

Mihai Márton (University of Hamburg)

Ethnic Construction in Journalistic Discourse
The Hungarian Law of Status and its Perception
in Hungarian and Romanian Daily Newspapers (2000–2003)

The main objective of my thesis is a discourse analysis of specific narratives in the Hungarian and Romanian press. In the light of the Hungarian Law of Status, the analysis concentrates on newspaper articles, which relate to the Hungarian minority in Romania. The analysis of newspaper articles will show the difference between the Hungarian and the Romanian newspapers' means of constructing the minority mentioned above.

Discourse analysis is a relatively new approach inside the spectrum of cultural anthropological methodology. Discourse, as I understand it, is a flow of information through time within defined special, linguistic and timely parameters. The basic resources used for the theoretical framework in this thesis are the works of Teun A. Van Dijk and Siegfried Jäger. While Van Dijk considers the individual as the driving force within a discourse, Jäger, who based his critique of public discourse on the works of Michel Foucault, suggests that it is the discourse that determines the individual. In my opinion, the narratives of the various newspapers are embedded in the public discourse in both countries. Thus, the Law of Status can be regarded as a discursive event in the ongoing public discourse about the Hungarian minorities. The narratives are composed of different individuals writing about the current political and social events. Further, the press influences to a certain extent the political elite, which itself is also a part of the narrative by granting interviews to journalists or by publishing themselves. Consequently, there is a reciprocal influence between journalists and politicians as there is between the newspapers' narratives and the public discourse.

The Hungarian Law of Status, which has passed through Parliament on the 19th of June 2001, and came into effect on the 1st of January 2002, has caused much disturbance in Hungary as well as in two of its neighbouring countries, Slovakia and Romania. It grants ethnic Hungarians in Hungary's neighbouring states, which are not members of the European Union (EU), certain economical, medical and educational benefits in their home country in addition to those granted in Hungary. The various debates within and outside Hungary about this law have continued for several years and were reflected in the press. I have put up a set of criteria, which should assort the type of newspapers, that

I want to analyse. Among these criteria are the facts that they publish nationwide in the respective state's official language, they intend to be politically neutral, they have a high circulation and they are not tabloids. Hence, this discourse analysis concentrates on four newspapers, two from Hungary and two from Romania, that share similar characteristics: Adevărul, Magyar Hírlap, Népszabadság and România Liberă. Nevertheless, it is my hypothesis, that every newspaper has its own narrative concerning the Law of Status, which can be detected by thoroughly analysing the relevant articles. The analysis is divided into three different perspectives.

The first one concentrates on ways of describing the Hungarian minority in Romania. According to my preliminary results, the Romanian newspapers have 33 ways of describing the Hungarian minority in Romania whilst the Hungarian papers have 68. These include descriptions such as “ethnic Magyars in the neighbouring states”, “persons of Magyar ethnos”, “reserves across the border” or “Magyardom from Romania”. The next step will be to analyse these descriptions and to find out their intentions.

The second perspective is composed of repeating motives. These include, among others, Europe, judicial points of view, elements of comparison between the Hungarian Law of Status and similar laws and historic arguments. Initial results for Europe show that all four papers consider European institutions such as the Council of Europe or the European Union as supra institutions. Europe loses its geographical meaning and becomes a political, moral and judicial concept. It becomes an idea, a goal to be achieved by both states. Other results concerning historical arguments illustrate in many cases the presence of the Treaty of Trianon within the discourse.

The third and last perspective is the personal assessment of the journalists' perspective concerning the Law of Status. Some journalists write their personal views about the events while others just try to be as informative and objective as possible. It further includes my personal estimation on matters such as whether the author has taken sides in the ongoing discourse or if he has tried to conceal or avoid certain facts.

Another aspect to be examined is the trans-cultural feature. The interviews that I have conducted with leading journalists from all four papers revealed certain trans-cultural aspects of importance. These facets have shown to be essential, bearing in mind that there are journalists who work for newspapers, which are published in a different country. This is significant when considering the fact that the large majority of Romanians cannot read Hungarian and vice versa. Hence the journalists who master both languages do not just transmit information, but they are also connecting links

between two cultures and two languages. Further encounters during my fieldwork in Bucharest and Budapest have confronted me with the political intentions behind the Law of Status and its practical implications. Some of the money destined for the families who send their children to Hungarian schools never arrived, the working permit for Hungary was difficult to get and the so-called *ethno-business* has started to spread more rapidly than before. These developments were reflected in the writings of a couple of journalists, who changed their mind about the Law of Status over the years. They changed from a reserved affirmation in 2000-2001 to a more realistic negation in 2002 and 2003 when the political game behind the scenes in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia became more apparent.