Legal consciousness and language ideologies through the example of a Hungarian indigenous community in South-Slovakia

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My poster will present a work-in-process project about informants’ legal consciousness and some results of the pilot research.

In my research I address the question how the Slovakian language legislation affect the language use of the indigenous Hungarian minority. Recognizing language rights is essential to maintain the minority language, but if this “is only symbolic that may work as a stimulus for assimilation to mainstream society” (Gorter–Jenoz 2012: 271). Although research on linguistic rights has become intensive in the last 20 years, the exploration of the effect of the language legislation on language choice has not been conducted from the interdisciplinary perspective of sociology of rights and sociolinguistics. In my research the notion of language legislation is considered as a dependent variable, in this sense legal consciousness refers to people’s own ideas about law, regardless of any <official> laws” (Hertoğh 2004: 474-5). This approach is supported by the fact that no informants had read the text of the language laws.

My fieldwork took place in a village in South-Slovakia, Szímo (80% Hungarians); a 120-member representative sample to the adult population was used. Quantitative and qualitative methods were combined.

The results show that participants were aware of the existence of the language legislation however they claim that their language use is not affected by it. Although 30% of the informants know about their right to use their minority language in the case of writing an official letter, only 3% uses it for this purpose. This raises the question which language ideologies determine the informants’ legal consciousness and – indirectly – their language use? Analyzing attitudes toward the language legislation is the main part of my project. To have comparable results I will conduct fieldworks in two other settlements in South-Slovakia. Results from these venues are to be presented at the conference.

Keywords: language legislation, legal consciousness.