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The Identification and Definition of the Minority Community as an Ideological Construct: the Case of Slovenians in Italy

When identifying the language/-s spoken by different members of a community, we first categorise and then further merge it/them into definitions. The author discusses some such definitions often used in discourse on the Slovenian language in Italy. The author gathered and analysed these definitions using the method of critical analysis of media discourse on language. She discusses the material from an epistemological perspective that transcends the linguistics field and reaches to other fields of humanities and social studies. Namely, the social dynamics and cultural paradigms of a language-speaking community are reflected in the perceptions of languages, their practices, and language policies. In this article, the author shows examples of language definitions found in the analysed material and explains when and why these definitions could be problematic.

Keywords: linguistics epistemology, critical discourse analysis, language ideology, mother tongue, standard language, dialect.

Opredeljevanje in definicija jezika narodne manjšinske skupnosti kot ideološki konstrukt: primer Slovencev v Italiji

Ko želimo opredeliti jezik/-e, ki ga/jih uporabljajo različni govorniki neke skupnosti, ga/jih po navadi razvrstimo v kategorije, ki jih nadalje strnemo v definicije. V nadaljevanju članka avtorica obravnava nekatere take definicije, ki se pogosto pojavljajo v diskurzu o slovenskem jeziku v Italiji; definicije so bile zbrane in analizirane s kritično analizo medijskih diskurzov o jeziku, v tem prispevku pa gradivo obravnava kot epistemološko vprašanje, ki ne sega samo na področje jezikoslovnih ved, ampak tudi na druga področja humanistike in družboslovja. Skozi percepcije jezika ter prakse in politike, ki so z jezikom povezane, se namreč odražajo družbene dinamike in kulturne paradigme skupnosti govorcev. V članku avtorica ob primerih definicij jezika, ki jih je zasledila v analiziranem gradivu, pokaže, kdaj in zakaj so lahko te definicije sporne.

Ključne besede: epistemologija jezikovnih ved, kritična analiza diskurza, jezikovna ideologija, materni jezik, knjižni jezik, narečje.

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1. Introduction

In this article, I introduce some results from the first part of the research conducted in 2009–2015, which I explain in detail later on.

The aim of this article is to show the ideologically motivated use of some, originally otherwise neutral language definitions and phenomena. This question is significant since the ideologically motivated use occurs predominantly in the media discourse and, at the same time, reflects and determines public opinion. The language can in certain circumstances become an element that represents grounds for establishing relations between belonging and excluding, power and discrimination, knowing (knowledge) and not knowing (ignorance). Knowing these dynamics can contribute to more informed identifications of the language and language phenomena, and can at the same time offer some tools for the implementation of more efficient language planning policies. A comprehensive critical analysis of language definitions that occur in a certain context is rare in scientific literature, even though there are some studies that discuss in depth some views that I will point out further on.

The goal of this article is to review the five most common definitions of language and language phenomena that occur in the selected corpus of texts and thus show how specific definitions gain an ideological connotation if used outside the epistemological context in which they originate.

2. Theoretical Framework

In the period of 2009–2015, the first research series was conducted on the language discourse of those speakers identified as the Slovenian national community (minority) in Italy (Grgič 2016). Predominantly those texts were examined that were published in the three printed media published in the population area of the Slovenian minority in Italy – i.e. *Primorski dnevnik*, *Novi glas* and *Novi Matajur*. One of the aspects I have analysed is the use of specialised terminology from different linguistics studies; I have focused on certain terms that the authors have used frequently in the analysed texts to define (Slovenian) language. This research is currently ongoing by gathering material from public and publicly available sources, mostly those on-line. Besides other findings (Grgič 2011, 2016), the analysis so far has also opened some epistemological questions, related to generally recognised definitions and terminological identifications of the language that overcame the boundaries of specialised texts and have become a part of a general discourse on language.

These are mostly sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and language didactics terms, such as mother tongue or first language, the language of the environment, second language, foreign language, and others, as well as some identifications of different types of language, e.g. standard language or dialect. These definitions

are used to identify different aspects of language and its use, though they do not necessarily belong to the same epistemological context. That is why an individual definition can become questionable or at least unsuitable. Each one of these identifications or definitions namely arose in a certain context, with certain goals, and with certain boundaries; they were products of individual linguistics studies' necessity to define its subject of examination and to verbalise it as precisely as possible (Grgič 2016, 15). That is why we can form a hypothesis that each of these definitions is ideologically neutral within its original context (Van Dijk 2006); as soon as they are used outside that context and with different intentions, they become more or less ideologically motivated.

The use of a certain language definition in epistemological contexts that are different to the definitions' original contexts can be especially questionable when it spreads into linguistically more exposed areas and when it becomes a part of a general discourse on language perception, on attitude towards the language, and on knowledge of the language. In such cases, the use of individual definitions may no longer have (only) cognitive, gnoseological function, but (mostly) a distinctive ideological background, so that within language discourses, it starts creating divisions between us and them, starts raising the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, superordination and subordination, of knowing (knowledge) and not knowing (ignorance) that can, in the end effect, be even discriminatory (Van Dijk 2006, Elias & Scotson 2008).

Language definitions and identifications that were supposed to be professionally neutral, non-ideological and aprioristic can thus be – the same as the use of language itself – the element that reflects social relations and cultural formations if not even generates them. This is especially obvious in linguistically exposed areas where seemingly neutral language identifications can also represent the identity option of speakers and community (Pertot 2014, 14). In other words: the community is not only formed through its language but also through perceptions and definitions of this or other languages with which this community is in contact (Grgič 2016, Petrović 2006).

3. Methodology

The research is based on the examination of the text corpus by using the method of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2010, Van Dijk 2006, 2008, 2012). Unlike classical discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA) that is based on the prior findings of Althusser, Foucault and other theories focuses mainly on the two aspects: the identification of language as a social practice and a discourse as a space where relationships of power, domination, and exclusion (can) form (Wodak & Meyer 2001, 2-12). The critical discourse analysis thus does not only discuss textual elements and narration processes but also the contexts from which these texts and processes derive. That is why it calls for a

distinctively interdisciplinary approach that should take into consideration different elements (texts, social interaction, culture formations and others), and for orientation towards concrete goals and changes in current social situations (Van Dijk 1993, 253). Critical discourse analysis is thus a method that is especially useful and usable there, where it is presumed that the processes of exclusion and domination are a consequence of subtle discourse practices, and where we believe that by using this analysis, we can contribute to more aware and structured discourses as well as to the introduction of different development politics – even with the language.

4. Analysis: Definitions and Language Identifications

In the analysed texts, we can see frequent use¹ of mainly those terms that are introduced later in this paper. The speakers use them to identify not only the language as an object but also this language's place in the society and their attitude towards it. In short, the expert terms and definitions introduced in this paper are not only the a posteriori marks that place language in a certain scientific paradigm but also identification options that shape language as a cultural formation.

4.1 Mother Tongue

The terminology linking the language learning process with the role of a mother, and language proficiency and its use with the concept of the nation, was established primarily in the 19th century (Hobsbawm 1992) but was already formed before that time. Dante Alighieri, e.g. defined that concept in a slightly different way by saying that folk language is the language learned by children spontaneously when in contact with their nannies – as opposed to the Latin that they had to learn later, intentionally and with teachers.² Despite the terminological inconsistency, some key features can be observed in the Dante's and the later definition of mother tongue: Early learning and consequentially optimal language proficiency that represents the primary (if not the only) option of individual's identification and thus the primary (if not the only) nationally constitutive element (Formigari 2001, 272).

The concept of mother tongue is generally linked with the formation of the ideal – and not necessarily real – speaker whose language knowledge and skills are intertwined with the speaker's origin (Saniei 2011, 77), i.e. the family as well as the social, cultural and national (Mufwene 1994). Mother tongue thus represents a static category since it is clear that no speaker can a posteriori influence the language used by their parents from the speaker's birth to about the third year of age. Mother tongue cannot be changed – it is some sort of a birthmark, presumably given by the family, especially by the family member that nurtures the baby: the mother (Davies 2003). While the interpretation of

the language as a static formation that equates learning processes, identification options and the proficiency level was in line with classical philosophical, social and linguistic theories of the 19th century, in the 20th century epistemological, cultural, and social frame changed fundamentally. The concept of mother tongue remained present in popular literature but was reshaped into the concept of a native speaker or the first language in scientific contexts (Bonfiglio 2010), as we will see later on.

The term mother tongue is mostly used in popular texts where it may have entirely different meanings. In the analysed corpus of texts, the following options that define mother tongue are most frequent: “the language that the speaker knows the best”; “the language that the speaker learned first”; “the language with which the speaker identifies himself.”³ Mostly the combination of these three meanings and uses is questionable or ideologically motivated: it is namely by no means self-evident or certain that the speaker knows the first taught language the best and that this is the language with which the speaker primarily and exclusively identifies himself – even within the speaker’s options of ethnic belonging (Myhill 2003). In the analysed text corpus, the minority language (Slovenian) is predominantly identified as the mother(’s) tongue of the speakers that identify themselves as a part of this group.

In the analysed pool of 250 texts, this term occurred twenty-one times. For comparison: a related term first language bearing the meaning “the language that the speaker learned first in early childhood / the family” recurred four times, and the term primary language does not occur at all. We can see from the texts that the term mother tongue always occurs in one possible combination of meanings that derive from the above-mentioned options (the language that the speaker knows the best and has learned as the first and with which they identify themselves): “mother tongue is a language that a child learns in early childhood from its environment, most times from the mother”; “[mother’s tongue] is a gift”; “this is the language that belongs to us.” The quantity and the collocations of these occurrences – mostly in comparison to other related identifications of the minority language – show a certain paradigm predominant in a community of speakers. This is a national-bourgeois paradigm of the 19th century that equated the language with the nation and furthermore linked both with the family: the speaker – a member of the nation was born and raised in that language; something that clearly happens within the family where the mother plays the crucial role.

Given the fact that the media considered in this article is widespread and given the number of term occurrences, we can assume that this media discourse paradigm is spreading and is becoming generally accepted in the entire community of Slovenian-speaking speakers in Italy. Alongside other factors, this can additionally influence the establishment of a static, nostalgic identification of the language and can thus also steer language planning policies and strategies in the same direction.

4.2 First Language (Also Native Speaker)

The term first language that is to some extent related to the term mother tongue, occurs rarely (four occurrences) in the analysed text pool; the term native speaker meaning “the speaker that has been learning the language since birth or has already learned it by the third year of age” does not occur in the analysed texts. I only mention it here because it is frequently used⁴ in contemporary linguistics and also in popular texts.

Both terms (first language and native speaker) summarise some aspects of the term mother tongue but were based on the generative grammar theory and cognitive linguistics that were established in the second half of the 20th century; in such context, their function is neutral and thus enable scientists to understand certain formation and transformation processes. By defining the term of a native speaker, Chomsky set foundations for his generative grammar that sees the transformational processes as intuitive derivations of the internal language, referred to as the I-language by the generativists (Isac & Reiss 2013, 77).

The terms first language or native speaker can, though, become problematic when they are used in sociolinguistics and language didactics without appropriate identification, especially when discussing linguistically exposed and multilingual areas (Bonfiglio 2010). As with the definition mother tongue, the terms first language and native speaker also presume a static condition – that the speaker presumably has the best knowledge of the same language through their entire life and that this is the language the speaker has learned in early childhood –, which is, at least in such environments, more an exception rather than the rule. This is where the presumption that becomes a general fact in an ideological discourse derives from (Van Dijk 2006): that a native speaker is a better and more competent speaker in comparison to someone that has learned a language at a later time in life; equating presumably all native speakers – all speakers that have learned a certain language in their earliest childhood, regardless of their later language skills development – is also ideological. Nevertheless, this concept also became a part of language competence (self)evaluation where a degree of level proficiency is often marked simply with terms mother tongue, native speaker or first language that only state the fact of which language the speaker has learned as the first or in their early childhood but not also how the speaker is using this language at the moment of their proficiency (self)evaluation.

By doing so, the concept that contemporary didactics and the theory of language learning discuss as essential mainly for learning minority languages, loses its meaning entirely: this is the concept of exposure. The research has namely shown that exposure to the language is a key factor for achieving a certain language proficiency level (Thordardottir 2011). Even with the concept of exposure, the speakers' age is one of the factors that influence the effectiveness of language learning: early exposure is in principle more effective than the one later in life. Nevertheless, exposure to language also includes other factors that are

considered as fundamental elements of the learning processes. Learning is more effective if the exposure is continuous (if the speaker is exposed to the language all the time or at least in different periods of their life) and diverse (if the speaker is exposed to different uses and communication practices of this language – i.e. different codes, genres and idioms or lects⁵).

Based on the research focusing on the concept of exposure it is, though, important to promote spontaneous language learning in the earliest period (0–3 year). At the same time, language planning policies and implementation of didactic models should ensure further continuous exposure to diverse language practices. These should not only enable but also demand from the speakers the use of different language codes, genres and idioms of a certain language continuum⁶. Language proficiency that is in epistemological context perceived as a lever of language skills development (Meisel 2007, 496) is thus a result of different factors, environments and strategies – it changes over time and is not just an end product. Whether a certain language is the speaker's mother tongue or not, or the first language or not, is thus in this perspective only one of the three key factors that influence what we could – lastly – name language proficiency. The role of the family (and, presumably, of the mother) in the language learning processes and achieving a certain level of language proficiency or skills is in this epistemological paradigm somewhat redimensioned. Whether a speaker is more or less proficient or skilful in different ways of using a given language – code, genre, idiom – depends only to some (though important) extent on the fact in which language the speaker communicated (presumably with parents, relatives and caretakers) in their earliest period of life. The responsibility for successful learning and lastly even for language proficiency is thus, at least partially, shifting from the family to the society or the community of speakers which is in such model implicitly responsible for forming proper strategies that will ensure continuous and differentiated exposure of speakers to different uses of the language.

In the analysed pool of texts, I did not come across the term exposure (meaning exposure to language or different language usage in the language learning processes). This can mean that the models of indirect or direct support of practices that supposedly retain only certain forms, structures and types of use of the Slovenian language are becoming more established than the active and professionally examined language policies. Further ongoing studies in the community of speakers of the Slovenian language in Italy show that these are mostly normalised, standard/literary models and uses that supposedly display the authenticity and autarchy of the local language.

Next to the term mother tongue examined in this article, the identification our language is most frequently used in the analysed pool of texts. This is an explicit use of a deictic term that authors of the texts use with very different references: Sometimes they identify with it the entire continuum of the Slovenian

language and its idioms, and sometimes only local use, dialects and even certain specific occurrences of language contact, e.g. different compensation strategies, code-mixing and code-switching. Such use of the label our language shows that the speakers identify themselves with different idioms of the Slovenian language continuum, predominantly with the local variants (Pertot 2014).

4.3 Language of Environment

If we presume that a corresponding exposure is necessary in order to achieve a certain level of language proficiency that enables the speaker to competently use the language in presumably all communication environments, the presence of the language in the environment becomes essential. In the discussed pool of texts, the minority language is in fact identified as the language of the environment where it is presumed that the speakers can (also) learn it spontaneously – within their living environment where they are sufficiently exposed to this language. In the analysed texts, I found this term in connection with the Slovenian language in Italy seven times, most (five) in texts that can be classified as popular scientific.

The definition of the minority language as the language of the environment is also not always self-evident, even though it is established in many areas.⁷ What is in fact regarded as the term environment, is namely already problematic. The fact that the presence of a language in only some environments – e.g. family, neighbourhood, informal communication situations – and only in a certain development period – e.g. childhood – leads into a sociolinguistic situation referred to as diglossia that was already proven a long time ago (Schiffman 1993, 120). But not only that: Even in the areas where the use of the minority language is possible in more prestige environments, e.g. school, public space, legal administrative procedures or other public administrative contacts, it can occur that the language use is weakening in other contexts and is thus abandoned in the long run as the general means of communication (Cooper 1989).

When defining the environment in which the language should be present for successful spontaneous learning and language skills development, one of the effective exposure factors is most often not taken into account: diversity. (Legal) status and (perceived) prestige that are also defined by the presence of the language in some formal contexts, mostly public, do not ensure the use of the minority language in potentially all communication situations. This would enable speakers to use different, even not standardised and less formal codes – from general colloquial language to different types of slang and jargon.

Furthermore, the environment cannot be understood merely as a physical space in which speakers exist. The language environment is also an environment with which the speakers are in indirect contact through their communication practices and do not require all participants of such communication processes to be present at the same time. In the past, mostly books and letters made such practices possible, then newsletters and magazines, and later on even television

and radio shows, films, and records. Language environment today is largely virtual and on-line: social networks, web media, chat rooms and other e-content and channels represent an important segment of communication. If in a world where such communication practices blur the line between the local and the global (even within a single language continuum) the speakers remain in contact only with local variants of certain language continuum, it may happen that their spectrum of available codes, genre and idioms or lects drastically decreases or it at least does not develop in line with new communicational requirements.

One consequence of that is the fact that even languages of a community that is otherwise not a language enclave or island (Auer & Schmidt 2010), are reduced to the level of so-called heritage languages (Benmamoun et al. 2010) that in the end only have a symbolic value but no functional ties with a wider community of speakers of a certain language continuum (Cooper 1989). The second consequence is the establishing of a parallel standard in all environments and communicational situations. The speakers are no longer familiar with types of use that are distinctive for presumably the entire language continuum but only with those distinctive for their own narrow environment or even geographical space. That is why they begin to develop compensation strategies (Winford 2003) that at first enable them to communicate in a dialect, perceived as a part of their own language continuum; at some point, though, these usages can be very different from otherwise standard use in this given language continuum.

The identification of a minority language as the language of the environment is thus not self-evident. This definition is entirely arbitrary and thus ideological if it is not founded on empirically provable information⁸ that can prove that there is enough of such language presence in an environment that spontaneous learning processes of a wide spectrum of language codes of a certain continuum can be established. On the level of language strategies, planning and didactics such establishing can be problematic since it is founded on false or at least unconfirmed assumptions.

4.4 Second and Foreign Language

In a context where definitions of the mother tongue and the first language, the native speaker and the language of the environment are problematic, the line between the mother tongue and the foreign language or between the first and the second language (or languages) also starts to weaken or shift in a different way.

At least until the second half of the 20th century, it was generally considered that every speaker has their own mother tongue and that they can know one or more foreign languages. Of course, this division was not entirely up to date even in a pre-globalised world: it mostly reflected the ideology of one nation – one language. In the second half of the 20th century, rapid social changes and new epistemological models brought some kind of a tripartite division to the

first language (or languages), learned in early childhood and definitely before all other languages, the second language (or languages), learned in different life periods in environments with such language exposure, and foreign languages, learned in a didactically structured environment, presumably without contact with an environment or environments in which these languages are generally present (Schmidt 2010).

In such model, the first language of a member of a certain minority community is supposed to be a minority language, the second language the majority language with which this member would be in contact in the environment, and the foreign language or the third language the language learned only in school. This division should also reflect the proficiency level and type – the first language is the language the speaker knows the best, sequentially then follow the second and the foreign language (languages) – and the individual's identification with the language or the community that uses this language: in such paradigm, the language of the identification is strictly mother tongue or the first language. Right after the beginning of the 21st century, it became clear that such divisions are obsolete (Canagarajah 2005).

The exposure to first and non-first languages in multilingual and generally heterogeneous and dynamic societies can be very different. That is why the learning processes, language proficiency and types of use of different languages with which the speakers are in contact also differ. Modern technologies, mainly web access to examples of language use, enable certain forms of spontaneous learning. Up until recently, this was impossible or even unimaginable. At the same time, interim phases of language perception and knowledge are appearing in the multilingual, dynamic and heterogeneous communities. These phases cannot be identified within the mentioned divisions.

The complex dynamic of language learning and identification with different communities of speakers occurs precisely in minority communities; as a consequence, e.g., the proficiency level of the second (majority) language is higher with some minority speakers than the level of the first (minority) language, and the speakers identify their belonging to different groups of speakers in different periods of their lives, thus creating fluid and multiple identities (Pertot 2014, 20). Next to that it can occur that speakers only develop certain codes, idioms or functions (though they may be prestige, literary or formal) in the minority language – even though this is their first language – and are not familiar with the broad spectrum of use in a different communication context (Cooper 1989).

4.5 Standard Language and Dialect

In the analysed texts, the terms standard language⁹ and dialect occurred twelve and nine times respectively. A label standard also occurred several (six) times in certain collocations, e.g. “standard use”, “this is not standard” etc.; a label dialect is also used in phrases such as “all that is in dialect”, “dialect poetry” etc. (seven

times). Standard language has very unambiguous connotations: It represents a standardised, high-standard language that the speakers should have used as often as possible; it is a model and a canon for the language use. As we will see further on, the connotation of a dialect is not as unambiguous.

The concept of the standard language as the highest language level that all cultivated speakers should try to achieve, was lastly formulated in the 19th century, hand in hand with the rise of the bourgeoisie and with the processes of modern nation-states formation. In this context, standard language played a part in connecting and in nation formation (Joseph 1987). This role at least partially changed in the social context of the transition from the 20th to the 21st century.

The idea that every country (nation) should have an own language that defines it and with which it can identify, and is at the same time used for communicating at the highest social levels was already present in the Middle Ages and began spreading rapidly during the Renaissance: When the individual standard languages formed and became standardised, Dante's dream of a national idiom came true – it was to be *illustre* (prestige), *cardinale* (standard in normative sense), *aulico e curiale* (suitable for use at court, i.e. for political and state matters).

Standard language is an ideal and always also at least partially an artificial construct. Different from other idioms, it namely does not develop only spontaneously (Lippi-Green 1997): It is also defined and delineated by individual groups that are formed in a certain context as the (scientific, expert, artistic) elites that gain power and the role of setting the language norm (Petrović 2006). These groups then set the models and criteria under which they will form the standard language: The language that undergoes these standardisation processes and lastly becomes the standard language is a result of discarding language elements based on the criteria of geography, history, and genre. At the same time, language learning methods are defined in these processes thus implicitly and explicitly limiting the group of speakers that have the option to access genres of this language that are perceived as the highest (Tollefson 2000).

The perception of the standard language as the highest and most prestigious language level and also the only standard for language proficiency evaluation changed in the 20th century. On one side, the quantity and the diversity of texts created by the community of speakers, distinctively influenced the emergence and the development of different language genres that became the most suitable or that were established as a canon of an individual text genre (Kodrić 2010). On the other side, because of social movements and the emergence of new, different groups of speakers, it became more and more apparent that the standard language cannot be the only idiom that is considered *cardinale* in a particular language context. With the development of (language) technologies nowadays, even the concept of standardisation or the norm essential for standard language has different dimensions and valences.

The problem of the language genre study, established during the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, is especially distinctive on language exposed areas and considering the lack of natural language learning processes. It can thus potentially occur that mainly the speakers of non-autochthonous minorities, e.g. migrants, never achieve the proficiency level of the hosting country's standard language that would be comparable to the level of other speakers which can lead to social inequalities and discrimination (Lippi-Green 1997). Inversely, it can occur that individual speaker communities know and use standard language because they learn it in didactically structured environments, but do not know any other language genres because they are not adequately exposed to them – e.g. this happens to the national minority communities that live outside areas where this language is primary. As a consequence, the use of this language is being discarded (Pauwels 2016) since the (formal, written) standard language is not suitable for use in certain, especially less formal contexts that represent the most common communicational practices and thus the use of the language. Next to that, speakers do not always identify themselves with a standard language since they perceive it as distant and partially artificial (Kordić 2010); when analysing communities of speakers it is more distinctive that – perhaps because of the lack of a not-normalised yet still standardised general colloquial idiom – the speakers do not identify themselves with uses that are typical for the entire Slovenian language continuum, but rather more and more distinctively with local variants of the Slovenian language (Pertot 2014).

In emphasising and supporting the local community, the dialects and their functions have a special place within a broad spectrum of language uses and communicational practices. A dialect is on one side a carrier of authenticity values, locality and belonging to a (smaller) community, and on the other a lower lever genre of the non-cultivated speakers (Grgič 2016). It is sometimes hard to establish a synthesis between these two positions that would bridge such purely dichotomic divisions. Because of that, the attitude towards a dialect is always only partial and thus problematic. After all, this can also be reflected in the policies of language planning, language revitalisation, and the development of the minority community languages (Dorian 1994, 486-487). Though this dualism is typical for the history and epistemology of linguistic studies of the 20th century, it is even more apparent in certain geographical and cultural contexts.

In a very distinctively diachronous 19th century linguistics that tried to reconstruct mainly the historical development of the language with then current language uses, the dialect was one of the ideal examples that supported such research (Petrović 2006). The desired purity, originality and authenticity were insured by its distance in time and space – e.g. the oldest possible speaker in the most remote areas is regarded as a typical informant (Williams 1973).

In the analysed texts, dialect overtakes some roles and functions of a standard language (Auer 2011): This occurs in the environments where standard language

would normally be expected (e.g. even in media language¹⁰, toponymy, and publicly available inscriptions) and represents an idiom with which the speakers identify themselves. Both occurrences can on one side represent a bottom-up experiment of language revitalisation and language use promotion, or can lead to language secessionism on the other (Kordić 2009): Speakers can at some point perceive a dialect as the independent (Abstand) language formation that is no longer a part of certain language continuum – namely Slovenian. It should be noted that the perception processes of a language (non-)continuum and (non-)identification with the language are independent from scientific or expert language discussions; more than scientific argumentation, are they subject to broader social, even political and economic factors.

5. Conclusion

Some definitions that were supposed to be potentially neutral but are in fact ideologically motivated arise from the language discourse that is, at the same time, also a discourse on this language speakers' identity option and on communities formed by the use of a certain language. They were created within certain epistemological paradigms and models with its function to study a specific linguistic phenomenon but are used also in other and different contexts by the media discourse that reflects and generates the discourses of the (entire) speakers' community.

When definitions are used in contexts that are different to those in which they were created without appropriate modification, can this contribute to creating ideological centres that furthermore influence the perception of linguistic phenomena, identification processes, language formation, language policies formation and the decision-makers' implementation plans.

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Notes

- ¹ Critical discourse analysis does not foresee quantitative analyses of individual term recurrences in the analysed texts. I thus define as frequent those recurrences that I found in different text types (news articles, columns, sections, readers' letters...) and recurred continuously in the entire time frame.
- ² "/.../ vulgarem locutionem appellamus eam qua infantes assuefiunt ab assistentibus cum primitus distinguere voces incipiunt; vel, quod brevius dici potest, vulgarem locutionem asserimus quam sine omni regola nutricem imitantes accipimus." De vulgari eloquentia, I.2.
- ³ For more details about the quotes from the analyzed texts please cfr. Grgič 2016, 47.
- ⁴ Given the fact that this term is also used in some texts published in the Slovenian-Italian linguistic area, we cannot rule out the possibility that the term does also occur in the media discourse but that the analysis of the pool of texts in the given corpus did not yield such result.
- ⁵ I use the terms idiom and lect as potentially neutral terms that encompass "also language, dialect, local language system, and any type of sociolect and specific language of an individual (or. idiolect). /.../ 'Idioms' [are] therefore all language codes used by a community in question" (Petrović 2006).
- ⁶ The term language continuum is used as a potentially neutral concept for denoting potentially all possible languages, variants, dialects, and codes that are perceived as a standalone language, disregarding their diversity.
- ⁷ It is used, e.g., to label the position of the Italian language in bilingual municipalities in Slovenia (Istria), that is predominantly in the scientific literature that deals with minority language teaching/learning.

- ⁸ Such research was conducted for the specific case of the Slovenian minority in Italy in 2015 but only considered the so-called language landscape of a population area of the said minority (Cf. Mezgec 2015).
- ⁹ In Slovenian: knjižni jezik (the most formal level of the language, used especially in written texts and standardized by norm – rather than by use –, deduced at least in part from classical literary examples).
- ¹⁰ The majority of the analysed texts published in the weekly paper *Novi Matajur* is written in a dialect.