

## ETHNOLOGY AND LINGUISTICS. An Introduction to Ethnological/Linguistical Research.

*The present text about the ethnological/linguistical or "ethnolinguistical" research is a part of a diploma thesis on linguistical and cultural situation of a group of Slovene workes and their families in Mannheim in West Germany.<sup>†</sup> It is a brief outline of previous linguistical and ethnological works which are of primary importance for defining and understanding the starting-points of research work in Slovenia.*

*In the time before World War 2 language studies were both in the USA and Great Britain best connected with anthropology. Linguistics has remained a subdepartment in American cultural anthropology. Anthropological linguistics (also known as ethnolinguistics, metalinguistics, macrolinguistics) derives from the definition of culture as understood by American cultural anthropology: "A culture is the way of life of a group of people, the configuration of all the more or less stereotyped patterns of learned behaviour and handed down to the next through the means of language and imitation." Culture cannot be envisioned without language "because language it that part of the culture that better than any other part assures people not only of the longevity of experience and knowledge but also participation in the experience and knowledge of others in the past and present." and because "Speech is so fundamental an activity of men and language so integral part of culture that no anthropology worthy of the name could pass either by. . . . For theory and method provide usefull, sometimes crucial examples of general problems – of how men differ, or of how they are alike; of how cultures work, or of how they change; of the scope of anthropology, or of the skills of the anthropologist."*

*Prewar studies of anthropological linguistics have derived from the description of unwritten Indian languages and from the reconstructions of the cultural picture. Therefore, they stressed the connection between vocabulary as a part of both language and culture. Vocabulary always more or less precisely describes the cultural inventory and is an expression of specific interests and values in the area of various techniques, social organization, religion, folklore. "The whole vocabulary of a certain language can be seen as a complex repertory of all ideas, interests and activities that attract the attention of an individual." Of course, it all depends on certain interest. Considering this, it becomes clear that the presence or absence of general terminology largely depends on the negative or positive nature of the interest for elements within a particular environment." The complexity of culture is seen in the multifariousness of vocabulary. From it, the following can be reconstructed: cultural type or the cultural level of individual communities, migration paths, migration and temporal determination of appearance of cultural elements and events. Obviously, vocabulary depends on the culture and language is a symbolic guide towards culture. A deeper connection between language and culture has been expressed in the so – called Sapir – Whorf hypothesis according to which people speak different languages and therefore live in different "worlds of reality"; language structures form the speaker's world view, condition his way of thinking and emotional response (the theory derives from the views of Humboldt and Boas). This view represents the correct understanding of the relation between language patterns and other cultural systems to that part of anthropology that defines culture as a system of historic patterns of life, implicit and explicit, rational and irrational, that guide the behavior of people.*



Determinism of the hypothesis has raised numerous criticisms. However, it is still present as a starting point in cognitive anthropology that "is concerned with the ways in which the speakers of a particular language classify and conceptualize phenomena,"... i.e. it studies "the ways in which the language of a particular society structures the perceptions or world view of its speakers." Linguistic tradition of Boas, Sapir and Whorf is also present in the branch of ethnolinguistics that deals with analyses of referential meaning or empirical semantics.

Linguists and anthropologists of the "London Circle" (Firth, Malinowski) have stressed the importance that a language has in a culture from the view of its functionality. Language is above all a mode of activity and a means of cultural transfer. The meaning of linguistic messages can only be analysed by considering a broader context (on the Trobriand islands, Malinowski contextually distinguishes three language functions: magic, narrative and pragmatic), therefore the name "contextual linguistics".

Functional aspect, developed by the Prague Linguistic Circle stresses that language is a system of expressive means of Communication. A study of texts that differ in their theme, form and purpose and that reflect a sender's intellectual and emotional inclination is necessary – in many ways, language is conditioned by extralinguistic elements outside the sphere of language; language of literature differs from the language of science, media, street or office.

The social function of language has been programmedly accented in de Saussure's definition of language (language is a system of signs with the social function of communication). His linguistics was defined in such a way that it excluded the study of concrete linguistic manifestation (*la parole*) in favor of language (*langue*) as a sign system ("the only real subject of linguistics is language by itself and for itself" that is hyperindividual, socially accepted and conditioned. The nature of the system enables communication within the framework of a speech community and postulates an ideal speaker ("de Saussure's paradox").

Something similar has happened to the opposition language competence (knowledge of a language) /language performance (usage of a language) in the transformational – generative grammar of Noam Chomsky. Linguistic attention was directed at the study of competence and of abstract knowledge of rules that enable speaker an almost unlimited number of possibilities of understanding and creating linguistic messages in his language. "Linguistic theory primarily deals with an ideal speaker-listener from a totally homogeneous speaker group that has complete command of his language and on whose recollection of his knowledge of language during speech activity grammatically irrelevant circumstances like limited memory, absentmindedness, shanges in attention and interest and mistakes (accidental and characteristic) have no effect."

Language use in which linguistic differences are justified has been left out of studies. However, first revelations and the „division of language" on the systemic part (de Saussure's *langue* and Chomsky's *competence*) and on the variable part (de Saussure's *parole* and Chomsky's *performance*) are of fundamental value to those schools in contemporary linguistics that have begun to systematically observe the latter part in which social and cultural determination of a language is seen. In a language description its stratification is expressed in its presentation as a diasystem of a subspecies, various styles that are primarily defined with the linguistic form (literary, conversational, colloquial, dialectal) and with the function of the message (artistic and non-artistic messages). This is a necessary guideline in the study of texts (spoken and written) and in the consideration of those extralinguistic circumstances that co-form messages. The context of one's communication has stepped into the forefront. Part of it is speech activity, man's primary means of expressing his relationship with the world and other people. For a broader linguistic learning inclusion of historic, social, psychological and cultural revelations was unavoidable.

Recent decades are characterized by a systematic study of broader aspects of man's linguistic communication in the form of the meeting point between linguistics and the before-mentioned sciences at those sections that derive from the interest of each discipline.

There is a growing demand for a total interdisciplinary learning of man's language use together with his other activities in which language is, to a larger or to a lesser degree, an important communication of communications.

Sociology of language (sociolinguistics) and "ethnography of communication" accept the rich tradition of anthropological, socio-psychological, psycholinguistic, comparative cultural and semiological research. They attempt to sistemize the learning about verbal behaviour and habits in various situations, groups, societies and cultures. The starting point of the „sociology of language" is an opinion that "man constantly uses language – spoken, written and printed – and is in constant contact with other people with whom he shares modes of behaviour. Sociology of language researches the interaction between two aspects of a man's behaviour. In short, sociology of language is interested in a whole scale of questions that refer to the social organization of language use, including not only the use of language as such but also an evaluation of language and the actual attitude towards the language and its users."

The actual attitude towards the language and its speakers is also a political and educational question (norms in the language, policy towards the language, problems of multilingualism and education...). The language itself is the



contents, the bearer of social scopes and ideology and thus subject to manipulation. Language is not symbolic by itself but only as much as linguistic variants – individual languages or language variants represent certain interests, past, origin ("prestige" languages); its symbolic value is greater or lesser, grows or ebbs with the rise and fall of the role of the most characteristic and most important functions that a certain linguistic variant has within a certain speech community.

Contrary to the tradition of linguistic relativism (and also cultural relativism), the key question is what people do with the language, not how language guides people.

The tendency for a broader linguistic learning, one that is enriched by a broader culturally or socially motivated information, is also present in the contemporary Slovenian linguistics. However, little cooperation with other sciences has not enabled a more systematic planning of interdisciplinary research. The various reasons for this are connected with the orientation of individual schools of linguistics. Each part of Slovenian linguistics has drawn explanatory information from other sciences. Thus, historic and geographic data had to be considered in the historical grammar, in etymology, in onomastics and in dialectology already in the last century.

In the post-war period, information from the social sciences was present in the study of the history of Slovenian literary language, stylistic development of Slovene literature and in the study of the variants of Slovenian language in the history and in the given period of time.

Much attention was given to the state of Slovenian language in the countries with a Slovenian minority. Here, contemporary sociolinguistic approaches were applied.

The purpose of cooperation of linguistics with other sciences has been stressed at several places. It is not a matter of professional initiatives that would only serve themselves but it is the matter of Slovenian language in public life (Slovenian language in public life!), of its reflection of social and cultural development. "Consideration of the social fundamentals of Slovenian linguistic development demands special attention and a new, contemporary evaluation. I do not mean a "social frame" within which independent linguistic research would be organized. What I mean is, that we, together with sociologists, ethnologists, historians . . . , should find the starting points for an evaluation of how much does the language reflect social development and also, to what extent did social relations in Slovenia influence the attitudes towards the language . . ."

Cooperation of linguistics and ethnology has recently been envisioned differently than before. The development of the relation between ethnology and Slavic language studies shows that in the era of Romanticism, ethnology, linguistics and literary history were considered part of the complex Slavic language studies (akin to German language studies). "Inclusion of a certain part of ethnology or ethnological thought into the framework of Slavic language studies was not accidental. Only that part was included that suited the then concept of the studies: interest in the so-called spiritual culture from the very precise viewpoints – in the 1840ies it was termed folkoristics . . . Basically, it was a search for the national or folk spirit that was long ago wholesome, organic, natural and pure . . . Compared to the ethnology of the Enlightenment period, thematic frames were very narrow: they bored into the depth of time, into the mythological past towards the supposedly genuine folk, national and natural values." Research areas were corresponding: spiritual and cultural values, forms of folk literature (heritage). Even after individual disciplines detached themselves from the common framework of the Slavic studies, the union of ethnology (which studies objects) and linguistics – the *Wörter und Sachen* concept – represented the "future of cultural history, culturally-historically oriented ethnology and linguistics. This orientation would give solid, documented reconstructions of the historic changes of individual cultural elements, especially of the house and tools.

Latest ethnological concept does not deny or exclude these forms of union with linguistics that concentrates on the literary history and folkoristics but it definitely surpassed them. The alliance of linguistics and literary history via folkoristics will still remain fruitful as ethnology has interest in the creativity of individuals and groups in the field of literary creation. The same is true of the linguistic viewpoint.

However, neither linguistics nor ethnology show their interest in a language only because of its purely poetic function. To both sciences language represents, in their contemporary concept, a man's expression of his relationship towards the world. "The study of languages, especially of lingual habits in the creation of oral and written messages is of the key importance to the understanding of our way of life." Since Slovenian linguistics is interested in the linguistic communication of a Slovenian in the broadest social context and since the subject of ethnological research is a Slovenian in all aspects of everyday life, the question of professional union is redundant.

Linguistic habits are discovered with the study of man's total activity in space and time of everyday life, in all situations when an individual speaks and enters into interaction with others and defines this interaction with language and through it more or less consciously, when steering these relations with language, reveals and evaluates himself.

Language accompanies a man since his birth when he is given a name and when his future used to be told. An individual can learn a language. He also learns where and how he (may) use it in various situations in life. He develops linguistic habits with which he regulates his life and interacts with others at home, on the street, at school, at work, in his



*home town and sometimes in a completely alien environment, ones that are also alien, linguistically new. We have little data on the life of Slovenians abroad that point to certain regularities and far too many stereotype judgements about dissolution into the majority and simultaneous loss of ethnic identity and consciousness. Only research that studies Slovenians abroad from the widest context of life can confirm or refute this. Ethnology also recently entered such a wide orientation.*

<sup>+</sup>*Ingrid Slavec, Slovenes in Mannheim. An Attempt in an Ethnological/Linguistical Presentation. A diploma thesis. (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Edvard Kardelj, Ljubljana, Department of Ethnology). Mannheim, Ljubljana 1981.*

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