

UDC 930.85(4-12)

YU ISSN 0350-7653

SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS
INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

BALCANICA XXXVII

ANNUAL OF THE INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

Editor-in-Chief

DUŠAN T. BATAKOVIĆ

Director of the Institute for Balkan Studies

Editorial Board

FRANCIS CONTE (Paris), DIMITRIJE DJORDJEVIĆ (Santa Barbara),
DJORDJE S. KOSTIĆ, LJUBOMIR MAKSIMOVIĆ, DANICA POPOVIĆ,
BILJANA SIKIMIĆ, ANTHONY-EMIL TACHIAOS (Thessaloniki),
NIKOLA TASIĆ, SVETLANA M. TOLSTAJA (Moscow),
GABRIELLA SCHUBERT (Jena)

BELGRADE
2007



Iskra Likomanova

**“People in My Life”
(Picture of Socialization)**

Nine life histories of elderly women (over 70 years of age) from several small Bulgarian towns are analyzed here. The stories were recorded according to a definite methodology and subordinated to a definite goal: to outline the narrators' social spheres. The narrative structure of the stories is described and analyzed as well.¹ The stories are predominantly monologues, but they are supplemented by way of clarifying questions asked by the researcher following the interviewees' monologues.² The stories take up about an hour each.

Here the content structure of life histories is being analyzed, based on the designations (nouns, adjectives and pronouns) used for persons from the narrator's environment.

1. Methodology of research. The analysis combines the statistical and qualitative methods. The number of designations for a person is studied statistically. For example, for her *father* a female narrator may use the following designations: *my father*, *he*, or just *the verb inflexion* (the so-called zero marker), which is typical of the Bulgarian language. The naming of one and the same person in the story is studied also in terms of his/her designations in relation to other people in the story, e.g. *my father-in-law* = *my husband's father*, or *my brother-in-law* = *my husband's brother*. So depending on the plot of the story one and the same person may be designated in the following ways: *my son*, *my daughter-in-law's husband*, *my grand daughter's*

¹ I. Likomanova, "How do we retell our life-story (Typology of autobiographical story)", *Communicating experience*, Proceedings from IX International Oral History Conference (Gothenburg, 1996), 815-820.

² For more, see I. Likomanova, "Life-History's Discourse" in *Organization in discourse*, eds. B. Warvik, S.K. Tanskanen and R. Hitumen, *Anglicana Turkuensia* 14 (Turku, 1995), 353-360; Eadem, "Life History discourse (between monologue and dialogue)", *Proceedings of Evaluation of Biographies* (Klagenfurt, 1997).

father, my other daughter-in-law's husband's brother, their son-in-law (in relation to relatives by marriage), *their brother* (in relation to other children) and so on. The terminology designating the persons in a large patriarchal family in terms of family relations is very widely used in the contemporary Bulgarian language.

2. Digressions from the topic – about grammatical characteristics of the Bulgarian language. The extremely rich kinship terminology in the Bulgarian language gives immense opportunities for such type of studies. The long-lasting agricultural and patriarchal way of life has developed a rich system of kinship terms to describe various relations within a large family living around the same courtyard if not under the same roof. In such a family, the sister of the father, for example, is designated differently from the sister of the mother, the same goes for their spouses, and in different regions of the country, in different dialects, the designations may be similar, but more often than not they are different. Different is also the mode of address for relatives belonging to a different generation for whom there are specific designating common nouns instead of proper ones.

Something more interesting: kinship terms in Bulgarian reflect a more obsolete stage in the evolution of language because the typical category of modern Bulgarian definiteness-indefiniteness is not applied always or in all kinship terms. Here the differences are distributed along the line of the opposition *female/male* and along the line *closer/more distant* in relation to the narrator's generation. For example:

	Bulg.	ženà mi vs. mǎžà mi [-def:+def]
		my wife vs. my husband;
	Bulg.	dǎšterja mi vs. sinà mi [-def:+def]
		my daughter vs. my son;
as well as:	Bulg.	zet mi vs. plemennika mi [-def:+def]
		my son-in-law vs. my nephew;
	Bulg.	brat mi vs. vnuka mi [-def:+def]
		my brother vs. my grandson

Based on these oppositions, I considered their use in the life history important; moreover they were manifested quite distinctly.

2.1. Life history as a rule is chronological – the narrated events in the life of the narrators begin with their birth, possible education, job, setting up their own family, building a home, raising the children, and then follow the events in which the narrator is a participant in the life of her children or grandchildren: death, school, weddings etc.

From the general scheme of the story it can be assumed that the basic social spheres are chronologically determined and conditioned by the narrator's life cycles. It turned out, though, that the extent of the inclusion of other persons taking part in their lives is different in the individual

story of every particular narrator. That is why the parallel social spheres are outlined according to their *thematic* boundaries. A topic of the story, as part of it, may be present as a fragment – a continuous narrative, but also as the background to other events – sub-topics. As we have observed in another study, the general topic of the story is more or less the same, but intensity (richness in detail) is different in different fragments – life events. Some of the events can be referred to considerably more often than others, some may be more recurrent than others, and some can be completely evaded, although we know that they are present in the life of the narrator (for instance, one of them mentioned neither her husband nor their wedding until I asked a direct question, knowing she had children; another told me about her parents and about her new house, but her children were not present in her story).³ The same holds true for the persons in the narrator's life, and this finds direct expression in the introduction of and/or reference to them in the story. Detailed description covers both closely related people and more distant relatives – along the line of kinship ties and social characteristics (job, place of residence, age – the same or close to that of the narrator).

The frequency with which persons are referred to within the framework of topic fragments is also looked at in terms of social groups according to sex.

2.2. The person presented with his/her features and commented on will be described in maximum detail. However, this does not hold true for the everyday circle (father, mother, husband and children), who are frequently mentioned for objective considerations and rarely commented.

That is why we shall distinguish here between the *objective* criteria for socialization (one's own family, school) and the *subjective* ones (work, school, more distant relatives, neighbours).

2.3. Any person in his/her turn can be introduced not only in the monologue portion of the life history but in the dialogue portion as well. This also changes their participation in the general scheme of socialization – their appearance in the story is provoked by the researcher rather than occurring in the natural flow of narration.

3. Basic topics of life histories. The most frequent topics in the recorded one-hour life histories of nine female narrators are their **childhood**, their own **family**, their own **house**, **work**, to some extent their education (theirs and their children's). Other periods or topics of human life (*youth, children, diseases*) are somewhat interwoven with the four basic topics.

The topics can be statistically divided into two groups according to the presence of other persons in the life of the narrator: a considerably

³ For more, see I. Likomanova and T. Kmetova, "Gaps in women's discourse", *Abstracts for XI Balkan Congress* (Athens, 1994).

larger number of persons, referred to in different ways, appear in the topic fragments of *childhood* (107) and *family* (105) as compared to the other two fragments, *house* (41) and *work* (39). *Education* occurs as a separate subtopic, but only in some of the stories with the presence of three persons in it. This coincides, to some extent, with the continuance of topics in the story.

3.1. Childhood. This is the most densely “populated” period in the life of the interviewees, and also socially the most intense period, with the most numerous interpersonal relations. One hundred and seven different persons from the life of the narrator are mentioned in it. These are predominantly members of the narrator’s nuclear and extended family and can be subdivided here according to both sex and generation group.

3.1.1. If the interviewee’s generation is taken as zero [0], we can include her brothers and sisters into it, notwithstanding their age differences, which may be considerable. Then her parents and her cousins’ parents will belong to generation [-1], and their parents to generation [-2]. In generation [+1], when mentioned, their children are included in an anticipatory way.

3.1.2. The persons from this period will be divided into persons of male and female sex. Their proportion in the topic fragment in all cases totals 52 : 55 to a slight advantage of female persons. This advantage is easily explained: children are surrounded by mothers, grandmothers, sisters, often aunts, wives of fathers’ brothers, and the reference to them is uniformly distributed among all persons of female sex as follows: *majka* (mother) – 24 times, *baba* (grandmother) – 5 times, *lelja* (aunt) and *strinka* (wife of father’s brother) – 14 times, *sestri* (sisters) – 11 times. At the same time, of all males, the *baštata* (father), mentioned 33 times in total, is the person most frequently referred to, while *bratja* (brothers) in the family are mentioned 8 times as well as others. On the whole, men are fewer in the story, but the first man in the life of the child is very actively present in the life history and is present much more than any woman.

It is observable that in this fragment of the story persons from the interviewee’s closest family and generational environment are present. This is her first family, and if I have chosen here to label this fragment as childhood, it is not only to distinguish it from the next topic in the story but also because the life history of the interviewed was initiated by my question: *Tell me about your childhood.*

3.2. The family of the interviewed. The women I have interviewed are about 70 years old. They set up their families 50 or 60 years ago, before the Second World War. The principle that governed in that period is formulated by one of them: *One gets married easily before 20, but later, no* (Granny Dana). The interviewees have been living mostly in small towns and villages (up to 20,000 inhabitants). These settlements, however, were even smaller at the time (not more than five or six thousand) and all the inhabitants knew each

other. Future spouses were chosen chiefly from among the neighbours, very often with the mediation of relatives and without previously knowing each other. One of them remembers how tenacious she was in her choice and her criteria for her future husband: *If he is rich, I don't want him, but if he's poor, I'll take him* (Granny Tina). Generally, the maxim "Poverty is no sin" functioned quite clearly in that period. Asked what their life was like, one of the women told me: *Our life was nice, because we were poor*.

In the family fragment, apart from the expected persons from the first fragment of the story, there also appear persons from the husband's family as well as the husband himself. Of 105 persons present within the topic *family*, the *husband* is mentioned 40 times; *his parents* and *brothers* or *sisters* – 5 times; his relatives: *etorva* (his brother's wife) and *zalva* (his sister) – 5 times; and her own parents – 9 times (they are already pushed into the background); her own *brothers* and *sisters* – 10 times (more than in the first period or topic, *childhood*); her own *relatives* of generation [-1] (taken as a whole – *vujni* [her mother's brothers], *lejji* [aunts], *strinki* [wives of her father's brothers] and *ćičo* [uncles]) – 12 times; her relatives of generation [-2] are still present: *baba* (grandmother), *djado* (grandfather) – 8 times; her *children*, and others, for example the *craftsmen* taking part in the construction of a shared house and so on. As regards the male/female opposition, persons of the two sexes occur in virtually equal proportions. But it should be taken into account that outside this opposition remain the children when they are not specified in greater detail (son or daughter; I would cite an informant who turned to her son at the birth of his first child with the following words: *Don't be mad, never mind it's a girl, God bless her*), the husband's parents when they are designated with the collective noun *svatovete* (in-laws), as well as her own parents if also named collectively as *my parents*, and only few times the women referred to their own families using the generalizing Bulgarian pronoun *nie* (we).

3.3. The house. Here different persons, mostly from the closest family circle, appear 41 times (*husband* – 9 times; *his parents* – 3 times; narrator's *own parents: mother* – 5 times; *grandmother* – 2 times; or *brothers* and *sisters* – 5 times; *children* – 11 times), but also *workers*, *nephews* and *nieces* – 6 times. The peculiarity in this fragment of the story is that there is virtually no sex-based differentiation among the persons introduced in the story, there is a balance between the persons of male and female sex: in these fragments the father is completely omitted, but there appear workers, most often helping in the construction of the family house. On the other hand, women of all generations are present, as they were at the beginning, within the topic *childhood*. Stress is laid on the new home and here the recurrence is noticeable of statements such as *Every woman is happy to get a house of her own* (Granny Nitcha); *My-my, I was so happy to live in my own house*

(Granny Dana); or *It was such a joy when we built the house* (Granny Kata). One of the few emotionally positively charged elements of the whole story is the one connected with memories of the new home.

3.4. Work. One of the interviewed said: *Nobody worked back then, we all were only farming*. The topic *work* runs through all other topics because children were engaged in agricultural work from an early age and very often these are the informants' only childhood memories – grazing goats and sheep, working on the master's fields. Agricultural work, however, is not considered as “real” work: *Women then took care of their children, the house and the cattle* (Granny Veta). In this topic mainly persons from the previous fragments are reintroduced and their total number is 39. In this topic fragment, however, mostly figure male persons, the only woman mentioned in several stories in this context being the *mother*. The other persons are: *father* – 6 times; *parents* – 3 times; there are also references to male/female *colleagues* – 8 times; the *master* – 7 times and *his sons* – 2 times; her *brothers* – 2 times; *bosses* – 6 times; *craftsmen* – 4 times; the *salesman* to whom the youngest daughter is sent for shopping, and others. Work still pervades the thoughts and dreams of the interviewed elderly women. One of them admitted to me: *When I wake up at night, I always make plans about what I should do, and always a week ahead*, and she is a 77-year-old widow, her children live far away and she is completely alone.

4. The next typological feature of the life histories is the presence of definite, designated persons. Again reference to the closest persons has been analyzed, but this time not just within the defined topic fragments but throughout the life history. I have chosen to analyze the persons appearing more than once in the life history.

4.1. Persons from the kinship circle in the story. Since all the interviewees are female, they represent the women's picture of their world: in it the *husband* is the person most frequently referred to: he appears 65 times, referred to by his *name*, by a *noun* – *husband, man*, and by a *pronoun* – *he, him*, as well as by kinship terms in relation to other persons in the story: *my mother-in-law's son*, chiefly in the context ‘and she told him: *My son...*’ If we rank them in order of frequency, the narrator's *father* takes the second place with 49 times, and her *mother* comes quite close with 35 times. Statistically, between them are the narrator's *children* – they are mentioned 40 times. The children are not presented here separately because the parents themselves refer to them by the collective noun – *the children*. Moreover, the families of that generation, which is the generation of our grandmothers, as a rule were not only numerous, but also had a lot of children. That is why here I describe them in one group – *children: sons + daughters*.

There follow the narrator's *brothers* – 28 times, *sisters* – 16 times, then come her *uncles* – 15 times (they often help in the construction of the

house, they have been worked with since childhood – something typical of a big patriarchal family). Other persons are mentioned considerably less frequently, but still those referred to are from the kinship circle: *svekr̃r* (father-in-law) – 9 times; *husbands' brothers* – 10 times; *strina* (wife of the father's brother) – 9 times; *lelja* (aunt) – 6 times; *granddaughter* – 5 times; *grandmother* – 4 times; *svekr̃rva* (mother-in-law) – 3 times; *vujna* (wife of the mother's brother) – 3 times; *cousins* – 3 times. Other close relatives are mentioned only once.

4.1.1. As this survey does not have as its aim to show the mere frequency of references in the story, comparison with the frequency dictionary of Bulgarian colloquial speech is appropriate. There the first noun from the kinship vocabulary is *majka* (mother) – it holds the 92nd place, but if combined with *mama* (mummy), which holds place no. 208, it gets a higher ranking position. There follow: *child* – place 103; *man* – 146; and *son* – 158. If we combine *father* + *daddy*, the 'male parent' gets place no. 161, followed by *sister*, *brother*, *svekr̃rva* (mother-in-law), *grandfather*, *baby*, *vujčo* (mother's brother), *snaha* (daughter-in-law), *uncle*, *cousin*, *daughter*, *svekr̃r* (father-in-law) and so on.

In another recurrence survey of the speech of educated Bulgarians almost all of the lexemes mentioned so far are absent except *mother*, *mummy* and *parent*.

4.2. Persons from other social spheres in the story. These are predominantly members of informal groups in the village or town: – *boys* – 8 times; *girls* – 5 times; *lads* – 2 times; *male/female friends*, *neighbours* – 3 times.

These also are different professional circles with which the narrator has communicated in different periods of her life, on different occasions and in a variety of situations presented in the story: *colleagues*, *craftsmen*, *teachers* – 5 times; *doctors* – 4 times; the *master* – 4 times; the *police* – 7 times; the *salesman* – 2 times, *workers* – 3 times; *other women* – 2 times.

5. Conclusions. On the basis of the survey thus conducted (recording and analysis), I propose the terms *life presence* vs. *narrative presence* of a person in a given life history.

Only narrative presence has been described above, the one which is subjective to the narrator and reflects her memories and point of view.

We know from the contents of the life histories that the life (objective) presence of a number of persons has been different from the picture presented. Thus, for instance, the mother is present in the life of a child much more actively and with much more time, especially in the child's early years. Child's memories, however, begin at a later age, when in fact the father's impact on the child is stronger, when the child begins to acquire

independence through his/her initiation into labour, a process occurring at a considerably earlier age than today.

In the *family* topic, the narrative presence of a very broad family circle is disproportionate to the incidental participation of children, who appeared quite often after a question by the interviewer.

By way of a working conclusion, it should be noted that the dialogue approach in an interview did not prove appropriate for this type of statistical-qualitative surveys of socialization. More than once the narrator gave an unexpected reply to a purposive question. This type of deviations should be the subject of another research.

In the topics *childhood* and *family* the distribution of male and female roles on the whole coincides with the usual pattern and here the interviews have produced a fairly accurate picture. The same may be said for the topic *work* (Bulg. *rabota*), where the presence of designated male persons is dominant.

Faculty of Slavic Studies
University St Kliment Ohridski
Sofia

UDC 81'272:316.614.4/.5
572.026