

Reviews

Marcela Gbúrová: Politika v jazyku. Jazyk v politike. Politologicko-historická analýza novely jazykového zákona. (Policy in Language. Language in Policy. Political-Historical Analysis of Language Law Amendment.)

Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo: Kubko Goral 2009, 232 pp.

The publication by Marcela Gbúrová is a scientifically sound and comprehensive response to the work of Hungarian historians, political scientists, and not least the leading politicians, which was absent in our scientific literature so far. The book is an important contribution to theories and concepts of the nation, nationality, and (ethnic) minorities, both in a methodological and a political-science perspective. Unlike those in Hungary, Slovak authors of publications in the field of social and political science did not give sufficient attention to an analysis of these concepts in the context of contemporary political thought and action. The contents and methods of the book in question have several dimensions and levels of interpretation and the author deals with them in a number of overlapping observations. Following the introduction, the first part of the work deals with “*The political background to the development of the Slovak language in its pre-literary period (9th century until 1787)*”, “*Slovak political thinking and the development of the Slovak language in its literary period (1787 – 1918)*”, and “*The literary period in the conditions of Czechoslovakia (1918 – 1992)*”, which consider both the Slovak-Czech and the Slovak-Hungarian relationships. In the following part, “*Language policy in the period of the independent Slovak Republic after 1993*”, the author analyzes Slovak-Hungarian relations, their political determinants, and their contemporary consequences.

In the introductory part, Marcela Gbúrová comments on two forms of scientific analysis of language: ideologized and non-ideologized. In this regard, the contribution of the work lies in the fact that the author uses new concepts – such as eurointegrating linguistic modernity – and that she develops them in political terms. This also allows her to focus on a detailed analysis of the Slovak language codifications of the 18th and 19th centuries, and for the later period of the 20th and 21st centuries, on the linguistic features of Slovak legislation in the context of the transformation and establishment of the (post-) modern Slovak Republic.

In the first chapter, the author concentrates on the political events that influenced the development of the Slovak language in the period before 1787. She briefly examines the structure of political power and the social background

to the ongoing development of the Slovak language until the "Bernolak codification" of 1787.

The second chapter analyzes the codification of the written Slovak language in the periods of absolutism and the Enlightenment, with its specific form characteristic of the Habsburg monarchy. The concept of literary Slovak was based on the idea of "common sense", the language of the people. The Štúr period, whose main representative was Ľudovít Štúr himself, the author interprets as a developmental stage of the Slovak language in which this language is defined as a separate language vis-à-vis Czech. This chapter details the scientific literature dealing with Štúr and identifies the political framework of the efforts to codify the Slovak language. The author analyzes the importance of the codification of this version of the written Slovak language in terms of the process of national emancipation and regards Štúr as one of the founding figures of Slovak national political history. In Štúr's concept language plays a vital role as an element of social cohesion, going beyond the notion of language as a matter only for the elite; indeed, it is "the major expression of national identity." It is this understanding by Štúr of the meaning of nationality that the author considers as an important step in the development of the contemporary nation as a political community, and therefore she stresses that Štúr moved to the forefront of the linguistic opening phase of the process of ethno-cultural formation of the nation. The author argues that the Slovak language was basically differentiated from, and delimited in relation to, the genetically similar Czech language, which resulted in a radical detachment of Slovak from Czech with the argument that Slovak was not simply a variant of the Czech language. In this section, the author also touches on the status of the Hungarian language in Hungary, which should serve as an instrument of ethno-cultural homogenization, which meant that the desired modernization of the country became in fact a process of linguistic unification.

In the next chapter, "*The literary period in the conditions of Czechoslovakia (1918 – 1992)*", the author deals with the status and development of the Slovak literary language in terms of the democratic changes after 1918. This period is seen as a positive framework for the development of Slovak identity. As negative phenomena obstructing the Slovak emancipation process she sees Czechoslovak unification theories and the policy of the Hungarian minority parties questioning the new Czechoslovak-Hungarian border after the signing of the Trianon treaty. This chapter is structured chronologically by discussing three different sub-periods, viz. 1918 to 1940, 1940 to 1968, and 1968 to 1992. Beneficial from a methodological point of view is the author's detailed investigation of the relationship between ethno-linguistic problems, on the one hand, and political and cultural questions, on the other hand, and how they

influenced each other, combining the civic-political and the ethno-national dimensions of Slovak emancipation.

In the last chapter, the author focuses primarily on those aspects of the Slovak identity, which are relevant in the context of the coexistence of majority and minority, especially the Slovak Language Law and the Hungarian legislative proposals. Gbúrová also analyzes the views and proposals of certain individuals (for example, Béla Bugár) for a form of separate minority (co)existence, its institutionalization, and the strategic plans to achieve this. An appendix of documents (the State Language Act and the principles of the Slovak Government regarding this Law), which are listed in the publication also in English and Hungarian, illustrates the authors intentions.

The author stresses the influence of language background on the philosophical and socio-political ideas and trends of the period. The publication is structured quite systematically by means of the different chapters, although the historical chronology is not always respected. It presents an interesting way to reflect the development of the Slovak language, identifying the major landmarks in the process and the national language's capabilities, goals, and targets at any given stage of social and political development in the Slovak territory. The author's analysis is based on a particular heuristic and methodological point of view and a serious and detailed study of both older and contemporary social science literature, including different documents, articles, and accessible online resources. The author thus critically analyzes the role of language and its importance for the formation of the Slovak national identity, which helped to strengthen the Slovak nation in the historical context of Central Europe. Certain imbalances in terms of contents and methodological approach – a conceptual essentialism versus the concrete historical facts – are due to the complexity of the issues and the ambition of the author to present the problematic in a long-term historical framework. However, since the existing research on the issue of the relationship of language and politics in Slovakia is only in its infancy (that is, in a more complex and newly conceptualizing way), we regard the publication of Marcela Gbúrová as a pioneering work in the field. The author offers to the reader a lot of interesting problem areas and complicated issues to ponder, which should be interesting to all those who want to help develop a more critical, scientific, and objective approach to the issue of language politics. Seen from this perspective, it is also important to develop in the future more detailed analyses of specific, shorter historical periods. The book by Marcela Gbúrová, *“Politics in Language. Language in Politics”* is, however, recommended to all experts, university students, and political and civic actors involved in addressing these issues.

Zuzana Poláčková