

Approaching identity talk and the case of ascribing schizophrenia to Europe and Hungary

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In this paper we will summarize our approach to study of identity relying on “semi-everyday” discourse of members of the Hungarian society and present a sample analysis of the data. Specifically, we will describe (1) why do we consider focus group method as a viable way of gathering specific type of discourses; (2) what is the general structure of our research design; (3) how did we obtain data for studying discursive construction of identity through focus groups. And finally, we will provide (4) a sample analysis of some sections of the conversations we obtained, namely an analysis of the sections in which the speakers characterized Europe and Hungary with the “schizophrenia”, i.e. with a term originating from mental pathology.

As the fourth task of the focus group sessions we asked the participants to form two subgroups and to write and discuss a biography for an imagined person called “Hungary-Person” or “Europe-Person”. In this way our four focus groups produced eight biographies. We would like to concentrate on only one feature of these personifications. To anticipate its gist: there is good news and bad news for the friends of Hungary and Europe. The bad news is that both Europe and Hungary was attributed schizophrenia by some of the groups, while the good news is that this ascription was not a “preferred” version of the state of the arts, according to the focus group participants. In other terms, the content of this characterization of “Europe-Person” and “Hungary-Person” attests a rather deep trouble with regard to their identity, while its ways of delivery, the interactional characteristics of saying it show that people do not at all consider this state of art as a normal one.

Out of the eight biographies the term “schizophrenia”, a psychiatric diagnostic category was mentioned three times. Once it served as a thematic characterization of the “Hungary-Person”, and twice as a descriptor of “Europe-Person”. While the prevalence of schizophrenia in the “real world” is about 0.3-0.7 percent in the population, it seems to be striking that one biography of “Hungary-Men” out of four (25 percent) and two biographies of “Europe-Person” out of four (50 percent) mentioned this feature. This seems to us as a rather significant finding, but of course not in a statistical sense. We will offer a *thematic* and a *discourse-oriented* analysis of the segments of conversations where schizophrenia was ascribed to Hungary and Europe.