

Language Ideologies in Hungarian Prescriptive Linguistics

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The aim of the paper is to uncover the ideologies influencing Hungarian Prescriptive Linguistics (or “language cultivation”, as it is called in Hungarian) and to describe their hierarchy. The research is based on scholarly and popularizing articles dealing with an ongoing language change in Hungarian, the extension of the meaning (function) of a number of verbal prefixes. The paper analyzes judgments about the “correctness” of the neologisms and the proposed prescriptive rules of the use of the new forms and new meanings.

The analysis of the language cultivators’ discourse on the verbal prefixes shows that their judgments are influenced by more than one ideology at the same time. One set of ideologies serves as a starting point of correctness judgments (nationalism, homogenism, standardism etc.), another set of ideologies – among them the so-called correctness ideologies – is designed to justify the specific correctness judgements (conservatism, aesthetism, systemism etc.). However, even the ideologies belonging to this second group are hierarchized: e.g. both aesthetic and systemistic arguments may serve conservative interests.

The analysis of prescriptive articles about the new trends in the use of verbal prefixes also showed that the ideological justification of prescriptive rules lacks consistency. A great number of examples can be found to show how some new features are condemned in spite of the fact that their “correctness” could be solidly justified by other ideologies used to condemn other new features. From this follows that the ideological arguments used in prescriptive linguistic articles about verbal prefixes are arbitrary, they are just means of justifying the ideologies which are hierarchically above them. Actually, their real function is to hide the fact that the correctness judgments are rooted in various language myths and other unscholarly beliefs about language.