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My Father's Story: An Ethnography About Language Loss

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A photograph of a prison or concentration camp. In the foreground, there are several strands of barbed wire. In the middle ground, there is a wooden guard tower with a gabled roof and several windows. To the right of the tower, there is a long, low building with a series of arched structures along its length. The background shows a hazy sky and some distant structures. The overall tone is somber and historical.

My Father's Story

An Ethnography about Language Loss

An IN-PROCESS MA Thesis in Applied Linguistics

Introduction

A family ethnography around language and identity loss; about war, trauma, and forced migration.

This story is particular to my family but it's one of millions - from the past to those being created today.

Political shifts in the Serbian Banat* region



* **Banat** - administrative subdivision

Source: europe.unc.edu

South Banat District - Vojvodina

Dél-bánsági körzet

(Hungarian)

Južnobanatski okrug

(Serbian)

Južnobanatski okrug

(Croatian)

Districul Banatul de Sud

(Romanian)

Northeastern district of Serbia (the Serbian *Banat*)



Source: DVHH.org

Literature Review

1

OTHER STORIES

2

**ETHNOGRAPHIC
METHODOLOGY**

3

HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE

How we examine language loss across disciplines

PSYCHOLOGY

CHILDHOOD
TRAUMA

NEGLECT

ABUSE

Poor identity formation
Low self-esteem
Shame / anger
PTSD

BIOLOGY

BRAIN INJURY

EPIGENETICS

CULTURAL
SOMATICS

Learning disabilities
Neurodivergence
Addiction

APPLIED LINGUISTICS

SECOND
LANGUAGE
ACQUISITION

L1
DEVELOPMENT

Transfer to L2 and Lx
Literacy issues
Teacher / learner needs

The ethnography aims to tell a story

- INTERVIEWS, FIELD OBSERVATIONS, and FAMILY HISTORY
- *'thick, rich description'* (Spradley, 1979)
- Prove validity and triangulation (Patton, 1999 and Guba, 1981)
- Qualitative data:

FIELD RESEARCH

INTERVIEWS

**PERSONAL
OBSERVATIONS**

Family research in Serbia

Retracing my father's childhood places



Photos from travels in Homolitz, Pančevo and surrounding towns in Serbia - Sept 2023



Photos from travels in Homolitz, Pančevo and surrounding towns in Serbia - Sept 2023

Memorial site for the victims of the camp at Rudolfsgnad outside of Pančevo, Serbia



Photos from travels in Homolitz, Pančevo and surrounding towns in Serbia - Sept 2023

Mass grave site
near Pancevo, Serbia



Photos from travels in Homolitz, Pančevo and surrounding towns
in Serbia - Sept 2023

Conflicting
languacultures
during my father's
childhood

Shwovish was used only at home and was neither German nor Serbian

The Nazi regime considered ethnic Germans their own people

Serbian camp guards punished the camp prisoners for being “Germans”

Communist school teachers beat my father for not being “Serbian”

German school teachers beat my father for not being “German”

*'If I think about food and a sense of home,
Serbia is where I feel most comfortable, but
I will never be accepted there.'*



Takeaways

Forgiveness and understanding - future generations

The associations that language brings to identity

The effects of language and power stay with us and form our idea of where we are accepted / or not

Language and identity dissociation has far greater damaging effects on people than we may realize

What is “your language” what is “your culture? For some it’s not easily defined and causes anxiety

This is just one story of many.

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