

They say ‘it will’, we say ‘it wile’: Emic differentiation of linguistic varieties in the “ausbau” bilingual Belarusian-Russian borderland

(Abstract for ICLaVE 3)

Marian Sloboda

Charles University, Prague

Ustav lingvistiky a ugrofinistiky

Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy v Praze

nam. Jana Palacha 2

CZ – 11638 Praha 1

e-mail: marian.sloboda@seznam.cz

Belarus is a bilingual country: the closely related Russian and Belarusian are the two main languages. The discourse practice in Belarus shows high variation and frequent language mixing. In addition, also Standard Belarusian is internally variable, having “classical” and “Soviet” variants. Belarusian linguists, who try to “settle the chaos” through codification, are themselves divided in their views on the variation. The categories which they apply to the linguistic situation in Belarus are, e.g., “literary”, “dialect”, “Russian”, “Belarusian”, “Belarusian natiolect of Russian”, “trasyanka” (a mixed variety). I point out that linguists’ categorizations differ from the non-linguists’ perceptions of language varieties and of what language they actually speak. The emic conceptualizations have not been seriously considered in expert discussions of the linguistic situation in Belarus, although emic, not etic, concepts are those that usually operate in the speakers’ linguistic behavior and to which the speakers assume attitudes. In my contribution, I show how inhabitants of the Belarusian-Russian borderland construe and manifest linguistic variability of their region and of Belarus in their narratives. Their constructions include also the “shapoval” argot and Chernobyl refugees’ variants. The analysis is based on audio data and field notes recorded in June 2004.