



***Between Emancipation and the Struggle for Survival.
The Lemko Language in the Third Decade of the 21st Century***

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Introduction

- The Carpatho-Rusyn movement, postulates the existence of a fourth East Slavic nation. The movement directs its political-national program to a small community of Ruthenian highlanders who live on the northern and southern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains, on the border of Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine.



Who was studied and how?

- Long-term research. Few revisits during the last thirty years.
- in-depth interviews with ethnic activists involved in the Carpatho-Rusyn movement
- Today I will be analysing just 50 interviews collected from Lemko activists
- *emic perspective*



Theoretical inspirations

Revisits: An Outline of a Theory of Reflexive Ethnography Michael Buroway (2003)

Research revisits, either by the same researcher or his successors, make possible to capture changes when a lot of time elapses between successive visits, or when there are intense changes in the studied area

Theoretical inspirations

According to Buroway, the reasons for the differences in descriptions of the reality studied in revisits can be attributed to four factors:

- 1) changes in the attitude of the observer toward the research participants
- 2) the theories that the researcher brings to the research field
- 3) internal processes within the field
- 4) external processes, outside the field, that nevertheless influence what happens in the research field.

Research Aim

In the speech, I will briefly discuss the main points of the narrative on the Lemko language present in the interviews collected during the four revisits, pointing out their distinctive features, while trying to show how the factors proposed by Buroway affect the way the language is problematized.

Brief information about the Lemkos

According to the latest 2021 census, **13,607** Polish citizens declared belonging to the Lemko minority, with **6147** people declaring Lemko as the language spoken at home.

Lemkos belong mainly to the **Orthodox** and **Greek Catholic** churches.

The group is divided in terms of identity.

The group is divided in terms of identity. Some of its members identify with the Ukrainian nation, while others postulate the separateness of Lemkos and Ukrainians on different levels, ethnic or national.

The attitude to the Lemko language

The two groups of the identity present different linguistic ideologies.

- **Lemko-Ukrainians:** believe that there is no separate Lemko language; Lemko speech is merely one of the dialects of the Ukrainian language, oppose the codification of the Lemko language; the literary language of the Lemkos is Ukrainian; codification lead to the creation of an artificial language; archaic form, will not be useful in the modern world
- **Lemkos aiming for emancipation,** have diametrically opposed ideas about their language: linguistic distinctiveness of the group; the standardization of Lemko, granting it the status of a literary language; efforts to have its distinctiveness recognized by the state, and teaching it in schools, were important elements of identity politics and the struggle for recognition of the distinctiveness of the Lemko community.

First visit and first revisit in the field (1992-2000)

Narrations - Discourse of ethnolinguistic (micro)nationalism (nationalism of minority groups)

- The struggle for recognition of the distinctiveness of the Lemko language from the Ukrainian language.
- The connection between language and nation and language and identity.
- The codification of the the Lemko language is placed in the context of nation-building processes of other Slavic nations (we do the same, just later).
- A significant part is devoted to the discussion with ideological opponents of Lemko emancipation: Lemko-Ukrainians and Ukrainians.
- The necessity of codification (each nation has its own literary language).
- The codification of the Lemko language is easier than in other regions, as the diversity of dialects has disappeared with displacement.

First visit and first revisit in the field (1992-2000)

Processes outside the field affecting what happens within the field

- **Democratic transformations in Poland in the 1990s** - democratisation, liberation of identity, freedom of speech, religion and association.
- ***de facto* recognition** - by the state - of the specificity of Lemkos, who postulate their difference from Ukrainians.
- **Support for the activities** of the Lemkos who seek to preserve and develop the Lemko culture and language.

First visit and first revisit in the field (1992-2000)

Internal processes within the field

- **Institutionalisation of the identity conflict:** The emergence of two separate Lemko organisations - the Lemko Association and the Lemko Union.
- **Introduction of the Lemko language into schools:** Beginning of the teaching of the Lemko language in educational institutions.
- **Development of language standards:** Establishment of norms for educational use.
- **Publishing activities:** Production of literature and periodicals in the Lemko language.
- **Inclusion of the language in various functional areas:** Incorporation of the Lemko language in various functional areas.

First visit and first revisit in the field (1992-2000)

The theory introduced into the field

- The ideology of ethnolinguistic nationalism
- I have viewed the Carpatho-Rusyn movement in the context of nation-building processes in Central and Eastern Europe.
- Incomplete/frozen nation-building processes.
- The emergence of a literary language is a necessary element of this process.

Second Revisit (2013-2015)

Narrations - the discourse of ethnolinguistic micronationalism is replaced by the discourse of minority protection

- **Reduced Discussion:** Less focus on the relationship between language and nation; no dialogue with opponents of codification and distinctiveness of the Lemko language
- **Legal Inclusion:** Recognition in law was viewed as a significant milestone in the emancipation process, though expectations were higher.
 - The state recognized the Lemkos while also acknowledging their ideological opponents, the Lemko-Ukrainians.
 - Expressions of dissatisfaction with state policy.
- **Questioning Codification:**
 - Notions arise regarding the **myth of dialect fragmentation** and the idea that a **codified language is artificial**.
 - Longing for a **"pure," "true" language** of fathers and grandparents.
 - Accusations of **"corrupting the language"** within various creator and user communities.
- **Emerging Controversies:**
 - Crisis of legitimacy among those codifying the Lemko language.
 - Disputes regarding which groups control linguistic correctness in publishing and teaching.

Second Revisit (2013-2015)

Processes outside the field affecting what happens within the field

- **Poland's accession to the European Union.**
- **Enactment of The Act of 6 January 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and on Regional Language**, which implements The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in Poland.

Second Revisit (2013-2015)

Internal processes within the field

- **Official Recognition:**
 - Recognition of the Lemko minority and the Lemko language as the language of the Lemko ethnic minority.
- **Protection and Rights:**
 - Enhanced protection for the group and language, including established language rights.
- **Institutional Developments:**
 - Establishment of Russian Philology with the Rusyn-Lemko language (2001-2017).
 - Emergence of Lem.fm radio, broadcasting 24/7 in the Lemko language.
- **Cultural and Educational Activities:**
 - Active involvement in publishing, cultural, and educational initiatives.
- **Community Dynamics:**
 - Further institutionalization and pluralization of collective life, led to new organizations and a new generation of activists.
 - Blurring of the division between supporters and opponents of Lemko's distinctiveness.
 - Expansion of the Lemko language into additional functional spheres.

Second Revisit (2013-2015)

The theory introduced into the field

Abandoning Methodological Nationalism:

Shifted focus from traditional national frameworks.

Linguistic Ideologies as a Key Theoretical Category:

Defined broadly, following Silverstein's perspective.

Any set of beliefs about language articulated by users to rationalize or justify perceived language structures (Silverstein 1979: 193).

Impact on Research:

Influenced interview methodology and interpretation of collected material.

Third Revisit (2023-2024)

Narrations - The discourse of minority protection coexists with the discourse of endangered languages

- **Greater focus in the narratives on reflection on the sociolinguistic situation of the group.**
- Description of the language situation: "endangered language," "language at risk of extinction."
- Indicating the very rapid disappearance of intergenerational transmission.
- Pessimism, the inevitability of its extinction, according to my interlocutors, is a matter of time.
- **Diagnoses of the causes of such a language situation:**
- Past traumas, long-term discrimination.
- Low prestige of the language among its "ordinary" users.
- The superstition is that bilingualism is disadvantageous for children and can pose a problem in school.
- Modernity

Third Revisit (2023-2024)

Narrations - The discourse of minority protection coexists with the discourse of endangered languages (cont.)

Planning actions for language protection and revitalization:

- Working with language users.
- Actions to raise prestige.
- Combating prejudices about bilingualism.
- Immersion method in teaching.
- Non-school teaching.
- Utrakvist teaching in Lemko Region

Third Revisit (2023-2024)

Processes outside the field affecting what happens within the field:

- **War in Ukraine**

- **The Takeover of Power:**

The rise to power of the right-wing party Law and Justice (PiS) in 2015.

Third Revisit (2023-2024)

Internal processes within the field:

- The war in Ukraine activates opponents of Lemko's distinctiveness, with accusations of Russophilism and Muscovophilism.
- Change in language practices.
- Disappearance of intergenerational transmission.
- Emergence of revitalization projects, the most important: Language as a Cure (2018-2020).
- Development of practical recommendations for supporting the protection of endangered languages.

Third Revisit (2023-2024)

The theory introduced into the field:

- The Project: Language as a Cure (2018-2020)
- The researchers worked with local communities, Lemko scholars, and activists, bringing new ideas into the field.
- Practical recommendations and solutions aimed at improving conditions for minorities and providing better support for efforts to preserve their languages and culture.
- Language Ideologies



Conclusion

The analysis of the collected material confirmed changes in Lemko activists' narratives about the language and the sociolinguistic situation of the group.

These changes reflect evolving linguistic ideologies that adapt as external conditions change, impacting the situation within the community.

Furthermore, the theories brought by researchers into the field also play a significant role. In the context of participatory research with a revitalization component, these theories can influence shifts in linguistic ideologies as well as the actions taken by language activists.

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