

Abstract

The Czech language islands in Bosnia and Herzegovina are enclaves forgotten both by researchers and the general public. Compatriots who have preserved Czech customs, music, dances and the Czech language even after about 150 years outside the Czech lands are gradually disappearing due to assimilation and inevitable demographic development – despite secondary migration from Volhynia, and tertiary migration to various larger settlements or abroad (for work or as a result of wars).

During eleven research trips, and using data from more than seventy speakers of Czech as an inherited language, living in more than twenty different localities, the study sought out members of Czech families who settled in Nová Ves and Maćino Brdo in 1894-5 (after the previous two decades of life in Volhynia).

Field research for this thesis was carried out from 2016 to 2023 and yielded unrepeatably data (a quarter of the 60 recorded informants have already passed away). Within the natural environments of foreign Czechs, field research has provided linguistic and non-linguistic data, including participant observations, photographic and audiovisual documentation, diary entries, and most importantly, recordings of semi-structured interviews.

The thesis deals with the topics of inherited language and its preservation vs. attrition and linguistic shift in relation to factors such as media, education, family upbringing, religion, geography (isolation from native homeland), social life, politics, etc. and specific spheres and situations of language use according to the experience of informants. The thesis presents authentic subjective reflections of the bilingual speakers on the listed factors. The thesis deals with the question: ‘What is the experience of members of families coming from the Czech villages of Nová Ves and Maćino Brdo in the north of Bosnia relating to the use, maintenance and intergenerational transmission of an inherited language in different spheres, situations and activities, and what do they think about various factors that could have played a positive or negative role?’

The consecutive objectives of the thesis were : 1) to find as many heritage speakers of the Czech language as possible, including descendants of Bosnian Czechs from both villages, Nová Ves and Maćino Brdo; 2) to create high-quality recordings of semi-structured autobiographical narrative interviews (with elements of language biography): first with the oldest (disappearing) generation, then with younger members (the youngest heritage language speakers are over 50); 3) to create an extensive database of recordings, metadata, videos, photographs and more than

2000 pages of transcriptions and notes on them; 4) within the framework of interpretative phenomenological analysis methods, to examine the topics and specific views of speakers arising from the principal research question 5) to consider the possibility of using the material for later analyses, whether classical language analyses, dialectological studies, etc., which were not the aim of this thesis.