶ There is little doubt in our minds that it is politicians rather than linguists who are primarily responsible for language legislation, yet we believe that the role of professional linguists in the political process deserves scrutiny because of the overall importance of linguistic human rights in people's lives. If there is profound disagreement among linguists over some language policy or legislation, it may be a sign of linguists' inadequate understanding of the issues (in which case scholarly debate should clarify and advance our thinking), or it may be a sign of philosophical and/or political differences among linguists.

Soon after the Slovak Law was passed in late 1995, the second author of the present paper posted a brief analysis of it on the LINGUIST List (Vol-7-167, Feb 2 1996). On 17 April, 1996, some concerned linguists launched an international protest, the main statement of which was signed by leading sociolinguists all over the world, and which resulted in well over a hundred letters and faxes sent to the President, Prime Minister and Minister of Culture in Slovakia. The protesters urged that the new law be changed in order to respect the linguistic human rights of minorities in Slovakia, and that a law on the use of minority languages should be passed.

A few weeks later one of the organizers of the protest, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, received email messages from Slovak linguists. One was from Ivor Ripka, director of the Ľudovít Štúr Linguistics Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, and another from Slavo Ondrejovič, Head of the Sociolinguistics Department in the same institute. Both charged the protesters with misrepresenting the facts, and said they were surprised to find the signatures of 'renowned sociolinguists' among the protesters.¹⁷

Thus the protest gave rise to a counter-protest but no linguistic debate occurred.¹⁸ For lack of space in this paper, we will not present all the 'counterarguments' of our Slovak colleagues, but will briefly comment on two points made by Ondrejovič,¹⁹ who – readers should note – does not fully

support the law. He wrote: 'I criticized the adopted law on the state language of Slovakia but, in my opinion, every state has the right to regulate the use of the language in official contacts.'

The first point that we quote from Ondrejovič's message is the following:

As far as the assimilation in southern Slovakia is concerned, we should also listen to the voice of those saying that it is the majority population in southern Slovakia that is exposed to assimilation and not the minorities.

This is the familiar claim found in Kačala's book, the Justification of the law, and in a great deal of Slovak nationalist discourse. There are two problems with this claim. First, it simply ignores the fact that the proportion of Hungarians in the total population of Slovakia decreased by 50 percent between 1921 and 1991 (see section 3 above). Second, we are not aware of any serious research which supports this widely-used claim. 'Listening to the voice of those' who make claims about the direction of assimilation in southern Slovakia does not count as social science.

Usually, it is a minority which is assimilated to a majority. For the opposite to happen, there should generally be a great status difference between the minority and majority languages, for instance, a minority which speaks a major international and ex-colonial language may assimilate some majority speakers. Hungarian can be seen as ex-colonial but not as international. Some of the facts that show the absurdity of the claim that Hungarians assimilate Slovaks in southern Slovakia are the following: first, Hungarians are economically disadvantaged, e.g., unemployment is higher in southern Slovakia than elsewhere: 12.1 percent nationally in June, 1996, vs. 14.9 to 22.5 percent in southern Slovakia (cf. *The Hungarians in Slovakia*, p. 14); second, one in four Hungarian schoolchildren go to Slovak-language schools, but the opposite does not occur in even remotely similar proportions; third, Hungarians are significantly less educated than Slovaks, e.g., 2.2 percent of Hungarians have a college or university degree as opposed to the 5.2 percent national average in Slovakia (Plichtová 1993: 16).

The second point we chose from Ondrejovič's message concerns Section 8(4) of the State Language Law of 1995:

Health care institutions conduct all their administration in the State language. Contact between health care employees and patients takes place usually in the State language, if the patient is a citizen or foreigner unfamiliar with the State language, then also in such a language in which they can understand each other.

In the plea for the protest it was stated that the new law 'has outlawed the use of Hungarian in all official contacts, forbidding, among other things, the use of the mother tongue between a Hungarian physician and patient'. In his message Ondrejovič disagrees: 'A lot of phantasy is needed to find in the Law any ban on the use of Hungarian in almost all public domains and forbidding the use of Hungarian "between a Hungarian physician and patient".' Unlike On-

drejovič, we would argue that the text of the law quoted in the previous paragraph forbids, at least implicitly, the use of Hungarian between a Hungarian doctor and a Hungarian patient, unless the patient is 'unfamiliar with the State language'. In other words, it does not allow the use of the language which serves the minority speakers' communicative purposes best.

7. Linguistically challenged language police

In post-1995 Slovakia the enforcers of the State Language Law (the 'language consultants') receive guidance and advice from professional linguists. This semi-legal role of linguists was clearly articulated as early as July, 1993, when the then Minister of Culture Dušan Slobodník announced at a press conference that

[u]nder no circumstances was it a breach of the requirement by the Council of Europe (CE) regarding the freedom of names, but this institution simply cannot impose certain things on us, said Slobodník. He pointed to the demand by the Hungarian ethnic minority not to attach the ending *-ová* [a grammar rule in Slovak – ed.].²⁰ The Slovak language painlessly accepts some elements from other languages. But there was a certain limit which no language could cross and no one can force this on us under any pretext, said Slobodník.

He added that the Slovak Government's decision stemmed from the necessity to preserve the principle of Slovak grammar. The EC cannot impose grammar on us, as it is not within its competence. It is within the competence of the supreme god in terms of the Slovak grammar, Ľudovít Štúr Language Institute, stressed Slobodník. (FBIS-EEU-93-133)

The Justification of the State Language Law specifies the role of the Štúr Institute in the following way:

The right to decide changes to the codified version of the state language belongs to the Ministry of Culture, which relies on the suggestions of Slovakist linguists working in the Ľudovít Štúr Linguistic Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the Linguistic Department of Matica Slovenská, and in the Slovak-language departments of colleges. (SSLL, p. 14)

It is also the Štúr Institute whose current and former directors are among the members of 'The Central Linguistic Council', which was appointed by the Slovak government in March, 1996. The Hungarian daily *Új Szó* reported on 22 March, 1996, the following:

Yesterday Culture Minister Ivan Hudec appointed the members of The Central Linguistic Council in Bratislava. The members are Ján Kačala, Ján Dorul'a, Milan Majtán, Ivan Masár, Jozef Mistrík, Jozef Mlacek, Šimon Ondruš, Mária Pisárčiková, Matej Považaj, Ivor Ripka, and Ján Sabol. It will be their duty to take measures to help observe the law on the protection of the state language. Further, it is their task to produce expert opinions on contentious issues in the use of the state language, to monitor the activities of the various terminological committees in public administration bodies, and to supervise the work of the language consultants.²¹ (*Nyelvtanács született*)

Thus there has clearly been some cooperation between politicians of the third Mečiar government (1994–1998) and academic linguists in creating what can

be identified as linguist practices (see Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1996). In the final part of this paper we will report on a meeting of linguists and language consultants, which the first author of this paper attended on 25 November, 1997, at the Štúr Institute in Bratislava.

It was stated in this meeting that the guiding principles of the activities of the language consultants had been determined by the Ministry of Culture. The job requirements for language consultants include a college or university degree and at least five years of work experience. In addition, language consultants have to take exams to prove their familiarity with 20 laws which are related to the State Language Law.

Of the interesting language planning issues discussed in the meeting, we will single out only one, which illustrates the problems arising from the clashes between variable language use and invariant/categorical legal regulations. Section 2 of the State Language Law says that the codified form of the state language is decreed by the Ministry of Culture on the basis of proposals made by specialist Slovak language institutes, and that interference with this codified form of the language is inadmissible (see section 5 above). In other words, since a violation of the prescriptive rules of Slovak may result in a fine, what is and what is not a violation becomes an important issue.

At the meeting sociolinguist Ján Bosák called attention to the fact that in some cases there is variation in the linguistic forms found in the books which the Ministry of Culture listed in its decree of January, 1996, as containing the norms of standard Slovak. He also criticized the fact that an old book on morphology, first published in 1966 and long since out of print, was later added to the list of authoritative books. Bosák asked the language consultants how, in their daily work, they resolved such anomalies as arise when a particular form is listed as correct in one authoritative book but as incorrect in another, equally authoritative book. For instance, there are differences between the rules of orthography and the Slovak explanatory dictionary. Short of a linguistic response, linguist Matej Považaj, who is a member of the above mentioned 'Central Linguistic Council', argued that (i) there are few such cases, and (ii) there are no funds to republish those authoritative books which are out of print. In the debate some suggested that the latest published books could be regarded as the authoritative works in cases of variation.

8. In lieu of conclusions

Language-based discrimination is widespread in the world at the beginning of the 21st century. Often such discrimination is backed by repressive language laws. The majority of professional linguists probably endorse language policies based on attraction rather than compulsion, but not all do. As experts in language matters, professional linguists can influence politicians and hence

play at least an indirect role in shaping language policies and legislation. We believe that the ethical problems of scientific objectivity and social commitment in linguistics need further scrutiny. By describing an unusual case in which professional linguists have played a considerable role in creating a highly repressive language law in Slovakia, we hope to have taken a step in that direction.

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Notes

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1. For a chronology of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia/Slovakia through September 1994, see Nás (1996: 576–580).
2. Ondrejovič (1993: 159) makes a similarly false statement: 'By virtue of [the 1990] law national minorities can use their mother tongue in official communication in villages where a minority makes up at least 20 percent of the population.' We cannot tell which definition of disinformation quoted from Cummins in section 2 fits the statements by these authors.
3. An unofficial English translation of the law is printed in Kontra (1995/1996 and (1997).
4. The fines are listed in Kontra (1995/96). For instance, the maximum fine which can be levied on a violator of Section 5, Paragraph 4 for failure to air a minority-language TV or radio program in its entirety in Slovak as well is 500,000 Crowns, which is equivalent to half the maximum fine for endangering Slovakia's nuclear safety. If a private businessman produces an audiovisual program in Hungarian for children under 12 and this program is not dubbed into Slovak, the maximum fine for that, 50,000 Crowns, is almost 17 times as much as the maximum fine for desecration of the Slovak national flag, a mere 3,000 Crowns.
5. The justification (= commentary explaining the purpose of the law) of the 1995 law implies that ethnically non-Slovak citizens of Slovakia, about 20% of the country's population, are not a 'state-forming element':

The Slovak language is the national language of the Slovaks, who comprise the only state-forming element of the Slovak Republic. The role of the Slovak language as the unifying language of all citizens of the Slovak Republic also arises from the position of [the Slovaks as the] state-forming element. (*The Slovak State Language Law and the Minorities*, p. 13)

What is left unanswered in the Justification of the law is this: If ethnic Slovaks are the only state-forming element, what are the national minorities? (Our note, S.S. and M.K.)

6. According to Kusý, a civil state is based on the principle of civil coexistence of all citizens of the state on the basis of equality, whereas a nation state is based on the principle of the superiority of the dominant nation.
7. Violations are noted and fines are levied by 'language consultants' (government officials whose job is to ensure compliance with the State Language Law; in colloquial Hungarian

they are called *nyelvvrendőrök* 'language police' in Slovakia). To illustrate their activities we quote one of many news reports, from August 1997:

The language consultants all but searched the premises of the dean of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Léva/Levice. While the Rev. Attila Pásztori was away from home, the consultants searched his private notes, leafed through his diary, and, in the presence of his secretary, they threatened to levy a fine. ... The leader of the language consultants also said that he would do all he can to remove from the Hungarian Reformed cemetery the monument erected to commemorate the 1100th anniversary of the Hungarian Conquest. (Sándor 1997)

8. While the English Only movement in the USA revolves around status planning, Hungarian debates concerning language legislation tend to be about corpus planning, that is, protecting the lexical purity of the language. Purist sentiments are wide-spread and such movements are endorsed by large sections of Hungarian society, even though those who openly advocate legislation against the use of foreign words are a minority. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences has repeatedly opposed language legislation as a means of enhancing language culture, and some language cultivators (e.g., Balázs 1998) have criticized the linguistically uninformed wording of a low-level regulation concerning the names of businesses.
9. 'In drafting the law on the state language, we took into consideration regulations having the force of law in several European states, primarily France, Lithuania, Belgium and Holland.' (Justification of the State Language Law, in *The Slovak State Language Law and the Minorities*, p. 14)
10. 'Matica slovenská' [Slovak Motherland] was originally a cultural organization established in 1863 which played an important role in the promotion and protection of Slovak identity. As Gyurcsik and Satterwhite (1996: 523) state, '[i]ts present role is quite different: after the November 1989 "revolution" the leaders of Matica organized mass demonstrations against minorities (October 1990), forced the adoption of discriminatory laws (such as the language law) and adopted memoranda whose aim was the extreme restriction of minority rights (March 1990, April 1992)'. Bugajski (1994: 339) makes the following prediction about Matica: 'If tensions between Magyars and Slovaks continue to increase, the Slovak Motherland is likely to be at the forefront, providing the ideological and conceptual underpinnings for any anti-minority measures.'
11. The prestige of Slovak vis-à-vis Czech was seen in need of strengthening because, in Plichová's words (1993: 18), 'Slovaks believe the Czechs denigrate them and have always found some excuse to prevent the Slovaks from coming of age'. Czech and Slovak 'share a great deal and are on average 90 percent mutually intelligible' (Short 1990: 367). In the fourteenth century Czech began to be used as the literary language in Slovakia. 'A uniform standard Slovak was established in the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1918, after the formation of Czechoslovakia, it became the official language of Slovakia' (Čapková 1994: 3971). Until then Latin or Hungarian had been the official language.
12. From the Prague Spring in 1968 through December, 1992, the Czech and Slovak Republics were two federated states within Czechoslovakia. Both Czech and Slovak were official languages, but Slovak had a lower prestige.
13. A second such meeting was held in 1993. Gyurcsik and Satterwhite (1996: 524) describe it as follows:
The so-called Second Memorandum of Slovaks from Southern Slovakia adopted at the 4 April, 1993, Matica slovenská meeting in Surány called for the adoption of laws for the protection of the official language and for the elimination of Hungarian-language education, as well as laws on local self-government elections and the administrative/territorial divisions of Slovakia. In addition to the above, the law on the defense of the Republic aimed at the restriction of Hungarians' political and cultural rights. A few weeks later,

the parliament provided buildings for Matica's use, and the Prime Minister expressed his support for Matica as an important organization. The ideas articulated in the Second Memorandum were accepted as the government's program.

14. Throughout the paper excerpts from the law are quoted from the unofficial English translation in Kontra (1995/96).
15. Kontra (1995/96: 368) argued that observance of this new (1991) rule presupposes a thorough knowledge of what Hungarians are regarded as belonging to 'the Hungarian era of Slovak history' – an unlikely and highly unusual requirement for a spelling rule, which would call for respelling the name if its bearer is officially regarded as belonging to Slovak history, but would retain the Hungarian spelling of the same name in case of a namesake bearer who is not so regarded.
16. For the role that Slovak linguists played in the 'place-name' war see Kontra (1996: 163–164). In the 'war over personal names' the director of the leading research institute for Slovak assisted his government's efforts in 1993 to forcibly assimilate visible ethnic groups in Slovakia (for details see Kontra 1995/96: 366–367).
17. Among others, the protesters included Ulrich Ammon, E. Annamalai, Phil Benson, Richard Benton, Chris Candlin, J. K. Chambers, Michael Clyne, David Corson, Joshua Fishman, Braj and Yamuna Kachru, William Labov, Robert Phillipson, Dennis Preston, Ivan Sag, Peter Trudgill, Ruth Wodak and many more.
18. The Slovak linguists who support the State Language Law made little effort to present the Slovak case at international conferences in 1997: there were no Slovak linguists among the presenters at the Contact+Confli(c)t conference in Brussels, May 28–31, or at the international Linguistic Human Rights conference in Budapest, October 16–19.
19. Thanks are due to Tove Skutnabb-Kangas for providing a copy of her email exchange with Slavo Ondrejovič.
20. A major issue in the 'war over personal names' (see Kontra 1996) was whether or not the surnames of ethnically non-Slovak female citizens of Slovakia had to contain the Slovak suffix *-ová* or not. (Our note, S.S. and M.K.)
21. Our translation of the original Hungarian news report.

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The sociolinguistic stratification of Hungarian in Subcarpathia*

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Abstract

The minority Hungarians of Subcarpathia (Ukraine) have been regarded as a linguistically homogeneous community whose Hungarian language use is affected by their contact with Russian and Ukrainian in a uniform manner. This study demonstrates that such a view cannot be upheld in the light of quantitative empirical findings, which show Subcarpathian Hungarians to be a sociolinguistically stratified group of speakers whose Hungarian language use varies in a systematic manner according to sex, age, level of education, and place of residence. The paper also outlines some of the main differences in the language use of Hungarians in Subcarpathia and Hungary which are manifested in statistically significant ways.

1. Introduction

Following World War I, millions of ethnic Hungarians found themselves outside the political border of Hungary and became citizens of other countries, namely Yugoslavia, Romania, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Austria. Even though many have chosen to re-emigrate to Hungary in the past eight decades, communities numbering hundreds of thousands – or, in the case of Romania, millions – of Hungarians have remained in these countries and have been living in bilingual or multilingual settings ever since. Their language use and the growing sociolinguistic and linguistic effects of bilingualism have never been empirically, or even just systematically, studied. Under the four decades of communism after World War II, the study or sometimes even the mention of Hungarian minorities was taboo, and linguistic research was not made possible until after 1989. In the years since the collapse of the communist regime, sociolinguistic and linguistic information about Hungarians outside Hungary has become increasingly more available, al-