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MARIJA ILIĆ, *DISCOURSE AND ETHNIC IDENTITY. THE CASE OF THE SERBS FROM HUNGARY.*

TRANSL. EDWARD ALEXANDER. BERLIN – MUNICH: OTTO SAGNER VERLAG,

2014, 344 p.

*Reviewed by Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović**

During the last few decades sociological, anthropological and linguistic studies have shown a keen interest in phenomena associated with diaspora, the ethnic and religious identity of minority groups, identity construction and change, discourse and narrative, precisely the issues that the book on *Discourse and Ethnic Identity: The Case of the Serbs from Hungary* by Marija Ilić, a research associate at the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, is concerned with. The book was published in 2014 by the renowned European publisher Otto Sagner Verlag in the Studies on Language and Culture in Central and Eastern Europe Series edited by Prof. Christian Voss. In the course of several years of her research interests in ethnolinguistics and anthropolinguistics and extensive fieldwork in Hungary, Marija Ilić has recorded a valuable collection of interviews with members of the Serbian minority in the village of Szigetcsép (Serb. *Čip*). The Serbian minority in Hungary has its long historical continuity and is more numerous in the south of the country, but the case study presented in this book is concerned with a small rural Serbian-speaking community in the vicinity of Budapest. After the Second World War, according to Ilić, this community “started to abandon traditional cultural practices and endogamy and shift from Serbian to Hungarian language” (p. 14). Therefore, in the field of anthropolinguistic studies it makes a valuable contribution for analysis of the language shift process and ethnic identity changes in diaspora communities.

Apart from an introduction, the book has four chapters, a conclusion, an appendix providing background historical information and an extensive bibliography.

In the introductory chapter, the author describes her book as an attempt to elucidate some current issues in anthropological linguistics and critical discourse analysis. More precisely, the book explores the complex relationship between oral discourse and ethnicity by using the case study of Serbs in Hungary. Her analysis is based on qualitative research conducted in 2001 and 2008 by a research team from the Institute for Balkan Studies, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The fieldwork was focused on the older generation given that they are the only fluent speakers of Serbian, while Hungarian has come to prevail among the younger generations. The author focuses on the discursive construction of ethnic identity which is understood as a form of narrative identity. Furthermore, Ilić introduces the concept of *collective narrative* which is “based upon collective memory and refers to collective sense of belonging. Thus, collective narratives unequivocally belong to cultural memory, which is directly related to group identity” (p. 44).

The first chapter, “Theory and Method: Discourse, Narrative, Identity”, outlines the theoretical and methodological framework of the study, defining the main analytical categories: discourse, narrative and identity. The research in Hungary initially used the (Russian) ethnolinguistic methodology, but ended up coming closer to the American school of anthropological linguistics. The author elucidates with clarity and precision what anthropological linguistics is and how this interdisciplinary approach links anthropology and

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linguistics. She is especially interested in the use of anthropological linguistics as an approach to discourse and discourse analysis, applying the Bakhtinian concept of *heteroglossia* and *dialogism*. Besides discourse, Ilić uses the concept of narrative relying on Labov's model of personal narrative experience. In this chapter, the interested reader can find the concepts of narrative identity, ethnic narrative identity and national narrative identity.

"The Serbs in Hungary: a Minority Community" is the title of the second chapter which, among other things, gives an overview of the migrations of Serbs and other Christians to the Hungarian and later Habsburg lands which began after the Ottoman conquest in the fifteenth century. It offers data on the historical development of the Serbian minority, especially following the creation of new nation-states after the First World War. Community history constitutes a significant part of Ilić's interlocutors' narrative identity, and she finds that "their oral history is marked by a tripartite structure: memories of the legendary past (15th–17th c.) alongside memories of the more recent past (20th c.) are regularly recounted, while other historical periods mostly fell into oblivion" (p. 64). This is why the role and importance of oral history for this community is stressed at the beginning of the chapter. However, a more recent history of the Serbs in Hungary required a detailed account of the legal framework of the minority, the status of the Serbian language and its vitality as well as demographic characteristics. In order to explain the current position of the Serbian minority, the author provides valuable data on the community's social history, the legal framework of minority rights after the Second World War, the status of the Serbian language, minority languages and ethnolinguistic vitality. Ilić identifies interethnic relations as one of the most significant factors in language

vitality, and especially the influence of interethnic marriages on language use.

The third chapter, "The Szigetcsép Community and Fieldwork", starts with the local history of the village of Szigetcsép, one of the oldest Serbian communities in Hungary which claims the settlement of its ancestors to the fourteenth and fifteenth century. Until the Second World War, as the author observes, "the Serbian community was especially closed and densely linked in many ways – through endogamy, kinship, neighbourly relations, the agrarian way of life, common language, tradition and religion" (p. 121). After the Second World War, various social changes had an impact on the position of the Serbs too. They also had an impact on language when, after the 1950s, Hungarian became the first language and Serbian was used in very restrictive domains on special occasions (p. 137). The author's fieldwork involved twenty-eight interlocutors, mostly women and mostly elderly – those born between the two world wars (1918–1945). The interview questions concerned linguistic, social and cultural specificities of the local community. The recorded material was transcribed using the method of verbatim transcription, which presents "one to one" relationship between the words spoken and transcribed, i.e. all of the spoken expressions (p. 151). The included interview transcripts are furnished with information on the interlocutors' gender, age, education and occupation.

The last chapter, "Ethnic Narrative Identity in Szigetcsép", uses the collected interview material to analyse the construction of ethnic narrative identity among Serbian speakers from Szigetcsép. Based on the interviews, the author introduces the concept of collective narratives and distinguishes several types: argumentative narratives, narratives of shared memory, narratives of a common culture and perspectivation narratives (p.

153). The structure of interaction in the research interview is analysed as well as power relationships, which is important in gaining a perspective on the interaction between researchers (linked to the authority of the “motherland” and standard language variety) and interlocutors (linked to the diaspora situation and nonstandard Serbian) (p. 157). Since all interlocutors are bilingual or multilingual, awareness of language use becomes very important and it is analysed within the concept of metapragmatics. This chapter provides examples of code-switching during the in-group interaction among bilinguals. Ilić points out that “the narrative evaluation reveals that linguistic behaviour of the Serbian minority speakers is not being accepted as adequate by either speakers of standard Serbian or native Hungarian speakers” (p. 191). Considering the constant demographic decline of this community it was important to analyse in-tragroup boundaries and ethnic relations with neighbouring communities. Not to be neglected is the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church, especially in language vitality. The maintenance of boundaries to others is based on ethnic or religious categorisation: Bulgarians, Croats, Germans (Swabs), Gypsies, Magyars, Jews, Rác; Catholic, Orthodox, Reformists. In this way, discourse is one of the most important social practices in the structuring of self/other and the author emphasises the role of linguistic construction of ethnic boundary and common culture. In this chapter the author shows how collective narratives play an important role in cultural memory and in the confabulation of the common past. Ilić explicates three types of narratives on migration: the Great Serb Migration (migration to Hungary), “optation” narrative (migration from Hungary to the Kingdom of SCS in the 1920s) and narrative on the expulsion of Germans. The role of the past for the author’s interlocutors is based on the

temporal frame of reference *then/now*, which mainly refers to the period *before/after the Second World War* (p. 270). Faced with various social changes during the twentieth century, the Serbs in Hungary have redefined their traditional symbolic values, experiencing also a language shift.

In the final chapter, “Discourse and Ethnic Identity: Conclusion”, Ilić highlights the main goal of the book and the importance of this particular case study, drawing two conclusions. One is theoretical in nature and refers to the existence of collective narratives as a special group of narratives within one community. Using ethnolinguistic and anthropolinguistic methods, this research has shown that collective narrative is based on collective memory. Collective narrative is seen as a counterpart to the personal experience narrative (p. 289). The other conclusion is given in the form of a rhetorical question: “Can the study about an elder generation identity discourse tell us something which could concern our own selves in the current moment?” (p. 290). It is the question of power and powerless discourse in negotiating ethnic and national identity and its boundaries.

On the whole, the monograph is a valuable contribution to minority and diaspora studies, but it is also useful for scholars concerned with theoretical and methodological issues related to ethnicity, discourse and narrative. Apart from providing numerous fieldwork examples, this book offers an important analysis of the language and ethnic identity changes and challenges of a Serbian diaspora community.