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The Complexities of the Field in a Linguistic Ethnographic Research

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Abstract. In critical sociolinguistics, language is viewed as a fundamentally social phenomenon that is defined discursively, rather than in terms of individual beliefs and attitudes, and because linguistic practices are themselves intersubjective. Moreover, the broader cultural, historical, and political aspects have also become relevant in the study of language, requiring new ways of addressing sociolinguistic issues. Linguistic ethnography may be a central tool in this inquiry, as it looks at everyday practices in order to understand wider social structures. In this paper, I argue that a festival as a place of encounters provides an adequate context for such research. After discussing the different concepts of the field in doing ethnographic work, I examine the online presence of the festival in question. Tusványos is an event organized in Transylvania every year, with the intention of bringing together Hungarian participants from Hungary and Romania, as well as Romanians.

Keywords: critical sociolinguistics, linguistic ethnography, field, festival studies, Hungarian–Hungarian encounters

1. Introduction

The globalization processes of the last decades have called for a paradigm shift in the conceptual and analytical systems of sociolinguistics, whereby working with previously established categories is being replaced by a sociolinguistics of mobile resources defined by trans-contextual networks and movements (Blommaert 2010). According to Jan Blommaert, beyond the traditional subject of linguistics, cultural, historical, and political aspects are also given a prominent role, i.e. "the sociolinguistic side of a larger social system" (Blommaert 2010: 2) becomes the subject of new research. Globalization has highlighted the importance of not only cultural but also linguistic diversity; as a result of the increasingly intensive

migration processes, the "predictability" of mobility pathways has disappeared (Blommaert & Rampton 2011: 22), and the social characteristics of those involved in the migration process have become more diverse. Vertovec (2007) describes this emerging phenomenon with the concept of superdiversity, which has become the dominant interpretative framework for a growing body of sociolinguistic works (e.g. Creese & Blackledge 2010, Rampton et al. 2015, Arnaut et al. 2016a,b).

Those who object to the use of the concept of superdiversity argue that this theoretical framework is not generally applicable, as the increase in the scale and intensity of migration is characteristic of Western Europe alone. But even in this highly Eurocentric context, it should be taken into account that European countries are not by default characterized by linguistic diversity (Pavlenko 2018), as the nation-state presupposes the existence and dominance of the national language. However, globalization and superdiversity characterize not only metropolises – despite the fact that the flow of people and languages is most easily captured there – but also "margins" (Wang et al. 2014: 24). In interpreting migration processes, not only are aspects of nationality, ethnicity, and language prevalent, but the motivations behind them and integration into the host society are also of linguistic interest (Blommaert & Rampton 2011: 22), and for Blommaert (2010) the mobility of semiotic resources themselves is a central concern.

Globalization is constantly reflected through new media and communication tools and changing economic activities, while the flow of social, political and cultural, linguistic and other semiotic resources is also present in marginal spaces. The classical social science paradigm tended to represent spaces, and thus the people and their linguistic resources, as fixed and closed systems. However, changing mobility overrides this as well, and connection between interrelated people, including their linguistic practices, are viewed as much more complex while becoming less predictable (Blommaert 2010). In the critical sociolinguistic framework, the focus shifts to the ways in which social and linguistic categories are created and maintained (Bodó & Heltai 2018: 505).

On the basis of the conceptual framework described above and as a consequence of the social, political, and cultural events of the last three decades, I argue that superdiversity can also emerge in a space where diversity within the same language is characterized by increased mobility. Transylvania, as a historically interethnic and linguistically heterogeneous space, is a prime example. The volume and intensity of Hungarian–Hungarian encounters (between Hungarians from Hungary and Hungarians from Romania) began to increase after the fall of communism. This goes hand in hand with the emergence of previously unknown paths and processes of migration and new discourses on these, such as economic migration from Transylvania to Western Europe or students from Hungary studying in Transylvania.

Thus, the context of this research is burdened by narratives of language, nation, and identity. The field of study is Bálványos Free Summer University and

Student Camp, more commonly known and hereinafter referred to as Tusványos, which from the beginning aimed to create an opportunity for dialogue between Hungarians from Hungary and Hungarians from Transylvania, as well as Hungarian and Romanian communities, creating an environment that does not entirely belong to Hungary or Transylvania and is constructed as a "third space" in the Bhabhan sense. By introducing the concept, Bhabha aims to overcome the dichotomy of spatial interpretations prevalent in different disciplines, the polarization of spaces, when he writes about cultural hybridity, as the third space "quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People" (Bhabha 1994: 37).

2. A linguistic ethnographic approach

According to Blommaert and Rampton, a linguistic ethnographic approach can be a central tool for a linguistically-based study of superdiversity (Blommaert & Rampton 2011: 35–36). The linguistic ethnographic framework relevant to this paper is based on the premise that if social realities are created and shaped by everyday interactions, then linguistic tools can help us understand the complexity of the social world without the need to draw generalizing and essentialist conclusions. It is important to note, however, that linguistic ethnography is not a paradigm but rather a "discursive space", and also a "place of encounter" (Rampton et al. 2015: 44), which leaves room for questioning dominant discourses given that knowledge production is achieved through interactions between different levels of society. While many fields of linguistics examine language through the lens of culture and society, the dominant approach of these sub-disciplines is to interpret language as universal and to assume that linguistic structures can be isolated and studied in this way.

In linguistic ethnography, the personal positioning of the researcher also plays a significant role. Awareness of the motivations behind the assumptions made about a given issue is an important aspect of research, as the researcher's own social and linguistic background, as well as knowledge of the subject, will determine how to interpret the practices under study and their wider context. Traditional anthropological research has sought to make forms of life and cultural perspectives that seem distant accessible, resulting in "making the strange familiar" (Hymes 1996: 4–5). In contrast, a linguistic ethnographic approach examines the embeddedness of practices of everyday life in wider social contexts and structures, thus focusing on "making the familiar strange" (Shaw et al. 2015: 7).

3. Festivals as places of encounters

In anthropology, the concept of the contact zone has traditionally been used to capture instances of communication between people from different cultural backgrounds and unequal power relations (Pratt 1991, 1992; Clifford 1997). A critique of the use of the concept is that, on the one hand, although it is intended as an analytical tool to model the interaction of certain groups in an asymmetric space, it does not focus on the dynamics of the process itself, the problem of "internal cooperation between the communities involved" (Wilhelm 2017: 43). On the other hand, the perspective offered by the contact zone can be a disadvantage in seeing and understanding a particular field, as the contact zone ultimately focuses attention on immediate, evidential situations while neglecting wider networks (Bennett 2013). As a result, encounter has become a central concept in cultural anthropology; in relation to encounter-based ethnographies, Faier and Rofel note that culture is not understood as "temporally fixed and spatially bounded", but rather the making and remaking of culture in everyday life becomes the object of study (Faier & Rofel 2014: 364).

Fictive contact zones are mentioned separately among the spatial determinants of the relations that emerge in the encounter; they are based on the encounter of the past with the future, on contact with the ancestor and the original, which implies a sense of authenticity. These types of spiritual encounters are mostly fuelled by what Bucholtz (2003) calls sociolinguistic nostalgia, a sense that the state or object sought no longer exists. The illusion of re-creating these states is the basis for tourism marketing or even cultural encounters (Régi 2017: 15). Academic interest in festivals comes mainly from business studies and marketing sciences, which aim at a quantitative analysis of the economic impact of events (Kim & Uysal 2003, Diedering & Kwiatkowski 2015); the latter usually investigates the success of the communication of events on various platforms (Bernstein 2007, Allen et al. 2011, Oklobdžija 2015). Thus, the disciplinary framework in which festival studies have been conducted so far has tended to interpret events as tourism activities, ignoring their potential political implications (Zhang et al. 2019: 95).

However, it would be a mistake to claim that festivals are only a relevant field of research in economics, marketing, and tourism. In the context of festival studies, Getz (2010) identifies three major discourses: the roles, meanings, and impacts of festivals in society and culture, festival tourism, and festival management. Research on authenticity, communal and cultural identity, social cohesion, celebration, ritual, myth and religion, as part of the first discourse, belongs to the field of anthropology. It is important to note that these have typically been studied in festivals for small communities (Cohen 2007, Frost 2008, Mackellar 2009).

Festivals can be diverse in their subject-matter, but all festivals are characterized by being held at a particular time (and place) and being repeated over and over

again (Wilson et al. 2017: 196). Festivals celebrate community values, ideologies, identity, and continuity (Getz 2005), while at the same time they are spaces for the expression, performance, and rediscovery of identity (Nurse 1999). Since the aforementioned political dimension has been neglected in the analysis of festivals, there is only a small body of recent works (Zhang et al. 2019) that discusses the role of festivals in the context of national identity formation. The festival that is the focus of the present paper is in the same category as other Hungarian music festivals in Transylvania in terms of the number of visitors, but it also emphasizes the promise of a community experience that is characteristic of smaller festivals.

4. The concept of the field

One of the methodological principles of anthropological research is that the site of research is not the same as the object of research. In the case of the present research, however, this view cannot be validated because in addition to the festival as a site framing the Hungarian–Hungarian encounters examined, the role of the festival itself in shaping the identity of place and group (Getz 2010: 4) is also part of the research question. At the same time, Margit Feischmidt's assertion that the object of anthropological research is "that which is strange, different, and at the same time local" (2007: 224) is also valid. A festival is characterized by these particularities at its core, as they bring the promise of escape from the mundane by having been present in societies as rites and celebrations for a very long time (Getz 2010: 7).

The steps in the construction of the field are traditionally captured by Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 12) in three moments: 1. the radical separation of field and home; 2. the valorization of certain modes of empirical cognition; 3. the construction of the researcher "self". In our case, the first and third of these steps will be less applicable since the field may be accessible from the home (more on this below, in the context of the online–offline nexus) and the researcher "self" outlined by Gupta and Ferguson presupposes the construction of a normative anthropological subject that is sharply distanced from the persons interviewed in the field.

Not only the nature of the festival framing the research but also the mobility of social and cultural phenomena in the 21st century calls for a revision of the theoretical and methodological foundations of anthropology in relating to the field. The validity of the single-, fixed-field concept of classical anthropological research first became uncertain in the context of migration research. In response to this and the theoretical dilemma it poses, George Marcus (1995) developed the concept of multi-sited ethnography, which "inevitably involves a body of knowledge of varying depth and quality, an incessant journey between the meanings of the field sites" (Lajos 2015: 165), which also overcomes the temporal and spatial demarcation of the field in the classical sense. The selective

knowledge production that results from the latter also defines ethnography in multiple arenas, but the knowledge acquired at the micro level is complemented by forms of knowledge from the macro perspective (Lajos 2015: 169–170).

The mobility paradigm shift also challenges the sedentary understanding of space in linguistics, including dialectology, as it contradicts the assumption that stability, being bound to a place, is a natural state of being (Britain 2016). One consequence of this is that the image of the authentic speaker – who lives isolated from urban modernity – is transformed, questioning expectations of "linguistic isolation" (Bucholtz 2003: 404) and a well-defined, static, homogeneous social environment (Britain 2016: 10).

The processing of the material collected during fieldwork and the knowledge gained there is complemented by the researcher's relationship to the field and their own ideologies. Reflecting on the unfinished nature of ethnographic knowledge production, Veronika Lajos echoes Anthony P. Cohen's dilemma that this two-level knowledge production makes it difficult to ensure the authority of ethnographic texts due to the changes that take place in the researcher's academic and everyday life and in the field (Lajos 2019: 595).

The macro level, which defines multi-sited ethnography, also includes knowledge produced in the virtual space. Blommaert and Dong (2019) point to the theoretical and methodological gap that arises from the failure to recognize that our lives are permeated by the online world in myriad ways. Therefore, as researchers, we must also examine the online mapping of all offline spaces, i.e. the entire online–offline nexus. It is also pointed out that when researching online interfaces, three questions arise that are not as straightforward to answer as in the offline space: What do we see? Who is there? Where are we? This is because of the bubble effect created by different algorithms, which requires awareness of distortions; we cannot be sure of the identity of the people speaking different content, and we have to be aware of the trans-contextual changes caused by invisible threads.

5. The characteristics of the field

Bálványos Free Summer University and Student Camp (more commonly known as Tusványos) is an annual event, currently organized by Pro Minoritate Foundation and the Hungarian Youth Council of Romania (MIT). The former is an organization that defines itself as an "independent and public benefit" organization "that aims to support European and national ethnic and national minorities, with a particular focus on helping Hungarians beyond the border",[1] while MIT is an umbrella organization for advocacy and has been co-organizing

1 https://prominoritate.hu/bemutatkozo/english/ (downloaded on 24. 09. 2022).

Tusványos since 2008. The history and beginnings of the festival are presented below on the basis of the film *Tusványos 30*, as there is no reference to them in other materials made available by the organizers.

There is no introductory content on the official website of Tusványos, but on the festival's Facebook page, under the *About Us* section, there is a text published on 19 June 2019, which gives a detailed account of the mission of Tusványos. According to the text, the aim of the event is to serve the reconnection of the peoples living in the Carpathian Basin, to provide a forum for cross-border cooperation and political dialogue, "contrasting Hungarian and Romanian perspectives on issues of public interest". 80,000 participants are expected to attend a rich programme of events, with lectures in the morning on topics of interest to both countries, with "a number of well-known and respected politicians and experts from all three sides – Hungarian from the motherland, Hungarian from Romania, and Romanian from Romania". The programmes during the day are mostly lectures and roundtable discussions on current political and social issues, while in the evenings there are cultural programmes and concerts. The text also reveals that the most popular event of the festival is the roundtable discussion, in which Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary, takes part and "makes important observations".

5.1. The narrative of the *Tusványos 30* documentary

Bálványos Free Summer University and Student Camp was held for the thirtieth time in the period of 23–28 July 2019. On the occasion of the round anniversary, a documentary entitled *Tusványos 30* was released by Pro Minoritate Foundation, featuring the founders of the free university, public figures, former and current organizers, performers and participants of Tusványos. Zsolt Németh, member of the National Assembly of Hungary, is one of the creators of the event. In December 1989, he was part of a group of friends who visited Romanian towns with the largest Hungarian population that had just been liberated from communism and met with local student unions and youth. According to David Campanale, a British journalist who joined the group in Hungary, their primary aim was to continue the dialogue that began during the December visit. That is when they came up with the idea of a summer retreat to celebrate their youth and to give them a chance to discuss their ideas.

One of the first frames of the documentary is the poster advertising the very first "summer camp", which took place between 21 and 30 July 1990; the title of the poster refers to the central theme and motto of the camp: the transition from dictatorship to democracy. Attila Sántha, who was initially a local organizer, also mentions the regime change when reflecting on the atmosphere of the free university: "We came from communism and we were hit by freedom." The very first edition of the summer university, however, basically had no infrastructural

background; in a few years, following a change of the initial location and a "marriage" between the summer university and an already existing student camp in Transylvania, the event was able to welcome a much larger audience in a more comfortable environment. One of the participants says in the documentary that prior to the plethora of festivals in recent years, Tusványos used to be "THE festival" for those living in Transylvania (referring to Hungarian-speaking people). Barna Fancsali, President of MIT, believes that: "Tusványos will always be the main meeting point for young people."

In addition to providing detailed information on the founding of Tusványos, its early years, and the turning points that have led to its development into an event that attracts tens of thousands of participants every year, the documentary features a number of public figures who articulate the ideological significance and mission of Tusványos. Szilárd Demeter, the current Director of the Petőfi Literary Museum, characterizes Tusványos as a "forum for nation unification and nation building" and a "hotbed of national policy decisions". Demeter highlights some of the initiatives that were conceived in Tusványos, where "a national narrative was built, we could tell each other who us Hungarians are". He says that Tusványos was always good at conveying strong messages because "we were able to formulate messages that were the result of looking at the world through Hungarian eyes".

László Tőkés, politician and one of the permanent guests and speakers at the free university, puts the role of Tusványos in a different light than before in regard to the relations between Hungarians from Hungary and those from Romania: "the orphaned, small motherland is looking for new blood in the regions beyond its borders, even in the field of political thinking". In this sense, the already mentioned national unification and the attempts to achieve it are made to satisfy a mutual need. Tőkés also praises the natural environment itself and its symbolic significance, in which Tusványos takes place year after year; he believes that going back to the ancient site "sets a fundamental direction of thought", which he believes is very much needed today, as Europe and its nationalities "are struggling with an identity crisis". The ancestral site referred to presents the idealized and isolated image that is often the starting point for nationalist narratives, as well as the identity crisis that results from a sense of threat from unions (e.g. the European Union) that aim to unify by diminishing a supposed national uniqueness.

In the documentary, very little is said about Hungarian–Romanian relations, although one of the initial aims of the event was to bring the three communities (Hungarians from Hungary, Hungarians from Romania, and Romanians from Romania) closer together. László Tőkés addresses this when he mentions future plans and prospects: "the Romanian–Hungarian dialogue must also be restored". In recalling the early years, one of the speakers in the documentary describes the Romanian participants of the event as seeing the Hungarians of Szeklerland

as "exotic" and as being characterized by a constant sense of wonder during their time at the festival, but at the same time as being keen to return in the years that follow.

David Campanale, former creator of the summer university, who is now a Liberal Democrat politician in the UK, sees the main reason for his appreciation of Tusványos as ideological and as a medium free of Western trends but still offering opportunities for open dialogue:

> I think one of the most difficult things in Western countries is that because of political correctness, they are very careful about what you say, how you say it, how it might be misunderstood. Here, the philosophy of the East and the West, and even Christian ideas, can work together, and it is quite natural to talk about the spiritual issues and the spiritual identity of the Hungarians living here. About the spiritual identity of Europe and what it means to be European.

In the closing shots of the documentary, current Prime Minister Viktor Orbán sums up the role and mission of Tusványos in the life of the Hungarian community: "Tusványos is the answer to the question of whether national unification is possible."

5.2. Tusványos in the social media

The Facebook page of Tusványos currently[2] has 32,000 likes, the event's official Instagram page has around 7,500 followers, and both sites list www.tusvanyos.ro as the official website of the event although it is important to note that the latter only contains material from after 2015, while the archives of previous events and galleries are available at www.old.tusvanyos.ro. These archives also contain the mottos of the previous festivals, which change from year to year (up to 2014, the relevant data are listed on the aforementioned website, while the mottos of the following years can be traced back from the images in the archives or other press material). These strongly emotional, almost community-forming mottos may explain why Tusványos defines itself as a *community* on its Facebook page, while for other similar events, Facebook page creators typically choose to classify them as *music event*, *festival*, *concert venue*, *event location*, or *event organizer*.

It is also clear from the presence of Tusványos on social media, namely Facebook, that it is different from both the festivals in the narrower Transylvanian context and the music festivals in Hungary. The comparison below is based on the content and posts uploaded in 2020 on the Facebook pages of Tusványos and a total of 5 other festivals, 2 from Transylvania (Double Rise, Vibe) and 3 from Hungary

2 The quantitative data of this section were collected in February 2021.

(Sziget, Balaton Sound, VOLT). As the main criteria of the comparison are the use of the Hungarian language and the posts on the social media pages of the events in connection to different (national) holidays, no Romanian festival was included that communicates exclusively in Romanian and/or English with its target audience.

Today's central industries are organized around the trade in textual content and other text-based services, and this is why language has become central to various economic phenomena, whether in terms of the products or even the processes of distribution and consumption (Pujolar 2007: 72). The resulting globalized and globalizing discourses threaten the political and economic foundations of nationalism (Bauman 1998 – qtd in Pujolar 2007) and may undermine the position of language and culture as stable in the one language – one nation paradigm. From this comparison, it follows that the opening up to international audiences as a result of globalization also has an impact on the Internet language policies of Hungarian festivals, as communication in English becomes dominant or at least equally prominent.

In the case of the festivals examined from Hungary, a globalizing trend can be clearly identified, which is developing along the lines of the economic impact that is being sought. All entries for Sziget (421,000 followers) and Balaton Sound (297,000 followers) are in English and Hungarian, while entries for VOLT (204,000 likes) are in Hungarian only. All three festivals in Hungary post festive content on their page on New Year's and Valentine's Day. In the case of the latter, the related economic factor becomes explicit: those who buy/reserve a pair ticket to the festival on 14 February or the days before will get a discount. In addition to the two holidays mentioned above, Balaton Sound and VOLT also dedicated a special post for Christmas wishes, and VOLT greeted its followers on the occasion of Women's Day. The three festivals in Hungary did not upload any content related to holidays other than those listed, one of the likely reasons being that they wish to attract a wider, international audience to their events, and commemorating events and holidays specific to different national or regional holidays, which may not be known to some of the page's followers, would not necessarily serve this purpose. The fact that the managers of the Sziget Facebook page did not greet their audience on Christmas, as this would not have appealed to their non-Christian followers, is also an indication of economic interest and inclusive communication in a globalized world.

The two other Transylvanian festivals studied alongside Tusványos, Double Rise (20,000 followers) and Vibe (19,000 followers), typically greeted their Facebook followers on the same holidays: New Year's Day, Valentine's Day, Women's Day, Easter, and Christmas. In addition, both festivals commemorated a national holiday, with Vibe posting on 15 March (the anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848) and Double Rise on 4 June (the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Trianon). Vibe also made an environmental appeal to its followers

on the occasion of Earth Day. Double Rise publishes content exclusively in Hungarian, while Vibe occasionally includes elements of English, although not to the extent of the bilingual communication seen in the case of Sziget or Balaton Sound. Although Vibe is the only one of the three Transylvanian festivals to feature international performers, attracting an international audience would be too bold an undertaking for a festival in a city that is not specifically a tourist destination (Târgu-Mureş), especially in the context of increasing economic impact through cultural events. However, it is important to note that the Vibe festival does not exclude potential Romanian-speaking audiences, and more specifically potential performers, as its call for entries for amateur local performers has been published in both Hungarian and Romanian.

Compared to the previous festivals, Tusványos has published a playlist for only one international holiday, World Music Day, but no entries for the internationally celebrated Valentine's Day and New Year's Day. In contrast, Tusványos has a much higher number of posts on Christian, family-related, cultural, and national holidays: Hungarian Poetry Day, Easter, Mother's Day, Children's Day, Pentecost, 4 June (the text of the post reads "We belong together"), 23 October (the anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956), Christmas. On the Facebook page of Tusványos, only Hungarian-language posts are published, which is justified by the fact that, like Double Rise, it only has performers from Transylvania and Hungary. However, if we take into account the statement in the introductory text, namely that its permanent aim is to promote a dialogue between Hungarians from Hungary, Hungarians from Romania, and Romanians from Romania, the fact that there is not a single post in Romanian besides Hungarian may be a source of unease, excluding a participant from the think tank who is identified by the event itself and who is excluded from its online presence precisely by creating and maintaining language barriers. All this seems to outline the community-building endeavour that has already been mentioned, and the common parameters of this community become apparent even in their online communication: language and nation.

6. Conclusions

The increased mobility of people, languages, and semiotic resources has made the reconsideration of previous theoretical frameworks and methods necessary. Linguistic ethnography sees itself as a "place of encounter" where interactions between different levels of society become possible. The field does no longer exist isolated in space and time but is in a continuous dialogue with the ideologies and dominant discourses that constitute it. Since festivals are meant to bring together people with different backgrounds yet with common interests, current sociolinguistic questions may be elaborately explored in such settings. The

festival analysed in this paper, Tusványos, functions as a third space as it does not belong in its entirety either to Romania or to Hungary.

First, I presented the narrative outlined from the documentary entitled *Tusványos 30*. Initial creators, former organizers, and current politicians and participants have made attempts to point out the significance of Tusványos. Be it related to the mission, ideology, or even the natural environment of the festival, they all agreed that it is a place of encounter with historical significance, where a sense of national unity is achieved. Further, I analysed the social media presence of Tusványos as compared to the Facebook activity of other music festivals with a Hungarian background. Based on the language use, and the selection of holidays that give an opportunity to festival organizers to establish communication with their public unrelated to the event in question, it can be concluded that Tusványos does not target an international audience, nor a Romanian one, as the Facebook page has posts written only in Hungarian. Moreover, their choice of holidays worth a post reflect a Christian set of values closely connected to the importance of family and national history, while there is no mention of international holidays often referred to by other festivals.

According to Bloomaert and Dong (2019), the online mapping of offline spaces must also be of academic interest, as only by considering the complexity of the online–offline nexus may social phenomena be examined thoroughly. Following the analysis of Tusványos's online presence and the narratives created in their official communication, further ethnographic fieldwork has to be conducted during the event itself, where a series of issues related to language may be addressed.

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