

## **Odjel za lingvistiku**

### **Zadarska lingvistička srida**

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## **Minority Education Models and Multilingual Identities of Children and Youths in Eastern Croatian Urban Spaces**

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The aim of this lecture is to present the complexities of language-identity relations in the multicultural area of Eastern Croatia, namely the city of Osijek, focusing particularly on the children and the youth generally from multilingual and multi-ethnic communities. This region of Croatia has witnessed numerous changes in governments and languages and there are still 20 official minority languages spoken in the city according to the last census (2013). In eight out of 20 schools in Osijek children and youths who speak another language as a heritage or home language have the opportunity to nurture this language and learn about their culture in either the A or C model, where the former implies that all subjects are conducted in the language of the minority group, and the latter the nurturing of language and culture for up to five hours a week.

In order to examine the complex relations of language and identity, and the official language policies implemented through these models, 19 in-depth interviews with multilingual children and youths were conducted. The children and youths with a diverse multi-ethnic background speaking Serbian, Slovak, Hungarian, Albanian, German, Roma-Bayashi and Bosnian-Croatian languages participated in the study. The interview questions covered a wide range of topics related to the communicative practice and language attitudes of the interviewees. The data was then analysed in the framework of critical applied linguistics drawing on the work of May (2005) and Canagarajah (2005), who claim that linguistic identities are dynamic and hybrid phenomena. The notions of marked and unmarked identities (Bucholtz and Hall 2004) from linguistic anthropology also contributed in the data analysis. In this framework, unmarked identities are those that represent the elite and the powerful, which in the Croatian context, as the interviews have shown, are the Croatian and English language, while the use of other languages represents manifold and layered marked identities, with some instances of what Bourdieu (1992) calls symbolic violence. Thus, the data revealed that though multilingualism is generally perceived as a personal resource, some common patterns regarding a diverse ethnic background emerged; the findings thus show that the multilingual identities are often hybrid, performed as the form of hidden practice in closed communities, frequently perceived as an asset in other places (outside of Croatia), but also as form of resistance.

The implications of this level of research were shared on the next level with stakeholders and policy-makers from public sphere to gain an idea how these identities are reflected on, but

also generated. At this level of research statements from the interviews with children and youths were used which epitomized their multilingual identities and discussed with the stakeholders (from state agencies, schools, municipality etc.). The results of this stage of research revealed dominant ideologies that shape and generate, and at the same time challenge the identity practices of the children and youths.

The overall results indicate that more care and effort needs to be made by the policy makers at all levels of the public sphere, especially concerning the recent war and its impact on society, in order to revitalize the diversity of city and the region in general.

### *References:*

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