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MAJORITY SERBIAN AND MINORITY HUNGARIAN STUDENTS' LANGUAGE ATTITUDES TO SERBIAN AND VARIOUS ACCENTS OF ENGLISH

*Többségi szerb és kisebbségi magyar diákok nyelvi
attitűdjei a szerb és az angol nyelv vonatkozásában*

*Jezički pristupi akcentologiji srpskog i engleskog jezika
kod učenika osnovnih i srednjih škola na mađarskom i
srpskom nastavnom jeziku u Vojvodini*

Abstract

The aim of the present study is to provide a comparison for the language attitudes of Hungarian minority and Serbian majority primary and secondary school students. The goal of the research is to give an insight into the language attitudes of Hungarian students and Serbian students living in Serbia towards the languages/varieties they are in daily or regular contact with, namely Serbian and various varieties of English (Hungarian Accented English, Serbian Accented English, British English and American English).

Keywords: language attitude, Hungarian minority and Serbian majority students from Vojvodina, Serbian language, accents of English.

1. Introduction

Language attitudes are attitudes which speakers of different languages/varieties have towards each others' or to their own language(s). Positive or negative feelings towards a language may reflect impressions of linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degree of importance, elegance, social status, etc. Attitudes towards a language may also show what people think about the speakers of that language. The social space in which various languages represent different linguistic capital and occupy dissimilar statuses on the linguistic market develop divergent language attitudes among multilingual speakers. Most frequently, the attitudes toward languages spoken/used in multilingual communities are in accordance with the linguistic identity and hegemony as well as economic, social, symbolic statuses of languages. That is, attitudes are more positive towards languages (or varieties) that are

to bring economic benefit for its speakers, while attitudes are less positive towards the ones that have low status and evaluation. The effort, desire and motivation to learn/speak/use a language is in strong relationship with the individuals' general attitudes towards the speakers of that particular community and the statuses of the languages on the linguistic market which can be detected through the study of languages attitudes. The benefit of exploring attitudes of such is crucial in multilingual and multicultural contexts especially from the minorities' point of view since their ignorance might easily have negative consequences on them, such as the abandonment of one's mother tongue, culture or identity or the opposite, strong rejection of the co-habiting ethnicities' language, culture. The revelation of the presence of either positive or negative language attitudes are to serve as basis and point of reference for governmental decisions when dealing with linguistic issues in a multilingual context.

This research, therefore, attempts to compare attitudes to languages that have different statuses in a multilingual community. The domain of education will be selected for the area of investigation since it plays a crucial role in shaping language attitudes. The subjects of interest will be primary and secondary school students in Vojvodina who are in daily contact with various languages as well as their various varieties. The present study attempts to provide a comparison of language attitudes towards the five languages/varieties spoken/used by students in Vojvodina to reveal any discrepancies in language attitudes among Hungarian minority and Serbian majority students.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Language attitudes*

Attitudes have been and continue to be in the focus of a great deal of research throughout several fields of social sciences. Thus, attitudes have been defined from different angles according to different theories and fields of sciences, such as sociology, social psychology, psycholinguistics as well as sociolinguistics on the basis of their angle of investigation. Within the frames of the latter scientific field, which focused on the linguistic aspects of attitudes defines language attitudes as the set of beliefs we hold towards a language or a language variety and more broadly, towards its speakers (Grosjean 1982).

When the investigation of language attitude began in the 1950s, their scope of examination was attitudes to different languages. Mostly bilingual studies were initiated in which researchers wanted to reveal to what degree attitudes towards two languages differ. Among the first research done in this area, the attitudes towards English and French were analyzed in Canada (Lambert et al. 1960). The researchers aimed to account for any differences in the evaluation of the same speaker when speaking in French and English. The findings of the study revealed that both French and English Canadians had stereotyped attitudes towards both languages. To be more specific, the research informants gave higher ratings to English than to French in many categories as a result of the high prestige of English in the country.

After the early studies of attitudes to different languages, an interest in attitudes towards different dialects of the same language soon emerged. One of the first studies, conducted for the purpose of examining the possible attitudes towards two dialects was realized by Tucker and Lambert (1969). Their research focused on the comparison of language attitudes towards northern white, southern white and southern Afro-American college students in the USA. They found that the listeners/judges made clear distinctions in the social evaluations of American dialects, namely, they rated the northern variety the most positively and the Afro-American variety the least positively. This study convincingly demonstrated that non-linguistics not only can, but do differentiate among various dialects of the same language and have stereotyped attitude towards their speakers.

Preston (1998) has come to similar conclusions when he investigated the attitudinal dispositions towards English varieties spoken in the USA among Alabama and Michigan university students. The respondents have proved to consider the least correct and pleasant English is spoken in New York City. In addition, Michigan students have also found the Southern dialect of English to be incorrect and unpleasant, however, this was not relevant for the Alabama students. Preston concludes that the native speakers of any dialects/varieties generally show high preference for their own dialect/variety, despite of its negative evaluation by speakers of other dialects/varieties.

Giles (1970) investigated the possible difference in the perception of various native and foreign accents of English in South Wales and South-West England. The secondary school informants listened to speakers of Received Pronunciation, French-accented, American, Irish, Welsh English, as well as, Birmingham, Cockney and Somerset English. The results indicate that the most non-prestigious accents, i.e. the industrial accents (Milroy 2001) received the lowest evaluations. Positive attitudinal dispositions were demonstrated towards other regional accents of England, other than the industrial ones, while the highest preference was shown to the RP. The foreign accents of English were also relatively highly ranked.

These studies have shown that very often the general public can differentiate between particular languages, dialects and accents as well as they have stereotyped attitudes towards most of these languages, dialects or accents (Preston 1989:51). This means that by noticing the differences of dialects and identifying them potential positive or negative evaluations towards its speakers rises in the listener. Although people are rarely aware of making such evaluations, they are quite common and widespread.

2.2. Tendencies in the research of language attitude

Edwards (1999: 102-103) believes that there are a number of patterns that seem to show important relevance in several studies on language attitudes. First, attitudes either towards languages or dialects and varieties reflect linguistics superiorities and inferiorities perceived or supposed by non-linguistics. He also claims that language

attitudes are strong reflections of social conventions and preferences, thus, the perception and production of varieties/dialects/languages inevitably trigger some sort of attitudes towards its speakers. It has been widely demonstrated that standard speech varieties tend to be evaluated most positively by native speakers in terms of status, in contrast, non-standard speech varieties tend to be evaluated more highly in terms of solidarity.

In multilingual contexts, attitudes towards languages carry relevant information concerning the social and economic relation of languages, i.e. its speakers. The research of language attitudes of multilingual groups provide valuable information of the status and evaluation of speakers that are used in the community, to be specific, the languages used or spoken by speakers of high status and power are usually positively evaluated while the languages of speakers of less power are more negatively evaluated (Ó Riagáin 2006: 329).

3. Methodology

3.1. Verbal-guise technique

An indirect approach to attitude research is applied with the aim of penetrating below the level of conscious awareness. Although the most frequently utilized indirect technique in the measurement of language attitudes is the matched-guise technique, in this research, it was decided to employ the verbal-guise technique. This decision was taken for three reasons. First, the use of spontaneous speech was more authentic than a pre-prepared text. Secondly, the control of the speech event, through the employment of the picture sequence provided suitable 'factually neutral' stimulus speech. The speakers were asked to explain a simple map (how to get from the church to the castle) (McKenzie 2008). Thirdly, from a practical point of view, it would prove impossible to find a single speaker who could convincingly produce all five varieties of speech selected for the present study.

The verbal-guise technique has been introduced by Giles and Powesland (1975) as the further development of the matched-guise technique. According to this language attitude measuring technique, different speakers provide the speech samples by producing some kind of spontaneous speech. The presence and the influence of various linguistic variables is less frequent, however, the application of this procedure is justified in instances where truly bilingual/bidialectal speakers are difficult to find. The advantages of using the verbal-guise technique are the naturally occurring speech and the presence of variance between the speech samples that would prevent the judges' boredom during listening to the speakers.

In accordance with previous attitude studies, a semantic-differential scale was utilized for the purposes of the verbal-guise section of the research instrument. The tendency among researchers has been to employ traits in the semantic-differential scale in the form of bi-polar adjectives in three, five or seven-point semantic-differential scale. The traits are generally categorized on the basis of two principal dimensions which are the following: social attractiveness and competence. The present study has

also followed this tendency, i.e. the research respondents were required to evaluate the speakers and mark their opinions on a seven-point scale and on the basis of the following characteristics and features: *honest, reliable, likeable, nice, generous, interesting* with the purpose of revealing the solidarity traits of the speakers, while the following features were used to focus on the status traits of the speakers: *educated, successful, rich, ambitious, prominent, confident*. This method aims to indirectly reveal the attitudes towards the languages and varieties that are tested in the present study.

3.2. *The varieties of speech selected*

The objective of the present study is to measure the attitudes of the majority and minority students towards Serbian and the various accents of English. In order to achieve this objective five speech samples (Hungarian, Serbian, British and American Accented English and Standard Serbian) were recorded from four distinct speakers. The speech samples for Standard Serbian and Serbian Accented English were provided by the same speaker.

In an attempt to further minimize potential extraneous factors among the selected speakers and speech recordings, a number of other factors were controlled, such as gender, age, level of education, quality of voice, topic and length of speech sample. Each of the speakers were men between the age of 40 and 58, had university degrees, had ordinary voice qualities, had to explain the same picture sequence and the length of their speech samples was around 1 minute.

3.3. *The informants and data collection*

The population selected for the present study was Serbian majority and Hungarian minority primary (7th and 8th grade) and secondary (3rd and 4th grade) school students from Subotica and Novi Sad. Their number in total was 318. The research respondents' ages were between 12 and 20. The population includes more women than men, the number of the female informants is 176, while that of men is 141. As for the mother-tongue, as well as, the participants' membership in terms of belonging to the majority or the minority nation is the following, in the present research there were 173 Hungarian respondents who belong to one of the minority groups in Serbia, while there were 145 Serbian students who belong the majority nation of the country. 201 of the informants study in Subotica, while 117 of them study in Novi Sad.

Data collection was carried out among Hungarian minority students in 2009 within the framework of LINEE project (Fenyvesi 2011) and among Serbian minority students in 2012 by the author herself.

The data presented in this study was gathered personally on various occasions during the students' regular, scheduled classes. The informants were asked to participate in a research by listening to five speakers who would try to explain and describe a map and afterwards provide their opinions of the speakers on the questionnaire distributed among them. The possibility of not participating in the research was also offered. Data collection took place at the beginning of the classes so as to ensure the students'

full commitment and attention to the task. The order of speakers was the following Hungarian Accented English, British English, Serbian, American English, Serbian Accented English. The Hungarian respondents did not listen to the speaker of Serbian Accented English, so their responses are relevant only in case of the speakers of Serbian, Hungarian Accented English, British and American English.

3.4. Data analysis

In order to investigate the research question, the numerical data were coded, entered and checked for errors, analyses was conducted with the use of SPSS (version 17.0). As for the internal reliability of the research instrument: the Cronbach's alpha is .928.

4. Discussion

The following section presents the results of the research which utilized the instrument of verbal-guise technique with the purpose of investigating, by indirect means, the language attitudes of majority and minority students towards Serbian and the various accents of English.

In the present study, a value of five always corresponds to the most favorable rating and, in contrast, a value of one always indicates the least favorable rating.

First, the status traits will be discussed followed by the solidarity traits.

4.1. Status traits

4.1.1 Status features and the respondents' ethnicity

The analysis of status traits brings light to the respondents' evaluation of the speakers' competences and social status. During data collection respondents were required to signal their opinion on a seven-point scale how confident, educated, successful, rich, ambitious and prominent they found the one Serbian and the other four English speaking speakers who were explaining and describing a map to the listeners.

The results for the status traits of the speakers of Hungarian Accented English, Serbian, British English and American English among Hungarian minority primary and secondary school students are shown in Figure 1 and the status traits of the speakers of Hungarian Accented English, Serbian, British English, American English and Serbian Accented English among Serbian majority primary and secondary school students are shown in Figure 2. Figures 1 and 2 show the respondents' ratings according to each status feature. As the rates show a visible difference can be noticed among the Serbian and Hungarian respondents rating, i.e. the Serbian subjects regarded each speaker more educated in comparison to the Hungarian respondents. However, the Serbian respondents did not consider the speakers as rich as the Hungarians evaluated the speakers' financial status.

Figure 1. Status traits – ratings of Hungarian minority students

<i>Vojs. Hun</i>	HunAccEng	Serb	BrEng	AmEng
Successful	3,63	3,48	3,33	3,61
Educated	2,68	3,03	2,65	2,86
Rich	3,95	3,84	3,51	3,77
Prominent	4,26	3,85	4,19	3,95
Ambitious	3,9	3,58	3,86	3,43
Confident	2,58	3,22	3,46	3,37

Figure 2. Status traits – ratings of Serbian majority students

<i>Vojs.Srb</i>	HunAccEng	Serb	BrEng	AmEng	SerbEng
Successful	3,7	3,86	3,39	4,06	3,19
Educated	4,62	4	4,44	4,14	3,61
Rich	2,59	3,04	2,5	2,78	3,5
Prominent	3,3	3,38	3,26	3,37	3,77
Ambitious	3,07	3,59	3,09	3,08	3,87
Confident	3,73	3,12	3,71	3,57	3,06

4.1.2 Status traits according to ethnicity and gender

According to the respondents' ethnicity and gender the results show that the highest evaluations on status traits were given to the speakers of Serbian and American English (Figure 3). The tendency is the same among Hungarian and Serbian speakers as well. However, there is a visible discrepancy concerning the rate values according to the ethnicity of the respondents. Hungarian respondents proved to be more critical and tended to under-evaluate each speaker in comparison to the Serbian respondents.

It is crucial to pay attention to Serbian speaker who provided two speech samples, the Serbian and the Serbian Accented English speech samples. The data show that the very same person when speaking different languages in differently evaluated. To be specific, when the Serbian native speaker explained and described the map in English, the Serbian respondents rated his competences and social status more negatively than when he was speaking in Serbian. The research subjects, of course, did not know that the same person was speaking Serbian and English as they were listening to the speech samples during the data collection procedure.

Figure 3. Status traits according to ethnicity and gender

<i>Status</i>	SrbFemale	SrbMale	HuFemale	HuMale
HunAccEng	4,45	4,23	3,54	3,6
Serbian	5,17	5,12	4,29	4,19
BrEng	3,99	3,92	3,4	3,43
AmEng	5,53	4,95	3,93	4,08
SerbAccEng	3,25	3,42		

4.1.3 Status traits according to ethnicity and school type

When analysing the ratings of status traits according to ethnicity and school type of the research respondents (Figure 4), it becomes clear again that the Hungarian respondents evaluated each speaker more negatively than the Serbian respondents. However, the tendency to prefer the Serbian and the American English speakers is relevant for both groups, i.e. both Hungarian and Serbian speakers regardless whether they attend a primary or secondary school show positive evaluations towards the Serbian and the American English speakers.

As for the Serbian speaker who also provided the Serbian Accented English speech sample, one can see that his English performance in the task of map description was more negatively rated as opposed his native language, i.e. Serbian performance according to the opinions of the Serbian respondents.

Figure 4. Status traits according to ethnicity and school type

<i>Status</i>	SrbPrim. school	SrbSec. school	HuPrim. school	HuSec. school
HunAccEng	4,34	4,38	3,35	3,73
Serbian	5,21	5,06	4,07	4,35
BrEng	3,77	4,18	3,37	3,44
AmEng	5,33	5,22	3,82	4,14
SerbAccEng	3,53	3,08		

4.1.4 Status traits according to ethnicity and residence

When analysing the data from the aspects of ethnicity and respondents' residence (Figure 5), the difference in the evaluation of all speakers among Hungarian and Serbian respondents is still visible, i.e. Hungarian respondents evaluated each speaker more negatively than Serbian respondents. The tendency to prefer the Serbian and the American English speakers more positively than all the other ones is also true for the data when looking at it from the aspects of ethnicity and respondents' residence.

As one can see, the Serbian speaker when speaking in English was again more negatively evaluation in opposition with speaking Serbian according to the opinions of the Serbian respondents.

Figure 5. Status traits according to ethnicity and residence

<i>Status</i>	SRB-Subotica	SRB-Novi Sad	HU-Subotica	HU-Novi Sad
HunAccEng	4,51	4,18	3,38	3,67
Serbian	5,16	5,14	4,14	4,52
BrEng	4,23	3,63	3,4	3,56
AmEng	5,52	4,99	4,02	4,09
SerbAccEng	3,68	2,9		

4.2. Solidarity traits

From here on, the solidarity traits will be discussed briefly. The evaluations of speakers on these traits are more complex than the status traits and show fewer clear tendencies. However, the tendency of Hungarian minority students to evaluate the speakers more negatively in opposition with the Serbian majority students is still relevant throughout the results for the speakers' solidarity traits.

Figures 6 and 7 show the overall results for the solidarity traits of the 5 speakers on the basis of the Serbian and Hungarian respondents. The data show a mirror reflection of the speakers' evaluation according the respondents' ethnicity. To be specific, while the Serbian primary and secondary school students considered the speakers to be more reliable, honest and generous in opposition with the Hungarian respondents, the latter group believed the speakers are rather nice, likeable and interesting in comparison to the Serbian respondents (except for the interesting feature for the Serbian speaker).

Figure 6. Solidarity traits – ratings of Serbian majority students

<i>VojvSrb</i>	HunAccEng	BrEng	Serbian	AmEng	SerbAccEng
Nice	2,62	3,04	3,76	3,18	3,32
Likeable	2,74	2,89	2,61	2,88	3,21
Interesting	2,54	3,06	4,02	2,9	3,02
Reliable	3,95	3,48	2,7	3,74	2,95
Honest	4,49	4,1	3,56	4,13	4,07
Generous	4,66	4,43	4,36	4,17	4,42

Figure 7. Solidarity traits – ratings of Hungarian minority students

<i>VojvHun</i>	HunAccEng	Serbian	BrEng	AmEng
Nice	3,58	3,8	3,51	3,63
Likeable	4,32	3,91	4,08	3,85
Interesting	4,73	4,37	4,12	4,16
Reliable	2,94	3,4	3,09	3,5
Honest	2,62	2,61	3,07	2,95
Generous	2,83	2,91	3,13	2,92

4.2.1 Solidarity traits according to ethnicity and gender

The analysis of the solidarity traits from the aspect of ethnicity and gender show that while a preference towards Serbian and American English still can be noticed that difference is not as sharp as the respondents' reactions for the status traits were.

Interestingly, the British English speaker received higher evaluations in comparison to his status rating. The British English speaker received almost as high evaluations as the American English speaker.

The Serbian Accented English speaker still received more negative ratings than the same speaker when he was speaking in Serbian.

Figure 8. Solidarity traits according to ethnicity and gender

<i>Solidarity</i>	SrbFemale	SrbMale	HuFemale	HuMale
HunAccEng	4,32	4,22	3,52	3,56
Serbian	4,8	4,68	3,86	3,78
BrEng	4,95	4,78	3,36	3,53
AmEng	5,04	4,32	3,69	3,79
SerbAccEng	3,89	3,89		

4.2.2 Solidarity traits according to ethnicity and school type

Figure 9 represents the data in the nexus of the respondents' ethnicity and school type. Both primary and secondary school students show preference for the Serbian, British and American English speakers, while the Serbian speaker when speaking English is more negative evaluated in comparison when speaking in Serbian.

Figure 9. Solidarity traits according to ethnicity and school type

Status	SrbPrim. school	SrbSec. school	HuPrim. school	HuSec. school
HunAccEng	4,5	3,97	3,36	3,66
Serbian	4,93	4,53	3,73	3,88
BrEng	4,8	4,94	3,48	3,43
AmEng	4,88	4,57	3,54	3,89
SerbAccEng	4,15	3,57		

4.2.3 Solidarity traits according to ethnicity and residence

In the nexus of respondents' ethnicity and place of residence, result still show a higher preference for the Serbian, British and American English speakers. The British English speaker is the most positively evaluated by the Serbian respondents living in Subotica.

The Serbian Accented English speaker is still more negatively evaluated in comparison to his Serbian performance, however, the respondents from Subotica still show a more positive rating towards the Serbian speaker speaking in English.

Figure 10. Solidarity traits according to ethnicity and residence

Solidarity	SRB-Subotica	SRB-Novi Sad	HU-Subotica	HU-Novi Sad
HunAccEng	4,44	4,06	3,52	3,78
Serbian	4,79	4,69	4,14	3,86
BrEng	5,23	4,44	3,4	3,43
AmEng	4,96	4,47	3,8	3,56
SerbAccEng	4,24	3,47		

5. Conclusion

The present research has aimed at the investigation of the language attitudes of Hungarian minority and Serbian majority students living in Subotica and Novi Sad towards Standard Serbian, American English, British English, Hungarian and Serbian Accented English. From the examination of attitudes towards the above mentioned languages among primary and secondary school students the following conclusions can be made.

First, it can be concluded that the Hungarian minority primary and secondary school students evaluated each speaker more negatively than the Serbian majority students.

Second, regarding status traits the Serbian and the American English speakers received the highest ratings both among Hungarian and Serbian students as well.

Third, regarding solidarity traits the Serbian, the British and American English speakers were most positively evaluated. The British English speaker achieved higher evaluations among Serbian students than among Hungarian ones.

Fourth, when the Serbian native speaker spoke English, his Serbian Accented English received lower ratings in each case than his Serbian performance among the Serbian majority respondents.

Összefoglaló

A nyelvi attitűdök kutatása különös jelentőséggel bír a többnyelvű közösségek tagjainak körében. Fontos, hogy a közösségben ismert és használt nyelvek vagy nyelvváltozatok társadalmi megítélése és értéke hogyan viszonyul egymáshoz. Ez a kutatás összehasonlító elemzést nyújt a vajdasági kisebbségi magyar és a többségi szerb általános és középiskolai végzős hallgatók nyelvi attitűdjéről. A kutatás célja, hogy a szerb és a magyar diákok nyelvi viszonyulásmódjairól adjon számot.

Kulcsszavak: nyelvi attitűd, vajdasági magyar kisebbségi és többségi szerb diákok, szerb nyelv, angol akcentusok.

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