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Crossing Borders, Keeping Language: Ethnolinguistic Vitality of Croatia's Diaspora in Sweden

Roko Uvodić
Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Croatia
e-mail: roko@idi.hr
ORCID: 0009-0005-8440-2318

Drago Župarić-Iljić
University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Sociology, Croatia
e-mail: dzuparic@ffzg.unizg.hr
ORCID: 0000-0001-5654-4080

ABSTRACT This article revolves around the question of integration of Croatian immigrants in Sweden and is written from the sociolinguistic perspective of sustaining the Croatian language among the members of diaspora. Through the theory of ethnolinguistic vitality, the study highlights how Croatians in Sweden maintain their language and ethnic identity in transnational social space. Based on a mixed-method approach including an empirical research with 150 participants of the survey, and participants of additional focus-groups, it offers insights into the language attitudes and complexities of post-migration experiences among Croatian immigrants. The study emphasizes the level of language and identity sustainment among Croatian immigrants in Sweden, calling out the necessity for further exploration of such topics within the realms of migration, transnationalism and ethnic studies, together with sociolinguistics. Even though this research is just a beginning in studying Croatian identity abroad from a sociolinguistic point of view, it offers useful insights on the dynamics of transnational migration and post-migration processes. Croatian immigrants in Sweden maintain a high level of ethnolinguistic vitality, retaining their ethnic characteristics and behaving as a linguistically cohesive identity, at the same time forming communities that bridge the gap between their home country and their current place of residence.

Key words: migration, Croats in Sweden, ethnolinguistic vitality, transnationalism, diaspora, sociolinguistics.

Acknowledgement

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1. Introduction and research aim

Language is not only used as a form of human verbal communication but also a powerful tool for expressing other non-verbal characteristics, such as personal and group identity, cultural belonging, ethnicity and nationality (Giles, Bourhis and Taylor, 1977). However, in today's world of increasing migration and globalization, maintaining a certain language in a foreign environment becomes more difficult, as at least one language in the world disappears every week (Ehala, 2009: 38). Although there are institutions that legally protect minority languages, this is often not enough to sustain them. Several authors agree that the fate of a minority language depends more on the attitudes of its speakers than on its legal status (Giles et al., 1977; Ehala, 2009). This makes ethnolinguistic vitality, i.e. likelihood that a group will behave as a collective entity in intergroup situations, an extremely important theoretical concept for studying the sustainability of such languages.

This concept is very significant for analysis in Sweden, where more than a quarter of the population consists of immigrants or Swedish citizens of foreign origin (SCB, 2023). Due to the rapid processes of globalization and industrialization in the second half of the 20th century and the growing need for workforce, Sweden welcomed hundreds of thousands of foreign workers who did not necessarily fit into the typical Scandinavian way of life in terms of ethnicity, religion, and language (Jervas, 1995: 11, in Godin, 2006: 127). Among them were also many citizens of the former socialist Yugoslavia, including Croatians, who as early as of 1960s began to establish various clubs, associations, and communities based on ethnic affiliation, creating a Croatian transnational space in Sweden (Mesarić Žabčić, 2006).

There are not many sociolinguistic studies on Croatians in Sweden (cf. Škifić, 2022), and there are also very few that focus on (post)migration, ethnic or diversity issues (Povrzanović Frykman, 2010; Kanižaj, Rajković Iveta and Bagić, 2021; Slavnić and Obućina, 2023). This article aims to cover both of those perspectives, while making an academic contribution to the development of these fields. Through a mixed-method approach, it is focused on explaining the phenomenon of the Croatian community in Sweden and their integration in the country, with a focus on maintaining their mother tongue and group ethnic identity in the transnational space.

2. From transnational social spaces to diasporic linguistic practices

Migration is a phenomenon that involves more than 281 million people worldwide, or 3.6% of the global population (McAuliffe and Oucho, 2024). It inevitably brings certain consequences, which can be economic, social, and political. For many individuals, groups and states, migration can represent significant opportunities, such as an increase in population and workforce, but it can also bring certain problems, such as unemployment and challenges related to the acculturation of migrants (Berry et al., 2006: 304). Yet, effects of (post)migration onto sociolinguistic practices of members of emigrants have been rarely investigated in transnational context among the members of Croatian diaspora in Sweden. In the research by Škifić (2022), the questionnaire administered among 64 Croatian immigrants in Sweden in 2020 showed that upon arrival they evaluated their knowledge of English language higher than the knowledge of Swedish, however, they noted significant progress in learning the Swedish language, which was perceived as important for employment.

The consequences of migration have been a crucial factor in changing the paradigm of migration studies over the past few decades (Faist, 2004; Colic-Peisker, 2006; Čapo Žmegač, 2019). At first, migration studies were viewed within the framework of methodological nationalism, or the "container" of a single nation-state (Faist, 2004:16; Colic-Peisker, 2006: 212). However, the perspective of transnationalism introduced a paradigmatic shift. This shift in focus from the act of migration to its consequences also meant incorporating broader social, psychological, political, and cultural (including linguistic) variables into the equation when examining what appears to be a simple process of relocation. Simply put, the term transnationalism refers to a set of close cultural, social, and economic ties that migrants maintain with their countries of origin (Faist, 2004: 17). According to transnational postulates, migration is never a completed process; it implies a constant flow and a "dynamic, permanent, and ongoing interaction between people from sending and receiving countries" (Grbić Jakopović, 2014: 28).

Migrant communities, families, and individuals started to assimilate less into reception societies and instead began relocating social ties and identity patterns into a transnational social space (Faist, 2004; Božić and Kuti, 2019). By creating such a space, immigrants became transmigrants who maintain the family, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political boundaries of their "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991) in the reception/host country and develop their transnational identities within them (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992: 1). They are individuals who move between different societies, so their identity is a result of the dynamic interaction between different cultural contexts, consisting of a complex network of social relations they maintain in various social spaces (Glick Schiller et al., 1992: 11). It is crucial to note that the ways of self-identification among transmigrants are the fundamental backbone of these fields, as their sustainability depends on the attitudes and perceptions of those who reside within them (Povrzanović Frykman, 2010: 3).

In diaspora, language practices may emerge as a complex interplay of identity preservation, adaptation to new social environment, and co-ethnic and inter-ethnic community bonding. Language and its vitality often play a role of a strong identity marker, although adaptation to destination country's language is prerequisite for meaningful long-term integration (Rosa and Trivedi, 2017). Oftentimes this results in bilingualism or multilingualism with transnational diasporic speakers alternating between their ancestral and host language in the public, professional and educational sphere in opposition to private sphere. Linguistic hybridization is an inevitable result of assimilation pressures with each new young generation of immigrant background, whereas lack of institutional support may pose a threat to the maintenance of cultural and linguistic identity among diaspora members, even though we find this identity not as a monolithic and homogenous entity, but rather as a socially constructed practice and relation. However, investments into cultural activities fostering linguistic identity may boost endeavours for preserving ethnic ties and solidarity among diaspora members. Thus, we posit that ethnolinguistic vitality may be utilized as a useful conceptual and theoretical framework for researching identity of Croatian diaspora in Sweden.

3. Theory of ethnolinguistic vitality

When individuals or groups migrate, they encounter cultures different from their own. Although culture is a broad term, it is commonly defined as a complex set of characteristics or traits that include knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, and all other capabilities and habits acquired by a person as a member of society, which are passed down from generation to generation (Tylor, 1871). The transmission of culture takes place through language, which makes it an integral part of the very essence of human culture (Duranti, 1997). That way, when individuals or groups migrate, they also encounter different languages, which can present various obstacles when integrating into a new society.

Language as a term is not easily defined, as it is not a simple code that all people can understand in the same way in every situation (Trudgill, 2000: 2). However, there is a consensus that it is an arbitrary set of symbols through which a particular social group expresses its views, ideas, and beliefs (Robins and Crystal, 2023). In practice, language serves not only for communication but also as a mechanism for expressing what words sometimes cannot describe (Wareing, 2004: 8-9). Social background, ethnicity, nationality, class, mental and physical state, or current mood, are just some of the things a person reveals about themselves while performing the act of speaking, often without being aware of it (Wareing, 2004: 8-9). From the sociolinguistic perspective, language also plays a strong cohesive role within social groups, as individuals signify their group affiliation through the language they speak (Kotsinas, 2002: 19). An individual's self-identification with a group implies the adoption of that group's linguistic conventions (Thornborrow, 2004: 158). By speaking the same linguistic variety, interlocutors

identify with the group and create a sense of belonging, thus strengthening cohesion within the speech community (Kramsch, 2009).

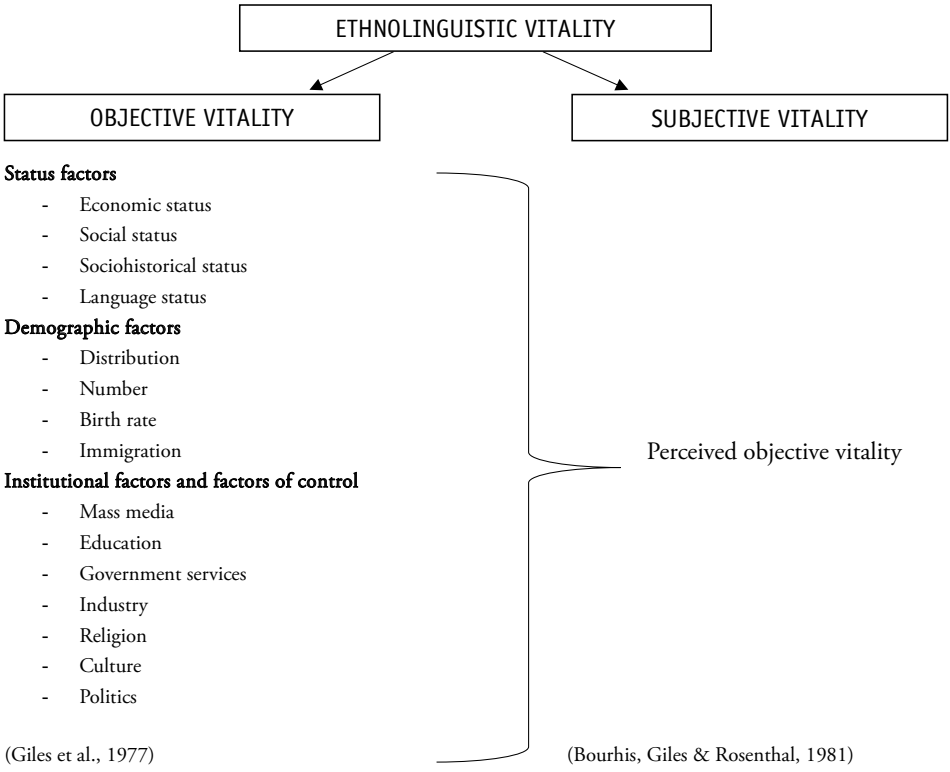
However, not all speech or linguistic communities are equally sustainable. The sustainability of a linguistic community or group can be measured through the concept of ethnolinguistic vitality, first introduced into sociolinguistics by Giles et al. (1977) and further developed by Ehala (2008; 2009; 2010; 2014). It is often used in the context of languages that are endangered or at risk of extinction, but it can also be viewed as the mere will of group members to act as a linguistic collective, based on their emotional ties to the group itself (Ehala, 2008; 2009; 2010; 2014). Ethnolinguistic vitality can thus be defined as a certain level of shared solidarity within a group, which, depending on its degree (high or low), represents the likelihood that the group will behave as a distinct and active collective entity in intergroup situations (Giles et al., 1977: 308).

The theory of ethnolinguistic vitality is not entirely a theory of language but is primarily concerned with social identity, although in many cases this overlaps with linguistic sustainability (Ehala, 2009). Vitality is therefore manifested by the willingness and readiness of group members to participate in social action and collective activities (Ehala, 2010: 204-205).

Giles et al. (1977) identified four factors that objectively influence the level of ethnolinguistic vitality of a group. These are, in order: economic status, social status, sociohistorical status, and language status. Economic status concerns the level of control that a linguistic group holds in the economic sphere of the country, region, or community in which it operates. Furthermore, social status is practically defined as the level of confidence a group possesses that is recognized by the majority group, while sociohistorical status is defined as the perception of a particular social group by the majority group, based on historical events and symbols associated with that group. Finally, language status concerns the social position of the language spoken by members of a particular group, both within and outside the boundaries of the speech community.

However, the level of ethnolinguistic vitality ultimately depends on a group's will to behave as a cohesive entity, so it cannot be measured solely by objective factors. It must also be considered subjectively, i.e., through the perceptions and attitudes of group members toward the objective factors. Therefore, Bourhis, Giles & Rosenthal (1981: 147) expanded the original model of ethnolinguistic vitality, emphasizing the need to include the subjective perception that influences the level of a group's vitality in the model, as group members' experiences can give context and meaning to objective factors. Similar models have also been used by Ehala (2008; 2009) and will be used in this research.

Figure 1.
Ethnolinguistic vitality factors (Ehala, 2008: 124)



The main factors in defining the subjective level of ethnolinguistic vitality are the perceived differences between the ethnocultural masses of two groups (M_1 and M_2), the perceived distance between the two groups (r), and the degree of individual utilitarianism (U). As Ehala (2008: 131) explains, the ethnocultural mass of one group (M_1) is the presence of certain ethnocultural events, language, and national elements in a society, as well as the self-perception of belonging to a particular community. It can only be understood in relation to the ethnocultural mass of the other group (M_2). Furthermore, the distance between the two groups (r) refers to perceived differences in social behaviour, such as reactions to different stimuli, but also in culture, e.g., fashion style, celebration of holidays, eating habits, religion, education level, etc. (Ehala, 2008: 132). The concept of individual utilitarianism (U) as defined by Ehala (2008: 134) diverges from the usual understanding of utilitarianism as a philosophical direction that sees the purpose of action in the benefit and welfare of the individual or community. Ehala considers the following utilitarian principles: (1) people are rational economic entities; (2) "good" is defined as that which maximizes happiness; (3) values are established quantitatively (Ehala, 2008: 134). In line with these principles, Ehala

creates a scale of individual utilitarianism with two poles, conservatism and liberalism, where it is assumed in this context that those who are more liberal will easier integrate into the target society (Ehala, 2008: 134).

In mathematical terms, this formula looks like this:

$$V = U (M_1 – M_2) / r$$

According to Ehala (2008: 129), when these variables are applied to the equation based on an analysis of a minority group, the highest possible result can be V = 0, indicating that the group is stable. However, when analysing a majority group, the result can be positive, though in such cases the value does not suggest the strength of the group. On the other hand, if V < 0, the group is in the process of assimilation. The more negative the value, the more the group has assimilated, with the lowest possible negative value calculated by the formula being 12 (according to V = 2 (1 – 7) / 1).

4. Croats in Sweden: then and now

When we talk about the number of Croatian residents in Sweden, we cannot speak in precise numbers but only estimates, as there are no publicly available and accurate records of the Croatian emigrant population. This situation has been causing difficulties for researchers for years, as reflected in a quote by Mesarić Žabčić (2006: 313) from nearly two decades ago: "Aside from estimating their number, almost nothing can be said about the basic characteristics of the emigrant population because — simply put — there is no data on their age and gender structure, their education, or their occupation at the time of emigration or today.". [1]

It is estimated that approximately 40,000 members of the Croatian emigrant population and their descendants live in Sweden[2]. The largest concentration of Croatian emigrants is in the southern Swedish cities of Gothenburg and Malmö, while during the 1990s, a significant number of ethnic Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina settled in central Sweden.[3]

Croats began settling in this Scandinavian country during the second half of the 20th century (Čizmić, Sopta and Šakić, 2005: 280). Starting in the mid-1960s, the first organized arrivals of Croatian migrants came to Sweden for so-called "temporary work" as "guest-workers", mostly in the automotive industry (Volvo, Saab, Scania)

[1] Translated from Croatian to English by the authors.
[2] Hrvatsko iseljeništvo u Švedskoj. Accessed on October 6th, 2024. https://hrvatiizvanrh.gov.hr/hrvati-izvan-rh/hrvatsko-iseljenistvo/hrvatsko-iseljenistvo-u-svedskoj/770
[3] Hrvatsko iseljeništvo u Švedskoj. Accessed on October 6th, 2024. https://hrvatiizvanrh.gov.hr/hrvati-izvan-rh/hrvatsko-iseljenistvo/hrvatsko-iseljenistvo-u-svedskoj/770

and in shipyards (Čizmić et al., 2005: 280). Many of them quickly learnt Swedish and advanced within their companies, paving the way for family reunification and the upbringing of the second generation of Croatian migrants in Sweden (Čizmić et al., 2005: 280). Thus, "temporary migrants" became permanent migrants (Mesarić Žabčić, 2006: 316). The second period of immigration began in the 1990s when Croats and Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina migrated to Sweden mainly for political reasons and due to the consequences of the Homeland War (Povrzanović Frykman, 2012; Slavnić and Obućina, 2023). The third period of immigration can be described as the modern or "brain drain" phase, which has been significant in the 21st century, especially after Croatia's accession to the European Union (Župarić-Iljić, 2016; Valenta, Jakobsen, Gregurović and Župarić-Iljić, 2024) and the Schengen zone in 2023.

5. Methodology

The research was conducted in February and March 2024 on a sample of Croatian immigrants in Sweden. Sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was used. Therefore, the results are not only the sum of the conclusions from both analyses, but also have explanatory value (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017).

In the first phase of the research, a survey was conducted. The aim of this phase was to numerically represent the level of integration of Croats into the Swedish society through ethnolinguistic vitality. The instruments were adapted from several similar studies (Ehala, 2008; Ehala and Zabrodskaja, 2014). The core part of the survey consisted of a set of questions regarding the respondents' sociodemographic and linguistic characteristics, such as gender, age, ethnic group, mother tongue, languages spoken, city and country of birth and residence, period of immigration to Sweden, and participation in activities of Croatian associations in Sweden. The first instrument measured perceived ethnocultural masses of Croats and Swedes (M_1 and M_2), i.e., perceptions of representation of one group's ethnocultural elements in the Swedish society. The second instrument measured the variable of perceived distance (r) between the two groups (Croats and Swedes). Both of these instruments were based on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 indicated the lowest level of agreement and 7 the highest. Some of the items in the scale were as following: How different is the Croatian mentality from the Swedish mentality? How stigmatized are Croats by Swedes? To what extent do you feel you belong to the Croatian community? To what extent do you feel you belong to the Swedish community? To what extent would you like to connect with the Croatian community in the future? The third instrument measured the frequency of use of Croatian and Swedish in specific situations on a scale from 0 to 7, where 0 represented the use of a third language. The value of 1 indicated exclusive use of Croatian, while the value of 7 indicated exclusive use of Swedish. The fourth instrument measured the level of individual utilitarianism (U), i.e., how inclined an individual is toward adaptation and assimilation. This was measured on a scale from 0 to 2, where 0 represented

a tendency toward conservatism and tradition, and 2 represented a tendency toward individualism and new experiences.

In the broader research this phase sought to address four hypotheses, but in this article, it only revolves around one, which was formed under the assumption that Croats integrate well into foreign societies while maintaining their own ethnocultural integrity (Lalich, 2010; Šutalo, 2010; Čapo Žmegač, 2019).

H1: Croatian immigrants in Sweden maintain a high level of ethnolinguistic vitality.

In the second phase, the research was conducted using focus groups. The aim of this phase was to gain an in-depth understanding of the reasons for self-identification with an ethnic group, and language use in certain situations. In other words, the goal was to obtain deeper insights into Croatian-Swedish relations that could not be gathered from the survey. All the focus groups were held online and in Croatian. For the purposes of this article, they were translated to English by the authors.

A total of 150 respondents participated in the survey. Women predominated (70.6%), while men participated in a smaller percentage (28.6%). One respondent chose not to disclose their gender (0.8%). Exactly half of the sample in the survey questionnaire consisted of respondents aged 31-45 (50%), followed by those in the age groups of 46-60 (21.4%), 18-30 (17.3%), and 61+ (11.3%). The sample was also segmented by the period of migration to Sweden, and participation in Croatian cultural associations and societies in Sweden. Most of the sample consisted of respondents who migrated to Sweden in the 21st century (71.4%), while a smaller number had migrated between 1960 and 1989 (15.4%), and between 1990 and 2000 (12.6%). One respondent (0.6%) was a second-generation Croatian migrant in Sweden who, although born in Sweden and technically not an immigrant, was included in the research to provide additional insights into post-migration relations.

All respondents were living in various parts of Sweden at the time of completing the questionnaire, with the largest number residing in Gothenburg (19.3%), Malmö (14.6%), Stockholm (13.3%), and Helsingborg (6%). The vast majority stated that they spoke Swedish (91.3%), while a slightly smaller number knew English (86.6%). Croatian was listed as a native language by all respondents (100%).

Regarding the focus groups, three group discussions were conducted with a total of 15 participants. The group consisted of seven men (47%) and eight women (53%), of which three (20%) had immigrated between 1960 and 1989, one (7%) between 1990 and 2000, and 11 (73%) from 2001 to the present.

It must be noted that this research has some limitations. First, carrying out the study

did not imply significant financial resources, and consequently, only a convenience sample of the Croatian immigrant population in Sweden was chosen. In it, there was a relatively higher number of women than men, as well as Croatian migrants who immigrated to Sweden in the 21st century. Therefore, the sample is not sufficiently representative to draw strict conclusions about the integration, habits, and social and linguistic behaviour of the whole Croatian immigrant community in Sweden. Second, the issue of measuring the concept of ethnolinguistic vitality has been present for decades, and numerous researchers around the world are gradually attempting to contribute to measurement instruments for this phenomenon (Giles et al., 1977; Bourhis et al., 1981; Ehala, 2008; 2009). Notwithstanding, some criticism acknowledge differences in perceptions of ethnolinguistic vitality (and its implications) with actual vitality of some particular immigrant groups (Yagmur and Ehala, 2011).

6. Results

Our research found that most participants are currently employed or studying in Sweden. They came to Sweden seeking opportunities and in pursuit of better socio-economic conditions than those offered by their home country. One participant shared a small anecdote about their arrival in this Scandinavian country in the 1960s.

> *"That I can't forget, I came with my deceased uncle by car, because he was living in Uppsala. He came there in '64 as an emigrant (…). Some people that were working with me during that time, most of them were from Herzegovina, they couldn't understand why I am going to Sweden, to the north, where, as they said, there are only chamois and wastelands (…). On Monday I started working at Volvo."*
>
> Participant 1, moved between 1960 – 1989

The main goal of this study was to determine the level of ethnolinguistic vitality of Croats in Sweden using the formula defined and developed by Ehala (2008). The level of individual utilitarianism (U), ranging from 0 to 2, was 1.72. The ethnocultural mass of the Croatian group (M_1) on a scale from 1 to 7 was 2.89, while the ethnocultural mass of the Swedish group (M_2) was 5.28, also on a scale from 1 to 7. The perceived difference between the groups (r), measured on a scale from 0 to 7, was 4.21. In mathematical terms, the formula, with the averages inserted for each of the variables, looks like this:

$$V = 1.72\ (2.89 - 5.28) / 4.21 = -0.97$$

The result of –0.97 indicates a relatively high level of ethnolinguistic vitality among Croats in Sweden. Based on this, it can be concluded that the group is generally stable and behaves as a cohesive entity in a foreign environment. In line with this interpreta-

tion, we accept the first hypothesis and can say that the group of Croatian immigrants in Sweden maintains a high level of ethnolinguistic vitality.

Supporting the finding of group stability are the quotes from several focus group participants who immigrated to Sweden at different times. Participant 2 and Participant 15, who immigrated in the 1970s, emphasize that they could never feel Swedish, as well as Participant 9, who immigrated in the 21st century.

> *"As for me, I feel more Croatian. I speak Swedish and I love Sweden; we've lived here for a long time, but I still feel more Croatian. If someone were to ask me, I would always say I'm Croatian. I mean, I love Sweden very much and I'm a Swedish citizen and all, but my roots are Croatian."*
>
> Participant 2, moved between 1960 – 1989

> *"I would never want to be a Swede. What more can they offer me besides the economy and a comfortable life? (…) I've been here since '79, and the longer I stay, the more Croatian I feel. Somehow, you have one heart, and that's it. (…) And my kids ask me, since I have children here, "Mom, where will we bury you?" And then I think, well, I have you here, but my father, mother, grandfather, grandmother — they're all buried down there, you know (…). When you're young, it's all like, 'Oh, I'm young, I'll stay here, I'll stay a bit longer…' But no, you won't stay. I mean, you can stay, but your heart will always stay down there."*
>
> Participant 15, moved between 1960 – 1989

> *"It never crossed my mind to say that I'm, like, Swedish or just from Sweden or anything, despite now having Swedish citizenship. I mean, I'm Croatian, and I live in Sweden, and that's how I feel. I've only had positive experiences with that."*
>
> Participant 9, moved in the 21st century

Croatians in Sweden regard their ethnicity as something important and inseparable from their identity. However, the following section of the paper will present an analysis of the high level of tendency towards individual utilitarianism, which may have its influences in the future.

6.1. Individual utilitarianism (U)

When it comes to the tendency towards individual utilitarianism, the average response of survey participants on a scale from 0 to 2 was 1.72. This suggests that for most respondents, tradition is not particularly important, and they are individually inclined toward adaptation. Furthermore, many focus group participants stated that they are

not overly traditional, yet they still practice certain Croatian customs. However, some have also adopted specific Swedish traditions and behaviour patterns.

> *"As for Croatia, I am connected to the čakavica-speaking region[4] and the customs that take place there. It's very, very localized; I'm not attached to tradition in a general sense, like Christmas or Easter, those don't really exist in my mind, as I wasn't raised to think of Christmas and Easter as a big deal. What has definitely changed since coming to Sweden is that I'm mostly in contact with Swedes, and I mostly socialize exclusively with Swedes. My partner is Swedish, and I think this has greatly influenced my view of tradition, as I'm involved in all the traditional Swedish holidays, like Midsommar, Kräftskiva… (…) So, I think I've become more traditional, as that is somewhat a part of "integration" in my mind..."*
>
> Participant 7, moved in the 21st century

> *"I think I've become more diplomatic here than back home. I studied in Zagreb, so when I see my friends in Zagreb, they tell me I've changed, to put it politely. Before, I used to be more, let's say, Dalmatian — hit it head-on and see what happens — but I don't do that anymore. Now I'm very diplomatic, I know how to say things, how to wrap them up, how to present them. But that's probably because of jobs here; you must be like that. People here [in Sweden] don't handle being told the hard truth very well."*
>
> Participant 11, moved in the 21st century

Some participants agreed that tradition is very important to them and mentioned that they practice certain Croatian customs even more in Sweden than they did in their home country. A shared reason for this seems to be a longing for their homeland, along with the cultural practice of certain traditions.

> *"Tradition is very important to me. With my children and family here, we perhaps nurture certain things even more than we did back home, so they're not forgotten. While some elements from Swedish culture manage to make their way into our lives — yes, that happens — but we are far from forgetting our own [culture]. [...] My children are very familiar with it, so I hope at least one of them will carry it on."*
>
> Participant 13, moved in the 1990s

Although the quantitative part of the study indicated a tendency towards individual utilitarianism and adaptability to new environments, this section provides context to those findings and shows that Croats in Sweden still nurture certain national cultural traditions, some perhaps even more than in Croatia. However, the majority agreed that they have embraced certain aspects of Swedish culture, which they now practice

[4] One of the three main Croatian dialects spoken mostly along the Adriatic coast.

personally, such as celebrating Swedish holidays or adapting certain aspects of their identity.

6.2. Differences in ethnocultural masses (M_1 and M_2)

According to the formula, on a scale from 1 to 7, the average perceived ethnocultural mass from the Croatian side was 2.89, while from the Swedish side it was 5.28. These data can be interpreted to mean that respondents believe that Swedish characteristics prevail much more in Swedish society than Croatian ones. Although this may seem quite commonsensical at first, the respondents were exposed to a brief vignette before this set of questions, which aimed to remind them of the multicultural Swedish society.

Focus group participants stated that they notice some Croatian elements in their places of residence daily, but that there are still more of them in other countries of the diaspora.

> *"I work in a film institute, and I can say from that perspective, which is quite amusing to me, that they all grew up with "Balthazar"[5], and if you were to stop someone on the street, they would sing you the opening theme of "Balthazar". But I also noticed Croatian products in a store, but only in one place. Literally, there was one shelf with Argeta pâté and Zvijezda oil, and that was about it... What you said, I have a feeling that in countries like Germany it's different."*
>
> Participant 6, moved in the 21st century

> *"You know what, I'm going to the Stockholm Film Festival when they air Croatian films. Every year, there's a Croatian film, so I go there and bring people with me (…). I've also been a couple of times to mass; there's actually a Croatian mass in Stockholm. It's really nice there; you meet a lot of our people."*
>
> Participant 11, moved in the 21st century

Many participants also pointed out that they believe Swedes still perceive Croatians as Yugoslavs, or as members of the former socialist state, and that not everyone may know the difference between Croatian and other Balkan cultures.

> *"In the library, just like in the rest of Sweden, books are categorized under Serbo-Croatian more than Croatian; the languages are not separated, which I think is politically relevant to mention."*
>
> Participant 7, moved in the 21st century

[5] Famous cartoon "Professor Balthazar" in Croatia and ex-Yugoslavia which started airing in the 1960s.

"You can find ajvar in every store, and I think that's more of a Yugoslav culture thing, maybe, rather than specifically Croatian."

Participant 10, moved in the 21st century

Even though Croatians believe that Swedish national elements are far more present than Croatian ones, they also pointed out that they exist in the Swedish society. These can be categorized under food products, books, films, and certain cultural events.

6.3. Perceived distance (r)

According to the findings from the quantitative part of the research, the perceived distance between the group of Croatians and the group of Swedes in Sweden is moderately high, scoring 4.21 on a scale of 1 to 7. This means that Croatians feel a considerable distance and significant differences between their ethnic group and the Swedish one, which can be reflected in several elements shared by focus group participants. The most frequently mentioned were communication style, time management, conflict avoidance, and attitudes toward family.

a) Communication

One of the key differences between Swedes and Croats, according to many participants, is the communication style. A participant who immigrated in the 21st century pointed out that, due to the different way of communicating, it was very difficult for her to adjust to Swedish society.

"Some things they say, they literally use words that I would never use. At work it was stressful, the job was poorly organized, and I told that to my boss once. Then the Swedish boss said to my boss: she was like besviken, like disappointed. No, I wasn't disappointed, I had a "heart attack and a nervous breakdown at the same time". You understand? Those are some… What are you trying to say with that? What do you mean by that? They use words that… I would never describe it that way."

Participant 12, moved in the 21st century

On the other hand, there were also those who are extremely satisfied with the way Swedes communicate and believe that it is more developed than the Croatian way.

"Swedes are very understanding; they listen to you and, if they can, they will help you. They won't laugh at you like our people do. If you confide in Croatians, they might tell that to other people, while Swedes won't do that."

Participant 2, moved between 1960 – 1989

Some participants pointed out that Swedes have a highly developed culture of decision-making, where everything always must be thoroughly discussed within a certain social group.

> *"[…] and their endless talking and debating in circles. Every decision must be discussed within the group; you have to accept that — it's not like you can just decide. Everyone shares their opinion every time, for sure. You don't necessarily get a better decision, but everyone expresses what they think each time, so maybe they feel more satisfied, I have no idea."*
>
> Participant 10, moved in the 21st century

The different communication style compared to Croatians was definitely a point of agreement for the majority of focus group participants, and it can be assumed that the source of this difference is somewhat culturally rooted. This highlights the inseparable link between language and culture (Duranti, 1997).

b) Time management

Certain participants mentioned that the private lives of Swedes are very time-oriented, unlike those of Croatians. On the other hand, a couple of participants noted that they are disorganized in some other aspects of their lives.

> *"Swedes must plan their time three months in advance. For example, if I want to have a coffee with my Swedish friend now, I need to call her three months in advance to meet for coffee or lunch at 12:00... So, for me personally, that's a disaster... They have their entire year planned out, and I still haven't gotten used to it, and I don't think I ever will. But their organization at work is a disaster. The same goes for the universities. So, their private life is organized, but everything else is not."*
>
> Participant 8, moved in the 21st century

Many of them mentioned that they must write down all their personal obligations in a calendar, just like Swedes, in order to be fully engaged in society. However, some participants also pointed out certain drawbacks of planning all obligations in a calendar.

> *"I always somehow complain to my friends in Croatia about how bad the social life is here, that you don't have friends and so on, but when you think about it, you constantly have something booked... So, it's not that bad when you look at it rationally and take a little time to check your calendar. Here, you must book everything in your calendar, and when you look at it, you see the statistics; it's not that bad."*
>
> Participant 11, moved in the 21st century

> *"The calendar is always filled, but there's no soul in it. For me, the soul is when I'm with our people back home. You have everything here, you understand? I don't know... You know because you're here; you have everything, but the heart, the soul—it's back home, it's back home, everything is back home. A stranger can never understand that."*
>
> Participant 15, moved between 1960 – 1989

Although putting work obligations in a calendar and fulfilling them on time is often a desirable trait in society, Croatians largely agree that this has been taken to an excessive level by Swedes, especially when such a way of organizing life spills over into the private sphere. They emphasized that they miss spontaneity when it comes to arranging informal gatherings with friends.

c) Avoiding conflict

Along with a more moderate way of communicating, focus group participants also noted a certain aversion to conflict among members of the Swedish population.

> *"They are quite konflikträdda; they have a fear of conflict. We are more direct... that's why with us, there's always a little bit of tension, and then there's war every once in a while, because we get into fights when things don't go our way. Jokes aside, we are more straightforward; we learned here to be a bit more diplomatic, to say things nicely. We say it directly, while they sugarcoat it and don't dare to say it. We have priests; I can go confess to them, I don't need a psychologist or whatever. I think we take care of ourselves much more. When I talk to my friends, we went out and yell at each other, and that's it. I don't need any pharmaceutical products."*
>
> Participant 15, moved between 1960 – 1989

> *"[…] they are also very good, and I speak from personal experience, at putting problems under the rug. They are exceptionally good at this within family situations, so they just ignore problems."*
>
> Participant 7, moved in the 21st century

What can be inferred from the participant's quote is the opinion that maybe Swedes are not "cold", which is a common stereotype and prejudice for people from Scandinavia, but rather that their culture is deeply rooted in an approach that avoids conflict.

d) Family relations

Some participants noted that they observe a significant difference in the attitude toward family between Croatians and Swedes.

"I've always socialized with Swedes and […] I think family is a bit more important to us than to them. My parents might seem strict compared to theirs, but to me, that's just normal considering how my parents behaved toward me and so on."

Participant 5, a member of the second generation of immigrants in Sweden

"I feel like they view themselves more as individuals, even within the family […] Parents who are divorced, that's also common here; they usually say they have a barnfri vecka, for example, when the child is with the father, because they usually switch off every other week. The mother says she doesn't have the child that week, but to me, that sounds awful."

Participant 9, moved in the 21st century

These quotes indicate a change in gender roles and family relationships among Swedes compared to Croatians, which are characteristics of the second demographic transition. The primary indicator of this phase is a cultural shift towards postmodern norms, specifically individualism and self-actualization (Van de Kaa, 2001).

7. Discussion and concluding remarks

As it was shown in this research, Croatian immigrants in Sweden maintain a high level of ethnolinguistic vitality (V = – 0.97), which suggests that they succeed in retaining their own ethnic characteristics, and behave as a relatively linguistically cohesive identity. While Ehala (2009: 130) contextualizes similarly derived results within the framework of a stigmatized group with a low level of individual utilitarianism (U = 0.2) that does not integrate into a target society perceived as very different from its own (r = 6.6), such an interpretation cannot be applied to Croats in Sweden, given that the level of individual utilitarianism is very high (U = 1.72), and the distance between cultures is moderate (r = 4.21).

These results indicate that Croats integrate very well in the Swedish society, yet still retain their ethnolinguistic characteristics and behave as an active and dynamic collective of co-ethnics. However, if considering the high result on the "U" variable alone, the potential for assimilation in the future exists (as with any other diaspora group to some extent), but this study cannot prove or predict such outcomes. In addition, all participants in the study identified Croatian (or a variant of Croatian) as at least one of the languages they considered their mother tongue, although the vast majority spoke Swedish.

Additionally, 14 out of 15 focus group participants confirmed that they could never feel like Swedes, even with Swedish citizenship, emphasizing their connection to their homeland or characteristics of their identity associated with Croatia. One participant

(a second-generation Croatian immigrant in Sweden) stated that she is at the crossroads of her two ethnic identities, but nurtures and practices all Croatian customs. These results call for further investigations that might also include the measuring of social (ethnic) distance of Croatian diaspora towards Swedes and other ethno-national groups in the Swedish society. Furthermore, it leads us to a conclusion that there are differences between known "ways of being" and "ways of belonging" in transnational social fields, as posited by Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004). Here we could see these differences manifest diverse senses of belonging and identification, shaped not only by cumulative migratory and transnational experiences of transculturation and hybridization among diaspora members, but also by possible bi-local ways of belonging, and to somewhat ethnic revival tendencies of reaffirming own ethnic origin identity and some sort of, at least symbolic, loyalty to a home country/nation.

We argue the greatest differences between Croats and Swedes are seen in the communication style, time management, family relations, and approach to conflict situations. When taking in account these categories, Croats see the Swedes as different communicators than themselves, who are more "individual" than family-oriented people that in general avoid conflict and have a highly organized schedule. These are telling results, which to some extent replicate usual stereotypical notions and dichotomies between North European (Nordic/Scandinavian) cultures and South European (Mediterranean) ones. Yet, more nuanced research models of measuring differences in cultural values of ethnic groups within and across nations, such as one proposed by Hofstede (2001), might shed light on intersections of objective and subjective ethnolinguistic vitality factors with regards to ways of belonging. This would lead to answering the question to what extent our participants' insistence on separate Croatian identity might stem from perceived and perpetuated cultural differences in comparison to Swedes?

Overall results of our study were somewhat expected in a broader context, as previous research on the population of Croatian emigrants in other countries has demonstrated that they integrate very well into the local societies while preserving their own ethnocultural identity and integrity (Lalich, 2010; Šutalo, 2010; Čapo Žmegač, 2019). This transnational social space created by Croats in Sweden further emphasizes the complexity of migration processes and the ability of migrants to integrate different aspects of their culture and identity into a new environment, which is one of the focal points of migration studies in the 21st century. Among Croats in Sweden, this space manifests through various forms, including the maintaining of ties with their homeland, such as participating in national cultural associations and societies, and forming communities that bridge the gap between their home country and their current place of residence.

However, given that the issue of measuring ethnolinguistic vitality remains present throughout the academic world, and on the other hand, there is a significant lack

of sociolinguistic studies on Croats in Sweden, this article can serve as a foundation for further research on these complex topics. There are a few directions that future research may take from here, leaning on the results of this research: Firstly, what is the role of the media, digital platforms and virtual social networks in building and sustaining ethnolinguistic vitality? Secondly, how amalgamation through intermarriages affects vitality and hybridization of linguistic practices? Thirdly, how institutional factors such as formal educational setting and cultural attempts (through activities of diaspora cultural clubs and practices of language tuition abroad, as well as summer camps in Croatia) influence ethnolinguistic vitality dynamics and expressions? Lastly, how all of the aforementioned together with bi-local living arrangements and/or circulation of Croatian diaspora members in Sweden affect their identity/ies and language in transnational social spaces?

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Ethical Approval

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Sociology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb on January 23, 2024.

Data Access and Transparency

Available upon request to the authors. Broader research conducted for a master thesis is open and available for download online (Uvodić, 2024).

Izvorni znanstveni rad

Prelaženje granica, očuvanje jezika: Etnolingvistička vitalnost hrvatske dijaspore u Švedskoj

Roko Uvodić
Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu, Hrvatska
e-mail: roko@idi.hr

Drago Župarić-Iljić
Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Filozofski fakultet, Odsjek za sociologiju, Hrvatska
e-mail: dzuparic@ffzg.unizg.hr

Sažetak

Ovaj se članak bavi pitanjem integracije hrvatskih imigranata u Švedskoj. Napisan je iz sociolingvističke perspektive s ciljem očuvanja hrvatskog jezika među članovima dijaspore. Kroz teoriju etnolingvističke vitalnosti, istraživanje prikazuje kako Hrvati u Švedskoj održavaju svoj jezik i etnički identitet u transnacionalnom društvenom prostoru. Na temelju pristupa mješovitih metoda, koji uključuje empirijsko istraživanje sa 150 sudionika ankete te dodatne fokus grupe, članak pruža uvid u jezične stavove i složenosti postmigracijskih iskustava među hrvatskim imigrantima. Istraživanje naglašava važnost očuvanja jezika i identiteta među hrvatskim imigrantima u Švedskoj te ističe potrebu za daljnjim istraživanjima ovakvih tema u okviru migracijskih, transnacionalnih i etničkih studija, kao i sociolingvistike. Iako se ovo istraživanje može shvatiti tek kao početak proučavanja hrvatskog identiteta u inozemstvu iz sociolingvističke perspektive, nudi korisne uvide u dinamiku transnacionalne migracije i postmigracijskih procesa. Hrvatski imigranti u Švedskoj zadržavaju visoku razinu etnolingvističke vitalnosti, čuvajući svoje etničke karakteristike i ponašajući se kao jezično kohezivna zajednica, istovremeno stvarajući zajednice koje premošćuju jaz između njihove domovine i trenutnog mjesta boravka.

Ključne riječi: migracija, Hrvati u Švedskoj, etnolingvistička vitalnost, transnacionalizam, dijaspora, sociolingvistika.