

THE CONCEPT OF DIASPORA LANGUAGE.

(Opening address)

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The theme of this workshop is "Children's language in diaspora". The term and concept "diaspora", "diaspora language" were developed and motivated in our JUBA-project here in Lund; as they are not generally known, I feel a need to comment on them in short.

The concept "diaspora" is used in opposition to "stabilized minority": e.g. the French in Canada or the Hungarian in Yugoslavia is a historically developed and stabilized minority language. These minorities - i.e. minorities within contemporary state formations - were established maybe hundreds of years ago, they have their stabilized regional variants of a standard language and their own dialects. For children of such groups, this linguistic situation makes up a "normal", linguistically homogeneous environment, with stabilized relations to the language of the majority as well.

Diaspora consists of dispersed groups of compatriots, who settled in the new country most often according to the needs of local industry. Consequently, the new settlements do not consist of people from the same neighbourhood, village or region, as was the rule e.g. during the great migrations to USA around the turn of the century. In this way, the Yugoslav community in the same Swedish town, around the same factory, can consist of people from different Yugoslav nations, from very different dialectal areas and, to a certain degree, from different social strata. All of them are -more or less - able to understand each other, all of them speak "naš jezik" ('our language'). Consequently, the children born in these circumstances learn and develop their mother tongue in a **linguistically non-homogeneous society**. Their inputs are potentially all the varieties of "our language" which occur in the given group. The same was stated e.g. by professor C. Pfaff about Turkish children in West Berlin.

It is this complex of features that is specific for the "diaspora" and the "diaspora monitoring", and it has long-reaching linguistic consequences.

In these conditions the language of the **adults** and that of the **children** behave differently. The adults' words can be forgotten, some words are loaned from the majority's language, some phraseologically bound entities are loan-translated etc. But the stabilized systems (phonology and grammar) remain untouched. - On the other hand, the children's language is in process of developing, it is **capable** of development and it develops **individually**. Single children accept and generalize **potentially different** inputs from the "our language" of the environment or from the majority's language. And the non-homogeneous environment **does not level** these individual features, they are/can be own-system-correct, even though they are aberrant from any known norm be it standard or dialectal of the mother tongue.

In this way **personal idiolects** emerge, potentially differing in some respects from all other idiolects, e.g. different number of cases, different constructions with quantifiers, different extent of grammatical animateness etc. These differences **do not disturb**, however, the communication within the group. This affects mostly the redundant parts of the system. I never encountered, for instance, a disturbed opposition of mood or tense. However, I earlier also described in SlaL idiolects without the opposition Nominative vs. Accusative vs. Dative, which confused the meaning of a given story. With those facts in mind, we can speak *cum grano salis* about **creating** a language of one's own, rather than about learning or acquisition, since these **last** two labels would rather imply the unchanged transfer of a given language from generation to generation. The same process does exist in homogeneous groups as well, but the pressure of the environment levels and corrects all deviations from the norm. The linguistically non-homogeneous diaspora leaves the same deviations untouched at least for some time.

Such differences between single idiolects are extremely important from the viewpoint of **general linguistics**, since they are symptoms of **endogenous autoregulating automatisms**, operating in the mind of the children.

At this point, of course, arises a conflict between this spontaneous development and the normative requirements of the society, i.e. normative requirements of the school, of the old country's authorities etc. The development, fascinating as it is for a linguist, disturbs the possibilities of using children's mother tongue where its codified forms are required.

It must be said, however, that a spontaneous levelling of children's idiolects takes place as well. Our texts show that contacts with new groups of "our language" speakers, with "home language" teaching in the school and with different other forms of standard language exercise a levelling pressure on children's idiolects, approximately at the age of nine to eleven/twelve years. This levelling appears in the texts as parallelism of idiolectal and normal system features.

It is these facts that - in my opinion - authorize us to coin the concept and the terms "diaspora", "diaspora language" - as a specific form of minority language.

All our invited speakers are specialists in one of the important diaspora languages in Western Europe. Or, to be more exact, I should have said "older" or "established" diaspora languages (I did not find any research about the Greek and the invited speaker about the Italian did not attend). The frames of this workshop did not allow us to search for potential specialists in such new diaspora languages as e.g. Iranian languages (incl. Kurdish), Urdu etc. And we do not know anything about diaspora languages in Eastern Europe, such as Vietnamese in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, USSR and some other countries.